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THE TOTALITARIAN STATE

BY LUIGI STURZO

THE name is newly coined, but its significance carries back to the Assyrian and Babylonian empires. Fascism reinaugurated and defined the totalitarian state: "Nothing outside or above the state, nothing against the state, everything within the state, everything for the state." Formulae apart, there have been similar conceptions in the past, both in theory and in practice. *Leviathan* has two and a half centuries of history.

Nonetheless there is a difference between today and yesterday; a comparison of the more or less totalitarian states of the past with those of the present reveals so many signs of diversity that we are forced to conclude that modern experiences of the totalitarian state have peculiar features all their own. For this historic process is not reversible; consciously or unconsciously, with the succession of new generations of men and of the personalities in whom history finds realization, the experiences of the past are transformed in the present into new forms.

We must therefore avoid abstract formulae. These are necessary to the student in the same way as piles and planks and scaffolding are necessary in the building of a house or the painting of a ceiling, but having served their purpose they must be put aside if we are to inhabit the house or enjoy the painting. Reality refuses to fit into formulae. Today in speaking of the totalitarian state we think at once of Bolshevist Russia, Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, Kemalist Turkey, and of Mexico, half socialist, half brigand. Other states have imitated these, Austria, Poland, Portugal. And since we are obliged, for the sake of convenience of language, to seek the general and typical, we speak readily of a totalitarianism that may be Bolshevist, Fascist or Nazi. We might even give Pilsudsky the honor of an "ism" and speak of Pilsudskism — an ugly word, but what it stood for was not pretty either.

The idea of the state is peculiar to modern times. The Middle Ages did not speak of states, but of kingdoms and kings, empire and emperor, lords and vassals, cities and republics. When men wished to define the nature of power they spoke of temporal power to distinguish it from or oppose it to the spiritual power. Peoples were called nations; classes, corporations or guilds; the principle of social life was the community or *universitas*. Every social group had a life of its own, its own liberties, privileges and immunities. The social complexus functioned like a world of living monads, in a kind of preestablished harmony á la Leibniz, undoubtedly preestablished but not always established in reality.

The juridical basis of this mediaeval world was a system of mutual obligations, private and personal in character. Even the relations between people or nation and king or emperor were envisaged as a contract, a mutual obligation of faith and loyalty. The king was bound to respect the common law and the individual privileges of groups or persons; the latter owed fealty and support to the king's person. The idea of the state as an entity based on public law, over and above the community, had then no currency. We must reach the Renaissance, with the Reformation and counter-Reformation, before the idea of the state acquires consistency and so imposes itself on the mental habits of the age as to be spoken of as though it were an effective reality.

The word *state*, created by a need as all words are, arose in Italy to indicate *stability*, precisely at that moment of the Renaissance when in those petty principalities, dukedoms, marquisates and pseudo-republics anything approaching stability of power, certitude of boundaries and surety of independence was, except in Venice, conspicuously absent. But on the same principle as *lucus a non lucendo* it was then that men in Italy began to speak of a *state*. With the old republics collapsing and peoples in ferment, with Spaniards and French warring for mastery in Lombardy, Rome, Naples and Sicily, everything had to be built anew. The idea of power as force, to be used against the mighty church, or against jealous neighbors or foreign invaders, or against rebel-

lions subjects, imposed itself as the sole means that would give stability to both the state and its ruler, especially when that ruler was a usurper. The identification of the state with the prince was the first manifestation of the idea of the state, and found its theorist in Machiavelli.

Machiavelli in politics invented "working truth" (*verità effettuale*), which later became *raison d'état*, just as the last century produced the term *Realpolitik*, or realist politics. The meaning in each case is the same. The ends of the ruler demand the subordination of the ends of subjects. Means are indifferent; so much the better if they are honorable, but even unscrupulous means, if useful, are not to be excluded. Religion is good inasmuch as it keeps the people quiet; morality is useful inasmuch as it furthers the general well-being; but above religion and morality stands politics, understood as the art of domination and of maintaining strength. Machiavelli had no liking for crime, but when it proved a path to success he admired its results. He tore aside the veils of hypocrisy and sought a rationale to justify the triumph of the useful as the prevailing necessity of the state.

From Machiavelli to Luther is but a step. Luther gave all powers, even ecclesiastical powers, into the hands of the prince, who became free of check or control from either church or people. Machiavelli had subordinated the ends of religion to the ends of the state as personified in the prince. Luther went further; his theory of the servile will separated morals from faith and left the whole of moral life and religious organization in the hands of the sole temporal authority. It pleased the German princes greatly to unite all powers in their persons, all the more since ecclesiastical powers were then very extensive and financially remunerative. All the Reformed princes took advantage of their opportunity. The others, who had remained faithful to Rome, respected the pope's authority — up to a point — but took such liberties in respect of ecclesiastical rights and fiscal systems as would enable them to compete with the Protestant princes. These tendencies were in the air of the age.

The experience of nearly a century of Machiavellianism on the one hand and of Caesaro-Papism on the other, in both its Reformed and non-Reformed varieties, created a need for another theory, more adequate than either Machiavelli's empiricism or Luther's servile will.

The theory of sovereignty made its effective appearance in systematic form with Jean Bodin's *Six Livres de la République* (1575). For Bodin sovereignty is "the absolute and perpetual power of a polity" (*république*); something self-subsistent that forms the foundation of the state. It is the power to make laws without being bound by them, contrary to the mediaeval view that the law was greater than the power that made the law, and binding upon both sovereigns and peoples.

In modern times the theory of sovereignty became general, in spite of the fact that various currents activated by various causes—Monarchomachs, Dominicans, Jesuits and Calvinists—met its emergence with hostility. By the second half of the seventeenth century it was more or less accepted by everyone. Invested with a divine character sovereignty became the divine right of kings. Bossuet, as a theologian, expressed it in Gallican form; Protestant and Anglican theologians upheld it as a twofold absolutism, civil and religious. Rome opposed both attitudes, in order to safeguard the rights of the church; she thus, implicitly, protected also the rights of the people, when these had been nearly forgotten.

Meanwhile the natural law school made its appearance, positing abstract nature rather than God as the basis of society. A tendency toward pantheistic naturalism had already been perceptible. The absolutism of the kings was, so to speak, secularized. Divine right, repudiated by Catholic doctrine, could find no adequate expression in the naturalistic culture of the age and was on the point of vanishing. The natural law theory came in time to save it. According to Hobbes' version of this theory men in a pre-social, almost animal, stage of civilization were not able to form a society or give themselves laws. They therefore ceded their potential sovereignty to a chief, or were forcibly compelled

by him to do so, completely and irrevocably. Thus, even though sovereignty might derive ultimately from the people, the absolute sovereignty of monarchs was justified. Rousseau held, on the contrary, that the monarchs had usurped the inalienable and indivisible sovereign rights of the people. And between the two conceptions a third developed, maintaining that the sovereignty of the people was absolute, but that it had to be delegated to representatives who could be recalled or reelected at fixed periods.

It was not the types of government represented in these political conceptions that was novel. Antiquity and the Middle Ages were aware that power might be held by one, as monarchy; by a few, as oligarchy; or by the people, as democracy. The specific feature of the natural law theories was above all that such power was unlimited, inhering in a sovereignty knowing no limits outside itself. This feature was characteristic not only of Hobbes' monarchic sovereignty by natural right, but also of Rousseau's sovereignty of the people. The latter had no limits beyond the collective will, which was considered a law to itself. That this would later be resolved into the law of the majority, or the law of representatives or delegates, according to the various practical forms of democratic organization, does not affect the absolutism of a sovereignty with no limits outside itself.

Bossuet's sovereignty by divine right, Hobbes' sovereignty by natural right, Rousseau's sovereignty of the people, inasmuch as they were unlimited, presupposed, encouraged and consolidated an impersonal, objective entity superior to men: the state. Little by little, in the course of conserving and increasing its power, the state came to be regarded as an origin, the origin of all rights, and as an end, the end of all public activity. This was what was meant by *raison d'état*: the subordination of everything to the greatness of the state. Botero's efforts to "Catholicize" the *raison d'état* served merely to cast a shadow on Catholicism; by admitting the *raison d'état* if the state were Catholic he appeared to justify by religious ends the political, worldly, utilitarian and at bottom im-

moral means employed by the Catholic sovereigns of his time.

The idea of the state cannot be an ultimate; it calls for a reality to substantiate it. In the days of the divine right there was behind the state, for good or evil, the idea of God, and this idea carried with it, at least implicitly, the idea of the people. The clergy sought to emphasize now the one, now the other, though they were not always able to do it effectively, as evidenced in the case of the Gallican or Josephist clergy. With the advent of the *encyclopédistes* the state was made to rest on the idea of nature or of humanity, both excellent ideas, for nature and humanity are God's creatures. But detached from God they remained abstractions, with no real consistency. In the quest for stable foundations three conceptions arose, which have guided political life from the beginning of the last century up to our own time.

The first is Hegel's. The state is nothing but a manifestation of the spirit; it is indeed the most perfect of such manifestations. The state is in itself ethics, right and power. It is a kind of divine incarnation, in which the idea of power becomes one with the idea of God. But what state in the Germany of Hegel's time could seriously be described as "a manifestation of the absolute spirit of the world and the will to power"? Outside Prussia all the other states and statelets could be said to be manifestations of the mediocrity of their petty despots and of the intrigues of their courts.

It needed the Napoleonic wars to bring to birth a national spirit in Germany. Fichte became its philosopher and prophet. According to Fichte it is only in the nation that the eternal becomes visible. It possesses a moral greatness that aspires to the lordship of the spirit. This is on the same lines as Hegel, but the state has become the nation. The state as nation, as the outcome of the whole culture of a people, was for Fichte the self-representation of God. When Bismarck achieved the unity of Germany, Belgium had already regained a personality of her own, Italy had found unity and the Balkan peoples were on the way to win independence. The principle of nationality—of independence and

unity—thus provided a political basis for the idea of the nation as power and culture, with the state merely the juridical and military instrument.

In France the idea of the nation, as opposed to the humanitarianism of the enlightenment, developed less through theories than through the rise of the third estate or middle classes, through military conscription and the Napoleonic wars, through democracy and the reactionary upheavals of Bonapartists and Clericals. France never repudiated the idea of the state, because the state coincided with the nation. And behind the state stood now the people, now the nation. But people and nation had no need of a myth to give them consistency; the idea of fatherland was one with which they had long been acquainted, and it was quickened by unabated sentiment. It needed Maurras' nationalism to bring some Frenchmen to the extreme limit of a positivist mysticism.

England never lost her pragmatic common sense, even when her philosophers introduced the gospel of Hegel and Fichte's exalted theories. Theoretically, and often in practice, what prevailed was utilitarianism, mingled with a moralism that was not wholly discernible. For the Englishman the nation was something living less through theories than through its history and empire.

While the national idea was coming to the fore another current was everywhere developing, repudiating state and nation in the name of class—the socialist current, which was raised to a theory by Karl Marx. The proletariat was to destroy the bourgeois state and the militarist nation through the advent of collectivist economy. Here historical materialism took the place of Hegel's historical process of the Idea. Class war took the place of national dynamism. Economy as organized labor took the place of the state as power. The Marxist-socialist movement destroyed the unity of national feeling, and in each separate nation created the zone of the International.

Hegel, Fichte, Marx — these three Germans express the efforts of nineteenth century Europe to give a meaning, a content, an absolute and all but divine finality, to the state, the nation, the class.

In the course of the nineteenth century two systems grew up around the conception of the national state, the liberal system and the authoritarian.

The former system was either conservative or democratic, and the latter was either absolute or paternalist. These words must not be taken literally as indicating fixed types, but merely as the prevailing tendencies in either case. The important fact for the purposes of our investigation is that behind democracy on the French pattern, and behind the authoritarianism of Bismarck or Wilhelm II, we find the national state. Only the Austro-Hungarian empire, because of the great diversity of the nationalities of which it was composed, could not be described as a true national state, and carried within itself the seeds of disintegration.

Wherever it may be found the national state has certain predominant features—an ever increasing centralization, a militarism based on conscription and standing armies, and state education employed as a means of creating national conformity. In France these features were a legacy from the revolution and the Napoleonic empire. In Germany they were the legacy of the Prussia of Friedrich II. In Italy they were necessities of the achievement of unity, and were copied from France. In Spain they represented an attempt to overcome dynastic particularism, autonomist movements and the influence of the church. In Austria they were conditions of the dominance of the house of Hapsburg and of the Austrian and Magyar peoples. Other European countries existed in a like atmosphere, when they did not experience similar needs.

Liberal economic systems and working class internationalism should have fostered a far keener cosmopolitan sense in opposition to nationalism, and to this facility of trade, scientific collaboration, the diffusion of the press and the organization of labor gave an impetus. But free trade was a phase soon left behind for protective tariffs, which were at first tentative, then extremely comprehensive, to the advantage of so-called national economy. The

periodical press soon lost its free and individual character, to become a more or less capitalistic enterprise, or in the dependency of industrial undertakings. The workers' international was always undermined by local particularism, save for the extremist and semi-anarchist sections, which were always poor in men and means. And though the various brands of socialism repudiated the national state as bourgeois, they would not have repudiated a national state that was proletarian.

The church, without concealing the preference she then felt for authoritarian states, fought against political centralization, which implied limitations to her authority and mission, against compulsory conscription and the armaments race, which entailed the danger of wars, and above all against state education, which revealed itself as threatening monopoly and as a means of dechristianizing the people in the name of the state. The struggle against liberalism was accentuated by the church from theoretical motives and because of the practical positions she would defend, but her main struggle was against the national state, by which she was oppressed.

In all the changes and upheavals of the World War and after, the four factors of the national state have remained—centralization, militarism, state schools and protective tariffs. In order to remedy their weakness of structure the new states have imitated the centralization of the old, which in turn have not ceased to create new officials and to increase their civil services at the expense of their budgets. A frenzy of military spirit has seized Europe from the new Baltic states to the Balkans, and where there are no regular armies there are armed bands, militarized youth movements, political militia, black, red, blue and orange. The school has become even more a field of political conquest than it was before the war. And protective tariffs have risen to dizzy heights; even England has ended by throwing free trade overboard. Finally Europe has seen the emergence since the war of a Bolshevist Russia, a Fascist Italy and a Nazi Germany—three great totalitarian states differing in character, but all three of a

national type and based on administrative and political centralization, militarism, a monopoly of education and closed economic systems.

In seeking the differences and the substantial similarities between the totalitarian states and the other national states that exist today we shall confine our analysis to these four main common factors.

(a) In the totalitarian state administrative centralization is carried to extremes—the suppression not only of all local autonomy, whether municipal or provincial, but also of the autonomy of all public or semi-public institutions, charitable organizations, cultural associations, universities. Centralization in the political field, which for good or evil is disputed in the national states that still fly the flag of democracy, has been effected in the totalitarian state. The executive has become *de jure* and *de facto* the sum of all powers, even those of the head of the state (in Russia and in Germany the head of the state and the head of the government are the same). The independence of the legislature and judiciary has completely disappeared, and even the government is reduced to a body subordinate to a leader, who has become dictator under the euphemisms of Duce, Marshal or Führer. The functioning of this central, absolute power, unlimited and personal, is necessarily bound up with the suppression not only of all autonomies but also of civil and political liberties, the right of *habeas corpus* and the freedom of organization, individual and collective; with a political police and an immense system of espionage, such as even Napoleon did not possess; with violent and bloody repressions; with the destruction of opponents and dissentients; and with the refusal to tolerate any failing in political conformity either at home or abroad.

(b) All this is possible when the dictatorial power has control of the army and is able to militarize the country. The so-called democratic states are militarized, inasmuch as they have conscription and powerful armies and navies, but normally these are

professional bodies which do not interfere in politics. They are non-party, and cooperate with any cabinet in the interests of national defense. In the past there have certainly been moments when army chiefs have displayed political tendencies—the Boulangist movement and the Dreyfus case in France, and the various *pronunciamentos* in Spain are well known—but such tendencies found an outlet in the free play of opposing political and social forces. In totalitarian states the position is different. The party is militarized. Either it dominates the army or the army allies itself with the prevailing power and the two armed forces cooperate or amalgamate. The youth of the country is militarized, collective life is felt to be military life, dreams of *revanche* or of empire, conflicts at home and abroad, penetrate the whole social structure. In Italy training in the use of arms extends over the whole of life; the gun becomes a constant companion; military parades, camp training and manoeuvres occupy a good part of the activity of both youths and adults. Germany is armed to the teeth, not only to assert her parity with other nations, but through a morbid and mystical exaltation of force and of the destiny of the Nordic teutonic race. Every German is a soldier. Russia identifies the task of defending the state with that of defending the revolution and Bolshevik ideology and of spreading it through the world. Communism is the word of salvation for Russia, as Fascism is for the Italians and National Socialism for the Germans—a word of salvation to be spread through the world by propaganda and by force, just as Mahomet, with the Koran and the scimitar, subjugated the peoples to the new gospel.

(c) To this end it is necessary that state education should become a rigorous monopoly. For over a century the monopoly of education has been of the first importance for the national state. Napoleon was the first to organize education for the benefit of the state and to make the state its direct end, from the university down to the primary school. Nevertheless the attempt has nearly always been made to combine educational monopoly with freedom of thought, even in respect of politics. As a rule the struggle

was openly or secretly against the church, and the church fought for the complete freedom of the school. But the totalitarian state is obliged by its very nature to go beyond the limits that have hitherto been respected. Everyone must have faith in the new state and learn to love it. From the elementary schools up to the universities, conformity of feeling is not enough; there must be an absolute intellectual and moral surrender, a trusting enthusiasm, a religious mysticism where the new state is concerned. Communism, Fascism, Nazism, have become religions. To create such a mentality a whole mental environment must be created in addition to the work of the school. Hence the official textbook, the state inspired and standardized newspaper, the cinema, the wireless, sports, school societies, the grant of prizes, are not only controlled but are directed toward an end—the worship of the totalitarian state, whether its banner be nation, race or class. The whole of social life is continually mobilized in parades, festivals, pageants, plebiscites, sporting events, calculated to capture the mind, the imagination, the feeling of the populace. And to excite this collective spirit of exaltation the worship of the state or class or race would be too vague in itself. The vital focus of emotion is the man, the hero, the demigod—Lenin, Hitler, Mussolini—whose person is sacred and whose words are the words of a prophet.

(d) Such a system demands on the one hand a vast expenditure of money, a luxury finance, and on the other hand an ever harsher and more strictly controlled economic policy. Just as all moral energies must serve the power of the state, so must the forces of economy. It is impossible for the totalitarian state to allow economic freedom to either capitalists or workers. There is no room for free trade unions or free employers' associations. Instead there are state syndicates or corporations, with no freedom of action, controlled and organized within the state and for the state. Hence a controlled economy, which is the first stage in a radical transformation of the economic system. Whether a controlled and closed economy is an advantage is a problem that cannot be

studied apart from that of the state regime involved. Bolshevism presented itself as simultaneously communist in economy and totalitarian in politics. Fascism has evolved gradually, by successive experiments both political and economic, and has stopped short at a controlled state economy, clothed by a corporativism that so far exists only in words. Germany, at the height of a financial crisis and weighed down by foreign debts, has installed at once a totalitarian regime and state socialism.

These aspects of the totalitarian state lead us to three problems of the highest importance for our civilization.

(a) The first is that of liberty, considered not only as a complexus of political rights and the share to be taken by a citizen in the life of his country, but more especially as implying the autonomy of the individual personality, the security of personal rights, the guarantee of personal activity both temporal and spiritual. Totalitarian states abolish political liberties and restrict personal liberties by state interference in thought, ethics and religion.

(b) This fact involves the very grave problem of the supremacy of the spiritual over the temporal, of ethical ends over political ends, and for Christians of religious and supernatural ends over the natural ends of the state. The solution of this problem was provided by Pius XI in his Consistorial Allocution of December 1926, and repeated in his Encyclical *Non abbiamo bisogno* of 1931, when, dealing with the Fascist totalitarian state, he declared that the state is not the end of man, but man is the end of the state.

The relations between church and state may be legally regulated, as in Italy since February 11, 1929; or they may be agitated and disputed as in Germany, in spite of the Concordat of 1933; or they may be definitely broken and non-existent as in Russia. All this belongs to the series of politico-historical vicissitudes that began nineteen centuries ago with the advent of Christ and the slaughter of the innocents. Apart from this the incompatibility between Christianity and the totalitarian state is plain from the

historical premises of the conception of the state, which has always tended toward a social and political monism, at the expense of human personality and the laws of the spirit. It is still plainer in the logical premises of *totalitarismo* which expresses this tendency as the mystical exaltation of a superhuman principle: the absolutism of a class, nation or race.

(c) This absolutism leads to a perversion of Christian civilization, for it does away with the morality that is the foundation of relationships of justice, private and public, domestic and international; it provides instead the principle of the state as intrinsic source of ethics, expression and end of the nation or class or race. Single individuals, no longer either subjects or citizens but followers, units in a rigid collectivity, are held to act morally if their action conforms to the ends of the state. Individuality is lost in the collectivity and the collectivity finds itself only in the state.

Every code of ethics demands a religion. Subjectivist ethics turns the "I" into a divinity. Naturalistic ethics may go so far as to deify the totem and lead to the development of magic. State ethics makes a divinity of the state or of the ideas that appear as hypostatized in the state, such as race or nation. From Machiavelli and Luther onwards the state has steadily followed the path that leads to its becoming a divinity. The totalitarian state is the clearest and most explicit present form of the pantheistic state.