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Errico Malatesta
Why Fascism Won
1923

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Why Fascism Won

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Material force can prevail over moral force; it can even destroy the most refined civilization, if the latter does not know how to defend itself with appropriate means against the offensive returns of barbarism.

Any wild beast can tear a gentleman to shreds, even if he is a genius, a Galileo or a Leonardo, if he is naive enough to believe that he can curb the beast by showing it a work of art or announcing a scientific discovery.

But brutality hardly triumphs — and in all cases its successes have never been general and lasting — if it fails to obtain a certain moral consensus, if civilized men recognize it for what it is and, even if powerless to eradicate it, flee from it as from something filthy and repugnant.

Fascism, which synthesizes all the reaction and calls back to life all the sleeping atavistic ferocity, won because it had the financial support of the rich bourgeoisie and the material help of the various governments that wanted to use it against the pressing proletarian threat; it won because it found against it a tired mass, disillusioned and made helpless by fifty years of parliamentary propaganda; but above all it won because its violence and its crimes have certainly

provoked the hatred and spirit of revenge of the offended but have not aroused that general reproach, that indignation, that moral horror which it seemed to us should arise spontaneously in every gentle soul.

And unfortunately there will be no material reconquest [riscossa] if there is no moral revolt first.

Let's say it frankly, however painful it is to verify. There are also fascists outside the fascist party, in all classes and in all parties: that is, everywhere there are people who, despite not being fascists, despite being anti-fascists, nevertheless have a fascist soul, the same desire to abuse that distinguishes fascists.

It happens, for example, to meet men who call themselves and believe themselves to be revolutionaries, and perhaps anarchists, who in order to resolve any question affirm with pride that they will act *fascistically* [*fascisticamente*], without knowing, or knowing too well, that this means attacking, without concern for justice, when you are sure not to run danger, either because you are by far the strongest, or because you are armed against an unarmed one, or because you are many against only one, or because you have the protection of the public force, or because it is known that the assaulted person is against reporting [il violentato ripugna alla denuncia] — in short, it means acting as a *camorrista* and a policeman. Unfortunately it is true: one can act, and often one acts, *fascistically* without having to join the fascists; and it is certainly not those who act or propose to act in this way who will be able to provoke the moral revolt, the sense of disgust that will kill fascism.

And don't we see the men of the [General] Confederation [of Labour],¹ the D'Aragonas, the Baldesis, the Colombinos, etc., licking the boots of the fascist rulers, and then continuing to be considered, even by their political opponents, as gentlemen?

These considerations, which we have made many times, came to our minds while reading an article in "*L'Etruria Nuova*" from Gros-

¹ CGL — Confederazione Generale del Lavoro (translator)

seto, which we were amazed to see complacently reproduced by “*La Voce Repubblicana*” of 22 August. It is an article by “its valiant director”, the good Giuseppe Benci, the chief [decano] of the republicans of the strong Maremma (just to use the words of the “Voce [Repubblicana]”), and it seemed to us a document of moral baseness, which explains why the fascists were able to do what they did in Maremma.

The brigandish deeds of the fascists in the unfortunate Maremma are well known. There, more than anywhere else, they vented their evil passions. From brutal murder to bloody beatings, from arsons and devastations to petty tyrannies and petty vexations that humiliate, insults that offend the sense of human dignity, they have committed everything without knowing limits, without respecting any of those sentiments that, as well as being a condition of every civilized life, are the very basis of humanity as it is distinct from the lowest bestiality.

And that proud republican from Maremma speaks to them in an unassuming tone and treats them as “people of faith”, and begs for their tolerance and almost their friendship for the republicans, claiming the patriotic merits of the republicans themselves.

He admits that “the government (*the fascist government*) has the right to guarantee the free carrying out of its activity”, and suggests that when the republicans come to power they will do more or less the same thing. He protests that “no one will admit that here (in Grosseto) the republican party has attempted to hinder the experience of the dominant party with any act”, and boasts of “not having hindered the action of the government in the slightest, even withdrawing from electoral battles to wait for the experiment to be carried out”. That is, to wait for the experiment of domination over all of Italy to be carried out by those people who have tormented his Maremma.

If the state of mind of Mr. Benci corresponded to the state of mind of the republicans, and if the fate of the fascist government were to depend on them, Mussolini would be right when he says

that he will remain in power for thirty years. He could remain there even for three hundred.