

Two Essays by Ivan Ilyin:
“National Socialism: The New Spirit”(1933) and “On Fascism” (1956)

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Alabama and Pennsylvania, USA
2026

“National Socialism: The New Spirit”
(*From Renaissance, Paris, May 17, 1933*)

Europe doesn't understand the National Socialist movement. It's afraid of it, making it even less knowledgeable. The more it doesn't understand, the more it believes all the negative rumors, all the tales of “eyewitnesses” and all the frightening prognosticators. Left-wing journalists from virtually every European nation are threatened by National Socialism, creating a veritable roll call of hatred and malice. Unfortunately, the Russian press abroad is also gradually beginning to be drawn onto this train of thought. European passions are beginning to spread to the [Russian] emigre community, clouding its vision. For those of us who are at the very center of events, seeing everything with our own eyes, subject to all the new regulations and laws, yet maintaining spiritual sobriety, it is becoming morally impossible to remain silent. We must speak and we must speak the truth.

First of all, I categorically refuse to evaluate the events of the last three months in Germany from the point of view of German Jews, who have had their public legal capacity curtailed, who have suffered materially as a result, or even who have left the country [He's referring to the Enabling act of March, which gave Hitler the power to act without the consent of the legislature]. I understand their state of mind, but I cannot turn it into a criterion of good and evil, especially when evaluating and studying such phenomena of global significance as German National Socialism, and it would be strange if German Jews expected this of us. After all, the Communists deprived us not of some, but of all and every right in Russia; the country was conquered, enslaved and plundered. 1.5 million of the indigenous Russian population were forced to emigrate; and many millions of Russians were shot, imprisoned or starved to death. During 15 years of this hell, there were no more pro-Bolshevik newspapers in Germany than the newspapers of German Jews, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, the *Vossische Zeitung* and the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Newspapers of other currents occasionally saw some truth about the Bolsheviks.

The editors of these newspapers could not help but realize the significance of their actions and the consequences they entailed for both national Russia and national Germany, but our Russian tragedy was alien to them; the dramatic misfortune that befell them neither shocks nor blinds us. German National Socialism is decidedly not limited to the restriction of the rights of German Jews, and we will discuss this movement on its merits from both the Russian national and universal (both spiritual and political) perspectives.

Secondly, I absolutely do not consider it possible to evaluate the latest events in Germany from the philistine, childish, or, as circumstances indicate, the vulgar perspective stating that the Russian and German enemies of communism are the same, and will march together. There is no point in discussing such nonsense. Let precocious political infants chatter about it, let those with shady intentions hide behind such phrases. It is difficult to stop them. Just stop listening to their seductive chatter. Their point of view cannot serve as a yardstick for us [this is something like

the Boomer idea that they were the same, both “socialists” and evil].

Finally, I refuse to judge the German National Socialist movement by the excesses of the struggle, isolated clashes, or temporary exaggerations advanced and emphasized by its enemies. What is happening in Germany is a vast political and social upheaval; its leaders themselves constantly describe it with the word “revolution.” It is a movement of national passion and political fervor, concentrated over the course of 12 years, where shedding the blood of its adherents in clashes with the communists was the norm. It is a reaction to the years of its post-war decline and despondency, one of grief and anger. When and where has such a struggle ever taken place without excesses?

To us who witnessed the Soviet Revolution, these excesses leave the impression of merely angry gestures or isolated, accidental inaccuracies. We advise against believing the propaganda trumpeting the atrocities here [in Germany]. There is a law of human nature: a frightened fugitive always believes the chimeras of his own imagination and cannot help but tell of the “terrible horrors” that nearly overtook him [this makes him the first Holocaust revisionist].

Consider whether Carl Severing, the ideological and honest Social Democratic leader of Germany, is living free in Bielefeld [where he did much of his labor organizing]? Did the National Socialists ever touch a single prominent Russian-Jewish emigre? So, let us be fair in our judgments. Those who lived outside Germany or came here for ordinary affairs do not understand the motives from which the National Socialist movement arose. The whole world did not see or know how steadily and deeply the Bolshevik poison penetrated Germany. Nor did the German masses themselves see it. Only three groups knew: the Comintern which organized this entire infection, we, the Russians abroad who settled in Germany and finally, the leaders of German National Socialism.

The country, caught between the Treaty of Versailles, the global economic crisis and overpopulation, streamlining its industry and seeking markets, swelled with unemployment and slowly slid into Bolshevism. The mass process unfolded of its own accord; its intelligentsia Bolshevized on its own. At every conference, the Comintern decreed a redoubled effort and triumphantly summed up the results. Not a single German party found the courage to combat this process; and when, in the summer of 1932, the new government declared that it was “taking the fight against communism into its own hands,” and refused to fight it and weakened or attacked private anti-communist initiative, the country's disintegration accelerated.

A reaction to Bolshevism was bound to come. Had it not come, and Germany had slipped over the edge, the process of pan-European Bolshevization would have been irresistible. A single civil war in Germany (and without a stubborn, brutal, and endlessly bloody struggle, the Germans would not have surrendered to the communists) would have found an immediate response in the Czechia, Austria, Romania, Spain and France, and if all the organizational skills of the Germans, all its discipline, endurance, devotion to duty and ability to sacrifice oneself, ended up in the hands of the Communists, what then? I know that some enemies of the Germans with incredible frivolity even said: “well, so much the better.” Like during the plague: the neighboring house is infected and dying out, so what? What does it matter to us? Blindness and madness still reign in Europe. The population thinks about today, waits for news and intrigue, amusing themselves. From the whole hurricane they see only dust and take the abyss for a small pothole.

What did Hitler do? He stopped the process of Bolshevization in Germany and thereby rendered the greatest service to Europe. This process in Europe is far from over, the worm will continue to gnaw Europe from within, but not in the same way as before. Not only because many

communist cells in Germany have been destroyed; not only because the wave of anti-Marxism is already moving across Europe, but mainly because the liberal-democratic hypnosis of non-resistance has been thrown off. As long as Mussolini leads Italy and Hitler leads Germany, European culture is granted some peace. Has Europe understood this? It has not.

Hitler took this reprieve, first of all, for Germany. He and his party will do everything to use it for the national-spiritual and social renewal of the country, but by taking this period of peace, he gave it to Europe as well, and the European peoples must understand that Bolshevism is a real and savage danger, that democracy is a creative dead end, that Marxist socialism is a doomed chimera, that a new war is beyond Europe's strength, neither spiritually nor materially and that only a national upsurge can save the cause of justice in each country, which will dictatorially and creatively undertake the social solution of the present social questions.

Until now, European public opinion has been repeating nothing but the fact that extreme racists and anti-Semites have come to power in Germany; that they have no respect for rights, they do not understand freedom, they want to introduce some kind of new socialism and that all this is "dangerous." As Georg Bernhard (former editor of the *Vossische Zeitung*) recently put it, this chapter in German history "will hopefully be short." We will hardly be able to explain to European public opinion that all these judgments are either superficial, short-sighted and biased, but let us at least try to understand the truth ourselves.

Thus, a legitimate revolution has taken place in Germany. The Germans have managed to break the democratic impasse without violating the constitution. This was the legal self-abolition of the democratic-parliamentary system, and at the same time, it was the end of the civil war, which had been raging year after year at every street corner. Democrats dare not call Hitler a "usurper," that would be a blatant lie. Supporters of law and order should first and foremost note the rapidly falling rate of political assassinations throughout the country. Supporters of bourgeois economic stability should consider the stable exchange rates and brisk trading on the stock exchange.

What's happening in Germany is an earthquake, a social upheaval, but this is not an upheaval of disintegration, but of concentration; not destruction, but of reconstruction; not wildly unbridled, but imperiously disciplined and well-organized; not boundless, but measured. What's most remarkable is that it evokes loyal obedience from all strata of the nation. The revolutionary aspect here lies not only in the disruptive novelty, but also in the fact that the new order is often hastily applied in the form of administrative orders [like executive orders in the US] before the enactment of a corresponding law. This leads to the anxiety and uncertainty characteristic of every revolution among men, not only regarding the limits of their legal status in general, but even simply in the present moment. However, these administrative orders are quickly replaced by laws, which usually provide less severe, more realistic and a more just formulas. That's the first point.

Secondly, these new orders and laws pouring out over the country concern only public rights, not private or property rights. There is no expropriatory tendency in them, unless you count the defamation of rights acquired by speculators during the inflation and the possible redemption of lands belonging to foreign nationals. Socialism in the usual sense of the word is out of the question. What is happening is a great social stratification, one not property-based, but political and cultural. The leading stratum is being renewed consistently and radically, but by no means entirely, on a large scale. It is a rejuvenation of civil personnel. Everything connected with Marxism, social democracy and communism is being removed, all internationalists and Bolsheviks are banned.

Many Jews are being expelled, especially among the bourgeois and the professoriate. They are the overwhelming majority, but by no means all. Those who are being expelled are those who clearly find the “new spirit” unacceptable. This “new spirit” has both negative and positive definitions. It is intolerant of Marxism, internationalism and defeatist dishonor, class persecution and reactionary class privilege, public venality, bribery and embezzlement.

There is no such intolerance with regard to Jewry as such, not only because private enterprise and trade remain open to Jews, but also because persons of Jewish blood – two grandfathers and two grandmothers are taken into account, both of whom must be Jewish for one to be a Jew – those who were lawfully in public service on August 1, 1914 or who have participated in military operations since then. Jews who have lost a father or son in battle or as a result of injury; or who are in the service of religious and church organizations, are not subject to restrictions in their rights to public service (decree of May 8, 1933).

Psychologically, it is understandable that such limited restrictions are perceived by Jews very painfully, as they are offended by the very introduction of a presumption to their disadvantage. It seems to say “you are unacceptable until you have shown otherwise.” It is not the religion that matters, but only blood. However, the mere presence of this presumption forces us to admit that a German Jew who has proven in practice his loyalty and devotion to the German homeland is not subject to legal restrictions (either in education or in service).

The new spirit of National Socialism, of course, also has positive attributes: patriotism, faith in the uniqueness of the German people and the power of German genius, a sense of honor, a readiness for sacrificial service, discipline, social justice and a classless, fraternal and national unity. This spirit constitutes, as it were, the substance of the entire movement. It burns in the heart of every sincere National Socialist, tenses his muscles, resounds in his words, and sparkles in his eyes. It is enough to see these believing, truly believing, faces; it is enough to see this discipline to understand the significance of what is happening and to ask oneself: “Is there a people in the world that would not want to create a movement of such upsurge and such spirit?”

In a word, this is the spirit that connects German National Socialism and the Russian White Movement with Italian Fascism. Each of these three movements undoubtedly has its own special characteristics and distinctive features. They are explained by the previous history of each of the three countries, the character of the peoples and the extent of the existing Bolshevik decay (1917 in Russia, 1922 in Italy, 1933 in Germany), and the racial and national composition of these three countries. Suffice it to recall that the White Movement arose directly from an unsuccessful war and a communist coup with the greatest devastation and turmoil on a gigantic territory, by way of heroic improvisation. Whereas Fascism and National Socialism had five and 15 years respectively to gather their forces and develop a program; they had the opportunity to prepare for and prevent the communist coup; they had before them the experience of fighting communism in other countries; their countries are incomparably smaller in size and have a much more concentrated population.

The Jewish question was posed in each country in its own way. However, the fundamental and essential thing unites all three movements, a common and united enemy, patriotism, a sense of honor, voluntary and sacrificial service, a craving for dictatorial discipline, for spiritual renewal and the revival of one's country, a search for a new social justice and an attitude of indecision regarding political form. What evokes sacred anger in the soul? What is the heart devoted to? What does the will strive for? What do people achieve and how do they achieve it? That is what is essential.

Of course, a German, an Italian and a Russian each cares about their own country and

each in their own way, but the spirit is the same and, from a historical perspective, united. It is possible that the National Socialists, like the Fascists, will not discern this spiritual affinity and will attach no significance to it; many things can and will hinder them in this, but the point is, above all, that we ourselves correctly understand, think through, and feel the spirit of the National Socialist movement. Its unjust denigration and slander hinders its correct understanding, sins against the truth, and harms all of humanity. The persecution of it is natural when it comes from the Comintern; unnatural when it comes from non-Bolshevik countries.

The spirit of National Socialism cannot be reduced to “racism,” nor can it be reduced to negation. It advances positive and creative goals, and these creative goals face all peoples. It is imperative for all of us to seek solutions to these challenges. To hiss in advance at others' attempts and gloat over their anticipated failure is foolish and ignoble. Wasn't the White movement slandered? Wasn't it accused of “pogroms?” Wasn't Mussolini slandered? And are Wrangel and Mussolini any less important for this? Or perhaps European public opinion feels called upon to hinder any real struggle against communism, both purifying and creative, and is merely seeking a convenient pretext for this?

On Fascism

*(From the Collection Our Tasks, Vol I, Articles from 1948-1954,
The Russian All-Military Union, Paris, 1956)*

Fascism is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon, and, historically speaking, far from obsolete. It contains elements of health and disease, old and new, protective and destructive. Therefore, its assessment requires calm and fairness, but its dangers must be fully considered as well.

Fascism arose as a reaction to Bolshevism [“socialist” and “Marxist” are used as synonymous with Bolshevism], as a right-wing concentration of forces to protect the state. During the onset of leftist chaos and totalitarianism, this was a healthy, necessary and inevitable phenomenon. Such concentration will continue to occur, even in the most democratic states. In times of national danger, the healthy forces within the nation will always concentrate in a protective and dictatorial direction. This was the case in ancient Rome, it has been the case in modern Europe, and it will continue to be the case in the future.

In opposing left-wing totalitarianism, fascism was furthermore a right-wing movement, since it sought just sociopolitical reforms. This quest could be successful or unsuccessful, as such problems are difficult to resolve, and initial attempts might fail, but to meet the wave of Marxist psychosis, anti-socialist measures were necessary. These measures were long overdue, and there was no need to wait any longer.

Finally, fascism was correct morally, since it proceeded from a healthy national-patriotic feeling, without which no people can either establish its existence or create its own culture. However, fascism also committed a number of profound and serious errors which defined its political and historical physiognomy and gave its very name the odious connotation its enemies tirelessly emphasize. Therefore, a different name must be chosen for future social and political movements of this kind. And if anyone were to call their movement by its former name (“fascism” or “National Socialism”), it would be interpreted as an attempt to revive all the shortcomings and fatal errors of the past.

These gaps and errors were as follows:

1. A hostile attitude toward Christianity, religion, confessions, and churches in general;
2. The creation of right-wing totalitarianism as a permanent and supposedly “ideal” system;

3. The establishment of a party monopoly and the corruption and demoralization that grows out of it;
4. Going to extremes of nationalism and militant chauvinism (national “mania of grandiosity”);
5. Mixing social reforms with socialism and sliding through totalitarianism into nationalization of the economy, and;
6. Falling into idolatrous Caesarism with its demagoguery, servility and despotism.

These mistakes compromised fascism, turned entire faiths, parties, peoples and states against it, led it to an unsustainable war, and ultimately destroyed it. Its cultural and political mission failed, and the leftist element spread with even greater force.

Fascism should not have taken a position hostile to Christianity or any religiosity whatsoever. A political regime that attacks the Church and religion sows division in the souls of its citizens, undermines the deepest roots of their sense of justice, and begins to claim religious significance itself, with itself is absurd. Mussolini soon realized that in a Catholic country, state power requires an honest concordat with the Catholic Church. Hitler, with his vulgar atheism, behind which hid an equally vulgar self-deification, never fully understood that he was following the path of the Antichrist, anticipating the Bolsheviks [*I'm not so sure*].

Fascism may have avoided the creation of a totalitarian regime; it might have been content with an authoritarian dictatorship strong enough to a) eradicate Communism and b) grant religion, the press, science, art, the economy, and non-communist parties freedom of judgment and creativity relative to their political loyalty. The establishment of a party monopoly will never lead to anything good anywhere, as the best men will step aside, the worst will flock to the party. The best think independently and freely, while the worst are ready to adapt to anything in order to advance a career. Therefore, a monopolistic party lives by self-deception, initiating a “qualitative selection,” it demands party unanimity, making it a condition for political legal capacity and effectiveness, it calls people to absurdity and hypocrisy and thereby it opens the door wide to all sorts of blockheads, hypocrites, swindlers and careerists.

The qualitative level of the party is disrupted, and malingerers, bribe-takers, predators, speculators, terrorists, flatterers and traitors are brought to power. As a result, all the shortcomings and errors of political party spirit reach their highest expression in fascism. Party monopoly is worse than party competition (a law known to us in trade, industry, and in all cultural development). The Russian fascists didn't understand this. If they succeed in establishing themselves in Russia (which God forbid), they will compromise all state and sound ideas and fail disgracefully.

Fascism should never have succumbed to political “mania for grandeur,” despised other races and nationalities or set about conquering and exterminating them [*oh no*]. Self-esteem is not arrogant pride; patriotism does not call for the conquest of the universe; liberating one's people does not mean subjugating or exterminating all neighbors. To turn everyone against one's own people is to destroy them. The distinction between socialism and social reform is profound and fundamental. To cross this line is to destroy social reform. For we must always remember that socialism is antisocial, and social justice and social liberation cannot tolerate either socialism or communism.

The greatest mistake of fascism was the revival of idolatrous Caesarism. This is the direct opposite of monarchism. Caesarism is godless, irresponsible and despotic. It disdains freedom, law, legality, justice and the personal rights of citizens. It is demagogic, terroristic and arrogant;

it thirsts for flattery, glory, and worship. It sees the people as a rabble and inflames their passions; it is immoral, belligerent and cruel. It compromises the principle of authoritarianism and autocracy, for its rule pursues goals that are not state or national, but personal. Franco and Salazar understood this and are trying to avoid these mistakes. They don't call their regime "fascist." Let's hope that Russian patriots will also reflect on the mistakes of fascism and National Socialism and not repeat them.