The political theory of Italian Fascism

BY CORTEZ EWING

It is indeed an ambitious undertaking for anyone to attempt a statement of the political theory of Italian Fascism within the short compass of fifteen hundred words. As with most of the pragmatic revolts against intellectual theories of the state—Bolshevism, Guild Socialism, Syndicalism and Christian Socialism—Fascism contains many creeds that merit detailed explanation. In this short paper that will, of course, be impossible. Therefore, I shall herein merely catalogue a few of the outstanding tenets of the Fascist faith, especially in so far as they conflict with the accepted doctrines of democracy.

To Mussolini—and he speaks for Fascism, with or without its consent—the state is an end within itself, a goal to be achieved through conscious and persistent effort. Yet, most important of all, the end is attainable. Therein lies the principal difference between Fascism and evolutionary Socialism and Democracy. Men must follow the gleam, but the Fabians follow a flare that remains ever in advance of pursuit; Fascists may overtake their beacon and bask in its light and warmth. Even the theorists of Democracy never supposed that perfection would obtain in any political set-up. With Jefferson, the struggle was always to the many against the few, always to those who were intellectually curious and tenacious, and with never the possibility of attaining the ultimate goal. Political progress resulted from the fatigues of the journey, for the destination reached must of necessity fall far short of the ideal.

The Fascist state is sacred and inviolable. Loyalty is demanded of everyone. He who does not manifest that love and patriotism is guilty of no less a crime than perpetual existence of es-

pionage laws. Not unlike the Communist battle on the "New Line," the Fascist state wages an unrelenting crusade against the internal enemies of the state. Non-believers must, either by conviction or force, be eliminated from the body of citizenry. Quasi-loyalty cannot be tolerated, for it can culminate only in political crises or, finally, in the passing of the state itself.

Mussolini believes in the organic theory of the state. As did Bluntschli, II Duce maintains that the state is comparable to a biologic organism. Human individuals are analogous to cells. Moreover, the welfare of the state depends upon the proper functioning of every cell within this political organism. Cooperation, therefore, between the different units, is indispensable to the life and proper functioning of the state. Carrying the analogy still further, in defining the responsibilities of the citizenry, Mussolini is particularly emphatic concerning the phenomena of strikes and lockouts. Seeking to abolish industrial crises, with which wavering Italy abounded in 1919 and 1920, he created his "corporate state." Pursuant to his idea that the state is nothing more than a synthesis of its varying interests, and seeking to achieve a successful co-ordination of those interests, he organized each trade and industry into a guild or "syndicate." There was the textile workers' guild, the butchers' guild, and even one for the artists. Employers were also grouped in the same manner. To insure the success of the scheme, Mussolini became the ex officio head of each guild. Without doubt, he is the greatest office holder of his time. Industrial courts were set up to adjudicate industrial disputes. Every workshop had its tribunal, composed of one representative each for the employer, the workers, and the Fascist government. Higher or appellate tribunals were organized in the same manner. And it is interesting to note that no employer may discharge a worker without first receiving official permission from the tribunal. Incidentally, in creating this system, the Fascist approached the Socialist principle that property rightfully belongs of the state, and that no person, employer or worker, has an unquestioned and irrevocable right to use his property in a manner detrimental to the state. Mussolini sought to escape the national loss incidental to industrial disorders, but most any proponent of the lightning strike as a labor weapon can present telling arguments against the corporate state. Only by means of the strike, has labor escaped an industrial servitude. But Mussolini answers that capital shall not proceed unrestrained. This theory of the merging and converging interests of the state has been termed "totalitarianism."

Regarding the nature of political society, Fascism contends that the citizen, illusioned, indolent and ignorant, and irremediably selfish, needs the prod, the rod, or the rope, to remind him of his duties to the state. Force is the dominant and prevailing factor in the origin and existence of states. Thereby, Fascism denies the Aristotelian thesis on the political nature of man. And, since force is so indispensable, Italy now experiences unprecedented military agitation—an army with universal military training, a Black Shirt militia, and two bodies of Junior Fascists. Indeed, six-year-old boys are now being instructed in the meaning and mechanics of the old Roman salute.

In his worship of force, Mussolini is panegyric. His disgust for human weakness is reminiscent of Machiavelli. With Nietzsche, he cries that there are too many flies in the market-place. To him, however, the strong man, the superman, can only evolve from an impelling urge for better things. The protoplasm of Italy was permitted to degenerate in envelopment and was debased in the absence of a lofty ambition. Yet it may be quickened, revived, again made virile. He is a reconstructionist rather than a eugenist, but such reconditioning is possible only through the clash of fist on steel.

In the field of governmental mechanics, Fascism repudiates political parties of the accepted Anglo-Saxon variety. Once important as regimenters of popular opinion, parties have no place in Italy. The Fascists are Italy; Italy is the Fascist state. The traditional parliamentary system was based on the presumption of the existence of at least two parties—the government and the opposition. It was the duty of the one to govern, and of the other to oppose and criticize. Yet Mussolini declares that parliamentary discussion only produces and aggravates weakness.
1929

Maurice Halperin, M. A., '29, instructor of French, is on a leave of absence from the University of Oklahoma working in Paris for the degree of Docteur Es-lettres.

John W. Todd, '29 sc., M. A., '30, has accepted a position as head of the department of physics and mathematics in Bethel college, Russellville, Kentucky.

1930

John Richards, '30 music, is supervisor of music in the public schools at Cleveland, Oklahoma this year.

Wesley Sperry, '30 arts-sc., has recently gone from Siloam Springs, Arkansas to Midland, Texas. Mr. Sperry is now connected with the Osborn Motor Company.

John B. Gordon, '30 arts-sc., has accepted the position of advertising manager on the Cushing Citizen at Cushing, Oklahoma.

Miss Mary A. White, '30 arts-sc., became associate business and industrial girls' secretary, of the Oklahoma City Y. W. C. A. late in September.

1931

Weldon "Spot" Gentry, ex '31 is well on his way to a career in professional football. Gentry is with the Providence, Rhode Island Steam Rollers.

Miss Hazel White, '31 fine arts, Shawnee, has been appointed by the national headquarters of the Y. W. C. A. to design the covers for the seven issues of L'Atom, official Y. W. C. A. southwest publication. The Southwest region includes Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma and Missouri.

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worked out in the sewing classes. Methods of making the island's typical and exquisite drawnwork and pillow lace have been scientifically simplified, and new patterns designed with native leaf, vine, and flower as motif. Bulletins embodying these and other features of the work of the department have been widely useful not only in Porto Rico, but have circled the tropic zone of the world, sent in answer to requests from a dozen countries.

Perhaps the most striking example of the university's response to its environment, however, is presented by its department of Spanish studies. The recognition already accorded the young impoverished university, without friends a priori, and without the wealthy and influential alumni whose tangible benefits often make life possible to our modern universities; a school far from other educational centers, and struggling with the difficulties no less inherent than the advantages in its bi-lingual environment, is nothing short of amazing. Newspapers in a dozen countries—such periodicals as The New York Times, The New York World, The New York Herald-Tribune, La Prensa and La Nacion of Buenos Aires, El Diario de la Marina de Havana, and El Sol of Madrid, as well as leading papers in Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, Nicaragua and Brazil—have during the past two years commented editorially, at length and with marked appreciation, upon the importance, from the standpoint of international understanding, of the work being done by the University of Porto Rico, working resolutely without becoming disheartened by its material lack. Don Ramon Menendez Pidal, president of the Royal Spanish Academy has commended its work and its program. Publicists and scholars in the two Americas, in Spain, in England, have expressed their interest in what the University of Porto Rico has already accomplished and their recognition of its importance as an intellectual liaison officer between the two cultures which divide the western hemisphere, the Hispanic and the English. Geography, as we have seen, and history, as we can but remember, have given Porto Rico a unique strategic position. Four hundred years ago the Conquista
tadors recognized and set down in terse Castilian the military importance of the island; and, as the great Spanish daily, El Sol, remarked last year in an editorial on the university, the strategic advantage culturally is no less great for an institution whose predestined purpose would seem to be that of interpreter and mutual friend of the two Americas.

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accept the legitimacy of criticism would admit the political fallibility and imperfection of the government. The Fascists are, much like the Pope, infallible. Hullinger records for us the argument of a leading Fascist in support of the theory. He argued that a schoolteacher—and the Fascists are the teachers of Italy—could scarcely hope for success if some one stood in the rear of the room and informed the student that the instructor knew nothing about that of which he spoke. Heckling is a lost art in Italy.

The duty of Parliament is to aid the government. There is no such thing as responsible government in Italy. A quick decision is necessary to political progress. The flood of futile talk in the Italian Chamber of Deputies from 1919 to 1922 was, to Mussolini, proof of the impotence of the government. The latter was without a mandate, for it had no way of discovering the real policy of the House, if indeed it had one. This impasse gave to the people an opportunity, as well as an example, for sloth and laziness.

But hold! says Nitti. "Democracy demands that all viewpoints be heard." "Democracy be damned," answers Mussolini and his Fascists. "It is the ghost of the XIX Century." Democracy has currency only in a population with little gods. It has no compelling, inspirational value. Chuck it! It has never existed, and never will. (Therein shows the influence of Pareto, one of his chief mentors, who taught at the University of Lille when Mussolini was on "his travels."') What a travesty to assume that all adult males are capable of intelligent participation in government! And as for woman suffrage, it would only add more weaknesses to the electorate. Woman caused man's fall from heaven. She must now make him forget it. Her proper place is in the home. Her noblest work is procreation, the production of the superman, who shall dignify Italy by worthy prowess. The only true function of the electorate in government is to approve the governmental policy; and the new reform of 1928 emphasizes that point. The guilds suggest men for the Chamber of Deputies, the Fascist Grand Council selects them, and the electorate approves the list submitted in the election. There is but one logical alternative to approval except non-voting."

Such is something of the nature of Fascist philosophy. It defies and indicates democracy and the idea of liberty. It marks a pragmatic revolt in politics, one that threatens to set a new value in political science. It is Machtpolitik to assume that Fascism has crushed democracy in Italy is, I believe, erroneous, for democracy, as France and the Anglo-Saxon nations understand it, has never existed in unified Italy. Giolitti was almost as much of a dictator as Mussolini, and all governments have exerted themselves, sometimes unduely, to remain in power.

1See especially Benito Mussolini, My Autobiography.
2For a rather one-sided comparison see John Hearly, Popo or Mussolini, ch. I.
3For control over local government, see Lester K. Born, "What is the Podestà?" American Political Science Review, XXI, 863-872 (November, 1927); also Paolo Monelli, Toes Up.
4"This terrorism is not restricted to Italy. For the activities of Fascist agents provocateur in France, see E. C. Lindeman, "Fascist Sympathies in the United States," Nation, CXXI, No. 3401, 265-267, (September 10, 1930.)
5Francesco Nitti (The Younger), Escape, for an account of the suppression of anti-Fascist opinion.
6For a favorable account see E. W. Hullinger, The New Fascist State, ch. v; see also Francesco Nitti, "Breakers Ahead for Fascist Italy," New Republic, LXIV, No. 820, (August 20, 1930); also Henry R. Spencer, "Political Developments in Italy," American Political Science Review, XXIII, 159-159, (February, 1929).
7For account of Fascist censorship, see George Solden, You Can't Point That.
8Hullinger, supra, 44.
9Francesco Nitti, Bolshevism, Fascism and Democracy.
11For best account, see Henry R. Spencer, "Political Developments in Italy." American Political Science Review, XXI, 139-150, (February, 1929.)