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Le Corbusier, Jews and fascism: setting the record straight

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For some years now, a campaign has been gaining ground in Switzerland to paint Le Corbusier as a person who was simultaneously an anti-Semite and a fascist or – even more seriously – a Nazi sympathiser. This campaign's starting point was a short article on Le Corbusier's views during the Second World War, published in 2005 by the writer Daniel de Roulet and widely reprinted thereafter¹. Such characterisations are extremely serious and are based on the use of fragments of correspondence removed from their biographical and historical context; they have been taken seriously in some quarters and call for the record to be set straight regarding the views of one of the greatest figures of not only modern architecture but modern culture as a whole. The analyses set out below are based on a more extensive reading of archived documents and place statements that were written under the intimate circumstances of correspondence in their biographical and historical context.

What role did fascist and anti-Semitic thought play at various stages in the life and work of Le Corbusier (at the beginning, peak and end of his career)? - What was Le Corbusier's relationship to the fascist regimes in Europe, in professional and private terms?

Two introductory comments should be made: one relates to the human environment and the other concerns Le Corbusier's generation. Charles-Édouard Jeanneret came from a specific background at a specific time and place, namely the Protestant middle class of La Chaux-de-Fonds; he went on to develop in other environments, particularly Paris, during a unique period in global history that was marked by the zenith of European imperialism, two world wars and the rise of national liberation movements, social reform and totalitarian regimes. This was a troubled period of human history when clear views and commitments tended to be the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, Jeanneret's generation was deeply traumatised by the bloodshed during the First World War. Although the young architect did not take part in that war (unlike his fellow citizen and contemporary Blaise Cendrars who joined the Foreign Legion as a volunteer), he was scarred by the conflict and was to retain a pacifist leaning that would become evident at a later stage.

One important fact must also be stated at the outset. Le Corbusier was *never* affiliated to any fascist organisation – nor to any other political grouping nor a Freemasons' lodge. Neither in his earliest years, nor in his heyday, nor at the end of his life. However, this is not to say that he – like many men and women of his generation – was not insensitive to fascist propaganda, that there were no points of contact between him and Mussolini's regime or that he did not seek to obtain commissions in Italy during the inter-war period.

Let us trace the development of his political affinities more closely. One of the first expressions of the young Charles-Édouard Jeanneret's ideas took the form of his sharply hostile reaction to the socialist municipal council elected at La Chaux-de-Fonds in 1912: this was mainly prompted by council's decision to terminate the experiments being undertaken in the "Nouvelle Section" ("New Section") of the Art School. From 1914 onwards, this stance was compounded by his nationalist identification with France in response to the destruction

¹ Daniel de Roulet, "Sur les traces du Corbusier, un voyage à Vichy", *Tracés*, no. 20, 2005, p. 32-35.

caused by the Germans during the first weeks of the war. In 1915, he told William Ritter that he had become "national" ("nationalist") and was no longer "socio" ("socialist")².

Mussolini completed his March on Rome in 1922. At this point, Le Corbusier was adopting a conservative stance, in particular because he espoused the views of the French employers following his own misfortunes as a small entrepreneur at the end of the war. This is the meaning of the "Architecture or revolution" dilemma, on which he completed his essay *Vers une architecture (Towards an Architecture)* in 1923, firmly rejecting the hypothesis of a violent change. In the second half of the 1920s, he took part in the activities of the "Redressement français" ("French Revival") association that was established in 1925 by Ernest Mercier, the founder of the "Union d'électricité" and the "Compagnie française des pétroles"; with the backing of Marshal Foch, it lobbied for the modernisation of French industry. Le Corbusier adhered to his Fordist programme and played a part in the activities of this group, which was critical of representative democracy. Furthermore, he was approached by the representatives of the Faisceau league, an extreme right-wing organisation founded by Georges Valois who was an advocate of the ideas of Georges Sorel. This organisation – typified by its hatred of parliamentarianism, its social egalitarianism and an interest in Fascist Italy that did not outweigh its admiration for the USSR – approached Le Corbusier in 1927 to ask him for a contribution to its periodical, *Le Nouveau Siècle (The New Century)*³.

In the same period, Le Corbusier was contacted by the Central Union of Soviet Consumer Cooperatives – Centrosoyuz – that engaged him to build its headquarters in Moscow in 1928, his most important commission prior to the "Unité d'habitation" ("Housing Unit") in Marseilles in 1946. He did not, however, align himself with the Bolsheviks' views, although he was profoundly impressed by the transformations in post-revolutionary Russia and felt a strong affinity with the avant-garde Constructivist movement. The main aspect of Bolshevism that he retained was the concept of "grandeur", which he interpreted in a highly personal way. But he was also baffled by the prevalence of egalitarianism. He underlined the following passage in Rousseau's *The Social Contract*: "We are told that a truly Christian people would create the most perfect society that could be imagined. I see only one major difficulty with this conjecture, which is that a society of true Christians would no longer be a society of men". And he wrote: "Ditto the USSR"⁴. His attitude towards the Soviets' social project was, therefore, fundamentally one of caution.

In January 1931, Le Corbusier was among the founders of the periodical *Plans* alongside Hubert de Lagardelle, an old acquaintance of Mussolini's prior to 1914 and a notorious figure of the French far right⁵, as well as the lawyer Philippe Lamour, a former member of the "Faisceau" who later became involved in the Resistance during the war. This periodical's editors simultaneously extolled the Italian reforms and the Soviet Five-Year Plan, advocating a Europe without war. Their stance, which rejected both right and left while aiming to come up with responses to the crises in Italy as well as Russia, could be characterised as technocratic – like those of other French groupings that were active at the same time.

² Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, letter to William Ritter, March 1915.

³ Rémi Baudouï, "Le Planisme et le régime italien", in Marida Talamona, ed., *L'Italie de Le Corbusier*, Paris, Éditions de La Villette, 2010, pp. 166-167.

⁴ Le Corbusier, note in the margin of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, Paris, Flammarion, 1929, personal library of LC. FLC J 106, p. 148.

⁵ Zeev Sternell, *Ni droite, ni gauche : l'idéologie fasciste en France*, Paris, Seuil, 1983.

Le Corbusier was upset after his failure in the competition for the Palace of the Soviets, so he then turned towards Fascist Italy where he foresaw the possibility of new commissions. As well as Lagardelle's contacts with the regime, he made use of his relations with the Italian members of the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM). From 1932 onwards, he made attempts to meet Mussolini; his stated purpose was to "make the Duce understand that modern Italy must stop rebuilding itself in the Roman style"⁶. Two years later, during a trip to Rome, he tried to see Mussolini between two lectures at the precise moment when the Italian leader was receiving the modern architects of the Florence railway station and the new town of Sabaudia to demonstrate his support for them. Warned by his conservative advisers against "a foreign artist and furthermore, according to what people say, a communist,"⁷ the Duce agreed that Le Corbusier could deliver his lectures but did not receive him, nor did he visit the exhibition of his work. Le Corbusier then wrote to the young critic Pietro Maria Bardi, one of his hosts: "One excellent format for the discussion with M. would be to be received in the evening in a place with a projection lantern and to show some slides"⁸. He was impressed by Sabaudia and had just drafted a plan for the new town of Guidonia that he actually intended to present to the Duce. Le Corbusier subsequently drew up a development plan for Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, that he sent to Giuseppe Bottai, the head of the corporatist and modernist wing of the regime.

When he returned to Paris after his journey in 1934, Le Corbusier sent a copy of his *Œuvre complète* (*Complete Works*) to Rome, with a dedication "to H.E. Mussolini, in memory of his address to the young Italian architects in June 1934, when I was in Rome to attempt to prove that unity in time and human works comes about only through the equivalence of the potential of creative energy. Every plagiarism and every glance backwards are merely death and blight. With my respect and admiration"⁹. This statement calls for several comments. Here, Le Corbusier is positioning himself in harmony with the young modern Italian architects, almost all of whom espoused the regime. All of them were won over by the Duce's affirmation of openness to new ideas. Edoardo Persico, the critic, and Giuseppe de Finetti, the Milan architect, were the only ones to resist. This espousal of the regime's organisations by architects such as Giuseppe Pagano, Giuseppe Terragni or Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini did not, however, turn them into ideologues who propagated the most nationalist or racist themes of its discourse. Some of them, moreover, would move over to the antifascist camp during the war. The complex nature of their relations with the regime has long been the subject of study, and the most recent analyses (such as those by Paolo Nicoloso) show that Mussolini had the closest relationships with eclectic opportunists such as Marcello Piacentini and that he listened to the advice of those who cautioned him against Le Corbusier¹⁰.

In France, Le Corbusier moved closer to the left after the victories of the "Front Populaire" ("Popular Front") in the 1935 municipal elections and then in the legislative elections of 1936. However, he anticipated a backlash, as he wrote to his mother from April 1936 onwards: "I think that the blow will be struck in the elections, and the right will be beaten. It's time! But

⁶ Le Corbusier to Senator François, 7 April 1932, FLC I2-3-7.

⁷ C. Di Marzio, letter to the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, 13 February 1933, quoted by Marida Talamona, "À la recherche de l'Autorité", in Marida Talamona, ed., *L'Italie de Le Corbusier*, Paris, Éditions de La Villette, 2010 Marida, 177.

⁸ Le Corbusier, letter to Pietro Maria Bardi, 1934, *ibid.*, p. 184.

⁹ This dedication is reproduced in: Hans Girsberger, *Mes contacts avec Le Corbusier*, Zurich, Les Éditions d'architecture Artémis, 1981, p. 39.

¹⁰ Paolo Nicoloso, *Gli architetti di Mussolini. Scuole e sindacato, architetti e massoni, professori e politici negli anni del regime*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 1999. Id., *Mussolini architetto; propaganda e paesaggio urbano nell'Italia fascista*, Turin, Giulio Einaudi, 2008.

the left will not be able to keep its promises. Then there will be mayhem. Today's crumbling structure will collapse, and France will finally have to give birth to a regime of its own, matched to her actual condition. Hitler is not such a fool as people have wanted to make him out. He plays his game with strength and consistency. There are some crazy people here – on the right and the far left – who would like to wage war. The gun merchants are working flat out and we're paying the taxes. I have a feeling that some solutions will emerge. The status quo can no longer be maintained. Too much is rotten"¹¹. He endeavoured to persuade Léon Blum, the President of the Council of Ministers, to build his planned reconstruction of Unsanitary Area no. 6 in Paris, and obtained the backing of Blum's government for his "Pavillon des Temps nouveaux" ("Pavilion of New Times") at the 1937 international exhibition. He also expressed very clear and public support for the Spanish Republicans (among whom he had a number of friends) against Franco's forces and he dedicated one of his paintings to the "Fall of Barcelona". Thus, he swerved sharply to the left in the zig-zag course of his political affinities¹².

After the 1940 armistice, he spent almost 18 months in Vichy, the seat of Marshal Pétain's collaborationist government. Le Corbusier did not go there in a political role, but as a "technician". Although the racist character of the regime became evident once it promulgated the anti-Jewish laws of 1940, many of the French saw Pétain as the "shield" against Germany while de Gaulle represented the "sword". Among government circles, Le Corbusier met up again with his friends from (the periodical) *Plans*, such as Lagardelle, the industrialist François de Pierrefeu and also Dr Alexis Carrel, the eugenics theorist with whom he had been in contact before the war. He attempted to have his vision of urban development and housing adopted by the "Review Committee on Housing and Building Construction" headed by State Councillor Robert Latournerie, while mobilising his support to implement the project that he had been planning for ten years in Algiers.

Le Corbusier responded to the Vichy programme with a plan for basic buildings intended for youth movements, the "Murondin" houses, while his publications echoed the regime's hatred of Paris that was regarded as a socially dangerous city. In his pamphlet *Destin de Paris (Destiny of Paris)* published in 1941, he states his opinion that "Paris must get rid of its inert crowds, the people who really have nothing to do in Paris and whose place is on the land or in industries that should be relocated". Development, therefore, is not merely a matter of construction, but also of population movements. In the Vichy doctrine, he also saw echoes of the regionalist programme of the *Plans* group when, in 1942 (in *La Maison des hommes (The House of the People)*), he suggested that construction should be realigned around a "tree of the built environment", putting down roots in the "person", the "region" and the "family"¹³. In the early period of the Vichy regime, it is fair to say that Le Corbusier saw the implementation of the programme that was drawn up at the start of the 1930s with his technocrat friends. And although he left what he thenceforth regarded as his "dear shitty Vichy"¹⁴ in July 1942, the fact was that the slanders perpetrated by Alexander de Senger had caught up with him in the meantime¹⁵.

¹¹ Le Corbusier, letter to his mother, 4 April 1936, Jornod Collection, Geneva.

¹² Regarding his tortuous progression, see: Jean-Louis Cohen, "Politique ; droite-gauche : invite à l'action", in Jacques Lucan, ed., *Le Corbusier 1887-1965, une encyclopédie*, Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1987, p. 309-313.

¹³ Le Corbusier, François de Pierrefeu, *La Maison des Hommes*, Paris, Plon, 1942, p. 174.

¹⁴ See: Rémi Baudouï, "Vichy. L'attitude de Le Corbusier pendant la guerre", in: Jacques Lucan, ed. *Le Corbusier une encyclopédie*, Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1987, p. 457.

¹⁵ Alexander von Senger, *Die Brandfackel Moskaus*, Zurich, Verlag Kaufhaus, 1931. In French: *Le Cheval de Troie du Bolchevisme*, Bienne, Éditions du Chandelier, 1931.

Like many reformers of his generation, Le Corbusier would have believed that the Vichy government, freed from the constraints and sluggishness of parliamentary life, could implement a regional planning and urban rationalisation programme under whose auspices he could have undertaken his own projects. The emphasis on authority and also on the necessity of entrusting power to the technicians were bound to have tempted him. But at no point did he come out explicitly in favour of the racial measures of Pétain's successive governments.

Le Corbusier was disappointed by his inability to incorporate his theories into the reconstruction programme, and he was doubtless impressed by the Allies' successes after the 1942 landing in Sicily and the 1943 victory at Stalingrad; from then on, he positioned himself as a member of the Resistance and assembled an entourage of young architects who continued part of the research undertaken at Vichy, redrafted in a discourse that was more progressive but also highly technocratic. In 1944, he inspired the biography dedicated to him by the journalist Maximilien Gauthier that presented him as someone operating "in the service of mankind" in time for him to obtain commissions from post-war France¹⁶. His progression closely resembles that of many artists and intellectuals who initially credited Vichy with the ability to implement its reformist intentions but then went on to join the Gaullists or the Communists.

What was Le Corbusier's relationship to persons with a Jewish background, both in professional and private terms? - How can Le Corbusier's intellectual attitude be described? Was it unique or are there comparable examples among other artists? How should it be seen in the context of its era?

Unravelling Jeanneret/Le Corbusier's relationship with the Jews is a complex undertaking. It evolves through various phases and must be placed in the context of his era. The first phase relates to his experiences at La Chaux-de-Fonds, where the watchmaking industry consisted essentially of companies belonging to Jews who had come from Mulhouse or Basel. Jeanneret grew up while the reverberations from the Dreyfus Affair were making themselves felt in Switzerland, although they did not provoke such violent outbursts of anti-Semitism as they did in France¹⁷. Georges-Édouard Jeanneret supplied his watch dials to the Jewish bosses of the watchmaking companies, and the Jeanneret family doubtless resented them for their tough approach to business. At any rate, his mother persisted in taking this attitude.

During his travels, the young Charles-Édouard fell back on the stereotypes that were common among large parts of the French and Swiss-French populations. In 1908, in Vienna, he noted that "the pavements were packed with gawkers, high-flying Jews with their wives or daughters, the esteemed middle class"¹⁸. Then, on his return to Paris in 1913, he announced that he had "seen and enjoyed, and suffered. First, endless hours with Jewish jerks, despicable and offensive, a budgie and a nitwit"¹⁹. These were the sons of the industrialists of La Chaux-de-Fonds who gave him commissions for various interiors from 1912 onwards. In 1914, he wrote: "The little Jew will be well and truly subdued one of these days. I call them little Jews because they dish out their orders, create a hullabaloo, strut about the place, and their daddies have more or less swallowed up all the local industry..."²⁰. This statement expresses his

¹⁶ Maximilien Gauthier, *Le Corbusier, ou l'architecture au service de l'homme*, Paris, Denoël, 1944.

¹⁷ Alain Clavier, "L'affaire Dreyfus en Suisse : repérages", *Le Mouvement social*, no. 166, January-March 1994, p. 39-52.

¹⁸ Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, 1908, FLC R1-4-64.

¹⁹ Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, 1913, R3-18-298T.

²⁰ Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, letter to Auguste Perret, 1914, FLC E1-11-100.

resentment against the Ditisheim, Schwob and Levaillant families who, incidentally, placed their trust in him. A member of the latter family, Marcel Levaillant, was to remain a lifelong friend. Following the construction of the Scala cinema for Edmond Meyer, whom he saw as a "hyena", the last commission that he executed in his native town was a villa for Anatole Schwob, owner of the Cyma brand. This ended up in lengthy proceedings regarding the cost of the work and the defects in it, which continued until 1920 and prompted Jeanneret to refer to the "cunning tricks and filthy behaviour" of the "sons of Isaac" in his letters to William Ritter²¹.

From 1920 onwards, Le Corbusier was involved in publishing *L'Esprit nouveau* (*The New Spirit*) with Amédée Ozenfant. The contributors to this periodical included the filmmaker Jean Epstein, a major figure in the Zionist movement, and the journalist Henri Hertz, who became the Secretary-General of the French section of the World Jewish Congress in 1925. The clients who awarded him his most outstanding commissions included, in particular, the sculptor Jacques Lipschitz and Michael Stein (brother of the writer Gertrude Stein) and his wife, Sarah. Jean Badovici, the architect, was also one of his closest friends until the end of the 1940s. Once his career had fully taken off, the Jewish question does not seem to have had a significant presence. It was only when he travelled to Moscow in 1928 that this issue surfaced, when his mother was amazed at her younger son's positive reactions because, as she stated: "The Bolshevik bosses are generally Jews, of rather low extraction, and all the massacres they perpetrated have made them odious"²².

A new element emerges with the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine under the British mandate. In his studio on the rue de Sèvres, Le Corbusier hosted young Jewish architects such as Shlomo Bernstein and Sam Barkai, who went on to pursue their activities in Palestine. In 1938, *Habinyan* (the Tel Aviv architects' periodical) published a highly optimistic comment by him regarding Palestine's ability to generate a new architecture: "I am sure that in Palestine there is not only the question of creating a kind of a formula, but it must be found the place itself - the fundamental elements that will lead not only to a functional architecture but also to an architecture in the spirit of time and history" [original English]²³. One of Le Corbusier's closest associates at that time was Julius Posener, the German architect who became the secretary to the editorial team of the Paris periodical *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* (*Today's Architecture*) in 1934, after he had fled from Nazi persecution. Following his departure for Palestine in 1935, Le Corbusier asked him to find him some work there: "In recent years, I have had the opportunity to appreciate the serious side of your character and your knowledge of architectural matters. With your willpower, I am convinced that you will manage to overcome the difficulties involved in a new installation in Palestine and that your abilities will enable you to be appreciated. I strongly confirm what I have said to you, namely that if you happen to foresee a problem where my participation could help to achieve a resolution, you are welcome to call on me. Such a case would entail a working relationship in which I would provide you with the fundamental ideas in the form of plans, while for your part you would undertake the relevant investigations on the ground and would then provide follow-through for the execution of the works"²⁴.

In 1938, Le Corbusier was contacted by Wolfgang (Binyamin Ze'ev) von Weisl, one of the organisers of the Jewish emigration to Palestine, for whom he wrote a text on the Jewish

²¹ Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, letter to William Ritter, 1920.

²² Marie-Charlotte-Amélie Jeanneret, letter to Le Corbusier and Yvonne Gallis, 28 October 1928, FLC R1-7-60.

²³ Le Corbusier, *Habinyan*, no. 2, 1938, p. 40.

²⁴ Le Corbusier, letter to Julius Posener, 1 September 1935, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Pos-01-1410.

question in 1938 that remains unpublished. Prophetically, he links anti-Semitic propaganda to the preparations for war, and he emphasises: "One merely needs to observe the links between the anti-Semitic movement and pan-German propaganda, the relationship between the persecutions of the Jews and the preparations for war, in order to understand the extent to which putting these words into practice is becoming an imminent danger. Indeed, the threat of annihilation hangs over the whole of Europe, not only the six million Jews in the countries on the other side of the Rhine. The Jews are the first victims, but they cannot be the last or the only ones who will fall prey to the unleashing of racial passions"²⁵. He displayed no reticence in connection with the political project of Zionism, to which he returned in 1939 when (as announced in *L'Univers israélite (The Israelite Universe)*) he delivered a lecture in Paris under the auspices of the "Notre Cité" ("Our City") association with the title "Youth confronting the machinist civilisation: a contribution to studies of the problem of Jewish emigration" in which he presented his "Radiant Farm" project. Like some of the Zionist leaders themselves, he did not necessarily view Palestine as the only destination for emigration, as he wrote at the time: "Due to dramatically exceptional circumstances, the era of the great migrations is being launched by the Jewish population. Sooner or later, this migration will extend to every country (rational and productive reoccupation of territory). [...] This vast Jewish experience that is to unfold for a whole decade is worthy of attentive and ample preparation"²⁶.

Nevertheless, one year later, Le Corbusier again took up the discourse of the French right wing regarding the reasons for a defeat that ensued from the actions of occult forces. To his mother and brother, he wrote: "Money, the Jews (who were partially responsible), Freemasonry: everything will be subjected to fair law. These shameful fortresses will be demolished. They have dominated everything"²⁷. Shortly afterwards, when the Pétain regime promulgated its racial laws, he wrote to them on this occasion: "The Jews are having a hard time. Sometimes, I'm contrite about that. But it seems that their unbridled thirst for money had poisoned the country"²⁸. His sympathy puts him at odds with a judgement that was tainted by the discourse of the anti-Semitic extreme right wing.

After the war, Le Corbusier supported the campaign by the left-leaning "Ligue Française pour la Palestine Libre" ("French League for a Free Palestine"), which advocated the creation of a Jewish state. In particular, he signed the League's "Appeal to the British People" in 1947, for which it thanked him²⁹. No further references to Jews will be found in his correspondence, nor yet in his writings, with one exception in 1956, when he wrote in a letter: "I am the Wandering Jew, or the Flying Dutchman. But I don't like to be Dutch, or Jewish either. So I am Le Corbusier – *Corbu*. And that's a hell of a role to play"³⁰. It is only here that his reluctance to be identified as a Jew is expressed, but this is not necessarily evidence of violent anti-Semitism. From these attitudes, we can gauge everything that separates Le Corbusier – whose remarks were made in private – from the genuine and outspoken anti-Semites: writers

²⁵ Le Corbusier, "Quelles sont les formes d'agrégation d'une nouvelle société machiniste?", 3 December 1938, FLC A3-1-215.

²⁶ Note on Le Corbusier's lecture, "La jeunesse en face de la civilisation machiniste : contribution à l'étude du problème de l'émigration juive", 1939, FLC A3-1-226, p. 13. See the analysis of these texts in: Marina Epstein-Pliouchtch, Tzafirir Fainholtz, "Is the Kibbutz a 'Radiant Village'?": Le Corbusier and the Zionist Movement", in Andrew Ballantyne, ed., *Rural and Urban: Architecture Between Two Cultures*, London, Routledge, 2010, p. 160-176.

²⁷ Le Corbusier, letter to his mother and Albert, 2 August 1940, FLC.

²⁸ Le Corbusier, letter to his mother and Albert, 1 October 1940, FLC.

²⁹ Henri Dillot, Secretary-General of the League, to Le Corbusier, 23 December 1947, FLC A2-18-98.

³⁰ Le Corbusier, 1956, FLC R2-2-173T.

such as Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Robert Brasillach and Pierre Drieu La Rochelle. The stereotypes of his youth are forgotten. He was open and tolerant in his personal and professional relationships with Jews; he recognised them as a group, and he reiterated the statements in the nationalist press that formed the basis for his reaction in October 1940. But in no way did he approve of or support the theory that they should be exterminated. After all, on the day after the Munich Agreements of 1938, he wrote to his mother: "Before 'Munich', 90% of Germans had removed the Nazi emblem from their buttonholes. After that, all of them put the emblems back again, saying: 'Hitler is our saviour.' The moral is confirmed on all fronts: the dying have truly been resurrected. It's far from nice! [...] We've seen the result of it: Czechoslovakia reviled and massacred. And then, the Jews treated in a way that we would never have dared imagine"³¹.

What was his part in the spread of a fascist mentality throughout Europe within and outside of his peer group? - Did Le Corbusier's sympathies towards fascist regimes come through in his research or were they actually more discreet?

Le Corbusier was involved in editing three periodicals – *Plans, Prélude (Prelude)* and *L'Homme réel (The Real Mankind)* between 1931 and 1932; although the articles in them focused on the policies of Italian Fascism, they did not turn a revolution of a fascist nature into a political programme. As for Le Corbusier himself: he very clearly asserted that "The despot is the Plan..."³². Fascism only made sense to him because he favoured a planned approach to urban development and architecture. From this point of view, he lagged well behind an urban developer such as Gaston Bardet who, in 1937, published a book on *La Rome de Mussolini (Mussolini's Rome)*, or Pierre Vago, editor-in-chief of *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui (Today's Architecture)* who was also an active pro-fascist propagandist, or again his mentor Auguste Perret who, in 1940, had no hesitation in co-authoring an essay *Mussolini bâtisseur (Mussolini the Builder)* with the critic Léandre Vaillat³³.

The articles in these periodicals and his attempts to make contact with Mussolini testify to his interest in Fascism, but his relationship to Nazism is quite different. He does not explain this relationship in any published text, and it is necessary to study his intimate correspondence to gain some idea of it. On 31 October 1940, he wrote to his perpetual confidante, his mother: "We are in the hands of a victor and his attitude could overwhelm us. If the deal is genuine, Hitler could crown his life's work with a magnificent project: the redevelopment of Europe. This is a challenge that may tempt him in preference to fruitless vengeance. There is an unknown element. Personally, I think the game is up. Barring criminal resettlement or a German invasion, France is an indigestible chunk [sic] and, if the problem consists of assigning each nation its role, killing the banks' money, accomplishing real and realistic tasks, then it's good. This will put an end to speeches from podiums or in front of meetings, and to parliamentary rhetoric and sterility. The revolution will take place with a sense of order and will not go beyond human conditions". This text has been reproduced in a truncated version and it is clear to see that Le Corbusier is merely taking note here of the German victory of 1940 that, to him, appears to authorise the reforms that he and his friends were awaiting. This comment is based on the assumption that Germany would win the war, but in no way on a desire that this should actually be the case. Were this assumption to prove true, however, Le

³¹ Le Corbusier, letter to his mother, 18 November 1938.

³² Le Corbusier, "Décisions", *Plans*, no. 10, December 1931, p. 94 and 96:

³³ Sergio Pace, "Mussolini bâtisseur", in Jean-Louis Cohen, Joseph Abram, Guy Lambert, ed., *Encyclopédie Perret*, Paris, Éditions du Patrimoine, Institut français d'architecture, Éditions Le Moniteur, 2002, p. 252-253.

Corbusier seems to imagine that his ideas about territorial reorganisation would find a listening ear.

It is impossible to suspect Le Corbusier of having even the slightest sympathy for Hitler's regime, given the extent of the hostility he had displayed towards Germany since the beginning of the First World War. In contrast to what happened in the case of Italy, Le Corbusier had no presence on the German scene after 1933, especially as he was viewed there as the "Trojan horse of Bolshevism". He did not seek any commissions from the German regime or from German industrialists. And the comments he makes in his letters to his family leave no shadow of a doubt. At the start of the "phony war", he wrote: "Will this dreadful Hitler go through Switzerland? Nothing bothers him – neither shame nor winter, rivers nor mountains. What a march towards suicide! It's truly astonishing that the German people have given themselves such a master. Because it is they who have done it. I fervently hope that you are not visited by the horrors of war"³⁴. It can therefore be concluded that he felt no sympathy whatsoever for Nazism and that, consequently, he had no reason to become its propagandist.

Can a city like Zürich justify overseeing the final completed work by Le Corbusier and making it open to the public as a museum?

Although Le Corbusier made anti-Semitic comments in his youth and although, in 1940, he espoused the slanders of the French extreme right wing against the Jews, there is no doubt in my mind that he also voiced his compassion and never stopped having relations with Jews in various capacities. These opinions were voiced privately, and in no way did they contribute to the spread of anti-Semitism in Europe; nor did the viewpoints expressed in the periodicals in the first half of the 1930s contribute to the spread of fascism. As regards Nazism, we have seen that – although he acknowledged the possibility of its victory – he was not one of its supporters, let alone one of its influencing agents.

Le Corbusier was politically somewhat gullible, and essentially he had only one overriding concern: to see the emergence of strong powers that would be able to undertake large-scale projects for cities and regions to be promoted by him – hence his opportunism. Moreover, it is clear that he had no particular commitment to parliamentary democracy, and his approach to politics was fundamentally elitist.

Debatable though they may be, none of these privately voiced opinions cast doubt on the fundamental point, which is the vast wealth of his work as an artist, urban planner, architect and author. The municipality of Zurich has every reason to continue with its project to take over the Zürichhorn Pavilion and turn it into a museum. It would simply be advisable not to pass over the contradictions of its designer in silence, but to present them in a transparent and measured manner as part of the educational materials intended for the public.

³⁴ Le Corbusier, letter to his mother and Albert, 28 October 1939.