
Latin Fascist Elites: The Mussolini, Franco, and Salazar Regimes. By Paul H. Lewis. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002. Pp. viii+209.

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The existence of a multifaceted Fascist movement resulting from an authoritarian response to the crisis of liberal democracy in several European countries in the interwar years has long fascinated scholars and caused harsh historiographical controversies. The focus of the debate, however, has been primarily on ideology and on the comparison between Benito Mussolini's regime in Italy and Adolf Hitler's counterpart in Germany (Carsten 1967; Woolf 1968; Larsen, Hagtvet, and Myklebust 1980; Payne 1980; Bracher and Valiani 1986; Collotti 1989).

Contrary to this trend, Paul H. Lewis, professor of political science at Tulane University, shifts the attention to southern European dictatorships and compares Mussolini's regime to Francisco Franco's in Spain and Antonio Salazar's in Portugal. Moreover, instead of concentrating on doctrinal aspects, Lewis examines how those authoritarian governments operated by investigating the selection of elite strata and their composition. In particular, elaborating on the findings of his previous studies on Fascist leaderships in Spain and Portugal (Lewis 1972; 1978), he offers a comparative outline of the dynamics of cooptation into the Fascist hierarchies and an analysis of the rate of turnover in the upper ranks of the regimes in Italy, Spain, and Portugal under the rule of Mussolini, Franco, and Salazar.

Lewis shows that, as for professional experience, party activists and politicians made up the majority (60.7 percent) of Mussolini's inner circle, technicians bulked large (57.7 percent) in Salazar's elite, while Franco's leadership was more evenly composed by military men (22.7 percent), politicians (32.1 percent), and technicians (41.2 percent). Of course, these overall data

varied in the different stages of the formative, consolidating, declining, and decadent phases of each regime. The presence of technicians, for example, increased from 15.2 percent at the beginning to 65.5 percent at the end under Franco. Moreover, in terms of turnover, under all the three dictatorships, top personnel served fewer than five years in their respective capacities, although many were the repeaters who held disparate posts at different times. The reason for such high rates of rotation in government was obviously the dictators' desire to prevent the rise of potential rivals. *Latin Fascist Elites* is also rich with statistics about the age and education background of the members of the dictators' inner circles. These data, too, are broken down according to the different phases of the regimes.

Lewis places his figures within the context of the events that caused the rise and fall of fascism in Italy, Spain, and Portugal. Yet he overlooks the issue of whether, and if so how, the prevalence of any of these categories in each Fascist hierarchy helped the survival of the single regimes. For example, Wolf (1980, p. 559) has suggested that the growing marginalization of the *ras*, the paramilitary bosses of the Fascist movement in the provinces, after 1925 contributed to the insulation of Mussolini's dictatorship from Italian society.

In addition, Lewis neglects the matter of the succession to Mussolini, Franco, and Salazar. For instance, while stressing several times that Costanzo Ciano's hold on Italy's Ministry of Post and Telegraph (which, in fact, was the Ministry of Communications) was unusually longer than ten years (pp. 64, 114, 184), Lewis fails to mention that Ciano was Mussolini's designated political heir in case of the *Duce's* death. Similarly, while examining the cabinet reshuffle of June 1936, which led to the appointment of Galeazzo Ciano – Costanzo's son and Mussolini's son-in-law – to the post of minister of Foreign Affairs (pp. 44-45), Lewis does not highlight the broader implication of this turnover in the government. Actually, the main purpose of the "change of the guard," as the *Duce* called it, was to pave the way in order to make Galeazzo the front runner as Mussolini's successor after faltering health and lack of popularity had turned Costanzo into an unlikely substitute (De Felice 1974, pp. 803-5).

One may have also expected Lewis to discuss his data against the economic and social backdrop of the three Latin countries that experienced fascism. For instance, it seems reasonable that in such a stagnant society as Portugal most of the high-ranking members of the Fascist elite, including Salazar himself, were technicians. In a similar milieu, Franco, too, already belonged to the establishment even before he led his successful rebellion against the legitimate Republican government. Given the sclerosis of Spain after Franco overthrew the legitimate government, defining the creation of his regime a “revolution” (p. 180) sounds rather inappropriate. Conversely, Mussolini and many of his officials were full-fledged insurgents – from both a political and a social standpoint. Unlike Franco and Salazar, they were not members of the pre-Fascist ruling class and benefited from Italy’s much greater dynamism in order to seize power, to make their way up the social ladder, and to enrich themselves as well. Once again, Costanzo Ciano would have offered Lewis a leading example of how regime-related speculations turned a naval officer into a millionaire (Santini 1993).

More troubling, however, is Lewis’ notion of the Fascist inner circles in the three countries he examines. He confines the concept of elite to membership in government and adds the position of secretary of the Fascist Party in the case of Italy alone. Yet this choice is questionable and sets the boundaries of leadership too narrowly at least for Mussolini’s regime. Between 1922 and 1925, before the centralization and the bureaucratization of the party, the *ras* not only played an influential role in the Fascist movement and contributed to the establishment of the dictatorship in January 1925, but they even managed to limit Mussolini’s authority. In addition, although the government did run Italy, the highest organ of both the state and the party was the Grand Council of Fascism. This latter body included not only top ministers and the secretary of the party but also the Quadrumvirs of the March on Rome (who held tenure for life), the presidents of the Senate and the Chamber, the members of the Fascist Directorate, the commandant of the Fascist Militia, as well as the presidents of the Royal Academy, the Special Tribunal for the Defense of the State, and the national confederations of workers and employers. Due to the wider range of ranking officeholders

among its members, one might argue that the Grand Council was more representative of the Fascist hierarchy than the government itself. Although the Grand Council initially had an advisory function, as Lewis aptly remarks, it set the legislative agenda, selected the deputies of the Chamber, and presented the King with the list of the ministers to be appointed. Last but not least, it was the Grand Council that initiated the process resulting in Mussolini's dismissal on July 25, 1943. On that night, twenty-two out of the twenty-nine members of the Grand Council were not ministers (Cannistraro 1982, p. 606). In particular, the mastermind that drew the resolution leading to the *Duce's* fall was Dino Grandi, who sat on such a body in his capacity as president of the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations. Fifteen out of the nineteen members who voted for Grandi's resolution did not sit on the cabinet either (Cannistraro 1982, p. 606). Yet Lewis' definition of the inner circle leaves Grandi out of the Fascist elite in 1943 to the benefit of smaller, little-known, and substantially powerless figures such as, for instance, Oreste Bonomi, the minister of Foreign Trade and Currency Exchange.

Lewis' short bibliography may make his readers frown as well. One can hardly conceive a study on Italian fascism that never cites the authoritative, though controversial, multivolume biography of Mussolini by De Felice (1965; 1966; 1968; 1974; 1981; 1995; 1997). It is similarly amazing that Lewis relies almost exclusively on English-language works for a research on Italy, Spain, and Portugal. Only one of the essays and monographs listed in his selected bibliography was published in a language other than English. Likewise, the findings of *Latin Fascist Elites* would have acquired further strength if they had been contrasted with the conclusions of previous studies in the same field such as Preston's essay on the military in the Spanish hierarchy under Franco (1990).

It could be also suggested that Lewis is not always at ease with Italian history. He contends that the "upper house Senate" was renamed Chamber of Fasces and Corporations (p. 195), while the latter indeed replaced the Chamber of Deputies, namely the lower house. He also repeatedly refers to the Confederazione Generale del Lavoro (CGL) by the acronym "CGT" (pp. 19-20), which in

fact was the abbreviation of its French counterpart, the Confédération Générale du Travail. Likewise, Grandi did not serve as Interior minister from 1924 to 1926, as Lewis erroneously maintains (p. 188), but held the post of undersecretary in that ministry between June 3, 1924, and May 15, 1925. Similarly, after leaving the Ministry of Communications in 1934, Costanzo Ciano did not become president of the Senate (p. 195), but chaired the Chamber of Deputies.

Finally, although Lewis briefly reviews the different scholarly definitions of fascism in the introduction (pp. 8-11), his attention to non-bureaucratic issues in the body of the volume is too scant to corroborate his conclusion that “however brutal, intolerant, or repressive these regimes may have been, they fell short of the totalitarian ideal” (p. 200). Indeed, one may even be surprised that, after having apparently chosen not to focus on ideological matters, Lewis eventually decides to deal with the nature of the Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese regimes. Like the concept of “Mediterranean fascism” in a previous study by Delzell (1970), Lewis’ concept of “Latin” fascism seems based primarily on the geographical location of the regimes than on some common features characterizing Mussolini’s, Franco’s, and Salazar’s dictatorships.

However, despite these limitations, *Latin Fascist Elites* offers a wealth of information and data on the background, recruitment, and tenure of the members of the inner circles of Mussolini, Franco, and Salazar. While it remains for future scholars to elaborate on Lewis’ raw statistics and to address the unanswered questions of his volume, his research should be of interest not only to the specialists in fascism but also to analysts of twentieth-century dictatorships in general.

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