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Stebelon H. Nulle

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## D. H. Lawrence and the Fascist Movement

By STEBELTON H. NULLE

**H**ISTORICALLY speaking, fascism may be defined as the preliminary response, mental and emotional, to the vast changes in human conditions of our times. Among other things, it may be regarded as the process by which the powers of the state are rounded out and as another step in the slow growth of a common mind and will, of wider and deeper human association. Philosophically, it marks the realization that individuality is a phase to be transcended and offers a way out of our self-defeating individualism. Like every other historical movement, its roots spread far and wide into the most diverse soil, into many aspects of truth. On the one hand, it finds its source in the marriage of knowledge and power, in the desire to apply reason and discipline to human affairs, to supply what H. G. Wells has so often referred to as a "competent receiver" for our bankrupt and bewildered age. On the other hand, fascism is an expression of the aspirations which found release in nineteenth century romanticism, in the mysticism of Nietzsche and the vitalism of Bergson, forces too numerous to mention, which, in our own times, insist upon the inadequacy of reason and urge the equal claims of the unconscious or those of the body as a whole. These elements in fascism, the rational and anti-rational, are united by common loves and fears; both want to liquidate outworn things and summon men to create a spiritualized and dedicated nation.

To D. H. Lawrence, this very harmony of the rational and the irrational was the supreme issue of our day. "The problem, for him, was to bring the animal and the thinker together . . . to make them coöperate in the building up of consummate manhood."<sup>1</sup> Though it is nearly ten years since he died, after stirring the stagnant pool of contemporary letters

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1. Aldous Huxley, "The Puritan," in *Music at Night*.

as it had not been stirred since Rousseau, the waves he set in motion have spread far and wide, influencing ever broader areas of thought and feeling. Curiously enough, the political implications of the work of Lawrence are only now being generally realized. Most commentators have contented themselves with such observations as that of the Frenchman, De Reul, that what political ideas he had were "*Plutôt faibles, vagues et changeantes*." Others deny that he made any political application of his irrationalism whatever. Possibly Rampion's (i.e. Lawrence's) diatribe against politics and politicians of all kinds in the twenty-third chapter of *Point Counter Point* will be recalled, and Aldous Huxley, who knew Lawrence as intimately as anyone perhaps, warns us that it is impossible to write about him except as an artist. Yet the spirit of fascism is nowhere better expressed than in his work and, moreover, in none of the foremost writers of our time is there to be found such sympathetic exposition of its positive principles. Lawrence the poet is, in effect, an excellent example of the Hero as Politician. Where in contemporary literature, if not in Lawrence, do we meet the great agonized spirit of revolt against the present order, the awful inner hatred of a system which, as he would say, "outrages the solar plexus," which frustrates life and makes it fundamentally unliveable for all of us? The sight and smell of decaying liberal-democracy sickened him as it must all sincere men. Like Rousseau, he thought and felt and wanted to live, not as his contemporaries did, but in the way he hoped his descendants would someday think and feel and live. In Rousseau's time, however, there was at least the final refuge of the wilderness; today the only hope this side of madness is revolution.

Like all men of today, then, Lawrence suffered, but to an acute degree, the sense of frustration which affects our times. His total vision of a wider living and comradeship was, of course, as unrealizable as that of Jesus and all the great prophets and poets. One with all of them, he suffered and died, leaving behind, for the most part, only the vaguest

testament to mankind. Like them too, he had no neat formulas and fixed principles to offer. Such men are alone with their souls and with the awful truth of things. Could he have explained the deeper insight which he had, each little party, as Carlyle said of Cromwell, would "either have shuddered aghast at it, or believing it their own little compact hypothesis must have gone wholly to wreck." Lawrence had his dream, but to the question: How is it to be made real? he had no answer. "For him and for other men it is a simple miracle for which he calls. This new world into which he bids us enter does not exist."

The experience of every great prophet and teacher is fated to be interpreted in terms of a lower order of reality. The *whole* perception is too dazzling, too "impractical"; and lesser men who would not see it vanish and be altogether lost reduce it to the limitations of the average gaze. Something of what Paul of Tarsus did for Jesus, or Cardinal Ugolino and Fra Elias for the Saint of Assisi is coming to be done for Lawrence's standpoint by the leaders of fascism. Just as Rousseau was the incoherent and unwitting evangelist of one revolution, Lawrence will eventually be numbered among the prophets of fascist revolution, for it seems certain that fascism, more than any other movement of our times, holds out the hope of capturing at least part of what he saw and of satisfying more of the demands that he made of life. If his prophethood was not recognized by fascists in his lifetime, it will be remembered that, with the partial exception of Sorel and Pareto, formal thinkers have likewise neglected the political applications of his forerunners, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. The more uncompromisingly rational are troubled by his putting the solar plexus above bloodless reason; and Roman Catholic fascists in particular do not like the author of *The Man Who Died* at all.

It may be asked: Why did he himself not hail the rising sun of fascism in Italy and Germany? Although he lived in Italy most of the time after the war until his departure for the East in the spring of 1922, it is true that he had little to

say in his letters about the preliminaries of the fascist coup. He did, however, when he was in Germany, in 1927, recognize "a new sort of stirring there: a horrible disillusion, a grinning awful materialism; but underneath it a stir of life." It was, as he said, too soon to look for results. He also saw pre-fascist Italy, with its corrupt parties and ineffective leadership, as a "ridiculous kingdom, politically," governing itself so badly "that one becomes indifferent to all political fates . . . and merely curses because there's no coffee and no post." It is also true that when he again met with what, at least, passed for fascism along with bolshevism in Mexico in 1923, he expressed his indifference to both alike. "I don't care, I don't listen," he wrote his wife's mother. One can only point to the fact that all prophets tend to play a lone hand and to overlook their potential allies.

It is frequently alleged that Jesus would be equally indifferent to institutionalized Christianity if he came upon it. No real prophet will betray his daemon for the sake of something less than his dream. Yet fascism is a movement, a ferment of revolt, rooted in the same soil from which the dream of Lawrence sprang. It hates most of the things which he hated and seeks some, at least, of the things which he sought. Like him it recognizes the need of revolution; but whereas he had nothing ready to replace the present order, it seeks to adapt liberty to the necessity of planning and to the coördinated public control of modern economic life. It seeks also the renewal and quickening of a sterile, stagnant people by actions, words, and symbols, and through all this a new integration of the life of our times. As Lawrence's friend, Gardiner, has pointed out in his pamphlet, *World Without End*, fascism is due to the clamor of men for their natural birthright. Middle-class democracy "annulled the mystery of power without which men cannot be men, stripped of which they feel humiliated, like a cock despoiled of his plumage. It represents insurrection against a deeply hurt male pride longing to reassert the mystery of power, glamour, and lordship, the sense of glory which Puritanism

and the bourgeois ideals of the nineteenth century have progressively destroyed." Fascism represents, in other words, some of the release and liberation which Lawrence sought.

If all this is rather less than what, in one of his more apocalyptic moods, he would have sought, it is because the individual and social point of view is to be reconciled only imperfectly. After all, Lawrence enjoyed a position of unusual independence, and, as Middleton Murry well says, "If to be free from domestic ties and to have a means of livelihood which can be exercised in any place are an indispensable condition of being whole, most men must resign themselves to permanent incompleteness." It will be remembered that the *fay ce que voudras* of Thélème was addressed only to such as he, unattached men, free from all restraints not only from within but from without.

Although it has been said that Lawrence saw with his whole soul the need of change, but was incapable of giving constructive form to his protest, this is not altogether true. There were times when he spoke clearly in terms of matter as well as of spirit. Whoever reads his Australian novel, *Kangaroo*, will have little doubt about what he thought and felt. Not only does he actually give us a detailed organization of a thoroughgoing fascist movement, but he himself is its founder and leader! The collection of part of his letters which Huxley edited also gives numerous, unambiguous statements of his viewpoints, which go a long way to confirm the foregoing interpretation of his place with respect to fascism. Interpretations of Lawrence are based too much upon his more obscure novels, where the hares run in so many directions as to be utterly bewildering. The letters represent, on the contrary, a simpler Lawrence, the prophet in his everyday contacts and relations, trying to be explicit and coherent. Frank Swinnerton has pointed out that "the Lawrence who wrote letters to his friends bears no resemblance at all to the Lawrence who has been described by others." They are, as he says, the work of a man supremely sane and sure.

When all of Lawrence's many contradictions and equivocations are considered, what *positive* political principles emerge from the letters, confirming not only the foregoing fascist aspects of a general nature but dissociating him as well from other movements and philosophies of protest, especially communism? In the following pages we shall let him speak as far as possible for himself.

First of all, perhaps, one would think of his splendid vitalism, so like (on the one hand) that of the new creative faiths, instinct with a spirit that answers to the call of modern man, and (on the other hand) so incompatible with the conventional type of political organization which we know today. He was "able to see things with incomparable freshness," as Ivor Brown admits; "he could write about them as though they had never happened before." The communist, Strachey, calls him "the one vital writer which England has produced since the war: the one who still wrote as if he knew that it was worth while to write"; and Edwin Muir calls him "the greatest genius of his time." Lawrence sought to restore the world of natural men, who respond to their instinctive urges, emancipated from ancient fears and frustrations. If life is to be lived completely, it must be accepted as a whole. The natural man lives in the body, and what André Maurois called the "renaissance of the body" or insistence on spontaneous living is most characteristic of fascism. Just as the Roundheads of 1649 changed the idea of treason, so the fascists have given sin a new meaning: sin means violence to life. To live, intensively and fully, is the guiding principle of fascism.

What is the problem of politics according to Lawrence? He would agree with Comte that at bottom it is a spiritual one, the recovery of the whole vision: "Get ye first the Kingdom of Heaven and all the rest shall be added unto you." Like Rousseau and Hitler he thought of politics not as the conflict of persons or parties but of ideals and faiths. "Down with the poor in spirit: A War!"—that was his watchword. This explains why the judgment and advice

he gave the world, were so perplexing and inadequate. As Aldous Huxley says, "Political advice from even the most greatly gifted of religious innovators is always inadequate; for it is never, at bottom, advice about politics, but always advice about something else." Lawrence saw that our world has almost exhausted the capital stock of inherited spiritual values upon which every civilization ultimately rests:

"Men live and see according to some gradually developing and gradually withering vision," he wrote in the *Fantasia of the Unconscious*. "This vision exists also as a dynamic idea of metaphysics—exists first as such. Then it is unfolded into life and art. Our vision, our belief, our metaphysic is wearing woefully thin. . . . We have no future: neither for our hopes nor our aims nor our art. It has all gone gray and opaque. We've got to rip the old veil of vision across and find what the heart really believes in after all and what the heart really wants for the next future."

For the present order he had nothing but contempt and hatred. It was a dead world in which he saw himself, a world in which men had lost their souls. "It is strange and fascinating," he wrote, "to wander like Virgil in the shades." And again: "Now is the time between Good Friday and Easter. We're absolutely in the tomb." Democracy was as offensive to him as to any fascist. "The more I see of democracy the more I dislike it," he told his wife's sister. "It just brings everything down to the mere vulgar level of wages and prices, electric light and water closets and nothing else." Socialism was no better: "It is a dud," he wrote Murry from Oaxaca. "It makes just mush of the people." Of communism he wrote: "The dead materialism of Marx socialism and soviets seems to me no better than what we've got." Conservatives and liberals and pacifists alike all want the same thing, he told Lady Asquith, in words that Mussolini himself might have trumpeted:

They are our disease, not our hope. . . . They want to keep their own established egos, their finite



and ready defined selves intact, free from contact and connection. . . . They want an outward system of nullity which they call peace and good will, so that in their own souls they can be independent gods referred nowhere and to nothing, little mortal absolutes secure from question. That is at the back of all Liberalism, Fabianism and democracy. It stinks. It is the will of the louse. . . . Let us have done with this foolish form of government.

"Fusty, fuzzy peace cranks and lovers of humanity," he wrote on another occasion during the war, "are the devil. We must get on a new track altogether."

This new track was to be reached only by a revolution, a "quite bloody, merciless, almost anarchistic revolution . . . a fearful chaos of smashing up," and the sooner the better. Preaching and teaching were no good now. (Cf. "Action, not talk"—Mussolini.) It was in violent action, as he said in *Kangaroo*, that the new spirit would rise. There was to be no mere transfer of power from capital to labor. "Labour, capital, aristocrat, they are all part of the same evil game."

O! start a revolution, somebody!  
 Not to install the working class,  
 But to abolish the working classes forever  
 And have a world of men.

(Poem to Charles Wilson.)

What he wanted, rather, was a revolt of the spirit against "the fixed thing," against "this horrible paucity and materialism of mental consciousness." Clearly as any prophet he saw that the very citadel of this spirit lay in what he called suburbanity, the "nice simple people, with their eternal price list." Here, indeed, in the "vulgar spirit of money, the blind spirit of possession," is the arch-enemy of every great leader of humanity from Isaiah to Hitler. The enemies of Lawrence and of fascism are one.

Into this revolution Lawrence would have liked to throw himself with all his being. "If I knew how to, I'd really join myself to the revolutionary socialists now," he wrote in 1921. "I think the time has come for a real struggle. That's the

only thing I care for. . . . I don't care for politics. But I know there *must* and *should* be a deadly revolution very soon and I would take part in it if I knew how." But as long as he lived his sense of remoteness kept him from breaking his isolation and coöperating in any movement, though his life was one long despairing search for comradeship, for a society to which he could belong. But the salvation of integrity was not to be his: he was torn between the desire for solitude and the pursuit of his own salvation, on the one hand, and the counter-impulse to concern himself with the souls and bodies of his neighbors. That inner conflict was never resolved, and it was this, as Huxley says, which drove him for relief into the "dark night of that otherness whose essence and symbol is the sexual experience."

The *Fuehrerprinzip*, the central political principle of leadership, however, he recognized as much as any fascist. "Give homage and allegiance to a hero and you become yourself heroic." (*Apocalypse*.) On one occasion, after having read Gibbon through, he wrote: "Men were always alike and always will be, and one must view the species with contempt first and foremost and find a few individuals if possible . . . and ultimately . . . to rule the species. It is proper ruling they need and always have needed." In *Kangaroo* he borrows the feeling of *Mein Kampf* and speaks of the "mystery of lordship . . . the mystic recognition of difference and innate priority, the joy of obedience and the sacred responsibility of authority." Unfortunately, as he told Rolf Gardiner in the spring of '28, real leadership is rare these days, save for such men as Gandhi or Mussolini. It was his firm belief in the principle of leadership which led to his recurrent projects for establishing colonies in Cornwall, Florida, Mexico, or even Polynesia, where he would have been Moses, the lawgiver; and at one time he even hoped that America would accept him as its leader, with the *Fantasia* as his gospel. But all these schemes were stillborn, leaving bitterness and frustration. In a very real sense, then, Lawrence was an unfulfilled Hitler—dark, brooding,

inward-looking, both of them—with the same capacity for attracting loyalty and the same disdain for intellectuals and aesthetes, believing passionately in the impossible, both of them. Both are adventurers who point the way to a quality of experience other than any yet achieved, knowing full well that the destruction of what exists is necessary to that which is to supersede it. Just as Robespierre was Rousseau's finest pupil, one might say that Adolf Hitler is bringing into Western consciousness something of the insight and idealism of D. H. Lawrence.

Perhaps the clearest statement of Lawrence's ideas on "proper ruling" and the hierarchical ordering of society is to be found in two letters written to Lady Cynthia Asquith in 1915.

Let us submit to the knowledge that there are aristocrats and plebeians born, not made. . . . Some amongst us are born fit to govern and some are born only to be governed," he wrote in part. "I don't believe in the democratic (republican) form of election," he went on. "I think the artisan is fit to elect for his immediate surroundings, but not for ultimate government. The electors for the highest places should be governors of the bigger districts—the whole thing should work upwards, every man voting for that which he more or less understands through contact—no canvassing of mass votes. And women should not vote equally with the men, but for different things. Women *must* govern such things as the feeding and housing of the race. And if a system works up to a Dictator who controls the greater industrial side of the national life, it must work up to a Dictatrix who controls the things relating to private life.

If we do not have here an unequivocal anticipation of a number of fundamental fascist principles and practices, it would be difficult to find them anywhere!

Unfortunately, Lawrence's views on the *nation* as a spiritual organism, that other great fascist principle, are not equally plain and consistent. As in so many respects,

the pragmatic implications of his inward experience are either not clear to him or else he is indifferent to making them so. The key to this contrariety seems to be in what he himself called the absolute frustration and repression of his societal instinct and the preponderance of his ego. "I am weary of my own individuality and simply nauseated by other people's," he told Dr. Burrow, the psychologist. In other words he himself suffered to an acute degree from the same evil which afflicted society as a whole, the conflict of wills and appetites which precludes real collective action. "It is our being cut off that is our ailment, and out of this ailment everything bad arises." So it was possible at one moment, when his artist's ego was uppermost, to glory in his isolation and in the inviolable abstraction within him, and at another to complain sorrowfully that the English have so little togetherness, that they were "like grains of sand that will only fuse if lightning hits it." This inner conflict between the solitary artist and the man who yearned to reshape society went on until the end.

One thing is certain, however, and that is that he interpreted the idea of a national organism (*Volksgemeinschaft*) in terms that might be classics of fascist teaching. "What is the *raison d'être* of a nation—to produce wealth? How horrible! A nation is a number of people united to secure the maximum amount of liberty for each member of the nation and to fulfill collectively the highest truth known to them." And again (to Lady Asquith), "Why are we a nation? We are a nation which must be built up according to a living idea, a great architecture of living people, which shall express the greatest truth of which we are capable." In the final chapter of *Apocalypse* occurs another gem of fascist thinking:

As a citizen, as a collective being, man has his fulfillment in the gratification of his power-sense. If he belongs to one of the so-called "ruling nations," his soul is fulfilled in the sense of his country's power or strength. If his country mounts up

aristocratically to a zenith of splendour and power in a hierarchy, he will be all the more fulfilled, having his place in the hierarchy.

But a nation must have a soul, its internal fire must be kindled, for without this it will be but an ant-like community of slaves. In our America, which had raised his hopes so high, he found "liberty, space, deadness," a monstrous trinity that filled him with horror and despair. "Men are free," he wrote in his *Studies in Classical American Literature*, "when they are in a living homeland, not when they are straying and breaking away. Men are free when they are obeying some deep inward voice of religious belief. . . . Men are free when they belong to some living, organic, believing community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealisable purpose." Writing in the *Enciclopedia*, Benito Mussolini has defined fascism as "a religious conception in which man is seen in imminent relation to a higher law, an objective Will that transcends the particular individual and raises him to conscious membership in a spiritual society." The language is more academic in form, but the ideas are the same.

In the achievement of this national oneness of action and purpose—this profound sense of solidarity with others—myths and symbols, mass-festivals and rituals were to play a natural and vital part, just as they have since been incorporated in the national life of fascist Germany and Italy. On different occasions Lawrence gave his blessing to Gardiner for his program of "song, dance and labour" for the youth movement of England, a movement, by the way, of which he approved most thoroughly, so long as it represented youth on the warpath, rather like the young blackshirts of 1922, "smashing the face of what one knows is rotten." But his sympathetic description of the Indian round dance in *Mornings in Mexico* reminds one still more closely of the sacramental spirit of fascist mass-rituals: "It is the homeward pulling of the blood, as the feet fall in the soft, heavy rhythm, endlessly. It is the dark blood falling

back from the mind, from sight and speech and knowing, back to the great central source where is rest and unspeakable renewal."

Irrational? Certainly! But then fascism not only appeals profoundly to the mind alone but to the emotions also. To its adherents fascism offers the gift of full coöperation of body and spirit such as the young rejoice in. There is such a thing as giving up one's reason in order to save it. Better this healthy unreason than Lawrence's Cornishmen, "like insects gone cold, living only for money, for *dirt*," or than his brother's neighbors in Derbyshire—workers who understand the "industrial-mechanical-wage idea" and nothing else. Before there can be an end of this nightmare of men and women more dead than alive, devoid of everything that makes for quality in life, there must come—if not the apocalyptic visitation of blood and fire that he foretold and welcomed—at least the prodding, purging and self-disciplining which alone can shape men according to his dream. Only then will man begin to be fully himself, fit to enjoy power and knowing the meaning of freedom and the delight of full, immediate living. Many believe that the spirit of fascism commands both the will and the power to do even a little towards the reorientation and reconditioning of the human race; and, unless our brief attempt at interpreting the mind of Lawrence in these matters has gone altogether astray, he seems to have thought so too. What he would have thought about the totalitarian states which have manifested themselves so far, however, is another matter altogether.