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c. 1991

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# Book and Gun: Perfect Fascist

**A (rather disturbing) look at proto- and early fascist history and ideology in France and Italy**

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ing else the squads were a physical manifestation of the fascists' single-minded drive to achieve their "revolution". Anarchists, however, when they consider even the possibility of a successful incursion into the political sphere tend to degenerate into sniveling hulks of beer-stained denim. Within the past two years a number of autonomous groups have attempted to build a "fighting" movement, only to be sidetracked into protest marches and by now probably candle-light vigils. This is so because such tactics always rely on a negative, the ultimately reformist response of Marxists and others trying to goad the government into doing something. Alternatively, the use of affinity groups to realize an insurrectionary situation in a town or geographic region, where Utopia can be at least be begun strikes me as a far more positive tactic. In the words of the enrages, "We ask for nothing, we demand nothing. We will take, we will occupy." Anybody got a light?

erally two centuries of rationalist speculation. Both Marxists and anarchists find themselves bound with the chains of either dialectical materialism on one side or extreme enlightenment ideologies on the other. Neither of which provide the fire, the spark necessary to ignite an insurrectionary conflagration. Ultimately, I am an anarchist because of an irrational desire for liberty: why should I construct a political dialogue (or a new world) using a methodology that I myself have renounced?

Fascism also provides us with an example of the strength of the myth. As Sorel theorized, all social movements are motivated to greater or lesser degrees by social myths. Such myths, though derived from actual situations and conditions, function on a deeper level than that affected by concrete reality. Again the lesson to be learned is that to affect individuals, to make ordinary people do extraordinary things (as in an insurrectionary situation), more is needed than a roll call of statistics, or a dialectical syllogism that now is the time. To achieve a better world, one needs the vision to imagine it and the courage to ask others to imagine it as well.

From the French proto-fascists comes the necessity of aiming a withering attack upon democracy itself. For though I've heard it said many times that anarchism is nothing more than direct, participatory democracy, I find nothing further from the truth or more misleading. Democracy always implies bowing to the will of the majority, it always implies the lie of the voting. Further, I am always surprised that individuals who identify themselves as enemies of the dominant culture use one of its main theoretical props as a basis of their critique. I see no difference between a bourgeois and a workers' democracy, both are tyranny of majorities, both deny my right to choose the course and contour of my life. In addition I believe both economic classes are equally mundane and idiotic, and hence equally incompetent to rule.

Finally, something must be said about fascist tactics: the evolution of the squads and their reckless expeditions. If noth-



# Contents

final saga was played out in the apartments of the king and not in the streets of the city. Liberalism gave way with a whimper and the Duce opened the city to the squads who burned a few subversive newspaper offices and then went home to milk the fruits of victory.

The history of fascism ends here. Mussolini found upon the assumption of power that the Italian State was just as difficult to lead without democracy as it was with it. He eventually took up the task of moderating various regional and sectional rivalries in much the same way that previous prime ministers had done. The only real difference was that Mussolini was probably a little better at the task and he could not be voted out of office. By the beginning of the Second World War Mussolini was having a harder and harder time justifying the regimes continued existence even to his supporters, and if the conflagration of the war had not occurred it is likely that fascism would have been jettisoned as an interesting experience but something of a waste of time.

## Lessons

First and foremost of the lessons to be drawn from the fascist experience is the primacy of the irrational in politics. I don't know how many meetings I've sat through where some anarchist or libertarian has crowed about how rational a society without government could be. How economic and political systems will be allowed to develop freely without the fetters of emotion and national/regional prejudice. I find argumentation on such a level, particularly by anarchists, to be hypocritical if not outright self delusionary. For what is anarchism but the will of the individual to control his/her own life, the will to liberty. And such a concept, that of the autonomy of the self, is indefensible in rational political dialogue. Additionally, insurrectionists of all stripe have the difficulty of renouncing lit-

a riot that left several dead and wounded. The city administration was suspended and the landlords moved in to crack the spine of the city's remaining socialist institutions, including the peasant union. The successes of the squads in Bologna escalated into wholesale war in the countryside. The fascists, and particularly the syndicalists, proved to be truly effective organizers when it came to repression. The telephone and the truck also proved to be of singular worth to the squadrists. Often, actions were organized by telephone between several different fascist groups, trucks were requisitioned from sympathetic landowners and the squads would roll into a town, clear out the socialist vermin and return home. It was so well-organized as to be almost choreographed. The extent of the violence was phenomenal, it is estimated that during the first six months of 1921 that 119 labor chambers, 107 cooperatives and 83 peasant league offices were attacked, sacked, and destroyed. Meanwhile, the government, which had initially denounced fascist violence, began to see the utility of the squads in quelling socialist-inspired unrest and thus did nothing as the fascist incursions reached their crescendo in 1922.

By late summer of 1922 Mussolini had effectively turned the original program of the fascists to his own ends. The movement that had initially derogated political parties was now an effective bloc within the Italian parliament. Discipline, control and a rigid hierarchical structure had also been imposed by Mussolini and his henchmen, occasionally by stealth and in a few cases by coercion. The difference between the movement in 1916 or even 1919 with the structured and static form of 1922 is paramount. One post-industrial Italian historian has remarked that by 1922 Mussolinism had become a better name for the political ideology than fascism.

The March on Rome was less a revolution or even a coup d'etat than it was an extra-legal cabinet shake-up. Regardless of how many fascists took part the military was consistently in control of the situation in and around Rome. In point of fact the



*Libro e moscetto: fascista perfetto*
(English: *Book and Gun: Perfect Fascist, Mussolini*)

> *Not only is reason not natural to man nor universal in humanity, but again, in the conduct of man and humanity, its influence is small.*
>
> -Hippolyte Taine

> *Before I begin I must admit to a certain amount of ambivalence towards both French proto-Fascism and Italian Fascism. Although I have no love at all for the programmatic aims of the fascists (e.g., totalitarian government, territorial and capitalist expansion) there are a number of areas where these movements have much to teach post-industrial theorists. Foremost of these is the uneasy mixture of politics and irrationality that typifies the early proto-Fascist and Fascist movements, a synthesis that is essential to any theory of insurrectionary egoism*
>
> author's note

Fascism was one of the most bizarre social phenomena of this century. The entire spectrum of political theorists, I believe, has failed in a fundamental sense to deal not only with the history of fascism but also its ideology and appeal. There have been two very broad schools of interpretation of fascism, the first, typified by Marxist historians (cf. Guerin), have held that despite a certain level of anticapitalist and antibourgeois rhetoric, fascism was essentially a device whereby the ruling classes retained what was theirs and then had the government steal what was not. These theorists tend to develop the thesis of fascism as one of the last stages in capitalist development. The second movement of critique, personified by Mumford and most liberal critics, deals with the issue of how such a thing could have happened in the first place. What drove essentially

"normal" people to embrace fascism, an anti-democratic, totalitarian movement? Significantly, the answer that this school arrives at is generally something on the order of the ease and comfort of renouncing freedom as well as some disingenuous remarks about "mass psychopathology," brainwashing and the like. Neither of these "schools" has captured the fundamental appeal of the fascist "myth" insofar as both rely heavily upon a rationalist, "enlightened" critique of the phenomenon. An intellectual approach, incidentally, that any "thinking" fascist would have scoffed at. To understand the fascists one has to move beyond the realm of rationality in politics and begin to deal with the "heresies" of individual will, fury as political weapon, and the renunciation of democratic forms; it is here that one finds the fascist truly at home.

## The French

As with most discussions that deal with politics and history, one is led inexorably back to France, the birthplace of all modern political debate. The first thinker to begin to stoke the fires of the extreme right was none other than Rousseau, the grandfather of modern revolutionary thought. In his conception of the General Will, Rousseau lays the groundwork for absolute obedience and also its complement, absolute authority. Rousseau theorizes that when a group of individuals, in order to form a society, relinquish their natural rights in favor of civil rights (the social contract), that they also merge their wills into a single will, the General Will. There are a few scary ramifications of such a conceptualization, and Rousseau, ever willing to follow a formula to its logical conclusion, deals with all of them. The consequence of the General Will that concerns us is the essential identity of the General and the individual will. For Rousseau (and the Fascists) they are one and the same. The will of the nation expressed in legislation,



As expected, the Italian foreign policy apparatus had a very hard time explaining to the rest of the world why one of the country's most important dramatists and poets had seized a city and turned it into a Disneyland for politically oriented drunks. D'Annunzio, of course, didn't help the situation by broadcasting news of his adventure whenever possible. Deputations were sent to a number of important western European powers demanding recognition and the exchange of ambassadors. Finally after months of pleading Nitti prevailed upon the army to liberate the city. This was accomplished without firing a single shot, which in itself is not surprising given the fact that D'Annunzio, his followers and the entire citizenry were probably experiencing one of the most momentous collective hangovers of the twentieth century.

Although green with envy, the lessons of D'Annunzio's Fiume adventure were not lost on Mussolini. The idea of the forced seizure of an entire town by armed contingents was something totally new, but the fascists were willing to give it a try. The actual beginnings of what would become *squadrismo* occur early in the fascist experience. On April 15, 1919, three weeks after the San Sepolcro meeting, a group of fascists torched the offices of *Avanti!*. During the summer of 1919, Mussolini urged the fascists to, "form armed groups composed of 200-250 sure, tried, and well-armed individuals." The growth of the squads and their importance were inextricably linked to the political orientation of the movement. Prior to the Fiume adventure they had been viewed as a purely national revolutionary force, as Mussolini swung to the right as a result of his inability to attract the proletariat and peasantry into the young fasci, the squads became a bludgeon with which to suppress bolshevism.

The squads were almost all recruited from agrarian areas hard hit by postwar inflation. The first major squadrist action occurred in Bologna during the inauguration of a new socialist administration in November 1920. The Bolognese fasci sparked

Socialism was subtly referred to as a religion, and the fascists as standing firmly against "red clericalism." In another vein he railed against the discipline inherent in the socialist parties of the time, "statutes, regulations etc., that is all party stuff." This derogation of party discipline and accouterments served the fascists well, as it appealed to the postwar discontent and undirected revolt then bubbling just below the surface of Italian society. Hannah Arendt was one of the first critical theorists to recognize the strength of such arguments, "The first to consider programs and platforms as needless scraps of paper and embarrassing promises, inconsistent with the style and impetus of a movement, was Mussolini…"

Then on September 12, 1919, an almost surreal political event occurred. Gabriele D'Annunzio, poet and military adventurer, marched at the head of two thousand students, ex-combatants, and assorted human flotsam left over from the war into the disputed city of Fiume. Initially D'Annunzio had proposed handing the city over to Italy, however, when Nitti, the Prime Minister, refused the offer D'Annunzio went him one better and declared Fiume a republic. Assisted by Alceste de Ambris, one-time anarchosyndicalist and fascist-to-be, D'Annunzio crafted the *carta del Carnaro*, the first constitution to section society into separate corporative entities and to declare music one of the cornerstones of the state. Daily life in Fiume was transformed almost overnight into a political circus. Concerts, drinking and fornication became the order of the day. D'Annunzio perched on a balcony high above the central square of the city spoke to the citizenry on an almost daily basis. Fireworks, plays and more drinking completed the evening's events. Among D'Anriunzio's followers were two groups worth mentioning, the *arditi*, shock troops left over from the war, and the escochi, ex-navy men turned pirates who kept the entire city fed by raiding Adriatic shipping lanes when needed.



declarations of war, whatever, are to be taken by the individual as manifestations of his own will. Individual conscience and responsibility are non-existent (or irrelevant) in such a system. In a converse construction, total obedience to the state is equivalent to total liberty. To refuse an order issued by the government of a nation-state is to refuse an order that the individual will has issued—such refusal is impossible.

All nineteenth-century French political thought may be seen in one way as reactionary; that is it finds its essential premise in events and expresses itself in response to them. Thus the French Revolution, the Paris Commune of 1871, and the Dreyfus Affair have provided grist for the mill of political theory in France. It was the Great Revolution, however, that proved to be the single most important detonator for the explosion of mid- and late-century theory. Extreme-left theorists were outraged at the idea of a political revolution without the concomitant transfiguration of economic forms. The extreme right was simply angered at just about everything that had occurred and in response it began to develop new approaches towards the issues that the Revolution had thrust upon the political scene, specifically liberty, authority, and the idea of the nation. It is here that one begins to find the roots of what would eventually be called fascism.

Although Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821) may be called the first theorist of the extreme right—his formulations fit more readily into the category of conservative monarchism, and it is difficult to see any relation between his work and fascism. In addition, his critique is solidly rationalist and hence he falls outside the scope of this piece.

It is Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893) who developed some of the most important intellectual formula in proto-fascist ideology. Taine, in bringing his enormous intellect to bear on the French Revolution, will in the process provide the extreme right with the basis in fact and hard-nosed scholarship that it had failed to materialize in the early part of the nineteenth century. After

careful examination of what Taine referred to as the "irony" of the Revolution (i.e., how a movement against a monarchy could develop into a dictatorship) he found himself launching a full-fledged attack upon on the very foundations of the Enlightenment. The fundamental assumption of the *philosophes*, that all humanity progresses towards rationality, Taine negates in an affirmative (and elitist) fashion. As opposed to all humanity, he states that in fact, **some** men do Progress towards rationality; most, however, do not. He justifies this conclusion by pointing to the mob violence of the Revolution and the "excesses" of the Paris Commune. Thus while some men may be capable of learning a revolutionary doctrine, others simply learn the slogans as an excuse to indulge in a collective insanity. For Taine, reason cannot and should never be a political tool of the left, the movements are dialectically opposed. The masses are incapable of reason, it is the property of the elite, the intellectual and the aristocracy. This is no flash-in-the-pan insight; Taine has effectively refuted almost all of the Enlightenment's theoretical gymnastics in one formulation. For instance, it follows that if the vast majority of humanity is incapable of reason, then the "drawing up" of the social contract is impossible. Men who do not reason cannot form a society of their own volition. Further, Taine will argue that society and the nation, far from being the product of a conscious act, is the result of long historical processes. The nation is not something that is chosen—it simply is. Two things should be evident from this discussion: Taine is an irrationalist. He may believe in reason, but he sees it has some very clear limitations. Taine is also on the edge of anti-democracy; again though he may grudgingly acknowledge that democracy in some ways is an efficacious form of government, he maintains that there are deep systemic flaws in the idea of the rule of the people.

The next thinker who demands our attention is Maurice Barres (1862-1923) and it is in his works that we will see one of the truly fascinating tendencies of French political thought. For,



in Milan and founded the fasci di combattimento (the league of combatants).

The initial prospects for the fasci didn't look good. They preached a confused program of wartime profit confiscation, mild anti-clericalism, and protection for private property. Such a statement, however, belies the essential strength of the fascist movement, flexibility. It was a commonplace of fascist writing that the movement precedes the doctrine. And even with the first *fasci di azione rivoluzionaria* this was essentially true; being a loose grouping of militants from different parties and ideologies that came into being in response to a specific problem, the war. The early fascists were also convinced of their elite position in the struggle for revolution. For the fascists the "dynamic minority" were the true revolutionaries distinguished by their sacrifice and idealism from the masses. The fascists in their consistent espousal of intervention came to view the war as an end in itself, a period of purification and regeneration. This, combined with a militant socialist ideology produced a perception of revolution not *through* war, as initially postulated, but as war. Mussolini provided a number of finishing flourishes to fascist ideology. Foremost of these was the extreme subjectivism that he tended to impart to most of his theoretics. For Mussolini socialism was not a *theorem* it was a *faith*. He soundly rejected the somewhat orthodox Marxism of his youth, much as Sorel did, in favor of a more militant, self-willed revolutionary credo.

As might seem obvious from the above discussion, such programmatic and methodological peculiarities would at best hamper a normal political party. The fascists, however, followed the above reasoning to its logical conclusion and declared their movement an "anti-party." Mussolini in a famous speech of March 1921 said "Fascism is not a church. It is more like a training ground. It is not a party. It is a movement…We are the heretics of all churches. We can permit ourselves the luxury of being both aristocrats and democrats."

and pursued his prowar stance in speeches and in the pages of Avanti! Mussolini's gamble, however, failed. He was jettisoned from the editorship of *Avanti!* and was then expelled from the party.

Italy entered the war on 24 May, 1915, under an agreement with the Entente Powers in the Treaty of London. The terms provided that in exchange for a declaration of war on the Allied Powers a number of disputed territories were to be ceded to Italy upon the successful cessation of hostilities.

Victory and peace did nothing to allay the deep divisions present in Italian society. Indeed, upon the signing of the armistice long suppressed intrasocial hostilities surfaced with a vengeance. Government to a great degree had lost its legitimacy, due to the denial of Italy its prewar territorial claims. Masses of ex-combatants and officers returned home to what amounted to a defeated nation. The emergent industrial proletariat and the peasantry all pursued conflicting and contradictory goals in the wake of victory. Public opinion turned sharply against the Liberal ruling class. On the left the PSI enjoyed a renewed vigor, and to the right the Italian Nationalist Association and other groups received recruits and money as more and more Italians jumped the liberal, democratic ship.

Meanwhile Mussolini and the dissidents from the PSI viewed these developments with increasing interest. In 1915, after his expulsion from the PSI Mussolini and some of his comrades formed the *fasci di azione rivoluzionaria* (literally, the group or league for revolutionary action. Note the word *fasci* denotes nothing more sinister than a loose organization. Only later would Mussolini attempt to tie the image to the *fascio*, the bundle of sticks and ax carried during the Roman Empire, symbolizing unity) in order to propagate the message of leftist intervention. On March 23, 1919, a small group of revolutionary syndicalists and socialists, futurists, and ex-combatants met with Mussolini on the piazza San Sepolcro



though Barres will amplify and enlarge the idea of the nation as the sole possessor of any sovereign right, he will also in the same sentence affirm the right of the nation to realize revolution. It is here, with Barres and a handful of other thinkers from his generation (Sorel will also fall into this category) that we begin to see the merging of extreme left and extreme right political theory. This phenomenon will also be a mainstay of early Italian fascist methodology. It is also important to note that it is a tendency that has continued unabated to the present. The extremist right-wing students of the Sorbonne (*L'Occidente*) during the May-June events in 1968 will produce pamphlets and flyers that in language and methodology are identical with Situationist tracts.

In most cases, this confluence of extreme left and right political theory has been superfluous, the importance of Barres is that he will delineate political and social goals that are similar to, if not identical with the goals of the revolutionary left. Thus, Barres will continually refer back to the Proudhonian constructs of the federation of small communes and their integration via contract as the most natural (that is, French) mode for the conduct of human affairs. Though shying away from anticapitalist rhetoric, Barres is not beyond castigating centralized, monopolistic capitalist combines. In addition, Barres, in his exposition of the communal units that he sees as the basis of a potentially regenerated society will rely less on medieval forms, as Proudhon or Kropotkin clearly do, and he will paint these communes in colors more reminiscent of tribal groups. This in turn refers us back to the nation not only as the basis of sovereignty but also as the end result of a long and complicated historical process.

Lastly, it must be noted that for most of his life Barres conducted a long and bitter dispute with French educational institutions. He felt that a pervasive and "unhealthy Kantianism" was at the core of much of the ills of French society. To teach the young that every action must accord to some notion of

universal law was anathema for Barres. He maintained that ail significant actions must be undertaken not in accordance with any universal law but with the best interests of France in mind. Barres couldn't have cared less whether Dreyfus was, in reality, innocent or guilty, what was important for France was that the sentence of the courts be upheld. That, for Barres, was the only justice that a Frenchman could expect. Universal justice is dispensed in heaven, let Dreyfus find it there. In all his critiques of the French educational system Barres will invoke a single philosophical construct in defense of his arguments, the Hegelian dialectic.

The most well-known thinker of the French extreme right was Charles Maurras (1868-1952). Maurras is perhaps the most enigmatic theoretician of the early part of the century, an outspoken monarchist who was shunned in royalist circles, a vociferous Catholic most of whose works were placed in the Index by the Vatican, and finally an anti-modernist who fixed extremist right-wing ideology firmly in the modernist camp.

It was the Dreyfus Affair that first thrust Maurras, an unknown journalist, into the public eye. And a brief review of the facts of the case are required in order to understand the impact that Maurras' first major article will have. In 1894 it was discovered that secrets were being passed to the German High Command. Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain attached to the French General staff was suspected of the crime. The news leaked to an anti-semitic rightist journalist who immediately published the discovery. Dreyfus was court-martialed and sent to Devil's Island. Not everyone believed in Dreyfus's guilt and a Colonel Piquart, while investigating the crime for himself, found that a critical piece of evidence had been forged by Dreyfus's successor, Colonel Henry. This miscarriage of justice galvanized the left and in a famous open letter to the President of the Republic, J'accuse, Emile Zola demanded a retrial. In 1898 a new trial was ordered by the Ministry of War. Colonel Henry's forgery was exposed in the press and in response the hapless colonel com-



to Trentino and while there served as the secretary to the local socialist organization.

Mussolini rose quickly in the PSI. He seemed to embody the tough, restless spirit then sweeping through the ranks of the younger party members. His irrationalism, intellectual temperament and latent authoritarianism all pushed him rapidly into the leadership of the party. By 1912 Mussolini was ready for one of the several coups that would punctuate his life. During the Congress of Reggio Emilia, called to debate the Libyan War, the revolutionary wing of the party crashed its way into power and the militants, albeit somewhat hesitantly, offered Mussolini the editorship of the party organ, *Avanti!* Much to the chagrin of the more ideologically coherent militants, Mussolini at once opened up the pages of *Avanti!* to unorthodox writers and ideas. The First World War was the crucible that would bring a faltering Italian democracy, a pacifist socialist party, a group of intransigent ex-soldiers, revolutionary syndicalists and Mussolini into a head-on, full-throttle collision. The war itself fractured Italian society. Those favoring neutrality included the Catholic Church, the PSI and the political allies of then-Prime Minister Giolitti. Those favoring intervention numbered among them dissident revolutionary socialists and syndicalists who believed war would hasten the Social Revolution, radical and republican democrats who feared Austrian and Prussian authoritarianism, and the nationalist right who wished to expand Italian territory at the expense of Austria.

Mussolini's position on the war wavered. Initially he affected the traditional socialist antimilitarist, internationalist convictions and preached passive opposition. This soon gave way to the perception that the war could be the device whereby the political system of *transformismo* might be crushed. In a famous editorial in *Avanti!* on 18 October, 1914 titled, "From Passive to Operative and Active Neutrality," Mussolini tried to edge the PSI towards a prowar stance. The top leadership of the party tried to change his mind but he remained unmoved

were to follow national programs. This allowed for a confusing and constant ebb and flow of national political alliances based on convenience rather than ideological agreement. The resulting instability of ministerial personnel became so pervasive as to warrant its own word, *transformismo*. Finally, the Italian constitution provided for the division of the country into districts overseen by Prefects stationed in Rome. The Prefects held enormous power in their respective districts and often wielded this influence to sway local elections. Thus an entire class of politicians came into being who were significantly more loyal to the government than they were to their own constituencies. By 1900, after a mere forty years, democracy in Italy seemed headed for certain extinction.

After the expansion of the electoral franchise in 1881, a significant Radical and Republican faction appeared in parliament. The opposition was augmented in 1892 the foundation of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI ). The government, however, viewed this new entity and the attendant unrest that followed its formation with mounting distrust. Less than a year after its initiation the PSI was banned and most of its militants were driven underground. A number of elites viewed this development with some consternation, particularly industrialists, who were convinced that the expansion of political rights was linked to economic progress. In 1899 the PSI was once again declared legal and the leaders embarked on organizing the industrial north of the country.

Enter Benito Mussolini, born in Predappio, on 29 July, 1883. Mussolini's mother was a schoolteacher and his father was a blacksmith and a convinced revolutionary socialist. Mussolini received his teaching certificate in 1901 and after only one year as a teacher he emigrated to Switzerland. While there he became acquainted with the coterie of revolutionary socialist and syndicalist militants who perpetually sought asylum in the neutral country. Mussolini returned to Italy in 1905 and served in the army until 1909. After his discharge he emigrated



mitted suicide. Enter Maurras, who, like most of the extreme right was less concerned with the scandalous activities of the military than he was about the loss of respect for the Army, the only French institution that had remained relatively unscathed by the pandemic corruption of the Third Republic.

Maurras, in response to the uproar following the Henry suicide, wrote an article entitled "The First Blood" and it is in this piece that all the aforementioned tendencies of the extreme right came into place, not as political categories, but as actual political arguments. Maurras firmly and unequivocally builds the myth of blood, Henry's blood, that cries out for retribution, the blood of the nation that must be purified by fire and sword. Nazi propaganda will follow a similar pattern, as in the slogan *blut und baden* (blood and soil). The impact of "The First Blood" was phenomenal. The Right had been searching for an effective refutation of pro-Dreyfusard propaganda, and Maurras, far from providing such a refutation, shifted the blame fully from the army to the pro-Dreyfusards and via association back to Dreyfus himself. As one contemporary observer noted, Maurras said what no one else had even dared to think. Indeed, Maurras spent the rest of his life writing explanations and clarifications of the article, though he never retracted it. Interestingly, the Dreyfus Affair was concluded to the satisfaction of both left and right, Dreyfus was retried by the army and found guilty once again (with mitigating circumstances), he was then pardoned by the President of the Republic, rehabilitated and presented with the Legion of Honor.

As with most of the extreme right, Maurras will also develop a scathing critique of democracy, and it is here that one begins to notice that the journalist has borrowed certain extreme left constructs. First, Maurras contends that far from the stated liberal goals of investing the people with both Liberty and Authority, society has in fact vested the populace with Authority (by the vote) but taken away its Liberty, which is ensconced in the ruling classes. To Maurras, this is an inversion of how society

should actually function, where the People are invested with Liberty, and Authority resides in a ruling elite (for Maurras this elite is the aristocracy and the crown). Significantly, similar conclusions were being reached concurrently by extreme-left theorists, particularly the syndicalists. Though obviously the formulation by the anarchists veered from the royalist conclusions of Maurras, the substitution of the term union for monarchy produces an identical formulation. Thus, the General Secretary of the CNT could state in the first decade of the twentieth century that the two goals of the Confederation were the reestablishment of Liberty and the destruction of democracy.

As stated above, there was a confluence in the early part of the century between extreme-left and extreme-right theory, and more importantly there was a confluence of theorists. In the first decade of the twentieth century a group of young Syndicalists who were working with Georges Sorel and few of the intellectuals whom Maurras had associated with formed the *Cercle Proudhon*. Though the stated principles of the *Cercle* were ambiguous, the primary interest of the group was to develop an overpowering refutation of democracy. Further the *Cercle* leveled a scathing critique at both the bourgeoisie and the working class for their policies of parliamentary compromise and collaboration. The theorists of the *Cercle* clearly were delineating a society based less on class struggle than on all-out class war. Similar associations of extremists with similar goals would spring up all over Europe as the continent headed inexorably towards the First World War. And it would be after the cataclysm of the "war to end all wars" that these associations would put their theories into practice.

It seems almost incredible to the late twentieth century observer that democracy could have come into such disrepute, especially when one considers the current liberal litany about the immutability of the democratic edifice. Yet, one is drawn to the conclusion that there were a significant number of intellectuals who were willing to renounce almost a century of



reason in order to realize an anti-democratic, anti-rational, and in some instances an anti-bourgeois society. In addition, these intellectuals were willing to provide the theoretical justification for the unleashing of a political fury that would eventually provide for the establishment of such a society.

## The Italians

The general impression during the last decade of the nineteenth century was that Italian democracy was doomed. This was so for a number of reasons. Most prominent was the sense of betrayal on both left and right that proceeded from the founding of the Italian state in 1860. The left, composed of republicans, socialists, and anarchists, had envisioned a Social Republic along the lines of Jacobin France or the Paris Commune, or at the very least a powerful legislative corps and an elected executive. The right had hoped for a strong non-constitutional monarchy with a foreign policy aimed ultimately at building an empire. Thus, when a mixed constitutional monarchy came into being, no one was very happy. Another flaw of the Italian system were the restrictions placed on the electoral franchise. An electoral reform instituted in 1881 admitted some small shopkeepers and skilled workers onto the voting lists; this, however, instead of calming the political situation threw it into more turmoil as the new voters rallied around the radical republican standard of Guiseppe Mazzini.

The structure of the government itself provided further complaints. The men who had shaped the constitution had used the extreme centralization of the French state as their paradigm. This produced a dual negative result. First, it denied regional autonomy to areas that had enjoyed almost total freedom of action and commerce for centuries. After unification, political elites were more likely to pursue regional agendas than they