

## REVIEWS

Michael Mann, *Fascists*

Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2004, £15.99, paperback  
429 pp, 0 521 53855 6

Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*

Alfred Knopf: New York 2004, \$26, hardback  
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## ENIGMAS OF FASCISM

Was fascism a revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary phenomenon? This question has always been the central dividing-line in the literature about it. If fascism was revolutionary, then it belongs with communism as a variant of totalitarian politics, and offers yet another example of the disasters to which twentieth-century revolutions led—Hitler and Stalin as twin monsters of the age. If, on the other hand, fascism was counter-revolutionary, then its place in European history looks quite different. Rather than standing as a warning against the dangers of revolutionary ideology, its success in defeating socialism can be seen as laying the groundwork for the spread of liberal-democratic capitalism thereafter, with the disappearance of any radical threat to the bourgeois order in post-war Germany and Italy, or post-Franco Spain. Interpretations of fascism are thus intimately bound up with alternative readings of the history of the twentieth century as a whole.

The appearance of two new books on the subject, by Michael Mann and Robert Paxton, each in their own way of high quality, illustrates this pattern vividly once again. Mann, the world's most prolific historical sociologist, is best known for his magisterial *Sources of Social Power*, which runs (so far) from neolithic times to the Belle Époque. He has recently offered a critical assessment of the Bush Administration's foreign policy, *Incoherent Empire*.

Paxton is one of the rare living historians to have demonstrably altered a country's understanding of itself, with his classic work *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* (1972) which showed not only the breadth of social support for Pétain's regime, but the extent to which it actively pursued a partnership with the Third Reich, rather than simply being forced to do its will. The two writers could hardly have reached more opposite conclusions. Mann insists that fascists were a revolutionary force possessing a powerful ideology, a coherent social base and a distinctive set of goals that would ultimately have created a regime incompatible with capitalism. Paxton argues that, on the contrary, fascism was a counter-revolutionary movement, whose medley of notions was intrinsically opportunistic; which came to power only through an alliance with terrified conservatives; and proved incapable of producing stable or coherent political institutions. What are the relative merits of each approach?

Mann's *Fascists* is an impressive book by any standards. It deals skilfully and fair-mindedly with a vast empirical literature, while sure-footedly—if sometimes selectively—picking its way through a treacherous jungle of competing theoretical models. Through all of this Mann crafts an original and well-documented central argument. Many of his trademark strengths as a sociologist are powerfully on display. He is excellent on the religious and regional dimensions of his problem and, while forcefully making his own case, is careful to consider the relative merits of what he takes to be the most significant alternatives. His book is organized into two parts. The first asks why 'over half, but not all, of the relatively advanced part of the world and of Europe' turned in a right-wing authoritarian direction after the First World War, and then why, within this zone, fascism arose as a subset of a wider drift. Mann conceptualizes the right-wing authoritarianism of the time as a continuum from mild to extreme variants, distinguishing four regime types within it, according to the relative powers enjoyed by the executive and legislative branches of the state, and the degree of popular integration into politics. While more articulated than most other discussions of interwar authoritarianism, this classification follows a basic logic common to much work on the subject, which is concerned to distinguish between the various regimes of the right in Southern and Eastern Europe that were often sharply opposed to their own local fascist parties, and fascist regimes proper.

More distinctive is the explanation Mann offers for the rise of right-wing authoritarianism and the—more localized—emergence of fascism, which he seeks to show can only be fully understood in terms of his 'IEMP' model of the four sources of social power: ideological, economic, military and political. By 1919, the strains of war, economic dislocation and the arrival of mass politics had destabilized to a greater or lesser extent all European regimes. How the ensuing crisis was resolved, he argues, depended on two factors:

the nature of pre-existing political arrangements and the extent of long-term economic development. In 'dual' states—that is, where the executive was largely independent of the legislature, or there was no party alternation—conservatives, fearing mass political participation as a threat to the traditional 'neutrality' of the state, were tempted to fall back on strong-arm rule by the executive. In states where parliaments were dominant before the war, the crisis took the form of intensified party competition. The result was a division of the continent between a democratic North and West, and an authoritarian Centre, South and East.

After laying out this larger geopolitical setting, in the second and much longer part of his book Mann proceeds to six case studies of fascist movements: in Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania and Spain. Here Mann sharply narrows his focus. Ideological power becomes the central mechanism for explaining the rise of fascism *within* the authoritarian zone. In essence, Mann argues that fascist ideology promised a 'transcendence' of social conflict that had a magnetic appeal for a 'nation-statist' core constituency that lay at a tangent to the major protagonists of industrial class conflict. This claim entails two equally important negative arguments. The first is that the social base of mass fascism was structurally classless, not simply because it included recruits from virtually all social strata, but above all because it pre-eminently featured groups *outside* the main class forces of a capitalist society—industrialists and financiers on one side, organized labour on the other. The second is that fascism was not a response to any significant threat from the left. Fascism was thus neither a counter-revolution, nor was it rooted in basic class antagonisms. Mann provides a wealth of fascinating detail on the movements it generated. But he makes little attempt here to provide an account of the regimes it installed, a task he defers to subsequent work. Essentially, his book stops short of the threshold of rule.

Paxton's *Anatomy of Fascism* offers an almost complete, formal and substantive, contrast to Mann's *Fascists*. Although about half the length of Mann's work, it covers a much wider historical span, running from the earliest origins to the final downfall of the two major European fascisms in Germany and Italy, with significant side-lights on lesser movements elsewhere. Like Mann, Paxton has mastered an extraordinary range of materials, and brought them into a highly lucid and manageable compass. But rather than a series of side-by-side case studies, Paxton has constructed an elegant analytic narrative, no less comparative, but with a quite distinct focus, that yields a central argument sharply at odds with Mann's. The differences begin with Paxton's central question. The *Anatomy of Fascism* asks: 'Why did [fascist] movements of similar inspiration have such different outcomes in different societies?'—that is, success in Italy and Germany, compared with a much more chequered or frustrated record elsewhere. It is no surprise,

given his disciplinary background, that *time* is at the centre of Paxton's study in a way that it is not for Mann. But less usually for a historian, Paxton's research design is sculpted conceptually in a particularly pointed and lucid way. The core of his analysis carefully tracks Italian and German fascism through five distinct stages: the creation of the movements, their rooting in the political system, their seizure of power, their exercise of power, and their trajectory as regimes.

Paxton starts by identifying four broad preconditions that set the stage for what he calls the 'epoch' of fascism: the experience of the First World War, the victory of the Bolshevik Revolution, the rise of mass socialist parties, and the emergence of a repertoire of cultural themes exalting the values of race, community or nation over those of the individual and of reason. Turning to an analysis of the varying extent to which fascist movements became effective players in their respective political systems, he deftly sketches Italian and German success in inserting themselves into a 'diagonal' class conflict pitting urban (and in the Italian case also rural) socialists against conservative small and medium-sized farmers, as against French failure to do so. Here his general argument is that to become a significant political force, fascist movements had to establish an alliance between small and medium-sized farmers and some urban elements, in the context of a weakly institutionalized liberal democracy.

Paxton's third stage focuses more narrowly on Italy and Germany, and asks how fascists, once they had taken root in the political system, actually came to power within it. For in neither did they gain control of the state by themselves, either by electoral victory or by armed coup. Rather they were brought into government by a conservative establishment. 'Mussolini and Hitler were invited to take office as head of government by a head of state in the legitimate exercise of his official functions, on the advice of civilian and military counsellors'. By contrast, in Romania and Austria, where mass fascist movements also developed, they were crushed or brought to heel by conservatives. Paxton makes it clear that the crucial question was thus: under what conditions were conservatives willing to invite mass fascist parties into power? His answer is unambiguous. Only where they felt threatened by a major challenge from the socialist left, and insufficiently confident of using the traditional repressive apparatuses of the state, was this likely to happen.

Paxton then moves to consider the tensions within fascist systems of rule, once the movements were ensconced in power. Three central conflicts characterized the Italian and German regimes: strains between fascists and conservatives, between leader and party, and between party and state. In Berlin, he argues, the first was rapidly settled in favour of the fascists, but in Rome ultimately in that of the conservatives, in part because of the continuing role of the Italian monarchy. The second ended with far more

power in the hands of the leader in Germany than in Italy. The upshot of the third tilted more towards the state in Italy, and to the party in Germany. Paxton ends his comparison by looking at the dynamic of the two regimes. He concludes that they became truly radicalized only when wars of conquest opened up new territories in which the party, freed from the restraints of the domestic state, gained something like total control on the ground—in Ethiopia, Poland and the captured areas of the Soviet Union. In doing so, they revealed their own limits: millions were murdered at their hands, but no coherent administrations were created.

How do the two overall approaches of Mann and Paxton, offering such different judgements of the ideological cogency, sociological basis, and political regimes of fascism, compare? Mann's insistence on the decisive importance of fascist ideology places him close to George Mosse and Zeev Sternhell, who have argued that fascism possessed a doctrinal coherence no less defensible than that of the other great 'isms', particularly socialism. But his way of describing it is in one respect somewhat more down-to-earth. 'Fascism', he writes, 'is the pursuit of a transcendent and cleansing nation-statism through paramilitarism'. On the face of it, this formula seems to combine an ideology (nation-statism) with a tactic (paramilitarism), but Mann regards the latter as also a 'value'. There can be no quarrel with the tactical part of such a definition. Classic fascism invented the party militia as a distinctive form of political organization, and this gave it an enormous advantage in relation to all of its competitors. It is a merit of Mann's to see this more clearly than many sociologists have done.

But the major weight of Mann's definition falls on ideological beliefs in a more traditional sense. "To understand fascism", he declares, "I adopt a methodology of taking fascists' values seriously". Few authors have dwelt so insistently on the power of fascist ideology. 'Fascism', we are told, 'was a movement of high ideals, able to *persuade* a substantial part of two generations of young men that it could bring about a more harmonious social order'. A persistent failure of Marxist approaches to fascism, Mann thinks, has been an inability to appreciate the attractive force of these ideals, leading to the blind alley of a class analysis that is doomed to fail as an *interpretative* sociology of fascism. Such analysts view fascism 'from outside', a perspective that would have made little sense to fascists, who dismissed class theories as they did every other aspect of Marxism. For Mann, the linchpin of their characteristic outlook was the idea of transcendence. 'Fascist nation-statism', as he puts it, 'would be able to "transcend" social conflict, first repressing those who fomented strife—and then incorporating classes and other interest groups into state corporatist institutions'. This formulation seems to be mostly adapted from *Italian* fascist doctrine of the late twenties and early thirties, although the intellectual sources here are not carefully explained. As Mann

himself admits, there is very little Nazi doctrine that could be interpreted as class transcendence: 'the shape of the future Reich was left to Hitler, and he was not too specific'.

How convincing is this account of fascist ideology? It suffers from two weaknesses. The first is simply that in so far as 'class transcendence' played any role in the outlook of black- or brownshirts, it was not class as a sociological fact, but the liberal way of institutionalizing it, that fascism sought to transcend. Italian doctrines, always more articulated than German, were quite explicit about this. It was Giuseppe Bottai, one of the regime's leading theorists, who made the point most clearly. In a collection of essays published in 1928, he accepted that conflict among economic interests was a normal and healthy process. The problem was to make sure that it did not damage or threaten the state. 'When we say that in Italy there is class collaboration rather than class struggle', wrote Bottai, 'we certainly do not want to say that the interests that divide individuals and categories do not exist. Corporativism is a conception that is realistic enough not to fall into such delusions.' But quite apart from this, there is also a serious chronological difficulty in Mann's account. Before the late twenties and early thirties, there is little enough that is relevant for his case to draw on even in Italy. It is hard to escape the conclusion that much of fascist doctrine was an after the fact and arbitrary affair. This is not to say that fascist ideology was of no significance. Mann is undoubtedly right to emphasize the peculiar fusion of a cult of violence with flamboyant symbology as a hypnotic element in fascism. What he fails to address is the critical issue of the typical relationship between 'values' and action, theory and practice, in fascist movements.

Paxton is much more sceptical of fascist claims to doctrinal coherence than Mann. The part that programmes and doctrine play in fascism is, he writes, 'fundamentally unlike the role they play in conservatism, liberalism, and socialism'. For fascism made no appeal to ascertainable or universal truths, indeed frequently scorning the very notion of them. What it relied on instead was emotional mobilization behind the charisma of its leaders, and the call to destiny of the race or nation. 'The rightness of fascism does not depend on the truth of any of the propositions advanced in its name', he writes. Rather than trying to reconstruct a coherent programmatic outlook from its contradictory assertions, Paxton argues, it makes more sense to plot fascism against the changing structure of political opportunities and social forces it encountered. Not that it was ever a purely pragmatic phenomenon. A drive to national and social domination was intrinsic to it, from beginning to end. But no philosophical structure of significance issued from fascism, whose ideology never received 'intellectual underpinnings by any system builder, like Marx, or by any major critical intelligence, like Mill, Burke, or Tocqueville'.

Paxton's deflation of the potency of fascist doctrine as a set of lofty goals and persuasive beliefs is an effective antidote to Mann's idealizations of them. Sternhell and others have, of course, sought to construct impressive intellectual pedigrees for fascist ideology. But these tend to rest on forced extrapolations from assorted forerunners, from Gobineau to Nietzsche, of an earlier epoch. Once in power, fascism did attract at least two gifted thinkers who offered legitimations of it, Giovanni Gentile and Carl Schmitt. But in each case, adherence was *ex post facto*. Neither had much influence on the regimes they served. On the other hand, this absence of systematic theory, in contrast with other ideological systems, was more a symptom than a definition of the real difference between fascism and its rivals. That lay in the fact that fascism was, as Paxton justly notes, a radically *non-programmatic* style of political thinking. Liberalism, socialism and conservatism are in principle all based on cognitively assessable claims about the present state of the world and its future possibilities. With them it is natural to speak of a relationship between means and ends, tactics or strategy and the goals at which these aim.

Fascist ideology did not possess this structure. It was rather an immanent form of political 'thinking', in which tactics—above all violence—acted as placeholders for values, instead of stepping-stones within an overarching, positive political project (like Mann's 'organic nation-statism'). As Gentile put it, fascism 'is not a philosophy that thinks itself, but rather a philosophy that acts itself, and therefore a philosophy that announces and affirms itself not with formulae, but with action'. Unlike socialism, fascism did not claim to convert objective historical possibilities into a political programme. It took action itself as the immediate realization of its doctrine. It follows that an interpretative sociology which imputes fascist actions to a set of overarching goals—'moral absolutes', as Mann describes them—is liable to miss much in the character of fascist subjectivity itself.

What of the social bases of fascism? Mann's most original claim is to have located a distinctive core constituency for it, across all the cases he has studied, among young highly educated men, public employees, and economic sectors linked to the state. These groups, he contends, constituted the natural carriers of fascist ideology, because 'from their slightly removed vantage point they viewed class struggle with distaste, favouring a movement claiming to transcend class struggle'. On the first score, there can be little doubt of the magnitude of Mann's empirical achievement. Not even the most ambitious work within the field of comparative fascism has attempted to produce systematic cross-national evidence on fascist party and militia membership across six countries. His book will be a gold mine for further work in the field for years to come. To say this is not to assent to every conclusion he derives from his own findings. A number of caveats are in

order here. One is simply that for Mann's thesis to hold, he must demonstrate that what he terms 'nation-statist' core groups were over-represented in fascist parties, *in relation to other political parties*. Does he show this? To assemble reliable evidence for fascist parties across such a range of cases was difficult enough; to muster comparable data for other parties might be thought nearly impossible, yet Mann comes very close to doing so. The results, however, do not seem to bear out his principal claim particularly well. At the very least one should expect public employees to be considerably over-represented in the ranks of fascist as opposed to other parties. But the Italian evidence shows that the Catholic Partito Popolare had a higher percentage of them than Mussolini could command. German data indicate that the Nazis had proportionately more party members among state employees than the parties of the left, but also make it clear that non-Nazi parties of the right all had higher percentages of public employees than the Nazis in the late twenties. In Hungary, Arrow Cross deputies elected in 1939 were much less likely to be public servants than those on the government bench. The upshot of these findings is, at the very least, ambiguous. They do not seem to show that the key cadres of fascism were outstandingly 'nation-statist'; they point rather to a more modest conclusion, that parties of the right in general did well among state-linked constituencies.

If Mann's positive argument is thus shakier than it looks, what of his negative claim that fascism had little to do with class? Since he maintains that its nation-statist core constituency had a 'distaste' for class struggle, he seems called upon to show not only that fascists were never recruited from any conventional positions in the class structure, but also that they were reluctant to engage in struggles against other classes. However, apart from a very good discussion of Italian agrarian conflicts, class struggles—indeed struggles of any kind—play very little role in Mann's book, save in the case of Spain, which he excludes from those countries that generated mass fascism. Another way of making the same point is simply to ask: what were the fascist paramilitaries *doing*? Here the answer is inescapable: they were fighting socialists and communists and the forms of class organization that these parties had constructed. Mann is of course correct to point out that violence possessed a symbolic as well as instrumental value for the fascists. But the plain fact is that the main activity of their squads was to destroy class-based organizations of the labour movement. It seems a little odd to argue then that fascists viewed the class struggle with distaste; they engaged in it with violent enthusiasm.

Another difficulty with Mann's argument is that, again with the exception of Spain, it in practice restricts consideration of class structure to urban industrial groups. Surprisingly, the importance of agrarian class structures is nowhere dealt with systematically in *Fascists*. Yet rural strata have played a



prominent part in much of the best Marxist work on fascism since Gramsci, and class struggles in the countryside were decisive in the germination of fascism, as Paxton emphasizes. Landholders large and small were a significant component of Italian and German, as well as of Austrian, fascism. In Hungary and Romania, on the other hand, fascist movements penetrated the industrial working class to an extent they never did farther west, but failed to attract significant support from big landholders. Mann suggests that proletarian support for the Arrow Cross and Iron Guard can be related to the role of the state in industrial development in these two countries, making the working class part of the nation-statist core. But was the state less involved in Italian and German economic development? This seems implausible.

But the brunt of Mann's case lies elsewhere. For Hungary and Romania occupy a crucial position in his overall theory of fascism. Here, after all, appears the decisive evidence against Marxist or other class-based explanations of it, since not only was there no threat from the left in either country, but labour itself freely enrolled in the cause of nation-state 'transcendence'. In this sense, the Arrow Cross and Legion of the Archangel Michael are the *pièce de résistance* of his whole empirical—and theoretical—argument. Here, however, his essentially static comparative approach reveals its shortcomings. For what it ignores is the temporal interconnexion between the different cases it offers up for inspection. The fascist movements in Hungary and Romania took off only after Nazism had come to power in Germany, and the influence and prestige of Hitler's regime radiated throughout Eastern Europe. Because they arose well after the destruction or crippling of socialist movements in their respective countries, they could—as Mann himself notes—operate as a surrogate for labour protest, rather than a front line of defence against it, under conservative authoritarian regimes that allowed little or no space for the political left. But just because they did *not* fulfil the classic historical function of fascism, they never achieved power, for the dominant social order had no real need for them. So, as one might expect, neither the Arrow Cross nor the Iron Guard developed any paramilitary organization of much significance. At best, the Second World War allowed the latter to nest for a few months within the Antonescu dictatorship, before being crushed by it; and the former to serve as German proxies of the last hour, before the Red Army took Budapest. In effect, the Hungarian and Romanian cases cannot bear the intellectual weight Mann puts on them. Their very departure from the Italo-German norm illustrates rather than disproves the class logic Mann wants to refute.

Paxton makes no such error. Without foregrounding the issue of the social base of fascism, he provides a strikingly different picture of its rationale. In both Italy and Germany, he argues, alliances between urban and rural property-holders were the key to the ability of fascist movements to 'take root'

in the political system. Where either one of these elements—radicalized right-wing urban strata, or a terrified landholding class—were missing, fascism failed to take hold. At no point does Paxton provide the kind of systematic data in which Mann's book is so rich, but his focus on the intersection of rural and urban class conflict provides a more satisfactory framework for understanding the dynamics of ascending fascism in the two European societies where it triumphed—as well as the reasons for its failure in interwar France—than a vague and over-extended notion of nation-statism.

But the most fundamental difference in the propositions of the two books is the role of a revolutionary threat from the left. This is foregrounded in Paxton's explanation of the rise of fascism in the countries where it was eventually successful. 'It is essential', he writes, 'to recall how real the possibility of communist revolution seemed in Italy in 1921'. Likewise, he insists that Hitler's victory in 1933 can only be understood against the background of the expanding Communist vote in Germany in the early thirties. This contrasts very sharply with Mann's dismissal of the Red threat as an objectively significant variable (even if here and there the possessing classes over-reacted to it). For Paxton, by contrast, it was this danger that determined acceptance of fascism into power from above by conservative forces. Where it was absent, paramilitary attempts to seize power by fascists from below were invariably crushed, not just in Europe but elsewhere too—he cites Vargas's repression of the green-shirts in Brazil, and could have added similar failures in Japan. Even after the Nazi conquest of most of Europe, Hitler himself was no more trustful of local fascist enthusiasts than were other authoritarians of the period, since there was little need for them. Only in Croatia, not included in Mann's otherwise comprehensive coverage, did Berlin permit the unleashing of a fully fledged native fascism.

Last but not least, how do the two works match up as portraits of fascist regimes? There is a sense in which the question is unfair, since Mann does not attempt to move systematically beyond them as movements, promising treatment of their performance in power in a subsequent volume. But since this, he explains, will be concerned with a general taxonomy of modern ethnic cleansing, it is not clear how far it will in this sense complement *Fascists*. More importantly, however, Mann appears to doubt whether any overall analysis of fascism in power is actually possible, on the grounds that 'an explanation of fascist regimes would be largely confined to two cases. Comparative analysis cannot deal with such small numbers'. This seems perverse. Since Germany and Italy were the only two cases of the passage of fascist movements to fascist regimes, isn't their disciplined *contrast* with other cases within the authoritarian half of Europe, and particularly other cases with mass fascism that *did not* produce fascist regimes, likely to yield important results? Mann's way of conceptualizing his problem blocks him

from posing the question of when and why mass fascist movements were able to achieve state power. It is striking how little treatment either the March on Rome, or the Nazi *Machtergreifung* receive in Mann's book. The reason for this absence is that explaining fascist movements and explaining fascist regimes are separate historical issues—four out of six of Mann's cases were, after all, movements existing within regimes that on his own account were corporatist, not fascist. The fact is that whatever the social composition of these movements, it was only when traditional power-holders were willing to give them office that regimes resulted. Paradoxically, then, while Mann provides an unprecedented wealth of material on fascists, he tells us surprisingly little about fascism.

One of the reasons for this may lie in his initial postulate that fascism was a revolutionary phenomenon, from which he deduces that had fascist regimes been able to develop in their pure form, they would have established a distinctive type of post-capitalist society. This claim leads to a peculiar gap in the book, in which the actual workings of these regimes have only a marginal place in his analysis. Since he treats fascism essentially as a *movement* driven by ideological goals, Mann can skirt the pragmatic realities of its rule. In one of the strangest passages of the book he writes: 'In discussing fascism, the most extreme of the authoritarian family, I am discussing less actual regimes than the future regimes envisaged by the larger fascist movements'. Such an approach makes it impossible to identify fascism as a concrete set of political institutions. The difficulty is clearest in Mann's attempt to contrast fascism with other types of authoritarian regime, which yields such impenetrable formulations as this: 'fascism provided a discontinuity, reversing the flow of power by adding a "bottom-up" mass movement centred on paramilitarism and electoralism, while also increasing coercive powers from the top'. What is perhaps most striking in this vague convoluted reference is the absence of any reference to the party-state complex characteristic of the classic fascist regimes.

What lies behind this surprising failure of conceptualization in a sociologist of Mann's stature? One answer may lie in his commitment to treating fascism as a revolutionary force inspired by transcendent ideological goals. Since fascist regimes—with their hybrid states, originating compromises with conservative elites, and often chaotic arrangements—clearly did not establish new social orders, they sit rather uneasily with this vision. There could also be a disciplinary element at work. Fascist regimes are difficult to grasp within the normal categories of political sociology, because they are not best understood as a fixed set of institutions, but were rather shifting congeries, rife with competing power-centres and ad hoc compromises, in which stable patterns of interaction are very hard to discern.

Paxton's book brings this home with great force. In two exemplary chapters, he traces the ways in which power was variably distributed and exercised under Mussolini and Hitler, examining four distinct agencies: leader, party, state and 'civil society' (often wrongly imagined to have been extinguished). One of the greatest strengths of the resulting account is its demonstration of how important periodization is in any comparison of the Italian and German regimes. Contrary to popular stereotypes, Paxton shows that in its early stages (up to 1924), Italian fascism was *more* violent than its German counterpart, just as the PNF was initially in a stronger position vis-à-vis Mussolini than the NSDAP with respect to Hitler. Later, these relationships were reversed, as the Duce consolidated his power and increasingly tended to subordinate party to state—relying on the traditional bureaucracy for his (very efficient) police repression, rather than on a specially created apparatus run by the party as in Germany. Along the way, Paxton offers a vivid portrait of the contrasting styles of the two dictators in the thirties: 'while Mussolini toiled long hours at his desk, Hitler continued to indulge in the lazy bohemian diletantism of his art-student days', shunning ministers, often unavailable to aides, ignoring urgent affairs of state, sunk in personal whims and daydreams.

Was there then any common constellation of fascist institutions? Paxton offers instead an arresting image: 'fascist regimes functioned like an epoxy: an amalgam of two very different agents, fascist dynamism and conservative order, bonded by shared enmity toward liberalism and the Left, and a shared willingness to stop at nothing to destroy their common enemies'. The suggestion of an endemic institutional shapelessness is reinforced by Paxton's analysis of the final radicalization of each regime. For it was precisely in this phase, amidst all-out continental war, when party bosses controlled significant territory, and one might have expected some less composite forms of rule to crystallize, that disorder was most displayed. 'The fragmented Nazi administrative system', Paxton writes, 'left the radicals unaccountable, and able to enact their darkest impulses. The Führer, standing above and outside the state, was ready to reward initiative in the jungle of Nazi administration of the eastern occupied territories'.

The Final Solution itself was, as Paxton shows, in part the result of an uncoordinated set of population expulsions carried out by party satraps in the East. Little could be further from the image of a consistent ideology implemented by a single-minded bureaucratic machine. Hans Mommsen thought Nazism had an 'inherent tendency toward self-destruction', and it was no accident that 'pure' fascist regimes were never institutionalized. The radically anti-programmatic character of fascist ideology militated against that. The epoxy was a pact of domination, not a constitution—Hitler was so indifferent to the formalities of the latter that he never even bothered to rescind the charter of the Weimar Republic.

While Paxton's *Anatomy* provides an admirable overview of the respective trajectories of Italian and German fascism, one fundamental dimension of the 'epoch of fascism' is nevertheless missing from it, as it is also from Mann's *Fascists*. There is no discussion in either work of imperialism. Yet mass industrial warfare was at once a decisive condition and consequence of fascist movements and regimes. As Paxton writes, 'War played a circular role in fascist regimes. Early fascist movements were rooted in an exaltation of violence sharpened by World War I, and war-making proved essential to the cohesion, discipline, and explosive energy of fascist regimes'. But neither he nor Mann explains where early twentieth-century war came from. Mann has tackled the origins of the Great War in the second volume of his *Sources of Social Power*, while Paxton has shown how crucial considerations of overseas empire were to the calculus of power in Vichy France. But, although Paxton rightly stresses the location of fascism in the defeated or frustrated powers of 1918, the overall context of inter-state competition—obviously as fundamental in the outbreak of the Second World War as the First—plays little role in either author's explanation of fascism.

This failing has a common effect on the conclusion of both books. For, after so many differences, they end in complete agreement that anything like historic fascism is impossible in the advanced capitalist world today, because of the basic solidity of liberal democracy in this region. Each then looks outside the capitalist core in search of the closest analogies to interwar fascism. If Latin America, the former Soviet bloc, Central or Southern Asia appear to offer the most favourable terrain for any future fascism, both Mann and Paxton take a measured and sceptical view of its chances of revival even there. These judgements are persuasive enough. But neither writer quite explains why it should be so, for both fail—at any rate here—to register the fundamental geopolitical differences between the contemporary period and the fascist epoch. Historical fascism arose in an age of imperialism and revolution, in which capital and the nation-state were symbiotic structures; the fragmentation of the world market after 1914, amidst a general turn toward protectionism, autarky and militarism, paved the way not only for extreme forms of violent nationalism but also the Great Depression.

But as often pointed out in the pages of this journal, most recently by Giovanni Arrighi, since 1945 the basic political economy of the capitalist world has differed profoundly from that of the interwar period. Market integration and monocentric empire, rather than autarky and plural imperialisms, now characterize the advanced capitalist zone. There is no contemporary counterpart to the armaments race between competing capitalist powers, or pressure to incorporate restive masses through extreme nationalism, of the first half of the twentieth century. What about the semi-periphery, which both Mann and Paxton identify as the most likely breeding-grounds for new

forms of fascism? In these regions, especially the Indian subcontinent, a situation of roughly balanced nation-states and geopolitical competition suggests some analogies to the thirties. What is missing, however, is any threat from a radicalized working class or peasantry. In India the BJP rose to power instead through a political vacuum created by the erosion of Congress, in the context of a global triumph of neoliberalism. In the end the story is perhaps simpler than either Paxton or Mann would lead us to believe. For it is the sway of the United States in both the capitalist core and the semi-periphery that has removed any proximate possibility of a return of fascism, both by eliminating the threat of a society beyond capital, and by re-organizing relations among the capitalist powers themselves on strictly pacific lines. How long the *Pax Americana* will last is a more open question.

# BOITEMPO

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## EDITORIAL



### MARGEM ESQUERDA N. 4

(Left Margin No. 4)

This issue presents six essays discussing political representation and the modern role of political parties, with contributions by **Emir Sader**, **John Holloway**, **Ricardo Antunes** and others, as well as a provocative interview with **Michael Löwy** and articles by **Paulo Arantes**, **Jorge Grespan**, **Francisco de Oliveira** and **José Luis Fiori**.

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