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Fascist Theory and Practice

Doctrine and Policy

Although fascism, like communism, is a movement that exists everywhere; it had no such authoritative statement of principles as communism has; moreover, no country, at present, is directing a fascist world conspiracy. During the Nazi regime (1933-1945), Germany was the most powerful fascist state in existence, and world fascism was very largely directed, financed, and inspired by German brains and money. Since the defeat of the axis powers (Germany, Japan, and Italy) in WWII there has been no major fascist state; Argentina never possessed anything like the worldwide influence that Nazi Germany had until 1945.

The absence of a universally recognized, authoritative statement of fascist principles is not total. Hitler has left in *Mein Kampf* (1925-1927) a trustworthy guide to his thought, and Mussolini's *Doctrine of Fascism* (1932), a moderate statement of fascist principles, expresses the Italian brand of fascism. The latter has served as a model for most other fascist movements in the world because it is much broader in outlook; Nazism, a specifically German brand of fascism, has proved less suitable for export.

Although there is no fascist manifesto with undisputed authority among fascists, it is not too difficult to state the basic elements of the fascist outlook:

1. Distrust of reason
2. Denial of basic human equality
3. Code of behavior based on lies and violence
4. Government run by an elite group
5. Totalitarianism
6. Racism and imperialism
7. Opposition to international law and order

Distrust of reason is perhaps the most significant trait of fascism. The rational tradition of the West stems from ancient Greece and is a basic component of the West's characteristic culture and outlook. Fascism rejects this tradition of Western civilization and is frankly *antirationalist*, distrusting reason in human affairs and stressing instead the irrational, the sentimental, and the uncontrollable elements in man. Psychologically, fascism is *fanatical* rather than reflective, *dogmatic* rather than open-minded; as a result each fascist regime has its taboo issues such as race, or the empire, or the leader, the nature of which demands that it be accepted on faith alone and never critically discussed. During the fascist regime in Italy (1922-1945), Mussolini's picture was shown in every classroom in the country over the caption, "Mussolini is always right."

The communist states have the taboo issue of Marxism-Leninism, a set of final truths that must not be questioned. In addition, there are the more passing taboo subjects as defined by the top party leaders in the Soviet Union, China, Yugoslavia, and other communist states.

As a matter of basic principle, democracy recognizes no taboo issue: There is no subject that cannot be questioned or challenged, not even the validity of democracy itself.

In practice, of course, democracies do not always live up to that ideal. Thus, it was argued by some in the 1950s that in the United States the question of the validity of democracy was on its way to becoming a taboo issue, especially in light of the Supreme Court's 1951 decision upholding the constitutional of the Smith Act of 1940 under which the advocacy of the duty, desirability, necessity, or propriety of revolution is a criminal offense.

The individual, too, may have taboo issues, dark corners in his heart or mind that must not be pulled out and subjected to rational examination. The mentally healthy individual has few or (ideally) no taboo issues because she is able to face reality as it is and does not insist on living in a dream world in defiance of reality. Psychologically, the existence of taboo issues in the individual or in a group, party, or nation is due to a sense of insecurity or guilt or both.

Under conditions of stress and strain, an individual as well as a group may take refuge in the temporary shelter of a taboo and postpone facing reality, even if it is possible impossible to shut it out forever. Since totalitarian regimes operate in a permanent state of high tension and crisis, the taboo is part and parcel of their normal environment. Democracies succumb to the temptation of the taboo and its false security only in periods of exceptional strain; it is significant that the Supreme Court's decision on the Smith Act took place in 1951, at the height of the Korean War. In the 1960s, a more tolerant and reflective mood prevailed, and the Supreme Court progressively eliminated restrictions on the constitutionality of revolutionary propaganda and organizations.

2. The *denial of basic human equality* is a common denominator of fascist movements and states. True enough, democratic societies do not always live up to the ideal of human equality, but at least they accept equality as the long-term goal of public policy. By contrast, fascist societies not only accept the fact of human inequality but go further and affirm the inequality as an ideal.

The concept of human equality goes back to the three roots of Western Civilization. The Jewish idea of one God led to the idea of one mankind, since all men, as children of God, are brothers among themselves. The Christian notion of the inalienability and indestructibility of the human soul led to the ideal of basic *moral* equality of all men. The Greek-Stoic concept of reason posited the onesness of mankind on the basis of reason as the most truly human bond that all men have in common.

Fascism rejects this Jewish-Christian-Greek concept of equality and opposes to it the concept inequality, which can be spelled out most simply in the contrast of superiority and inferiority. Thus, in the fascist code, men are superior to women, soldiers to civilians, party members, one's own nation to others, the strong to the weak, and (perhaps most important in the fascist outlook) the victors in war to the vanquished. The chief criteria of equality in the Western tradition are man's mind and soul, whereas the fascist affirmation of inequality is based ultimately on strength.

3. The fascist code of behavior stresses violence and lies in all human relations, within and between nations. In democratic type governments, politics is the mechanism through which social conflicts of interest are adjusted peacefully. By contrast, the fascist view is that politics is characterized by the friend-enemy relation. Politics begins and ends, in this fascist way of thinking, with the possibility of an enemy – and his *total annihilation*. The democratic antithesis is the *opponent*, and in democratic nations the opponent of today is considered the potential government of tomorrow. (The party out of

power in the British Parliament is officially called “Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition,” and the leader of the Opposition receives a special salary to do his job well.) The fascist knows only enemies, not opponents, and since enemies represent evil incarnate, total annihilation is the only solution. This doctrine applies to domestic as well as to foreign enemies; thus, the Nazis first set up concentration camps and gas chambers for German citizens and later used them for non-Germans.

Contrary to common belief, concentration camps and slave labor camps, as under Hitler and Stalin, are not incidental phenomena in totalitarian systems but are at their very core. It is by means of concentration and slave labor camps that totalitarian regimes seek to destroy the legal and moral person in man and to deprive him of the last residue of individuality. The technique of brainwashing deliberately seeks to warp a person’s mind to the point where he will publicly confess to crimes he did not commit and perhaps could not have committed. After a period of brainwashing, the victim no longer has a mind of his own; he merely plays back, like a recording tape, what is expected of him.

By institutionalizing organized mass murder in concentration and slave labor camps, totalitarianism regimes demonstrate to the entire population what is in store for anyone in disfavor with those in power, and at the same time they provide the shock troops of the regime with a peacetime outlet for savagery and fanaticism. Immediate death is often considered too humane a penalty by such regimes; moreover, the slow death of concentration or slave labor camps has greater demonstration value than the clean, old-fashioned method of the execution squad or the gallows.

4. *Government by an elite group* is a principle that fascists everywhere frankly oppose to the “democratic fallacy” that people are capable of governing themselves. The concept that only a small minority of the population, qualified by birth, education, or social standing, is capable of understanding what is best for the whole community, and of putting it into practice, is not an invention of twentieth-century fascism. Plato, one of the first Western political philosophers, strongly believed that only one class, the “philosopher-kings,” are fit to rule society. The contrary belief, that the people as a whole are capable of self-rule, is of relatively recent origin and has worked successfully only in limited areas of the globe.

Although the fascist idea of government by a self-appointed elite is undemocratic (a fascist government usually shoots its way into power), such a government does not always lack popular approval. Strange as it may seem to the democrat, people frequently have approved of autocratic governments throughout history. Approval alone, however, is not evidence of democracy. What makes a government democratic is that it always depends on popular consent given frequently in free elections. In fascist regimes, even when the government enjoys popular approval, it is carried on independently of popular consent, without free elections, a free press, or a freely functioning opposition.

The fascist *leadership principle* expresses the extreme form of the elite concept. It reflects the irrational emphasis of fascist politics; the leader is said to be infallible, endowed with mystical gifts and insights. In a conflict between popular opinion and the fascist leader, the will of the leader prevails; he represents the public interest, the way all people would think if they knew what was best for the whole community (Rousseau’s “General Will”), whereas the people express only individual whims and desires not necessarily in harmony with public good (Rousseau’s “Will of All”).

The emphasis on leadership is not compatible, in the long run, with the fascist enforcement of orthodoxy and conformity. Hitler, Mussolini, and Peron grew up in nonfascist societies with considerable free competition. So far it has been impossible to appraise the leadership qualities of a generation born and bred under fascism. The German, Italian, and Argentine brands of fascism did not last long enough to supply conclusive evidence of the matter.

5. *Totalitarianism* in all human relations characterizes fascism as a way of life rather than as a mere system of government. Many dictatorships, particularly in Latin America, apply the authoritarian principle only in government. If the people do not make any trouble politically and do not interfere with the rule of the dictator and his henchmen, they can lead their own lives pretty freely. Education, religion, business, and agriculture are not touched very much by these political dictatorships. By contrast, fascism is totalitarian; it employs authority and violence in *all* kinds of social relations, whether political or not.

With regard to women, the largest discriminated-against minority of the world, fascism is antifeminist. Women, said the Nazis, should stay in their place and their concern should be the famous three Ks- *Kinder, Kuche, Kirche*. Since women are considered incapable of bearing arms, they are automatically considered second-class citizens according to the fascist view, and they are excluded from leadership positions in government or party. They have the right to vote, but since this right in fascist countries means only the right to be enthusiastic about the leader and his party, it is not much a practical asset. Within the family the father is the leader, and his wife and children get a strong taste of domestic authoritarian government, which has more effect on their everyday lives than the operations of a remote political government in the capital. In the extreme case of Nazi Germany, the contempt for women was finally demonstrated in the official ridicule of the institution of marriage as a false Jewish-Christian prejudice, and Germany women were encouraged to produce children for the fatherland outside of wedlock.

Fascist countries also preferred to employ male teachers in schools. From the fascist viewpoint, the purpose of schools is to teach discipline and obedience, specifically to prepare boys for military service and girls for domestic activities. In a program of such importance, fascist educators feel that women teachers should play subordinate roles.

Thus it can be seen that fascist totalitarianism, unlike the traditional dictatorships of Latin America, is totalitarian in its objective to control all phases of human life, political or not, from the cradle to the grave. It may begin this control even before the cradle by pushing definite population policies, and has been known to reach into the grave, so to speak, to decide whether a dead person should have a burial at all and, if so, in what form.

Fascism is also totalitarian in its means. It will use any form of coercion, from verbal threats to mass murder, to obtain its goals. By contrast, the traditional authoritarian dictatorship was, and is, more restrained in its means and resorts to murder only on a limited scale. Thus, when a Latin American leader is ousted, he is usually permitted by his opponents to assemble his family and peacefully depart to a foreign country.

6. Racism and imperialism express the two basic fascist characteristics of inequality and violence as applied to the society of nations. Fascist doctrine holds that within the nation, the elite is superior to the mass and may impose its will upon the latter by force. Similarly, between nations, the *elite nation* is superior to others and is entitled to rule them. German fascism went the furthest in its racist and imperialist policies. A straight line led from the theories of German-Nordic “race” superiority to the murder of millions of people. The German objective of world domination included the elimination of some nations through genocide and the enslavement of the rest. After the expected defeat of Britain and the Soviet Union, the United States was next on the list. The Japanese race theories found their practical imperialist expression in the concept of “co-prosperity,” under which Japan would prosper by exploiting Asia and the Pacific.

Italian fascism was for a long time (from 1922 to 1938) remarkably free of exaggerated race theories; early Italian propaganda concentrated on the idea of reviving the old Roman Empire. In 1938, however, Mussolini announced that the Italians were a pure and superior race, and he became more closely tied to Hitler’s Germany.

Racism and imperialism are not an exclusive monopoly of fascism, however. During World War II, the Soviet Union annexed Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. After the war, it held onto positions of Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Finland, and Romania. Russian domination of the multinational Soviet Union has been increasingly stressed, differing only in degree from the Great Russian superiority concept held in tsarist Russia. More recently, China has used the propaganda argument of race and color in her struggle with the Soviet Union for supremacy in the communist world and for leading the developing “third world” countries--mostly inhabited by nonwhites--toward communist revolution.

In the democracies, too, there is a tradition of racism; in the United States, for example, racial discrimination has seriously corroded the vitality of democratic ideals. Called (by the Swedish social scientist Gunnar Myrdal) “the American dilemma,” the race issue may ultimately decide the fate of democracy in the United States. Britain, with a much smaller proportion of nonwhites in its population (2 percent compared with 12 percent in the United States), was also beset by racial tensions in the 1960s and early 1970s. While the issue of race is less burning in Britain than in the United States, it has brought to the fore latent prejudices and popular sentiments that sharply contradict the British liberal tradition of the last hundred years. Communists have exploited American and British racialism in their propaganda communications to the largely nonwhite developing nations and have been effective in this because there is enough substance to validate much of that propaganda.

7. Opposition to international law and order, or war, is the logical outcome of fascist beliefs in inequality, violence, elitism, racism, and imperialism. Whereas nonfascists (except nonresisting pacifists) accept war as a tragic fact, as something that should be abolished, fascists raise war to the ideal, because as Mussolini put it, “war alone brings up to their highest tension all human energies and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it.”

Any type of international organization assumes some form of government by consent, which is directly contradictory to fascist *government by force*. Also, equality of

states before the law of nations is a basic principle of international order. The fascist concept of an elite leads, as we have seen, to the leadership of one nation over the society of nations as it does to the leadership of one man within a nation's government. Fascist states limits or decline from participation in international organizations in which they are expected to abide by majority decisions and in which policy setting is carried on by methods of discussion rather than by force.

The fascist regimes of Italy and Germany had no use for the League of Nations; Germany withdrew in 1933 and Italy in 1937. In the United States, Peronist Argentina consistently played a lone-wolf role. In the Organization of American States, she did all she could to prevent effective cooperation between the American republics—a policy later copied by Cuba under Castro.

In West Germany, neo-Nazi groups merged in to the National Democratic Party (NDP) in 1964. In addition to taking a hard line on communism and law and order, the NDP has since stressed a strong nationalist position on issues affecting Germany's relations with other nations. Thus, the NDP favors German withdrawal from all supranational bodies, such as the Common Market, NATO, and special agencies of the United Nations, since the NDP states there must be no outside interference with German sovereignty. The NDP also takes a belligerent stand regarding the German territories ceded to Poland and the Soviet Union after World War II, and favors the use of German armed forces for strictly nationalist objectives.

Fascist Economics: The Corporate State

The corporate state applies fascist principles of organization and control to the economy. The fascist economy is subdivided into *state-controlled* associations of capital and labor, and each association has a monopoly in its trade or occupation. Thus, the one-party state is the ultimate arbiter of conflicts between capital and labor.

The philosophy of the corporate state rests on two assumptions. First, the individual should not be particularly articulate as a citizen (except for the small ruling elite) but only as a worker, entrepreneur, farmer, doctor, or lawyer; general political problems are assumed to be too complicated for the masses, who are expected to understand only those issues that bear directly on their vocational or professional work. Second, members of the ruling elite are supposed to understand broad problems that affect the whole society, therefore they alone are qualified to govern.

The democratic concept rejects this corporate approach to economic and political organization for several reasons. First, it is not always easy to separate economic from political aspects. Tariffs seem to be a purely economic issue, yet they directly affect political and diplomatic relations with other states.