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THE ROAD TO FASCISM

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*THE RISE OF ITALIAN FASCISM AND ITS RELATION
TO ANARCHISM, SYNDICALISM AND SOCIALISM.*

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His government is doing in Italy... what the Soviet has done for Russia. The more militant liberalist elements are being heavily discouraged... What will shortly be reached will be a great socialist state... rigidly centralized... to the smallest detail... In ten years a state will have been built in which no trace of European "liberalism" or democratic "liberty" exists. Wyndham Lewis, English Fascist fellow traveler writing in 1926.

The path these people tread is always the same. They are at first Anarchists or very extreme Socialists, then they are "converted" to Nationalism and produce remarkable Messianic ideas... and charge the harmless nationalism of associations and parties with the dynamite of anarchist readiness for action. Otto Strasser, Left-Nazi activist (1)

THE PRE-FASCIST ITALIAN STATE AND SOCIETY

The nature of Italian unification and of the Italian State played a role in the development of Fascism. Unified Italy was not the product of a popular revolution but cobbled together from above by the Kingdom of Piedmont. Hence, there was little popular identification with this state, as the people still thought of themselves primarily as Romangnoles, Sicilians, or Tuscans. The political leaders did not trust the people and so adopted the French centralist or Jacobin model of the State which further alienated the population and also encouraged corruption. Elitist lack of trust also meant a restricted franchise. Even as late as 1882, only 7% of the male population could vote. The State was very authoritarian, banning the Socialist Party in 1894 and declaring martial law in 1898, at which time 118 people were killed by troops in Milan alone. Economic protectionism for backward and unprofitable industries led to corruption and price-gouging. 2.

In spite of, or perhaps more correctly because of its authoritarianism, the Italian state was weak and never succeeded in creating a genuine national unity, nor did it encourage economic development. Since the rulers were self-styled liberals, to many Italians, this wretched state of affairs was an example of democracy and liberalism, rather than its antithesis. Pseudo-liberalism created hostility toward other alleged liberal virtues. Thus, in the minds of conservatives and radicals alike, democracy, tolerance, compromise, rational discourse, free markets and peace were either frauds or equated with weakness and corruption. Much of Italian history was marred by religious intolerance, feuding, banditry, and violent conspiratorial groups such as the Mafia and Carbonari. This was the matrix out of which Fascist ideology would grow.

Three factions came together to form the Fascist Movement; the proto-fascist Syndicalists, the Nationalists and the Mussolini Socialists. Since Benito Mussolini is the one Fascist everyone has heard of, and was the head of the movement, I will discuss him first.

THE YOUNG MUSSOLINI

Benito Mussolini was from Romagna, a classical land of political violence, 3. Before the rise of revolutionary socialism and Bakuninism, the province was wracked by the violence of the Jacobins and Carbonari. A very poor province of Italy, mainly inhabited by share croppers and landless laborers, Romagna was the land of blood feuds. During the last few decades of the 19th Century these feuds took the form of violent disputes between republicans and social revolutionaries (chiefly anarcho-communists). Foremost among the latter, and indeed the founder of the local movement, was Alessandro Mussolini, father of Benito. Even though Alessandro opted for socialism in the 1880's, he remained close to the anarcho-communists, standing mid-way between Marxism and anarchism. At this time, anarchism was losing support in Italy, the Propaganda of the Deed and failed insurrections having alienated the populace. One result of this failure was that a group of anarcho-communists took terrorism and violence to an even greater extreme, claiming *the revolution is the continuous action of perpetrating every kind of crime against public order*. 4. The older Mussolini was not sympathetic to these actions and thus became the founder and leader of the socialist movement in his town. He was highly thought of, indeed *venerated* by the local workers. Although he was not politically sectarian, he was violently anti-clerical. Extreme anti-clericalism was one of the dominant features of Romagna society. Small town socialists and anarchists spent more time attacking religion than any other aspect of society.

Ultra anarchist-communism was fanatical, authoritarian and intolerant. Its supporters did their utmost to stir up hatred and resentment against their opponents, thus laying the groundwork for the revenge-seeking and scape goating propaganda of Fascism. Their cynical attitude toward all aspects of society, ends justify the means terrorism and desire for a clean-sweep revolution also foreshadowed Fascist nihilism. For Carlo Cafiero, the literally insane leader of the extremists, violent action was good in and of itself, a true Fascist sentiment. The ultras specialized in attacking "moderate" anarcho-communists - such as Erico Malatesta - *even threatening to shoot him* - and engaging in armed robbery. 5 PENSIERO e DINAMITE, an organ of the terrorists, wrote in 1891, *... for the Social Revolution to triumph completely, it is necessary to destroy in its entirety...the bourgeoisie. Women and old men, babies, all must be drowned in blood*. 6 Such sentiments are far

worse than anything ever espoused by Italian Fascism, having more in common with Pol Pot than Il Duce.

Given this cultural and political background, it is not surprising Benito was a born extremist. At age 17, the young Socialist lauded the assassination by an alleged anarchist of King Umberto and defended political violence as a tactic. He was also anti-religious and indeed, was more radical than most socialists in this regard... *more like the anarchists*. 7. His relationship to the anarchist movement was close and cordial. In 1903, he spoke at meeting with the anarchist Luigi Bertoni and was listed *as an anarchist* by the Italian consulate in Geneva. 8. While speaking on Italian socialism in Switzerland, he emphasized its revolutionary nature, denied that he was an anarchist, but claimed to be a revolutionary. Mussolini was expelled from the Swiss Republic and blamed his expulsion on the local reformist socialists in an article he wrote for an anarchist newspaper, IL RESVIGLIO.

In 1904 Mussolini debated Emile Vandeveldt on the religious question. For Vanderveldt, as for the vast majority of Socialists, religion was a private matter and it was wrong to divide the working class over the issue. Mussolini demanded atheism, even going so far as to denounce Christ, *the morality of Christ leads to brutishness and cowardice*, a view far beyond the normal anti-clerical stance. His views on religion, government, democracy, militarism and the use of violence were far closer to that of the ultra anarcho-communists, than the mainstream Socialists. The young Mussolini was *...always an extreme left or revolutionary Socialist*. 9

MUSSOLINI AND SYNDICALISM

In 1902 Arturo Labriola (also a future Fascist and not to be confused with the Italian philosopher Antonio Labriola) and Walter Mocchi founded the journal SOCIALIST VANGUARD to promote syndicalism. Benito admired Labriola and became an important contributor to the paper. He promoted the view that reforms weakened the working class, preferring reaction to liberalism and *never missed an opportunity to vilify the representative form of government*. 10. He felt the monarchists and clerical right were best combated through direct action and class war. During this period, he was a sympathizer of the growing syndicalist movement, but it would be incorrect to say that he **was** a syndicalist. However, in 1908, the syndicalist faction of the Socialist Party was expelled by the moderates. Mussolini and some other pro-syndicalists were able to avoid this purge and by 1912, had gotten sufficient strength to take over the party from the moderate faction.

Before going any further, perhaps it is necessary to define the term syndicalism. Most generally, it is a form of radical trade unionism which seeks to replace capitalism and the state with workers' control through a

structure of democratic trade union locals and other voluntary associations. The basic ideas of syndicalism were rooted in anarchism, especially thinkers like Proudhon and Bakunin, but the concept came into full fruition in the 1890's with Ferdinand Pelloutier. This is Anarcho-syndicalism. Some marxists were influenced by the actions of the anarcho-syndicalists and formed a distinctly marxist brand of syndicalism. It is from **Marxist** syndicalism and not anarcho-syndicalism, that fascist syndicalism evolves.

Throughout this period, Mussolini was deeply interested in revolutionary anarchism. He read all the anarchist journals and translated Kropotkin's *Paroles d'un Révolté* into Italian. Later, he translated Reclus' *L'Homme et la Terre* and Kropotkin's *French Revolution*. He had no use for moderate anarchism, writing in the anarchist paper *PAGINE LIBRE*, *Anarchism that is adapted to the masses loses all its grandiose, heroic quality, because the mass is cowardly... only the sublime violent people who live beyond good and evil can call themselves anarchists.*¹¹ This did not mean he **was** an anarchist, and he never referred to himself as one, what he admired was the courage, violence and extremism of the ultra anarchists. Mussolini also extolled the alleged virtues of the conspirators Babeuf and Blanqui. *The core of his political philosophy and an abiding characteristic of his socialist and fascist career is his faith in the necessity and efficacy of violence as an instrument of social change.*¹²

There are numerous examples of his glorification of violence. He supported propaganda of the deed and the attentats, wrote that expropriation *will be accompanied by a more or less long period of acts of violence.*¹³ Mussolini approved of the bombing of the Colon Theatre in Buenos Aires in 1910 in an article in *CLASS STRUGGLE* and also supported the alleged anarchists of the Sydney Street affair. This affection for violence was not only literary. In 1909 he was involved in a plot to blow up a police station in Trent.¹⁴

You can sense the coming of fascism in his early writings. The new socialist system would come about only *by smashing it* (the old society) *to pieces... It is through death that humanity reaches the summits of the ideal.*¹⁵ He saw *socialism as the greatest act of negation and destruction that history records* and that *socialism is war.*¹⁶ It should be pointed out that Mussolini was not just a thug or ignorant rabble-rouser, but was well educated and cultured. (The workers called him Professor Mussolini for good reason.) He was an omnivorous reader, wrote poetry and novels as well as his prolific journalism and even found time to play the violin. (Rather well, in fact) Nor was he ever a careerist nor ever *showed any sign of venality*, living like a poor worker and spending most of his money on books.¹⁷

The sociologist Wilfredo Pareto was much admired by syndicalists for his criticisms of liberalism, democracy and moderate socialism. Mussolini shared in this admiration, to the point of attending his lectures. One aspect of Pareto's thinking that the future Duce especially liked was his concept of elites. Pareto believed the capitalist class was finished historically and was about to be replaced by a new elite rising from the proletariat. Mussolini understood this to mean *the new social elite is now forming, in the trade unions... the nuclei of future economic organization on a communist basis.*¹⁸ This concept translated into the milieu of the Socialist Party meant the party formed a revolutionary elite and constant agitation and action was needed to keep the elite in fighting trim. He never had any use for the "mass", only for the minority, feeling that masses meant mediocrity and inaction. The masses were to assume a passive role, supporting the new socialist elite in its struggle against the bourgeoisie. *He was a thorough-going Blanquist... a spiritual brother of Lenin.*¹⁹ At this point we leave the Socialist proto-Fascist Mussolini, and look at another tendency which helped give rise to fascism.

SYNDICALISM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF FASCISM

Independent of Mussolini and his faction, the Marxist syndicalists made a major contribution to the development of a Fascism. These proto-fascist syndicalists were never Mussolinians, nor right-wing Nationalists, but stood on their own, developing a left-wing Corporatism or National Syndicalism. *The direction which Mussolini provided for the Fascist regime was hesitant and uncertain at best. It was only because the syndicalists...prepared the ground and continued to insist on their concept of Fascism that the regime began to move toward totalitarian corporatism.*²⁰ The more important of these were Sergio Panunzio, A. O. Olivetti, Edmundo Rossoni, Paolo Orano and Augustino Lanzillo. (Olivetti and Panunzio influenced Mussolini in the years 1904-1908.) It should be noted that **most syndicalist labor organizers became fascists.**²¹

The greatest influence on the development of a fascist syndicalism was Sergio Panunzio. After the March On Rome, he became a member of the Fascist Chamber of Deputies, a director of the Party and head of the Council of Corporations. (no small fry, he.) Olivetti, the editor of *PAGINE LIBRE* also served on the Council of Corporations. Rossoni served as head of the Fascist Syndicalist Federation from 1922 to 1928. It must be stated clearly that prior to 1914 these men were all militant syndicalists.

Italian syndicalism developed in a different manner from the French variety. The latter was a natural development from a synthesis of a

pre-existing trade union movement and Anarchism. (And to a certain extent, Marxism and Blanquism.) Italian syndicalism was rooted in an anti-reformist faction of the Socialist Party formed in 1902 under Labriola and Mocchi. **It was also doctrinally Marxist, not anarchist.** The syndicalist faction gained converts, but so too Reformism. A major problem for the syndicalists was the Reformist success in the industrial North. The syndicalists tended to be restricted to the backward South. For an allegedly proletarian movement, this was a sorry state of affairs. 22 The syndicalists remained orthodox Marxists, but doctrinal difficulties and failure to gain adherents among the factory workers of the North made them begin to ask questions. 23

Arturo Labriola had already written that the economy was not following Marx's prophecies. He denied that capitalism would collapse. Like Lenin, he emphasized voluntarism. The problem was, given the dogma of economic determinism, which he refused to reject in total, why should the proletariat ever revolt in an expanding capitalist economy? Pareto provided a quick answer. The new proletarian elite - ie, **the syndicalist militants** - would replace the old bourgeoisie. 24 As the decade moved on, the frustrated syndicalists became ever more hostile to Reformism. **This would lead them to consider the Socialist Party as one of the greatest enemies of the Syndicalist Revolution.** 25 Panunzio, in 1906, unknowingly echoing Lenin, declared that workers were not innately revolutionary and had to be made so by joining a revolutionary organization, like the syndicates.

The Italian syndicalist relationship to anarchism should be mentioned again at this point. **They rejected it.** This was so because Italian anarchism still stressed the archaic and self-defeating notion of insurrectionism. Such a method was anachronistic in an industrializing society. Panunzio, indulging in a strawman argument, also denounced anarchist associations as "atomistic", preferring strong worker organizations based upon an "organic institutional" basis and not at all contractual in nature. And while anti-statist in word, **the syndicalists were not anti-authoritarian.** 26 *The individuals who became syndicalists and left-Fascists had common personal values and needs, not derived directly from their socio-economic positions...* The syndicalists were generally people with a *low tolerance for ambiguity and conflict...* and also... *superficiality, a tendency toward rhetoric, abstraction and exaggeration...* 27. In other words, **authoritarian personalities.**

In 1905-8 the syndicalists were driven out of the Socialist Party and suffered defeat within the unions. They became a small minority within the trade union movement. Important strikes in 1907-08 led by them were broken. The syndicalist leaders began to reject the idea of an apocalyptic revolution and even the idea of revolution through a general strike. They felt the workers needed a long period of

preparation before the Syndicalist Revolution could be launched. 28 The failure of Marxism doctrine became ever more apparent. They began to see Italy's problems as not reduced to capitalism, but to the fact there wasn't **enough** capitalism. Italy was economically underdeveloped, and the main cause of this lay with the Italian State which was parasitic and destructive of a healthy capitalist economy. Thus, Italy's problems seemed particular to it, and not explained by some sweeping Marxist generalization or tawdry economic reductionism. **29 One of the major causes of Fascism was the failure of Marxist ideology to describe the real world.** The syndicalists had evolved to the point where they believed in the need for a revolutionary elite and a National Revolution. But the one thing that did not change, nor was it ever to change for them, even as Fascists, was the desire for a syndical-based economy.

In 1912 trade union revolutionaries united to form the Unione Sindicale Italia (USI), in a final break with the Reformist unions. The USI had about 100,000 members, but this was only 25% of the membership of their opponents. USI led strikes failed in the North. These failures, plus the dogma of militancy no matter what the situation, helped discredit it among workers. 30 The syndicalist leaders became increasingly disappointed with the working class. There was a call for formation of a Syndicalist Party which would include non-syndicalist revolutionaries. The syndicalists formed a tactical alliance with the Mussolini Group in 1912, enabling the latter to seize control of the Socialist Party from the Reformists. Around this time, a certain number of syndicalists also found an affinity with the right wing Nationalists. They were similar to the French CGT leaders who allied with the Royalist (and proto-fascist) Action Francaise. 31 They were *manifestations of the same psychology.* 32 Both groups hated parliamentary democracy and liberalism, both shared an elitist perspective and a cult of action and violence.

Then there was the question of war. Mussolini and the syndicalists were opposed to militarism. The Duce was even more extreme on this issue than the usual Socialist, taking the Hervéist position of desertion as an anti-militarist tactic. (Gustave Hervé was a revolutionary Socialist and fervent anti-militarist. He too, later became a Fascist) However, by 1908 Panunzio - again like Lenin - began to see a positive revolutionary potential in war. He believed a widespread war would allow the new proletarian elite to seize power. The workers would also be *used to fighting* and therefore in good shape for a revolution. Thus, in 1911, Panunzio, Labriola, Olivetti and Paolo supported the Italian war against Turkey that was fought in Libya. 33

Thus, when war broke out in August 1914, *the leading syndicalists came out for intervention quickly.* 34 The breakdown of alleged worker solidarity in the belligerent countries also caused the syndicalists to question why this had happened. The answer they came up with was

that this solidarity was an illusion. Panunzio thought the war would bring about the long-awaited Revolution. Pro-war syndicalists and socialists organized themselves into the FASCIO RIVOLUZIONARIO D'AZIONE INTERNAZIONALISTA. These squads were originally set up to protect IL POPULO – Mussolini's Interventionist Socialist paper – from attack by anti-war Socialists. 35 Some members of this group were also non-socialist Nationalists. It must be stressed that FASCIO only means "action group" and at this time, socialists, anarchists and other ideological groupings had their own FASCI. (Some of the original fasci of the late 19th Century were affinity groups of anarchist insurrectionists)

The breakdown of international solidarity caused the syndicalists to further question their Marxist orthodoxy. They went from seeing Italy's problem as merely **particular**, to believing that Italy had to "go it alone" if it was to achieve a syndicalist revolution. 34 Aware of the underdeveloped nature of the Italian economy, they saw the need to build an economic basis for socialism. *Each proletariat had to create socialism in its own way, within its national collective...Socialism had to be a national proposal.* (my emphasis) 37 For Marxists "society" was an abstract concept, the proto-fascists concretized society as the Nation. As Panunzio stated, *the Nation is nothing but a specific society, an organic, concrete, historical form of society.* 38 To be fair, it should be mentioned that *even as Fascists*, these syndicalists retained much internationalist sentiment, wanting international harmony and a European Federation. Panunzio wanted free trade and found no incompatibility between his concept of nationalism and internationalism. 39

The workers had a different perspective. Not driven by ideological abstractions and knowing they were cannon fodder, they did not support the war effort. The majority of the USI refused to support the leadership. The federation split, the pro-war faction taking only a minority of trade unions. Seemingly the only person convinced by the pro-war syndicalists was Benito Mussolini, who did an about face (not the last!) and came out for intervention in November 1914. There was also some interplay between pro-war Socialists and Nationalists, but the two groups remained suspicious of each other, since the former wanted proletarian revolution and the latter did not.

After Italian intervention, many soldiers began seeing themselves as revolutionaries and looked for allies. The anti-war majority Socialists rejected the soldiers, who then turned toward the pro-war (proto-fascist) left. About the same time, Alfredo Rocco, a left-wing member of the Nationalist Party proposed a form of National Syndicalism, thus bringing his wing of the Nationalists closer to the proto-Fascist syndicalists and socialists. Nevertheless, the pro-war syndicalists could

not at this point be considered Fascists – at least in the sense of the word as used post-1922. They were now called **neo-syndicalists**.

NEOSYNDICALISM

The Bolshevik Revolution had a negative impact upon the group which became neo-syndicalist. It was *the sort of revolution the syndicalists had always warned about* – a caricature of socialism made by a bourgeois party in an extremely backward country. They also feared that application of the Bolshevik model in Italy would lead to disaster.⁴⁰ The Bolshevik Revolution also showed that capitalism simply couldn't be lightly tossed aside and had to develop to its fullness before Socialism was possible.

It was at this point the neo-syndicalists, drawing from their awareness of Italy's underdeveloped economy, began to distinguish between two different types of capitalism. One variety was what Italy suffered from, a state-engendered parasitism, the other aided industrialization. The former was reactionary and the latter progressive. Panunzio writing in 1917, declared that Socialism was bankrupt and if it was to have any future at all, a new theory was needed, one not so determinist, not just based on the proletariat alone and pragmatic in practice. One year later, he re-defined syndicalism. The Italian political system was to be replaced by one based upon syndicates rooted in their economic function. **The role of these syndicates was largely political, not economic as in the past. Membership in these organizations was to be obligatory.**⁴¹ The year 1918 also saw the development of a new union federation – in opposition to the anarcho-syndicalist USI – called Union Italiano del Lavoro (UIL) The UIL was neo-syndicalist and in 1921 adopted a platform written by A. O. Olivetti which emphasized Panunzio's thinking as outlined above.

The first factory occupations were organized by the UIL in Bergamo, March 1919. Mussolini visited the factory and praised the workers for their radical action.⁴² Mussolini and his group were influenced by the neo-syndicalists. They helped fill an ideological void existing among the membership of his Fasci di Combattimento. Not all of the UIL entered the Fascist movement, however. In 1922 the union disintegrated over joining the Fascists. The Fascist General Confederation of National Syndicates was set up in place of the UIL. It had 458,000 members, more than half of whom were agricultural workers.

THE FASCIST SYNDICALISTS

As well as the Neo-syndicalists-become-Fascists, there existed a group of younger men influenced by Panunzio and Olivetti. These were the 'Young Turks' of the *Fasci di Combattimento*. Dino Grandi, Giuseppe Bottai, Augusto Turati, Italo Balboa, and Curzio Suckert all became

important Fascists in the late 1920's. They could be considered Fascist Syndicalists. Grandi had been a syndicalist as a student before the War, Turati became a Fascist union organizer, Bottai developed a notion of Corporatism almost indistinguishable from Neo-syndicalism, which he declared was the true essence of Fascism. Suckert thought Fascism the heir of Socialism and Panunzio its most important thinker. Italo Balbo, the famous aviator, had also been a pre-War young syndicalist and sought to create a National Syndicalist union movement to replace the Socialist unions he later helped to crush.

The Program of the Fasci of March 1919, influenced by these militants, called for an 8 hour day, workers control, retirement at 55, votes for women and a graduated income tax. 43. Mussolini was not happy with this program, feeling it was too limiting. A total opportunist - like Lenin - in the sense of seizing an opportunity - he emphasized "action" rather than anything specific. Thus he would be free to do what ever was necessary to seize power, whether that was to swing to the left or to the right. His first attempt was to split the Socialists and form a new party with the remnants. Later it would be to unite with the Nationalists to crush the Socialists.

THE FASCIST REVOLUTION

The conflict between the Fascists and the Socialists was *primarily a conflict of two different revolutions*.⁴⁴ The Socialist position - influenced by Bolshevism - was totally inadequate for the situation in Italy. While the ISP was the largest party in the 1919 parliament, it refused to unite with the Catholic Peoples Party or the Liberals and introduce social reforms, since the Bolshevik inspired Socialists sought to destroy "bourgeois democracy". On the other hand, the ISP had no idea of how to make an Italian revolution. Thus, the Socialists fell between two stools, ending up neither reformist nor revolutionary.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, AVANTI, the Socialist daily, *frequently repeated* that the ISP would do to Italy what the Bolsheviks had done in Russia, and called for the elimination of the other political parties and attacked the returned soldiers. ⁴⁶ This frightened the middle class. Those people who were turned off by the Socialists, yet desired radical change, searched for an alternative. The alternative was the neo-syndicalist influenced Fascists.

While Nationalists and reactionary landowners certainly jumped upon the Fascist bandwagon, Fascism was not anti-labor *per se* as we have seen. The early movement (which destroyed the Socialist Party) was locally controlled and locally financed and not a mirror of the landowners class interests, as *many of the young provincial leaders were syndicalists of varying degrees...In five provinces... the squads took action against recalcitrant employers who refused to observe labor and rental agreements.* ⁴⁷

The Socialist Party was an obstacle to the Italian revolution and had to be destroyed. And this is precisely what the armed Fasci proceeded to do. Furthermore, the Socialist agricultural program and its unions tended to favor the large farms. The nationalization of land threatened the peasants and the agricultural unions forced the small farmers to take part in strikes whether they wanted to or not. Splits occurred within the Federation of Agricultural Workers allowing the Fascists an opening. They launched the slogan, *The land to those who till it!* in response to Socialist land nationalization. Thus the peasant leagues *went over in a bloc to the Fascist Syndicates... the cooperatives followed... while lorry loads of Black Shirts forcibly dissolved the local Socialist administrations.* ⁴⁸

While the Socialist Party was an enemy, individual Socialists were not. Mussolini worked to split the ISP and to separate the General Labor Confederation (Socialist-dominated union federation - the largest in Italy) from its parent party. His goal was to take the break-away groups and unite them in a new Labor Party - a party to be National Syndicalist in orientation. But the Fascists were not successful in this endeavor. Mussolini had little control over his rank and file at this point and their attacks upon the Socialist unions tended to alienate public opinion. In order to make his revolution, Mussolini had to unite with the Nationalists and clamp down upon his own militants. He almost didn't succeed, as the Fascist militants revolted and almost split the organization. Thus, the Fascist Movement was converted into a Party and the socialist program of 1919 was dropped in favor of "integral nationalism" to placate the Nationalists.

As a result, the Fascist Party was born schizophrenic, one half was right-wing Nationalist and the other half was left-wing National Syndicalist. The right-wing Fascists thought democracy gave the workers too much power, the left-wing Fascists thought it didn't give them anywhere enough. Left-Fascists had full confidence that the working people could learn to run society and the school where they developed this ability was the trade union. For the left, syndicates were to take over the functions otherwise accomplished by the State, the State was to be dissolved into the economy. Unlike the right-wing Nationalists, who had few ideas, they sought solutions to the problems facing Italy, problems such as underdevelopment, social atomization, and bureaucratic corruption. ⁴⁹

The Right-Nationalists, Johnny-come-lately's to Fascism, did not like capitalism any more than their left-Fascist rivals. However, their form of Corporatism denied the workers any input and was therefore a only means of social control. Capitalism, like everyone and everything else, was to be kept in line by the State, functioning in the interests of the State. Right-Fascism never had the theoretical coherence, nor the vision

that motivated the left-Fascists. The Rightists were an eclectic mix of individuals motivated by a variety of impulses, revenge, fear, fanatical nationalism, romanticism, nihilistic action-for-action's sake, a love of violence, greed, and a lust for power. The Left wanted a genuine revolution, one would eventually empower the working class – after a brief period of Fascist tutelage. The Right wanted nothing of the kind. (It goes without saying that the Left-Fascist utopia had only a very superficial resemblance to anarcho-syndicalist goals and the two should not be equated. As mentioned before, these people were not in any way anti-authoritarian.)

Mussolini stood in the middle of this muddle – though at heart sympathetic to the left – *the old Socialist in Mussolini (was) very much alive*, 50 using one faction against the other, and thus staying in power. For Il Duce, this was fine – he had what he had longed for – power – and by this time had become bitterly cynical about the Italian people, feeling they deserved what they got. Mussolini believed several generations would pass before the people were intellectually ready for anything smacking of syndicalism. Ironically, it was the left-Fascists who encouraged the Cult of the Personality of in an attempt to win Mussolini permanently to their side. 51

While Fascism was united enough to overturn the political status quo, it was not coherent enough to implement the National Syndicalist program. Two opposing groups within the same party – soon to be the **only** legal party, meant most of the National Syndicalist or Corporate ideals were to be realized on paper more than in reality. After 1925, when Italy moved toward totalitarianism, it was the Bolshevik model Mussolini emulated and not the National Syndicalist. Left-wing Fascism did have some successes, however. One was in the area of social welfare measures. The Fascist Syndicates did stand up for the interests of the worker – to the extent that some of the more militant union leaders were deposed at the demand of the right-Fascists. The Left also served a valuable function for the regime, legitimating the government in the eyes of the population, who otherwise would have been opposed to a purely right-wing Nationalist State.

Left Fascism never lived up to its goals and right until the very end – the wretched 1943 Salo Republic, the Fascist left-wing pushed for a syndicalist economy and government. (It should be noted, that National Syndicalists like Panunzio had no use for either Hitler or Nazism and tried to keep Mussolini out of World War II.) When, in the mid-1930's, due to the growing war pressure, Mussolini saw the need to make major changes in the economy, it was State Capitalism and not National Syndicalism that was adopted. Only Russia was to exceed Italy in the level of state ownership. Mussolini did not want the workers getting in the way of his war plans. Fascist syndicalism got pushed ever further into the future and it died as a hopeless utopia.

OTHER VARIETIES OF FASCISM

After reading this far, it should be evident that other alleged forms of Fascism, such as Nazism, or the Salazar or Franco dictatorships did not have much in common with Italian Fascism, especially left-Fascism. The Salazar and Franco dictatorships were purely reactionary in nature and not based upon any ideal of National Syndicalism or State socialism. The attraction of nationalistic Catholic reactionaries for Fascism needs some explanation. First off, the Church as a pre-Modern institution was never happy with Modernity, Liberalism and its economic form, capitalism. A form of Corporatism stressing order and ultimate control by a State in league with the Church hierarchy was preferable to either liberal capitalism or anarcho-syndicalism. Furthermore, right-wing Corporatism seemed to be a contemporary form of the medieval Guild system, a form of economy the Church admired. About this time (1928) Mussolini (the militant atheist!) made his Concordat with the Pope, putting him in the Church's good books. Keep in mind that even reactionaries in the 20th Century did not like to think of themselves as such and the new, glossy mantle of Fascism tended to give them an air of being progressive and "with it".

NATIONAL SOCIALISM

In Germany, like in Italy, many of the returned soldiers were attracted to both the left and nationalism. A handful of nationalistic leftists led by a machinist named Harrer formed the German Workers Party. A left-nationalist soldier, Capt. Ernst Roehm sent one Corporal Hitler into the tiny party as a spy, since the captain was interested in building a revolutionary movement. Hitler soon drove out the original leaders. Roehm thought he could control Hitler – the first of many to make that mistake! Around the same time another left-nationalist soldier, Gregor Strasser brought his group into the fledgling party. His brother, Otto Strasser, remained outside the party until 1925, but was a sympathizer. Otto had been a Social Democrat who quit the party after the Social Democratic government went back on its promise of nationalizing industry.

Within the now renamed National Socialist German Workers Party, two currents flourished. One which might be called Strasserite (which would include Roehm) emphasizing the nationalization of industry and the other, the Anti-Semites (or Hitlerites) emphasizing hatred of the Jews, racism and war. While the Strasserites were also Anti-Semitic, their program emphasized, 1. the nationalization of land and industry. 2. a corporatist form of government with a parliament formed of 5 organizations, one each for workers, peasants, white collars, industrialists and professionals. 3. Abrogation of Versailles Treaty's anti-German aspects 4. A federal Germany. 5. European Federation with

free trade among member states. Thus, the Nazi Party also had within it a radical, left-wing movement.

As with Italian Fascism, the Strasserite left was to prove a key faction within the movement. In the early years Gregor Strasser was the chief organizer of the NSADP and his leftist ideas attracted many soldiers and other discontented individuals. While Hitler was in prison as a result of the failed Beer Hall Putsch, Strasser and Roehm led and re-built the party. They attempted to expel the Anti-Semite faction led by the professional haters Herman Esser and Julius Streicher. When Hitler got out of prison he cooked a deal with a number of industrialists who were seeking a bulwark against the Communist Party (and most likely NASDP radicalism as well) With money from this source, the Hitler faction was able to undermine the Strasserites. By the late 1920's Hitler was totally in charge. In 1930 Otto Strasser quit the Nazis and formed an underground revolutionary national socialist group, the Black Front. Gregor Strasser, Roehm and other leftists were murdered during the Night of Long Knives in 1934. Hitler's deal with industrialists like Thyssen, helped give rise to the legend that the Nazis were only a front for capitalism. Hitler was only using the industrialists for his own ends, as he used everyone else. While not a radical state socialist like the Strassers, he nonetheless needed a heavily statist economy to pursue his war aims. Adolf Hitler was certainly no friend of the capitalists, let alone an apostle of 'laissez faire!

There were other instances of left-Fascism beside the Italian fascist-syndicalists and Strasserite Germans. At least three other instances of this phenomenon occurred, all of which are in some manner related to syndicalism, and not state socialism. These were the Ibanez Regime in Chile, the Vichy syndicalists of France and the Peronist Movement of Argentina.

CHILE AND IBANEZ CORPORATISM

Early in the 1920's Chile was in turmoil. A reform president, Alessandri-Palma had been elected but was unable to enact his reforms due to the power of the landowning class. The largest trade union movement was anarcho-syndicalist and divided into two wings, the militants and the pragmatists. A section of the military had become radicalized and pushed for social reform. Many of these reformers, and especially Colonel Ibanez who took power in a coup in 1925, were attracted to Mussolini's Corporate State. Ibanez decreed a series of social reforms and gave the trade unions legal status - all except the militant trade unions, that is. The pragmatic syndicalists backed the Ibanez Regime, until it fell in 1931.

VICHY FRANCE AND THE COLLABORATIONIST SYNDICALISTS

With the defeat of France at the beginning of WWII, the collaborationist Vichy government was set up under Marshal Petain. Vichy claimed to be in the process of setting up a Corporate State, but this system had more in common with reactionary Catholic Corporatism than radical national syndicalism. Nonetheless, a number of prominent French syndicalists joined the Petainists. One of these was Rene Belin, number two man in the CGT. Long time militants, George Dumoulin, Marcel Roy, Raymond Froideval and Georges Yvtot collaborated as did the syndicalist theoretician, Hubert Lagardelle. Belin joined the government as Labor Minister with Froideval and Georges Lafranc as staff members. Roy became a propagandist for Vichy, Dumoulin the Inspector General of Social Committes. Lagardelle replaced Belin as Labor Minister in 1942. His support for Vichy was not altogether surprising. In the 1920's he had abandoned Revolutionary Syndicalism for National Syndicalism, which accompanied his admiration for Mussolini. These Vichy syndicalists were to give syndicalism a bad name after the War, as the Stalinists made as much propaganda out of the situation as possible.

There were a number of reasons behind the turn from syndicalism to Vichy. The most important syndicalist group, SYNDICATS, which had formed after the CGT united with the Communist CGTU, was militantly pacifist. The group felt France should not be in "London's war" (later "Moscow's war".) They were deeply hostile to the Stalinists who had taken over and perverted the CGT. There were personal matters. The Stalinists forced out Dumoulin as head of CGT Nord, Roy as leader of Metalworkers and Froideval as Construction Workers head. For Belin and other syndicalists, the failure of the Popular Front meant the masses were not ready for radical change and the social revolution would have to be brought about by an elite. The contemporary situation was one of competing imperialisms, the most vicious of which was Stalinist imperialism, hence they felt fundamental liberties had to be defended on a **national** basis. We have seen how similar ideas within Italian syndicalism evolved in the direction of Fascism.

ARGENTINA AND PERONISMO

The situation in Argentina was more complex than either Vichy France or Ibanez Chile. Prior to WWI, anarcho-syndicalism predominated in the workers movement. The most important group, FORA, was anarcho-communist in ideology. The repression of 1910 weakened the anarcho-communist syndicalists and a new form of Syndicalism (Revolutionary Syndicalism) arose. This ideology soon became more prominent than

free trade among member states. Thus, the Nazi Party also had anarcho-communism. The Revolutionary Syndicalists (hereafter called Syndicalists) believed in the general strike and were anti-political, but were willing to bargain with the employers and the government. About this time, the Radical Party (liberals) under President Yrigoyen had taken power and pressured the employers to settle with the unions. While there was no formal alliance between the Radicals and the Syndicalists, nor did either side want one, there was a good deal of mutual support. The Radicals wanted to help the Syndicalists in order to defeat their rivals the Socialists. Radical policies aided both the maritime workers and railroad workers to organize and generally encouraged the growth of syndicalist unions. *The government's attitude was decisive in allowing the Syndicalists to become the largest segment of the labor movement.* 52

Thus the Syndicalist Union Ferrocarril was close to the Radicals and Yrigoyen forced the telephone company to sign with FOET, the Syndicalist telephone workers. In 1922 the Syndicalists formed a new federation, the Union Sindical Argentina (USA) which had close ties with the Radicals. Interestingly enough, some of the unions in FORA were also playing footsie with the Radicals too.⁵³ In 1930 the USA joined with the Socialist dominated unions to form the General Confederation of Labor, (CGT) with the Syndicalists in a majority. The following year, the military overthrew the government. FORA responded with a series of attempted general strikes, *which failed dismally...The Anarchists never recovered...* 54 The CGT was far luckier, since the military were divided as to what to do about the unions. One wing, the landowner-Conservatives wanted to destroy them, the other wing, influenced by Corporatism and Fascism was somewhat sympathetic. The main enemy of the military was the Radical Party. The Corporatist wing began to court the Socialist unions in order to undermine the Syndicalists, who as we have seen, were friendly with the Radicals. All a ploy to undermine the Radicals. The Syndicalists were also more militant than the Socialists, not a mark in their favor with the military. In this manner, they were levered out of power in the CGT.

The military's policies of import substitution caused a rapid growth of new industries in the late 1930's. But neither the Anarchists nor the Syndicalists benefited from this. The new industries were organized by Communist and Socialist Unions. The Syndicalists split from the Socialist-Communist dominated CGT to form a purely Syndicalist CGT-II. By 1940, however, the Socialists and Communists were at each others throats for control of CGT-I. The trade union movement went into a decline as a result of this three-way conflict.

Like everywhere else in the world, practical results and not ideology mobilized the rank and file and attracted new members. All unions, Socialist, Communist or Syndicalist were highly centralized, often with

"strong personalities" at the helm and with little authority given to the locals. None permitted dissent, the need for unity in action was more important. The union leadership became ever more distant from the membership.⁵⁵ This resulted in the unions becoming bureaucratized as membership expanded in the late 1930's.

Countering these trends was the ability of workers to "vote with their feet". There was no dues check-off, union membership was not obligatory and a multiplicity of different unions existed. The stagnation of the union movement, the lack of friends in government and the tight control of the unions by the leadership laid the basis for what was to occur from 1943-on. Union leaders, looking at the previous 30 years, saw that government had played a crucial role in the labor movement's development.⁵⁶ The union leadership was looking for something new, to break the logjam.

What was new was Juan Peron, one of the young Corporatist military officers. He greatly admired Mussolini and the Fascist system in Italy. He also had a fondness for Hitler, indeed after WWII, allowed thousands of fleeing Nazis to settle in Argentina. As a dictator, Peron ruthlessly crushed any opposition and created a Cult of the Personality around his remarkable (and much more radical) wife, Evita. The Labor Department under Peron gave support to the unions and incurred the wrath of the employers. He was also anti-Communist. All three pleased the Socialists and Syndicalists. With Peron, *the dream of recreating the relationship with the government that had existed under the Radicals was fulfilled and surpassed. The State shifted the balance between labor and capital in favor of the former.* 57

By 1945, the majority of the unions were backing Peron. When he was removed from the Labor Department by the right-wing military in 1945, the unions saw this as a threat to their gains and came out in mass for his re-instatement. The Syndicalist union FOET *strongly supported* Peron during this struggle. Without the unions, he would also have not been elected President in 1946. 58 Now the union leaders got what they wanted, dues check off and one union per industry with obligatory membership. They had greater control over the rank and file than before and their salaries increased rapidly. Union bosses formed the core leadership of Peron's Labor Party, and later his Justice Party. Some of these party leaders were former Syndicalists like Luis Gay of FOET. The CGT was to remain the most important centre of Peronist support long after he was deposed in 1955.

CONCLUSION

1. Fascism was rooted in the authoritarian and violent culture and history of South-Central Italy. A society of rich landowners and land-

- poor peasants dominated by a reactionary Church. A society that suppressed the individual and gave rise to bitterness and hostility.
2. Fascism was also rooted in the politics of late-19th Century Italy, a society suffering from economic underdevelopment, a weak bourgeoisie, a lack of democracy, over centralization and little understanding and practice of liberalism.
 3. Out of this oppressive society arose a form of anarchism which was to become the first step on the road to Fascism. This *indirect* link occurs through a specific form of anarcho-communism found in Italy in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries which espoused the violent and coercive doctrines of Propaganda of the Deed (or terrorism) and expropriation
 4. Fascism was a result of the failure of both Marxism and Revolutionary Syndicalist doctrines.
 5. Fascism was also a culmination of the centralizing "Big Is Best" tendencies of modernity. It was also, through Marx and Blanqui, one of the legacies of French Jacobinism.
 6. Outside of Italy, in Argentina and Chile, Fascism became attractive to certain labor leaders as a result of the inability of the trade unions to achieve more than a moderate success in maintaining their membership, confronting the employers and obtaining social reforms.
 7. The causes of fascism are **historically unique** and there is no sort of fascist virus hovering about in contemporary society. While present neo-fascist groups are an annoyance, the likelihood of their gaining power is therefore exceedingly slim.
 8. Fascism is a product of the far left, a violent form of state socialism. Hence attempts to stick conservatives, populists and so-called right-wing libertarians with the fascist label are exceedingly dishonest, and is in itself reminiscent of the fascist mentality.

FASCISM AND ITS DOCTRINES - BENITO MUSSOLINI

The following are excerpts from Mussolini's handbook, FASCISM AND ITS DOCTRINES, published in 1935. Mussolini, as we have seen, played the role of mediator, steering a middle course between the extremes of left and right fascism. Although few of these ideas were his own, in truth we can say the following quotes are "straight from the horse's mouth" and represent basic fascism.

Anti-individualistic, the Fascist... stresses the importance of the State and accepts the individual only in so far as his interests coincide with those of the State... It is opposed to Classical Liberalism which denied the State in the name of the individual... Fascism stands for liberty... the liberty of the State... The Fascist conception of the State is all-embracing: outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist. Thus understood, Fascism is Totalitarian... No individuals or groups outside the State... Fascism recognizes the real needs which gave rise to

socialism and trade unionism, giving them due weight in the guild or corporate system in which divergent interests are co-ordinated and harmonized in the unity of the State. 11

RACE AND NATION

A nation is not a race, nor a region but a people united by an idea... It is not the nation which generates the State. Rather it is the State which creates the nation 12

Race... a feeling and not a reality. 41

FASCISM IS NOT REACTIONARY

If the bourgeoisie... believe that they have found in us their lighting conductor, they are mistaken... I therefore hope this assembly will accept... national syndicalism. 12

The Fascist negation of socialism, democracy, liberalism, should not, however, be interpreted as implying a desire to drive the world backwards to positions occupied before 1789... History does not travel backwards... Dead and gone forever are feudal privileges... 25

STATE CAPITALISM AND FORDISM

Since 1926 economic and political developments have everywhere emphasized these truths. The importance of the State is rapidly growing. The so-called crisis can only be settled by State action... 28

Supercapitalism (Mussolini's term for Fordism) finds its inspiration and justification in a utopia - the utopia of unlimited consumption. 50

We can now assert that the capitalist mode of production has been superceded and with it the theory of economic liberalism. 44

THE FASCIST ECONOMY

If Liberalism spells individualism, Fascism spells government. The Fascist State lays claim to rule the economic field no less than others... all the political, economic and spiritual forces... circulate within the State. 24

Now we are burying economic liberalism. The Corporations mean a regulated economy... superceding socialism with a new synthesis... 58

To do this (install Corporatism) there must be 3 conditions: 1. A single party so that economic discipline may be accompanied by political

discipline. 2. A totalitarian State. 3. A period of high ideological tension. 60

The Corporation is... an organ of State administration... (Syndical) Associations affiliated to Corporate organs are autonomous in all matters connected with the negotiation of labor contracts... 109, 110

...the organizer of the enterprise is responsible to the State for the direction given to production. 135

It is compulsory for the employer to engage workers through the Bureau (State Labor Bureau) ... with preference given to members of the Fascist Party and Fascist Syndicates... 140

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FOOTNOTES

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31. see P. Mazcaj,
32. 236 Megaro
33. 89 Hughes
34. 106 Roberts
35. 168 Joes
36. 9 Morgan
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