

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN A FASCIST STATE

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The Jew has stolen woman from us through the forms of sex democracy. We, the youth, must march out to kill the dragon so that we may again attain the most holy thing in the world, the woman as maid and servant!

The German girl is a state subject and only becomes a state citizen when she marries.²

For her world is her husband, her family, her children and her home...We do not find it right when the woman presses into the world of the man.³

The goal of female education has invariably to be the future mother.⁴

All of the above quotations are from prominent men speaking about woman's place in a fascist society. The first two are fairly extreme, but the last two are still said by many people in all parts of the world today and are certainly milder than the sexual hostility displayed by a Norman Mailer or Mickey Spillane. Which quotation comes closer to the real position of women in a fascist state both in theory and in reality?

In this paper I will be using the word "fascism" in a specific sense, rather than a loose, colloquial way. I will concern myself mostly with women in Nazi Germany. I will be concerned with the feminist movement in Germany and with the place of women in general.

Fascism in the specific sense refers to a system of government that is modern and which depends on a mass base supporting a charismatic leader. It is characterized by a nationalistic and romantic yearning; it glorifies anti-intellectualism, violence and terror. Although it has been supported by and has used conservative parties, it is revolutionary rather than conservative and thus is not a true descendent of an older autocracy. A fascist state is further characterized by the gradual atomization of its citizenry. In the ideal fascist state all aspects of human life are subject to the scrutiny and intervention of the state. Only the leader of the state makes judgements and decisions. As the leader cannot rule completely alone an elite is formed to help him rule and receives special privileges. This elite group penetrates all independent groups or sets up parallel organizations that gradually take control. This forces the destruction of a pluralistic society. It also forces a hierarchy and constant jockeying for position within the party elite itself.

Because it comes at a particular time of economic development a fascist state commands mass support. Although the masses are manipulated and often destroyed, they follow blindly. "Believe, obey, fight;" Mussolini's slogan, can still be seen on walls in towns of Italy today. The masses believe and obey because they have no training in thinking for themselves, because they are economically desperate, because the alternative leadership is ineffective or destroyed, and because they are threatened by a loss of personal identity gained through an erstwhile membership in a class society. Once the new fascist party becomes strong, all resistance is ruthlessly crushed.

No fascist state has succeeded in living up to this description, but Germany under Hitler came the closest. The ultimate goal of the fascist state, and of Hitler, is totalitarianism:

*Total domination, which strives to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual.*⁵

This total domination is achieved through the training of the elite, the absolute suppression of opposition, the complete loyalty of the masses and the atrocities performed in special camps. The lower elite direct or perform these atrocities as part of their training and the populace knows just enough to keep it in a state of terror, isolation and loyalty.

Where in all this is the place of women? Of course, one must realize that women all over the world had few rights, or few that were more than legalities. The whole world had suffered a terrible war followed by a troubled peace, horrifying inflation and depression. However, there had been a feminist movement growing slowly throughout western Europe that had reached Germany in the years before the first world war. This had continued to grow during the war and by 1928 a great national women's federation was formed, with four main divisions. Gertrud Baumer, the leader of German feminism, was a member of the Reichstag and a high official in the ministry of the Interior.

From the first the Nazi party saw this federation of women's organizations as a force to be taken seriously. Even though the federation had not succeeded in altering any of the German civil code to give women a larger share in the management of their own households, the Nazi party set out to destroy it. It did this in the same way it destroyed all potentially competitive organizations; by factionalizing, infiltrating, taking over leadership positions, setting up parallel organizations of their own, and destroying the leadership. The directives for destruction were written by men, and as the various organizations were either absorbed into party groups or destroyed, the leadership was taken over by men.

By 1933 the feminist organizations had all been brought into the party organizations of the Frauenorden and the Frauenwerk. The Federation of German Women's Clubs and League of University Women, two of the organizations with educated women who had been interested not only in feminism but pacifism, internationalism and birth control, dissolved themselves rather than become assimilated. Other intellectuals, who might have been expected to come to the aid of these women were themselves under attack as Hitler began to outlaw all forms of creativity which did not conform to the tradition of Voelkisch art, literature and music. By the end of 1933, or early 1934, all organized feminist resistance, or even the thought of resistance, had been purged. Women were now ready to submerge themselves in the role assigned to them by the Nazi state.

In describing the subservient position of women in Nazi Germany it is important to remember that everyone was subservient to the state. As has been stated, fascism has totalitarianism as its ultimate end

...the creation of a new human being, a new fascist man, Homo fascistus. The characteristics of Homo fascistus depend on either his aspiration to participate in the fascist hierarchy or his acceptance of a subordinate role as a member of the masses. . . Homo fascistus was expected to be a true believer and an obedient and brave follower. . . Fascist doctrine thereby became a cult, a pseudo-religion.⁶

In the creation of this new man, this Homo fascistus, all other ties and loyalties had to be destroyed so that in his terror and loneliness the new man would be totally dedicated to the party and his leader. One of the strongest of all emotional ties is obviously that of the family. Does the state make a direct frontal attack on the family, or work through the family?

In the beginning Hitler and the party worked through the family by glorifying motherhood through propaganda and by concrete rewards for mothers. The Nazi regime taxed bachelors and spinsters, and in 1933 enacted its Marriage Loans, under which one third of all German marriages were contracted thereafter. This guaranteed tax and interest rebates for all children born of the marriage. The wives took out the loan, but it was paid to the husbands. The wives under this loan law were not allowed to work. The law not only removed 800,000 women from the work force, but helped tremendously to raise the birth-rate. This went from 971,174 in 1933, to 1,261,273 in 1935.⁷

To further insure a rising birthrate all birth control clinics were closed by 1933, sex education became strictly based on eugenics and racism, abortion became extremely risky or impossible, homosexuality was a punishable offense, prostitution and porno-

graphy became the privilege of the elite, and the number of educated women was forcibly reduced. A government decree of 1933 limited the number of women university students to one in ten and the high school students to one in three.

As the Nazi state grew in power and the SS elite gained total control there was no longer the need to talk about the sanctity of the home or the glories of motherhood, or working at menial jobs for the state; women had no other choices.

Women were not even allowed to work within the party elite, they were unable to get the education to equip themselves for positions of leadership, and the attitudes of the male elite made such a thing impossible.

*The National Socialist Movement is in its nature a masculine movement. . .The realms of directing and shaping are not hard to find in public life. To such realms belong the tremendously great sphere of politics. This sphere without qualification must be claimed by man.*⁸

Germany had always been a patriarchy, an autocratic, hierarchical society dominated by the males within it. In the beginning more men were given employment by getting women out of the labor force, and more men were given university positions by limiting the number of women attending, but the policies of Nazi Germany cannot be comprehended in any truly rational fashion. It does not make any kind of sense for a country that needs every bit of labor and talent it can find to reduce one half its population to the level of beasts of burden and brood mares. It doesn't make sense to exterminate people whose labor could have been useful; it doesn't make sense to relocate thousands of people when all means of transportation are needed for a war effort. It doesn't make sense to have a leadership so isolated from reality that its plans and ideas are impossible to carry out. It makes no sense that trained professional army officers put a personal oath to their leader above their responsibility to their country and their men. Yet all of these things happened toward the end in Nazi Germany. In all of them women were victims along with everyone else; more vulnerable, never able to rise, destined to serve, but perhaps no more singled out for terror and destruction than anyone else. They too, were the legitimate prey of an elite and a leader gone mad.

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Footnotes

¹G. Feder, Die Deutsche Frau in Dritten Reich, Reichstagkorrespondenz der Bayrischen Volkspartei, Apr. 4, 1932.

²A. Hitler, "Mein Kampf", Reynal and Hitchcock, New York, 1939 p. 621.

³Ibid. p. 624.

⁴Ibid. p. 621.

⁵H. Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., New York, 1973, p. 438.

⁶S.J. Woolf, Editor, The Nature of Fascism, Random House, New York, 1969. p. 13-14.

⁷Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, Avon Publishers, 1969. p. 226.

⁸Ibid. p. 225.