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Has Fascism Ended With Mussolini?

By Don Luigi Sturzo

THIS question may be answered by “yes” or “no,” according to one’s point of view. Mussolini’s Fascism—that of the black shirts, of banners bearing the skull and bones emblem, of the so-called Roman salute, of parades, punitive expeditions with muskets, clubs and castor oil, of the East African Empire and the Albanian Kingdom—may be called dead, even buried. But the Fascism that ante-dates Mussolini, the Fascism of all times and all countries—that brand of Fascism never dies. It adapts itself, instead, to all climates and all temperatures; it dresses according to the fashion, disguises itself and hides. That brand of Fascism has not died because it is deathless.

The destiny of names, like that of men, is strange. Fascism was an insignificant name: it was taken from the Lictorian fasces of ancient Rome to indicate power or strength in union. Mussolini and a group of First World War veterans chose it to differentiate themselves from (or even to oppose, out of jealousy) the *Arditismo*, the name taken by the followers of D’Annunzio who had excited popular fancy with the expedition of Fiume (1920). *Arditismo* was derived from *arditi* (the bold; the daring; the audacious), a name given in the Italian Army to those squadrons and groups appointed for daring attacks and difficult undertakings. (In other countries similar groups were called death or suicide squadrons, and by other colorful or degrading names.) Mussolini invented the name of *Fascio* (*bundle*); from that were later derived *Fascista* and, finally, *Fascismo*. It is so easy to invent a new name; the difficulty lay in giving the name a meaning. This difficulty was greater because the author really meant so little himself.

Mussolini came from the left wing of Socialism; he had, as an ideal, the social revolution, or rather the Revolution (with a capital R) as means and as an end. It was no wonder that Mussolini, even when he was a dictator, could not help affirming the revolution that had been made and the revolution that was to come. In all his youth he had heard nothing but talk of revolution and its exaltation as a world palingenesis.

It worried him that Italian Socialism was dominated by the re-

forming wing with Turati and Bissolati at the head, that within it there prevailed the founders and administrators of cooperatives, popular banks and labor unions, that these leaders thought of everything except revolution. During the Libyan War he tried to arouse the people against the Government; he succeeded only in some sporadic demonstrations, tearing up railroad tracks and massing crowds of women and children in front of trains transporting troops. The attempt failed. Another revolt was tried later in Ancona in 1913; it was called "The Red Week;" it, too, failed. (The Socialist leaders of that time did not want to participate in the Government in order not to collaborate with the capitalistic bourgeoisie and did not promote revolution, except in words, because the occasion was not deemed mature.) Mussolini could not thus await its hour, and, seizing the opportunity offered by the World War in which Italian public opinion was favorable to intervention on the Allies' side, he suddenly left the Socialists and their newspaper, *L'Avanti* (of which he was chief-editor), and founded a new newspaper at Milan with the subsidy of the French Government. During the war, his name became popular because he knew how to write with ease polemics against his former companions for their neutrality, while he boosted, in his turn, that exaggerated and inconsistent nationalism which was then in vogue.

When the war ended, the working masses and a good part of the middle classes and veterans flocked to the Social-Communist Party (Socialists and Communists were at that time fused) and to the Christian Democratic Party (then called the Popular Party). Mussolini found himself with a handful of companions, but without followers. The dreamed-for revolution was escaping from his hands. He thought of an extreme program that should be republican, anti-clerical, anti-capitalist and nationalist; this was the 1919 program of the first *Fascio* created at Milan. The workers did not follow him; those to the Left did not believe in his program. In the meantime, for the anti-Socialist struggle, Mussolini got money from the industrialists and landed proprietors of the Valley of the Po, help from the heads of the Army, and favor from the bankers and some politicians.

What decided Mussolini to leave the Left and pass to the Right, always, of course, as a revolutionary, was the fact (a revelation for him) that in the general political elections of November 1919, he was not able to obtain—with the system of proportional representation so favorable for small parties—a single seat in Parliament, either for himself

or for others of his Party, whereas the Socialists (together with the Communists) obtained 158 seats and the Popularists (Christian Democrats) 99 seats.

The Fascist revolution had no appeal at that time. Mussolini would find an audience whenever he would exaggerate the Bolshevist peril, whenever he would send his armed squads to burn cooperatives and assail Municipal Palaces of the Communes administered by Socialists. And, since the hatred that the industrialists and agrarians bore against trade unions was also directed against the Christian Democrats, the "punitive" expeditions made by the Fascists were extended to the men and institutions of the Popular Party.

In this undertaking Mussolini found those aids from the Capitalist and "Liberal" sides that he never could have dreamed of obtaining had he continued to be a revolutionary of the Left. He shifted his Republicanism to an understanding with the Monarchy, his anti-clericalism to amity with the clergy, his social revolution to the support of the capitalists. His success was assured.

This is not the occasion to re-tell its history: there are thousands of books, *pro* and *con*, and many others will be written on the subject. I mention it only to arrive at the principal fact that I intend to emphasize: the lack in him of convictions and stable principles. Thus the revolutionary menace served him only as a means for achieving power, it mattered not a jot whether with the help of the working masses or against the same masses. Once power was obtained, the revolutionary menace served to support him against the working masses or against the bourgeois classes; against the Church or against Free-Masonry, as needed. And thus did Mussolini work during all his life, in the national field as well as in the international, by creating around himself boundless expectations and limitless distrusts, until, finally, his game could no longer serve him. When he bound himself to the fate of Hitler, he suddenly lost his personal character, his political consistency, even his physical figure; he returned to his real being: the mask that falls, the stage performer that returns behind the scenes, the shadow that disappears.

* * *

The difference between Mussolini on one side and Franco, Pétain, Dollfuss and Salazar on the other, lies precisely in this, that Mussolini never believed in Fascism as an ideal and as a principle. He made use

of it only as a technique for power, while the others, though they adapted to the particular situation of their countries the Fascist technique, believed or still believe in non-Fascist ideals (I should say ideals of authoritarianism and conservatism) which have been or are the basis of their action. Notwithstanding this, they, too, are to be blamed, in measure with their actions for having introduced, either in the acquisition or in the exercise of power, Fascist methods which exceed by a long stretch the authoritarian and arbitrary methods of princes of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries.

Franco and the others represent an intermediate phase between the anti-liberal authoritarianism of the Holy Alliance and the Fascism of Mussolini. The element that characterizes them is that political or clerical Catholicism of the beginning of the past century which opposed every constitutional system, every form of political liberty. Liberty was then badly understood by clericals but it could have been re-linked to the Christian tradition of popular sovereignty and to the democratic regime. These Catholics were the late heirs of such a clericalism; they saw in Fascism a system of "popular" reaction and a means (however violent) of political recovery which made possible that Corporative State by which, according to them, the authority of the State would be reconciled with the well-being of the working classes. They accepted Fascism as a method capable of overcoming the demagoguery of the Socialists and the subversiveness of the Communists. Moreover, in their anti-historical religious conception they saw again in action the collaboration of the State with the Catholic Church, through concordats, or even without, but with the mutual aid of favors and services.

How far all of this was from true Fascism (from which Nazism took a great deal) as well as from the democratic concept of Western Civilization, has been seen during the war and will be seen better still after the war by those countries which will have a chance of not falling into the Moscow sphere of influence. The others will pass from one totalitarianism to another and God alone knows when they will be able to breathe the air of liberty or, at least, have assured the elementary right of human personality.

Mussolini (who had "genialoid" intuitions) invented the adjective "totalitarian" and applied it to his system with the celebrated affirmation: "Nothing out of the State, above the State, against the State;

everything from the State, for the State, and in the State.” From that sprang the substantive: *totalitarismo* (the English and Americans say *totalitarianism*) and from that time (about twenty years ago) the two words entered into all languages without the permission of linguists even, or of the compilers of dictionaries.

Totalitarianism is the common qualification that can be applied to Mussolini's Fascism, Hitler's Nazism, Stalin's Communism, Franco's Falangism and so forth. It is understood that between the concentration camps of Dachau or Buchenwald and those of the deportees to Siberia from one side and the “Confino” in the Islands of Ponza, Ustica, Lipari and Pantelleria there was some difference; that between Hitler's or Stalin's purges and Mussolini's Statel Defense Court there was also some difference; that between the suppression of the Jews in Germany and the laws against the Jews in France and Italy there was some difference. The Latin temperament and the relative traditions enter into the account, but when the human beast is in the clutches of fear or hatred, at bottom it is always the same. This has been seen during this war in those zones of Italy under the Nazi and Fascist yoke.

If real Fascism, the Mussolinian brand, has fallen, totalitarianism survives its unhappy “literary” author, because at bottom it lived before him. Napoleon Bonaparte gave a first sample of it to the modern world; the ancients were called tyrants, but the peoples of that time and the Church knew how to resist tyrants or avoid their clutches; today, both peoples and Church have been and are still less equipped to resist totalitarianisms. There is still another difference between totalitarianism and ancient tyranny; the latter was personal or of the family or caste, and did not claim to appeal to the people for its consent or to solicit their national sentiments or their social aspirations; it is modern totalitarianism that calls the people into its orbit, regiments them for its own ends and constrains them to servitude through a single party. Today only two such parties survive: the Communist and the Falangist. The latter is about to fall because Franco at last doubts the system, the Spanish Church from having been tepid and tolerant now has become opposed to Falangism, and the opinion of neighboring countries is clearly opposed.

Instead, Communist totalitarianism is spreading and is becoming a terrible heir of the Fascisms of Pilsudski, Horthy, Schuschnigg,

Antonescu, and of the various Serbian, Bulgarian, and perhaps Greek, Kings and Regents. We shall not speak of what Germany occupied by the Russians will be; there, a new totalitarianism will be "justified" by military and even (why not?) "educational" reasons for extracting the poison of Nazi totalitarianism from the Germans. Let us hope it will not be so: hope never dies.

* * *

On the other hand, let us see what may be the Fascist residues in the Western countries which are presumed to be, now or in the future, democracies. We begin, of course, with Italy.

It cannot be denied that there exists in that country signs of Fascist survival. I do not speak of the Monarchy, which, although infected with Fascism for so many long years, as an institution cannot be called Fascist. But the men of the House of Savoy, the entourage of high officials, of court people, of defenders and supporters of the Monarchy (outside of the Liberal *elite* around Croce) has a more or less Fascist mentality. This is not said with the purpose of crying: "Wolf, Wolf;" some Fascists there are in all the Parties: those who were Fascists to earn their livelihood, others because of a nationalistic spirit, and, also, alack and alas, some who really believed in Fascism. Ninety per cent of them were deceived or attracted by the environing atmosphere (as many were in foreign countries outside Italy), but they had no crimes for which they had to answer before their judges. It is their mentality, their spirit, their education that must be changed. It will be changed assuredly. Indeed, it is in the process of changing and events teach more than words.

This post-Fascism may have some influence but in itself it causes no fear. There is another Fascism to be feared. If Italy is further humiliated politically and submitted to territorial mutilations and the loss of colonies, willy-nilly, a nationalism of resentment will develop widely, Fascist ideas and secret Fascist propaganda (which will not be lacking) will kindle a fire that it will be very difficult to extinguish, even though during certain periods it will remain under ashes.

Another post-Fascism is that of street violence against opposing parties, practiced today by certain Communist groups against Christian Democrats, by certain local groups in southern Italy against Socialists and Communists, and by the Separatists in Sicily against

their adversaries. Demagogues are not lacking to threaten in the newspapers of the Left even a civil war if what they propose is not allowed.

It can be said that this spirit of violence is a product of the war and that it is not lacking in any European country, France and Belgium included; but for a country such as Italy which, besides the wars (and what wars!), has had more than twenty years of Fascism in power and, before that, three more years of street Fascism, the spirit of violence assumes a character that I should call endemic and which gives food for thought.

Misery, hunger, inflation, the black market, the secret terms of the Armistice, workers' unemployment, the fall of money, have influenced and are influencing banefully the creation of a general state of mind which (would that I were mistaken) I should call either pre-Fascist or pre-totalitarian, even if, as I believe, it will not go as far as the Communist experiment—unless London and Washington (through their lack of comprehension and their mistakes) push Italy toward that line.

What we say of Italy may be said, with variants adapted to each case, of all the Latin countries, even of the neutral countries of the Iberian peninsula which likewise have an indigenous Fascism and which, notwithstanding their neutrality, do not fail to feel the economical, psychological and political effects of the war.

What is surprising is to find wide traces of Fascism in England as well as in America. Let not the reader marvel. When Winston Churchill, on December 15, could announce to the House of Commons with a sense of tranquillity that about ten million persons will be *disentangled* from local populations and *transferred*, also expelled, within or outside of Poland, and that this will be done *humanly* with modern means at our disposal, one remains incredulous, uncertain whether such an affirmation is being made in a country of liberal tradition, or whether its authors are Mussolini or Kemal Pashà. Mussolini succeeded in transferring only about 150,000 Tyroleans and Kemal Pashà only about one million Greeks of Anatolia.

But the greatest astonishment has been caused not only by the lack of spiritual reaction on the part of the English people against a violation of this kind of the rights of human personality, but by the consent of many political men, statesmen, scientists, journalists, clerics

and laity. We have heard that Benes and his Government has proposed to purify Czechoslovakia of Sudeten Germans (to be shipped to Germany), that Horthy told the Allies that Germans or other minorities of Hungary should be pushed out beyond the boundaries. This "readjustment of populations" against the individual will of each person, against his personal rights, his interests and family ties, under the pretext of a homogeneous race, national interests, state security, is the summit of injustice and is in line with Fascist criteria of the rights of the State over individuals.

It is true that similar transfers of populations were not lacking in the eras of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation; but in those times the populations were given the option of staying and submitting to civil and religious limitations or of emigrating where they would find a benevolent prince or a free zone as in America. But, for us, those wars, those deportations were barbarities against which succeeding centuries reacted. That from the House of Commons was to come a similar proposal which did not find a chorus of disapprovals is something that gives one thoughtful concern. That Fascist totalitarianism should have reached the point of defiling Gladstone's country. It is the peak!

But there is worse still: the proposal to make slaves of German laborers for the reconstruction of the occupied countries. It is one thing to exact an indemnity from the German people, obliging the new German state to distribute the burdens as best it may; it is another thing to oblige definite individuals, who have the fortune or misfortune of being masons, carpenters, smiths, engineers and such to undergo years of servitude in a foreign country. No matter how much it may be organized, such a "service" is always a form of war slavery, discarded (we thought) forever. That this should be demanded by Moscow causes no surprise, considering the dictatorial mentality and their Czarist, Leninist traditions; but by some people in Paris, in London, in Brussels. . . . !

If anyone reads the proposals of certain American scientists, usually of positivistic mentality, and the proposals, sometimes too, of the man in the street, he finds suggestions that cause amazement. There are some who propose the sterilization of all the Japanese; others, convinced of the impossibility of "educating" the Germans, propose their destruction. If I myself had not read with my own eyes these pro-

posals, some mad, others criminal, I should not believe it possible that they should have been made. But the worst is that they find reception in the press and that unconscious journalists and editors, anxious about circulation, do not think of throwing them into the waste paper basket, instead of giving diffusion to such ideas. These ideas penetrate into the depths of consciousness, they find a hearing in some spheres of public opinion, they accustom the common mentality to find these things natural, or rather, inherent in the spirit of the time. And there are no voices of protest except those usual few and weak ones that end by not counting.

The fundamental error of Fascism was the contempt for human personality. This contempt is at the basis of every anti-Christian concept of man and it became characteristic of the Fascism that wanted to deify the State and identify itself with it in Mussolini's celebrated epiphonema recorded above, "Nothing outside, above or against the State; everything from the State, for the State, in the State." It is worth recalling that Pius XI raised his voice against such a theory many times, from the Christmas allocution of 1926 up to the very end of his life.

Fascism derived this attitude from the positivists of the nineteenth century. They, however, counterbalanced their concept of the State with that vague humanitarianism which, at least, caused them to take into account the interests and rights of man (I say "rights," though no true positivist can admit that rights exist, since rights have a spiritual content).

But when the humanitarianism of the past century declined as being inconsistent with positivism, human personality had no other defense except that of the play of forces in conflict: the class struggle of Karl Marx served Socialism and frightened the bourgeoisie; the bourgeoisie caused liberty, for which it had fought for two centuries, to collapse. There was, moreover, no other solution in the politico-economic field, except "Statal Monism," either in the name of the nation (Fascism), of the race (Nazism) or, on the other side, in the name of the class (Communism). Such iron unification crumbled for Fascism and Nazism only on the field of battle; it has not crumbled for Communism which, because of the effects of the present war, is thriving among the European masses.

But Communism itself, from the economic and political viewpoint

is but the other face of Capitalism, to which it seems to be antagonistic. Modern society is based on a capitalistic system and cannot do without it. Whether capital is in the hands of a few capitalists or in the hands of the bureaucracy of the Communist State is insignificant incidence if both are responsible for the appalling phenomena of our times: the totalitarian war and the new slavery of industrialized labor. But it would be worse indeed if Capitalism and Communism make an alliance in the international field in order to create a joint power for common aims even though over distinct spheres of influence. Their totalitarianism would then cover all human activities.

In such an event our modern society would endure the last consequences of that political and social "Monism" which for the past century has infected philosophy, science, politics, economics and public opinion, weakening one by one all the institutions that our Judeo-Christian civilizations built up in defense of human personality.

The Anglo-American and the Scandinavian democracies themselves, which more than the other European democracies have maintained Christian ideas and feelings through the Reformation and Counter-Reformation periods and the following revivals, are no longer capable of finding those moral convictions which, if truly felt, can draw out of the minds and hearts of peoples the venom of positivism. They also, of course, are going to encounter some experiences of totalitarianism.

It makes no difference if we call it Fascism or Communism: though each be placed at the opposite ends of the arch of a pendulum, they have the same impulses, the same fundamental concepts, namely: the spirit of violence and the use of force as a means to acquire and maintain power, the subordination of the legal rights and moral values of the human personality to the interests of the State, the loss, be it gradual or violent, of Liberty! *

* Translated by Dr. Angeline H. Lograsso.