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# *Protest Ideologies*

THE GREAT DEPRESSION which engulfed America in the Thirties while Stalin consolidated power in Russia, Mussolini rode triumphant in Italy, Hitler fashioned his Nazi legions, and Spain was torn with civil strife caused Americans to reassess their political beliefs more critically than ever before in the twentieth century. Though the dominant lines of political thought seemed to run between economic individualism and pragmatic liberalism or progressivism, America was not lacking a host of critics who offered more radical solutions to the crisis than were contained in the mild and often confusing patch-work patterns of the New Deal. Some sought to turn the desperate state of the country to their private advantage, seeking personal power or wealth; some more altruistic souls spent all, health and wealth, in their effort to aid their fellow-man; some were militant, vituperative, and vindictive; some were kindly, charitable, and compassionate. Some, in these confusing times, wrote simple panaceas only to find that such were the needs of the country that suddenly they were looked upon as messiahs, and urged to lead the helpless, insecure, and unemployed out of the wilderness. Such a one was Upton Sinclair, the Socialist writer whose novel *The Jungle* (1906), with its lurid description of health hazards and inhumane working conditions in the meat-packing industry, had left its mark on American thought. Now, in 1933, Sinclair joined the Democratic party and wrote a political pamphlet entitled *How I Ended Poverty in California*. Suddenly E.P.I.C. (End Poverty in California) became a political symbol of great significance and Sinclair barely missed being elected Democratic governor of California. These were the days of Huey Long and his "Share-the-Wealth" program, of Father Coughlin with his inflammatory *Social Justice*; of Senator "Bob" Reynolds, with his *Silver Shirts* and *American Vindicator*, as well as the days of the benign Dr. Townsend with his old-age pension plan. In these unhappy days there was a certain abundance of

food for thought, for all the uncertainty of nourishment for the body.

While the main stream of American thought moved with the elections a little left of center, or rather more to the center from the right, there were voices of dissent and protest which radically challenged the basic preconceptions of a capitalistic democracy. With an ideological struggle soon to engulf the world, it was inevitable that some measure of this struggle be mirrored in the philosophical controversies over domestic politics. The many varieties of Marxism in America had all their devotees in frequent and ferocious eschatological dispute, closely infighting with the extraordinary zeal known only by the sectarian devout. Stalinists, Trotskyites, and various Socialist sects waged mortal combat with each other, and with endless fission reduced themselves to insignificant proportions, thereby dissipating the energy which they might have been expected to expend on their common enemy, capitalism. Meanwhile, into the confusion, dressed in various patriotic garbs, came the exponents of fascism. Out of this curious and often bewildering *mélange* of dissident voices, three—Lawrence Dennis, Norman Thomas, and Paul Sweezy—are especially worthy of mention here in that they departed in some measure from the trodden paths of American thought and sought to turn the thinking of their countrymen in new political directions.

#### AMERICAN FASCISM: LAWRENCE DENNIS

When, in 1935, Sinclair Lewis's best-seller *It Can't Happen Here* was published, portraying the coming of fascism to the United States, there were those who felt that it could indeed happen here. Huey Long (until assassinated in 1935) ruled Louisiana with virtually dictatorial power. Father Coughlin preached anti-Semitism; Senator Reynolds' Silver Shirts seemed to have a similarity to Mussolini's Black Shirts; and Nazi Bund meetings were on the rise. It was, in all, plausible to believe that the historic hour of democracy had passed and a new wave of the future was coming into being. The insecurity, frustration, and fear that swept across the land in those dark days severely challenged the benevolent conceptions of man inherent in democratic values. Toleration was challenged by movements dedicated to intolerance; equality was met with sinister suspicion when not the outward violence of racial battles; liberty was countered

with such a crude economic interpretation as to deny its traditional moral meaning. It was in this setting that American fascism rose as a sporadic political movement and as a system of political thought.

The identification of capitalism with democracy, and the subsuming of each under the term liberalism, was characteristic of fascism along with other anti-democratic thought of this period. The obvious historic parallel of capitalism and democracy gave to each system an intriguing suggestion of dependency upon the other. For capitalism, like democracy and Protestantism, was an outgrowth of the medieval period; indeed, in the subsequent centuries these three value systems or ideologies were often found together. The relationship of the religious ethic and the spirit of capitalism has often been remarked on.<sup>1</sup> America, like England, was predominantly Protestant, capitalistic, and democratic. It was the relationship of capitalism and democracy, however, which received most attention in the writings of modern American political theorists. Were they in fact conflicting systems of thought, as seemed implicit in the writings of the Populist and progressive reformers, as well as in the opinions of the staunchest defenders of judicial review of economic legislation? Or were they mutually supporting ideologies, as was implicitly maintained by such proponents of a natural aristocracy as More, Babbitt, and Cram (concerning whom, see Chapter 19)?

The assumption that liberalism—capitalism and democracy—had reached its peak in the nineteenth century and was now collapsing before the march of a new order was common to fascists and communists alike. Both held that democracy in a capitalist country was not only actually impossible but undesirable. Both thus sought the overthrow of capitalistic-democracy and the institution of a totalitarian dictatorship. The fascist sought the dictatorship of the elite while the communist sought the dictatorship of the proletariat; proponents of each system thought of it, however, as the inevitable new order.

While there were many minor fascistic movements in America during the Thirties, there were few coherent spokesmen for fascism. Lawrence Dennis (1894- ) was undoubtedly the most articulate and intellectual defender of American fascism as a system of thought.

<sup>1</sup> See R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (London: J. Murray, 1926); Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: G. Allen, 1930); Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, 2 vols. (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1931).



In his three major works, *Is Capitalism Doomed?* (1932), *The Coming American Fascism* (1936), and *The Dynamics of War and Revolution* (1940), as well as in his numerous articles in the *American Mercury*, Dennis made clear the major features of fascism for America. Fascism, as Dennis developed it, was basically an attack upon liberalism—capitalism and democracy—which he found to be obsolete as an ideology and impractical as a scheme of social organization. The major burden of the fascist criticism, however, was upon *laissez faire* capitalism, not democracy; democracy came under attack largely because it permitted the follies of business leadership. Tracing the rise of capitalism through nineteenth-century America, Dennis found that capitalism prospered as long as there was an expanding frontier, an expanding population, and easy wars of conquest. With the twentieth century, however, these major props for capitalism were gone. Capitalism thus approached a senility marked by inflation and bust, the depression of the Thirties which could only be alleviated by war. To a large extent Dennis blamed the international bankers for modern wars and depressions. Yet, he charged, capitalistic leadership, such as usually existed in a democracy, was generally incapable of effective social programming and control.

Business is a competitive game of profit-seeking and not a cooperative way of promoting human welfare. Love of the game, love of activity, love of power and love of lucre are the dominant motives in business enterprises. The driving force is human greed. The technique is human cunning. Such a system calls for moderation and practice under the effective play of strong factors of social impulse, guidance and restraint.

The charm of capitalism is that it may be practiced in a way to allow of a varied and balanced civilization. When business leadership becomes dominant, balance is lost.<sup>2</sup>

The business ethic, Dennis argued, was contrary to the normal requirements for social order, let alone growth and development. Furthermore, such an ethic was totally lacking in those vague and mystical qualities that gave cohesiveness to the community. As a result the urge to profits could have only limited appeal and therefore only limited social utility.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Dennis, *Is Capitalism Doomed?* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932), p. 7. By permission.

The problem of society is the pursuit of happiness according to some scheme of values. The problem of business can only be the competitive pursuit of profits through the satisfaction of human wants and the exploitation of human weaknesses. The pursuit of these conflicting objectives must always involve a conflict between society and profit seekers.<sup>3</sup>

The profit motive had proven satisfactory in the past only because it had not been the primary motivating force in capitalism. The expansion of capitalism had been a part of the "militant nationalism" of the nineteenth century which thus gave a spiritual or "non-commercial" impulse to the social order. Something beyond the search for profits was needed if a society wished to prevent stagnation. "The success of communism or fascism and the futility of liberalism are explained largely by the fact that communism and fascism are living religions and that man is an emotional being."<sup>4</sup> Capitalism was thus subjected to the fascist criticism that it was unable to provide the sort of leadership necessary to a people who desired more than the mere satisfaction of the pecuniary desires. Military leadership was preferable to business leadership, Dennis argued, in that the soldier-leader recognized a sense of obligation to his subordinates, whereas the business leader looked only to his own advantage. "Profit makers cannot lead a people. Profit makers are against and never with the people."<sup>5</sup>

Thus, in 1932, Lawrence Dennis maintained that capitalism was doomed for two main reasons: first, the conditions which made the rise and flourishing of capitalism possible no longer existed; second, the type of social leadership which capitalism brought forth was socially destructive rather than constructive and because of its emphasis on the profit motive denied to society the mystical or spiritual values that gave impetus to social growth and development. Even in the field of economics, Dennis maintained, business leadership had failed.

States of feeling, not knowledge of facts or technique, determine choices, generate activity and, in short, shape human destiny, in economics quite as much as in love or in war. Value and demand, the two most fundamental economic concepts, are the products of the emotions. If the capitalistic machine, as it is now functioning, inhibits

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

such leadership as is essential to the creation of the right states of feeling for a satisfactory quantity and quality of activity for the biological survival and the spiritual growth of the human race, it would seem that the machine is doomed. . . . Possibly frequent wars, which will bring into play strong spiritual leadership, will continue to provide the requisite solutions at appropriate intervals. But, then, can capitalism survive many modern wars? Russia suggests grave doubt.<sup>6</sup>

Dennis had predicted the end of capitalism, and with it the end of liberalism as an ideology, well before the full effects of the depression were felt. By 1936, in the depths of the depression, he believed that the collapse of capitalism had been adequately demonstrated. In *The Coming American Fascism* he continued his attack upon capitalistic-democracy with the evidence of the depression fresh at hand. The charge that the system had failed, he maintained, was supported by the fear, frustration, and unemployment throughout the land. Only war, he argued, could temporarily salvage the system. Viewing capitalistic-democratic society much as Hobbes had viewed the state of nature, Dennis argued that life in a profit system was a war of every man against every man, of minority groups against minority groups, with each and every contestant indifferent or opposed to the national welfare. Yet under the logic of *laissez faire* capitalism, government ought not to intervene; in fact government in a constitutional democracy, as interpreted by the courts, was powerless to intervene. When intervention in the economy was considered permissible it was only because some minority group had temporarily succeeded in gaining power to the disadvantage of opposing groups and interests. Such a system—which Dennis called liberalism—was obviously irrational as it assumed that out of this struggle of selfish forces would come a beneficial social order. To the contrary, Dennis maintained, out of this struggle could come only temporary victories for selfish groups which were usually contrary to the best or more general interests of society.

This continual combat, this chaos, was carried on under the framework of a legal system which was supposed to make this country a government of laws and not of men. This fiction, as Dennis called it, led to two misconceptions. First, it led to the belief that the constitutional and legal systems were impartial expressions of the people's will, as was usually stated in defense of judicial review.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.



Second, it overlooked the crucial and partial role of the administrator and interpreter of the laws. The struggle for advantage, Dennis insisted, reached its highest point in the making and interpreting of the laws which controlled men. The conception of law and its administration as impartial justice expressing the general popular will was a vestigial remnant in theory from the eighteenth century, clearly fallacious in any realistic view of politics. Neither the laws nor their administration was either general in source or impartial in application. Indeed, Dennis countered, laws in America were generally the achievement of the capitalist elite; and these laws were then interpreted by the partisans of this elite.

Thus far Dennis attacked capitalistic-democracy as being not a system of order but a state of chaos whose laws were rules which worked to the advantage of the powerful. Like Hobbes, Dennis rejected moral restraints upon human behavior as being nothing more than platitudes which limited no one not otherwise restrained. The terms of peace in this war of each against all were determined by force and power, not platitudes nor law. Law was an instrument of force which might only be employed by those already possessing force. Dennis thus rejected the assumptions of an ultimate harmony of interests between competing groups or individuals, a moral code actually governing human behavior, and impartial justice administered by a disinterested government. Government, indeed society, under the liberal ideology, was to Dennis a storehouse which each tried to rob to his private advantage, the spoils of which went to the most ruthless and cunning robber.

Capitalistic-democratic thought, Dennis noted, attributed to itself as one of its virtues the claim that wide areas of freedom existed within the law. That is to say, freedom existed where governmental restraint was absent. This view, too, Dennis attacked as a misconception. There was little difference to him between the force employed by the police, or a large corporation, or a labor union. Economic coercion was an instrument of force; the policeman's club was an instrument of force. Force was found wherever conflict existed in society; and the heart of liberalism was competition and conflict. Freedom was thus a shibboleth in a complex, highly interdependent society. Beyond such normative expressions as freedom, justice, truth, etc. was always the ulterior value which was sought by the user of the expression. If one sought employment and there were no jobs available, he was as coerced into unemployment as though there were a law against employment. Coercion, or force,

permeated society; governmental repression was simply a tool which some of the victors employed when it served their convenience. "The much vaunted freedom of modern capitalism is largely a matter of the freedom of property owners from social responsibility for the consequences of their economic choices."<sup>7</sup>

Dennis's use of Hobbesian assumptions regarding human nature led him directly to Hobbesian conclusions regarding the social order. The great Fascist Leviathan, to be brought forth from the chaos of liberalism, would establish a sovereign leader, or committee of the elite, with absolute power over all within the national boundaries. Out of the depression, or the next war, he maintained, the frustrated elite would come into power. Who were the elite? "The elite may be defined roughly and arbitrarily as including capitalists deriving most of their income from property, business enterprisers and farmers, the professional classes, and, generally, the employed whose salaries are considerably above the average."<sup>8</sup> In other words, the upper-income groups constituted the elite. Yet these were the very groups who Dennis claimed control the country anyway. By Dennis's own argument, leaders were those with a will to power who possessed power; therefore a change in leadership would represent a change in the locii of power; were power to remain in the hands of those already possessing it, it is difficult to see how there would be either a change in leadership or a change in political ethic. Nevertheless he argued that when fascism came about—and he assumed that its coming was inevitable—there would be a complete change in our political system as well as in our political thought. The change in political values and the thought associated with them would be extremely consequential.

Two simple but profound and fundamental notions are essential to any understanding of planning, or fascism, or communism as well as to the formulation of any new social system. The first notion is that any social system represents a given scheme or hierarchy of ultimate values, or group and personal objectives, the upholding of which is one of the chief duties of man, the State, and social institutions generally. The second notion is that these ultimate values cannot be validated by the processes of logic or by reason.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Dennis, *The Coming American Fascism* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1936), p. 23. By permission.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107. The brief quoted passages in the text following are from pages 105 and 106.

It was this emphasis upon ends rather than means which gave to fascism no little of its Machiavellian appearance, for the criterion for judging the means employed was the degree of success in accomplishing the desired end. In other words, there was no question of the morality of any means which might be indicated to reach the ulterior value or end. Furthermore, rather than being bound by any given scheme of values, fascism employed a flexible approach, based on the assumption that there were no absolute values or absolute truths. "The fascist scheme of things is an expression of human will which creates its own truths and values from day to day to suit its changing purposes." Fascism then "is essentially an expression of the human will reacting to the changing situations of life in the eternal struggle for existence." Fascism was not however "anti-intellectual or anti-rational"; it only rejected the rationalism of the eighteenth century which assumed that reason was normative "instead of being merely instrumental, or the tool of the will and of our emotional drives." The ultimate values of fascism—while not specifically defined—were thus not absolute ones.

The elite of the fascist state would select the ultimate values, the ends of the social order, and would establish the means for their fulfillment. Conscious planning and control would supplant the older system of economic anarchy. Since coercion existed under any system, the introduction of social control would not necessarily increase coercion but simply shift the location and subjects of power. "We cannot demonstrate scientifically that there is more or less freedom or coercion under any one of the three systems, capitalism, fascism, and communism, than there is under the other."<sup>10</sup> Planning, however, would emphasize social order rather than "individual or group self-expression." Toleration, however, would exist to the extent that such a policy was socially useful. There could be, of course, no place for a right of an individual or minority against the government, or against society. Utility rather than righteousness was the heart of fascist policy. Or to state the matter another way, righteousness was the standard established by the strong, which in fascist theory meant the government could do no wrong. Judged by political consequences, the government might act ineffectually but never wrongly. "It is a favorite and basic axiom of liberalism that might does not make right. It is a self-evident fact that under the liberal, as under every other, regime, might does make right and always has made

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.



right."<sup>11</sup> Since the victors made the rules, Dennis argued, it was impossible for justice to be otherwise.

As superior power was to be found in the hands of the elite controlling the fascist government, superior virtue was to be found there accordingly. All institutional checks upon the government would be abolished. Government officials would have permanent terms. As did Hobbes, Dennis argued that the absolute ruler would be most inclined to promote the public interest. "The art of insuring a desired standard of performance by public officials is to be found in making it their professional pride and self-interest under the system created so to perform—not in creating a system of checks, restraints, and interferences, the principal results of which will be irresponsibility in administration, frustration of efficient government, and the fostering of rackets, rather than protection of the weak or curbing of the mighty."<sup>12</sup>

Fascism, by exploiting the driving emotional force of patriotism, or nationalism, would achieve a social solidarity lacking in the individualistic ethic of liberalism. In its economic program, there would be state planning and control over the more vital areas of the economy. All economic institutions would be considered as means to the national ends, rather than as ends in themselves. The techniques of social control would be varied; most small private enterprises would be permitted to exist. "It is necessary only to nationalize large financial institutions and monopolistic industries, as well as all corporations whose services are indispensable but whose management has become completely divorced from ownership, and to discipline adequately all private enterprise."<sup>13</sup> Some amount of "free market" would be permitted to help establish economic values. Generally, private property would continue in private hands but again not as a right but as long as it was a convenient means to a socially desired national end.

The specific political arrangements of fascism were not made clear by Dennis. One political party would exist, but only one, for its function was primarily that of a channel of communication between the people and the government. When Dennis speaks of representation, he defines it as "the process through which the government is

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176.

kept apprised of the popular will and through which government makes the popular will understand and will the means and ends of public administration."<sup>14</sup> Federalism, the separation of powers, and the rigid Constitution would of course be eliminated. Education would be rigidly controlled in order to make of the pupils "good citizens."

In the fascist view of things, all institutional formation of character, mind, social attitudes, and opinions with a social purpose, must harmonize with, and not be antagonistic to, the larger purposes of the national plan. This means that fascism holds that no institution forming people's minds, characters, and attitudes should have among its purposes or effects the unfitting of people for good citizenship as the State defines good citizenship.<sup>15</sup>

There could be no academic freedom in the fascist state, for education served a crucial function of indoctrinating students with the correct political and social values. To leave this to chance would be even more disastrous to the state than to permit an equal amount of freedom in the economic sphere. It must be understood, of course, that Dennis's denial of objective truth in the realm of values led him to argue that values represented the advantageous claims of strong groups or interests. Conflicting values represented conflicting groups or interests. Thus in the realm of values or attitudes it was always a question of whose values and to what purpose. Or, as he posed the question:

Who shall manipulate the opinions, feelings, and attitudes of the masses?—for manipulated they must and will be in a civilization as complex and highly organized as ours. Is it preferable to have mass opinions, feelings, and social attitudes manipulated by powerful private interests for personal or minority group ends, or to have mass opinions guided by a national State in the pursuit of some idealized plan of social well-being and order?<sup>16</sup>

It was thus a function of the elite in the fascist state to know clearly what they wanted as national ends; to accomplish these national ends; and to make the people feel these national ends were exactly what they really wanted. Through the manipulation of public opinion the will of the people thus coincided with the will of the elite

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211-212.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.



who ruled them. Since the masses wanted what they got, they got what they wanted and thus their will was satisfied; so they enjoyed perfect freedom. Through the accomplishment of the national will, fascism in effect forced people to be free.

The fascist concept of the elite assumed that there were in every society a few individuals who were distinguished from the rest of the people by their excessive will to power. Unlike the "natural aristocracy" line of thought, fascism did not attribute to the elite superior wisdom or virtue or any ethical qualification. The elite possessed superior power, or such an obvious will to power that their claims were recognized in society. Ethical standards in society simply reflected the decisions of the elite. All societies were in fact governed by minorities; in democratic societies the various elites gave the masses issues to vote on and manipulated public opinion so as to control the outcome. However, in democratic societies there were conflicting and competing elite groups which led to schisms in public opinion and irrational political behavior as power shifted from one minority group to another. Under fascism, it was argued, the perpetual character of the triumphant elite would eliminate the conflicts inherent in democratic government and give order and consistency to the policies that furthered the national interest.

This conception of the role of the elite, however, introduced some difficulties into fascist thought. First, it may be observed that if elites inevitably do rule, and if the social attitudes are what the elite in power have manipulated the public to accept and desire, how could Dennis and others come to a contrary political attitude? Second, if the pragmatic test of elitism is the possession of power, how could the fascists out of power lay claim to elitism? Obviously Dennis's objection to what he called liberalism was—given the assumption that elites always ruled—that the wrong elites were in power, and motivated by the wrong ethic, they were doing the wrong things. In other words, after having reduced political values to nothing more than the codes of the stronger, fascism failed to follow its own logic but challenged liberalism precisely on ethical grounds. Liberalism was bad, Dennis had argued, because there were so many unemployed, because the courts favored the rich, because America engaged in world wars, because the big corporations had their own way, because property was favored over humanity, and because political and economic power were irresponsible. To criticize the "is" as what ought not to be is completely contrary to the

fascist logic that the victors make the rules and the people accept them as moral standards.

Fascists were inclined to refer all matters to the supposed standard of the national interest. Thus they criticized liberalism for neglecting the national interest or acting contrary to the national will. But since, by the logic of fascism, the national interest is what the rulers say it is, it would appear to be impossible for any ruler to neglect the national interest or oppose the national will. The fascist use of such terms as the national interest, the national will, and the responsibility of leadership is clearly a resort to a supposed ethical standard quite beyond the bounds of fascist thought. It is indeed a return to the normative approach of the eighteenth century which Dennis castigated liberalism for accepting. Fascism, Dennis wrote, "proposes a formula of national interest and national discipline under which power is exercised with responsibility to the State for the social consequences of its exercise and with a view to realizing the national plan."<sup>17</sup> To introduce the concept of responsibility in this fashion would seem to indicate that power does not necessarily set the standards of political conduct. That is, it introduces a reference point as to how power ought to be exercised.

"A powerful State guided by a capable elite loyal to some scheme of national interest is far more expressive of the popular will than a weak liberal State, because the powerful State can do more than a weak State to shape social events of importance, and also chiefly because the powerful State can make the people genuinely like or assent to what it does."<sup>18</sup> Beyond the elite, it would appear, there was a national interest which was not just what the elite declared it to be. There would seem, however, to be no special virtue in the elite's expression of the popular will which they created; thus fascism rejected the popular will as a normative factor even as it claimed for fascism the virtue of being that system which best expressed it. "The great contribution of fascism to mass welfare is that of providing a formula of national solidarity within the spiritual bonds and iron discipline of which the elite and the masses of any given nation, every one in the measure of his capacity, can operate for the common good."<sup>19</sup> The common good, like the national interest, is of course a normative proposition.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

There being no institutional checks upon the elite, the only restraint upon their authority was their own sense of responsibility to the national interest. Fascism, in Dennis's theory, would introduce responsibility into elite leadership, in place of the irresponsible leadership which he charged against liberalism. Responsibility so used, however, reduces that term to sheer mysticism. Fascism rejects responsibility to the judgment of others not in power as being both impossible and undesirable. Responsibility is impossible because the elite always rule according to their own standards; it is undesirable because the masses are incompetent to rule. Responsibility to the national interest is therefore not responsibility to people but to an ideal, a value, as interpreted by the elite. Responsibility thus is a matter of the leader's loyalty to his own judgment; which is not political responsibility at all but the total rejection of it.

Fascism offered an elitist system based upon no clear principle of responsibility, and, in fact, no clear definition of the elite. Dennis's elite was a mystical notion which defied identification in practice as it did definition in theory. Rejecting liberalism, fascism looked to a golden age of inequality in the future in which the frustrations, insecurities, and materialistic ambitions of man would either be eliminated or checked in favor of a "higher order" of life. Social duties would be emphasized in place of private rights; and the rights of man would always be subordinate to the interest of the right man. Indeed, in the final sentence of his bitter *The Dynamics of War and Revolution* (1940), Dennis declared, "One will hear less about the rights of man and more about the duties of man and the rights of the American people."<sup>20</sup> In fascism, patriotism, nationalism, and Americanism were put to service in a mystical system in which authority was imposed from above and the masses were condemned to a political impotence commensurate with their alleged incompetence.

Fascism in America never achieved much in the way of a popular following. For a time, just before World War II, there was a motley assortment of racists, super-patriots, and isolationists who, under the label of America First, were ominously suggestive of a nascent fascist movement, but the movement died with the coming of the war.

The significance of Lawrence Dennis lay in the fact that he gave philosophical respectability to one of the major ideologies of the

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Dennis, *The Dynamics of War and Revolution* (The Weekly Foreign Letter, 1940), p. 250.



decade. While other supporters of fascism in America were frequently rabble-rousers, eager to incite and inflame crowd grievances to no apparent end other than personal power, Dennis performed the less spectacular role of fascist theoretician. He thus gave substance to a line of argument more usually conveyed by shouted slogans. Should the course of world politics give rise to the spectre of fascism again, one may assume that in America the writings of Lawrence Dennis would be called again into service.

### NORMAN THOMAS: SOCIALISM

For all of the efforts of the Socialist Party to enlarge the following of Karl Marx in America early in the twentieth century, the efforts proved largely unsuccessful. Eugene Debs attracted a large personal following, but this undoubtedly was as much in spite of his socialism as because of it. Deb's appeal no doubt lay as much in his old fashioned Populism as in his socialism; indeed there is no evidence that there was any great conversion of people to socialism for all of the limited popularity of Debs. Although Socialists had won over a few cities—Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, Reading—early in the twentieth century, there was no great intellectual or political following of socialism on a national basis. Faced with seemingly endless internal dispute and fractionalization, together with the declining health and prestige of Debs, the Socialist Party failed to run a presidential candidate in 1924, choosing instead to support the candidacy of Robert LaFollette on the Progressive ticket. Thus had the fortunes of socialism declined since the peak of membership and influence in 1912. By the time of Debs' death in 1926, many former socialists had left the party while others were writing of the passing of socialism in the United States.

Although socialism seemed dead in the prosperous Twenties, the depression of the Thirties temporarily revitalized the movement. The instrument of this brief revitalization was Norman Thomas (1884- ). A perennial candidate for President on the Socialist ticket, like his predecessor Eugene Debs—(Thomas ran 6 times, Debs 5)—Thomas gave leadership to Socialist Party thought for over three decades. The son of a minister, Thomas also became a minister, but hardly before the religion of humanity had come into competition in his mind with more orthodox theology. Inspired by

## Chapter 18

### THE PROTEST IDEOLOGIES

For the historical context of these ideologies see the bibliography for the preceding chapter. A critical analysis of elitist thought is found in David Spitz, *Patterns of Anti-Democratic Thought* (New York, 1949). Additional views on international affairs of Lawrence Dennis are in his articles in the *American Mercury*: "What Price Good Neighbor," XLV (1938); "After the Peace of Munich," XLVI (1939); and "Propaganda for War: Model 1938," XLIV (1938). For the politics of fascism see Raymond Gram Swing, *Forerunners of American Fascism* (New York, 1935); Dwight MacDonal, *Fascism and the American Scene* (New York: Pioneer Publishers, n.d.); John Roy Carlson, *Under Cover* (New York, 1943), and *The Plotters* (New York, 1946).

There is a growing literature linking fascism with populism in America. See Oscar Handlin, "How U. S. Anti-Semitism Really Began," *Commentary*, XI (1951); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York, 1955); Peter Viereck, "The Revolt Against the Elite," in Daniel Bell (ed.), *The New American Right* (New York, 1955); and particularly Victor C. Ferkiss, "Populist Influences on American Fascism," *Western Political Quarterly*, June, 1957. Also see Victor C. Ferkiss, "Ezra Pound and American Fascism," *Journal of Politics*, XVII (1955).

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## Chapter 19

### CONSERVATISM

American conservatism is developed historically, and defended, in Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana* (Chicago, 1953), and Clinton Rossiter, *Conservatism In America* (New York, 1955). Also see Gordon Harrison, *Road to the Right: The Tradition and Hope of American Conservatism*. Further statements of conservatism may be found in Russell Kirk, *A Program For Conservatives* (Chicago, 1954), and *The American Cause* (Chicago, 1957); Peter Viereck, *The Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals* (Boston, 1953), and *Conservatism From John Adams To Churchill* (New York, 1956); Francis G. Wilson, *The Case For Conservatism* (Seattle, Washington, 1951). Also see Wilson's "A Theory of Conservatism," *American Political Science Review*, February 1941, and