

Author's Introduction

The interview before the reader was prompted by political developments in the Middle East and the direct impact those developments have had in both Europe and the United States. "Jihadism," the armed expression of extremist Islamism, has precipitated a displacement of populations unparalleled since the end of the Second World War. The flood of migrants and refugees has taxed the resources and the response capabilities of all the nations of Europe. Part of the reaction has been a measureable shift to the political right in a variety of places. In some cases there has been significant resistance to the admission of migrants attended by real or potential violence. The media has been quick to identify these occurrences as "a rise of fascism."

In the United States, both the violence of jihadist extremists as well as the reaction by anti-jihadist elements have similarly been characterized as "fascist." Together with those marginal persons who bomb government buildings, set fire to abortion facilities, vandalize gravestones in Jewish cemeteries, and use politically offensive speech, they are all deemed "fascist."

One of the results has been that several European journalists have requested an interview with me in order to discuss the putative return of a political ideology presumably destroyed by force of arms in the Second World War. As a political scientist I have spent the bulk of my academic career in the study of Fascism – that revolutionary system identified with Benito Mussolini that dominated Italian and influenced European politics for the first half of the twentieth century. It was a movement and an ideology presumably destroyed in the most devastating war in human history.

And yet, for years after its purported demise, evidences of fascism have continued to surface virtually everywhere. The term “fascism” has become one of generic abuse, invoked to elicit repugnance. As a term employed in ordinary speech, it has become all but entirely emotive in content, offering little, if any, cognitive substance. Very few among us would venture on an effort to define “fascism” – as it was in its time, or as it is understood in our own.

When Mr. Antonio Messina approached me with the suggestion that an interview on the subject of “Italian Fascism” might help to resolve some of the confusions that have collected around the subject and that currently seemed to occupy more and more of our attention, I agreed. Historic Fascism was one of the major political forces of the twentieth century – and it has continued to influence our world in a variety of ways. Not only has it become an inextricable part of our political vocabulary, but traces of its doctrine can, in fact, be found in a variety of places. To follow its influence over more than half a century – and to identify its real presence – requires retracing its sometimes obscure passage from one time to another. I have tried to accomplish this with a minimum of academic jargon. The text before the reader was intended for an intelligent lay audience. For my colleagues who would like more academic references for my opinions I have provided a list of my publications dealing with each and every aspect of the political phenomena dealt with in the interview.

The interview is intended to deliver a coherent account of Fascism – its rise on the Italian peninsula, its military defeat in the Second World War, and its survival in the political behaviors of those revolutionaries responding to economic,

political, and psychological stimuli reminiscent of those that gave rise to the paradigmatic form. The interview is offered as a summary recounting of sixty years of academic research. It is hoped that it will help to clarify a considerable portion of the radical politics of the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries.

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Preface by Anthony J. Joes

A. James Gregor is an internationally acknowledged authority on the subject of totalitarian political systems – with emphasis on Fascism and “fascisms.” In the interview below, Professor Gregor demonstrates his familiarity with every aspect of Fascism – its history, philosophy, applications, as well as those national forms that, at times, are classified as variants. He traces linkages between ideas and phenomena that previously might have seemed unrelated. He makes a case, for example, that some East European, and East Asian, states are, or have been, “fascist” in all but name.

His fundamental ideas on Italian Fascism are so clear, so persuasive, and so well documented in his earlier works, that they can be convincingly summarized with brevity in the interview herewith provided. First, and perhaps foremost, he rejects conflating Italian Fascism with Hitler’s National Socialism. Mussolini’s association with Hitler in the closing years of the 1930s, can be traced to the clear possibility that Germany appeared to be poised to dominate Europe for years, if not decades. Mussolini feared that if Italy did not become Hitler’s ally, it would become his vassal. The case is made that Italian Fascism was a revolutionary movement independent of Hitler’s National Socialism, and their association in the Second World War was the result of contingent circumstances.

Gregor argues that Fascism was a form of reactive nationalism, responding to felt humiliation at the hands of nations more economically advanced. If it were to seek political equality and prosper in the competitive environment of the twentieth century, Italy would be compelled to rapidly develop its industrial economy. Nationalism and rapid eco-

conomic development became the dominant political “myths” of the system. In committing itself to the program entailed in such commitments, Fascist Italy became the paradigm of revolution for nations that found themselves in similar circumstances throughout the century. For Gregor, that helps to explain why “fascist” features are to be found in the revolutionary movements of economically less developed communities that insist on their “Marxism” or “socialism.” In some instances, their “fascist” features are pronounced: the state dominates the political system, the unitary party controls both it and the economy, and the charismatic leadership infuses it all with an ideology conceived impeccable.

The interview is filled with illuminating suggestions. The reading would profit both the political science professional as well as the intelligent lay reader. It is recommended to those who study politics as well as those who are interested in our potential future.

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