

# Correspondence

## MORE ON FASCISM

Dear Comrades:

In *Urgent Tasks* number 4, Noel Ignatin criticized the old Comintern definition of fascism, using it as a foil to bring some much-needed new ideas into the discussion of fascism. In the face of the growing offensive of the right, which no doubt includes some would-be Hitlers, it is necessary to smash out of the confines of the usual left dogmas. However, I would like to raise two points where I think Noel has made mistakes.

First, Noel simply defines out of existence all examples of fascism which are likely to defy his analysis.

The indiscriminate use of a term which is meant to apply to a specific form of rule that arises in definite circumstances can and does obscure the reality of modern society and the forms of social motion which appear within it, including the emergence of a revolutionary social bloc. (page 25)

Quite right. But he goes on to discuss almost exclusively Germany under the Nazis. In fact, except for two passing references to Italy, the entire refutation of the Comintern definition relies on the German example.

What argument about fascism can dismiss so quickly the first movement to call itself Fascist? Or the many other countries whose regimes often aligned themselves with the Nazis, and were commonly referred to as fascist, such as Spain, Hungary, Romania, Lithuania, Poland and Austria, among others? One of Hannah Arendt's best points in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is that the Nazis (and, according to her, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) were a new type of "government," qualitatively different from these other regimes (including Italy), all of which became more ordinary one-party dictatorships.

The latter did not involve dynamic movements that constantly created new fronts to hide behind; they did not massacre huge sections of their own populations (compare the fates of the Basques and the German Jews); they did not have pretensions to world mastery. All of these governments used nationalist appeals — and, at least in the case of Italy, foreign adventures — to mobilize the population to greater exploitation in the name of the future.

These regimes certainly were chauvinist, terrorist (aiming mainly at "the suppression of conscious opponents"), and as imperialist as they could manage. For instance, the Balkans in the thirties were a hotbed of national oppression and complicated state-inspired subversions among Yugoslavia, Albania, Hungary, and the rest. At least the Comintern definition has a chance with these regimes. However, I agree with Noel (and the MIR) that it lacks value in describing various non-fascist military dictatorships, such as present-day Chile. I also tend to believe that it doesn't adequately describe Ethiopia or Afghanistan, although the Eritrean People's Liberation Front has made a plausible case for the former.

Germany was a special case that cannot be assimilated to one-party dictatorships, such as Italy; military dictatorships, such as Chile; or bourgeois democratic empires, such as the United States. The Nazis were masters of the creation of organizations and "movements" in a constant political shell game. They carried out massacres on a really incomprehensible scale. They definitely saw themselves as a European movement, and actively aspired to world domination. Their relation to the German bourgeoisie was at least ambiguous; the Nazis themselves certainly despised the capitalists as small thinkers.\*

But Noel misses two important

points in the following passage:

The aim of the Nazis was not the establishment of German supremacy, although they occasionally referred, for mass consumption, to that goal. The aim of the fascists was the establishment of the master race, which they insisted was just beginning to make its appearance, and which would be drawn from the "Aryan" elements of all the peoples of northern Europe. They repeated often that, for them, the conquest of the German state was simply a stage on the path to the reconstitution of Europe, that fascism was a movement, not a state. As Hannah Arendt points out, they treated Germany itself as a conquered nation, the first of all the nations of Europe to receive the benefits of their racial purification policies. It is no exaggeration at all to observe that fascism, far from being motivated by nationalist considerations, in fact tended toward *internationalism* — not of the proletarian type, to be sure, (page 30)

First, the Nazis conflated "Aryan" with "Germanic." The "Aryan elements" they intended to mobilize were the remnants of the waves of Germanic tribes that overran Europe in the first millennium A.D. (The history of this notion is in G. L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*.) This explains both the

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\*The bourgeoisie, for their part, probably laughed at allegations that *they* controlled the Nazis. The I. G. Farben plant at Auschwitz had to settle for 75% efficiency from its workers because the SS refused to feed them adequately, since they were to be gassed anyway. And after four years, worker resistance, combined with conflicts with the extermination goals of the SS, yielded this result:

Despite the investment of almost 900 million Reichsmarks and thousands of lives, only a modest stream of fuel and not a single pound of Buna rubber was ever produced. (J. Borkin, *The Crime and Punishment of I. G. Farben*, Free Press, page 127)

partiality of the Nazis to the northern European nations (which Noel mentions), e.g., the formation of French, Dutch, etc. Waffen SS divisions, but not Italian, Spanish, or Greek SS; and the antagonism between Hitler, Franco and Mussolini. (Italy and Germany almost went to war over the Austrian Anschluss in 1938.) On the other hand, their notion of Aryan certainly excluded the descendents of Aryan-speakers in Iran. In fact, they didn't include any non-northern-Europeans in their master race — not even their allies, the Japanese military elite.

Second, the Nazis did carry out a process which admitted most Germans to the privileges of Aryanism: the process of making Germany "Judenrein," or Jew-pure:

... the Nazis gave their members at least the psychological equivalent for the initiation ritual of secret societies when, instead of simply excluding Jews from membership, they demanded proof of non-Jewish descent from their members and set up a complicated machine to shed light on the dark ancestry of some 80 million Germans. It was of course a comedy, and even an expensive one, when 80 million Germans set out to look for Jewish grandfathers; yet everybody came out of the examination with the feeling that he belonged to a group of included which stood against an imaginary multitude of ineligible. (H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Meridian edition, page 377)

Hitler said, "World Empires spring from a national basis, but they expand soon far beyond it." (Quoted in *ibid.*, page 359) The world empire springing from the German nation was to be based on the "Germanic race." That is why Hitler also said, "Incidentally, I am not the head of a state in the sense of a dictator or monarch, but I am a leader of the German people." (Quoted in *ibid.*, page 357) This is a notion so rooted and soaked in the swamp of "extreme nationalism of an oppressor country" as easily to rate the name of national chau-

vinism.

What is the significance of all this for us as we confront the right-wing offensive? First, the atomization of the white workers in the U.S. — i.e., a loss of any sense of an identity within society that is the basis for a Nazi-like movement — is decisively held back by the system of white supremacy. As long as white skin privilege persists, the white workers will continue to feel at home in the white oppressor nation, located in their minds in a definite social location: on top of Third World peoples. No such alternative to both atomization and class consciousness existed in Weimar Germany. From a different angle, Don Hamerquist once wrote:

... So long as the bulk of the white working class sees its interests mainly in terms of skin color, not class position, the likelihood of fascist rule being extended to the society as a whole is minimal. The dominance of the white supremacy within the white sections of the working class works effectively against the development of a mass revolutionary movement on that terrain. However, at least some elements of such a movement are needed to mount a serious challenge to U.S. capitalism. Since this serious revolutionary threat is a necessary factor to convince the ruling class of the necessity of fascism, it follows that, contrary to Litt's assertions, there is little likelihood that the ruling class will resort to fascism to "maintain social control" over the working class as a whole while white supremacy is doing such an admirable job. To a large degree bourgeois democracy in this country is a white privilege. (*Fascism in the U.S.?*, STO, page 6)

Second, I believe that the model for U.S. fascism we must look at is Nationalist South Africa, rather than Nazi Germany. Both the U.S. and South Africa are white settler colonies with large populations of white workers. Both have a history of opposition to British imperialism, and a tradition of frontier democracy based on the internal

oppression of Third World peoples. In contrast to the U.S., though, South Africa is ruled by a popularly-based white party, the Nationalist Party, which has put the country on a permanent war footing; brought the government into the economy in a big way; and which has responded even to white dissent with a range of repression from house arrest to hanging. (Of course, this still, with a few exceptions, doesn't touch the magnitude or severity of the response to Black dissent.) It is controlled by a semi-secret society with a stable structure, the Afrikaner Broederbond, which bears a striking resemblance to the Ku Klux Klan — right down to the pose of anti-imperialism (either against British or Northern imperialism, as in "Free the land — join the Klan"). These differences between the current situations in the U.S. and South Africa are why the latter can be described as fascist, while the former cannot.

Although most elements of the Comintern definition of fascism should be discarded, we must not neglect the importance of white national chauvinism in U.S. fascism. As the present crisis deepens, we must be ever-vigilant to the growth of a U.S. fascist movement.

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*Reply:* I concentrated my attention on Germany because I believe it represented most fully the *type* I was studying. This is the Marxist theoretical method, to identify a social phenomenon and seek to discover how it would look when fully developed. Thus Marx based *Capital* on a study of England, although at the time he was writing, English society was no more representative of the average form of capitalism than Nazi Germany represented the "average" fascism. Robie's citing Spain, Hungary, Romania, Lithuania, etc. (which were not universally regarded as fascist even in their own day) or Italy can refute me only if he is using these cases to

make one of two points: (1) that Germany was an individual deviation from the fascist type, or (2) that there is no fascist type.

There is some truth in Dan's criticism that I "define out of existence" examples which defy my analysis, but that is my right. Definitions are not right or wrong; they are useful or not useful. I think it is useful to differentiate fascism from other forms of right-wing dictatorship; the key element in my definition that serves this purpose is the important role of the autonomous mass movement.

On Robie's second point: the racialism of the Nazis was not an outgrowth of nationalism but the negation of it. Hitler's myth of the "Germanic race" had no more relation to the realities of nationhood in Europe than would a similar myth of a "Celtic race" including the Irish, Welsh, Scottish, Cornish and Breton peoples of today. Imagine a "Celtic Hitler" who set out to "Celticize" Spain, France and southern Europe all the way to Turkey — all areas where Celtic languages were once spoken and where Celtic peoples have mingled their blood with others to give rise to modern nations!

Finally, I urge Dan Robie to elaborate the point (which he drops in passing) that the U.S. is a white settler colony. I and other readers of *Urgent Tasks* would, I'm sure, love to debate that one.

Noel Ignatin

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