

# New Fascism—American Style?

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“A fascist government is a one-party system, highly centralized and authoritarian, with rigid control over every phase of a nation’s life...This government is militaristic, nationalistic and imperialistic and it claims dogmatic political faith.”

—Herbert Matthews of the *New York Times* on Nazi Germany

Liberation News Service — It can no longer be accepted that the troubles of our government and our society stem from men who are well-meaning but misguided, that if the conservative Lyndon Johnson were replaced by a liberal Kennedy things would be substantially different, that the Vietnam war is in any manner of speaking a mistake.

Nor can it be accepted that the approaches practiced by the Johnson administration in Vietnam, in urban America or in regard to civil liberties are in any way alien to the ideology of American liberalism. On the contrary, the excesses of the Johnson administration are the ultimate expression of American liberalism.

Liberalism as it is practiced in America is a profoundly conservative doctrine. The two-party system here is based on Lockean consensus—property rights, representative democracy and corporate privilege are the assumptions; the parties differ basically on how best to maintain the status quo. The liberal-reformist approach has dominated since 1932.

Liberalism combines a smattering of humanitarianism with the often correct observation that the best way to preserve the status quo is to get at the causes of unrest, poverty, people turning to communism, etc. In this way the Marshall Plan was sold and this too was the rhetoric of much of the Kennedy reform of the early sixties.

But when liberal reform fails to cope with the needs of the people on the bottom we find that the essence of liberalism is not humanitarians but rather social control. The Rostow approach to “underdevelopment” is the classic case. The American approach to the Third World is couched in the rhetoric that fast industrialization along the lines of parliamentary capitalist democracy is the best way to serve the needs of a starving people. (That such development serves the needs of American corporate capital is also evident.)

All American aid moves from this basic assumption of development—the rest is detail. When deviations alien to that system of development such as revolution in Cuba or Vietnam or radical reform in the Dominican Republic occur—the international guard is called out.

It would be nice to be able to deal with this in terms of strict economic exploitation and imperialism, but that explanation, while important, is not entirely adequate. There is simply too much more involved.

The Rostow approach to international development is mirrored in the Kerr approach to education, the Daley approach to domestic reform, the Humphrey ex-ADA approach to civil liberties. The key words are elitism and order; there is no strict philosophy to their actions, each approach their domain with a general view whose rhetoric is based on the needs of the general welfare. Each will listen to those who are being administrated but only with the clear understanding that ultimate power resides at the top. To ignore the administrative decision is to break the law and create disorder—in no cases will this be tolerated.

Indeed, this is the one thing that cannot be tolerated, for personal self-determination on the bottom is a threat to the entire carefully ordered structure. The elite of the party machines, the labor and management corporations and the other spin-off corporations (such as education and welfare) maintain a semblance of democracy while basing their existence on a totalitarian stability of the law and order designed by the legislatures they in fact control.

A serious challenge to that order, however grounded in moral right, will always evoke a hard-line response in the name of law and against “anarchy.”

Thus insurrection in the ghettos, which could ultimately have been avoided by allowing them to become self-contained financial and political communities, is less a price for a mayor to pay than allowing poverty funds to be handled on a local level.

Thus the liberal mayor of New York prefers to spend \$500,000 a day on the National Guard rather than allow garbage men \$130 a week in an “illegal” strike. Thus university administrators will suffer a sit-in to preserve their own autocratic rule.

Why? In one sense it seems we are confronted with a bunch of scared, insecure men deathly afraid of “alien ideologies.” The system of bureaucracy and consensus is so ingrained in our culture that men in power have lost their psychological tolerance for any conflict whatever.

As Wayne State University historian Norman Pollack has said: “[We face] the desire to eliminate uncertainty from one’s existence. Rigid ego-defenses are erected against seeing what one does not want to see. Conflict cannot be tolerated. Contrary ideas cannot be tolerated. Contrary ideas cannot be admitted, for fear they will threaten one’s very identity.”

But ultimately we must recognize that the threat to these bureaucrats is real. American society is now being strained as it never was before. The liberal reform of modern social science has proved inadequate and can never cope with the real physical and psychological shortcomings of life on the bottom or even in the middle of the heap. The choice is between a radical relocation of the loci of social power or the police. The liberals, when pushed, rapidly and unabashedly join the conservatives in opting for the police.

This is not without precedent. If the socio-political approach of society’s leadership is based on the totalitarian assumption that a government can and must define order and the good life for all who live under it, then when that order is threatened it is only logical to expect a similar totalitarian response. Totalitarian liberalism, however humanitarian, helps lay the base for totalitarian reaction as well.

After World War I Italy and Germany found themselves caught between extreme dissatisfaction on the bottom and the remnants of corporate elitist control on the top. When challenged by a weaker revolutionary left the corporate (and formerly reformist) right played on the frustrations of the bourgeoisie to preserve a social structure in which they dominated. The rallying call was that of an authoritarian restoration of law and order; the call was maintained with a war economy and a liberal dose of racism.

All the same elements are present in the United States today. One does not use the term “fascist” lightly. To evoke the spectre of men who deliberately exterminated six million civilians, who built a society on racism and exploitation and whose scientists treated human beings as if they were mere objects to be experimented on is to evoke the worst human aberration the modern world has seen.

But it is time to realize that the United States is repeating all that Nazi Germany did. It is fighting its third war in less than thirty years against the yellow race; its politicians are playing on the racism of the middle and lower classes at home; its foreign and domestic “welfare” and “education” programs are based on the treatment of human beings as if they and their societies were objects to be administered into a preconceived mold of none of their own doing.

The economy of the country is increasingly based on war, the rhetoric of its welfare is continually based on military terminology, the country is purposely kept in a permanent state of national crisis and semi-panic, and everywhere the police are given freer rein and taken further away from public control.

If there are differences between the German Nazi party and the American liberal-conservative elite they are definable in differences of the objective conditions of the two countries at the two times, not in terms of the relative worth and needs of the reactionary elite. In Germany, Hitler needed storm troopers; here we have them too, in the form of police, but the terror is often subtler, consisting of the soft-sold lies of Dean Rusk and Lyndon Johnson, the sophisticated irrelevancy of the mass media, and the overbearing dehumanizing weight of a system which

demands that people give up their identity or lose their subsistence. Continuity is maintained by insuring that humanistic objection is labeled “dissent,” recognized as an oddity to be observed, not a guide to the behavior of real people.

In Germany the intellectual elite was exterminated, fled, or sold out; in America the social-science elite designed the plans for consolidation of control.

It is time to stop playing with words—these men are the fascists of a mass technocracy and must be recognized as such. If they can be stopped at all it is only by a disaffected, well-informed mass with a plan and a will for self-determination that can do it.

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