

Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias occidentales* (1552). Lewis Hanke, *Bartolomé de las Casas: An Interpretation of His Life and Writings* (1951). One of the most important Spanish historians of our century, Ramón Menéndez Pidal, published at the ripe age of ninety-three a vicious attack on Las Casas and on what he sees as a tradition of conscious slandering of Spanish honor in the “leyenda negra” with *Bartolomé de Las Casas: Su Doble Personalidad* (1963).

Critique

To quote the cartoon character Pogo: “We have met the enemy and he is us.” The key strength in Forbes’ analysis of fascism is his wide-ranging historical sweep and the way he shows that many elements in American character, such as prejudice against immigrants and eagerness for the spread of American ideas overseas, are related to fascist tendencies throughout American history.

Forbes reinterprets some of the important events and social movements in western history and shows how the tendencies buried in many cultural systems lead to fascist states when the conditions are right. He argues that we cannot dismiss fascism as a momentary aberration of a few fanatic states but must consider how we and our current politico-economic systems are all involved in fascist behaviors. The high points of Forbes’ discussion include his comments on “Jeffersonian democracy,” the Confederate States of America, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In each case, he shows how the high-blown rhetoric of their proponents, who, following the model of Jeffersonian democracy, promised liberty and equality for everyone but masked the repression and terror visited on subordinate groups, such as slaves.

Even though his discussion is exciting, the broad coverage and large number of situations Forbes examines and finds to be fascist or to have “fascist tendencies” lead to two related weaknesses. One is the lack of precision that results from the

mixing of levels of analysis and the other is the erratic shifting from one level of analysis to another. For example, Forbes goes from nation-states (as Italy and Argentina) to theocracies (as Puritan New England) to bureaucratic agencies (as Bureau of Indian Affairs) to units within nations (as Oklahoma, Virginia). He also has "proto-fascist" states, "open" fascism (as presumably different from "closed" fascism), as well as "fascist tendencies," all without clear specification of how the reader is to tell one from the other. Related to this mixing of levels is his definition of fascism, which has at least eight "key" elements and ten "secondary" characteristics, ranging from the type of government to the use of pageantry.

Forbes' interpretation is basically economic, for he emphasizes the monetary aspects of fascist behavior. For him, fascistic tendencies develop to "prevent the loss of wealth and privilege" and to enhance the "opportunities for acquiring new wealth" by groups or classes which already have wealth and privilege. Thus, for Forbes, fascism often arises when powerful groups, such as the whites in nineteenth century Virginia, are threatened with loss of wealth or fear an inability to gain more wealth. In this way he ties together two motivations, one psychological (greed) and the other socio-structural (inequalities in power between groups). The "greed" motivation also seems to have a corollary, which is that no wealthy or powerful group ever seems to be satisfied with what it has but is always in search of more wealth, regardless of who gets trampled or killed in the search. It may be that some groups have shown restraint, but such behaviors by those groups have not made the history books.

A third key element for Forbes, and a corollary of his structural motivation, is the presence of colonies, for according to him that is where fascism originates. Colonies by definition have different groups present, with some more powerful and wealthy than others and with the more powerful searching for ways to keep their domination. An examination of Forbes' list of fascist attributes indicates that most of the other attributes beyond "greed" and systematic inequalities are refinements on the theme of the terror and repression needed to keep subordinates in line and wealth flowing to the dominant group(s).

Although Forbes subordinates ideology to material interests, he does indicate that beliefs are often used to reinforce the power of the dominant group. This implies that dominant groups need to justify their position and do so by means of the ideas and beliefs they perpetuate. Examples include the labeling of subordinates as “heathens” who need to be “civilized” or converted to the true religion, as well as the outright denial of human status to the members of such groups. This labeling justifies the repression to both the dominant group (“After all, we’re only helping them run things because they really don’t have the skills.”) as well as to the subordinate groups (“If they don’t help us run things, it will all fall apart.”). In other words, both need to be convinced of the correctness of their respective positions. Also, the force behind the commands of the dominant group needs to be masked whenever possible so that the subordinates will feel and believe that they are doing things of their own free will.

Fascism for Forbes is basically a creation of the colonial situation and the wide applicability of his definition to western history results largely from the repeated growth of empires which characterizes this history and from the repeated re-using of the forms of terror and repression that such empires engender. These forms of repression (such as religious bigotry, terrorist groups, assassinations, spying, control of the media, imprisonment of dissenters, and loyalty cults) have been common enough that they are both available and widely known as well as legitimized by their widespread and continued use.

The idea that corporate capitalism was behind some fascist movements (such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ treatment of Native Americans) needs strengthening beyond pointing out that the corporations were basically co-opting the fascist organization for their own benefit. The relationships between fascism and corporate capitalism, and especially multinational corporate capitalism, need to be examined in more detail. The support of the U.S. government for the fascist regimes in Latin America, for instance, suggests that such regimes provide favorable conditions for the flourishing of such corporations, perhaps in some kind of symbiotic relationship. In such an interpretation, the fascist states provide the repression of the masses and supply cheap

labor for the corporations, for they can be looked upon as saviors of the masses since these corporations provide jobs and income, a situation existing in Taiwan and South Africa. In this way, the corporations do not directly repress but benefit from the repression perpetrated by others.

Forbes is basically pointing out that, given a chance, any in-group will persecute any out-group, especially when the reward is more wealth and power, or a continuation of current power. This observation suggests that fascism is part of and similar to all the other "isms" that plague the world today. These "isms" include racism (the oppression of groups supposedly on the basis of so-called "racial characteristics" and sexism (the oppression of females by males). These "isms," including colonialism, imperialism, and fascism, all relate to the systematic oppression of some groups by others, and their presence and practice is almost universal. One reason that Forbes finds "fascist tendencies" everywhere is due both to the wide spread of empires and to the overlap between the "isms," such that it is often hard to tell which particular "ism" brings about which particular kind of repression.

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Critique*

Forbes's analysis of fascism reveals that fascist tendencies are dormant seeds of exploitation that resurface and flourish under conditions of greed or when exploitive systems are threatened and opposed by those they oppress. Because fascism is more than politics and shares a symbiotic relationship with supportive and enduring cultural values, he is correct in directing our attention to those historical and cultural antecedents that give rise to omnifarious forms of fascism in this country and elsewhere. Cultural values and their symbiotic connectedness with political decisions are perhaps the single-most important feature of fascism considered in this timely and cogently discussed issue.