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# Red Fascism

Voline

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I've just been reading an extract from a letter from our valiant comrade A[lfonso] Petrini[1] who is in the USSR, under banishment. There I came upon the following lines: *"(…) They're locking us all up, one by one. Real revolutionaries may not enjoy freedom in Russia. Freedom of the press and freedom of speech have been wiped out, so* **there is no difference between Stalin and Mussolini**."

I have deliberately emboldened the last phrase, for it is spot on. However, for the accuracy of this short phrase and all its ghastly realism to be appreciated, it is essential that we have a **deep and clear-cut grasp** of fascism: deeper and more clear cut than is generally the case in leftist circles.

On the basis of such a grasp, the reader will understand Petrini's statement not as some sort of a catch-phrase but as the precise expression of a very sad fact.

Twelve years ago, when Mussolini's movement — Italian **fascism** — achieved its victory, the general belief was that it was merely a localised, passing phenomenon without future prospects.

[1] Alfonso Petrini: Ancona-born Italian anarchist sentenced in absentia by the Italian courts to 17 years behind bars for his alleged part in the killing of the

Since then, not only has "fascism" been consolidated in Italy, but kindred movements have emerged and carried the day in a number of other countries. Elsewhere, under some semblance or another, "fascism" represents a menacing school of thought. The very expression, once entirely localised, has now become widespread and international.

This state of affairs forces us to the following conclusion: the so-called "fascist" movement must have sound, deep-rooted, far-reaching historical foundations.

Now what could those foundations be? What might the main factors be underpinning the birth and above all the **success** of fascism?

Speaking for myself, I can come up with **three** which I regard, taken altogether, as the factors underpinning its success.

1. **The economic factor**. This is quite clear cut and widely understood. Here it is, in a few words: private capitalism (the economic foundation of which is demand freely competing for maximum profit and the political expression of which is bourgeois democracy) is falling apart and bankrupt. Violently assailed by all its enemies, whose numbers are on the rise, it is immersed in filth, crime and impotence. Wars, crisis, whole armies of the unemployed, impoverished masses, contrasted with material wealth galore and the boundless possibility of adding still further wealth, have exposed private capitalism's powerlessness to resolve the economic problems of the age. These days there is a growing awareness of its death throes and imminent demise. So, instinctively or knowingly, thoughts have turned to replacing it with some new brand of capitalism, in the hope that the latter will be able to "save the world". Yet again in human history, thoughts are turning to the lofty mission of a strong, all-powerful State based upon dictatorship. Thoughts are turning to a **state** capitalism directed by a dictatorships that "is above private interests". Such is the new brand of capitalism underpinning fascism **economically**.

2. **The social factor**. This too is very clear cut and widely understood. The failure of private capitalism with all its horrific implications has conjured up an unmistakably revolutionary situation. The increasingly unhappy masses are stirring. Revolutionary currents are gaining ground. Organised workers are making increasingly active preparations to do battle with a system which grinds them down to the advantage of a gang of bandits. The working class, freely and pugnaciously organised (along political, trade union and ideological lines) is becoming more and more of an irritation, more and more of a threat to the propertied classes.

The latter have woken up to how precarious their situation is. And are running scared. So, instinctively or consciously, they are looking for a way out. They strive at all costs to cling to their privileged position which is based on exploitation of the toiling masses. What matters above all else is that the latter should remain an exploited, wage-dependent flock fleeced by its masters.

If the current model of exploitation cannot be sustained, a change of model will be called for (no great deal) to ensure that the underlying situation is unchanged. The masters of today can remain such as long as they agree to become members of a vast economic, political, social and essentially statist panel of leaders. Now, if this new social structure is to be made a reality, there has to be, above all else, an almighty state led by a strong man, a mailed fist, a dictator, a Mussolini, a Hitler! Such is the new brand of capitalism by which fascism is being fed, socially.

Were fascism based only upon these two things — its economic and its social underpinnings — it would never have gained the power we know it possesses. No doubt about it: the organised labouring masses would swiftly have stopped it in its tracks once and for all. Indeed, the means whereby the working class generally does battle with capitalism would, with a few minor adjustments, be of service still in effectively fighting against the reaction and

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carabinierie Antei during the revolutionary disturbances in Ancona in 1920.

fascism. Which would be simply the latest chapter of the workers' great historic struggle against their exploiters. How many times during the course of history to date has the enemy adopted a new tack, donned a new mask or switched weapons! None of which ever stopped the workers from carrying on with their fight, without loss of equilibrium or confidence, without letting themselves be undone by the enemy's maneuvering and U-turns!

Now, here we come to the important point. Whilst it may be regarded as a new (defensive and offensive) ploy by capitalism, fascism, wheresoever it set seriously about its task, scored such a stunning, extraordinary, fantastic success that the working class's struggle proved, all of a sudden and universally — and this goes for Italy as well as for Germany, for Germany as well as for Austria, for Austria as well as elsewhere — not just testing but utterly ineffective and powerless. Not only has liberal bourgeois democracy failed to defend itself, but so have socialism, (Bolshevist) communism, the trade union movement, etc. They have all failed utterly to stand up to a capitalism with its back to the wall as it has maneuvered to save its skin. Not only have all these forces failed to wage a successful resistance against a capitalism overhauling its shaken ranks, but it has been the latter which has been quick to regroup and crush all its foes.

Socialism, so mighty in Germany, Austria and Italy, has proved powerless. "Communism", itself very strong, especially in Germany, has proved powerless. The trade unions have proved powerless. How are we to account for this?

An already highly complicated problem is becoming even more so, if we think about the current situation in the USSR. As we know, there it was an authoritarian state communism (Bolshevism) that scored a stunning and rather easy victory in the events of 1917. Now, these days, nearly seventeen years on from that victory, not only is communism proving powerless to resist fascism abroad, but, where the regime within the USSR itself is concerned, the latter is more and more often being described more and more deliber-

**emancipation of the working class, the victorious revolution actually and despite all the theorising of the dictator-liberators, brought forth the most comprehensive, ghastliest enslavement and exploitation of that working class at the hands of a privileged ruling class**.

So much for the third and chief factor in fascism's special power. It is fed primarily by the **deeply fascist — and unwittingly fascist** — ideology of a multitude who would be the first to be astonished and outraged to be accused of being fascists. That ideology, which has seeped in everywhere, even into the ranks of the "emancipators" and workers themselves, is poisoning the workers' movement, making it flabby and breaking it down. It kills off genuine activity by the masses and whittles their struggles and indeed their successes to nothing — or rather, to a fascist outcome.

This — alas! — is why Petrini has it right. "*No difference between Stalin and Mussolini.*" Which is why the "**red fascism**" is no catchprase but an accurate expression for a very sad fact.

Yet there is consolation to be had. The masses learn through all too palpable first hand experience. And the experience is there. Across one sixth of the globe it is an everyday fact. Its real outcomes are starting to become more and more widely known in greater and greater detail. We must wait for the labouring masses of every land to derive from it, at the opportune moment, the lesson vital to the success of their future struggles.

Whether this hope comes true depends largely on the conduct of those who have understood already. They have a duty to make the most energetic efforts to get the vast toiling masses to recognise the negative lessons of the Russian experience.

We anarchists, who have come to understand, must step up and intensify our propaganda, whilst keeping that experience in the forefront of our minds. If we do our duty, if we help the masses understand in time, then the USSR's "red fascism" will, historically speaking, have rendered a useful service: and, by acting it out, done the idea of dictatorship to death.



ately as "*red fascism*". Comparisons are drawn between Stalin and Mussolini. Note is taken of the ferocious repression of the toiling masses by the ruling apparatus there which makes up a million persons of privilege dependent, as they are everywhere else, by the way, upon military and police powers. The absence of all freedom is noted. So too is the arbitrary and relentless persecution. And what counts is that such discoveries or opinions are coming, not from bourgeois quarters, but above all from the ranks of revolutionaries … socialists, syndicalists, anarchists, and even from the ranks of the communist (Trotskyist) opposition which, on this basis, is "*resuming the fight for emancipation*" and launching the Fourth International.

All of these things are extremely worrying. They lead us inescapably to this conclusion, which may appear paradoxical: that even in the USSR, albeit under a different guise, it is fascism that has carried the day: that it is a new capitalism (state capitalism under the leadership of a mailed fist, a dictator, Stalin) that is in the saddle.

How are we to account for all this?

And might there yet be some other element, some other basis, some other raison d'etre that could be affording fascism some exceptional edge?

To which my answer is Yes. Here we have the third factor: the one I have yet to explore. I regard it as the most important one of all, as well as the most complicated and the least understood. Yet it is the one that explains everything for us.

3. **The psychological (or ideological!) factor**. The underlying factor in the successes of the fascists and the powerlessness of the forces of emancipation is, as I see it, the poisonous notion of dictatorship per se. I would even go further. There is a notion so widespread that it has all but turned into an axiomatic truth. Millions upon millions, even today, would be astounded to find it called into question. Better still: a goodly number of anarchists and syndicalists too see nothing suspect in it. Speaking for myself,

I regard it as entirely wrong-headed. Now, every false notion embraced as a fact poses a great danger to the cause it affects. The notion in question is as follows: **in order to win in the struggle and achieve their emancipation, the toiling masses have to be guided and led by some "elite", some "enlightened minority", by "far-seeing" men on a level higher than the masses**.

That such a theory — which I see as merely a sweetened expression of the notion of dictatorship, for, in fact, it strips the masses of all freedom of action and enterprise — that a theory such as this can be peddled by **exploiters**, is perfectly understandable. But that such a notion should be anchored in the minds of those who purport to be **liberators and revolutionaries**, is one of the queerest phenomena history has to show. For — and this strikes me as obvious — if they are to shrug off exploitation, the masses should be led no longer. Quite the contrary: the toiling masses will rid themselves of all exploitation only once they have found a way of ridding themselves of all tutelage, of shifting for themselves, using their own initiative, in pursuit of their own interests, with the assistance and from within the ranks of their own authentic class agencies — trade unions, cooperatives, etc., — federated one with another.

The notion of dictatorship — be it mailed fist or velvet glove — being universal and universally embraced, the way is open for fascist psychology, ideology and action. **That psychology penetrates, poisons and disintegrates the entire workers' movement and points it along a dangerous path**.

If the reckoning is that dictatorship is needed to direct the working class's struggle for emancipation, then in actuality the class struggle turns into **a competition between dictators**. At bottom, the point of that struggle is to find out who will retain or win a decisive hold over the masses. So the outcome of the contest depends on all sorts of rather incidental circumstances. Dictator X carries the day here, dictator Y or Z yonder. Either of them may profess very different, indeed contradictory ideals. But the fact remains that in



place of unfettered, far-ranging activity by the masses themselves, it is the winner who will lead the masses dragooned into following him on pain of ghastly repression. It must be obvious that such a prospect can have nothing to do with actual emancipation of the labouring masses.

The notion of dictatorship, of elite leadership inevitably leads to the formation of political parties: agencies which nurture and support the future dictator. In the end, such and such a party will triumph over the rest. At which point its dictatorship climbs into the saddle. No matter which it may be, it quickly conjures up its appointments and, ultimately, its privileged strata. Subjecting the masses to its will. Oppressing them and exploiting them and, deep down, inevitably becoming fascist.

So my vision of fascism is quite elastic. As I see it, **any school of thought that countenances dictatorship** — be it of all-out or kid-glove, "right wing" or "left wing" variety — **is, deep down, objectively and essentially fascist**. In my eyes, fascism is primarily the **notion of the masses being led by some "minority", some political party, some dictator**. In terms of psychology and ideology, fascism is the idea of dictatorship. That idea articulated, spread or implemented by the propertied classes is readily understood. But when that same idea is taken up and implemented by ideologues from the working class **as the road to emancipation**, that should be deemed a poisonous aberration, a short-sighted, silly nonsense, a dangerous deviation. For, being essentially fascist, that idea, if put into effect, leads inevitably to a profoundly fascist social organisation.

This truth has been comprehensibly — and incontrovertibly — borne out by the "Russian experience". The notion of dictatorship as a means of emancipating the working class has been put into practice there. Well, its implementation has inevitably brought forth an effect which these days is becoming plainer and plainer and which soon even the most ignorant, short-sighted and pig-headed will be forced to acknowledge: **instead of leading to the**