



Who Is "Fascist"?

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Those who put a high value on words may recoil at the title of Jonah Goldberg's new book, "Liberal Fascism." As a result, they may refuse to read it, which will be their loss — and a major loss.

Those who value substance over words, however, will find in this book a wealth of challenging insights, backed up by thorough research and brilliant analysis.

This is the sort of book that challenges the fundamental assumptions of its time — and which, for that reason, is likely to be shunned rather than criticized.

Because the word "fascist" is often thrown around loosely these days, as a general term of abuse, it is good that "Liberal Fascism" begins by discussing the real Fascism, introduced into Italy after the First World War by Benito Mussolini.

The Fascists were completely against individualism in general and especially against individualism in a free market economy. Their agenda included minimum wage laws, government restrictions on profit-making, progressive taxation of capital, and "rigidly secular" schools.

Unlike the Communists, the Fascists did not seek government ownership of the means of production. They just wanted the government to call the shots as to how businesses would be run.

They were for "industrial policy," long before liberals coined that phrase in the United States.

Indeed, the whole Fascist economic agenda bears a remarkable resemblance to what liberals would later advocate.

Moreover, during the 1920s "progressives" in the United States and Britain recognized the kinship of their ideas with those of Mussolini, who was widely lionized by the left.

Famed British novelist and prominent Fabian socialist H.G. Wells called for "Liberal Fascism," saying "the world is sick of parliamentary politics."

Another literary giant and Fabian socialist, George Bernard Shaw, also expressed his admiration for Mussolini — as well as for Hitler and Stalin, because they "did things," instead of just talk.

In Germany, the Nazis followed in the wake of the Italian Fascists, adding racism in general and anti-semitism in particular, neither of which was part of Fascism in Italy or in Franco's Spain.

Even the Nazi variant of Fascism found favor on the left when it was only a movement seeking power in the 1920s.

W.E.B. DuBois was so taken with the Nazi movement that he put swastikas on the cover of a magazine he edited, despite complaints from Jewish readers.

Even after Hitler achieved dictatorial power in Germany in 1933, DuBois declared that the Nazi dictatorship was "absolutely necessary in order to get the state in order."

As late as 1937 he said in a speech in Harlem that "there is today, in some respects, more democracy in Ger-

many than there has been in years past."

In short, during the 1920s and the early 1930s, Fascism was not only looked on favorably by the left but recognized as having kindred ideas, agendas and assumptions.

Only after Hitler and Mussolini disgraced themselves, mainly by their brutal military aggressions in the 1930s, did the left distance themselves from these international pariahs.

Fascism, initially recognized as a kindred ideology of the left, has since come down to us defined as being on "the right" — indeed, as representing the farthest right, supposedly further extensions of conservatism.

If by conservatism you mean belief in free markets, limited government, and traditional morality, including religious influences, then these are all things that the Fascists opposed just as much as the left does today.

The left may say that they are not racists or anti-semites, like Hitler, but neither was Mussolini or Franco. Hitler, incidentally, got some of his racist ideology from the writings of American "progressives" in the eugenics movement.

Jonah Goldberg's "Liberal Fascism" is too rich a book to be summarized in a newspaper column. Get a copy and start re-thinking the received notions about who is on "the left" and who is on "the right." It is a

book for people who want to think,

rather than repeat rhetoric.

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