

# Fascism in America

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THE question of Fascism in America; the question, that is, of the possibility of its rise; of its nature, if and when it does arise; and of the best methods by which the American working class can combat it, is of capital importance.

We are often asked whether Marxists consider that Fascism is inevitable. The proper answer to this question seems to me to be to say that *an attempt* to establish the Fascist form of the capitalist dictatorship in America is inevitable, but that there is nothing whatever inevitable about the *success* of a Fascist mass movement.

Marx long ago expressed the inevitability of the attempt by the present holders of power to maintain their position by a more open and flagrant use of violence and terror. He said that "every revolution inevitably breeds its counter-revolution." He meant, of course, that as the ever deepening crisis of capitalism drove the workers into mass action, as the horrors of capitalist war alternated with the horrors of capitalist peace, as the workers were forced slowly and reluctantly, but inevitably, to come into action against the system, so also the violent and terroristic action of the armed forces of the capitalist class would increase.

Is there anything more crassly ignorant than the charge, now commonly leveled by liberal intellectuals against us, that Marx never realized the possibility of Fascism? It is true that the word was not invented in his day. But, both in terms of general theory, and in the particular case of that regime, Fascist in all but name, the Third Empire of Louis Napoleon, Marx studied Fascism with peculiar care. He never for a moment fell into the Utopian delusion that the working class would be allowed to take power without the most desperate resistance on the part of the capitalist class. And Fascism is precisely the most violent and the most desperate form of this resistance.

The question of the form in which Fascist movements are likely to develop in America is of importance. There seem to be two broad possibilities. I would call them respectively:

(a) *Fascism Proper*, that is to say, a

pseudo-revolutionary mass movement closely modeled on the German and Italian examples, recklessly using economic demagogic promises of scotching the bankers, big capitalists, etc., and mingling these with appeals to race hatred and jingoism of every kind.

(b) What I would call *State Fascism*, that is to say, a gradual and concealed abandonment of democratic forms by the existing capitalist state, so that political democracy is slipped off without the need for a seizure of power by a specially organized mass movement.

There are plenty of signs in America today of the growth of both these forms of Fascism. I have attempted some slight study of the various efforts now being made to establish demagogic mass movements along Nazi lines in America.

There are the silver shirts, the khaki shirts, and the reconstructed Ku Klux Klan, for example. All these movements are of a perfectly orthodox Fascist character. There is nothing surprising even about the extreme illiteracy, and indeed insanity, of their programs and of the statement of their leaders. Every one of the fantastic utterances of Mr. Pelley of the Silver Shirts, for example, could be paralleled by German prototypes. Here is a quotation from an article in Mr. Pelley's journal *Liberation* for April 22, 1932:

Israel, at least that part of it represented by the tribe of Judah, contains a great mass of entities from Cosmos who have incarnated in this generation to stir up a vast Armageddon against the White Peoples—cosmically speaking—of the earth.

Such statements could be paralleled from the programs of most of the present Fascist organizations. It would, however, be the greatest mistake in the world to think that this gibberish necessarily makes them negligible. On the contrary, it is probable that these organizations, using the wildest type of anti-Negro, anti-Jew, pro-jingo demagoguery, stand a good deal more chance of success than do saner-seeming Fascist movements. Mr. Lawrence Dennis, who has recently turned Fascist, is, for example, attempting to create a Fascist movement around his new journal *The Awakener*. Mr. Dennis, however, suffers the disad-

vantage of possessing an intellect. Accordingly he seems to find it difficult to use the full Fascist incantations. However, he will probably soon get over such intellectual squeamishness.

The question, however, of which, if any, of the present embryo Fascist organizations will rise to formidable dimensions is at bottom the simple question of which, if any, of them, will attract a really large amount of financial support from some big capitalist interest. The formula of Fascist demagoguery is now pretty well established. But it needs heavy financial backing to make it effective. Each of the would be American Fascist leaders is, of course, perpetually engaged, as was Hitler, in trying to capture some really important capitalist, or capitalist group, from whom to draw funds. And the first man—whether Mr. Pelley of the Silver Shirts, Mr. Dennis of *The Awakener* or another—who "lands" a Ford or a Morgan partner, or a Myron Taylor, and thus receives several million dollars, will become the leader of the demagogic Fascist movement in America.

For it is in this way that Fascism becomes the bludgeon of capitalism. To suggest that the capitalists themselves "think up" Fascism for their own protection is to oversimplify the question. What actually happens is that certain ambitions, able and unscrupulous types see the possibility of organizing a mass movement by wild demagogic promises, combined with the inflammation of race hatred and nationalism to the nth degree. They then make a start with what resources they can muster, and it is only when they have already some nucleus of a movement that they are able to enlist heavy capitalist contributions. They do this by balancing their confused anti-capitalist, anti-"money power" street-corner propaganda with the most binding public and private pledges to the capitalists to serve their interests faithfully, if and when they come into power.

If Mr. Lawrence Dennis finds it difficult to mouth Mr. Pelley's wild nonsense about "freeing the nation from the Jewish money power," he is particularly strong on promising capitalists that his movement will protect their interests to the very last dollar. For example, his