

DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- After acknowledging that progressives use the term ‘fascist’ as a derogatory term for conservatives, Mr. D’Souza goes on to ask, “...are they correct? To answer this question, we have to ask what fascism really means: What is its underlying ideology? Where does it even come from?” Why do you think that leftists so often tend to resort to name-calling in the first place? Why do you think that so many progressives use the term fascist, in political discourse or as a slur, without even knowing what a fascist actually is?
- Mr. D’Souza shares some history about the founding philosopher of fascism, Giovanni Gentile, then explains that, “Gentile believed that there were two ‘diametrically opposed’ types of democracy. One is liberal democracy, such as that of the United States, which Gentile dismisses as individualistic – too centered on liberty and personal rights – and therefore selfish. The other, the one Gentile recommends, is ‘true democracy,’ in which individuals willingly subordinate themselves to the state.” Do you agree with Gentile that a society centered on freedom is ‘selfish?’ Why or why not? Why do you think that Gentile, like today’s progressives, considers the model of all people willingly doing whatever the government tells them to do to be a ‘true democracy?’ Explain.
- Mr. D’Souza explains that in Gentile’s fascist ideal, “...all private action should be oriented to serve society; there is no distinction between the private interest and the public interest. Correctly understood, the two are identical... Consequently, to submit to society is to submit to the state, not just in economic matters, but in all matters. Since everything is political, the state gets to tell everyone how to think and what to do.” Do you want the government to control every aspect of your life all of the time, as would be the case if progressives successfully transformed the U.S. into a fascist state? Why or why not? Do you think socialism of any kind or to any degree fits with the ideals and values of the United States? Why or why not?
- Later in the video, Mr. D’Souza further explains that, “Fascists are socialists with a national identity,” and that, “Gentile’s work speaks directly to progressives who champion the centralized state. Here in America the left has vastly expanded state control over the private sector, from healthcare to banking, from education to energy. This state-directed capitalism is precisely what German and Italian fascists implemented in the 1930s.” Why do you think progressives want a centralized state? What is the significance of Mr. D’Souza pointing out that the Nazis and the Blackshirts also expanded state control over the private sector?
- Mr. D’Souza concludes the video by pointing out that, “Leftists can’t acknowledge their man, Gentile, because that would undermine their attempt to bind conservatism to fascism... To acknowledge Gentile is to acknowledge that fascism bears a deep kinship to the ideology of today’s left. So, they will keep Gentile where they’ve got him: dead, buried, and forgotten. But we should remember or the ghost of fascism will continue to haunt us.” Considering that fascism is actually a political model that shares values with the left, a model that the left thinks is so great, why do you think that progressives wish to associate conservatives with fascism rather than proudly own the term themselves? What do you think Mr. D’Souza means by his warning that ‘the ghost of fascism will continue to haunt us?’ Explain.

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: The Blackshirts

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “‘This Is the Violence of Which I Approve’ A short history of the political violence that helped Mussolini attain power,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What motivated the early fascists to unite? What was fascist violence initially used for? How did fascists spend their weekends? What would happen to people who refused to let the fascists into their homes to ‘talk?’ How did the Blackshirts inflict ritual humiliation? Where did fascists attack candidates for the election in 1921? How many people were killed? How many provincial governments did the fascists control by the end of 1922? How did the fascists handle the press? How did Mussolini come to control the police? What purposes did political violence by the Blackshirt fascists serve, even after Mussolini took full control of Italy?
- Why do you think that the Blackshirts, and later the Nazis, used violence to actualize Gentile’s fascist philosophy? Explain. Knowing that actual fascists are violent members of a political group that work towards totalitarianism, do you consider the left’s comparison of American Republicans and conservatives to ‘fascists’ ridiculous? Why or why not?
- In what ways, specifically, are the points made in the video supported by this article? Explain.



QUIZ

IS FASCISM RIGHT OR LEFT?

- 1. Who is the philosopher of capitalism?**
 - a. Karl Marx
 - b. Giovanni Gentile
 - c. Adam Smith
 - d. George Washington

- 2. For Giovanni Gentile, fascism is a form of _____.**
 - a. capitalism
 - b. socialism
 - c. communism
 - d. feminism

- 3. The word Nazi is a contraction of what terms?**
 - a. "new socialist"
 - b. "neutral socialist"
 - c. "natural socialist"
 - d. "national socialist"

- 4. The left wants to place the resources of the individual and industry in the service of a centralized state.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

- 5. The left has vastly expanded state control over the private sector to include _____.**
 - a. healthcare
 - b. education
 - c. energy
 - d. All of the above.



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http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/fascism/2017/01/how_italian_fascists_succeeded_in_taking_over_italy.html

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“This Is the Violence of Which I Approve”

A short history of the political violence that helped Mussolini attain power.

By Michael Ebner



The Action Team of Lucca in 1922.

Jose Antonio/Wikimedia Commons

Excerpted from Ordinary Violence in Mussolini's Italy by Michael R. Ebner. Published by Cambridge University Press.

During the high tide of “*squadristo*,” members of the *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* movement, who would form the official Fascist party by 1922, mobilized tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands, of Italian men who carried out thousands of acts of brutal violence within their own communities and neighboring cities, towns, villages, and hamlets.

Before this “takeoff” in provincial fascism, the Fascists were initially an urban phenomenon, motivated primarily by nationalism. They desired revenge against the Socialists and others who had not supported Italy’s participation in the Great War. Even before the war’s end, veterans who would later become Fascists were calling for the extirpation of Italy’s “internal enemies,” whom they held responsible for Italy’s crushing defeat to the Austro-Hungarian and German forces at the 1917 Battle of Caporetto.¹ Fascist attacks against Socialists, according to Benito Mussolini, were like assaults “on an Austrian trench.” He declared, “This is heroism...This is the violence of which I approve and which I exalt. This is the violence of Fascism.”²

The rise of fascism in the provinces of the Po Valley, in northern Italy, occurred in reaction to the remarkable postwar growth of Socialist power. During the *biennio rosso* (red two years), between 1918 and 1920, Socialists made huge electoral gains nationally and locally, while labor unions unleashed a wave of strikes unprecedented in Italian history. In the Po Valley, the Socialists established a virtual “state within a state,” winning control of municipal government, labor exchanges, and peasant leagues (unions). Socialists also founded cooperatives, cultural circles, taverns, and sporting clubs.³ Such working-class organizations exercised their power largely through legal means—elections, boycotts, strikes, and demonstrations—which nonetheless often led to clashes with police, with injuries and deaths on both sides.

Political culture and the social order had been radically altered, with rough peasants and workers occupying the halls of power and red flags hanging from town halls. For landowners, life in this new “red” state meant higher wages, higher taxes, reduced profits, lost managerial authority, deteriorating private property rights, and the threat of social revolution. Moreover, displays of red flags, busts of Marx, and internationalist slogans offended nationalist and patriotic middle-class sentiments.⁴ Conservatives denounced the “red terror” and “atrocities” of this period, though the landowners and middle classes were in little real physical danger.⁵ They were not physically assaulted, nor were their homes, offices, or private property damaged or destroyed. Yet, from their perspective, they lived in a world turned upside down. The Socialists had virtually “taken over,” and the liberal state appeared to have lost control of law and order.

In the provincial centers, Fascist violence was initially used to break the Socialist hold on local administration and labor organizations. Fascists interrupted meetings, beat elected officials, and made impossible the work of local government. Socialists in particular were intimidated, threatened, and even beaten until they resigned. The consequences for the Socialist Party, which was entirely unprepared to counter organized, paramilitary violence, were disastrous. In the province of Bologna, one of “reddest” provinces in the entire Po Valley, where the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) received almost three-quarters of the vote in 1919, the Fascists demolished the Socialist Party in a matter of months. Between March and May 1921, the squads destroyed dozens of newspapers offices, chambers of labor, peasant leagues, cooperatives, and social clubs.⁶

Throughout northern and central Italy, Fascists replicated this feat. Having conquered major provincial centers, Fascists spread out into small towns and hamlets. Major cities provided launching points for attacking other cities. Having consolidated power in these places, the squads then moved into more peripheral areas. Newly founded *fasci* were local initiatives, organized by Fascists who understood the life of the place. The leaders were often locals who bore a particular grudge against Socialists, whether economic, political, or personal. When necessary, stronger *fasci* nearby lent paramilitary support. After rooting Socialists out of a community, Fascists commonly held a public ceremony inaugurating the new *fascio*. As fascism penetrated smaller rural communities, it became a mass movement without precedent in Italian history.

As Adrian Lyttelton has noted, the most immediate and powerfully symbolic form of *squadrist* violence was the annihilation of the institutions of the Socialist Party, “but the ‘conquest’ of Socialist organizations and municipalities was reinforced and made possible by terror exercised against individuals.”⁷ The peasant leagues, cooperatives, labor halls, and social clubs—the entire infrastructure of the Socialist “state”—were intensely parochial institutions, organized around popular, charismatic political and labor leaders.⁸

Fascist squads thus practiced highly personal, localized strategies of violence and intimidation, attacking the most prominent and influential “subversives” within a given province, town, or *comune*. Fascists sometimes beat these men, occasionally with homicidal intent, but perhaps more commonly intimidated them until they were forced to leave town, thereby decapitating their organizations. The Fascists spent their weekends chasing prominent peasant leaders across the countryside.



Thus, life for labor leaders became terror-filled, especially because Fascists did not limit their attacks to the public sphere. Nowhere was safe. Late at night, 10, 30, or even 100 Blackshirts, as these squad members became known, sometimes traveling from neighboring towns, might surround a home, inviting a Socialist, anarchist, or Communist outside to talk. If they refused, the Fascists would enter forcibly or threaten to harm the entire family by lighting the house on fire.⁹

In small towns, where everyone knew everyone, Fascists inflicted ritual humiliation on their enemies, a powerful strategy of terror understood by all. Blackshirts forced their opponents to drink castor oil and other purgatives, and then sent them home, wrenching with pain and covered in their own feces. In some cases, squads forced their enemies to defecate on politically symbolic objects: pages of a speech, a manifesto, a red flag, and so on. After administering a castor oil treatment, Fascists sometimes drove prominent anti-Fascist leaders around in lorries in order to reduce them in the eyes of their own supporters.¹⁰ They also accosted their opponents in public, stripped them naked, beat them, and handcuffed them to posts in piazzas and along major roadways.¹¹

Although individual working-class leaders might have been willing to live under the constant threat of physical attacks, most were unwilling to subject their families to such danger. Deprived of leadership, meeting places, offices, records, and sympathetic Socialist town councils, the landless peasantry became subject to the landowners’ conventional tactics of strike breaking and intimidation. Having broken the leagues, the Fascists then forced the laborers into “politically neutral” (Fascist) syndicates. Vulnerable peasants had little choice but to join. Landowners used their newfound position of power to restore labor relations to the 19th century status quo.

The squadrist’ most explicit goal—destroying “Bolshevism”—was rapidly achieved, yet the violence continued unabated. Only by perpetuating this “revolutionary” situation could the Fascist movement undermine the liberal state and continue its push for political power. Additionally, at the local level, violence and criminality persisted more or less independent of any immediate larger political goals. The power of the Ras and the bonds of squadrist camaraderie depended on Fascists sustaining a state of lawlessness and initiating new attacks.¹² Illegal activities increased feelings of belonging and emotional interdependence among squadrists, making it more difficult for individual Blackshirts to pull out of the squads or refrain from violent acts. Any retreat, any return to normalcy, would have required dealing with potentially serious legal and psychological consequences.¹³ Violence thus became cyclical and self-sustaining. Squads perpetuated the environment of terror by constantly identifying new victims. Not

surprisingly, due to its intimate nature, Fascist violence was shaped by local conditions: petty feuds, personal rivalries, and other motives beyond mere class warfare.

Having “conquered” and “pacified” Socialist communities, Fascists next asserted domination over the political and symbolic use of public space. The Fascists tore down red flags, busts of Marx, and Socialist slogans, replacing them with the Italian flag, busts of the king, and the fasces. Marches, parades, and political ceremonies reinforced the perception that the Fascists now dominated public spaces only recently occupied by Socialists. This “performance” of Fascist dominance intimidated real and potential enemies, while also fostering cohesion and solidarity among the Blackshirts.¹⁴ It also served to reassure the provincial bourgeoisie that their dominant social position had been restored. Conservative and even moderate liberal provincial newspapers expressed support for the Blackshirts, praising their “patriotism” and respect for “law and order.”¹⁵

The new Fascist “state within a state” was very different from the preceding two years of Socialist hegemony. Through illegal violence, rather than elections, Fascists controlled government administration and destroyed the offices, newspapers, and cultural and social organizations of the Socialists, trade unions, and peasant leagues. Cyclical violence directed against local leaders prevented Socialists from reorganizing. Mass demonstrations, supported by the police and property-owning classes, were patriotic, reaffirming the primacy of the nation over internationalism. Politically, economically, and socially, traditional elites had reasserted their dominance over the laboring classes.

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Despite its broad geographic impact and the importance of large, coordinated, interprovincial squad activity, the Fascist “Revolution,” or reaction, largely consisted of thousands of intensely local episodes of violence. Fascists and their victims perceived squadristo as a continuation of the Great War, squads resorted to personal, highly symbolic, face-to-face violence and murder, rather than mass anonymous killing. In essence, although they could be exceeding brutal, Fascist squads practiced a selective, calibrated, and choreographed economy of violence.

Squad political violence started to erode the institutions of the liberal state even before the Fascists marched on Rome.¹⁶ Inside the parliament, deputies debated the legitimacy of squadristo. Right-wing Fascist sympathizers deemed it patriotic, and therefore just, while Socialist and anti-Fascist Liberals lamented the demise of the rule of law. Meanwhile, the governments of Ivanoe Bonomi (1921) and Luigi Facta (1922) seemingly failed to appreciate the scope of the phenomenon, issuing assurances that incidences of attacks against citizens and the state were “limited and isolated.”¹⁷ On one hand, this misperception seems justifiable. Accounts of murders, beatings, and arsons appeared, if at all, in local newspapers, often in the sections devoted to common crime.¹⁸ Political elites with no personal connection to the localities affected by Fascist terror thus might be excused for failing to comprehend its magnitude.

On the other hand, Fascist violence deeply affected national politics.¹⁹ The elections of May 1921, which brought 35 Fascists into the parliament, were preceded by a wave of squad violence that, in just two weeks, left 71 people dead and 216 wounded. Fascists attacked candidates in their home districts, in Rome, and even in the parliament. At the convening of the new legislature, the Fascist deputies refused to allow the Communist deputy, Francesco Misiano, to enter the chamber. Fascists had thus successfully pushed for, and attained, a system in which state agents and political leaders tolerated and even legitimized illegal right-wing violence inflicted on Socialists, Communists, Catholic *Popolari*, and anti-Fascist liberal moderates. Though its success was not inevitable, the 1922 March on Rome was a Fascist coup against a system whose institutional integrity had already been severely compromised.²⁰

The March on Rome has often been portrayed as a comic opera, a “bluff.” But as Giulia Albanese has shown, it was accompanied by serious, widespread violence. In provinces throughout Italy, paramilitary groups seized control of prefectures, telegraph offices, post offices, and rail stations. In Rome, Fascists

marched through popular neighborhoods and destroyed the offices and meeting places of left-wing newspapers, social clubs, and co-operatives.²¹

Fascists also raided the homes of nationally prominent politicians—including the former prime minister, Francesco Nitti—throwing their books and furniture out the window and lighting the pile on fire. Meanwhile, in the provinces, Fascists seized control of local administrations that had resisted up until then. By the end of 1922, Fascists or pro-Fascists controlled virtually every communal administration in Italy.²² Finally, the freedom of the press was severely curtailed. In the days following Oct. 28, 1922, Fascists prevented most major dailies from publishing news of events.²³

On Oct. 29, 1922, the Italian king appointed Mussolini prime minister. Mussolini presided over a mixed cabinet consisting of Fascists, Nationalists (who were absorbed by the Fascists in 1923), Liberals, and Popolari. Many political elites assumed that a Mussolini government would bring an end to two years of violent disorder, but it did not. By taking the portfolio of minister of the Interior for himself, he controlled the Italian police.²⁴ Political violence in the years after the March on Rome continued to serve the same purposes as before: it suppressed opposition, replaced Socialist and non-Fascist administrations, and extended Fascist control over the rest of Italy.²⁵ Mussolini occasionally decried the illegal activities of the squads, but they operated as the motor that drove his government along the road to dictatorship.

Excerpted from Ordinary Violence in Mussolini's Italy by Michael R. Ebner. Published by Cambridge University Press.

1. See Angelo Ventrone, *La seduzione totalitaria: Guerra, modernità, violenza politica, 1914–1918* (Rome, 2003), 211–54.

2. Mussolini, *OO*, XIII:64–6.

3. De Grazia, *Culture of Consent*, 6–10.

4. See Corner, *Fascism in Ferrara*, 76–84; and Lyttelton, “Fascism and Violence,” 259.

5. On the overstatement of “red violence,” see Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde*, 70–1.

6. Cardoza, *Agrarian Elites and Italian Fascism*, 340–1.

7. Lyttelton, “Fascism and Violence,” 266.

8. See Lupo, *Il fascismo*, 68–70.

9. On home invasions, see Partito Socialista Italiano, *Inchiesta socialista sulle gesta dei fascisti in Italia* (Milan, 1963), esp. 21–4; see also Franzinelli, *Squadristi*, 73.

10. Franzinelli, *Squadristi*, 77–8.

11. Lyttelton, “Fascism and Violence,” 266–7.

12. *Ibid.*, 268–9.

13. Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde*, 474–5.

14. Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde*, 135–39; Lyttelton, “Fascism and Violence,” 269.

15. On the support of provincial elites, see Corner, *Fascism in Ferrara*, 113–15; Cardoza, *Agrarian Elites and Italian Fascism*, 309–10; Snowden, *Fascist Revolution in Tuscany*, 56–7, 226n158. For examples of moderate and conservative press coverage, see Alberghi, *Il Fascismo in Emilia Romagna*, 267–8.

16. Giulia Albanese, *La Marcia su Roma: violenza e politica nella crisi dello stato liberale* (Bari, 2006).

17. Petersen, “Violence in Italian Fascism,” 285.

18. *Ibid.*, 286.

19. Franzinelli, *Squadristi*, 77–8.

20. Albanese, *Marcia su Roma*, 36–41.

21. On violence and March on Rome, see Albanese, *Marcia su Roma*, 117–18.

22. *Ibid.*, 119–21, 127.

23. *Ibid.*, 100–1.

24. Lyttelton, *Seizure of Power*, 8–9.

25. Albanese, *Marcia su Roma*, 176.

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