

Hitler and Mussolini: History's Dirty Little Secret

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There is a dirty little secret that has received little attention. It is the untold narrative about the historical and socioeconomic context behind Italian Fascism and the German National Socialism. It is not what most people have heard before. It is not what many want to hear. But it is not something that can be ignored.

As it turns out, the horrendous ideologies of fascism and national socialist are not merely pejorative terms to dish out in flippant responses. They have historical significance. They have consequences. And their ideological underpinnings are still widely accepted in today's world. In fact, many government administrations and agencies take the attitude that "It's not fascism when WE do it!"

To understand those underpinnings, it is vital to comprehend what these collective ideologies represent from a historical perspective. History does repeat itself, and usually to the detriment of the ignorant.

Near the end of World War II, George Orwell, author of *1984* and *Animal Farm*, attempted to define fascism. He found it difficult. He wrote that the word "Fascism" is almost entirely meaningless, arguing that it is recklessly flung around in every direction.¹ Orwell had been disappointed that nobody seriously wanted to come up with a clear and generally accepted definition of fascism. He knew why most were reluctant. If they did examine the core of fascism, they would have to gaze into a mirror and see an unsavory reflection.

Italian-style Fascism

So what is Italian-style fascism? One of the best descriptions came from author Lew Rockwell, who wrote: "Fascism is the system of government that cartelizes the private sector, centrally plans the economy to subsidize producers, exalts the police state as the source of order, denies fundamental rights and liberties to individuals, and makes the executive state the unlimited master of society."²

This seems cut and dried, and not an uncommon type of government today or in the past. So, why did fascism become a universal swearword, especially since so many governments actively pursue its policies? Many blame fascism's low status on Soviet Union propaganda. After Nazi Germany terminated the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact by invading its Soviet Union partner, the two military titans engaged in bitter war of epic proportions. Like a jilted lover, communists not only went after Nazi Germany with vengeance on the battlefield, but cranked up their propaganda machine to identify anyone opposed to communism as "fascist." This is a curious anomaly given that the

German National Socialists had masterminded the initial military strikes against the Soviet Union, not Mussolini's Fascist Italy.

This is an historical oddity, because Benito Mussolini had warm relations with the Soviet Union and Lenin. Mussolini wasn't a monarchist, capitalist or a rightwing churchgoer. He was fervently anticlerical, an avowed atheist and a well-known Marxist during the early years of his life. Where's the proof? In 1924 Fascist Italy became the first western country to recognize the Soviet Union. That should not be surprising. Calling himself the "Lenin of Italy," Mussolini had earlier launched a theoretical Marxist journal, *Utopia*. Two of his collaborators on *Utopia* went on to found the Italian Communist Party. Another helped found the German Communist Party.³ As socialist and labor agitator, he led strikes and riots against Italy's invasion of Ottoman Libya in the 1911–1912. He supported the violent labor strikes during "Red Week, until it failed to topple the government. During the 1920s and 1930s, he often boasted that fascism was the same as communism.

Mussolini rose quickly as an influential leader in the Italian Socialist Party. Author David Ramsey Steele painted Mussolini as "the Che Guevara of his day, a living saint of leftism. Handsome, courageous, charismatic, an erudite Marxist, a riveting speaker and writer, a dedicated class warrior to the core, he was the peerless *duce* of the Italian Left. He looked like the head of any future Italian socialist government, elected or revolutionary."⁴

Mussolini's friendship with the Russian Bolsheviks was substantial. Fascist Italy's official recognition of the Soviet Union opened the flood gates to tremendous trade, making Italy a major supplier of arms to the Soviet Union, especially after the signing of the 1933 Russo-Italian "Treaty of Friendship, Nonaggression, and Neutrality." Fascist Italy had forged an alliance with the Soviet Union, a commercial accord that provided technical help to Moscow in the aviation, automobile and naval industries.⁵ A number of scholars contend that Italy's industry and banks were responsible for the military industrialization of the Soviet Union, greatly contributing to Russia's development of its oil and armament industries. The bustling trade between Fascist Italy and Soviet Russia lasted until 1941.

But how did fascism become anchored to Marxism? Historically, fascism arose in the 1890s out of a crisis in Marxist theory which was making Marxism archaic, obsolete and irrelevant. One of its major crises dealt with class conflict. The problem was, few workers were interested in class struggle. Instead, the populace was drawn to the flags of nationalism, especially with the unification of Italy in 1861 and of Germany in 1871. In an attempt to save Marxism, a number of notable Marxist intellectuals attempted to replace class struggle with revolutionary nationalism. In a well-documented article, "The Mysteries of Fascism," David Ramsay Steele explained: "Fascism began as a revision of Marxism by Marxists..."⁶

That changed slightly in 1914, when Mussolini joined a splinter group of revolutionary syndicalists who supported Italy's entrance into World War I. This labor-union movement metamorphosed in 1914 into the Marxist-inspired *Fasci d'Azione Rivoluzionaria Internazionale*—known as the Fascists—causing the infamous split between pro-war socialists and anti-war socialists.⁷ Similar breaks occurred within communist and socialist communities across Europe.

In his book, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, Vladislav Pleshakov wrote "The Socialists of France and Germany and even of Russia supported World War I as a war between nation-states."⁸ Four days after Germany declared war on France, Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO) which eventually morphed into the French Communist Party, dropped its antimilitary, internationalist stand and replaced it with French patriotism, fully supporting the war. Established as a Marxist party in 1875, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) also came out in support of World War I.⁹

As for the political spectrum, Italian Fascists did not generally think of themselves as a movement of the right; that label was already reserved for the reactionary forces of the monarchy and the clergy. In his 1927 "The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism," Mussolini clearly states "this will be a century of authority, a century of the Left, a century of Fascism," which came from Jane Soames' 1933 authorized English translation.^{10 11} In the next sentence, Mussolini continued and wrote: "For if the 19th century was the century of individualism (Liberalism always signifying individualism) it may be expected that this will be the century of collectivism, and hence the century of the State." As most political scientists would acknowledge, "collectivism" is clearly an ideology pegged to the Left. President Herbert Hoover, in his 1934 book *Challenge to Liberty*, used the same phrase "century of the Left" when he quoted from Mussolini's "Doctrine of Fascism."^{12 13}

Mussolini saw himself as anti-bourgeois, anti-liberal, anti-individualist, anti-laissez-faire capitalism, and anti-religious. He fancied himself as a leader of a great pro-worker state, saying: "If the 19th century has been the century of the individual (for liberalism means individualism), it may be conjectured that this is the century of the State." What hardcore left-wing ideologue could disagree with Mussolini's visions?

To collectivists, fascists, communists, national socialists and a slew of dime-a-dozen rigid ideologies, the state is the highest embodiment of god-like power and therefore nothing must overshadow its awe-inspiring divinity. As Mussolini stated in 1925, "Everything in the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State" In actuality, the only thing that can be worshiped at the altar of an autocratic regime is the almighty State.

As can be readily seen, the incorrect alignment of political spectrums cloaks one of history's dirtiest secret. A little before World War II, the National Socialist German Workers Party, Mussolini's Fascism and the Soviet Union's Bolsheviks were considered to be ardent socialists pegged on the political left. During the 1920s, the progressive left embraced fascists as one of their own, lionizing both Hitler and Mussolini for championing a progressive social movement, especially Hitler's generous welfare programs, socialized healthcare and old age programs (social security).¹⁴ Even W.E.B. Du Bois, the American sociologist, historian, civil rights activist, socialist and Pan-Africanist who eventually joined the Communist Party, spoke highly of Nazi Germany's march towards collective empowerment, viewing Hitler as a man of the Left.¹⁵

Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw, a leading member of the socialist Fabian Society, heaped praise on Mussolini in 1927. He said that fellow "socialists should be delighted to find at last a socialist who speaks and thinks as responsible rulers do."¹⁶ Shaw further noted that he found Mussolini appealing because he was "farther to the Left in his political opinions than any' of his socialist rivals."¹⁷

In fact, the Italian fascists boasted to voters that they were a political party squarely on the Left. Prof. Pamela D. Toler in *The Everything Guide to Understanding Socialism*, writes: “In the 1919 parliamentary elections, fascist candidates presented themselves as part of the Left not only in their beliefs, but also in their willingness to ally with other leftist parties.”¹⁸ Unfortunately for Mussolini, their mishmash of left-wing issues and nationalism fared poorly among voters.

Like many collectivist-leaning politicians, Mussolini had a turbulent relationship with the Church, with industrialists and with other socialists. During his early years, he threatened to shut down the Catholic Church and seize all its Italian property. But such vitriolic anti-church sentiment was highly unpopular in a deeply traditional and religious nation, and Mussolini had to back off. Still, he spent considerable time rebuking the Church, proclaiming that the “papacy was a malignant tumor in the body of Italy and must ‘be rooted out once and for all,’ because there was no room in Rome for both the Pope and himself.”¹⁹ On other occasions he would announce his hope that death would soon come to the Pope. Mussolini had almost as much disregard for monarchies, especially the Hapsburgs.

Mussolini also had to both condemn and placate industrialists and business leaders, the same ones he had rioted against during his organized labor strikes. As for socialism, he criticized other socialists and Marxists while telling his friends and foreign visitors that Fascism and Bolshevism were dear brethren. Many books of the era show the extent of this love affair and the overlapping of the two.

For instance, Francesco Nitti, a former Prime Minister of Italy and a leading leftist, remarked in his 1927 book *Bolshevism, Fascism and Democracy*, “There is little difference between the two, and in certain respects, Fascism and Bolshevism are the same.”²⁰ In a chapter entitled “Bolshevism and Fascism are Identical,” Nitti wrote: “In Italy today one finds that greater tolerance is shown toward Communists affiliated with Moscow than to Liberals, democrats, and Socialists.”²¹ In 1931, when Alfred Bingham, the son of a U.S. Republican Senator, visited Mussolini, he was told that “Fascism is the same thing as Communism.”²²

Edmondo Rossoni, the first leader of the Italian Fascist labor confederation and professor at the University of Florence, described Benito Mussolini in Gaetano Salvemini’s 1936 book, *Under the Axe of Fascism*, as a “revolutionary Socialist of the extreme left.”²³

Besides being an admirer of Lenin, Mussolini looked kindly towards Stalin as a “fellow Fascist.” Many Italian fascist leaders believed that Stalin’s bolshevism was evolving into fascism. Poet and journalist Gabriele D’Annunzio, considered as a folk hero to fascists, characterized fascism as a form of Latinized National Bolshevism.

In another book published in 1930 *Il Duce: The Life and Work of Benito Mussolini*, by pro-fascist L. Kemechey, the author fervently argued that Mussolini was a Socialist and a Leninist and a revolutionary.²⁴

Mussolini’s fame came about from his days as a labor organizer. In fact, he got the nickname “Il Duce” after he was released from jail for organizing violent workers to oppose Italy’s imperialism and the capitalist system. During a celebratory banquet, a Marxist veteran congratulated Mussolini and said: “From today you, Benito, are not

only the representative of Romagna Socialists, but the Il Duce of all revolutionary Socialists in Italy.”²⁵

In England, Sir Oswald Mosley, a minister in the left-wing Labor Party until 1931, founded the “British Union of Fascists.” Mosley was a big admirer of economist John Keynes, Mussolini, state corporatism and protectionist trade policies. Many other well-known Europeans in the forefront of the progressive social movement were attracted to Mussolini’s fascism and Hitler’s National Socialism. One such luminary included science fiction author H.G. Wells, who coined the phrase “liberal fascism” in 1932 during a speech at Oxford University for the Young Liberals. One of the most influential progressive and socialist intellectuals of his day, Wells talked about having “foresight for enlightened Nazis.” Actually, in that speech, Wells praised both Stalin's Russia and Hitler in Germany.²⁶ He believed that Fabian socialism and parliamentary democracy had failed and that liberal *Fascisti* would be a better replacement.

But H.G. Wells was not talking about the classical liberalism of John Locke and Thomas Jefferson. He was referring to the non-individualist modern liberalism that was careening towards collectivism and socialism. Mussolini understood this difference, writing: “If classical liberalism spells individualism, fascism spells government.”

Interestingly, the socio-economic policies of Mussolini and Hitler are almost indistinguishable from the modern liberalism currently found in England, Canada and the United States, which have little relationship to the original liberalism of the American Founders. Basically, much of modern leftism has slowly morphed into an old, recycled version of Italian fascism. Some scholars have quipped that the modern liberal has become a quasi-authoritarian plagued by an identity crisis.

Socialist versus Socialist

But what about the violent conflicts between various socialist and fascist factions? There is nothing odd about collectivists with similar ideological messages fighting bitterly over turf and strategy. Shades of socialist doctrine are as numerous as recipes for chili. Since collectivism is based on group-conformity, any group unwilling to conform must be opposed, no matter how similar in ideology. The herd mentality can lead to conflict when individual identity is suppressed.

The armed conflict between the National Socialists of Germany and the Communists of Russia can be likened to two street gangs, first cooperating, and then slugging it out in a contest to dominate more territory. Both ideologies promoted state intervention in economic and personal affairs, but the policies they administered were of divergent structures and tactics. The Nazis and Communists were not opposites, as some historians have attempted to argue, but two sides of the same coin. They were unscrupulous competitors, not polar opposites.

For instance, Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany were not always on the best of terms. In fact, before his first meeting with *der Führer*, Mussolini referred to Hitler as that “silly little monkey.” Their rivalry was in accordance with the collectivistic nature of strict group conformity. In 1934 Engelbert Dollfuss, the “Austro-fascist” chancellor of Austria and strong admirer of Mussolini, feared Hitler’s rise to power in Germany. He established a one-party dictatorship, banning both the Austrian National

Socialist Party and the Communist Party. His concentration camps were packed with Nazis, Communists and Social-Democrats. He allied with Mussolini in order to protect Austria from Nazi Germany and to remain independent. He saw little difference between the ideologies of Hitler and Stalin, convinced that Austrofascism and Italofascism could keep other socialist rivals at bay. Nazi agents assassinated him.

After Dollfus' assassination, Mussolini mobilized Italian troops on the Italian-Austrian border, and threatened war with Germany if Hitler invaded Austria. A large northern unit of German Nazis did invade Austria's southernmost state of Carinthia, but was apparently routed by Italian military units.

This type of conflict demonstrates the danger of collective ideologies, and their strict allegiance to group conformity. All collective ideologues seek to impose one particular value system upon society. This means everyone must toe the same dogmatic, moralistic line. Seeing the world in stark black and white, collectivism takes an approach where either you are part of the tribe, or you are against the tribe. There is no middle ground. Individuality has no merit within a Borg-like universe, since individual thoughts are considered subservient to group thoughts. Uniqueness of self is seen as a weakness; individual choice condemned as a sort of bourgeois plague that will plunge the nation into chaos. To the collectivist, the individual becomes expendable in service to the state.

Of course, this groupthink of collective identity—race, nation, class, gender—can harm diversity and toleration, especially when enforced conformity leads to outright racism. But when collective group goals conflict ever so slightly with other collectivist groups holding similar fundamental beliefs, violent and vindictive feuds are not far behind. Such political rivalry can burst into epic battles of eye-gouging, blood-letting, and all-out street rumbles that can run roughshod over the innocent.

For instance, after the October 25, 1917 Russian Red Revolution, a host of other communist-leaning groups, mainly the Socialist Revolutionaries, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, and Mensheviks, eventually opposed the Bolsheviks' power grab. The Bolsheviks were determined to install a one-party government. But they ran into a problem. The November 12, 1917, nation-wide elections to fill seats in the Russian Constituent Assembly did not go their way. The Socialist Revolutionaries proved to be far more popular with voters, receiving 57 percent of ballots cast. The Bolsheviks, who had limited support, mostly in a few large cities, had garnished only 25 percent of the vote. Fearing the loss of power, the Bolsheviks under Lenin's leadership quickly disbanded the Assembly. The unpopular Bolsheviks had stolen the election.

After seizing control of the Russia government without an electoral plurality, the Bolsheviks refused to let rival socialist-revolutionary parties participate in the new communist government. The situation became ugly. Unhappy with the Bolsheviks' refusal to share power, the leftwing of the Socialist Revolutionaries instigated what some refer to as the Third Russian Revolution of 1918. With 1,800 armed revolutionaries, the socialist insurgents attacked the Kremlin and bombarded the Bolsheviks' capitol with artillery fire. Socialists were fighting other socialists over power. Many other Russian cities saw anti-Bolshevik uprisings. After a few days, the *coup d'etat* in Moscow failed. Many Left Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks were arrested, imprisoned or shot.²⁷

During this conflict two assassination attempts were made on Vladimir Lenin's life in 1918. The first one failed. The second one was carried out by a Socialist-Revolutionary party member, Fanya Kaplan. Accusing Lenin of being a "traitor to the Revolution," she approached him and fired three shots at the Soviet Head of State. Kaplan's first bullet struck Lenin's shoulder, the second one slammed into his jaw and neck. Immediately, the Bolsheviks issued a "Red Terror" decree. Within the month, the secret police (Cheka) rounded up some 800 Socialist Revolutionary Party members and other opponents of the Bolsheviks. Most were executed without trial.

After the failed revolution, many Socialist Revolutionaries and Menshevik members allied with the White Russians to fight the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War. Further, many Black Army detachments of anarchists also fought the Bolsheviks, bombing the headquarters of the Moscow Committee of the Communist Party in 1919. In the countryside, Green Armies of armed Russian peasants fought both the White Army and the Red Army.

Corporatism, Fascism and Modern Statism

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2009, informally known as Obamacare, included a controversial provision that forces the public to buy a product from a corporation —health insurance. This individual mandate, which regulates inactivity and forces Americans into commerce, is the type of "third way" that both the National Socialists in Germany and the Fascists in Italy referred to in an effort to explain their socio-economic policies. Many have argued that Obamacare smacks of a "corporatocracy," where the government sector forcibly merges with the private sector. Most nations have variations of this mixed economy of fascist corporatism, drowned in economic dirigisme that establishes an atmosphere of centralized planning and control. In this realm, the state becomes the driver, while stockholders sit in the passenger seat. So, in many ways, almost every nation's economy could be likened to Mussolini's description of the third way.

But the history shows that the concept of the third way first emerged in the Soviet Union. After Lenin imposed socialism on Russia, producing massive famine and economic collapse, Marxists looked for an alternative "Third Way" between socialism and capitalism. In response, Lenin rolled out his New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921, introducing a form of "market socialism" or what he called, "state capitalism." Under the NEP, markets gained a greater degree of free trade and private ownership, while sanctioning the co-existence of private and public sectors. Lenin began to privatize parts of the economy. He encouraged a number of market principles and the profit motive, which allowed the people to trade, buy and sell for private profit. In fact, state-owned enterprises had to be self-reliant and operate on profit/loss principles. Lenin's NEP was turning Russia into a state-oriented "mixed economy."²⁸

Mussolini took Lenin's lead and soon established market socialism in Italy. In essence, Mussolini's fascism was simply an imitation of Lenin's market-based approaches, similar to what is found in today's Red China. In short, Lenin's revised Marxism gave birth to Mussolini's fascism. It could be argued that Lenin was the first "red fascist" and state corporatist.

However, Mussolini's corporatism was not similar to America's corporations. He had fashioned twenty-two state-run holding corporations in 1932, headed by a top official of the government or by members of the National Fascist Party. They were completely controlled and operated by the Italian state in Mussolini's effort to move beyond capitalism and socialism. According to Pamela D. Toler, Mussolini's "corporatism borrowed heavily from Georges Sorel's theories of revolutionary syndicalism."²⁹ This meant that the Italian government was attempting to create worker-state corporations. Although the corporations were put under government-controlled trade unions and employer associations, strikes were illegal. Both Lenin and Stalin had done the same in the Soviet Union, taking over all independent labor unions and worker cooperatives and merging them within the apparatus of the worker-state. Both Marxist and fascist leaders banned labor strikes because the workers were now supposedly in charge of the government, making labor strikes unnecessary. The worker state had been accomplished, but managed by the bureaucracy and party leadership.

Mussolini had merged state and corporate power, but what he got was a vertical syndicalist-type corporatocracy that harkened back to medieval guilds. Speaking about what he had done, Mussolini explained in 1932 "When brought within the orbit of the State, Fascism recognizes the real needs which gave rise to socialism and trade unionism, giving them due weight in the guild or corporative system in which divergent interests are coordinated and harmonized in the unity of the State."³⁰

Mussolini also made it clear that his ideal corporatist nationalism was a top-down model of state control, writing: "The Fascist conception of the State is all-embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value. Thus understood, Fascism is totalitarian, and the Fascist State—a synthesis and a unit inclusive of all values—interprets, develops, and potentiates the whole life of a people."³¹ By 1935, Mussolini boasted that fully three-fourths of Italian businesses were in the state's hands.³² By 1939 Italy had the highest percentage of state-owned enterprises outside the Soviet Union.³³

German-Style National Socialism

German National Socialism is a political creed that absorbs systems rather than abolishing them. A hodgepodge of socialism and nationalism, this ideology simmers in a collectivist cauldron of military prowess and racial superiority. Nationalizing some sectors of the economy such as the railroads and Jewish businesses, this command-based system permits ownership of property in name only. Legal ownership is considered secondary; what is important is that the state has the final decision over everything. As the press chief of Nazi Germany, Otto Dietrich, wrote: "The individual as such has neither a right nor a duty to exist, as all the rights and duties derive exclusively from the community."³⁴

A form of "state capitalism" or "corporate state socialism," National Socialism is a system that is rigidly enforced through a state-driven and centrally planned economy. The state is set up as the sole manager of all socio-economic programs,

unlike theoretical Marxism, where the people supposedly rise up and self-organize the economy without the benefit of a well-defined structure. It is a theory of collectivism and racism that is directly opposite to the individualism found in classical liberalism.

Nazism's socialist core is too pronounced to ignore. After all, Nazi was an abbreviation for National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP). Most of the Nazi leaders were ardent socialists, many calling their movement a revolutionary socialist crusade. Other Nazis had distinct Marxist backgrounds and tendencies. Even many lower-ranked Nazi comrades could not decide which socialist party to join. During the 1920s and 1930s, German Communists would join the Nazi ranks when the communists were doing poorly on the national scene; when the opposite occurred, Nazis would join the Communist Party. Those watching this phenomenon said that the Nazis were like a beefsteak: brown on the outside and red on the inside.

Hitler himself was crystal-clear about his advocacy of socialism. He boisterously proclaimed in a 1927 May Day speech: "We are socialists, we are enemies of today's capitalistic economic system for the exploitation of the economically weak,..."³⁵ Hitler told the same to Otto Strasser in private that he was a "Socialist" and that "Socialism is nothing more than Marxism."³⁶

A few years later, Hitler did make a statement that he had regretted using the word "socialist" in the party name. He said he preferred the phrase "social revolutionary," which had stronger Marxist overtones.³⁷ In fact, the red background used in the Nazi flag was the same symbolic blood color for communism and socialism. In his book, *Mein Kampf*, Hitler talked about using imagery and symbols to target like-minded Socialists and Communists. And as it turns out, even Hitler's use of the ancient swastika symbol predated his movement. A little after World War I, some Soviet troops wore shoulder patches with the Nazi-like Soviet swastika. For a time, even Lenin considered adopting the swastika icon for the Soviet Union.³⁸ Although the swastika is an Ancient India symbol, it appears that many brands of socialists found its imagery appealing.

Despite his pro-socialist stances, Hitler did not believe that the German state had to nationalize every factory and workshop; that German socialism had more profound roots, stating, "Our Socialism goes far deeper.... Why need we trouble to socialize banks and factories? We socialize human beings."³⁹

Hitler occasionally voiced support for private property, but under his interpretation, owners were to be subservient to the state. Hitler put this in no uncertain terms, proclaiming: "The party is all-embracing. It rules our lives in all their breadth and depth... There will be no license, no free space, in which the individual belongs to himself. This is Socialism... Let them then own land or factories as much as they please. The decisive factor is that the State, through the party, is supreme over them, regardless whether they are owners or workers."⁴⁰

Hitler's Marxist Tendencies

The National Socialists were leery of Bolshevism. After all, the Nazis were in direct competition with the Communists for Weimar Germany, which pitted International Socialism against National Socialism. But Adolf Hitler did not play

favorites; he discredited all other political parties, even those with similar nationalist and racist platforms. For instance, the far-right conservative nationalist German National People's Party (DNVP) condemned the Nazis for being socialist. In return, the Nazis denounced the DNVP for being reactionary and bourgeois.⁴¹ For Hitler, only his was the one true party.

The differences between National Socialism and Bolshevism are superficial; they were not opposites, they were competitors. But the Nazis did fear a communist worker-controlled state. Such a political system was viewed as chaotic since the final stage of Marxism led to the withering away of the state. This idea horrified national socialists. To them, state-directed socialism was to be molded to precise specifications and administered through a highly organized hierarchy, not by some illusive people's community that appeared to have little structure or future.

Still, Hitler and his inner circle flirted with Marxism. Along with Mussolini, Hitler held the view that Bolshevism was moving towards National Socialism, declaring in 1934:

“It is not Germany that will turn Bolshevik but Bolshevism that will become a sort of National Socialism. Besides, there is more that binds us to Bolshevism than separates us from it.... I have always made allowance for this circumstance, and given orders that former Communists are to be admitted to the party at once. The *petit bourgeois* Social-Democrat and the trade union boss will never make a National Socialist, but the Communist always will.”⁴²

Obviously, Hitler sympathized with Marxism, although in a love-hate type of relationship. For instance, after serving in World War I, Hitler's battalion was absorbed by the Bavarian Soviet Republic from 1918 to 1919, where he was elected to the position of Deputy Battalion Representative. During this time, he was outspoken in his anti-monarchist and pro-classless society positions. He even attended the funeral of communist Kurt Eisner and was seen wearing a black mourning armband on one arm and a red communist armband on the other.⁴³ In 1931 he said: “[W]hen I was a worker I busied myself with socialist or, if you like, marxist [sic] literature.”⁴⁴

Hitler admitted that differences with the communists were less ideological than tactical. He once told Rauschning that the German Communists were ineffective, and that he would “put into practice what these peddlers and pen pushers have timidly begun.” And then he conceded that the whole of “National Socialism was based on Marx.”⁴⁵

Hitler had uttered similar sentiments to Nazi major general and confidant, Otto Wagener, which were not published until six years after Wagener's death in 1971.⁴⁶ Composed in a British prisoner-of-war camp after the war, Wagener's memoir revealed that “Hitler was an unorthodox Marxist who knew his sources and knew just how unorthodox the way in which he handled them was. He was a dissident socialist. His programme was at once nostalgic and radical.”⁴⁷ Hitler told Wagener that he was going to act on what the communists had failed to accomplish, saying: “What Marxism, Leninism and Stalinism failed to accomplish, we shall be in a position to achieve.”⁴⁸

Socialism in Germany

But other Nazi leaders were even more radical and revolutionary in promoting hardcore socialism. One who was openly leftist and socialist was Dr. Josef Goebbels. He was one of Hitler's closest associates and the Nazi Minister of Propaganda. Goebbels hated capitalism and pushed for a working-class, proletariat socialism. In 1932, Joseph Goebbels proclaimed the Nazi Party as a "workers' party", "on the side of labour, and against finance."⁴⁹ During his student years, he briefly described himself as a German Communist, who agreed with the writings of Karl Marx before joining the National Socialist party.⁵⁰

Goebbels made no bones about what socialism meant. "To be a socialist," Goebbels wrote, "is to submit the I to the thou; socialism is sacrificing the individual to the whole." When he was once asked about the position of National Socialism, Goebbels responded, "the NSDAP is the German Left. We despise bourgeois nationalism."⁵¹

According to Goebbels, National Socialists opposed Jews because they are considered exploiters and capitalists. In 1932 Goebbels wrote: "As socialists, we are opponents of the Jews, because we see, in the Hebrews, the incarnation of capitalism, of the misuse of the nation's goods."⁵² Perhaps this is one reason why Hitler commended Stalin for purifying the Communist Party of its Jewish leaders.⁵³

A hot debate within the early Nazi leadership centered on which was most important—socialism or nationalism. More conservative elements in the party stressed nationalism. Goebbels defended full-blown socialism and proclaimed his hatred for what he called the "right-wing bourgeoisie" and the "the money pigs of capitalist democracy."⁵⁴ And to make his case he published an open letter in 1925 to "My Friends of the Left," where he urged an alliance between socialists and Nazi leaders against the main enemy—the capitalists. "You and I," he wrote, "we are fighting one another although we are not really enemies."⁵⁵

To show off his anti-capitalist colors, Goebbels claimed in his diary that if his only choices were between Bolshevism and capitalism, "it would be better for us to go down with Bolshevism than live in eternal slavery under capitalism."⁵⁶ Reporting on a riot in Berlin, *The New York Times* quoted Goebbels as saying: "Lenin is the greatest man, second only to Hitler, and that the difference between Communism and the Hitler faith is very slight."⁵⁷

In his memoirs, Adolf Eichmann, one of the major organizers of the Holocaust, asserted that "'My political sympathies inclined towards the left and emphasized socialist aspects every bit as much as nationalist ones.'" He added that he saw Nazism and Communism as "quasi-siblings."⁵⁸

The leftist and socialist roots of National Socialism were abundant from the start. One of the main founders of the newly minted Nazi party in 1920, along with Hitler, was Konrad Heiden. He and other early Nazi leaders referred to their organization as a "party of the Left."⁵⁹

Socialism and Racism

Perhaps Hitler's biggest stumbling block with Marxism was over the significance of race – implying that they were otherwise close. Without the issue of race, Hitler said,

National Socialism "would really do nothing more than compete with Marxism on its own ground."⁶⁰ To Hitler, the fatherland and race was everything, the holy grail of his cause. He had no love for soulless internationalism, especially after Lenin said that the proletariat did not require a fatherland.

Putting his faith in socialist-racialism, Hitler declared: "If we are socialists, then we must definitely be anti-Semites," Hitler explained during a party speech in Munich, August 1920, "How, as a socialist, can you not be an anti-Semite?"⁶¹

But ironically, it was Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels who publicly advocated genocide. In 1844, almost a hundred years before the Holocaust, Marx published his anti-Semitic rant—"On the Jewish Question." Despite his Jewish heritage, Marx wrote: "What is the worldly religion of the Jew? Huckstering. What is his worldly God? Money... Money is the jealous god of Israel, in face of which no other god may exist."⁶² Some of Marx's anti-Jewish statements made Hitler's tirades mild by comparison. Near the end of his article, Marx concluded: "The social emancipation of the Jew is the emancipation of society from Jewry."

In the case of Engels, some have claimed that he was the harbinger of fascism, a sort of proto-Nazi. Along with his homophobic discourse and paranoia about the Russian menace, Engels considered "the Polish Jews" to be the "meanest of all races," denoted by "its lust for profit."⁶³ Furthermore, like Hitler, Engels wanted to see Germany's influence spread eastward, overcoming the Slavic people in "an annihilating fight and ruthless terror."⁶⁴ Engels believed that to safeguard the revolution, communists and socialists would have to engage in an ethnic cleansing and genocide against entire reactionary classes, dynasties and peoples, to "wipe out all these petty hidebound nations, down to their very names."⁶⁵ Could Hitler ask for more?

Others in prominent socialist circles also spewed racist slurs. For instance, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, anarchist and leading socialist thinker, wrote: "The Jew is the enemy of the human race. One must send this race back to Asia or exterminate it...By fire or fusion or by expulsion, the Jew must disappear..."⁶⁶

Some historians argue that ethnic cleansing had been orthodox socialism since almost its conception. Even the American philosopher and social-democrat, Sidney Hook, has admitted, "Anti-Semitism was rife in almost all varieties of socialism."⁶⁷ For example, Fabian socialist Bernard Shaw, publicly approved the principles of extermination of certain people that the Soviet Union had already adopted, along with linking eugenics with the virtues of socialism.⁶⁸ An admirer of Stalin, Mussolini and even Hitler, Shaw suggested in 1910 that the state needs to use a "lethal chamber" to solve the problem of those unfit to live.⁶⁹ Shaw explained: "We should find ourselves committed to killing a great many people whom we now leave living..."⁷⁰

Some argue that Marxist theory actually required mass genocide. According to George Watson, a fellow in English at St John's College, Cambridge, "The Marxist theory of history required and demanded genocide for reasons implicit in its claim that feudalism was already giving place to capitalism, which must in its turn be superseded by socialism. Entire races would be left behind after a workers' revolution, feudal remnants in a socialist age; and since they could not advance two steps at a time, they would have to be killed. They were racial trash, as Engels called them, and fit only for the dung-heap of history."⁷¹

The Anti-Capitalism of National Socialism

Whether in public or private, Adolf Hitler held capitalism in contempt, considering capitalists parasitical moneylenders, egotistic in nature and in league with Jewish bankers. He opposed free-market capitalism, preferring a state-managed economy subordinate to the community interests of the *Volk*.⁷² Referring to free-market capitalism, Hitler declared it "is the creation of the Jews."⁷³ He was hostile to the "bourgeois" pariah class of capitalism; he despised individualism, free choice, private property, free trade, limited constitutional government, and classical laissez-faire liberalism. Hitler peppered his discussions with bitter scorn for what he called "degenerate bourgeois politicians." In private conversations, Hitler would offer refer to bourgeois capitalists as "cowardly shits."⁷⁴

Hitler promoted a mixed, mercantilist state-driven economy, but not where everything is necessarily owned by the state. He allowed private ownership through public-private partnership, strictly controlled under a byzantine bureaucracy. During a confidential interview in 1931 to an influential pro-business newspaper editor, Hitler said: "I want everyone to keep what he has earned, subject to the principle that the good of the community takes priority over that of the individual. But the State should retain control; every owner should feel himself to be an agent of the State ... The Third Reich will always retain the right to control property owners."⁷⁵

Some historians argue that the reason for Nazi's Keynesian-like approach to economic control in the first few years was to introduce a stronger version of socialism without causing too much resistance. Adolf Hitler's economic advisor, Otto Wagener, made this case, saying that people would eventually "find and travel the road from individualism to socialism without revolution."⁷⁶

Still, the Nazi economy was highly centralized, socialized and welfarized by even modern standards. Beginning in the late 1890s, Germany was already considered the first modern welfare state, and Hitler, expanded it. For instance, the Nazi regime expanded socialized medicine and state funding for old-age pensions and introduced euthanasia programs. National Socialism called for full employment and good living wages. They used pro-labor rhetoric, demanding limitations on profits and the abolition of rents. They actively limited competition and private ownership, to promote the general welfare. Hitler expanded credit, subsidized farmers, suspended the gold standard, instituted government jobs programs, mandated unemployment insurance, decreed rent control, imposed high tariffs to protect German industry from foreign competition, nationalized education, enacted strict wage and price controls, borrowed heavily and eventually ran huge deficits almost to the point of financial collapse.

This is why Germany had to levy heavy taxes on the wealthy. By 1943 industrialists bitterly complained that the Nazis were siphoning off 80 to 90 percent of business profits.⁷⁷ In fact, the Nazis had sharply increased taxes on capital gains and hiked taxes on corporate revenues to over "1,365 per cent" during a six year period.⁷⁸ Such anti-capitalist policies should be expected from an ideology that proclaimed in its Nazi 25-Point Platform from 1920: "The Common Good Before the Individual Good."

To refinance their massive national debt, the Nazis increasingly had to rely on plunder from conquered nations and the cannibalization of Jewish assets.⁷⁹ In *Hitler's*

Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War and the Nazi Welfare, German historian Gotz Aly describes National Socialism as a form of populist wealth-redistribution welfare-state socialism.⁸⁰ He maintains that Nazi ideology preached equality only among Germans, and no other groups. To maintain their generous welfare state at home, the Nazi regime transferred wealth from non-Germans to Germans.

This point cannot be over-stressed. Nazism was a tribal-egalitarian movement. The Nazis aspired to build what Götz Aly termed “racist-totalitarian welfare state” that soaked the rich and plundered occupied territories in order to bribe the Germans into complacency.⁸¹ Hitler’s socialism was based on nation and race; whereas Stalin’s socialism was based on class. Under National Socialism, the state would plunder and kill other national groups and races to provide Germans with an unsparing welfare/warfare society. Under Marxist international socialism, the state would plunder and kill other classes to provide communists with an unsparing welfare/warfare society. Both systems believed in equality and socialism, but for different collective groups. Although Nazism preached inequality between the races, it placed great significance on equality among only true-blood Germans.

National Socialist had demanded the nationalization of all corporations and industries, but they did sell some state-own businesses, usually to loyal party members in a blatant display of cronyism. Albert Speer, Minister of Armaments and War Production, complained about Nazi cronyism in the armament industry. He found that many of those in charge of war production were Nazi appointees who knew nothing about their industry.

When it comes down to it, Hitler was the quintessential Machiavellian, where the means always justified his ends. He admitted to a number of Nazi confidants that he had no scruples whatsoever. Perhaps this is why he admired unscrupulous strongmen like Napoleon. In a rare moment of honesty, Hitler once confided that he saw Napoleon as his role model for his anti-conservative, anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois attitudes.⁸²

Hitler rose to such worldwide prominence by 1938, that *Time* magazine chose him as their Man of the Year, "for better or worse." The editor’s tone was cautious and critical about the German Chancellor, writing: "Most cruel joke of all, however, has been played by Hitler & Co. on those German capitalists and small businessmen who once backed National Socialism as a means of saving Germany's bourgeois economic structure from radicalism. The Nazi credo that the individual belongs to the state also applies to business. Some businesses have been confiscated outright, on other what amounts to a capital tax has been levied. Profits have been strictly controlled. Some idea of the increasing Governmental control and interference in business could be deduced from the fact that 80% of all building and 50% of all industrial orders in Germany originated last year with the Government. Hard-pressed for food-stuffs as well as funds, the Nazi regime has taken over large estates and in many instances collectivized agriculture, a procedure fundamentally similar to Russian Communism."⁸³

The ultimate point of this narrative is that aggressive behavior will always lead to bad consequences. Whether it is communism, fascism, National Socialism or some other distant relative, they all engage in the same aggressive violence against the

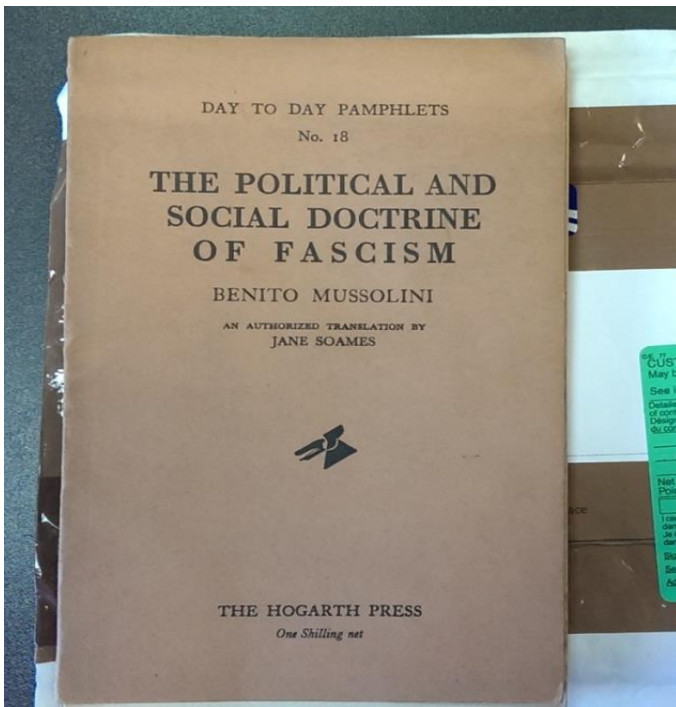
citizenry. This is the legacy of all governments that rely on brute force instead of on voluntary human action.

Understanding the creeds of Italian Fascism and German National Socialism is vital to future generations. People must recognize the underlying doctrines that permeate such evil movements. If they don't, if people become complacent, they will again become vulnerable to the same nightmarish abuses. For, if these collectivistic ideologies come to the forefront again, they will be swathed in deception, peddled under a hidden agenda and touted as the next messiah.

L.K. Samuels is the author of *In Defense of Chaos: The Chaology of Politics, Economics and Human Action*, published by Cobden Press in 2013. Visit his website at www.lksamuels.com. This material was written as content for a script to be used in the production of a possible 60-minute documentary film.

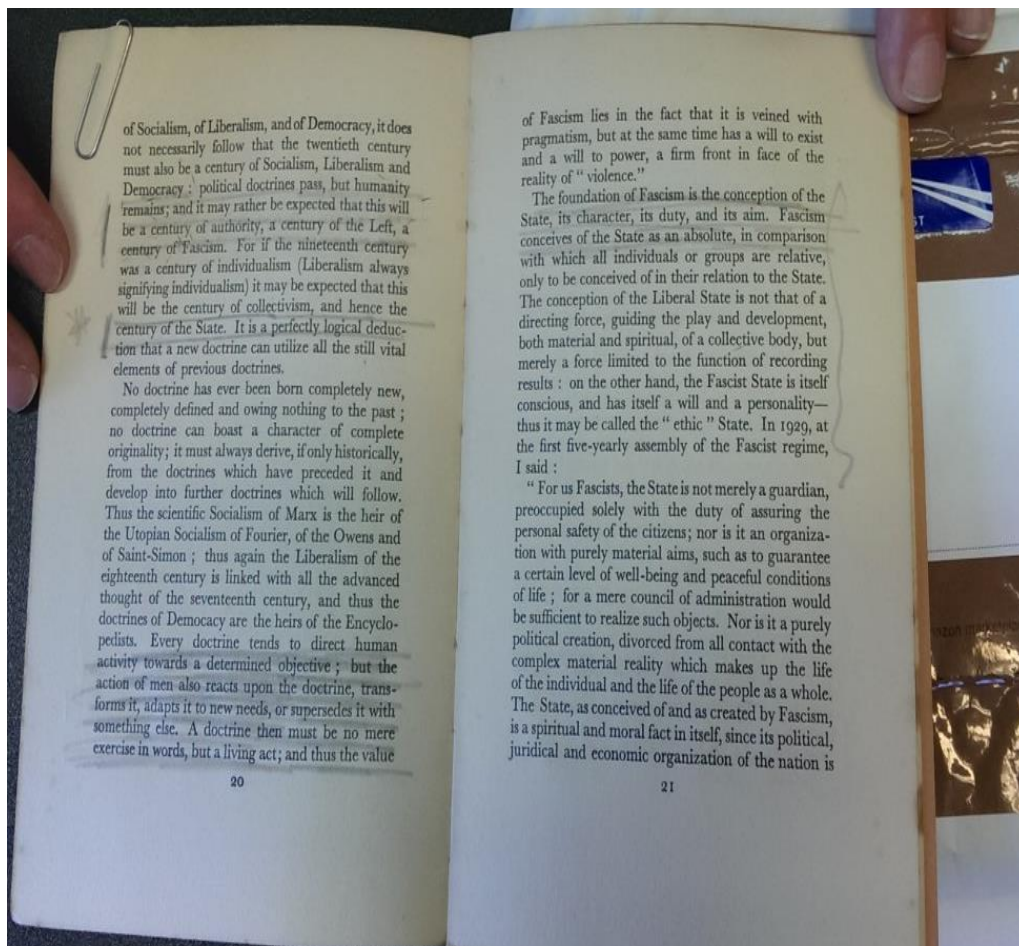
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Caption: The Jane Soames' 1933 translation of Mussolini's "The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism." First English translation authorized by Mussolini's National Fascist Party.

Caption below: In Mussolini's "The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism," he writes on page 20 near the top "...it may rather be expected that this will be a century of authority, a century of the Left, a century of Fascism."



Footnotes

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- 4 David Ramsey Steele, "The Mystery of Fascism," *Liberty*, Vol. 15, no. 11, Nov. 2001.
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- ¹⁵ Thomas Sowell, "Socialist or Fascist?" posted on lewrockwell.com, June 19, 2012.
- ¹⁶ Richard Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany, 1933-39*. London: Trinity Press, 1980, p. 259.
- ¹⁷ Gareth Griffith, *Socialism and Superior Brains*, Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2003, p. 253. Shaw made this statement in the *Manchester Guardian* in 1927.
- ¹⁸ Pamela D. Toler, Phd., *The Everything Guide to Understanding Socialism: The political, social, and economic concepts behind this complex theory*, section: "Mussolini: Socialist 'Heretic,'" Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2011.
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