



A HISTORY OF  
**FASCISM**  
1914–45

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Stanley G. Payne

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Second impression 1997

Published outside North America and Japan by

UCL Press Limited

1 Gunpowder Square

London

EC4A 3DE

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Printed in Great Britain

**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 1-85728-595-6 PB

Illustrations for this book are reproduced courtesy of the following sources:

Editori Laterza, Rome: pp. 97, 236

Editorial Planeta, Barcelona: pp. 109, 159, 166, 177, 193, 219, 283, 301, 304, 307, 359, 366, 374

*Historia 16*, Madrid: pp. 257, 259, 265, 432, 433, 434

Museum of Contemporary History, Budapest: p. 418

Süddeutscher Verlag, Munich: pp. 241, 285, 303, 393, 408, 418

State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison: p. 169, WHi(X3)49792; p. 171, WHi(X3)49796; p. 175, WHi(X3)49794; p. 183, WHi(X3)49795; p. 199, WHi(X3)49793

# Preface

In 1980 I published a brief book, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition*, which sought to establish a working definition and a comparative taxonomy of historic European fascism. The work was well received, and I hope that it added some clarity and precision to the "fascism debate" of the two preceding decades. It remains in print in English and Spanish.

That book, however, did not narrate the history of fascism, and it often proved dense and baffling to undergraduates, unless it was extensively supplemented with basic descriptive literature. The present volume, therefore, does not constitute a revision of the earlier book but is a completely new study designed to provide a narrative of generic European fascism and to extend the framework of analysis and interpretation. The result is a book as long as the first was short, but one that is, I hope, more complete.

Any inquiry into fascism has to grapple with the fundamental problem which George L. Mosse once described as attempting to analyze the irrational through rational study. The goal is not to rationalize the irrational but to elucidate the historical problems and contradictions involved.

The bibliography pertaining to the history of fascism is now enormous. I make no claim to having read everything, for that would require several decades in itself. The citations and bibliography here are not intended to be comprehensive, but only to include those works which I found most useful. For the main body of literature, the reader should consult Philip Rees's *Fascism and Pre-Fascism in Europe, 1890–1945: A Bibliography of the Extreme Right* (1984).

Once more I wish to acknowledge and thank my chief mentors in fascist studies, first of all Juan J. Linz and George L. Mosse (to whom the book is dedicated), and in the key area of Italian fascism, Renzo De Felice, Emilio Gentile, and A. James Gregor. Gregory Kafka shared his own research prior to publication and provided invaluable help with the Japanese case. Special

thanks are also due to Luca De Caprariis for his assistance in obtaining Italian materials, and to Daniel Kowalsky, who prepared the Bibliography. Angela Ray edited the manuscript with unusual care and skill, and Raphael Kadushin and Carol Olsen supervised production of the manuscript at the University of Wisconsin Press. Additional photos were provided by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Editori Laterza, Editorial Planeta, and the Süddeutscher Verlag. To all of them—and very many more unnamed—I offer my thanks and gratitude.



STANLEY G. PAYNE

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# A History of Fascism, 1914–1945



# Introduction

## Fascism: A Working Definition

At the end of the twentieth century *fascism* remains probably the vaguest of the major political terms. This may stem from the fact that the word itself contains no explicit political reference, however abstract, as do *democracy*, *liberalism*, *socialism*, and *communism*. To say that the Italian *fascio* (Latin *fasces*, French *faisceau*, Spanish *haz*) means “bundle” or “union” does not tell us much.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the term has probably been used more by its opponents than by its proponents, the former having been responsible for the generalization of the adjective on an international level, as early as 1923. *Fascist* has been one of the most frequently invoked political pejoratives, normally intended to connote “violent,” “brutal,” “repressive,” or “dictatorial.” Yet if *fascism* means no more than that, then Communist regimes, for example, would probably have to be categorized as among the most fascist, depriving the word of any useful specificity.

Definition in fact bedeviled the original Italian Fascists from the beginning.<sup>2</sup> The problem is compounded by the fact that whereas nearly all Communist parties and regimes have preferred to call themselves Communist, most of the movements in interwar Europe commonly termed fascist did not in fact use

1. One of the first German works on Italian Fascism, by the Social Democrat Fritz Schott-höfer, aptly observed that “Fascism has a name that tells us nothing about the spirit and goals of the movement. A fascio is a union, a league; Fascists are unionists and Fascism a league-type organization [Bündlertum].” Schottthöfer, *Il Fascio. Sinn und Wirklichkeit des italienischen Fascismus* (Frankfurt, 1924), 64. For further discussion of the problem, see the chapter “Was ist Faschismus: politischer Kampfbegriff oder wissenschaftliche Theorie?” in W. Wippermann, *Faschismustheorien* (Darmstadt, 1989), 1–10.

2. In this study the names of the Italian Fascist Party and its immediate antecedents, members, and components will be capitalized, while the terms *fascism* and *fascist* used in a broader and more generic sense will not.

the name for themselves. The dilemmas of definition and categorization which arise are so severe that it is not surprising that some scholars prefer to call putative fascist movements by their individual names alone without applying the categorical adjective. Still others deny that any such general phenomenon as fascism—as distinct from Mussolini's own Italian movement—ever existed. Finally, the great majority of the hundreds of authors of works on fascism or individual fascist movements make little or no effort to define the term and simply assume that their readers will understand and presumably agree with the approach, whatever that may be.

This book argues that it is useful to treat fascism as a general type or generic phenomenon for heuristic and analytic purposes, just as other categories of political forces are so treated. As Arthur L. Stinchcombe has observed, "Whenever a large number of variables go together, so that specific values of one are always associated with specific values of another, the creation of typologies, or sets of type-concepts, such as the chemical elements, is scientifically useful."<sup>3</sup> Like all general types and concepts in political analysis, generic fascism is an abstraction which never existed in pure empirical form but constitutes a conceptual device which serves to clarify the analysis of individual political phenomena.

If fascism is to be studied as a generic and comparative phenomenon, it has first to be identified through some sort of working description. Such a definition must be derived from empirical study of the classic interwar European movements. It must be developed as a theoretical construct or an ideal type, for all general political concepts are broadly based abstractions. Thus no single movement of the group under observation would necessarily be found to have announced a program or self-description couched in the exact terms of this definition. Nor would such a hypothetical definition be intended to imply that the individual goals and characteristics identified were necessarily in every case unique to fascist movements, for most items might be found in one or more other species of political movements. The contention would be, rather, that *taken as a whole* the definition would describe what all fascist movements had in common without trying to describe the additional unique characteristics of each individual group. Finally, for reasons to be discussed later, the definition might refer only to interwar European fascist movements and not to a presumed category of fascist regimes or systems.

Any definition of common characteristics of fascist movements must be used with great care, for fascist movements differed from each other as significantly as they held notable new features in common. A general inventory of their distinctive characteristics is therefore useful, not as a full and complete definition of such movements in and of themselves, but only as an indication

3. A. L. Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories* (New York, 1968), 43.

of the chief characteristics that they shared which distinguish them (in most respects, but not absolutely) from other kinds of political forces.

The problems involved in reaching an inductive set of characteristics may be illustrated by reference to the six-point "fascist minimum" postulated by Ernst Nolte, who helped to initiate the "fascism debate" of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>4</sup> It consists of a set of negatives, a central organizational feature, a doctrine of leadership, and a basic structural goal, expressed as follows: anti-Marxism, antiliberalism, anticonservatism, the leadership principle, a party army, and the aim of totalitarianism. This typology is helpful as far as it goes and correctly states the fascist negations, yet it does not describe the positive content of fascist philosophy and values and makes no concrete reference to economic goals.

More recently, Roger Griffin has sought to achieve elegance, parsimony, and precision through the definition of fascism as "a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism."<sup>5</sup> This once more is accurate and useful, referring tersely to the cross-class populist appeal of fascist politics and its grounding in ultranationalism. Fascist ideology was certainly "palingenetic"; that is, it emphasized above all the rebirth of the national spirit, culture, and society. Yet leftist, moderate, conservative, and extreme right-wing nationalisms are also frequently "palingenetic," for the rebirth and re-creation of the nation are goals fundamental to many different forms of nationalism. Similarly, there have been nonfascist populist revolutionary forms of nationalism, such as that of the MNR in Bolivia in 1952, that were also palingenetic, so that the qualification of "populist" does not serve adequately to restrict and to specify. Finally, as we shall see, Griffin's definition—while admirably succinct—cannot describe certain of the central characteristics fundamental to a definition of fascism.

Indeed, the uniqueness and complexity of fascism cannot be adequately described without recourse to a relatively complex typology, however laudable the principle of parsimony may be. Thus in his authoritative article on *fascismo* for the new *Enciclopedia Italiana* (1992), Emilio Gentile presents the "constituent elements for an orientative definition of fascism" in a dense list of ten complex points.<sup>6</sup>

4. E. Nolte, *Die Krise des liberalen Systems und die faschistischen Bewegungen* (Munich, 1968), 385.

5. R. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London, 1991), 44. This is the best work on the comparative analysis of fascism to appear in the past decade.

6. Gentile defines *fascismo* as follows:

"1) a mass movement with multiclass membership in which prevail, among the leaders and militants, the middle sectors, in large part new to political activity, organized as a party militia, that bases its identity not on social hierarchy or class origin but on the sense of comradeship, believes itself invested with a mission of national regeneration, considers itself in a state of war against

The common characteristics of fascist movements were grounded in specific philosophical and moral beliefs, a new orientation in political culture and ideology, generally common political goals, a distinctive set of negations, common aspects of style, and somewhat novel modes of organization—always with notable differences in the specific character of these new forms and ideas among the various movements. To arrive at a criterial definition applicable to all the interwar fascist movements *sensu stricto*, it becomes necessary therefore to identify common points of ideology and goals, the fascist negations, and also special common features of style and organization.<sup>7</sup> The descriptive typology in table I.1 is suggested merely as an analytic device for purposes of comparative analysis and definition. It does not propose to establish a rigidly reified category but a wide-spectrum description that can identify a variety of differing

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political adversaries and aims at conquering a monopoly of political power by using terror, parliamentary tactics, and deals with leading groups, to create a new regime that destroys parliamentary democracy;

"(2) an 'anti-ideological' and pragmatic ideology that proclaims itself antimaterialist, anti-individualist, antiliberal, antidemocratic, anti-Marxist, is populist and anticapitalist in tendency, expresses itself aesthetically more than theoretically by means of a new political style and by myths, rites, and symbols as a lay religion designed to acculturate, socialize, and integrate the faith of the masses with the goal of creating a 'new man';

"(3) a culture founded on mystical thought and the tragic and activist sense of life conceived as the manifestation of the will to power, on the myth of youth as artificer of history, and on the exaltation of the militarization of politics as the model of life and collective activity;

"(4) a totalitarian conception of the primacy of politics, conceived as an integrating experience to carry out the fusion of the individual and the masses in the organic and mystical unity of the nation as an ethnic and moral community, adopting measures of discrimination and persecution against those considered to be outside this community either as enemies of the regime or members of races considered inferior or otherwise dangerous for the integrity of the nation;

"(5) a civil ethic founded on total dedication to the national community, on discipline, virility, comradeship, and the warrior spirit;

"(6) a single state party that has the task of providing for the armed defense of the regime, selecting its directing cadres, and organizing the masses within the state in a process of permanent mobilization of emotion and faith;

"(7) a police apparatus that prevents, controls, and represses dissidence and opposition, even by using organized terror;

"(8) a political system organized by a hierarchy of functions named from the top and crowned by the figure of the 'leader,' invested with a sacred charisma, who commands, directs, and coordinates the activities of the party and the regime;

"(9) a corporative organization of the economy that suppresses trade union liberty, broadens the sphere of state intervention, and seeks to achieve, by principles of technocracy and solidarity, the collaboration of the 'productive sectors' under the control of the regime, to achieve its goals of power, yet preserving private property and class divisions;

"(10) a foreign policy inspired by the myth of national power and greatness, with the goal of imperialist expansion." (Quoted with the kind permission of Professor Gentile.)

7. The idea of a tripartite definition was first suggested to me by Juan J. Linz at a conference in Bergen, Norway, in June 1974. The specific content is my own.



Table I.1. Typological Description of Fascism

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A.	<b>Ideology and Goals:</b> Espousal of an idealist, vitalist, and voluntaristic philosophy, normally involving the attempt to realize a new modern, self-determined, and secular culture Creation of a new nationalist authoritarian state not based on traditional principles or models Organization of a new highly regulated, multiclass, integrated national economic structure, whether called national corporatist, national socialist, or national syndicalist Positive evaluation and use of, or willingness to use, violence and war The goal of empire, expansion, or a radical change in the nation's relationship with other powers
B.	<b>The Fascist Negations:</b> Antiliberalism Anticommunism Anticonservatism (though with the understanding that fascist groups were willing to undertake temporary alliances with other sectors, most commonly with the right)
C.	<b>Style and Organization:</b> Attempted mass mobilization with militarization of political relationships and style and with the goal of a mass party militia Emphasis on aesthetic structure of meetings, symbols, and political liturgy, stressing emotional and mystical aspects Extreme stress on the masculine principle and male dominance, while espousing a strongly organic view of society Exaltation of youth above other phases of life, emphasizing the conflict of generations, at least in effecting the initial political transformation Specific tendency toward an authoritarian, charismatic, personal style of command, whether or not the command is to some degree initially elective

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allegedly fascist movements while still setting them apart as a group from other kinds of revolutionary or nationalist movements. Individual movements might then be understood to have also possessed further doctrines, characteristics, and goals of major importance to them that did not necessarily contradict the common features but were added to them or went beyond them. Similarly, an individual movement might differ somewhat with regard to one or two individual criteria but nonetheless conform generally to the overall description or ideal type.

The term *fascist* is used not merely for the sake of convention but because the Italian movement was the first significant force to exhibit those characteristics as a new type and was for a long time the most influential. It constituted the type whose ideas and goals were the most readily generalized, particularly when contrasted with racial National Socialism.

It has often been held that fascism had no coherent doctrine or ideology, since there was no single canonical or seminal source and since major aspects of fascist ideas were contradictory and nonrationalist. Yet fascist movements