

## The Faces of Janus: Marxism and Fascism in the Twentieth Century A. James Gregor

In his latest book on political philosophy A. James Gregor challenges the long-standing belief that Marxism and Fascism are ideologies on opposite sides of the political spectrum, with Marxism residing on the "left" side and Fascism residing on the "right." Concomitant with this assumption is the typical characterization of Marxism as benign, progressive, and humanitarian, and the characterization of Fascism as malicious, regressive, and chauvinistic. Gregor believes that these characterizations are erroneous and blur the essential similarities between the two, leaving modern political theorists without a proper understanding of twentieth century revolutionary practice (p. 17). The thesis of his book is that the theoretical and practical relationship between Fascism and Marxism is "curvilinear rather than rectilinear" (p. 128).

In the beginning of the book (Chapters 2 & 3) Gregor locates the origin of the false dichotomy between "right wing" revolution and "left wing" revolution in the first Marxist-Leninist interpretations of Fascism. According to this original interpretation, Fascist dictatorships arose when the ruling bourgeoisie attempted to stave off the impending socialist revolution by installing a dictatorship that would protect their interests. Gregor dismisses this argument as being "at best, a caricature of the actual political and historical sequence" (p. 36) and argues that the regimes of both Mussolini and Hitler displaced the traditional bourgeoisie from power and subordinated the bourgeoisie's interests to the collective national interest (pp. 40-42). According to Fascist ideology, the means of production and the forces of the market, under the control but not the ownership of the state, are seen as instruments to coordinate and harmonize the productive forces of the nation for the good of all classes. Gregor concludes that Fascist regimes are not in the service of any one particular class, but seek a harmony between all the classes.

Gregor devotes the middle chapters of the book (Chapters 4, 5, & 6) to a detailed discussion of the regimes of the former Soviet Union and Maoist China. Here he argues that the practical applications of Marxist-Leninist theory took on an essentially Fascist appearance. Mao and Stalin both conceived of the world as divided between "less-developed nations and advanced industrial democracies" (p. 73). This gave rise to the nationalistic policies of each country which stressed revolutionary violence and submission to the charismatic leader (pp. 80-82). Since these are characteristics that are typically described as "right wing" it was "never made quite clear whether Maoism [or Stalinism] was a form of 'right wing extremism' or 'left wing adventure,' which suggests that the distinction was never really clear or convincing" (p. 75).

The muddled distinction is based on a fundamental, but common, misunderstanding of fascist ideology. The most provocative part of Gregor's book (Chapters 7, 8, & 9) is devoted to an exegesis of the origin of Fascist ideology. Here Gregor delves into the writings of Fascist theorists in order to show that Fascism is a "variant of revolutionary Marxism designed to address the reality of lesser developed nations" (p. 133). Traditional Marxist theory argues that Capitalist economic practices contain within them conflicts that only a proletarian revolution can transcend. However, social liberation via revolution of the proletariat can only be achieved after the Capitalist industrial system of a nation develops to the point where it can provide the material conditions and abundance needed to achieve social harmony. In lesser industrially-developed countries, which do not have the material conditions for a genuine Marxist proletarian revolution, a different mode of industrialization had to be achieved that did not leave those same countries subservient to the interests of international capitalists. It is out of this background that Fascism arose. Fascist ideology emerged around the Italian Syndicalist attempt to enhance the productive capacity of Italy in the face of international exploitation at the hands of developed industrial countries. Syndicalists argued for a coordination and collaboration of all the productive forces of a nation via the intervention of the state. Gregor quotes Syndicalist-turned-Fascist ideologue Roberto Michels as claiming Fascism to be "the revolutionary nationalism of the poor" (p. 133). Mussolini's corporate state was a way of harmonizing the interests of all social classes. The result is a society in which labor and business is coordinated under the leadership and control of the state even if private property is, nominally, allowed. Fascism, via Syndicalism, transformed the Marxist theory of international revolution by emphasizing an ideology that stressed the conflict between nations. Syndicalist-Fascists thinkers (Benito Mussolini, Sergio Panunzio, Enrico Corradini) had described the world as divided between developing plutocracies and lesser developed nations that seemed to be destined for exploitation at the hands of those plutocracies. According to these thinkers any theory emphasizing internationalism was "a product of late capitalism, serving 'free trade' interests of imperialism" and destined to leave "proletarian nations" "the victims of exploitation" (pp. 140-141). Thus, these thinkers had seen Fascism as the socialism of the proletarian nations (p. 135). This interpretation makes it easier to understand how "left wing" Communism transformed itself into "right wing" Fascism; much as Mussolini, the one time leader of the "left wing" Italian Socialist party, became the "right wing" Duce of Fascist Italy.

Out of this doctrine of "competing nations" came the Fascist emphasis on nationalism and race. Gregor argues that the notion of race originally conceived by the fascists was not a strict biological racism that became prominent in National Socialist Germany. Rather, Fascist intellectuals such as Giovanni Gentile and Carlo Costamagna conceived race to refer to the collective sense of a nation that arises out

of the affinities of "ethnicity, language, history , and culture" (p. 154). Race was synonymous with nation or people that invoked a sense of identity, community, and common destiny. It was this common destiny that Fascism sought to preserve in the face of international expansion of Enlightenment political theory and practice.

Gregor's book is both informative and important. While radicals today typically throw around epithets like "fascism" and "fascist," they often do so with little or no understanding of what Fascist theorists said or wrote. Gregor's book is a helpful remedy to this because he presents a clear and concise foundation of Fascist ideology, explicating both the historical conditions from which it arose and the direction it attempted to move society. Gregor also traces the similarities between Fascist and Marxist thought- similarities which had become obfuscated because of intellectuals' attempts to dichotomize synthetically revolutionary practices into "right wing" revolution and "left wing" revolution. Considering the historical record of the revolutionary practices of the twentieth century, anything less than a firm understanding as we move into the twenty first century can be dangerous.

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