

## **The Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals**

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#### **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 preWar 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.