



Abba Hillel Silver Collection Digitization Project

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MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.

Series V: Writings, 1909-1963, undated.

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Fascism as a dominant principle in America, 1933.

To Don Wilder of the Press

6-7-33

I do not believe that Fascism is likely to become a dominant political principle in America. Some people have been flirting with this idea in our country. Many others have interpreted the recent concentration of power in the hands of our chief executive as evidence that we were fast drifting towards Fascism. This is furthest from the truth. It is not inconsistent with the democratic doctrine that in periods of national emergency greater power should be vested temporarily in the hands of one man or a few men. This was done in the past. It is being done now. The important thing is to retain the ultimate veto power in the hands of the democratically elected legislative bodies of a nation and to preserve the institutions of free expression of opinion and criticism, a free press, the right of public assembly and opposition parties. With these safeguards a democracy may safely resort to extreme concentration measures for the duration of a period of emergency. In Italy, Germany, Russia, however, these final repositories of the democratic technique have been completely destroyed and nothing remains but absolute dictatorship.

It is significant that dictatorships have entrenched themselves only in those countries which have had no real democratic tradition. Russia experienced self-government just six months in 1917. Prior to that time and for long centuries Russia knew only the most thorough-going and oppressive absolutism in State and Church. The dominant political tradition of Italy derives from the city states of the Renaissance which were ruled by small aristocracies or by tyrants of the Mussolini type. The German Republic lasted only fourteen years. Prior to 1918

Germany knew Kaiserism for fifty years and before that time centuries of local despots, small or great. The present dictatorships are therefore reversions to type. These countries were unripe for self government. They did not possess the long democratic tradition of the Anglo-Saxon countries or even of France.

