



The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture by Benjamin G. Martin.

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Cultural historian Benjamin Martin (Uppsala Univ.) has written a superb new history¹ of the efforts of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy to radically alter the socio-cultural landscape of Europe. He argues specifically that the Nazi-Fascist allies aimed to control Europe not only physically, but ideologically. Their envisioned new cultural order would stand in stark contrast to the post-World War I liberal international order. Martin taps a variety of sources—journals, diary entries, personal correspondence, speech transcripts, institutional records, and newspaper articles—bearing on political and social events in 1933–44.² He explains in detail the Nazi-Fascist attempts to craft a new cultural model by building a coalition of organizations to appeal to conservative elites across Europe.

Focusing on both institutional and individual actors, the author clarifies the connections between state ideology and the instruments of cultural change. For example, Nazi Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels enforced a policy of political *Gleichschaltung* (coordination) using cultural organizations both in Germany and throughout Europe. The Nazis exploited leading artists like composer Richard Strauss as frontmen for such state-run organizations as the Reich Music Chamber and the State Approved Society for the Utilization of Musical Performance (STAGMA) designed to promote National Socialist ideology and solicit the collaboration of other countries (23). Fascist Italy had started this process already in the 1920s with its Ministry for Press and Propaganda led by Dino Alfieri, but the Italians and the Germans followed divergent paths to accomplish their goals. Martin asserts that Alfieri and other leading Fascists sought to avoid the perceived extremes of liberal individualism and tyrannical communism, by positioning Italy as the leader of a pan-European cultural union.

Italy's political and cultural objectives differed sharply from the Nazis' in the early 1930s. Even a year after Adolf Hitler became chancellor, relations between the two countries were suffering diplomatic and ideological strains. For example, the Nazis tried to bully their way onto the international cultural stage at the 1934 Venice Biennale, using Richard Strauss to pressure attendees to join the Permanent Council for International Cooperation among Composers. Though the tireless Strauss succeeded in recruiting other countries to partner with Germany on the cultural front, the assassination of Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss (25 July 1934) by Nazi loyalists aggravated tensions between Germany and Italy. Clearly, the two nations' goals were not yet completely aligned, especially regarding the means to effect "cultural revisionism" (43).

The turning point in relations between Italy and Germany came in 1935, when the Nazis formed the International Film Chamber (IFC), which eleven other nations eventually agreed to join at the Venice Film Festival that same year. Fritz Scheuermann, president of the Reich Film Chamber, coordinated with Goebbels to make Venice the focal point of this endeavor, in part to challenge Hollywood's

1. Originally, diss. Columbia Univ. 2006.

2. Among the repositories consulted are the German Federal Archives, the Central State Archives of Italy, and the Hoover Institution Archives. Martin deftly integrates the diaries of figures like Josef Goebbels and Fascist journalist Giuseppe Bottai into his narrative to reveal the daily intrigues and thought processes that underlay their work. The Yearly Reports of the DKZ and the meeting records of the IFC offer insights into the inner workings of the organizations.

preeminence in the world of film. Again, Fascist Italy had done something like this when it created the educational film company Istituto Luce in 1924. Benito Mussolini himself worked with the League of Nations in 1927 to allow Italy to host the International Institute for Educational Cinematography (ICE). In contrast, Nazi Germany withdrew from the League in 1933 and then trumped the ICE with its IFC, as part of the Rome-Berlin Axis.

The official formation of the Rome-Berlin Axis in November 1936 posed a threat to the West's liberalism and laissez-faire capitalism. This in turn allowed a "cultural Axis" to emerge, as evidenced by the success of the 1936 Venice Film Festival, where the IFC played a significant role and included leading film figures from France, Germany, and Italy (76). Another tactic of Nazi-Fascist ideologues was tying internationalism to Judaism in the cultural sphere. Artists like Italian composer Adriano Lualdi emerged as anti-Semitic voices and the Germans and Italians sought to challenge the Americans through the IFC, choosing famed French producer Georges Lourau as the organization's president and making Paris the seat of the institution. The Axis powers were both realigning European loyalties and directly challenging their enemies. As Martin puts it, "The logic of National Socialism and fascism, even in cultural politics, meant war" (108).

Martin contends that "inter-nationalism" (114) necessitated a new type of cultural exchange and cooperation. For instance, Italy's head of the National Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations, Alessandro Pavolini, collaborated with the Nazi Permanent Council and IFC. By 1938, Martin notes, Italy had committed to Nazi plans for Europe, but doggedly pursued its own agenda of imperial and cultural hegemony in the Mediterranean with the start of World War II.

Concurrently with Germany's military conquests in mainland Europe in 1939–41, a "reordering" of European culture was also underway (149). Branches of the German-Italian Society of Berlin were opened in every major city in the Reich, and the Italo-Germanic Cultural Association in Italy saw its membership increase from two thousand in 1939 to ten thousand by 1941. The German Central Conference Office (DKZ) was working in Paris to consolidate the power of French organizations. The administration of the Nazis' New Order for European cultural inter-nationalism was answerable only to the state, with no input from scholars or artists. The Italians did, however, Martin observes, organize the Universal Exposition in Rome in 1942 to show off examples of their culture, industry, and technology.

A chapter on "European Culture under German Hegemony" traces in detail the evolution of Nazi-Fascist policy goals and institutional developments beginning in the 1930s. In July 1941, Goebbels organized an IFC meeting in Berlin to promote the cultural unification of Europe and revive stagnating pan-European institutions. He believed he could rally European elites against Bolshevism while preparing for a global conflict with the United States.

Although the advent of a two-front war scuttled most of these initiatives, Goebbels continued to use cultural diplomacy through the Reich Chambers of Culture, STAGMA, the DKZ, and other elements of the Propaganda Ministry.

By 1943, then, the International Film Chamber was working closely with the DKZ, the International Law Chamber, and the Union of European Copyright Societies, revealing the degree to which these institutions served a single project: an effort to create an integrated European cultural market that corresponded to and supported the autarchic political-economic "great space" envisioned by Nazi leaders as the defining feature of the New Order. Clearly, the "conference and convention mania" of 1941 and 1942 was doing far more than producing propagandistic talk about "European solidarity." It was laying the institutional bases for a continental structure of control that would help to legitimate German dominance and render permanent Hitler's antidemocratic reconstitution of European life. (213)

Cultural imperialism both solicited support from Europeans and enforced Nazi policies and beliefs. Ultimately, Goebbels wanted Germany to become Europe's Hollywood, with other continental states producing only local, low-budget films.

Martin concludes that, in the 1930s and 1940s, Hitler's Berlin and Mussolini's Rome were more appealing cultural centers for many European elites than Paris, London, New York, or Moscow. For them, the old order of liberal-capitalist internationalism was politicized and coercive. However, the outbreak of war and the Nazis' brutal occupation policies vitiated their efforts to impose any alternative "New Order." The Nazi *völkisch* ideology glorifying rural and provincial artists clashed with Roman ideals of civilization. Nevertheless, the fact that some Europeans embraced the Nazi-Fascist vision of Europe's high cultural legacy is an object lesson in our own times of nationalist parties and anti-immigration attitudes in Europe (and elsewhere).

The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture is a decidedly original and salutary publication at a time when Europe and the West are flirting with political populism and bitter polarization. Martin's depth of knowledge on his subject makes his arguments compelling and urgent.