Slouching Towards Utopia?:
An Economic History of the Long Twentieth Century

XI. Fascism and Naziism

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11.1. Italian Fascism

11.1.1. The Fasces

Back in ancient Rome, the *fasces* had been a bundle of sticks about five feet long, tied with leather thongs. The Romans had copied it from the Etruscans. It was their symbol of order, strength, and authority: the power to command and be obeyed, *imperium*. The attendants of Roman magistrates—consul, praetor, aedile, proconsul, propraeter—carried the *fasces*. Thus they showed to all that here was somebody with the right to command citizens of the Roman Republic, and subjects of the growing empire.

You can see the fasces on the back of the American winged-liberty dime that was minted until 1945. You can see the fasces in the U.S. Treasury Department's stair bannisters: they are the uprights supporting the railing. You can see the fasces on the arms of the chair in which Abraham Lincoln sits in the Lincoln Memorial.

The symbology of the fasces is clear. Individually, each stick is weak and easily broken. Bundled together and tied with leather thongs, they are strong. The Roman people united and bound together by the institutions of the Roman Republic, in the persons of its elected magistrates, are to be feared and obeyed.

11.1.2. Young Mussolini

In the aftermath of World War I, young Italian journalist-politician on the make Benito Mussolini needed something to distinguish himself. He took up this Roman Republican symbol and making it his own: And so he became the first *fascist*, the first united-and-tied-together-we-are-powerful-like-a-bundle-of-sticks guy.

11.1.2.1. Mussolini the Socialist

Mussolini had started out as a socialist journalist: editor of the Italian socialist newspaper *Avanti!*; an agitator among Italian workers in Switzerland, then arrested and deported for calling for a violent general strike; an agitator for socialist causes in the mixed Italian-German-speaking alpine regions of the then-Austro-Hungarian Empire; a protestor against Italy's imperial adventure conquering Libya; sometimes thrown in jail for political rioting.

By the eve of World War I he had become one of Italy's most prominent socialist journalist-politicians.

As World War I began, representatives from all of Europe's socialist parties came together in Brussels on July 29, 1914 for a meeting of the world's Second Socialist International. At previous meetings Basle in 1912 and at Stuttgart in 1907 it had been agreed that the working class knew no country: The united world socialist movement had agreed that a threatening war should be met by a call for a general strike. Workers would down tools, and so bring the machine to a halt as railroads stopped running and war munitions factories stopped operating. Then diplomats could do their work.

But in Brussels the Austrian socialist leader Viktor Adler announced that the workers of Vienna were in the streets—but they were not demonstrating for peace; they were chanting for war. "It is better to be wrong with the working classes than right against them", Adler said: the Austrian socialists would support their Kaiser. In France, the President of the Council of Ministers was a socialist: Rene Viviani. Viviani also called on French workers to defend their country. In fact, outside of Italy only a handful of major socialist leaders stood against this war: Hugo Hasse, Rosa Luxemburg, and Karl Leibknecht from Germany; and Vladimir Lenin from Russia;.

The socialists of Italy did not have to choose between their pacifist principles and a government urging war for the sake of the nation. Italy had in 1882 formed a defensive military alliance with Germany and Austria. The Italian government

announced that Germany and Austria were the aggressors, and that Italy would stay neutral. And the Italian socialists applauded the government.

11.1.2.2. Mussolini the Nationalist

Mussolini, however, was shaken by the collapse of the Second International in the face of the forces of nationalism.

What did it mean that, when push came to shove, the working class appeared to have a nation after all? He was shaken by defections from the Italian socialist cause calling for entering the war on the allied side to conquer Italian-speaking regions from Austria: "Cardi, Corridoni, *la* Rygier, apologists for war! It is a contagion that spares no one! But I want to hold the rampart to the end." But, he thought: "The Second International is dead".

And so in the third month of the war Mussolini began to leave the rampart. If the Italian workers he wanted to lead were going to be nationalists first and socialists second, he would join them. Mussolini was not the kind of person to stand alone. He was not a George Orwell, to think that one had a duty to go against the crowd when it was wrong, even when "to see what is in front of one's nose needs a constant struggle." He was not a Leon Trotsky, whom Edmund Wilson compared to Henrik Ibsen's character Dr. Stockman in *Enemy of the People,* "the strongest man is he who stands most alone". Mussolini's identity was that he had to be with and one of the leaders—he hoped *the* leader—of a mass movement. And by the late fall of 1914 Mussolini had drawn a lesson from the collapse of the Second International and mass enthusiasm by the working classes for war: that *class* was unlikely to be the basis for a strong and durable mass movement, but *ethos* or *nation* might well be.

Benito Mussolini had become convinced of the psychological inadequacy of Marxian socialism: it had no place for the enormous outpouring of nationalist enthusiasm that he saw during the war, no place for the struggle between nations, and no recognition of the fact that solidarity was associated with the national community—not with one's international class or with humanity in general. Moreover, socialism had no plan for how a post-capitalist economy would operate. Mussolini soon became an ex-socialist, intent on integrating the lessons and appeal of nationalism with the appeal of socialism.

Mussolini started his own new newspaper, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, calling for intervention on the side of France and Britain. His ex-comrades denounced him as

having been bribed by the French intelligence service. On November 24, 1914, Mussolini was expelled from the Italian socialist party. The bridges had been burned.

Had Mussolini been bribed by the French intelligence service before his break? It seems unlikely.

And after his break with the socialists, Mussolini's new movement was financed by French intelligence. After all, they had every reason to do so.

11.1.3. What Was "Fascism" Going to Be?

But what might that movement be?

Originally Mussolini had just a placeholder, the word "fascism." And originally he had just an observation: that while the working classes were hard to mobilize for a largely-economic internal struggle of protests, demonstrations, strikes, and votes to obtain respect and an end to poverty, they were easy to mobilize for a bloody and destructive war to reclaim, or rather claim, Alto Adige, Trentino, Frulia, Udine, and the city of Trieste.

Mussolini therefore felt his way forward into his doctrine. And many have followed him since.

11.1.3.1. Fascism as Critique

Perhaps the dominant theme of fascism as an ideology was that liberal capitalism had had its chance and had failed along several dimensions, which were seen as—somehow—linked together:

The first was macroeconomic failure: it had not guaranteed high employment and rapid economic growth.

A second was distributional failure: either the rich got richer and everyone else stayed poor, or liberal capitalism failed to preserve an adequate income differential between the more-educated, more-respectable lower middle class and the unskilled industrial proletariat. Depending on which aspect of income distribution was highlighted, industrial capitalism produced an income distribution that was either too unequal or not unequal enough. Fascism could and did play both ends against the middle: under liberal democratic capitalism, equals were treated unequally,

while unequals—those who were not *really* part of the ethnic community—were treated equally.

The third dimension was moral failure: the market economy reduced all human relationships—or at any event many human relationships—to arms-length market transactions: you do this for me, and I will pay you. But people are not comfortable dealing with each other as nothing but black boxes: machines for transforming your money into useful commodities, or your labor time into your money. Contests and gift-exchanges have more psychological resonance. By ignoring and trying to suppress as much as possible of the contest and gift-exchange dimensions of economic relationships, the market society dehumanized much of life.

Fourth, the liberal capitalist order ignored the fact that we are all in this together: that inhabitants of an ethnic nation have common interests that are much more powerful than any one individual's interest. Thus economic policy needs to be made in a "syndicalist" or "corporatist" mode: the state needed to mediate between employers and unions, and the state needed to crack heads when necessary to make sure that employers and unions did the right thing. Not market forces but government regulation would set the price of labor and the quantity of employment, for those were too important for society to be determined by the distribution of property and the workings of the market.

Fifth, not only the liberal economy but also the liberal government was flawed: parliaments were incompetent. They were composed either (a) of time-servers with no initiative, (b) corrupt distributors of favors to special interests, or (c) ideological champions who focused not on the public interest but what made their own narrow slice of supporters feel good. They were a swamp. The swamp needed to be drained. A strong leader who would say what he thought and do what was needed without paying attention to norms or niceties was needed to do the job.

11.1.3.2. Fascism as Policy Platform

Thus nationalist expansion became Mussolini's first plank: demanding that the Italian border be moved north into the Alps and east into what would become Yugoslavia, as far as possible. Anti-socialism became his second plank: recruiting groups of young thugs and sending them out into the streets to beat up socialists and disrupt working-class organizations. He was appealing to the same sources of discontent and energy that the socialists were, and so needed to sharpen the contradictions to keep his own recruits from drifting left. Back in the early second century St. John the Evangelist had needed his congregation to stop dividing their

contributions between church and synagogue, hence his gospel demonized the Jews. Mussolini's—and Hitler's—gospels needed to do something analogous to recruit cadres.

"Corporatism": replacement of the anarchy of the market by some form of government-administered planning, at least of wage levels and incomes, became his third plank. Fascism would embrace the dignity of work and of occupations, and not value every form of work and every worker by what the market wanted to pay in some equilibrium. Thus policy needed to be made in a "syndicalist" or "corporatist" mode, with the state mediating between those who thought they had opposed interests, for example employers and unions, and remind them that they had much more in common as ethnic Italians than divided them as members of different classes.

And to make people sit up and behave—subordinate their class interests to the ethno-national interest—there needed to be a strong leader: Mussolini. People did not have interests that politicians existed to satisfy. Instead, people needed to be led and given a sense of national purpose by having their leader tell them what their interests were. Rulers should not listen and obey, but speak and command.

11.2. Was Fascism Real?

Was this real, or was this just a con game?

Italy's elected politicians alternately tried to suppress and to ally with fascism. In 1922, after winning some electoral successes, Mussolini threatened to make Italy ungovernable through large-scale political violence—unless named prime minister. The king named him prime minister. From there he became dictator of Italy: Il Duce, or "The Leader". By judicious murders, imprisonments, and political wheeling-dealing, he remained at the top of Italy until the western allied armies of Britain and America came knocking in 1943.

Perhaps it was just a confidence trick. Mussolini needed to perform the role of the prophet of a new ideology to seize power, he then needed a doctrine to cloak his personal despotism, and he somehow needed to keep his opponents divided and off-balance. To claim that his doctrine was "fascism", and then to at every moment define "fascism" as what seemed tactically opportune, and then to play the trump card of asserting that contradictions and inconsistencies were in fact the point of the leadership principle that was at the core of fascism—this is certainly not a

normal political movement. A normal political movement is based on interest groups who see their well-being as part of a good society, adds to that a view of how the world works that suggests certain policies will advance that well-being, and then attempts the assembly of coalitions to implement such policies.

But while it is certainly true that "fascism" was disorganized, self-contradictory, confused, and vague, most political movements are disorganized, self-contradictory, confused, and vague. In forming a coalition or a party the goal is to maintain friendships and alliances by the blurring of differences and the vagueification of concepts inside the group, and not to obtain conceptual clarity, or logical, or correct thought.

Fascism in the twentieth century has had too many adherents to be a nonexistent illusionary confidence trick, even if most fascists most of the time were clearer on what they were against than what they were for. I count six elements usually found —in Italy and elsewhere—in regimes that called themselves "fascist": a leadership commanding rather than representing, a unified community based on ties of blood and soil (and rejecting and degrading those who are not of the community), coordination and propaganda, support for at least some traditional hierarchies, hatred of socialists and liberals, and—almost always—hatred of "rootless cosmopolites" in some form or other.

What gave it strength was that after World War I, fascism was the only game in town if you did not approve of liberal democracy, or if you feared socialism and thought that liberal democracy would lead to reall -existing socialism once the working class realized its voting strength. Monarchy was out. An aristocracy of birth and rank was out. Theocracy was out. Plutocracy had… difficulties keeping a mass base. Fascism was it. And a lot of people were and are willing to endorse and support it.

Indeed, if you took a look at European and Latin American governments between the World Wars, you could easily convince yourself that fascism was the wave of the future. Nearly everwhere democracy was in retreat, unable to provide answers to the economic problems of the Great Depression or to resolve social conflicts. On the eve of World War II democracies in the world were few and far between: Great Britain and its Dominions (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and perhaps South Africa), the United States (if you were white), Ireland, France, Belgium, Holland, and Scandinavia (Sweden, Norway, and Denmark). That was it. Everywhere else you had authoritarian, non or anti-democratic governments of the left or the right.

11.3. Nazism

In Germany after World War I, supporters of the German Socialist Party were called *Sozis*—the first two syllables of *Sozialist.*

For some reason, urban Bavarians made fun of people named Ignatz: the name was a stand-in for a what in English is a country bumpkin: someone rural, foolish, and awkward.

There was a diminutive nickname for Ignatz: Nazi.

Hence the political enemies of Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist German Workers Party in Bavaria in the 1920s began calling them "Nazis". The name has stuck.

Once Adolf Hitler had seized power in 1933 and consolidated it in 1934, Hitler was by and large popular. Germany had recovered from the Great Depression relatively rapidly once Hitler had taken power and broken adherence to monetary and fiscal orthodoxy. With the Gestapo in the background to suppress agitation for higher wages, better working conditions, or the right to strike, and with strong demand from the government for public works and military programs, unemployment fell rapidly in Germany in the 1930s. The Great Depression in Germany had been the deepest in the world save for the United States. Recovery was fastest save for Japan, and Scandinavia.

Hitler in power during peacetime appears to have been focused on boosting employment and building weapons, not adding to industrial capacity and increasing national wealth. Build national highways, yes—but build them not by building individual city-to-city or resources-to-industry links, but by building as much as possible first where it would be seen as many as possible. Political effectiveness and military capacity were the priorities.

Political effectiveness we understand: The Nazi movement was still a minority movement. Even at its high point it could command a majority in the Reichstag only with the socialist and communist deputies excluded from the room. And even then the rump Reichstag was only willing to vote Hitler emergency and dictatorial powers in the panic that followed the "mysterious" burning of the Reichstag. Hitler and his party did see building more and stronger political support as a priority—

hence jobs, and at least the appearance of a government building large infrastructure projects.

But weapons? Armies? Hadn't World War I taught the Germans, and even the Nazis, and even Hitler, not to do *that* again?

11.3.1. Young Hitler

Hitler during World War I does not seem to have what a normal person would have regarded as a "good war". But he thought he had one.

He enlisted—untrained—in the Bavarian Army in August 1914, after having been rejected by his Austrian homeland as unfit for military service. In October his 1st company of the 16 (List) Bavarian reserve regiment was part of nine newly-enlisted largely-untrained infantry divisions thrown into the line on an emergency basis against the British at the First battle of Ypres. The Germans call this the K*indermord*: the child-death. That is an explicit reference to the Biblical incident of the massacre of the innocent babies of Bethlehem by King Herod of Judea. 40,000 of 90,000 were killed or wounded in 20 days. Hitler's company of 250 had only 42 men alive, out of the hospital, and still with the colors by the end of the battle.

Then the 16 (List) Bavarian reserve regiment was, like so many others during World War I, chewed up and thrown away. It was sacrificed over and over again in the big battles of the Somme (1916), Fromelles (196), Arras (1917), Passchendaele (1917). Hitler was wounded in the thigh in 1916 by a shell exploding at his dugout entrance. He was hospitalized for two months. He was then ordered to the reserves behind the line in Munich. He begged to be recalled because with his comrades at the front he could not stand Munich. He was then (temporarily) blinded and struck dumb by a British gas attack in October 1918. He spent the last 25 days of the war in the hospital.

Yet these experiences did not put him off war.

Hitler was then demobilized and set adrift: he was not one of the those the General Staff wanted to keep for the peacetime army. But intelligence Major Karl Mayr picked him up as an undercover operative in mid-1919. Mayr sent him to spy on socialists. One small socialist group he was sent to spy on was Anton Wexler's Germany Workers Party. Drexler found Hitler to be "an absurd little man". But

Drexler was impressed with his ability to speak. Drexler invited Hitler to join on September 1919.

It became the Nazi Party five months later, when "National" and "Socialist" were added at the front of its name, "National" with Hitler's enthusiastic support, and "Socialist" over his objection. The idea seems to have been that some looking for a socialist meeting would wander in. Since they were, like the socialists, recruiting from the groups for whom the system was not working, such wanderers-in might stay. Later it was too late to change the name of the party.

Karl Mayr started 1919 on the German right and moved left. In 1925 he joined the Socialist Party, where he led some of the socialist left-wing paramilitary street bullies. After Hitler took power in 1933, he fled to France. When the Nazis conquered France in 1940, he was on the Gestapo's list. He was sent first to the Sachsenhausen and then to the Buchenwald concentration camp. There he was murdered on February 9, 1945.

Hitler pushed Anton Drexler out of the Nazi leadership in 1921. Drexler resigned from the party in 1923. In his 1925 *Mein Kampf,* Hitler described Drexler as:

> a simple worker, as speaker not very gifted, moreover no soldier… weak and uncertain… not a real leader… not… fanatical enough to carry the movement in their hearts, nor… to use brutal means to overcome the opposition to a new idea…

Drexler died of natural causes in the Bavarian city of Munich in 1942.

11.3.2. Nazism and Malthusianism

Adolf Hitler took the turn of the nineteenth century economist Thomas Robert Malthus deadly seriously.

We today know Malthus as the pessimist who gloomily predicted that human populations would outrun their food supply. That either nature would bring human populations back into balance with the food supply via war, famine, disease, and death; or (a better alternative) that "moral restraint"—late marriages and infrequent sex supported by strong religious faith—could allow a small gap between the edge of starvation and average living standards. We know Malthus as somone whose doctrines provided a good description of life before he wrote, but were a bad guide (so far) to subsequent history.

11.3.2.1. Germany's "Malthusian Problem"

Hitler drew different lessons from Malthus. He began thinking about foreign policy from the premise that;

> Germany has an annual increase in population of nearly nine hundred thousand souls. The difficulty of feeding this army of new citizens must grow greater from year to year and ultimately end in catastrophe.... There were four ways of avoiding so terrible a development.

One way was birth control to reduce population growth, but Hitler saw population restriction as a violation of the principles of social Darwinism and a way to weaken the German race. A second way was to increase agricultural productivity and farm more land, but Hitler saw this as doomed for the same reason as Malthus did: diminishing returns. The third way was to purchase food from abroad by "produc[ing] for foreign needs through industry and commerce"; Hitler calls this way relatively "unhealthy" and unrealistic, for Britain would never allow Germany to become the dominant industrial and mercantile power without a fight, and without using all its political resources to discourage German competition with British industries.

11.3.2.2. The "*Elbow Room*" Solution

What was left? The fourth way was to acquire new soil: a policy of territorial expansion. And Hitler goes on to say:

> We must... coolly and objectively adopt the standpoint that it can certainly not be the intention of Heaven to give one people fifty times as much land and soil in this world as another.... [W]e must not let political boundaries obscure for us the boundaries of internal justice....[T]he law of self-preservation goes into effect; and what is refused to amicable methods it is up to the fist to take… If land was desired in Europe, it could be obtained by and large only at the expense of Russia, and this meant that the new Reich must again set itself on the march along the road of the Teutonic knights of old, to obtain by the German sword sod for the German plow and daily bread for the nation.

Pre-World War I German foreign policy had gone wrong because it tried to make Germany an industrial and a commercial rather than a territorial power. It had thus built a large battle fleet and so involved itself in a war with Britain on the others side. Hitler wanted to take a different road, and "consciously draw a line beneath

the foreign policy tendency of our pre-War period. We take up where we broke off six hundred years ago. We stop the endless German movement to the south and west, and turn our gaze toward the land in the east. At long last we break off the colonial and commercial policy of the pre-War period and shift to the soil policy of the future."

But how could Germany expand to the east? Here Hitler was certain that Fate had already lent Germany a hand: "By handing Russia to Bolshevism, it robbed the Russian nation of that… Germanic nucleus of its upper leading strata. Today... it has been replaced by the Jew.... [I]t is... impossible for the Jew to maintain the mighty empire forever.... The giant empire in the east is ripe for collapse."

All Germany had to do was make sure that it had an army large enough to take advantage, and be prepared for when the collapse would come. As Hitler said in June 1941 when he launched the Nazi armies into Russia: "You only have to kick in the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down."

11.3.2. The Core of Nazism

11.3.2.1. The Core: Doctrine

Here we have the core of Nazism:

1. A very strong dose of German antisemitism (with a paranoid belief in a conspiracy between Jewish financiers who control the capitalist economy and steal from the Germans, Jewish liberal intellectuals who preach humanism and enfeeble the Germans, and Jewish communists who seek to enslave the Germans.
2. A belief in the German nation and the "aryan" German race as an entity with a special, heroic destiny.
3. War as the ultimate test of national strength and worth; and (iv) conquest—with extermination or removal of the resident population—to create more "living space" or the German people and larger fields for the German farmers.

Add to this:

- the leadership principle—a hatred of parliamentary institutions, and a belief that a good political order sees an inspired leader giving people vision and commands (rather than see parliamentarians haggle and compromise on behalf of interest groups).
- the use of terror to obtain obedience, and

- the desire to make sure that all of society's organizations serve the national cause.

And you have Nazism.

11.3.2.2. The Core: War and Genocide

Hitler took his Malthusian economics-based Aryan-racial-domination ideology seriously on March 15, 1939, when German tanks rolled (unopposed) into Prague and Germany annexed Czechoslovakia. He took it in dead earnest on September 1, 1939, when German tanks rolled (opposed) across the Polish border, crushed the Polish army in less than three weeks, and began the European phase of World War II. He took it in the most dead earnest of all on June 22, 1941, when German tanks rolled (opposed) across the Soviet border and Germany—still engaged in a brutal war with Britain—took on the Soviet Union as an enemy as well because the entire point of Hitler's foreign policy was the drive to the east: to win bread for the German nation and sod for the German plow by the sword. In so doing he sought and hoped to exterminate, expel, or enslave all the slavic peoples who lived to Germany's east and stood in the way.

And he took it in dead earnest in the Final Solution to the "Jewish Problem."

Perhaps 50 million people died in Hitler's war. But had the Nazis won their war, that number would have been more than tripled.

11.4. How Many Totalizing Political Movements in the 1930s?

11.4.1. Were Nazis Fascists?

Have I committed an error in lumping fascists in with Nazis here?

A great many people applauded fascists, after all. The University of Chicago's political philosopher Leo Strauss, teacher of some and darling of many on America's political right, proudly stated that even though the Nazis were misapplying them that his principles remained: "fascist, authoritarian and imperial". Far-right economists' darling Ludwig von Mises wrote of fascism that it was: "dictatorships… full of the best intentions… their intervention has, for the moment, saved European civilization. The merit that Fascism has thereby won for itself will live on eternally in history". (He did immediately thereafter call it an

"emergency makeshift" and warn that "view[ing] it as something more would be a fatal error". Libertarian darling Friedrich von Hayek urged Margaret Thatcher, in a document that has somehow gone missing, to hew more closely to the methods of Augusto Pinochet in scotching Labour opposition to her policies. (She replied politely that "some of the measures adopted in Chile are quite unacceptable…. We shall achieve our reforms in our own way and in our own time.) In seeing them as part of the same species, am I illegitimately tarring their views?

Perhaps. Perhaps not.

It is certainly true that if fascists were of the same species, they were much tamer versions of Nazis. Most fascists' economic doctrine was largely negative: they were not socialists, and they did not believe that the Marxist platform of the nationalization of industry and the expropriation of the capitalist class was the right way to run an economy. But they did not buy into the "national living space", "lebensraum" doctrines of Hitler. They were less anti-semitic. And they tended to do their killing on a retail rather than a wholesale scale.

But fascists were identifiably of the same ideological genus as Nazis. They recognized each other. It is no accident that Hitler writes of his "profoundist admiration for the great man south of the Alps," Benito Mussolini, the founder of fascism. It is no accident that Mussolini allied with Hitler during World War II, and no accident that both Hitler and Mussolini sent aid to Francisco Franco's rebels in the Spanish Civil War of the late 1930s. It is no accident that Nazis fleeing Europe after the collapse of Hitler's Third Reich found a welcome in Juan Peron's Argentina.

12.4.2. Were Really-Existing Socialists Fascists?

Have I committed an error in not lumping fascists in with really-existing-socialists here? Perhaps. For how much difference was there between the fascist and the really-existing-socialists?

A distressing number of people, starting with Mussolini himself, seem to have transited from one to the other directly. That suggests not a left-right political spectrum but rather a color wheel. Red and blue are as far apart in terms of visual spectrum wavelength as colors can be. Yet if you take magenta paint and add a little bit of cyan you get blue; if you take magenta and add a little bit of yellow to get red. Felipe Fernandez-Armesto put it most eloquently, in the context of George Orwell's "but aren't we all socialists?" question he asked in Barcelona in 1937 as

he watched the Stalinist socialists exterminate the POUM faction he had joined when he arrived in the city (while Franco's fascists waited outside), comparing it to "aren't we all Christians?" asked at the sixteenth-century massacre of Protestants in Paris on St. Bartholemew's Day:

> The extremists at both ends seemed close enough to touch.... Individuals moved between fascism and militant socialism as if by connecting channels…. My father... carried a communist card and wore a [fascist] Falangist uniform [in Spain] at different moments in the 1930s…

There were important differences in the way of policy: As Hermann Rauschning claimed Hitler had said to him: "Why need we trouble to socialize banks and factories? We socialize human beings!" The focus on control over institutions and commodity flows as primary and control over what people think, say, and do as secondary in really existing socialism is a difference. But how profound a one?

And while status inequality was important to really existing socialists, material inequality and ruling-class luxury was… embarrassing. By contrast, material inequality and ruling-class luxury were, for fascists, something that demonstrated that you were not with the program if it bothered you.

But do these make up a difference in species, or just variation within the species properly called "totalitarian"?

The British socialist historian Eric Hobsbawm—a card-carrying communist from before World War II until 1956—has a couple of asides in his histories that strike me as revealing. The first comes in his history of the short twentieth century, the *Age of Extremes*: Only joining a:

> Moscow aligned Communist party... offered both to interpret the world and to change it, or looked better able to do so.... It was, for most of the world's believers in the need for global revolution, the only game in town…. Lenin's 'party of a new type'… gave even small organizations disproportionate effectiveness, because the party could command extraordinary devotion and self-sacrifice from its members, more than military discipline and cohesiveness, and a total concentration on carrying out party decisions at all costs. This impressed even hostile observers profoundly…

The assumption that unthinking obedience to whoever the current dictator in Moscow was appropriate because it was the way to change the world begs the question of what kind of change, and what kind of world. To take being the

follower of a leader whose commands you do not question as a great and good thing—Mussolini and Hitler would have definitely approved; Karl Marx would definitely have not approved.

Thus this is not even a hair's breadth away from a fascist worship of force and the leader.

And did the party discipline of the really-existing socialists impress or horrify observers?

The impression is that for Hobsbawm (as well as for many others) a principal attraction of communism was in its closeness to fascism: the glorification of force and effectiveness. When World War II broke out, Stalin and Hitler were allied—and world communist doctrine was that the British and French were the bad guys in trying to stop Hitler's expansion. Yet Hobsbawm sees this as:

> something heroic…. Nationalism, political calculation, even common sense, pulled one way, yet they unhesitatingly chose to put the interests of the international movement first…. They were tragically and absurdly wrong. But their error... should not lead us to ridicule the spirit of their action. This is how the socialists of Europe should have acted... carrying out the decisions of the International.... It was not their fault that the International should have told them to do something else…

But if was not Hobsbawm and his fellow cadres' fault that the International was the puppet of a paranoid dictator in Moscow rather than the pathfinder of humanity's progress toward utopia, whose fault could it have been.

In my view, Hobsbawm was well answered more than fifty years before he wrote by the American literary critic Edmund Wilson.

Wilson wrote of the:

> remarkable scene at the first congress of the Soviet dictatorship after the success of the October insurrection of 1917, when [Leon] Trotsky, with the contempt and indignation of a prophet, read [the socialist] Martov and his followers out of the meeting. "You are pitiful isolated individuals," he cried at this height of the Bolshevik triumph. "You are bankrupt; your role is played out. Go where you belong from now on—in the garbage-pile of history!"
>
> These words are worth pondering for the light they throw on the course of Marxist

policy and thought. Observe that the merging of yourself with the onrush of the current of history is to save you from the ignoble fate of being a "pitiful isolated individual"; and that the failure to so merge yourself will relegate you to the garbage-pile of history, where you can presumably be of no more use….

We may agree with the Bolsheviks that Martov was no man of action, [but] his croakings over the course that they had adopted seem to us full of far-sighted intelligence…. Proclaiming a socialist regime in conditions different from those contemplated by Marx would not realize the results that Marx expected; that Marx and Engels had usually described the "dictatorship of the proletariat" as having the form, for the new dominant class, of a democratic republic… that… "All power to the Soviets" had… soon been exchanged by Lenin for "All power to the Bolshevik Party."

There sometimes turn out to be valuable objects cast away in the garbage pile of history…. From the point of view of the Stalinist Soviet Union, that is where [Leon] Trotsky himself is today [in the late 1930s]. He might well discard his earlier assumption that an isolated individual must needs be "pitiful" for the conviction of Dr. Stockman in Ibsen's [play] An Enemy of the People that "the strongest man is he who stands most alone."