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**On the Nature
and Substance
of Fascism**

**Marxism and
Economic Theory
by Maurice Dobb**

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On the Nature and Substance of Fascism

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, it was somewhat fashionable in left political circles to describe various Chief Executives as "fascists." With the election of Reagan as President, one hears the same term applied to his regime. In this latter sense, it appears that fascist is equated with extreme conservatism and that fascism then means political reaction, or a rather histrionic nationalistic phrasemongering.

This position on fascism takes a decided theoretical position on the nature of governance within a modern capitalist society. It assumes that fascism is in some sense "declared" by the chief political authority, that fascism depends upon the individual proclivities of the President, or that the populace (stupidly or unconsciously to be sure) periodically elects a fascist (as opposed to a liberal) to office. Basically, then, fascism is nothing more than the "choice" of individual politicians and is independent of the underlying social order.

As well, one periodically hears or reads of the position that fascism is the choice of rule by capitalists through their political lackies. Given the opportunity, businessmen would love to impose this form of rule and the only thing that prevents them from doing so is fear (or lethargy, or the obstacles placed in their way by more intelligent advisors).

Given the continued and worsening crisis of capitalism (regardless of what very short-run indicators would appear to demonstrate) and the need for good, solid Marxist theoretical analysis in order to deal with and take advantage of this crisis,

it seems that a traditional presentation of some of the most important aspects of fascism is in order. What we propose doing is defining fascism, demonstrating why and under what conditions fascism would be imposed, and dealing with certain, more important, characteristics of a fascist order. It is to be hoped that this argument will produce a better understanding of this phenomenon so that those within the communist movement will be better equipped to deal with the immediate future.

Lenin on the Nature of the State

In any straight theoretical account dealing with the substance of minority class rule, it is necessary to begin with Lenin. To be sure, "everyone" has read Lenin's classic statement, but just in case someone missed something, it is always wise to remind them just what Lenin argued.

The State is the product and the manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms. The state arises when, where and to the extent that class antagonisms cannot be objectively reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable.

...According to Marx, the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another; it creates "order," which legalises and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the collisions between the classes.

(Lenin, State and Revolution, pp. 8,9.)

The state, including its political functionaries, is a mechanism of oppression, mandated in any class society by the very nature of classes which stand in opposition to each other. The basis of this class contradiction and antagonism is economic and is

founded on the control of the means of production and the generation and distribution of social output (Chapter V).

The question, though, is how the ruled class is to be oppressed; how it is to be controlled so as to prevent that class (or classes) from learning its strength and acting upon that strength to effect fundamental social change which would free it from its oppression. That is, how must a minority ruling class rule in order to allow itself to continue in power and reap the privileges associated with that society?*

Contrary to usual pronouncements (and somewhat to appearances), minority ruling classes do not like to rule by force. This seems incongruous: All minority ruling classes are criminal and violent by their very nature--they live on the basis of exploitation, become accustomed to bossing others around, and, increasingly, become less "human" as their rule continues. Hence, as they learn to enjoy violence and blood-letting, it would seem natural that such classes (or their members) would just love to rule by force and demonstrate their power and contempt on a regular basis.

It is true that minority ruling class members are congenitally stupid (in a social sense), but most are not this stupid. Regardless of how much they would like to show their power, they know that they cannot survive in the long-run if they were to attempt to control the lower classes by virtue of sheer force. For this would give away the game. Force is clear: One can fairly easily see who is using force against whom, and for what purpose. And, given that the minority ruling class is a minority, if the majority oppressed class understands its oppression and realizes it can do something about it (or at least becomes so irritated that it feels it has nothing to lose anyway), then the minority class cannot hold on to power for any appreciable length of time.

*We are not concerned here with the nature of class rule under socialism, merely minority class rule, in particular capitalism.

Granted, all minority ruling classes use force from time to time (especially slaveholders), but their principal means of control is fraud. What these classes attempt to do is convince the lower classes that: a) the current society is just, harmonious, natural and there is no need for fundamental change, some few troublemakers to the contrary, or b) even if it's not just, harmonious and natural, there's nothing that can be done about it anyway, so hold your tongue (and everything else) and maybe there will be a reward when you're dead.

Consider the following position set forth by one of the current century's most able theoreticians:

That perversion of the purpose of intelligent thought is independent of any dishonesty in the intentions of the holders of power. The most conscientious is more keenly concerned than the most unscrupulous that the authority he wields should rest upon a just sanction. He is more passionately intent upon that justification than any tyrannical usurper. The falsification of thought in the interests of power is to an enormous extent sincere and well-intentioned. But we are probably too prone, in our tolerant, euphemistic way--euphemism and tolerance, the courtesies and charities of judgment striving to be dispassionate, are themselves ruses of self-protective power-thought--we are too prone to minimize the part played by intentional and deliberate fraud. Wherever access is afforded to detailed evidence deliberate deception is found. From the tricks of the witch-doctor and the Pompeian priest's speaking-trumpet down to the 'political intelligence' and the education of public opinion of our newspapers, there is a vast amount of fraud which cannot be wholly euphemised away by charitable interpretations. The old 'imposture theory' has perhaps been unduly discredited--it was an unpleasant

theory, and therefore it was only proper to dwell upon its superficiality.

It is however not easy, in general, and it is unessential, to draw a sharp demarcation between conscious and subconscious intellectual dishonesty. Opinions have an ingenious tendency to flow in the channel of vested interest. The priestly class is favourably disposed towards mythology, the landowning class towards feudal principles, and stock-jobbers are particularly acute to perceive the dangers of communism. The adaptation of rational intelligence to the interests of power has little difficulty in justifying itself as a virtue and a duty. The necessity of sound principles, the principles upon which the existing order rests, is manifest. Subversive facts are a danger to society, and the social order must be protected even against itself. To abet dangerous tendencies of thought, to dwell unduly upon facts which, to the unsound judgment of many, might prove misleading, would be clearly culpable. It would be a betrayal of their welfare, for which the holders of power, who enjoy the privilege of sounder culture, must account themselves responsible. The duty laid upon them demands that they should discountenance the dissemination of poison. Nay, it were culpable to permit their own minds to dwell upon facts calculated to sap the principles which make for general security and stability. And if a slight modification in the complexion, in the presentation and nomenclature of facts conduces to a more wholesome attitude of the mind, so much the better. Do not our most reputed philosophers offer us, as the modest conclusion of their meditations, the cogent argument that, since we have to live under existing conditions, we should believe any-

thing that will help us to do so?
(Briffault, Rational Evolution, pp. 34-5.)

The purpose of that stultification of the natural functions of human intelligence is the same today as it has been through seven thousand years of traditional civilisation. It has nothing to do with the deficiencies or incapacities to which the human mind is naturally subject. It is the necessary and inevitable effect of the traditional structure of civilisation. That structure has solely in view the maintenance of the power of a ruling class. To maintain the status quo of that structure is the purpose to which all others are subordinate. In order to achieve it the natural functioning of human intelligence must be perverted. It is necessary that men should be prevented from apprehending and analysing their actual relations to facts. It is necessary that they should be rendered unable to form rational judgments and conclusions. It is necessary that ideas and opinions should accord with the authority of tradition, because upon that authority alone can the structure and institutions handed down from barbarism and savagery to modern civilisation be defended and justified. Unless loyalty can by those means be successfully inculcated and maintained no organisation operating for the profit of a limited class at the expense of the bulk of mankind could be safeguarded from destruction for a day. Force would not avail. Only by controlling the human mind itself, by checking and defeating the natural operation of intelligence can the task be carried out. Hence that intelligence which, where those vital interests are not at stake, where they are furthered by the achievements of knowledge, shows itself to be capable of

exploits to which it appears, difficult to set a bound, is reduced to impotence, puerility and imbecility where social conditions, human relations, and human interests are directly or indirectly involved.

It is often said, half in jest, half in earnest, that the world is mad. To provide for the defeat of the natural functions of intelligence is in fact to produce a state of dementia. The insanity sometimes ascribed to civilised humanity is no less pathological for being collective. But again, as in the case of the barbarism and savagery which are said to burst forth through the veneer of civilisation, the charge is commonly laid at the wrong door. That men and women are naturally disposed to defeat the functions which their natural intelligence is constructed to perform is not true. That is not at all a character of human nature outside asylums. It is a character imposed upon the minds of men and women by a traditional civilisation which can be maintained only on the condition that the myths upon which its existence depends shall be accepted, and that the human race shall be so deprived of the use of its intelligence as to be able to accept them loyally. (Briffault, Breakdown, pp. 45-7.)

To the extent that fraud is successful, the underlying population is quiescent: It either accepts its lot as natural and reasonable or concludes that nothing can be done to change it in any case. And this is why fraud is the preferable mechanism of rule. If the lower classes accept the position of the minority ruling class, then they do not offer opposition to that rule. Thus, the exploiting class can do what it wants (within limits).

But fraud cannot be successful forever. Every minority ruling class society, because it is based on exploitation, is crisis-prone. During periods of crisis (war, famine, depression, etc.), the under-

lying population is increasingly oppressed. Further, and linked to this intensification of oppression, the prevailing ideas inculcated by the ruling class break down. As these ideas are fraudulent, they are the opposite of truth and cannot be supported by objective evidence. With a crisis, the lower class populations are forced to come to grips with objective reality and begin to see through the lies fostered by a minority, exploiting class.

When the exploited classes are no longer content with their lot, when they no longer accept the fraud disseminated by a minority class, then the exploiting class must modify the mechanism of its rule. When things were going swimmingly (for the minority), it was content to rule primarily by fraud: Force was a secondary weapon of class rule, used as sparingly as possible and, at least if the agents of the state understand their proper functioning, only in "emergency" situations. If, however, the ruling class perceives its interests seriously threatened by a discontented majority, it will alter the method of its rule and attempt to dominate primarily by force.

Every minority ruling class is capable of and historically has undergone this modification of its rule. In the modern period, when monopoly capitalists can no longer rule primarily through fraud and turn increasingly to force, we term this modification fascism.

Fascism Defined

Fascism does not alter the basic character of capitalism. Nor is it separable or distinct from capitalism (as texts in comparative economic or political systems would have it). It is merely capitalism without the parliamentary facade. Consider the following definitions as constructed by some major theoreticians who have examined 20th century fascist society:

The regime which the Nazis proceeded to establish is fairly described, by the very

nature of the major interest which sponsored it, as a dictatorship of monopoly capitalism. Its "fascism" is that of business enterprise organized on a monopoly basis, and in full command of all the military, police, legal, and propaganda power of the state.

But it is more than a mere formal dictatorship over economic affairs. No one knew better than the Junkers and the magnates of industrial and finance capitalism that in the struggle for power not only capitalism and a profits economy were at stake. Far more important, in its final analysis, was the fact that the very essence of capitalist civilization itself was in the balance. All the attitudes and points of view, all the supporting social codes and doctrines, and all the theories and practices of a class-ordered capitalist society had been under attack from the left....

The Nazi system is, accordingly, set up to control completely all activities and all thoughts, ideas, and values of the entire German nation. It seeks to "co-ordinate spirit," or point of view, and to "co-ordinate structure," or all the economic machinery of the state. To these ends it embodies three principles: "the leader principle," "the authority principle," and "the total principle." The first two mean centralization of the power to direct from on top, with each "leader" having final and unabridged control over appointment, removal, and all activities of all subordinates under him. Authority is from the top down; responsibility is from the bottom up. This is a complete reversal of democracy in spirit and form. The third, the "total principle," means the extension of such control over all members of the population in all their activities--work, leisure, and recreational--and over all the forms and media for the expression of any point of view whatsoever.

The Nazi system represents, in short, nothing more than an extension to the nation at large of the rules, the behavior patterns, and the points of view of the ordinary autocratically governed business enterprise, nothing more--with this exception, that it adds thereto power to enforce complete conformity with its point of view on the part of all members of the community, regardless of class, station, or interest.

(Brady, Spirit and Structure..., pp. 22-3.)

Fascism is nationalism, predatory capitalism, and traditional civilisation at bay, with mask and gloves off. The hollow pretences and formulas of pseudo-democracy which have hitherto served to clothe its obscene nudity are cast aside in a desperate situation. When the house is on fire or the ship is sinking, the delicacies of conventional modesty are dispensed with.

(Briffault, Breakdown, pp. 164-5.)

Fascism, in fact, is no peculiar, independent doctrine and system arising in opposition to existing capitalist society. Fascism, on the contrary, is the most complete and consistent working out, in certain conditions of extreme decay, of the most typical tendencies and policies of modern capitalism.

What are these characteristics which are common, subject to a difference in degree, to all modern capitalism and to Fascism? The most outstanding of these characteristics may be summarised as follows:

1. The basic aim of the maintenance of capitalism in the face of the revolution which the advance of productive technique and of class antagonisms threatens.

2. The consequent intensification of the capitalist dictatorship.

3. The limitation and repression of the independent working-class movement, and building up of a system of organised class co-operation.

4. The revolt against, and increasing supersession of, parliamentary democracy.

5. The extending State monopolist organisation of industry and finance.

6. The closer concentration of each imperialist bloc into a single economic-political unit.

7. The advance to war as the necessary accompaniment of the increasing imperialist antagonisms.

All these characteristics are typical, in greater or lesser degree, of all modern capitalist states, no less than of the specifically Fascist states.

(Dutt, Fascism..., pp. 92-3.)

It is important to understand that fascism is a sign of weakness of capitalist rule. Businessmen are no longer able to rule in the manner they would like--the prevailing fraud has broken down sufficiently and the working class is powerful enough so that capitalists must resort increasingly to force. But force further exposes the nature of capitalist society, a result which, of course, capitalists would like to avoid at all costs. Again, force is not the preferred method of rule, and capitalists will resort to force only when necessary.

But why would capitalists find themselves in a weak position. There are, basically, two reasons. First, a crisis situation must occur. Crises are great educational devices. Given the breakdown of the system (for whatever reason), crises force an exposure of the fraud which, under "normal" times, prevents (or, at least, mitigates) a correct understanding of the nature of capitalism. Secondly, the working class must be well organized and pose a threat to the continued rule of businessmen. If a crisis occurs, and the working class has no organizational

basis from which to launch an attack, it is no threat at all.

This organizational basis further implies something about the nature of working class leadership. Essentially, capitalists will replace a "democratic" dictatorship with a fascist dictatorship when they fear a revolutionary upheaval. This connotes that the working class must be under revolutionary leadership to a degree sufficient to pose a real threat. Now, if this leadership is indeed communist (in the real Bolshevik sense), then there is a high probability that a working class revolution will succeed. If the leadership is social democratic, revisionist, then the capitalists will most probably be able to impose their fascist dictatorship and eliminate working class opposition (for a time). It is important to understand that, where fascism was instituted, the capitalists of those countries feared a growing drift to a (real) communist position and were able to impose fascism due to social democratic refusal to lead a revolution.

Hence, fascism appears during a period of uncertainty: Capitalists fear the immediate future, feel they are no longer capable of ruling in the same way as before, and institute fascism in order to prevent socialist revolution. But they can only succeed if the working class, as a potentially revolutionary force, is misled by its own leadership.

Now, while fascism demands a greater reliance on force than during "normal" times, this does not imply that fraud, the primary method of rule, diminishes. In fact, it must be intensified. The use of force to the extent required by fascism clarifies the nature of rule--it exposes the class-based organization of the state and of society in general. Thus, fascism tends to intensify class struggle. This demands an increase in the amount of fraud which capitalists use to undermine class struggle and produce a relatively quiescent population.

Under fascism, all the specific sorts of fraud used within any society are exaggerated: Racism, sexism, patriotism, etc., all witness a growth to

their extreme illogical conclusion. For example, the German fascists promoted racism on the basis of racist ideology previously developed in England and the United States. In kind, there was no fundamental difference between the racism practiced in Germany and that practiced in the U.S. The underlying rationale was the same in both cases. The difference lay in degree: The Nazis exterminated populations based on supposed racial inferiority.

Even the facade of parliamentary democracy was not eliminated altogether. True, to come to power, fascists were forced to suspend the normal parliamentary practices in those countries where this had been the rule. But, as voting for the officers of the capitalist class is one primary method through which capitalists try to convince the working class that its interests are being served, it was necessary to restore some semblance of the older democracy as soon as possible. Thus, plebiscites were instituted to retain at least the shell of the older arrangements (hollow though these were).

But of all the frauds practiced under capitalist rule, that which receives the largest push under fascism is nationalism with emphasis placed on militarism. Veblen, in his inimitable style, correctly characterizes the virtues of military training under minority ruling class rule:

The largest and most promising factor of cultural discipline--most promising as a corrective of iconoclastic vagaries--over which business principles rule is national politics....Business interests urge an aggressive national policy and business men direct it. Such a policy is warlike as well as patriotic. The direct cultural value of a warlike business policy is unequivocal. It makes for a conservative animus on the part of the populace. During war time,... under martial law, civil rights are in abeyance; and the more warfare and armament the more abeyance. Military training is a

training in ceremonial precedence, arbitrary command, and unquestioning obedience. A military organization is essentially a servile organization. Insubordination is the deadly sin. The more consistent and the more comprehensive this military training, the more effectually will the members of the community be trained into habits of subordination and away from the growing propensity to make light of personal authority that is the chief infirmity of democracy. This applies first and most decidedly, of course, to the soldiery, but it applies only in a less degree to the rest of the population. They learn to think in warlike terms of rank, authority, and subordination, and so grow progressively more patient of encroachments upon their civil rights....The disciplinary effects of warlike pursuits...direct the popular interest to other, nobler, institutionally less hazardous matters than the unequal distribution of wealth or creature comforts. Warlike and patriotic preoccupations fortify the barbarian virtues of subordination and prescriptive authority. Habituation to a warlike, predatory scheme of life is the strongest disciplinary factor that can be brought to counteract the vulgarization of modern life wrought by peaceful industry and the machine process, and to rehabilitate the decaying sense of status and differential dignity. Warfare, with the stress on subordination and mastery and the insistence on gradations of dignity and honor incident to a military organization, has always proved an effective school in barbarian methods of thought.

In this direction, evidently, lies the hope of a corrective for "social unrest" and similar disorders of civilized life. There can, indeed, be no serious question

but that a consistent return to the ancient virtues of allegiance, piety, servility, graded dignity, class prerogative, and prescriptive authority would greatly conduce to popular content and to the facile management of affairs. Such is the promise held out by a strenuous national policy. (Veblen, ...Business Enterprise, pp. 391-3.)

Return to Brady's description of fascism. Nationalism incorporates the three basic principles of fascist organization: leadership, authority, and totality (which includes the supposed harmony of interests doctrine). Within this general rubric, capitalists are able to consolidate their power, undermine the strength of the working class, and accomplish two more important objectives: turn workers' attention away from the mundane, materialist concerns of day-to-day life (food, shelter, etc.) toward the "spiritual" mystique of the "nation," and facilitate preparation for war.

Given that fascism results from the breakdown of the normal functioning of capitalist society, to be effective it must restore--at a higher level--all those characteristics which facilitate capitalist rule. The fraud must incorporate servility and submission to authority of "the leader" and the re-development of the attitude that, in some sense, all members of the same national population have a commonality of interests. Nationalism accomplishes these ends. As well, given that capitalists have no interest in raising the material well-being of the working class--indeed, have every interest in lowering the standard of living--they strive mightily to turn the focus of workers' attention away from creature comforts toward "higher" matters. It is no accident that under fascism, the concept of the nation takes on super-mythical significance. This is one reason why we see in Germany, for instance, the revival of the Order of the Teutonic Knights, the falsified history which attempts to demonstrate that the seeds of the modern German nation lay in the misty past of a partially mythical

German tribal battle, etc.

In the long-run, however, and from the larger social point of view, the most nefarious result of this intensified nationalism is war. Fascism leads directly to war. Given that fascism is a reponse to social collapse, and that monopoly capitalists are always striving for colonial conquest and the redistribution of the capitalist world's colonies; war is viewed as one solution to the economic problems faced by capitalist groups. And in the preparation for war, nationalism is one necessary and vital fraud designed to enlist the support of that portion of the population which has no objective interest in war:

There is a growing need of such national aids to business. A business corporation as such is restricted by certain large formalities of common honesty, the observance of which is not contemplated when business is done in the name of the Nation. The Nation, being in effect a licenced predatory concern, is not bound by the decencies of that code of law and morals that governs private conduct. So the national pretensions make a convenient cover for such adventures in pursuit of gain as run beyond the pale. These adventures in business, as well as the national pretensions, unavoidably run at cross purposes with one another; the abiding purpose of all competitors being to get whatever may be got at the cost of their neighbors or at the cost of those industrially backward peoples who have something to lose. It is the foremost aim of the imperialistic statesmen to extend and enlarge the advantages of such of the nation's business men as are interested in gainful traffic in foreign parts; that is to say, it is designed to extend and enlarge the dominion of the nation's absentee

owners beyond the national frontiers.

And by a curious twist of patriotic emotion the loyal citizens are enabled to believe that these extra-territorial gains of the country's business men will somehow benefit the community at large. The gains which the business men come in for in this way are their private gains, of course; but the illusions of national solidarity enable the loyal ones to believe that the gains which so come to these absentee owners at the cost of the taxpayers will benefit the taxpayers in some occult way,--in some obscure way which no loyal citizen should inquire into too closely.

So the loyal citizens loyally place their persons and their substance at the service of those absentee owners who aim to get something for nothing by lucrative traffic in foreign parts and among the helpless outlying peoples; the constituted authorities dutifully cover the traffic with the national honor, the national prestige, the national consular service, and the national armament; and the taxpayers faithfully pay the public cost of the armaments and the diplomatic and consular service by use of which their absentee owners are enabled to increase their private gains. Indeed, on occasion the same loyal taxpayers have been known gladly and proudly to risk life and limb in defense of this absentee trade that "follows the flag." Should any undistinguished citizen, not an absentee owner of large means, hesitate to throw in his life and substance at the call of the politicians in control, for the greater glory of the flag and the greater profit of absentee business in foreign parts, he becomes a "slacker."

By stress of this all-pervading patriotic bias and that fantastic bigotry which

enables civilised men to believe in a national solidarity of material interests, it has come now to pass that the chief--virtually sole--concern of the constituted authorities in any democratic nation is a concern about the profitable business of the nation's substantial citizens.

But business enterprise here and now, and particularly business done on so large a scale as to bring it under the favorable notice of the federal authorities, is quite invariably an enterprise in absentee ownership. Any "Business Administration" will be a "Big-Business Administration." So the constituted authorities of this democratic commonwealth come, in effect, to constitute a Soviet of Business Men's Delegates, whose dutiful privilege it is to safeguard and enlarge the special advantages of the country's absentee owners. And all the while the gains of the absentee owners are got at the cost of the underlying population, whether with or without special countenance from the side of the democratic authorities. (Veblen, Absentee Ownership, pp. 35-7.)

Fascism vs. Political Reaction

It is important to distinguish fascism and political reaction, symptomatic of the period we are now going through. If one examines United States society since the mid-1970's, one sees a growth in racism, sexism, nationalism, political conservatism, etc. All are characteristics of fascism as well. But reaction is not fascism; in fact, in one sense it is the very opposite of fascism.

As analyzed in Science, Class and Politics (#2), reaction is the normal, cyclical response to a previous democratic upsurge--in the current context, the anti-war and civil rights movements of the 1960's

and early 1970's. Reaction is the response of capitalists in attempting to recover what they lost in the way of economic and political power during the democratic period--and, of course, if they can get away with it, to turn history back to a period before that democratic "sickness." But reaction is a political program undertaken on the basis of strength, not weakness. The reason why capitalists in the U.S. have been so successful under Carter and Reagan (and it must be remembered that Reagan is, to a large extent, nothing more than a continuation of the "democratic" Carter), is the very absence of large-scale, organized, militant opposition. There is simply no serious challenge at the moment to the continuation of capitalist rule.

Of course, this may (and in the long-run, will) change. In fact, the continuing pressure forced on the working class will stimulate a growth in opposition, regardless of how well "kept" the union leadership now is. Moreover, given the relative success the capitalists have been having, the lack of response to the criminal invasion of Grenada, etc., we are certain that the government, acting in the interests of large businessmen, will soon do something stupid--invade openly and with unrestrained force Nicaragua, for example. And while such a development might have the support of enough of the population initially, it will not have it in the long-run. And, at that time, if effective, responsible leadership will have developed, the capitalists will then resort to fascism--if necessary. And they will do this regardless of who happens to be President. It might prove helpful to remember that the Roosevelt regime instituted economic and legal mechanisms which were no different in substance from those developed under the Nazis. Had Roosevelt's "liberalism" failed, the capitalists in this country were ready to replicate developments in Europe--regardless of who the President in office was.

Fascism and the Intelligentsia

There are many aspects of fascism which one could discuss and analyze. Rather than running over already well-tilled ground, we refer the reader to the works of Briffault, Brady and Dutt cited in the bibliography. Here we wish to focus on two issues only: the support fascism received by many capitalist intellectuals, and the establishment of the bases of fascism laid during capitalism's "normal," non-fascist periods.

In a well documented work, Alistair Hamilton supplies an enormous amount of evidence concerning various distinguished (and some not so distinguished) intellectuals' support for fascist ideology and fascism in practice. (The Appeal of Fascism, New York, Macmillan, 1971.) The list is somewhat astounding: T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Butler Yeats, Martin Heidegger, Oswald Spengler, etc. If one were to add to the overt fascists, as exemplified by the listing above, those whose writings gave objective support to fascism, it is probable that most intellectuals, in one way or another, were supportive of fascism.

There are good reasons for this phenomenon. Initially, one can point to various particular issues which would appeal to many intellectuals, particularly those in Europe. For example, one aspect of most of the fascist parties' ideology was anti-semitism coupled to virulent racism. As is well known, the upper classes in Europe have a long, well-documented history of both these anti-human, criminal attitudes. In Europe, the leading intellectuals are drawn largely from the upper classes and they would carry these attitudes into their work. Hence, a political program which featured such perspectives would find enormous appeal among many of these individuals.

One can also point to the timid, opportunistic, careerist nature of most intellectuals. When faced with threats from authority, most intellectuals will cower under the table, fearing for their lives (a natural reaction) and for their jobs. Given the relative well-being of most intellectuals, and given that most are not much good at anything else, when

fascist authority would threaten them with the loss of their jobs unless they toed the line, most did. In addition, with the ascendance of fascism, many people were kicked out of fairly good positions, both within government and in the private sector. This, then, created vacancies which had to be filled by someone so that the normal functioning of government and business could be maintained. Given the opportunism of many intellectuals, we observe them jumping at the possibility of furthering their careers--at the cost, of course, of whatever conscience they had.

Further, intellectuals are trained to hold the same, capitalist ideology with which everyone is educated. This ideology includes, of course, nationalism. A party, then, which preaches nationalism and the restoration of the nation, particularly during the tumultuous period between the world wars when the whole of Europe was in a state of chaos, would certainly appeal to these sentiments held by ostensibly "ivory-towered" individuals.

One could add many more specific characteristics to the above list which would partially explain why various intellectuals adopted the fascist creed. But all can be subsumed under one major heading--petty bourgeois ideology.

At the heart of any fascist system is a strong petty bourgeois, individualist ideology. Indeed, this is part and parcel of the intensification of fraud which must accompany any fascist government. Fascism seeks to convince the population that it is seeking a "third way," a third solution to the twin collectivist evils of socialism and monopoly capitalism--both of which are, of course, collectivist (though in quite different senses of the word). Fascist propaganda is that "the state which governs best is the state which governs least." That is, fascism feeds upon the ideology laid by small businessmen during the historical period of competitive capitalism (up to the mid-1800's) and which continues in the modern period through various populist programs such as the Libertarian Party, The John Birch Society, the Ku Klux

Klan, etc., etc. To be sure, the leading, more intelligent fascists (Hitler, Mussolini, and so on) never took this propaganda seriously. They always knew that they were supported by and in return supported big businessmen. Yet, obviously, an organization never gets very far if it comes out openly in support of monopoly. Hence, the cover employed by these groups is that designed to seemingly promote the small businessman, peasant, craftsman, etc.* Their appeal was to the so-called middle class.

Now, this petty-bourgeois ideological program coupled to actual support for monopoly capital (which it railed against) created some difficulties within the fascist organizations themselves. In Germany, for example, the Nazis were begun by real "middle class" (peasants, craftsmen, small business) elements who were economically disadvantaged by the ravages of World War I and the post-war inflationary debacle and the rationalization (monopolization) of German industry of the same period. Disgruntled and disaffected, this class sought a solution in the formation of its own party, with the eventual goal of seizing power. They would wrest control from the monopolists and, at the same time, prevent the socialists from taking over.

*As well, most of these organizations had a "socialist" facade. In the 1920's socialism was "in the air." To appeal to workers, fascist organizations usually incorporated some socialist rhetoric in their programs and many included the word socialist in their names: Hence, National Socialist Party. In Germany, there was even one organization calling itself National Bolsheviks. All this, again, was a fraudulent cover to the real fascist program.

As well as through the populist program, capitalists promote fascist ideology through the notion of class harmony (the "total" principle). All programs urging the cooperation of classes toward a common good, from the vatican's "corporate state" to Hayden's "Economic Democracy" are nothing more than superficial covers for fascism.

The Hitler gang had to play this song until it was firmly entrenched in power in 1933. Then, to consolidate this power, Hitler ordered the extermination of the original strength of the Party, the Brown Shirts, who were ready to displace Hitler, believing--correctly so--that he had betrayed the ideals of the Party. (See, Ernst Henri, Hitler Over Europe, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1934.) In other words, once the "honest" elements of the Party (those who really held a petty bourgeois position) had done their work in battling the left and destroying the trade union leadership, the "dishonest" elements (those who said they held the same position but, in reality, were always pro-monopoly) took over and destroyed their former comrades in arms.

In any case, the point is this: Fascism carries with it a strong individualist ideology and (fraudulent) platform. As intellectuals are largely individualist in their outlook and strongly anti-communist, such a program would be appealing to this segment of the population. And all of the specific characteristics of the intellectuals which would cause them to be supportive of fascism--nationalism, careerism, etc.--are, of course, indicative of a petty-bourgeois perspective. Thus, when push comes to shove, when a revolutionary situation develops and classes polarize, people must show their true colors. And at this time, the real principles of the intellectuals (along with every one else) will win out. Some, without question, will move to the left: Most will openly or covertly display the white cloak of fascism.

The other consideration we find important for general analysis is that the ideological and practical bases of fascism are laid during the non-fascist, "normal" periods of capitalist rule. Fascism does not markedly depart from democratic capitalism. Rather, it exaggerates those features of capitalism which people have come to accept as normal and natural.

All the fraud with which capitalists rule during fascist periods have been developed prior to these periods. What is observed is an exacerbation of these

frauds and a greater tendency to carry them through to their logical conclusions. For example, the genocide directed against various religious, racial or nationalist groups, the reduction of women to child-bearing hausfraus, the nationalist appeal which serves war as its end--all these ideas (and many more) we observe during the most liberal of capitalist times. Under fascism, however, they are intensified.

The same is true of the force with which capitalists attempt to hold on to power. Any time there is a major strike movement, it is found that workers are subjected to a massive amount of violence. Under fascism, this violence is nationalized, normalized, and made a part of standard operating procedures. Laws are promulgated which clearly demonstrate that workers have no fundamental rights except to work in a disciplined, passive manner for their bosses--which is also true under non-fascist capitalism but is concealed under various slogans such as "the right to strike." We know that if workers seriously challenge the profit-making operations of a capitalist enterprise, they do not have the right to strike, that injunctions will come forward prohibiting that strike, that police will shepherd strike-breakers through the picket lines, and that, if workers persist, the police, national guard, or military units will be brought in to show them the error of their ways. Under fascism, the niceties of fraudulent democracy are dispensed with: The club is brought to bear with few, if any, prior formalities.

And, at all times, the lower classes are taught to accept the dictates of fascist rule. Witness the programming on television which extolls the virtues of police, of the military; which pushes violence as normal and natural, and about which nothing can be done. Are we not constantly being educated into believing that greed, individualism, illegitimate power over people--capitalism itself--are merely aspects of human nature which people must accept and learn to live with.

The ideological justification for fascism (and, by definition, capitalism and other forms of minority

class rule) are found in those theories which extol the virtues of socially criminal behavior and which are then popularized through the principle means of communication. The works of Konrad Lorenz, Nobel Prize winner, represent a prime example of this contention. His work which argues that humans are by nature aggressive (found in On Aggression among other works) is certainly not original, but it is important. What this type of unsupported theory attempts to accomplish is to undermine the rational faculties of the majority of the population so that it accepts the violence directed against it. And for fascism to work, this end must be developed prior to the implementation of fascist rule. Part Three of Brady's Spirit and Structure of German Fascism provides a handy reference guide to these theories and their practical implications.

Conclusion

Fascism is not to be distinguished from capitalism: It is merely capitalism without the democratic facade and with a necessarily greater reliance on force than during the "normal" operations of this social system. At the same time, because fascism tends to expose the nature of capitalism itself, there will be a heightening of fraud under fascist rule. Fascism is not the preferred mode of capitalist rule; it will be implemented only under duress, when the continued rule of capitalists is threatened by a militant, well-organized working class that appears to be bent upon changing the social order.

As fascism is implemented during periods of extreme social duress (crises), and such periods are normal to any minority ruling class society, the necessary pre-conditions for fascism cannot be eliminated--either by the capitalists or by working class organizations. What can be eliminated, however, is fascism itself. If the working class is organized under revolutionary leadership, if it has been sufficiently educated as to its own objective class interests, then the crisis situation provides an opportunity for revolution.

And socialist revolution will prevent fascism.

At the present, this would appear to be an impossible goal. What is observed is a fragmented, ideologically weak working class under capitalist leadership. In the long-run, this will change--if Marxists themselves keep working for this goal. In the interim, however, it is absolutely necessary to undermine as much as possible the fraud, in its specific varieties (racism, sexism, etc.), as well--and more importantly--as in its general varieties--theories of innate aggression, necessary rule by an elite minority, etc. To the extent that the working class is not taken in by the fraud, workers are better prepared to understand capitalism and to defend their interests against fascism. Periods of reaction tend to promote demoralization, and demoralization means that the work necessary to be done will not be done. This cannot be allowed: History demands the creation of a just, decent society. And this is long overdue. The world increasingly appears to be in a period leading to major conflagration. Either a new world is wrought or there may well be no world to worry about. Which do we choose? ■

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