

FASCISM IN ITS SIXTH YEAR

V. P. SEARY

ON the 29th of October last, Benito Mussolini reviewed his Fascist Militia, as part of the fifth anniversary celebration of the Fascist Revolution and the March on Rome. Newspaper dispatches told of the demonstrations and the processions carried out with perfect order in Rome, whose entire population appeared on the streets and at the Colosseum to shout acclaim to the Duce. The blacksmith's son held a triumph before which the most arrogant display of the Caesars fades into significance. Mussolini appeared as the leader of the nation, and, incidentally, as the principal agent in one of history's greatest political experiments. For Fascism is nothing less.

From its inception, it has divided its observers sharply into two groups. Everyone seems eager to praise or to blame, none to judge dispassionately. In Italy itself this attitude is understandable. There are some who must be 'agin the Government.' The opponents of Fascism have lost something, while some of its adherents have gained a great deal. Opposing groups are naturally defined. Just why similar feelings have been engendered in the rest of the world, it is more difficult to grasp. Possibly the perplexity brought about by lack of complete acquaintance with the situation has given undue opportunity for the group of notions which are pre-conceived, and, being attacked, receive stubborn adherence and defence. There is an appeal, too, in the heroic figure of the lonely dictator, even if the appeal is slightly theatrical. In any case, the movement lacks neither friends nor enemies, as evidenced by the bodies of imitators on one hand, and by equally assiduous denouncers on the other.

Mussolini and the lesser leaders have been supremely indifferent to the criticisms of their régime levelled in lands other than their own; and, for reasons so personal as to include health and freedom of movement, Italian critics have gone to other countries in order to remain vocal. They are equally contemptuous of the forms of government and political creeds of these other countries. Liberalism and Democracy they sneer at as outworn. Socialism and Communism they regard as futile. It therefore becomes interesting to

discover in what they really have faith, and why they look upon the rest of the world as the unfortunate victim of one form of political delusion or another.

Briefly, the fault they find with all political doctrines but their own is that they are based on the theories of natural law and the principles proceeding from it. They express a concept of the state which is atomistic. This concept, according to the Fascists, treats the state as the sum of its constituent individuals and nothing more. Its ends are the ends of these individuals who make up its mass. Such an idea of society, they think, precludes the possibility of its possessing attributes other than those of space. Its temporal qualities are ignored, because social life is restricted to that of a single generation. We are accused of trying to shut up the Present in a water-tight compartment, cut off from the Past and the Future. If this is so, we seem to have established many of our institutions under the impression that, after all, "posterity will do something for us."

Fascism regards with derision the statement that, in countries governed under natural-law doctrine, sovereignty resides in the people. The system of checks and balances of a constitutional government seems to Fascist philosophers an elaborate subterfuge by which the people are divested of sovereignty, or power if you will, in order that it may be assumed by a small self-constituted élite composed of the representatives in the legislature. The mass abandons the right to rule. There is a half-truth in this assertion, the public apathy toward questions of government so noticeable in present day democracy having been misinterpreted; but the "élite", having usurped the people's sovereignty, seem to be somewhat chary of using it otherwise than as its rightful owners dictate. That this phenomenon apparently has escaped the notice of the Fascist critics may be due to the parliamentary, or rather the unparliamentary, methods adopted by Italian statesmen during the constitutional régime. Their mode of carrying on a parliamentary government was not above reproach, and the captious stickler for decorum may argue with some justification that parliamentary government might not have proved a failure in Italy if it had been given a trial. Its success seems to be in direct proportion to the length of time and the spirit in which it is used. Anglo-Celtic peoples, with their natural ability for compromise, see no reason for its abandonment, no diminution of its success.

Fascism originated in a period of great social stress, and became a deciding factor through action and force. Once these methods were given up, the movement would have ceased of its own inertia

and would have become as useless as that of several competing groups, which at that time were equally strong in man-power. Having gathered sufficient momentum to crush and to absorb opposition organizations, having restored the social equilibrium and removed, for the time, the threat of anarchy, Fascismo has had time to formulate its own philosophy. In other words, it has begun to rationalize its actions.

The result has been a complete doctrine which, to its adherents, seems to have the quality of perfect obviousness. It is self-justification and, at bottom, is of little value because it is just that. While Fascismo reserved its energy to secure order, its achievements from a material standpoint were good. No one can hope to decry successfully the economic accomplishments of the first few years of Fascist rule. Their effect has been entirely admirable. Now that the end has been gained, the attempt to elevate a harsh code into a universal truth is both unnecessary and wrong. Fascism has laid itself open to an attack more dangerous than any that could be brought against it by an armed faction within the Italian state. At the same time it has itself become more dangerous, not so much to Italians as to the citizens of other countries not yet fully accustomed, as Italy was unaccustomed, to parliamentary forms of government. It must always be kept in mind that the Fascist triumph was the result of a daring coup. It gripped the attention and won the admiration, even though it was unwilling admiration. The government it set up was what an English writer once described as a "stunt" government. Thus marked at birth, Fascism has to keep on "stunting", and to step out of character is to step out of favour.

The new doctrine it has just given a waiting world is based on a number of fundamental concepts that are largely negations of those commonly accepted by the rest of civilized humanity. The first is that humanity and society are synonymous biologically, but not otherwise. "There is not one but several human societies", says Rocco, Minister of Justice, "each of which is both a biological and a social unit." Each of these units, with a more or less common language, culture and tradition, has as its primary duty the elevation of its individual content. This social unit is not merely the sum of its constituents, but a sum much greater, and composed of the infinite number of generations of the past and of the future with their spiritual as well as their material attributes. One readily sees the comparative unimportance attached to any one generation compared as it is with the rest. It follows that the individual life loses value to an equal or proportionate degree.

Such a thesis reverses the idea that the state is created for the citizen. Society, as defined by the Fascists, becomes the end, the individual the means. At the same time Fascism does not profess the intention of eliminating the individual's importance. The citizen will be submerged in the state. Insignificant though he may be, his enlightenment determines the development of his generation, and, in an infinitesimal degree, that of his social unit. He is a recurring decimal, though a minute one, in a series which makes up his social group. If it is felt necessary for the ends of that social group that the individual be sacrificed, his immolation is a thing of little moment. These ends, inherent in the group, are those of preservation, expansion, and improvement. They may be in direct opposition to those of the individual. They may, and probably will, unless radically changed, involve war, "the eternal law of mankind"; which, through adherence to the flabby doctrines springing from natural law, the great nations of western civilization have come to regard as a degraded remnant of primeval savagery or as the insane horror of modern decadence.

Fascists are troubled by no such qualms. Once let it be shown them that Italy's destiny lies in the path of conquest and, regardless of the human misery entailed, they will fall upon all obstacles to the complete fulfilment of that destiny to sweep them away by force. The Fascist state therefore cherishes and protects its citizens, not for themselves, but as the instruments of its ambition. One almost hears the murmur, "cannon-fodder", again.

Fascist theorists have a fine contempt for principles. They prefer the word "method". The difference between sacrificing principles and discarding methods, though superficial to most, has a value to them. It is all rather cynical; but as long as nothing is allowed to dampen the ardour of its followers, Fascismo rests content. So liberty, from being a principle in the interests of the citizen in the Liberal state, descends to the status of a method in the Fascist state, and is used accordingly. A journalist has written that Mussolini is dictator by popular consent. He adds, somewhat thoughtfully, that a term of imprisonment awaits those who withhold their consent. The deprivation of an individual's liberty is excused because it is done in the interests of the state. One must not be guilty even of thought hostile to the administration. To disagree is contrary to the interests of the state. An English observer, noticing the hangdog expression on the faces of some petty officials in a local Fascist demonstration, made enquiries as to its cause. A disinterested Italian explained to her that the officials were present through no sense of pride in or love for Fascism, but

through fear of being dispossessed of their jobs, and of persecution which would follow any sign of wavering allegiance. This growth of fear has been one result of the Fascist government of Italy. Thus are the spiritual ideals of the state elevated.

The ever-present fear and the merely grudging admission of Fascism's material success by the older people are very fully counter-balanced by the enthusiasm of the younger generation. Among the youth of the country there is no such suspicion as is felt by their elders. Prosperity and the spread of propaganda may account for their attitude, or it may not. However, the young men and boys of Italy are extravagant in their praise and enthusiasm for the new political machine. In obtaining the support of the virile youth of the country, the Fascist leaders have created a really unified Italy for the first time in its history. Just how deep the new and apparently consuming spirit of nationality has gone, it is difficult to estimate. Those familiar with Italy, and with the movements which sweep across peoples and races, say that never in its history, and seldom in the history of any country, has Chauvinism taken such a hold. Independent observation would tend to strengthen the idea that the invocation of Machiavelli by the Fascists is something more than a gesture. Read any speech that you like of the Duce's, and you will find some reference, either veiled or overt, to Italy's manifest destiny in conquering. It is by this method, as old as tyranny itself, that men in his position have distracted the attention of those they have come to rule from their immediate surroundings. History contains another lesson which Mussolini seems to have overlooked. This method has always led from threats and gestures to action, and the action has inevitably brought disaster in its train.

As long, then, as Fascism still refrains from proselytizing outside Italy, either by peaceable methods or by force, it is harmless to the rest of civilization. But the moment it seeks converts it becomes civilization's Nemesis. The danger from the former is almost non-existent in Anglo-Celtic countries. We have lived under parliamentary rule too long to exchange it recklessly for a political experiment, however successful it may seem for the moment. Again, we can endure the serio-comic in our politics, but would be almost certain to rebel against the introduction of the opera-bouffé of a posturing "man on horseback" declaiming the ancient glories of the race as reasons for support to a dictatorial régime. Our political leaders still fight elections on the issues of the past century, still recount the glories of departed statesmen to a disinterested electorate. They are ploughing the sand. But a dictator of the Mussolini stamp could never arise in Canada, because apathy would vanish

and amusement take its place. He would be the delight of cartoonists, and the proper subject of public ridicule.

The second procedure, that involving the use of war, the "eternal law of mankind", is the one in which the danger lies. When the Duce makes good his threat to cross the Brenner, western civilization will tremble in the balance, not because it is likely to pass under Italian sway, but because the world is too small for a war of any dimensions to remain isolated. If Mussolini can resuscitate Italy, if he can improve her lot without infringing the rights of any of her neighbours, if he can do these things with the consent of those he governs, let him do so. His theories may be acceptable to the mass of Italians through either fear or favour for years to come. He can rest assured that, so far as the rest of Europe is concerned, he will be undisturbed. The days of intervention passed with the Holy Alliance, and to remain within bounds is to be unmolested. He should, however, investigate the remark of Rabindranath Tagore that "States break down when man is made impersonal." Poets, particularly those of an ancient civilization, sometimes have the faculty of arriving at a weighty conclusion by a short route.

Possibly some conclusion of the sort has occurred to the formulators of theoretical Fascism. Rocco, Minister of Justice in the Government of Italy—the style of nomenclature reminds one of that wary appellation "German Emperor"—has described Fascism's protection of the free development of individualism. The concept permits of the unfolding of the personality, but only in behalf of the state. Even this concession arises from no softening of attitude toward man, but from the belief that the welfare of the state is a reflection of that of the citizen. Fascism refrains from interference as long as individual development works toward the attainment of the state's aims, and as long as its growth is "normal." Freedom is given by the state in return for service; but any undue growth of one or other of the classes is looked upon as unhealthy, a social disease to be prevented as soon as perceived. After all, this precaution is excusable in a political party which must imagine an enemy in every shadow.

Regarding individual initiative effort as best, in the long run, to bring about economic development both of production and of distribution, Fascism is prepared to tolerate the present type of business structure. Rocco points out that in so doing the state is not departing from the idea of the citizen as the instrument of the social group; while any other attitude would have discouraged the investment of foreign capital in the country's industries. Italy

made good use of the object lesson provided by Russia and avoided her fatal mistake of alienating, at one stroke, the support of individualists at home and abroad. It is this aspect of Italian state affairs which has appealed so strongly to the American imagination. American capital flows into Italy, and the American press applauds her attainments in the industrial field. A complete investigation of the motives behind the Fascist concession of economic liberty and the belligerent undercurrent of the dictatorship would probably lessen the influx of American capital into industrial Italy, and diminish the moral support which the Fascist régime receives in the United States. It could scarcely be otherwise, since the United States are declared to contain the most individualistic people in the world.

The position seems to be that the individual in Fascist Italy has been subordinated into an impersonal instrument not only of the state but of the ruling political caste, a caste which cuts across social and class lines. This caste is at present paramount, because its rule is the alternative to chaos, and as such has drawn to it those elements in the country preferring stable government no matter what its ideals. Its predominance is also assured by its policy of activity, and by the national pride it has produced in a people formerly possessing only a local patriotism that was more disruptive than unifying. As long as this condition of equilibrium in motion is maintained, the Fascist experiment will succeed. It will have what Vilfredo Pareto calls a "centrifugal effect." In the production of a dogma expounding its views and announcing its aims it has laid bare the plot. "Man has been made impersonal", but he has had neither time nor opportunity to realize it, surrounded as he has been, and is, by the rush of transition and the rising tide of material prosperity, and having his sources of information either cut off or poisoned at the source by the suppression of a free press and free speech. As the motion subsides and the prosperity fades, or becomes an accepted fact and not an unexpected gift from Heaven, he will have the opportunity to take stock, and then will come the real crisis for Fascism. It is a doctrine which cannot have a universal appeal, and which must stand accused of the grossest cynicism, and of the resumption and application to state life of ideals long ago condemned by the world as base. In its struggle for political supremacy it has cultivated a heedless Jingoism that threatens the peace of the world, and is already beginning to bear fruit in the Balkans. It is cultivating a growth upon which the world must look more askance as time wears on. Germany found that her healthy industrial condition could not save her once she

had adopted the wrong ideals and the world has advanced since Versailles. The old Machiavellian theories cannot be made to fit new conditions, though they have been cast in a new mould.

Perhaps the most distressing result of the Fascist supremacy has been the deliberate attack on the mind of the Italian public. This was first disclosed by the abolition of a free press. Sheets whose editors dared print articles criticizing Fascist methods were suppressed and their proprietors punished. The medium in which public opinion had its being was removed, and its place taken by an artificial medium controlled from the Chigi Palace. Political activity by the opponents of Fascism disappeared. Parties were annihilated. Free public speech was at an end, and private conversation forced to limit itself to the weather. Later this method of intellectual control was introduced into the education system of the state, which has now become a training system for Fascism. Female teachers are now prevented from teaching philosophical subjects or the social sciences. One is reminded that Napoleon took similar action, and attempted to use the schools of France as a buttress to his empire. At the same time, the physical condition of the schools has been improved. Certainly if one must use a tool, one should make it as efficient as possible.

As part of the campaign of silence, eminent Italian savants have been asked "as a personal favour to the Duce" to cancel lecture engagements in the United States and elsewhere. They are prisoners, just as surely as though they were in the stocks.

It is still too early to see the final outcome. One can only watch the trend of events, and wait. The Italian colonies in North Africa have lost what little self-government they possessed. Four or five divisions of the French army are stationed on the frontier in case another incident like the Ventimiglia affair takes place. The Southern Slav state, bereft of the steadying hand of the veteran Pashitch, lies invitingly in growing disruption, a promising field for armed exploits. Murmuring on the north frontier has not died down appreciably. Fascism is still at the cross-roads.