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State Power and Control: Core Elements of Fascism in FDR's Regime

Abstract

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), the hero of the Great Depression and WWII, employed fascist elements into American society. The term fascist is used as a mere epithet today, just as it was in the 1940s. Some argue it is a phenomenon of the political Right, others of the political Left. Notwithstanding, a definition, or a detailed description for the meaning of the term is hardly ever undertaken. The meaning of a term is essential if one hopes to find where it exists. Part of the task in this work is to attempt to define or describe the term fascism with as much detail as possible. Once the elements of fascism have been identified, historical evidence is analyzed. Going beyond FDR's own words, and analyzing the intent and consequences of his actions, can open the eyes of the unbeliever in affirming the proposition that core elements of fascism were deeply embedded in FDR's regime. FDR's American style fascism hid behind a front of apologetics for democracy. As with any other central planner, state power and control were the ultimate objectives. To these ends, FDR was wholly successful.

Keywords

Fascism, FDR, Franklin D Roosevelt, Roosevelt, state power and control, Nazi, Mussolini, American fascism, central planning, planned society, centralized government, planned economy, WWII, Great Depression, serfdom, fascist, despotism, statist

Introduction

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) enjoys a generous public image among many in academia, the media, and the entertainment industry. He is viewed by many to be among the top American statesmen of all time. Among the echelon, and sometimes even superior to, George Washington himself. Historiography surrounding Roosevelt has gone beyond clever revisionism and handpicked omissions into the realm of hagiography. He could do no wrong, and everything he did was for the good of the collective. His messages were often inspiring and patriotic. He went to war against the totalitarian regimes of Mussolini and Hitler to preserve western democracy. How could anyone charge FDR with having embraced the principles of the same totalitarian regimes with which he went to war against? This is precisely the paradox this work intends to address. However, before embarking on this quest, some points ought to be made clear. This is to say, terms will need to be defined. This step is critical, particularly if the term to be defined or described is political in nature. It is even tougher when the meaning of a term, especially a political term, changes or has proven to be confusing over time. Once the term has been defined or described with enough detail, historical evidence may then be analyzed, and conclusions drawn. The term to be defined is fascism. The subject, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Defining Fascism

There are times when the meaning of a term changes. On occasion, a term originally denotes a virtue, only later to be defined as a vice. Over time, sometimes the term reverts back to its original meaning (e.g., from vice to virtue). Short of creating a new term, when this happens, writers are often forced to insert an adjective ahead of the noun to inform the reader whether they are referring to the old meaning of the term or the new. For example, “classical liberalism,” as opposed to “modern liberalism.” It is important to understand the context and historical evidence associated with the changing of the meaning of a term, particularly when that term is associated with politics. This was the fate of the term “liberal,” which meant free markets, individual freedom, and a demand for natural rights as well as responsibilities.¹ According to scholar Amity Shlaes, it was “progressives and descendants of the New Dealers who have given liberalism a bad name.”² Shlaes notes that FDR successfully usurped “the term ‘liberal’ to make it mean almost the opposite,” no longer respecting the individual but the collective.³ On one of his “fireside chats,” FDR discussed two “schools of

¹ Amity Shlaes, “Will the Real Liberal Please Stand Up?” review of *The Age of Abundance: How Prosperity Transformed America’s Politics and Culture*, by Brink Lindsey, *Claremont Review of Books* VIII, No. 3 (Summer 2008): 46-47.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

thought” in American politics, the “liberal” and the “conservative.”⁴ To FDR, the liberal point of view embraced “progressive principles” and sought to engage government in finding and implementing “new remedies” to new challenges while rejecting “individual initiative and private philanthropy.”⁵ Government to FDR was the solution to any socioeconomic problem, whether real or manufactured, meaning a non-existent future problem. It is under Roosevelt that progressivism morphs into liberalism with force. On the floor of the United States House of Representatives, Fred Lewis Crawford, a Republican from Michigan, described the new school of liberalism in 1938 as one that “would have the Government do more and more about more and more of our economic activities until ultimately government will do all about everything.”⁶ In contrast to the long established traditional or classic liberalism, Crawford argues that this new liberalism “leads to a state-controlled, state-directed, and state-planned economy,” declaring the measure to be “nothing short of tyranny.”⁷ Except for the tyrannical remark made by Crawford, this was precisely what American philosopher John Dewey thought about liberalism. To Dewey, the old meaning of liberalism had to be reversed, meaning it no longer applied to individual freedom based on a vague set of natural

⁴ Franklin D. Roosevelt, Russell D. Buhite, and David W. Levy, *FDR's Fireside Chats*. First ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992, 133.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Cong. Rec.*, 75th Cong., 3rd sess., 1938, Vol. 83, pt. 1: 183.

⁷ Ibid.

rights, but to the freedom of government to organize, plan, and direct social action.⁸ He wrote, “Organized social planning, put into effect for the creation of an order in which industry and finance are socially directed in [*sic*] behalf of institutions that provide the material basis for the cultural liberation and growth of individuals,” was the only “method of social action” to realize the new liberalism.⁹ This idea of liberating government from its restraints was the American progressive version of a European movement that was transforming from the failure of socialism into fascism. In fact, John T. Flynn, a journalist and contemporary of Mussolini and FDR wrote, “The march of fascism would not have been possible had it not been for the leadership it got from men who were known as liberals or radicals. Fascism was a leftist job.”¹⁰ He later declares, “Fascism is a leftist product—a corrupt and diseased offshoot of leftist agitation.”¹¹

Fascism is not a term exclusive in the description of totalitarian regimes such as Mussolini’s Italy or Hitler’s Germany in the early twentieth century. Mussolini himself tried to make this claim. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported

⁸ John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action*, Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 2000, 60.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ John T. Flynn, *As We Go Marching*, Auburn, AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2007, 25.

¹¹ Ibid., 68.

in 1922 that Mussolini described fascism as “a purely Italian question” that did not apply to other nations, “just as bolshevism is a purely Russian matter.”¹² But this can be argued to be kindred to asserting that only Italians can speak Italian. This is clearly absurd, certainly a non-Italian may be capable of learning the Italian language, just as non-Italians may learn to be fascists. Flynn asserted, “It is fatuous to look upon fascism as a growth indigenous to any particular country.”¹³ Nevertheless, an accurate description of fascism is needed if one wishes to know where it exists. The amalgamation of the ingredients that constitute fascism can be argued to form a recipe, an ideology or doctrine, a characteristic behavior based on certain dispositions of human nature. Namely, power and control. Short of a revolution, the process involved in this transformation can be slow.

There have been many attempts at defining or describing fascism, from philosophers to famous writers such as Herbert George Wells (H. G. Wells). Wells was a “radical intellectual,” characterized as such by historian Paul Johnson, who defined the bearer of the term as a contradictory figure whose personal vices they loath in others, yet they cannot resist “to give advice to humanity on how to conduct its affairs.”¹⁴ True to this character, H. G. Wells wrote a scathing article

¹² “What Fascism is and Who Fascisti Are,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, St. Louis, Monday Evening, November 6, 1922, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/138636329/>.

¹³ John T. Flynn, *As We Go Marching*, sup., 76.

¹⁴ Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals: From Marx and Tolstoy to Sartre and Chomsky*, Harper Perennial Paperback Edition, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007, ix.

on the *New York Times* denouncing fascism and Mussolini, whom he declared to be “devoid of thought or intelligence.”¹⁵ Mussolini was “a Socialist of the extreme Left,” who later morphed his ideology into fascism, a political philosophy whose young adherents were highly emotional and poorly educated, writes Wells.¹⁶ It was an ideology that destroyed “all criticism and critical opposition,” using “young roughs to intimidate electors,” and “clearing out the last nests of independent expression in the universities.”¹⁷ Three months after H. G. Wells published his article in the *New York Times*, Tomaso Sillani, editor of *La Rassegna Italiana* in Rome, wrote a rebuttal to Wells’ conclusions that in fact asserted many of Wells’ points.¹⁸ For instance, Sillani acknowledged that “Black Shirts” resulted to violence, that Mussolini was a “revolutionary Socialist,” and that the state must “reject everything” it perceives as a threat or that might “undermine its rights.”¹⁹ Furthermore, Sillani’s version of fascism concurs with Dewey’s liberalism “in the subordination of the individual” to the state, the “organization of the labor corporations,” and experimentation, all meant to

¹⁵ H. G. Wells, “What is Fascism—And Why?” *New York Times* (1923-), Feb 06, 1927, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/what-is-fascism-why/docview/104264014/se-2>.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Tomaso Sillani, “In Defense of Fascism,” *Current History* (1916-1940) 26, no. 2 (1927): 179–86.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

achieve “lofty and superior ends” for the collective.²⁰ Another talented writer, Ayn Rand, defined fascism as “a governmental system with strong centralized power, permitting no opposition or criticism, controlling all affairs of the nation (industrial, commercial, etc.).”²¹ However, this definition applies only to a fully established despotic state, and the elements it enumerates are ingredients of fascism, which are non-exhaustive, any of which, considered in isolation, cannot be said to constitute fascism. Charlotte Twight, a scholar and historian, described the philosophy of fascism a little differently. She noted, “The essence of fascism is collectivism, which endows a group or ‘collective’ with rights superior to the rights of the individual.”²² Adding, “Like any form of collectivism, fascism empowers an elite to determine the specific purposes that other individuals in the society are compelled to serve.”

Notwithstanding, one of the most well-known philosophers of fascism was Giovanni Gentile. Flynn notes Gentile was a “liberal philosopher, second in fame only to Groce,” referring to Benedetto Groce, “Italy’s foremost contemporary philosopher.”²³ Gentile became Mussolini’s Minister of Education, and he used

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ayn Rand, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, New York: The New American Library, 1967, 226.

²² Charlotte Twight, *America’s Emerging Fascist Economy*, New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1975, 14.

²³ Flynn, *As We Go Marching*, sup., 35.

his position to condition Italy's youth into dreaming beyond facts and reality.²⁴ He encouraged them to have "faith in the necessity of the advent of an ideal reality, a conception of life which must not enclose itself within the limits of fact."²⁵ This utopian dream of Gentile needed to commence early in a youth's life, "from their most tender years."²⁶ Education, and all other forms of propaganda were necessary for the fascists to "foster the political and moral ideals of Fascism, so that the thought and the will of the solitary person, the Duce, becomes the thought and the will of the masses."²⁷ Professor A. James Gregor notes that fascism "found its intellectual and normative rationale in the thought of Giovanni Gentile."²⁸ As an intellectual figure of such caliber, it is important to understand Gentile's own views about fascism. As did Flynn and others, Gentile notes Mussolini was a socialist, edited a socialist paper, *Avanti*, then became a revolutionary fascist and started a new paper disseminating fascist principles, *Il Popolo d'Italia*.²⁹ For Gentile, all opposition to the fascist state, whether internal

²⁴ Ibid., 69.

²⁵ Ibid., 222.

²⁶ Giovanni Gentile, and A. James Gregor, ed. and trans., *Origins and Doctrine of Fascism*, New York: Routledge, 2017, 28-29.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., xiii.

²⁹ Ibid., 16-17.

or external, had to be eliminated, employing violence when deemed appropriate.³⁰ Fascism was nationalistic, meaning the state was infinitely more important than the individual, whose assigned tasks associated him with the collective, “belonging to the same unitary economic organism,” the state.³¹ It was totalitarian under the direction of a leader (il Duce) who controlled the market economy through a “corporative syndicalist regime.”³² Gentile declared, “Morality and religion, essential elements in every consciousness, must be there, but they must be subordinated to the laws of the State, fused in it, absorbed in it.”³³ To wit, fascism was anti-individualistic. Individuals “are means or instruments, rather than the subjects of the political life of the nation” where “liberty and discipline” exist, outside of which, “there is nothing.”³⁴ Mario Palmeri, another fascist philosopher, proclaimed that “the welfare of the State” was “above the welfare of the individual,” that idealism was above wants, “sacrifices above desires,” that fascism was “the antithesis and the nemesis of Individualism.”³⁵ Historian Jim

³⁰ Ibid. 17, 49.

³¹ Ibid., 25-29.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 31.

³⁴ Ibid., 40.

³⁵ Mario Palmeri, *The Philosophy of Fascism*, Chicago: The Dante Alighieri Society, 1936, 39.

Powell notes that FDR and Mussolini were both anti-individualistic, “that individualism was old-fashioned, an obstacle to progress.”³⁶ Notwithstanding, these are some of the main elements of fascism in Gentile’s view.

Flynn, a contemporary of Gentile in America and writing several years after Gentile, observed a number of characteristics essential to fascism, but he affirmed that isolating any one of them did not necessarily constitute the existence of fascism.³⁷ Just as any astute observer may note today, the term “fascist” in the 1940s was used in the same way an expletive was used, meaning it was nothing more than a “bad word” one calls another when a disagreement arises out of a social or political argument.³⁸ Notwithstanding, Flynn set out to pinpoint the characteristics or essential elements of fascism that, when combined, can reveal the development or existence of a fascist state. He enumerated these succinctly as, “a system of social organization in which the political state is a dictatorship supported by a political elite and in which the economic society is an autarchial capitalism, enclosed and planned, in which the government assumes responsibility for creating adequate purchasing power through the instrumentality of national debt and in which militarism is adopted as a great economic project for creating

³⁶ Jim Powell, *FDR's Folly: How Roosevelt and His New Deal Prolonged the Great Depression*, New York: Crown Forum, 2003, 77.

³⁷ Flynn, *As We Go Marching*, sup., 68.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

work as well as a great romantic project in the service of the imperialist state.”³⁹ Flynn added, “Wherever you find a nation using all of these devices you will know that this is a fascist nation. In proportion as any nation uses most of them you may assume it is tending in the direction of fascism.”⁴⁰ These are features of an already established or developed fascist state, as observed by Flynn. He also discussed the fertile environment for fascism to take hold. Flynn described this environment as containing high levels of propaganda, government debt, indoctrination of “the minds of the youth,” and general economic and societal troubles.⁴¹ He notes fascism thrives on crises, and follows a cycle of crisis, war, then more crises. Flynn writes that when a crisis ends, fascists conjure up more crises, that the “secret of the whole black chapter” begins or is “born in crisis, lives on crises, and cannot survive the era of crisis.”⁴² That, “By every law of its nature it must create for itself, if it is to continue, fresh crises from year to year.”⁴³ This is to say, crises is not only fertile ground for fascism, it is its sustenance. Therefore, fascism as discussed above is not defined but observed. It contains essential ingredients or characteristics. In isolation, these ingredients may not

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 56, 68, 160, 166-67.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 256.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

indicate the presence of fascism, but the amalgamation of a great number of them may certainly indicate a fascist state in existence or development.

Progress in America

Progressives in America surfaced in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Their focus was on remaking American politics into what they considered to be higher political and ethical aims than eighteenth century principles and institutions.⁴⁴ They rejected the idea of an unchanging human nature in favor of a relative nature that changed with history and social conditions.⁴⁵ This constant change meant a change in direction away from the founder's safeguards, such as federalism and checks and balances, into "ways of evading or overcoming those," and empowering "national efforts to solve national problems."⁴⁶ Progressives set out to revise the "general spirit" of the Constitution in favor of a "living Constitution," abandoning "ideals of right and wrong," which were "children of their age," for an evolutionary "Darwinian" view of changing ideals.⁴⁷ The idea of a living Constitution was asserted by Woodrow Wilson while

⁴⁴ Bradley C. S. Watson, and Charles R. Kesler, *Progressivism: The Strange History of a Radical Idea*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022, ix.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, ix-xv.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

he was still the president at Princeton University in 1908.⁴⁸ In *Constitutional Government in the United States*, Wilson claimed, “Government is a part of life, and, with life, it must change.”⁴⁹ This change Wilson refers to is not that granted in the U.S. Constitution under Article V. He wanted to evade or overcome that lengthy process. He acknowledged there was a pathway to amend the Constitution in Article V, but declared this approach to be “a thing too difficult to attempt.”⁵⁰ He refused to acknowledge the Constitution as a legal document and asserted that its interpretation must change with the times.⁵¹ “The Constitution of the United States,” claimed Wilson, “is not a mere lawyer’s document: it is a vehicle of life, and its spirit is always the spirit of the age.”⁵² Wilson was aware of activism in the ranks of the Supreme Court and how government had already grown immensely large without any constitutional amendment process. Armed with this fact he declared, “[E]ach generation of statesmen looks to the Supreme Court to supply the interpretation which will serve the needs of the day.”⁵³ Despite his views on

⁴⁸ Woodrow Wilson, *Constitutional Government in the United States*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1908.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 158.

the constitutional amendment process, it was under Wilson that the Sixteenth Amendment, granting Congress the power to “lay and collect taxes on income,” the Seventeenth Amendment, changing the election of a Senator by popular vote rather than by state legislature elections, and the Federal Reserve Act, reforming America’s banking system. Of the income tax and the Federal Reserve, historian Larry Schweikart writes, “This one-two punch, it could be argued, did more to fundamentally reorder American economic life than any other package of legislation passed anytime thereafter, including the New Deal and Great Society programs.”⁵⁴

The road had been paved for Franklin D. Roosevelt to implement his own view of government on American society using the tools prepared for him by his predecessors. From his very first inaugural address on March 4, 1933, FDR declared his disdain for the financial sector. He stated that “the rulers of the exchange of mankind’s goods have failed,” meaning capitalism had failed, and affirmed that “the money changers stand indicted in the court of public opinion.”⁵⁵ Mussolini declared a similar disdain for financial institutions in a public speech in which he affirmed, “We will squash them as soon as they are identified at

⁵⁴ Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen, *A Patriot’s History of the United States: From Columbus’s Great Discovery to America’s Age of Entitlement*, New York: Sentinel, 2019.

⁵⁵ *Cong. Rec.*, 73rd Cong., Special Session of the Senate, 1933, Vol. 77, pt. 1: 5.

home.”⁵⁶ In his autobiography he added that after that speech, “The great financial institutions understood that it was not possible to adopt independent policies without having to reckon with the government.”⁵⁷ Clearly, private institutions under Mussolini were threatened and subdued, squashing entirely any remnants of a defunct laissez faire economy. But FDR did not have dictatorial powers in America, he needed to be vested by Congress with greater control. This, he also made clear to Congress in his first inaugural, stating that to take-on the current financial crisis, he required “broad Executive power to wage war against the emergency, as great as the power that would be given to me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe.”⁵⁸ FDR wanted the people to trust him, to have confidence in him, asserting “that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”⁵⁹ But, this confidence in men, and this exchange of fear for safety, is precisely what Thomas Jefferson warned against long ago. Jefferson wrote “that it would be a dangerous delusion were a confidence in the men of our choice to silence our fears for the safety of our rights: that confidence is every where the parent of

⁵⁶ Benito Mussolini and Richard Washburn Child, *My Autobiography: With “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism,”* New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2006, 197.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Cong. Rec.*, 73rd Cong., Special Session of the Senate, 1933, Vol. 77, pt. 1: 6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

despotism.”⁶⁰ He added that it was “jealousy and not confidence which prescribes limited constitutions, to bind down those whom we are obliged to trust with power.”⁶¹ To wit, men were not to be trusted with power, let alone with unlimited power, and that this limit in power, was the primary function of the Constitution. Of anyone who may hold a position of power, Jefferson declared, “bind him down from mischief by the chains of the constitution.”⁶²

It seems that by the time FDR got into office, many of the founder’s voices had been suppressed or neglected to the point of deafness to reason. What followed after FDR took office changed the American socio-economic system and many other core functions of society, in some cases, permanently. There was already a crisis when FDR took office, the Great Depression, and there was no time to waste in gearing up the tools of the state to solve the problem. FDR wrote that his New Deal was “the spirit” of his overall program, which sought to control “agriculture, industry, commerce and finance,” and he asserted that this new change in concept was “the duty and responsibility of government toward

⁶⁰ Thomas Jefferson, et al., *The Virginia And Kentucky Resolutions of 1798 And '99: With Jefferson's Original Draught Thereof. Also, Madison's Report, Calhoun's Address, Resolutions of the Several States In Relation to State Rights. With Other Documents In Support of the Jeffersonian Doctrines of '98*, Washington: Published by Jonathan Elliot, 1832, 64-65.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

economic life.”⁶³ He wanted this power to help the American people and get the nation out of the depression, or at least that was the political rhetoric employed. Ayn Rand declared the notion that FDR “got us out of the depression” was the work of “mythology.”⁶⁴ She writes, “The National Industrial Recovery Act [NIRA], the Wagner Act, and the abandonment of the gold standard (with the government’s subsequent plunge into inflation and an orgy of deficit spending) were only three of the many disastrous measures enacted by the New Deal” to get the nation out of the Depression, all of which “had the opposite effect.”⁶⁵ Rand also argues that statist (advocates of a strong central state) often “twist themselves into semantic pretzels” to hide the true purpose of their aims, using “euphemisms” such as the “New Deal” or the “Welfare State.”⁶⁶ These euphemisms preserve a pretense of reason or morality that can confuse their prey, but that this “is the logic of a con man who cannot afford to let his victims discover his purpose.”⁶⁷ Early during FDR’s first term as president, notes Rand, there were men who noticed that Roosevelt’s program was “a form of guild

⁶³ Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Looking Forward*, New York: Touchstone, 2009, 203.

⁶⁴ Rand, *Capitalism*, sup., 84-85.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 216.

socialism and that it was closer to Mussolini's system than any other."⁶⁸ These men, adds Rand, "were ignored," asserting that, "Today, the evidence is unmistakable."⁶⁹

Historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch notes that "New Deal America imported major elements of European economic and social order."⁷⁰ French historian Bernard Fay was a little more specific. Fay, referring to Roosevelt's declaration to "cease to support the dollar" and his "embargo on gold," stated that, "Roosevelt on this occasion attracted more than the sympathy and trust of the country; he became a veritable dictator supported by the affection and enthusiasm of the masses."⁷¹ Mussolini himself, after reading FDR's book, *Looking Forward*, wrote a review of the book entitled "Roosevelt and the System," where he noted, "The atmosphere in which the whole doctrinal and practical system moves, is certainly akin to that of Fascism."⁷² In reviewing a book (*New Frontiers*) by Henry Wallace, FDR's secretary of agriculture, Mussolini writes, "If someone were to

⁶⁸ Ibid., 245.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals: Reflections on Roosevelt's America, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany, 1933-1939*, New York: Picador, 2007, 188.

⁷¹ Bernard Fay, *Roosevelt and His America*, Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1933, 310.

⁷² Marco Sedda, "Il New Deal Nella Pubblicità Politica Italiana dal 1933 al 1938," *Il Politico* 64, no. 2 (189) (1999): 241–75.

ask: where is America going? Well, after reading Henry Wallace's book, it can be safely said that America is moving towards the corporate economy.”⁷³ The view from America was similar to Europe’s. Mauritz Hallgren, a man of the Left, wrote an article in *The Spectator* stating that “we in America are bound to depend more and more upon the State as the sole means of saving the capitalist system. Unattended by black-shirt armies or smug economic dictators—at least for the moment—we are being forced rapidly and definitely into Fascism.”⁷⁴ Roger Shaw, of *The North American Review*, argued that many American businessmen wanted a Mussolini in America, yet they often whaled against the National Recovery Act, “most of which,” he asserted, “was adapted from Fascist Italy.”⁷⁵ To wit, FDR employed fascist elements in America’s socio-economic system. Mussolini and Roosevelt were men of the Left with similar aims. Rand concurs, “fascism is not the product of the political ‘right,’ but of the ‘left’—that the basic issue is not ‘rich versus poor,’ but man versus the state, or: individual rights versus totalitarian government.”⁷⁶ Elsewhere, Rand notes that fascism, Nazism,

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Mauritz Hallgren, “Will Roosevelt Succeed?” *Spectator*, no. 151, 5486 (August 18, 1933):211-12.

⁷⁵ Roger Shaw, “Fascism and the New Deal,” *The North American Review* 238, no. 6 (1934): 559–64.

⁷⁶ Rand, *Capitalism*, sup., 200.

and communism are but “variants” of socialism.”⁷⁷ To wit, on the Left. The comparisons between Mussolini and FDR were regular, in Europe and in America. Even *Fortune* published an article declaring, “the Corporative State is to Mussolini what the New Deal is to Roosevelt.”⁷⁸ Amity Shlaes makes another indictment against FDR and his leanings toward fascist elements. She writes, “Roosevelt cared little for constitutional niceties and believed they blocked progress. His remedies were on a greater scale and often inspired by socialist or fascist models abroad.”⁷⁹ She adds that one of FDR’s Brain Trust members, Rexford Tugwell, had been “profoundly shaped by Mussolini.”⁸⁰ Tugwell was one of the most liberal “left-wing” members of FDR’s Brain Trust.⁸¹ In his diary on October 22, 1934, Tugwell wrote about Mussolini and his fascist Italy, “It’s the cleanest, neatest, most effectively operating piece of social machinery I’ve ever seen. It makes me envious.”⁸²

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁷⁸ “The Corporative State,” *Fortune* 10, no. 1 (July 1934): 57-59.

⁷⁹ Amity Shlaes, *The Forgotten Man: A New History of The Great Depression*, New York: Harper Perennial, 2008, 6.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals*, *sup.*, 31-32.

⁸² Rexford G. Tugwell and Michael Vincent Namorato, ed., *The Diary of Rexford G. Tugwell: The New Deal, 1932-1935*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1992, 138-39.

Despite the remarks made comparing FDR and Mussolini, it is more important to evaluate what he did, in order to establish whether his deeds align with elements of fascism. One of Roosevelt's most drastic measures in his attempt at reviving the American economy was his National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), an Act that was signed into law in 1933, and soon after shortened to (NRA).⁸³ The NRA was Roosevelt's "attempt to control a huge swath of the economy" by the use of conspiratorial "price-fixing, restraints on production, aversion to competition, and corporatist partnerships between industry and government."⁸⁴ This "partnership" between corporations and the state, was denounced by Rand as "an indecent euphemism for 'government control.'"⁸⁵ The NRA was one of the main reasons for comparing Roosevelt to Mussolini, notes Powell, because it was "the American version of the collectivist trend" in Europe.⁸⁶ The NRA's "price controls and regulations," included the likelihood of "boycotts" for any business that refused to display the NRA's symbol, the "Blue

⁸³ Burton W. Folsom Jr. and Stephen Moore, *New Deal or Raw Deal?: How FDR's Economic Legacy has Damaged America*, New York: Threshold Editions, 2009, 4.

⁸⁴ Charles R. Kesler, *Crisis of the Two Constitutions: The Rise, Decline, and Recovery of American Greatness*, New York: Encounter Books, 2021, 269.

⁸⁵ Rand, *Capitalism*, sup., 243.

⁸⁶ Powell, *FDR's Folly*, sup., 76.

Eagle.”⁸⁷ The Supreme Court struck down the NRA as unconstitutional in 1935.⁸⁸ The case came under Supreme Court review as *Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States*, and looked into the NRA’s “Codes of Fair Competition,” which granted businesses and unions, “once approved by the President,” the ability to make law, a delegation of authority by Congress to the president.⁸⁹ The Supreme Court determined that “Congress lacked the power to enact the NRA.”⁹⁰ Chief Justice Charles E. Hughes wrote the majority opinion stating, “The delegation of legislative power sought to be made to the President” regarding the NRA, was “unconstitutional.”⁹¹ He added that there must be a distinction between “direct and indirect effects of intrastate transactions” under “interstate commerce,” or else “there would be virtually no limit to the federal power, and, for all practical purposes, we should have a completely centralized government.”⁹² Only days after the NRA was struck down by the Supreme Court, Roosevelt was still defending it, claiming the Court was taking the nation “backward” to a “horse and

⁸⁷ Iain Murray, *The Socialist Temptation*, Washington D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 2020, 18-21.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Randy E. Barnett and Josh Blackman, *An Introduction to Constitutional Law: Supreme Court Cases Everyone Should Know*, New York: Wolters Kluwer, 2020, 37.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *A. L. A. Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States*, 295 U.S. 495 (1935).

⁹² *Ibid.*

buggy” reasoning of the Constitution.⁹³ Roosevelt was interested in power and control, not rules. Rules only applied to subjects, not the elite. Economist Thomas Sowell writes, “The ignorance, prejudices, and groupthink of an educated elite are still ignorance, prejudice, and groupthink—and for those with one percent of the knowledge in a society to be guiding or controlling those with the other 99 percent is as perilous as it is absurd.”⁹⁴ This is nevertheless, one of the guiding principles of progressives and liberals since they arrived at the American political scene.

Another of FDR’s assaults on the American people came through the application of state power and control under the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) of 1933, which created schemes that would pay farmers not to produce, manipulated farm prices, and compelled “millers and processors” to pay the costs.⁹⁵ The entire gambit was under the power and control of FDR’s secretary of agriculture, “who would set the Processing taxes, target price of many commodities, and tell farmers how much land to remove.”⁹⁶ Roosevelt promoted the program as an emergency measure, but he also meant it as grounds for

⁹³ Folsom, *New Deal or Raw Deal?*, sup., 58.

⁹⁴ Thomas Sowell, *Intellectuals and Society*, New York: Basic Books, 2011, 20.

⁹⁵ Folsom, sup., 60.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

complete government control and direction of farming.⁹⁷ Roosevelt also increased taxes, even proposed Congress establish a Joint Committee on Tax Evasion and Avoidance to keep “wealthy taxpayers” from avoiding to pay “their full share of taxes.”⁹⁸ Mussolini embarked on a similar journey when he noted the need “to rake up tax-slackers” in fascist Italy.⁹⁹ Even Andrew Mellon, the former secretary of the treasury under Calvin Coolidge became one of FDR’s tax targets.¹⁰⁰ The high taxes made it harder to recover from the economic troubles of the 1930s, which also prolonged unemployment, causing employers to fear “their property rights” would be “undermined,” and “anticipated the possibility of a dictatorship.”¹⁰¹ But the revenue collected by the central state was not going to the needy, it was going into ensuring FDR’s reelection by channeling public funds to “political supporters.”¹⁰² When WWII started, all of the exuberant and flattering similarities between Mussolini’s fascist regime and FDR’s progressive liberalism were no longer being entertained. Robert H. Bork writes, “We tend to forget that there was burgeoning sympathy for fascism of both the Italian and German

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁹⁸ Powell, *FDR’s Folly*, sup., 82.

⁹⁹ Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, sup., 192.

¹⁰⁰ Powell, sup., 83.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 83-87.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 97.

varieties among intellectuals until that became a dangerous sentiment to express during World War II.”¹⁰³

The policy of government deficit spending and welfare undertaken by Roosevelt’s regime from the beginning, even as he denounced Hoover’s “borrowing and spending” practices, was “a deliberately planned deficit” to keep the government in crises.¹⁰⁴ The NRA and AAA noted above, which were two programs among many others, were meant to plan and control society through syndicalist cartels. The partnerships between government and private industry against competition formed corporatist monopolies. Militarism, “a system of conscription in time of peace,” surfaced in 1940 with the “selective service bill.”¹⁰⁵ The idea of “national defense” spending, notes Flynn, has proven to be a cause for which “the taxpaying elements” of society were “willing to see money spent.”¹⁰⁶ They sanctioned it, even if this spending was the deficit spending kind, as long as it led to billions of dollars in “defense contracts.”¹⁰⁷ The imperialist element follows from the militaristic element, and it is stoked and kept alive by

¹⁰³ Robert H. Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline*, Revised Paperback ed. New York: Harper Perennial, 2003, 94.

¹⁰⁴ Flynn, *As We Go Marching*, sup., 172-76.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 208.

fear and scornfully calling dissenters, isolationists.¹⁰⁸ These points, along with a score of other relative particulars discussed above, are evidence of an American inclination toward fascist elements during FDR's four-term reign. A popular argument made against the claim that Roosevelt employed fascist elements into American society is the fact that Roosevelt went to war with the fascist states of Germany and Italy. Therefore, the argument goes, the spilling of American blood to destroy fascism abroad, exonerates FDR. But the argument is flawed, polished by revisionist historiography and FDR hagiography. FDR was not a fascist, their claim goes, because if he were a fascist, he would not have gone to war with those whose ideology were kindred to his own. This is preposterous. Two counterexamples are easy enough to present against this claim. Consider the Sunni and the Shia, they each adhere to Islam, yet this has not kept them from slaying each other for centuries over their line of succession from Muhammad. Would anyone argue that because they skirmish with one another, they are not Islamic? Or consider Cain and Abel, does the fact that Cain killed Abel make them any less brothers? Of course not. They were kin, just as fascism and modern liberalism are kin. Their kinship does not preclude the possibility, or the probability, of conflict between the two, and conflict is not a sufficient condition for denying kinship.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 212-15.

Conclusion

One of the bedrock principles held by today's conservatives on the American political Right, is limited government. It includes the precepts of checks and balances and separation of powers, which were essential to the framers of the Constitution. In fact, on the separation of the legislative, executive, and judiciary, James Madison writes in *Federalist No. 48*, "The concentrating these powers in the same hands is precisely the definition of despotic government."¹⁰⁹ But this was precisely FDR's aim. In one of his fireside chats, he scolds the Supreme Court for curtailing his power grabbing efforts. He makes the analogy of government as a "three-horse team," where each horse represents a branch of government, noting that, "Two of the horses, the Congress and the executive, are pulling in unison today; the third is not."¹¹⁰ It is not difficult to conclude from this excerpt that FDR wanted to have total control and discretion to direct American society as he pleased. He was restrained by some institutional elements and other voices of sound reasoning. However, Roosevelt cannot be charged with fascism of the sort Mussolini or Hitler subscribed to. He can, however, be charged with having implemented into American society fascist

¹⁰⁹ Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay, Charles Kessler, and Clinton Rossiter, ed., *The Federalist Papers*, New York: Signet Classics, 2003, 307.

¹¹⁰ Roosevelt, et al., *FDR's Fireside Chats*, sup., 86-87.

elements that restricted the individual natural rights of the American people, in some cases, ad infinitum.

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