

## **History of International Relations**

### **The European Interwar Far-Right: Elements of a Political-Intellectual Psychology**

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**Abstract:** Far-Right may be defined as a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.

**Keywords:** Far-Right; Fascism; National-Socialism

Some Western historians were probably right when writing that the European far-right (with its main forms of manifestation - Fascism and National-Socialism) was the big political surprise of the twentieth century. (Allardyce, 1971, p. 1)

The (methodological, interpretative, but also affective-psychological) difficulties in addressing such an issue, led these historians to believe that the Fascist problem (understood as a unifying model for all the “-isms” of this type) would represent the most difficult and, probably, the most important historical issue of our time. (Allardyce, 1971, p. 1)

It cannot be emotionally and psychologically easy, for both a series of researchers, as well as for some amateurs of history to read in certain historiographical works (beneficiary of a critical apparatus of indisputable scientific accuracy) that Adolf Hitler's regime was the most popular government in the whole history of Germany, or that the socio-economic model imposed by Mussolini's Fascism would amount

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to a success of social nature, many years after the “Blackshirts” have gained political power in Italy. (Allardyce, 1971, p. 1)

But, summarizing the manifestations of the European far-right exclusively to the standard models illustrated by Fascism and National-Socialism would be a mistake, a narrowing of the approach and a sign of the existence of some prejudice that should not have any contact with scientific analysis. The ambition of a multitude of small groups in different European countries to crystallize their own cultural-ideological national versions which would fit the wide range of the far-right is a reality that is no longer questionable today but by improvised researchers or theist spirits. (Allardyce, 1971, p. 5)

Thinkers such as Santayana rejected the argument according to which the far-right, with its whole array of facets, was the expression of an unfortunate accident of history, which tragically diverted the evolution of the European capitalist society, believing instead that it actually belonged to the historical experience of the West. (Allardyce, 1971, p. 6)

The supporter of the far-right political attitude would have had his own unmistakable specificity, yet differing according to the historical and geographical space and to its identity experience. Capitalist society, after generating for decades prosperity, balance, sense of complete human fulfillment, now faced a series of crises, its representative values being considered by certain social segments as unnecessary, false or simply dangerous, generating sense of alienation.

The far-right would in fact be a psychological reaction to the stress generated by the monopoly of the capitalist world itself, with its mosaic of attractions, opportunities and behavioral clichés. (Allardyce, 1971, pp. 10-11)

A society that was increasingly worshipping the Golden Calf, proposing hedonism in art, culture and everyday life, lack of prejudice, practicing free love and making some religious precepts susceptible to doubt or derision through the rationalist thinkers.

In Erich Fromm’s view, the Western middle class had proved most easily penetrable by a genuine sadomasochistic model, understood as an ambivalent attraction to power and submission. (Allardyce, 1971, pp. 10-11)

It would have secretly longed for the feeling of safety born out of the conviction that an organizing social force would decide for each and every one in a balanced way and would direct the whole development of the nation towards the good

desired by all. Belonging to the same community of blood, language and tradition proved more powerful than the followers of a Neo-cosmopolitanism cultivating logic and modernity believed. Like tribe or clan solidarity, the followers of the new “-isms” of the radical right would feel the need to pull back behind the images of ethnicity or authoritarian force, eventually identifying the origin of evil in egalitarian democracy, Socialism or Communism.

Some authors like R. Palme Dutt, believed that the social thinking specific to the far-right had such a power of influence that, even after the political failure of Fascism, some administrative-institutional elements specific to its area had been preserved like some tiles placed at the foundation of buildings. He identified such examples, when referring to the work and activity of figures such as F.D. Roosevelt or Bruning - reflected in their very conception of the state itself. (Allardyce, 1971, p. 30)

The psychology of the far-right followers reserved a special status for the idea of state, this being considered the key element to understanding the new proposed project. Basically, the absolutization of the concept of state was specific to the whole Hegelian school and its successors, in this regard tradition being very strong.

L. Mumford, referring to the ideological physiognomy of Fascism, wrote that its sources should be identified in the human soul and not in economy, an idea that would be found in Corneliu Zelea Codreanu’s speech, almost obsessed by the mystical-spiritual side of social involvement. (Allardyce, 1971, p. 43)

The human being always strived to obey, to self-scourge, but also to dominate, alternately changing the role of master with that of slave. In this context, the state appeared not only as a juridical and organizational entity, but also as a living symbol of the collective national soul, a kind of terrestrial reflection of the celestial origin.

When historical circumstances had shattered the foundations of the apparently solid structured state (like in the episode represented by the First World War), the national pride of the frustrated peoples secreted the seeds of future challenging. Thus the far-right had in desperation, bitterness and defeat its first cradle...

Peter F. Druker believed that Fascisms were actually an anti-capitalist revolution, effect of the alienation of societies after having their vital breath taken away by the large monopolistic trusts. (Allardyce, 1971, p. 50)

After 1945, Maurice Bardeche (Fascist theoretician) identified in the far-right ideas a signal emitted by the “natural” man against any form of compulsion the modern society would seek to initiate against him. (Diondonnat, 1973, p. 408)

The paradoxes of the sketch of such a follower of the radical challenges (on the side of the supporters of the radical right/far-right) seem disconcerting at first. The character was ambivalent, being equally supporter of the traditions and opponent of the typical classical formulas of a complacent bourgeoisie, iconoclastic and conservative, pessimistic and dynamic, respecting hierarchy but always supporting the revolutionary triumph of the new.

However, democracy was the theme on which all protagonists of the currents of ideas arising from the common ideological core, generally agreed: as principle, it represented the embodiment of institutional evil, as it opposed the specific of human nature, faking the native data of the individual.

Egalitarianism, leftism, Communism would spring from the cloak of democracy, opposite principle (obviously) to national traditions, crystallizing formulas around the symbols of motherland, family, nation.

Starting from these perceptions, it seems almost “logical” to consider human rights ridiculous, hostile to natural law. Last but not least, the principle of borders would not have any value in reality, unless it would reflect a real order, rooted in the natural communities. (Maissonneuve, 2002, p. 15)

Each representative figure of the European interwar radical right/far-right would bring one’s own individual experience and not least, one’s own mental and psychological traits into the construction of the general ideological scaffolding.

Benito Mussolini knew for years the experience of socialist activism, Socialism itself seeming to him at one point as the quintessence of all doctrines, having the ultimate goal of the human being gaining happiness.

His historical-philosophical culture was brief enough, intermittently assimilating, being fascinated especially by the pragmatic aspects of acquiring political power. His innate intelligence, the capacity for improvisation, the intuition, the cynicism (curiously intertwined with a considerable dose of pessimism) have transformed the former propagandist of the left into a supporter of the “sacred egoism”. This would be the expression with which Italian Fascism would describe the diplomatic struggle in the Peninsula after 1922, to acquire a growing influence in geopolitical terms.

The Italian Fascism praised adventure, the heroic deed, the ability to break away from any canon, considered too “respectable” and therefore obsolete. Excessively vain, Mussolini influenced significantly the typology of the Italian Fascism, boasting with the conception of some maxims and formulas that he considered essential for the very understanding of the mechanisms of the doctrine. The ideological academicism, the programmatic foundation were almost useless aspects for the politician desired by Fascism, considering that reality itself would represent the only regulation worthy of following. Reality would dictate, therefore, the development of ideas, the construction of all historical and political scenarios and would show in this way that the excess of culture would in time cause the annihilation of the individual’s adaptability.

The Italian Fascists would excessively use terms borrowed from the biological arsenal, even if we consider virility, the hardness of actions, the primary energy of the individual, advisable to rather develop the warrior instincts than stable-constructive inclinations.

The exacerbation of the state would gain in Mussolini's vision almost mystical dimensions, the new fascist Leviathan transforming the human being into a negligible element itself, but nevertheless decisive through its successive multiplication, the state itself being perceived as a monolith.

The strict hierarchy, cultivating the infallibility of the supreme leader (“the Duke”) was correlated with the relentless anti-Communism and with an association with the symbols of the Roman Catholic Church, an approach soon born out of political calculation, but well received by the majority of Italians.

Violence was identified with an illustration of metaphysical exasperation, with an indispensable stage of the human being’s attempt to be really fulfilled, detaching from the legacy of other times. The fascist man compensated his acceptance of the hierarchy, by cultivating his warrior potential, through military and sports exercises, colonial projects and the return to the primary sources of the teachings of the eminent dead of the Italian history. The saints, knights, ascetics, martyrs and fighters became components of a single, anthropomorphized cosmology, by which the teenagers and the young people of the new age should be permanently inspired.

Thus, it would be born the new Italian ruling elite, which wanted to be fundamentally different from the traditional ones that had succeeded until then on the political scene, and which were responsible as a whole for all historical

unfulfillment and the economic underdevelopment of the country. Strangely (but naturally for many), the new Fascist elite wanted to be the sequel of the episodes of Italian historical exceptionalism and not of those that indicated the failures. The humiliating moment of Adua (1896) - for instance, was rejected as a shameful exception. Basically, it was considered that there almost demonic factors acted to contribute to the defeat of the Italian Army.

On the one hand Fascism avoided the frequent invocation of sad moments in the history of Italy, and on the other hand, it supported the idea that man, despite the efforts of church, family and school, was in his essence a culpable and weak being, the state alone representing the last solution to correcting his limitations.

Consequently, the corporate system would amount to a genuine social and economic panacea, a fortunate alternative to the classical capitalist organization, most often identified with routine and lack of historical perspective. In the system proposed by Mussolini's followers, strikes would be banned, as they were considered genuine examples of betrayal of the Italian national interest, clear indicators of society anarchy - the premise for the triumph of Communism. The organizing principles of labor unions were to be changed completely, the Fascists proposing the so-called model of "national" unions. The anti-Communist rhetoric was progressively amplified, Fascism proving in this sense, tireless energy and stylistic inventiveness. For who had closely watched Mussolini's doctrinal trajectory, such a metamorphosis seemed more than surprising. Formerly, the son of the smith in Forlì acted as a fanatic of Socialism, which he had identified with a movement of an almost religious nature, one of the most thrilling current of ideas that humanity had ever experienced.

Mussolini's Socialism praised however the show-deed, the adventure, the perpetual revolution, having (in some respects) a number of similarities with Trotskyism. It glorified the illusion, the chasing of an ideal not seldom quite impossible, considering that the harsh beauty of such involvement would be the Sisyphus progress of tenacity in its natural state.

The echoes of Sorelian anarchism are also obvious in the doctrinal mix of Italian Fascism, even if we consider just some clichés such as the love for "cleansing" violence, the "gorgeous" dynamizing barbarism - designed to toss in the air the traditional institutions that became models of the society. Some critics of Marxist orientation saw in the promotion of such principles the clear signs of a disturbing cultural obscurantism, obstinately promoted by Fascism. But it would be seen later

that the doctrinaires of Fascism would not repudiate the Italian cultural-historical tradition but they would try to refresh it, changing it in the sense of the typology of the Mussolini's speech, with special emphasis on the "offensive" spirit of spiritual expansion. A certain dark romanticism was diffused by this whole conceptual assembly, a sequence of heroic-mystical images based on the idea of duty, sacrifice and predestination.

Italy was identified with a living being, the personification of the idea of Latin homeland being one of the first rank arguments of Fascism. The country's future had therefore to be built on the coordinates of the new nationalism propagated by Mussolini and his followers, the tones the fascist propaganda rhetoric made use of being of an extreme bombast. (Mussolini, 1934, p. 5)

Emerged from the failures of Socialism, Fascism would still keep part of the propaganda arsenal and mentality of the offensive left, even if we think of the criticism of those aspects of the capitalist society considered hostile to the complete historical development of Italy.

The Italian nation was considered a young, "proletarian" nation, bursting with energy and the desire of universal affirmation, being in an almost logical conflict with the "old", "plutocratic" nations which, in their immense selfishness, systematically and wrongly refused the Italian people its natural "place under the sun".

The enthusiastic cult of youth (even the text of the National Fascist Party anthem was a eulogy dedicated to youth, "the spring of beauty") reminded the vigorous contesting accents of the leftist militants, once and for all decided to impose by force the foundations of "the new world" – mixture of utopian dreaming and fanatic romanticism.

France and England - the classical models of the European capitalist spirit, were for the Italian Fascism the concrete targets of its revolution based on the national idea, the social reform and the reconsideration of spiritual values. The economic successes, the decadentist refinement, the moralizing classicism, the prosperity ostentatiously displayed at every step, all these deeply wounded the collective feeling of those who consider themselves unfairly excluded from the table of major decisions.

In 1922, when Benito Mussolini came to power in Italy, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle was 29 years old. His experience as a former combatant in the trenches of World

War I fundamentally changed the meaning of his existence. (Andreu, Grover, 1979, p.37) Wounded three times, Drieu would finally be demobilized on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1917. The death of his best friend, the aggressive pettiness of the so-called “normal existence”, filled him with disgust, in a France that he considered already spiritually exhausted, like a grumpy old lady, who would stubbornly refuse to die, infesting the atmosphere with her maniacal complexes.

Born into a good family, Drieu suffered a genuine shock in war, his life until then seemed to him a farce, an insignificant episode, of a staggering mediocrity. On the front, oscillating between death, spying, waiting, instincts, cruelty and fraternity he discovered (according to his own confessions) his authentic soul, he actually discovered himself, almost like a newborn, but who appeared suddenly as an adult, almost old, on a territory of the absurd.

People can also be different, heroic, looking death in the eyes, united in their attempt to maintain a precarious balance on the invisible wire that separates them from the meeting with the ancestors. For, Drieu La Rochelle's obsession for the embracing voluptuousness of death would virtually be the central theme of his entire work. Those who died on the fronts of World War I were the best sons of the nation, young people who, in peacetime, would have regenerated France, driving it out of the dusty silence it indulged in.

Drieu could not free himself from the ghosts of the front, from the fight within his soul between death and the human ancestral instincts. He would be an atypical dandy his entire life, a combination of a medieval prince of a deadly sadness and a receptacle of the passions that would push him towards the most unusual adventures.

He would note with that cosmic sorrow that would be his characteristic that the demobilized Frenchmen of World War I suddenly woke up terribly alone, surrounded by a hostile nation. The heroes and the saints perished in the great carnage and those who would have to take on the torch of hope – were not born yet. The only chance for this generation of the present, under the terrible curse of history would be its biological youth itself, the unstoppable river of desire, the impulses of love, sacrifice and passion. And in the Italy after Versailles, many former soldiers returned home were no longer able to grasp the meaning of their existence, feeling as strangers in an environment petrified in slowness, philistinism and demagoguery. Those “Arditi” would increase Mussolini’s black battalions, betting everything on the card of adventure, of the permanent beginning. In France,



a certain disillusioned youth with ashes in its soul and heroes' nostalgia in the eyes, would see in Pierre Drieu La Rochelle the writer who would express its sensitivity. Drieu's initial leftism would (as in the case of Mussolini) metamorphose and would gain the attributes of Fascism, a Fascism that would not abandon the socialist radicalism and even the name itself of French Socialism. Drieu would actually define Fascism as a reformist Socialism.

The pessimism, which he could not shake off until his suicide in 1945, gave this vision some romantic, dark coloration, able to fascinate like a siren song certain typologies prone to such a message.

Paradoxically, Drieu La Rochelle's far-right ideology also had in its composition a pro-European dimension, meaning that Drieu constantly dreamed about a Europe unified under the sign of some truly memorable events or personalities.

His sadness and incurable mysticism did not exclude (but on the contrary!) the admiration for the balance and stability of the forms of state organization. The model towards which he inclined was The Middle Ages, considered an exceptional era, almost unbelievable, with sacred perennial values. And in this context, Drieu distilled everything through the filter of its unusual sensitivity, the resulting images being as grand as they were illusory. The France of the knights, of the great cathedrals and of the Crusades, the symbolic unity of the European Christian world, the exemplary dignity of the hero who advances serenely on the road to salvation, these are some of the examples Drieu would invoke in his writings, like some priceless gems. They would be his ideal world, the image which, like that of Narcissus could only be seen on the water mirror, but not touched.

Tired by war, ravaged on the inside, the spirit of the French people was in need of an emergency resuscitation, of almost a renaissance, but by a different code of values. Drieu believed he had found it and unleashed himself in his writings with an amazing lexical imagination of an exasperating, unfair, bitter, brilliant subjectivity...

He criticized with an unusual energy the followers of cosmopolitan rationalism, stating that the role of homelands was not yet finished, these remaining for a long time the classical forms of preserving national identities.

The novels, poetry, drama and essays of Drieu La Rochelle are equally literary works and psychological observation sheets of the inner torture of the writer who

was always unsatisfied with himself and thought he could escape into the world he tried to build for himself out of disillusionment, sensitivity and pain.

In Drieu's texts, the relation between history and geography appears as a mysterious, sacramental connection. They influence each other and give the nations the halo of accomplishments, failures or collective frustration which imprint in the collective mentality specific attitudes and reactions.

The nameless evil followed him everywhere, accompanying him since his coming back from war and tormenting him with its disturbing phantasms, creative boredom and scented schizophrenia of lost nights. Looking into the depths of French society, Drieu would enhance his catastrophic representations and would issue merciless sentences of a flawless aesthetic refinement. Especially the Journal which he kept during 1939-1945 and which was posthumously published provides an impressive radiograph of a tortured conscience, passing increasingly shocking value judgments.

Equally interested in literature, religion, mysticism and sex, Drieu La Rochelle discovered in the 30s the seduction of Fascism and declared himself a Fascist, with a sense of inner peace of great acuity. He believed this way he had found his own path, oscillating between nationalism and leftism, hating the capitalism of French society that he would consider irrevocably obsolete, harmful to the fate of the nation.

France won a military war, but it lost all the others, the challenge-wars inside it, and Drieu was quick to identify them. He would write with violence and injustice about surrealism, Hebrews, homosexuals and opium addicts, conveying them his whole contempt and indirectly the contempt of a whole generation of frustrated and angry young people who thought that since 1789 onwards, France had not ceased to decline, due to the democracy which attacked its soul, like a worm that turned the fruit into metastases...

Parliamentarism was (according to Drieu La Rochelle) the great curse of France, assembly of official horrors, of mediocre biographies and demagogic speeches. France was dying little by little, without anyone of those responsible for its policy, making indeed a savior gesture. The democratic and egalitarian wordiness had turned the real public opinion into a caricature. Hope (Drieu thought) was to be found only in nationalism which he defined in poetic terms as "*the cement of human nature*".

The right-wing extremism professed by Drieu La Rochelle is equally stylistic and temperamental, meaning that in all his texts he did not make any compromise regarding his obsession for the metaphor adapted to a certain state of mind that possessed him.

In his view, the state was like a living, restless being, incapable of inner balance, which would somehow be the projection of its own anxiety, a state that could only exist through insurrection and direct action, carrying within the seeds of war.

The 1939-1945 period confirmed Drieu La Rochelle as one of the sharpest voices of the European far-right, in tragic times for Europe. He became enthusiastic about National-Socialism and Fascism, from which he expected the miracle of unified Christian Europe's renaissance about which he wrote...

He saw the European spirit up to then as hopelessly ill, lacking any future. It could no longer produce anything else other than "monsters", disillusion, and alone the authoritarian model personified by Adolf Hitler would be the key to the future ... (Winock, 2001, pp. 229-240)

He vehemently condemned Marxism and in his Journal showed a strange fascination for Stalinist Russia whom he foresaw in 1943 the victory over the Fascisms and assigned the role of future hegemony of Europe. Man of contrasts, Drieu is a symbol of extremism born out of pessimism and frustration, for who the way of suicide represented his true heroism, confirming the total failure he had anticipated since early in his life...

Unlike Drieu La Rochelle, Leon Degrelle had an incurable self-confidence and an almost pathological desire of asserting himself. His adventurous life, the legend that accompanied him postwar (he died in Spain, in 1994, at the venerable age of 88 years) recommends him even today as one of the myths of the European far-right. (Brassilach, 1936, p. 24)

French-speaking Belgian, Degrelle was the creator of the Walloon Rexist movement, of Catholic and Fascist inspiration, party which in 1936 obtained an incredible 11.50% of the total Belgian votes at the parliamentary elections. (Weber, 1995, p. 122)

Student at the Faculty of Law of Louvain, Degrelle never got his Bachelor's degree, despite the fact that he possessed a lively intellectual curiosity, equally directed to political science, archeology, art, philosophy or the history of Catholicism.

What impressed most those who knew him was his amazing eloquence, the ability to create suggestive and catastrophic images, the continuous energy that animate him and the personal style always going towards the tendency to dominate others. Virulent and charismatic, he also stood out as press editor, publicist, but also as militant within the Belgian Catholic youth.

The creation of the party or REX, in 1935, but especially its accession to the Belgian Parliament, at the election of 1936, was a huge surprise. Degrelle's political career has been identified by some commentators with a miracle. Without any coherent political program, abusing in vague prognostics, he knew how to nurture the hope of many Walloons disappointed with the cohabitation with the Flemish, seduced not least by the exceptional oratorical verve of this young politician entirely atypical for Belgium. Degrelle's rhetoric was focused on criticizing parliamentarism and multi-party system, parties being considered by him the cause of all the problems faced at the time. The politicians holding offices would prove to be really ridiculous, stupid or much worse - enemies of their own electorate. Degrelle believed that his movement could not be equated with any of the classic Belgian political parties (in fact, he never called his faction "party"), being born out of the expectations of "the real country." (It is also significant the fact that "The Real Country" was the name of the official newspaper of Rexism).

Democracy had created a huge gap between politicians and people - Degrelle believed, and Rexism advocated for cancellation of this unfair break, meaning to revive the spirit of national solidarity and the taste for heroic action.

The dream of the Belgian far-right leader was that of the province of Wallonia becoming autonomous, going up to the secession from the rest of Belgium, but for this the democratic system itself had to be replaced with an authoritarian and corporate one. (Weber, 1995, p. 122)

Despite the formidable and inspired oratorical energy of its leader, Rexism could not gain any real content, being totally dependent on the personality and public evolution of Degrelle himself. Leon Degrelle's structure was of such a nature that he could not tolerate around him other equally charismatic collaborators and consequently, the formation faced a constant shortage of authentic personalities. The majority of the Rexist members of the Parliament proved totally unprepared for such a role, producing a bad impression.

The very young age at which Degrelle obtained his first political success (29 years) constituted a disability and a trap for his temper inclined to megalomania, getting to believe, at some point, that he had been invested with a divine mission to govern Belgium. He was increasingly confident of his future, of the 270,000 votes gained in the elections of 1936, ready to swear that more and more Belgians would join him. Some historians have issued hypotheses under which Leon Degrelle had planned to set up a dictatorship in Belgium, suppressing all political parties except the Rexist movement, which was to become single party.

However Degrelle's fulminant political evolution was meteoric in the sense that, the Rexist formation would constantly lose supporters, the Belgian public opinion penalizing his lack of concrete solutions, the amateurism of most collaborators of the leader and, not least the manner in which Leon Degrelle was building a genuine cult for Adolf Hitler, whom he considered his great political and ethical model.

Nazi Germany supported financially the Rexist party logistics, aspect which would determine later Degrelle's call before a court, being accused of having planned the future subordination of Belgium to the national-socialist interests. Subsequently, such an accusation could not in fact be proved, but even so, Leon Degrelle's attitude had become sufficiently worrying for the defenders of democracy in Belgium and, obviously, for the authorities. After the country capitulated to Hitler's armies, the fate of the former Rexist leader had a new turn in the sense that, at 35, in 1941, he applied for participation as a volunteer in the campaign taken by Germany and its allies against the USSR, and he was also committed to create a special unit of Walloon fighters. Their number reached about 1000, and they formed the so-called "Wallonia" legion.

Degrelle became senior officer of the German army and was present on the battle front in the USSR until 1944, manifesting such fanatic courage that, at a meeting with Hitler, the latter would have confessed that if he ever had a son, he would want him to be like Leon Degrelle.

Undoubtedly, the anti-Communism of the former Rexist leader was sincere and idealistic, as he was convinced that a war won by the Soviets would mean the disappearance of the European Christian civilization. He believed that only the spirit of National-Socialism could save the European states, Adolf Hitler being assimilated with a modern Napoleon who could provide that millennial peace to the Occident which would allow its urgent internal reorganization.

Residing in Spain, Degrelle would publish a series of articles and books in which it would keep intact his admiration for Hitler and National-Socialism, proving in writing the same obstinacy as when he had been politically active.

The contempt for democracy, his obsessions about the alleged negative role of Jews in the world's history remained unchanged in their turn. Those who admire him even today consider him above all a contemporary anti-Communist crusader, a man who should be respected for the constancy of his convictions...

In 1944, when Degrelle's military adventure was completed, in Hungary besieged by the Soviet armies, Ferenc Szalasi became prime minister and "national leader", in a time when death and suffering bit deep the country's body.

Former officer, Szalasi virtually created out of nothing a party originally called of the National Will, later renamed the Arrow Cross. The man itself was a strange character, able to generate radically different feelings. (Nagy-Talavera, 1996, pp.249-339)

Modest, with an almost ascetic personal life, devoid of the visible and strident megalomania of so many political figures, Szalasi was yet what is commonly called a fanatic, who believed with a strange fixity in his historic mission, designed to radically transform the destiny of Hungary. Honesty seemed to be his main quality that later drew some sympathy from highly heterogeneous social environments, starting with the poorest representatives of the working class and continuing with inferior officers, youth lacking perspectives from urban areas and not last a large number of women, seduced by his interesting face and the gentleness of his attitudes.

He had the patience (almost unbelievable for a politician) to refuse any compromise, regardless of its size, obstinately stating that his political formation would eventually be in power in Hungary, not by benefitting from the goodwill of other parties, but by simply being "called" by the public opinion to govern.

The press in Budapest (in its immense majority) had never taken seriously the Arrow Cross leader, which it considered either a buffoon or a pitiful pathological case. He was, indeed, an unusual character for the political environment up to then, and the self-confidence with which he claimed he had been called into the world to regain the old glory of Hungary, amazed or intrigued.

Szalasi loved most traveling the country to meet the most diverse people, in attitudes that reminded rather of a missionary priest who had come to save the most

hopeless of his fellows and to heal them of the woes of the world. He was not an orator, he did not exhibit martial attitudes, but he captured sympathies, some segments of the population valuing his personal honesty, his disinterest for ephemeral pleasures and the passion with which he exposed his creed. He spoke of the future of a great empire of Hungary, the Hungarian nation being destined to control the east-central-European area through its cultural tradition and the important contribution it had in the evolution of civilization.

Szalasi had a special attitude towards the Jewish problem, not militating for the killing of the Jews, but for their exclusion from the bosom of the Hungarian homeland. For him, the Hebrews could never be considered Hungarians, even if they had been born in Hungary and become integrated in the structure of the society. He wanted them to leave in block the country towards other destinations, for the Hungarian nation to be able to preserve its specificity. (Nagy-Talavera, 1996, pp.249-339)

The leader of the Arrow Cross Party was claiming the creation of a new political-philosophical current, totally original, which he promptly called Hungarianism. It would have been revealed to Szalasi directly from the divine source and the politician (like Muhammad in the case of the Quran) had only reproduced the body of ideas that he had been inspired with. Transposing his ideology into writing, Szalasi proved to be an extremely prolix doctrinaire. All his texts contain abundant, simply confusing passages, and over them hovers some strange air of religiousness with Neo-pagan accents, despite the fact that the Father of Hungarianism manifested all his life as a devout Catholic, animated by the most pioussness.

Personally, Szalasi never considered himself the creator of a political party, but rather the apostle of a new spiritual orientation, the only one designed to bring Hungary in the position of great European power which it had in the Middle Ages.

Hungarianism was also called "National-Socialism" in some of his writings, but historians do not consider this would be sufficient evidence to prove that Szalasi was actually a plagiarist of German National-Socialism. Hitler personally treated him with indifference and even contempt for a long time, considering him either crazy or totally lacking any practical sense. Indeed, as leader of his party he delegated the executive competences, keeping for himself a rather symbolic role, located, as in the case of constitutional monarchs, above the swarming between parties.

Introverted nature, being satisfied with suddenly pulling into long inner conversations with himself or with extramundane forces that (in his opinion) would be constantly advising him on major political decisions, Szalasi clearly belonged to the accentuated type of personality. The Arrow Cross Hungary was rather a mythical projection, with a national leader resembling more a solitary prophet than a standard politician, capable of shocking statements among which the one stating that Hungarianism would have come to power in Hungary even if the Arrow Cross party had disappeared.

The international context totally unfavorable to Nazi Germany led to what seemed to many being a joke for years, namely the accession to power of Szalasi. In desperation and even against personal choice, Hitler resorted to an experiment doomed to failure from the start. The German-Hungarian armies that defended Hungary were retreating step by step, but Szalasi, completely losing touch with reality, having an acute attack of religious mysticism, continued to talk about a Hungarian Empire, about triumphant Hungarianism and to write undisturbed in the history of his own life.

Everything resembled a fragment of a scenario that combined equal doses of absurdity and tragedy. Szalasi's followers unleashed themselves against the Hebrew ethnics in Budapest, being recorded numerous killings and persecutions, for which, at least in his official position at that time, the Arrow Cross leader was responsible.

In 1946 he was sentenced to death and executed by hanging in Budapest. He was 49 years old. Not in the last moment did he abjure his conceptions, receiving his sentence with an inflexible attitude.

A somewhat similar adventure lived the Croatian Ante Pavelic, the lawyer from Zagreb with conspiratorial proclivities, who dreamt of Croatia's secession from the rest of Yugoslavia. (Paris, 1961, p. 85)

Creator of the Ustaša movement, he remained till the end of life a highly controversial character, being considered either a bloody criminal or a hesitant politician, periodically haunted by gloomy moods, a simple puppet of Rome.

In his novel *Kaputt*, the writer Curzio Malaparte dedicated a chapter to Pavelic in which he presented him in the beginning with some sympathy and understanding, defining him structurally as a peasant in love with the nature and traditions of his country, enjoying traveling through Croatia in order to discuss in general with



ordinary people. The end of Malaparte's account suddenly slips into grotesque, when we are presented a Pavelic who had on his desk a glass bowl filled with human eyes that had belonged to Serbian partisans who had suffered the Ustashe's punishment. It seems that Malaparte later recognized lying for a literary purpose, the Croatian leader having a simple basket of currants from which he ate during the meetings with the Italian writer.

Incontestably, however, the Croatian Ustasha movement displayed unimaginable cruelty, the horrors committed by Pavelic's men on Serbs, Jews and Gypsies, with the purpose of an ethnic cleansing in favor of the Croatian element, are shocking even today just by their simple report. The snapshots of that era provide numerous sinister examples in this regard. Members of the Ustasha movement were photographed in serene-smiling attitudes next to their victims, like in a hunting ritual. Serbian Orthodox priests beheaded with axes, grabbed by their gore-drenched beards and presented as some trophies, partisans of the same ethnicity having their heads smashed with some heavy iron hammers, Hebrews and Gypsies who were stabbed or beheaded and their blood was immediately collected in a kind of special vessels, women raped, whose breasts or ears had been subsequently cut off, the strangling and then throwing into mass graves of Pavelic's various opponents...

All these throw into a depth of hell any doctrinal principle or sentimental-ideological consideration, despite the fact that, paradoxically, Pavelic could find today that his dream unexpectedly came true, through the existence of an independent Croatian state. A still highly discussed and disputed episode during the governances in the period of the Second World War, a controversial light also focused on the Roman Catholic Church in Croatia, which supported up to a point the authoritarian regime of the leader (the "Poglavnik") Ante Pavelic...

A strange mythology of the right-wing extremism was woven out of resentments, vaporous dreams and fantastic projections, at its origin being in equal measure both former followers of various current and analysts of the present with claims of scientific exegesis, not to adds even some actual historians.

Some commentators of the phenomenon were seduced by the undeniable charisma of many of the protagonists of the far-right and especially by their implacable anti-Communism. A brief characterization of the European political discourse and action of this kind cannot ignore the sentimental act of predestination that was equally felt by people like Hitler, Mussolini, Szalasi or Degrelle - to mention only a

few names in this regard. Like hallucinating they followed their own path, deaf to almost any suggestions or criticisms, convinced that the choices they made represented in fact the desire of the overwhelming majority of the nations on behalf which they claimed to act.

The mere hostility towards Communism cannot cast light on the phenomenon, in this regard there should be included both psychological factors and certain cultural traditional patterns. Excepting the Italian Fascism, the anti-Semitic rhetoric was extremely strong at the level of the European far right, the image of the people of Israel gaining amazingly varied negative situations, most of them springing from older clichés, of broad European use. A significant example in this respect is represented by a character who had never engaged in politics, but who supported (even indirectly) the far-right: the French writer Louis Ferdinand Celine. (Hewitt, 1988, p.87) In 1937 he published a pamphlet entitled *Bagatelle pour une massacre* (*Trifles for a Massacre*), virulent and almost unbelievable advocacy for the elimination of the Judaic element in the French and European society in general. Jews were held responsible for all the vices of the modern world, propagators of Decadentism, perversion and lack of creativity, their presence in history being (in the author's view) a real curse. Celine stood out up to then as a brilliant innovator of French prose, excellent connoisseur of slang resources and inventor of a stylistic form nearly equivalent to a revolution of letters at European level. Nonconformist spirit, cynical, with a hectic never monotonous life, Celine was himself a true character of his prose ... The desire to flog at any cost the philistinism and hypocrisy of the French bourgeoisie (explicable in the case of his great novels) was later metamorphosed into literary reactions of xenophobic type, impossible to decrypt. In the name of inner rebellion and sarcasm that seemed to always haunt him, Celine lifted the lid of Pandora's Box to release prejudice and hatred. It did not take long for the unfortunate effects to appear...

The far-right politicians were very good at contemplating social evil, at shaping tenebrous, gray atmospheres, which held no longer any hope, like Dante's bolgias. Their propaganda exaggerations also included (quite often) certain poetry of ugliness, the repetitive populism and the primitive-Christian influences could easily be traced.

The public that tasted these kinds of speech was extremely heterogeneous and had (from country to country) its particular motivations. In general, however, there were people with a low social standard, with strong inner frustrations, finding it

hard to adapt to the dynamics of economic evolution and the social challenges generated by the modernity lessons. But there were also segments with high professional intellectual training, but lacking a certain tolerance, not accepting the complexity of the democratic phenomenon or which, as a result of the political disasters, had felt abandoned by the operating political elite.

The terms and symbols of religious extraction were present, being often preferred to the liberal-democratic formulas, perceived by some as downright boring. The far-right discourse primarily addressed feelings and instincts and hardly, reason. Hitler had almost mocking words about the politicians who based their interventions on logic or structured their subjects in the manner of academic rhetoric. In his view, such attitudes were long outdated being specific to bygone times. The political public of the future would surprisingly resemble the public of the amazing performances of the gladiators in the Roman era: like that, it would be avid for the thrill, thirsty of enjoying blood-bathed picture of people agonizing. The German Nazi leader was specialized in a kind of empirical analysis of the psychology of crowds, identifying their sentimental typology with that of a capricious woman, always ready to follow the politician which would be able to dominate her, through a cyclopean strength of will.

The far-right equally encouraged the feeling of anger, of despair and that of integration into a new collective corpus, capable to determine major national revolutions. Alone, the individual would be left with his biblical fears and infirmities, thus his only chance of salvation would have been the mass integration into the hierarchy, hence actually feeling the benefits of some exceptional times at which he contributed too. God had designed the world, and people were now called upon to reproduce at social level the “eternal” order of the bygone times, that order which had been seriously questioned by the principles of democracy. 1789 was taken in this regard as a detrimental landmark, being identified with a demonic hour of humanity, when, in the name of some artificial principles, the universal work of destruction of homelands and nations had started. Between nation and ethnicity there was an equality sign, racial connotations being stimulated and increasing more and more, reaching quite often, aberrant forms.

God was no longer a way for all humanity to relate to, but it had turned into a kind of ethnic fetish, a particular mirror that would reflect only the traits of a certain people.

The drama of the European far-right and of the political actors representing it largely consisted in the almost maniacal desire to change the data of reality or to “see” only those parts of it which corresponded to its mystique. Excellent popular orators, most leaders of the extreme right were incapable of building a really pragmatic socio-economic project, which would represent a real long-term alternative to what they called the congenital weakness of democracy. Despite all its decreases and imperfections, the democratic model ultimately proved superior to the romantic-affective projections of the radical right. The international situation had, in its turn, a role in influencing the far-right discourse and implicitly regarding the evolution of its ideological model. The wars, the crises, the defeats, the human fears and prejudice were as many arguments in favor of the structuring of this model.

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