

MANIFESTO OF THE FASCIST INTELLECTUALS

Origins

Fascism is a recent movement and an ancient movement of the Italian spirit, deeply bound up with the history of the Italian nation, though not without meaning and interest for all other nations. Its origins go back to about 1919 when a band of men, returned from the trenches and resolved to fight vigorously against the demo-socialist politics that then prevailed, gathered around Benito Mussolini. The other politicians saw only the immediate material effects of the Great War from which the Italian people had emerged victorious but exhausted. If they did not openly deny its moral value, they let it go to waste by representing it to the Italians, from a petty individualist and utilitarian point of view, as a tally of sacrifices for which each person had to be compensated in proportion to the damage suffered. The result was a presumptuous and threatening opposition of private interests to the State, a disregard for its authority, a loss of prestige for the King and the Army – symbols of the nation at a level higher than individuals and the various categories of citizens – an unleashing of passions and baser instincts, an inciting of social fragmentation, of moral decadence, of a selfish and irresponsible spirit of rebellion against all law and discipline.

The individual against the state – an expression typical of the political side of the spiritual corruption that could not abide any higher norm for human life which might vigorously rule and constrain the attitudes and thoughts of individuals. In its origins, however, Fascism was a political and a moral movement. Its politics was like a gymnasium of self-denial, a campaign for the sacrifice of the individual to an idea in which the individual might find his life's purpose, his freedom and his entire law – the idea which is the Fatherland, an ideal which is realized historically without ever being exhausted, a specific and well-defined historical tradition of civilization, but a tradition that never remains in the past as a dead memory but becomes a personal force in the citizen's mind, aware that there is a goal to attain, a tradition which is therefore a mission.

Fascism and the State

This is the source of the religious character of Fascism.

Its religious and therefore intransigent character explains the method that Fascism used in its struggle during the four years from 1919 to 1922. Fascists were a minority in the country and in Parliament, where a small, core group arrived after the elections of 1921. The constitutional State was therefore anti-Fascist, as it had to be, since it was the State of the majority, and it was precisely this State that called itself liberal which stood opposed to Fascism.

The State was liberal, but its liberalism was the agnostic and acquiescent kind that understands only external freedom – the State which is liberal because it remains outside the free citizen's mind as if it were a mechanical system apart from the activity of each individual. Although the representatives of hybrid socialism – democratic and

parliamentary – had adapted themselves, even in Italy, to this individualist version of the idea of politics, this State was plainly not what socialists yearned for. Nor was it the State whose idea had worked so forcefully in the heroic Italian era of our Risorgimento, when the State rose out the work of a small minority strengthened by the power of an idea to which individuals yielded in various ways: its basis was the great project of making people who had gained their independence and unity into Italians.

Embattled against this State, Fascism took strength from its idea, which attracted a rapidly growing number of the young because of the fascination that comes from any religious idea that calls for sacrifice. It became the party of the young – just as Mazzini's Young Italy grew out of a similar political and moral need after the events of 1831.

That party also had its Hymn of Youth, which Fascists sing joyously from an exultant heart.

And like Mazzini's Young Italy, Fascism became the faith of all Italians who were offended by the past and eager for renewal. A faith, like any faith in collision with a reality, which comes from breaking up and melting in the crucible of new energies and being reshaped in keeping with the new ideal, ardent and intransigent.

It was the same faith that ripened in the trenches and in a deep change of heart about the sacrifice offered on the battlefields for the only purpose that could justify it – the life and greatness of the Fatherland – a faith of energy and violence, disinclined to respect anything that opposed the life and greatness of the Fatherland.

Thus arose the squadrons, a young people's movement that was resolute and armed. They wore black shirts and organized themselves militarily, breaking the law in order to set up a new law, a force armed against the State to establish the new State.

The squadrons moved against the fragmented anti-nationalist forces whose activity culminated in the general strike of July, 1922, and finally risked an uprising on October 28, 1922, when armed columns of Fascists marched on Rome after occupying public buildings in the provinces. Some died in the March on Rome, before and after it reached its goal, especially in the Po Valley. Like all bold actions with deep moral content, the March ended first with amazement, then admiration and at last with universal acclaim. It thus seemed that at one stroke the Italian people had rediscovered their enthusiastic pre-War unanimity, yet this feeling was even more vibrant because people realized that victory had been won and that a new, refreshing wave of faith had come to revitalize the victorious nation on its hard new path toward the urgent restoration of its financial and moral strength.

Fascist Government

The squadrons and the law-breaking stopped, and Fascism outlined the elements of the regime that it wished to see. Between October 29 and 30, the fifty thousand blackshirts who had marched on the capital from the provinces left Rome in perfect order. They left

after parading before His Majesty the King, and they left at a sign from the Duce, who became the head of Government and the soul of the new Italy that Fascism hoped for.

Was the revolution over? In a sense, yes: the squadrons no longer had a reason to exist. The Voluntary Militia for National Security was formed to incorporate former squadron members into the State's armed forces. But the State is not the Government and the Government was still waiting, amidst the consensus of the great majority of Italians that they saw Fascism as the most potent political force, the one capable of expressing all the strength of the nation's heart and giving it the discipline for the change in legislation that the State now needed to find the form best suited to the social trends and spiritual needs of the Italian people.

This transformation goes on gradually in the midst of perfect public order, under a strict financial regime which has put the unstable post-War budget back in balance by reorganizing the army, the judiciary and the educational institutions without wobbling or wavering, even while there has been, and still is, plenty of vacillation in public opinion, an opinion violently agitated by a public press whose rigidified opposition becomes all the more furious as it grows more hopeless about any possibility of returning to the past. The press takes advantage of every mistake and every accident to stir the people up against the difficult, constructive and unrelenting work of the new Government.

But foreigners coming to Italy have crossed the ring of flame drawn around Fascist Italy by the defensive fire of ferocious propaganda, written and spoken, internal and external, from Italians and non-Italians, which has tried to isolate Fascist Italy by slandering it as a country fallen into the hands of the most violent and cynical power. As foreigners have been able to see this Italy with their own eyes and as they listen with their own ears to the new Italians living their material and moral lives, they have come to envy the public order that prevails today in Italy. They have become interested in the spirit that strives every day to gain more mastery of this well-regulated mechanism, and they have begun to sense that here beats a heart, one full of humanity even if agitated by the frustrations of patriotic passion. The Fatherland of the Fascist is also the Fatherland that lives and moves in the heart of every civic person, the Fatherland that stirred feelings everywhere in the tragedy of the War and now stands vigilant in every region – must stand vigilant to protect its sacred interests even after the War, indeed, as consequence of the War that no one any longer believes to be the last.

This Fatherland, moreover, is a reconsecration of traditions and institutions that endure in civilization, in the flux and perpetuity of tradition. It is also a school for the subordination of the particular and inferior to the universal and immortal. It is respect for law and discipline. It is freedom, but freedom to be won through law, freedom established by renouncing all petty willfulness and wasteful, irrational ambition. It is an austere conception of life and a religious gravity that does not paint grand ideals by banishing them from this world, where the hard work of making life ideal goes on by expressing one's own convictions in action and in words. These words themselves are actions that bind the person who speaks them, and with him they also bind the world of

which he is a living, responsible part at every moment of time, in every secret that the mind breathes.

This ideal is an ideal, but it is an ideal for which a struggle goes on in Italy today, those very harsh conflicts that show how serious things are and that there is a faith in people's hearts. Fascism, like any of the great movements, grows stronger as it becomes more able to attract and absorb, more effective and engaged in the workings of minds, ideas, interests and institutions – briefly, in the living fabric of the Italian people. And so the point is no longer to count and weigh each person but to look to the idea and to value the idea which, like any true or living idea, is endowed with a power of its own and has been made not by human beings but for them.

MANIFESTO OF THE ANTI-FASCIST INTELLECTUALS: A REPLY BY ITALIAN AUTHORS,
PROFESSORS AND JOURNALISTS TO THE MANIFESTO OF THE FASCIST INTELLECTUALS

Fascist intellectuals meeting in Bologna have addressed a manifesto to intellectuals of all nations in order to explain and defend the policies of the Fascist party to them. In setting out on so great an enterprise, these eager gentlemen must not have recollected a similar and celebrated manifesto announced to the world by German intellectuals at the start of the War in Europe – a manifesto greeted by universal disapproval at the time and later considered a mistake by the Germans themselves.

Intellectuals, students of art and science, exercise their rights and do their duty when they join a party and serve it faithfully. But as intellectuals their sole duty is to use the work of research and criticism to elevate all people and all parties alike to a higher spiritual level so that they can fight the battles that they must with ever more positive results. To breach these boundaries of the office assigned to them, to contaminate politics and literature, politics and science, is an error that can scarcely be called munificent when, as in this case, it happens by encouraging deplorable acts of violence and insolence and by suppressing freedom of the press.

And this action taken by the Fascist intellectuals does not even respond with much sensitivity to the Fatherland, for it is not right to submit the Fatherland's troubles to the judgment of foreigners, who do not take the trouble (naturally, as it happens) to look beyond the various special political interests of their own nations.

In substance what they write is a piece of half-baked schoolwork where one finds intellectual confusions and ill-spun arguments at every point – trading the atomism of certain types of nineteenth century political science, for example, for nineteenth century liberalism, treating anti-historical, abstract and mathematical democratism, in other words, as equivalent to the highly historical notion of free competition and alternation of parties in power, whereby one makes progress, as if in small doses [*quasi graduandolo*], thanks to the opposition. Another example is the facile and fevered rhetoric that celebrates the individual's dutiful submission to the whole, as if that were the issue, rather than the capacity of authoritarian structures to guarantee the most effective moral advancement. Or another, where we are betrayed [*si perfidia*] by a calamitous inability to distinguish economic institutions like unions from ethical institutions like legislative assemblies, thus courting the combining – or rather, the miscegenation – of the two types, which would end in their mutual corruption or, at least, their mutual obstruction. And we leave aside the arbitrary interpretations and manipulations of history, which are by now well-known.

But the violence done by this piece to ideas and history counts for little in comparison to the abuse of the word “religion.” As the leading Fascist intellectuals understand things, we should now have found joy in a war of religion, in the exploits of a new evangel or a new apostolate against an old superstition, resisting to the death what dominates it and to which it still has to bow [*alla quale dovrà piegarsi*] – and they take this to be proven by the hatred and spite that now makes Italians rage against Italians as never before. This is

what they are calling a disagreement about religion: the hatred and spite provoked by a party which denies that elements of other parties are Italian and insults them as foreigners, by that very act making itself a foreigner and oppressor in the eyes of the others and thereby introducing into the life of the Fatherland the feelings and habits that go along with such conflicts. Using the word 'religion' to dignify the suspicion and animosity which has been sown everywhere, which has deprived even university students of the trusting sense of brotherhood that they used to have when they shared youthful ideals, turning them against one another in fake clashes – to tell the truth, this sounds like a rather sorry joke.

Whatever the new evangel might be, the new religion, the new faith, one cannot tell from the text of this wordy manifesto. As a practical matter, however, what its mute eloquence reveals to an objective observer is a bizarre and incoherent blend of appeals to authority and demagoguery; a profession of reverence for the law and violation of the laws; ultra-modern ideas and musty old notions; absolutist attitudes and Bolshevik dispositions; flattery for the Catholic Church and denials of belief; a dread of culture and sterile starts at a culture deprived of its premisses; mystical mawkishness and cynicism. And even if there were any plausible proposals for the present government to enact or undertake, there is nothing in them to brag about, no innovative product to identify a new political system that would be named 'Fascism.'

For this chaotic and incomprehensible religion, then, we are not inclined to abandon our old faith, the faith that for two and a half centuries has been the soul of a resurgent Italy and a modern Italy, the faith whose ingredients are love of truth; hope for justice; a generous human and civic sense; zeal for intellectual and moral education; and eagerness for freedom, which is the strength and security on which all progress depends. When we look back at images of the people of the Risorgimento, those who labored, suffered and died for Italy, their faces seem angry and upset at the words that are said and the things that are done by our Italian adversaries, and because we are steadfast in their cause we take the warnings seriously. Our faith is no abstract, artificial contrivance, no mental obsession caused by theories poorly supported or poorly understood. It is the possession of a tradition which has become an emotional disposition and an intellectual or moral structure.

In their manifesto the Fascist intellectuals repeat the hackneyed phrase that Italy's Risorgimento was the work of a minority, not mentioning the weakness of our political and social makeup on this very point. Indeed, it almost seems that they take satisfaction when most citizens of Italy today, faced with disagreements between Fascism and its opponents, seem to be indifferent – at the least. Liberals have never been satisfied with such a thing, and they have tried with all their power to have an ever-growing number of Italians called to public life. This was the main reason for some of their most controversial actions, such as the granting of universal suffrage. Even the sympathy with which many Liberals greeted the Fascist movement in its early days implied, among other things, the hope that it would introduce fresh new forces into political life, forces of renewal and (why not?) forces of conservation. But they never considered keeping the bulk of the nation inert and indifferent, buying them off with various material goods.

They knew that doing so would have betrayed the purposes of the Italian Risorgimento and would have restored the evil devices of absolute and quietist governments.

Even now, neither this putative indifference and inertia nor the obstacles that block the path to freedom lead us to despair or resignation. What matters is to know that what one wants and should want is something intrinsically good. The present political struggle in Italy, because it presents such great contrasts, will serve to awaken our people and give them a more concrete understanding of the value of Liberal policies and methods, causing people to have a more conscious sense of their desire for them. One day, perhaps, people will look serenely at the past and conclude that the ordeal we now endure, harsh and painful for us, was a stage that Italy had to go through in order to revive its life as a nation, complete its political education, and learn a harder lesson about its duties as a civil society.