

DOCUMENTS ON FASCISM

Contents Page

What is Fascism? General
Characteristics of a Fascist Country
The 7 Conditions that Foster & Fuel Fascism
The 14 Defining Characteristics of Fascism
Fascism - What it is? (Trotsky)
What is Fascism? Some General Ideological Features

Extracts from:
'Old Nazis, the New Right, and the Republican Party'
The Origins of Fascism
The First Fascist Movement: ITALY
Fascism in Germany: National Socialism

Compiled by: Leonard O' Donnell 2006

What is Fascism?

By Laura Dawn Lewis

This may surprise most educated people. One of the more common government strategies today, especially in developing regions is fascism. Fascism is commonly confused with Nazism. Nazism is a political party platform that embraces a combination of a military dictatorship, socialism and fascism. It is not a government structure. Fascism is a government structure. The most notable characteristic of a fascist country is the separation and persecution or denial of equality to a specific segment of the population based upon superficial qualities or belief systems.

Simply stated, a fascist government always has one class of citizens that is considered superior (good) to another (bad) based upon race, creed or origin. It is possible to be both a republic and a fascist state. The preferred class lives in a republic while the oppressed class lives in a fascist state.

Until the Civil Rights act of 1964, many parts of the US were Republic for whites and could be considered fascist for non-Caucasian residents. Fascism promotes legal segregation in housing, national resource allocation and employment. It provides legal justification for persecuting a specific segment of the population and operates behind a two tiered legal system. These two tiers can be overt as it was within Nazi Germany where Jews, Homosexuals, Catholics, Communists, Clergy and the handicap were held to one set of rules and courts, while the rest of Germany enjoyed different laws.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A FASCIST COUNTRY:

1. **Fascism is** commonly defined as an open terror-based dictatorship which *is*:

Reactionary: makes policy based upon current circumstances rather than creating policies to prevent problems; piles lies and misnomers on top of more lies until the truth becomes indistinguishable, revised or forgotten.

Chauvinistic: Two or more tiered legal systems, varying rights based upon superficial characteristics such as race, creed and origin.

Imperialist elements of finance capital: Extending a nation's authority by territorial acquisition or by the establishment of economic and political domination of one state over its allies. Though a dictatorship is the most common association with fascism, a democracy or republic can also be fascist when it strays away from its Tenets of sovereignty. In the 20th Century, many Fascist countries started out as republics. Through the use of fear, societies gave up their rights under the guise of security. Ultimately these republics morphed into Fascist states.

2. **Fascism is** an extreme measure taken by the middle classes to forestall lower-working class revolution; it thrives on the weakness of the middle classes. It accomplishes this by embracing the middle-class' love of the status-quo, its complacency and its fears of:

**Generating a united struggle within the working class Revolution
Losing its own power and position within society**

In a more simplistic term the people currently in control fear that if they allow equal rights and equal consideration to those being oppressed, they will become oppressed and lose everything. Generally those in power are of a smaller segment of society, but they hold the wealth and control of key systems like manufacturing, law, finance and government position, (i.e. the slave owners in the south prior to the civil war) and the oppressed vastly outnumber them, (the slaves during the same period).

In reality it is the oppressors' fear of retribution by the oppressed that perpetuates fascism; for justification they dehumanize, demonize, strip them of rights, add new laws, restrict movement and attempt to control them by whatever means possible to prevent an uprising. It is very common in a fascist system to have the oppressed referred to as sub-human, animals, terrorists, savages, barbarians, vermin or any other term designed to create justification for the acts of terror and fascism perpetrated on the oppressed. Via dehumanization society can then accept that the oppressed are incapable of thinking or acting in a peaceful manner or taking care of themselves, and thus society is exonerated from culpability in their own minds. **Propaganda, not persuasion**, logic or law, is the tool of fascism, though at times very difficult to spot. It specifically rides the fact that negative behaviour is innate, (born with) rather than a logical behaviour in response to oppression. Propaganda also empowers the oppressors with elitism racially, socially, intellectually and/or spiritually.

THE 7 CONDITIONS THAT FOSTER & FUEL FASCISM

1. **DISCONTENT** among the rural lower middle class (clerks, secretaries, white collar labour). Consistent discontent among the general middle and lower middle classes against the oppressing upperclasses (haves vs have-nots)
2. **HATE:** Pronounced, perpetuated and accepted public disdain of a specific group defined by race, origin, theology or association.
3. **GREED:** The motivator of fascism, which is generally associated with land, space or scarce resources in the possession of those being oppressed.
4. **INSTABILITY** of capitalist relationships or markets
5. The existence of considerable **DECLASSED SOCIAL ELEMENTS**
6. The **STRIPPING OF RIGHTS AND WEALTH** focused upon a specific segment of the population, specifically the middle class and intellectuals within urban areas as this the group with the means, intelligence and ability to stop fascism if given the opportunity.
7. **ORGANIZED PROPAGANDA:**
 - a) The creation of social mythology that venerates (creates saints of) one element of society while concurrently vilifying (dehumanizing) another element of the population through misinformation, misdirection and the obscuring of factual matter

through removal, destruction or social humiliation, (name-calling, false accusations, belittling and threats).

- b) The squelching of public debate not agreeing with the popular agenda via slander, libel, threats, theft, destruction, historical revisionism and social humiliation. Journalists in particular are terrorized if they attempt to publish stories contrary to the agenda. It then promotes this a "patriotic", "supportive" or "the party line" and disagreement with such as "anti-government", "anti-faith" or "anti-nation".

3. Fascism DOVETAILS BUSINESS & GOVERNMENT sectors into a single economic unit, while concurrently increasing infighting and distrust between the units fostering advancement towards war.

4. a) Fascism PROMOTES CHAUVINIST DEMAGOGY, (appealing to the prejudices and emotions of the populace) by fostering selective persecution and accepted public vilification of the target group.

b) Fascism CREATES CONFUSION through "facts". It relies on junk science, revisionism, the elimination of cultural records/treasures and **obfuscations** to create its case and gain acceptance. Fascism can also combine Marxist critiques of capitalism or faith based critics of the same to re-define middle class perceptions of democracy and to force its issues, confuse logic and create majority consensus between targeted groups. This is also referred to as creating a state of:

Cognitive Dissonance, the mental state human beings are most easily manipulated.

5. Both middle and upper-middle-class dictated democracy and fascism are class dictatorships that use **ORGANIZED VIOLENCE (verbal or physical) to maintain the class rule of the oppressors over the oppressed**. The difference between the two is demonstrated by the policies towards non-lower-working class classes.

Fascism attains power through the substitution of one state's form of class domination with another form generally a middle class based republic segues into an open terrorist dictatorship, run by a few elite.

THE 14 DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF FASCISM

by Dr. Lawrence Britt

Dr. Lawrence Britt has examined the fascist regimes of Hitler (Germany), Mussolini (Italy), Franco (Spain), Suharto (Indonesia) and several Latin American regimes. Britt found 14-defining characteristics common to each:

1. POWERFUL AND CONTINUING NATIONALISM -

Fascist regimes tend to make constant use of patriotic mottos, slogans, symbols, songs, and other paraphernalia. Flags are seen everywhere, as are flag symbols on clothing and in public displays.

2. DISDAIN FOR THE RECOGNITION OF HUMAN RIGHTS -

Because of fear of enemies and the need for security, the people in fascist regimes are persuaded that human rights can be ignored in certain cases because of "need." The people tend to look the other way or even approve of torture, summary executions, assassinations, long incarcerations of prisoners, etc.

3. IDENTIFICATION OF ENEMIES/SCAPEGOATS AS A UNIFYING CAUSE -

The people are rallied into a unifying patriotic frenzy over the need to eliminate a perceived common threat or foe: racial ethnic or religious minorities; liberals; communists; socialists, terrorists, etc.

4. SUPREMACY OF THE MILITARY -

Even when there are widespread domestic problems, the military is given a disproportionate amount of government funding, and the domestic agenda is neglected. Soldiers and military service are glamorized.

5. RAMPANT SEXISM -

The governments of fascist nations tend to be almost exclusively male-dominated. Under fascist regimes, traditional gender roles are made more rigid. Divorce, abortion and homosexuality are suppressed and the state is represented as the ultimate guardian of the family institution.

6. CONTROLLED MASS MEDIA -

Sometimes the media is directly controlled by the government, but in other cases, the media is indirectly controlled by government regulation, or sympathetic media spokespeople and executives. Censorship, especially in war time, is very common.

7. OBSESSION WITH NATIONAL SECURITY -

Fear is used as a motivational tool by the government over the masses.

8. RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT ARE INTERTWINED -

Governments in fascist nations tend to use the most common religion in the nation as a tool to manipulate public opinion. Religious rhetoric and terminology is common from government leaders, even when the major tenets of the religion are diametrically opposed to the government's policies or actions.

9. CORPORATE POWER IS PROTECTED -

The industrial and business aristocracy of a fascist nation often are the ones who put the government leaders into power, creating a mutually beneficial business/government relationship and power elite.

10. LABOR POWER IS SUPPRESSED -

Because the organizing power of labour is the only real threat to a fascist government, labour unions are either eliminated entirely, or are severely suppressed.

11. DISDAIN FOR INTELLECTUALS AND THE ARTS -

Fascist nations tend to promote and tolerate open hostility to higher education, and academia. It is not uncommon for professors and other academics to be censored or even arrested. Free expression in the arts and letters is openly attacked.

12. OBSESSION WITH CRIME AND PUNISHMENT -

Under fascist regimes, the police are given almost limitless power to enforce laws. The people are often willing to overlook police abuses and even forego civil liberties in the name of patriotism. There is often a national police force with virtually unlimited power in fascist nations.

13. RAMPANT CRONYISM AND CORRUPTION -

Fascist regimes almost always are governed by groups of friends and associates who appoint each other to government positions and use governmental power and authority to protect their friends from accountability. It is not uncommon in fascist regimes for national resources and even treasures to be appropriated or even outright stolen by government leaders.

14. FRAUDULENT ELECTIONS -

Sometimes elections in fascist nations are a complete sham. Other times elections are manipulated by smear campaigns against or even assassination of opposition candidates, use of legislation to control voting numbers or political district boundaries, and manipulation of the media. Fascist nations also typically use their judiciaries to manipulate or control elections.

FASCISM -- *What It Is and How To Fight It*

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**FASCISM -- WHAT IS IT?**  
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Extracts from a letter to an English comrade, November 15, 1931; printed in "The Militant", January 16, 1932

What is fascism? The name originated in Italy. Were all the forms of counter-revolutionary dictatorship fascist or not (That is to say, prior to the advent of fascism in Italy)?

The former dictatorship in Spain of Primo de Rivera, 1923-30, is called a fascist dictatorship by the **Comintern**. Is this correct or not? We believe that it is incorrect.

The fascist movement in Italy was a spontaneous movement of large masses, with new leaders from the rank and file. It is a **plebeian** movement in origin, directed and financed by big capitalist powers. It issued forth from the petty bourgeoisie, the slum proletariat, and even to a certain extent from the proletarian masses; Mussolini, a former socialist, is a 'self-made' man arising from this movement. Primo de Rivera was an aristocrat. He occupied a high military and bureaucratic post and was chief governor of Catalonia. He accomplished his overthrow with the aid of state and military forces.

The dictatorships of Spain and Italy are two totally different forms of dictatorship. It is necessary to distinguish between them. Mussolini had difficulty in reconciling many old military institutions with the fascist militia. This problem did not exist for Primo de Rivera. The movement in Germany is analogous mostly to the Italian. It is a mass movement, with its leaders employing a great deal of socialist demagogy. This is necessary for the creation of the mass movement. The genuine basis (for fascism) is the petty bourgeoisie. In Italy, it has a very large base -- the petty bourgeoisie of the towns and cities, and the peasantry. In Germany, likewise, there is a large base for fascism.... It may be said, and this is true to a certain extent, that the new middle class, the functionaries of the state, the private administrators, etc., can constitute such a base. But this is a new question that must be analyzed....

In order to be capable of foreseeing anything with regard to fascism, it is necessary to have a definition of that idea.

What is fascism?

What are its base, its form, and its characteristics? How will its development take place? It is necessary to proceed in a scientific and Marxian manner.

What is Fascism? Some General Ideological Features

by Matthew N. Lyons

I am skeptical of efforts to produce a "definition" of fascism. As a dynamic historical current, fascism has taken many different forms, and has evolved dramatically in some ways. To understand what fascism has encompassed as a movement and a system of rule, we have to look at its historical context and development--as a form of counter-revolutionary politics that first arose in early twentieth-century Europe in response to rapid social upheaval, the devastation of World War I, and the Bolshevik Revolution. The following paragraphs are intended as an initial, open-ended sketch.

Fascism is a form of extreme right-wing ideology that celebrates the nation or the race as an organic community transcending all other loyalties. It emphasizes a myth of national or racial rebirth after a period of decline or destruction. To this end, fascism calls for a "spiritual revolution" against signs of moral decay such as individualism and materialism, and seeks to purge "alien" forces and groups that threaten the organic community. **Fascism** tends to celebrate masculinity, youth, mystical unity, and the regenerative power of violence. Often, but not always, it promotes racial superiority doctrines, ethnic persecution, imperialist expansion, and genocide. At the same time, fascists may embrace a form of internationalism based on either racial or ideological solidarity across national boundaries. Usually **fascism** espouses open male supremacy, though sometimes it may also promote female solidarity and new opportunities for women of the privileged nation or race.

Fascism's approach to politics is both populist--in that it seeks to activate "the people" as a whole against perceived oppressors or enemies--and elitist--in that it treats the people's will as embodied in a select group, or often one supreme leader, from whom authority proceeds downward. **Fascism** seeks to organize a cadre-led mass movement in a drive to seize state power. It seeks to forcibly subordinate all spheres of society to its ideological vision of organic community, usually through a totalitarian state. Both as a movement and a regime, **fascism** uses mass organizations as a system of integration and control, and uses organized violence to suppress opposition, although the scale of violence varies widely.

Fascism is hostile to Marxism, liberalism, and conservatism, yet it borrows concepts and practices from all three.

Fascism rejects the principles of class struggle and workers' internationalism as threats to national or racial unity, yet it often exploits real grievances against capitalists and landowners through ethnic scape-goating or radical-sounding conspiracy theories.

Fascism rejects the liberal doctrines of individual autonomy and rights, political pluralism, and representative government, yet it advocates broad popular participation in politics and may use parliamentary channels in its drive to power. Its vision of a "new order" clashes with the conservative attachment to tradition-based institutions and hierarchies, yet **fascism** often romanticises the past as inspiration for national rebirth.

Fascism has a complex relationship with established elites and the non-fascist right. It is never a mere puppet of the ruling class, but an autonomous movement with its own social base. In practice, **fascism** defends capitalism against instability and the left, but also pursues an agenda that sometimes clashes with capitalist interests in significant ways. There has been much cooperation, competition, and interaction between fascism and other sections of the right, producing various hybrid movements and regimes.

This article is adapted from the author's preface to Russ Bellant's book

- Old Nazis, the New Right, and the Republican Party - , co-published by South End Press and Political Research Associates.

EXTRACTS

"Fascism, which was not afraid to call itself reactionary... does not hesitate to call itself illiberal and anti-liberal."

Benito Mussolini

The seeds of fascism, however, were planted in Italy. "Fascism is reaction," said Mussolini, but reaction to what? The reactionary movement following World War I was based on a rejection of the social theories that formed the basis of the 1789 French Revolution, and whose early formulations in this country had a major influence on our Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights.....

Fascists particularly loathed the social theories of the French Revolution and its slogan: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."

Liberty from oppressive government intervention in the daily lives of its citizens, from illicit searches and seizures, from enforced religious values, from intimidation and arrest for dissenters; and liberty to cast a vote in a system in which the; majority ruled but the minority retained certain inalienable rights.

Equality in the sense of civic equality, egalitarianism, the notion that while people differ, they all should stand equal in the eyes of the law.

Fraternity in the sense of the brotherhood of mankind. That all women and men, the old and the young, the infirm and the healthy, the rich and the poor, share a spark of humanity that must be cherished on a level above that of the law, and that binds us all together in a manner that continuously re-affirms and celebrates life.

This is what fascism as an ideology was reacting against--and its support came primarily from desperate people anxious and angry over their perception that their social and economic position was sinking and frustrated with the constant risk of chaos, uncertainty and inefficiency implicit in a modern democracy based on these principles. Fascism is the antithesis of democracy. We fought a war against it not half a century ago; millions perished as victims of fascism and champions of liberty.

"One of the great lies of this century is that in the 1930's Generalissimo Franco in Spain was primarily a nationalist engaged in stopping the Reds. Franco was, of course, a fascist who was aided by Mussolini and Hitler."

"The history of this period is a press forgery. Falsified news manipulates public opinion. Democracy needs facts."

George Seldes
Hartland Four Corners, Vermont,
March 5, 1988

Fascism was forged in the crucible of post-World War I nationalism in Europe. The national aspirations of many European peoples--nations without states, peoples arbitrarily assigned to political entities with little regard for custom or culture—had been crushed after World War I. The humiliation imposed by the victors in the Great War, coupled with the hardship of the economic Depression, created bitterness and anger. That anger frequently found its outlet in an ideology that asserted not just the importance of the nation, but its unquestionable primacy and central predestined role in history.

In identifying "goodness" and "superiority" with "us," there was a tendency to identify "evil" with "them." This process involves scapegoating and dehumanization. It was then an easy step to blame all societal problems on "them," and presuppose a conspiracy of these evildoers which had emasculated and humiliated the idealized core group of the nation. To solve society's problems one need only unmask the conspirators and eliminate them.....

Other fascist movements in Europe were more explicitly racist, promoting the slogan still used today by some neo-Nazi movements: "Nation is Race." The Nazi racist version of fascism was developed by Adolph Hitler who with six others formed the Nazi party during 1919 and 1920. Imprisoned after the unsuccessful 1923 Beer Hall putsch in Munich, Hitler dictated his opus, ***Mein Kampf*** to his secretary,

Rudolph Hess. ;

Mein Kampf (My Battle) sets out a plan for creating in Germany through national socialism a racially pure *Volkish* state. To succeed, said Hitler, "Aryan" Germany had to resist two forces: the external threat posed by the French with their bloodlines "**negrified**" through "contamination by Negro blood," and the internal threat posed by "the Marxist shock troops of international Jewish stock exchange capital." Hitler was named Chancellor of Germany by Hindenburg in January 1933 and by year's end had consolidated his power as a fascist dictator and begun a campaign for racist nationalism that eventually led to the Holocaust. This obsession with a racism not only afflicted the German Nazis, but also several eastern European nationalist and fascist movements including those in Croatia, Slovakia, Serbia, Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, and the Ukraine. Anti-Jewish bigotry was rampant in all of these racist movements, as was the idea of a link between Jewish financiers and Marxists. Even today the tiny Anti-communist Confederation of Polish Freedom Fighters in the U.S.A. uses the slogan "Communism is Jewish."

"Reactionary concepts plus revolutionary emotion result in Fascist mentality."
Wilhelm Reich

One element shared by all fascist movements, racialist or not, is the apparent lack of consistent political principle behind the ideology--political opportunism in the most basic sense. One virtually unique aspect of fascism is its ruthless drive to attain and hold state power. On that road to power, fascists are willing to abandon any principle to adopt an issue more in vogue and more likely to gain converts.

Hitler, for his part, committed his act of abandonment bloodily and dramatically. When the industrialist power brokers offered control of Germany to Hitler, they knew he was supported by national socialist ideologues who held views incompatible with their idea of profitable enterprise. Hitler solved the problem in the "Night of the Long Knives," during which he had the leadership of the national socialist wing of his constituency murdered in their sleep.

What distinguishes Nazism from generic fascism is its obsession with racial theories of superiority, and some would say, its roots in the socialist theory of proletarian revolution.

Fascism and Nazism as ideologies involve, to varying degrees, some of the following hallmarks:

Nationalism and super-patriotism with a sense of historic mission.

Aggressive militarism even to the extent of glorifying war as good for the national or individual spirit.

Use of violence or threats of violence to impose views on others (fascism and Nazism both employed street violence and state violence at different moments in their development).

Authoritarian reliance on a leader or elite not constitutionally responsible to an electorate.

Cult of personality around a charismatic leader.

Reaction against the values of Modernism, usually with emotional attacks against both liberalism and communism.

Exhortations for the homogeneous masses of common folk (Volkish in German, Populist in the U.S.) to join voluntarily in a heroic mission--often metaphysical and romanticized in character.

Dehumanisation and scape-goating of the enemy--seeing the enemy as an inferior or subhuman force, perhaps involved in a conspiracy that justifies eradicating them.

The self image of being a superior form of social organisation beyond socialism, capitalism and democracy.

Elements of national socialist ideological roots, for example, ostensible support for the industrial working class or farmers; but ultimately, the forging of an alliance with an elite sector of society.

Abandonment of any consistent ideology in a drive for state power. It is vitally important to understand that fascism and Nazism are not biologically or culturally determinant. Fascism does not attach to the gene structure of any specific group or nationality. Nazism was not the ultimate expression of the German people.

Fascism did not end with World War II.

The Origins of Fascism:

Despite the many forms that fascism takes, all fascist movements are rooted in two major historical trends.

First, in late 19th-century Europe mass political movements developed as a challenge to the control of government and politics by small groups of social elites or ruling classes. For the first time, many countries saw the growth of political organizations with membership numbering in the thousands or even millions.

Second, fascism gained popularity because many intellectuals, artists, and political thinkers in the late 19th century began to reject the philosophical emphasis on rationality and progress that had emerged from the 18th-century intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment. These two trends had many effects.

For example, new forms of popular racism and nationalism arose that openly celebrated irrationality and vitalism—the idea that human life is self-directed and not subject to predictable rules and laws. This line of thinking led to calls for a new type of nation that would overcome class divisions and create a sense of historical belonging for its people. For many people, the death and brutality of World War I showed that rationality and progress were not inherent in humanity, and that a radically new direction had to be taken by Western civilization if it was to survive.

World War I also aroused intense patriotism that continued after the war. These sentiments became the basis of mass support for national socialist movements that promised to confront the disorder in the world.

Popular enthusiasm for such movements was especially strong in Germany and Italy, which had only become nation-states in the 19th century and whose parliamentary traditions were weak. Despite having fought on opposite sides, both countries emerged from the war to face political instability and a widespread feeling that the nation had been humiliated in the war and by the settlement terms of the Treaty of Versailles. In addition, many countries felt threatened by Communism because of the success of the Bolsheviks during the Russian Revolution.

The First Fascist Movement: ITALY

A. Mussolini's *Fasci*

The first fascist movement developed in Italy after World War I. Journalist and war veteran Benito Mussolini served as the guiding force behind the new movement. Originally a Marxist, by 1909 Mussolini was convinced that a national rather than an international revolution was necessary, but he was unable to find a suitable catalyst or vehicle for the populist revolutionary energies it demanded. At first he looked to the Italian Socialist Party and edited its newspaper *Avanti!* (Forward!). But when war broke out in Europe in 1914, he saw it as an opportunity to galvanize patriotic energies and create the spirit of heroism and self-sacrifice necessary for the country's renewal. He thus joined the interventionist campaign, which urged Italy to enter the war. In 1914, as Italian leaders tried to decide whether to enter the war, Mussolini founded the newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia* (The People of Italy) to encourage Italy to join the conflict. After Italy declared war against Germany and Austria-Hungary in May 1915, Mussolini used *Il Popolo d'Italia*, to persuade Italians that the war was a turning point for their country. Mussolini argued that when the frontline combat soldiers returned from the war, they would form a new elite and bring about a new type of state and transform Italian society. The new elite would spread community and patriotism, and introduce sweeping changes in every part of society.

Mussolini established the *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* (Italian Combat Veteran's League) in 1919 to channel the revolutionary energies of the returning soldiers. The group's first meeting assembled a small group of war veterans, revolutionary syndicalists (socialists who worked for a national revolution as the first step toward an international one), and futurists (a group of poets who wanted Italian politics and art to fuse in a celebration of modern technological society's dramatic break with the past). The *Fasci di Combattimento*, sometimes known simply as the *Fasci*, initially adopted a leftist agenda, including democratic reform of the government, increased rights for workers, and a redistribution of wealth.

In the elections of 1919 Fascist candidates won few votes. Fascism gained widespread support only in 1920 after the Socialist Party organized militant strikes in Turin and Italy's other northern industrial cities. The Socialist campaign caused chaos through much of the country, leading to concerns that further Socialist victories could damage the Italian economy. Fear of the Socialists spurred the formation of hundreds of new Fascist groups throughout Italy.

Members of these groups formed the Black Shirts—paramilitary *squadre* (squads) that violently attacked Socialists and attempted to stifle their political activities.

B. Mussolini's Rise to Power

The Fascists gained widespread support as a result of their effective use of violence against the Socialists. Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti then gave Mussolini's movement respectability by including Fascist candidates in his government coalition bloc that campaigned in the May 1921 elections. The elections gave the newly formed National Fascist Party (PNF) 35 seats in the Italian legislature. The threat from the Socialists weakened, however, and the Fascists seemed to have little chance of winning more power until Mussolini threatened to stage a coup d'état in October 1922. The Fascists showed their militant intentions in the March on Rome, in which about 25,000 black-shirted Fascists staged demonstrations throughout the capital. Although the Italian parliament moved swiftly to crush the protest, King Victor Emmanuel III refused to sign a decree that would have imposed martial law and enabled the military to destroy the Fascists.

Instead the king invited Mussolini to join a coalition government along with Giolitti. Mussolini accepted the bargain, but it was another two years before Fascism became an authoritarian regime. Early in 1925 Mussolini seized dictatorial powers during a national political crisis sparked by the Black Shirts' murder of socialist Giacomo Matteotti, Mussolini's most outspoken parliamentary critic.

C. Fascist Consolidation of Power

Between 1925 and 1931, the Fascists consolidated power through a series of new laws that provided a legal basis for Italy's official transformation into a single-party state. The government abolished independent political parties and trade unions and took direct control of regional and local governments. The Fascists sharply curbed freedom of the press and assumed sweeping powers to silence political opposition. The government created a special court and police force to suppress so-called anti-Fascism. In principle Mussolini headed the Fascist Party and as head of state led the government in consultation with the Fascist Grand Council. In reality, however, he increasingly became an autocrat answerable to no one.

Mussolini was able to retain power because of his success in presenting himself as an inspired *Duce* (Leader) sent by providence to make Italy great once more.

The Fascist government soon created mass organizations to regiment the nation's youth as well as adult leisure time. The Fascists also established a corporatist economic system, in which the government, business, and labour unions collectively formulated national economic policies. The system was intended to harmonize the interests of workers, managers, and the state. In practice, however, Fascist corporatism retarded technological progress and destroyed workers' rights. Mussolini also pulled off a major diplomatic success when he signed the Lateran Treaty with the Vatican in 1929, which settled a long-simmering dispute over the Catholic Church's role in Italian politics. This marked the first time in Italian history that the Catholic Church and the government agreed over their respective roles.

Between 1932 and 1934 millions of Italians attended the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution in Rome, staged by the government to mark Fascism's first ten years in power. By this point the regime could plausibly boast that it had brought the country together through the *Risorgimento* (Italian unification process) and had turned Italy into a nation that enjoyed admiration and respect abroad.

For a time it seemed that Italy had recovered from the national humiliation, political chaos, and social division following World War I and was managing to avoid the global economic and political crises caused by the Great Depression. Mussolini could claim that he had led the country through a true revolution with a minimum of bloodshed and repression, restoring political stability, national pride, and economic growth. All over the country, Mussolini's speeches drew huge crowds, suggesting that most Italians supported the Fascist government.

Many countries closely watched the Italian corporatist economic experiment. Some hoped that it would prove to be a Third Way—an alternative economic policy between free-market capitalism and communism. Mussolini won the respect of diplomats all over the world because of his opposition to Bolshevism, and he was especially popular in the United States and Britain. To many, the Fascist rhetoric of Italy's rebirth seemed to be turning into a reality.

D. The Fall of Italian Fascism:

Two events can be seen as marking the turning point in Fascism's fortunes. First, Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany in January 1933, which meant that Mussolini had the support of a powerful fascist ally. Second, Italy invaded Ethiopia in October 1935 (see Italy: The Ethiopian Campaign). In less than a year the Fascist army crushed the poorly equipped and vastly outnumbered Ethiopians. Mussolini's power peaked at this point, as he seemed to be making good on his promise to create an African empire worthy of the

descendants of ancient Rome. The League of Nations condemned the invasion and voted to impose sanctions on Italy, but this only made Mussolini a hero of the Italian people, as he stood defiant against the dozens of countries that opposed his militarism. But the Ethiopian war severely strained Italy's military and economic resources. At the same time, international hostility to Italy's invasion led Mussolini to forge closer ties with Hitler, who had taken Germany out of the League of Nations.

As Hitler and Mussolini worked more closely together, they became both rivals and allies. Hitler seems to have dictated Mussolini's foreign policy. Both Germany and Italy sent military assistance to support General Francisco Franco's quasi-fascist forces during the Spanish Civil War, which broke out in 1936. The Italian troops in Spain suffered several dramatic losses, however, undermining Mussolini's claim that his Fascist army made Italy a military world power. Then in November 1936 Mussolini announced the existence of the Rome-Berlin Axis—a formal military alliance with Nazi Germany.

Fascism, once simply associated with Italy's resolution of its domestic problems, had become the declared enemy of Britain, France, and the United States, and of many other democratic and most communist countries. Italian Fascism was fatally linked with Hitler's bold plans to take control of much of Europe and Russia. The formation of the pact with Hitler further isolated Italy internationally, leading Mussolini to move the country closer to a program of *autarky* (economic self-sufficiency without foreign trade). As Italy prepared for war, the government's propaganda became more belligerent, the tone of mass rallies more militaristic, and Mussolini's posturing more vain and delusional. Italian soldiers even started to mimic the goose-step marching style of their Nazi counterparts, though it was called the Roman step.

Although the Italian Fascists had ridiculed Nazi racism and declared that Italy had no "Jewish problem," in 1938 the government suddenly issued Nazi-style anti-Semitic laws. The new laws denied that Jews could be Italian. This policy eventually led the Fascist government of the Italian Social Republic—the Nazi puppet government in northern Italy—to give active help to the Nazis when they sent 8,000 Italian Jews to their deaths in extermination camps in the fall of 1943.

Mussolini knew his country was ill-prepared for a major European war and he tried to use his influence to broker peace in the years before World War II. But he had become a prisoner of his own militaristic rhetoric and myth of infallibility. When Hitler's armies swept through Belgium into France in the spring of 1940, Mussolini abandoned neutrality and declared war against France and Britain. In this way he locked Italy into a hopeless war against a powerful alliance that eventually comprised the British empire, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and the United States.

Italy's armed forces were weak and unprepared for war, despite Mussolini's bold claims of invincibility. Italian forces suffered humiliating defeats in 1940 and 1941, and Mussolini's popularity in Italy plummeted. In July 1943, faced with imminent defeat at the hands of the Allies despite Nazi reinforcements, the Fascist Grand Council passed a vote of no confidence against Mussolini, removing him from control of the Fascist Party. The king ratified this decision, dismissed Mussolini as head of state and had him arrested.

Most Italians were overjoyed at the news that the supposedly infallible Mussolini had been deposed. The popular consensus behind the regime had evaporated, leaving only the fanaticism of *intransigenti* (hard-liners). Nevertheless, Nazi *Schutzstaffel* (SS) commandos rescued Mussolini from his mountain-top prison, and Hitler then put him in control of the Italian Social Republic—the Nazi puppet government in northern Italy. The Nazis kept Mussolini under tight control, however, using him to crush partisans (anti-Fascist resistance fighters) and to delay the defeat of Germany. Partisans finally shot Mussolini as he tried to flee in disguise to Switzerland in April 1945. Meanwhile hundreds of thousands of Italian soldiers endured terrible suffering, either forced to fight alongside the Nazis in Italy or on the Russian front, or to work for the Nazi regime as slave labour.

E. Significance:

The rise and fall of Fascism in Italy showed several general features of fascism.

First, Italian Fascism fed off a profound social crisis that had undermined the legitimacy of the existing system. Many Europeans supported fascism in the 1930s because of a widespread perception that the parliamentary system of government was fundamentally corrupt and inefficient. Thus it was relatively easy for Italians to support Mussolini's plans to create a new type of state that would transform the country into a world power and restore Italy to the prominence it enjoyed during the Roman Empire and the Renaissance.

Second, Italian Fascism was an uneasy blend of elitism and populism. A revolutionary elite imposed Fascist rule on the people. In order to secure power the movement was forced to collaborate with conservative ruling elites—the bourgeoisie (powerful owners of business), the army, the monarchy, the Church, and state officials. At the same time, however, the Fascist movement made sustained efforts to generate genuine popular enthusiasm and to revolutionize the lives of the Italian people.

Third, Fascism was a charismatic form of politics that asserted the extraordinary capabilities of the party and its leader. The main tool for the Fascistization (conversion to Fascism) of the masses and the creation of the new Fascist man was not propaganda, censorship, education, or terror, or even the large fascist social and military organizations. Instead, the Fascists relied on the extensive use of a ritualized, theatrical style of politics designed create a sense of a new historical era that abolished the politics of the past. In this sense Fascism was an attempt to confront urbanization, class conflict, and other problems of modern society by making the state itself the object of a public cult, creating a sort of civic religion.

Fourth, Italy embraced the fascist myth that national rebirth demanded a permanent revolution—a constant change in social and political life. To sustain a sense of constant renewal, Italian Fascism was forced by its own militarism to pursue increasingly ambitious foreign policy goals and ever more unrealizable territorial claims. This seems to indicate that any fascist movement that identifies rebirth with imperialist expansion and manages to seize power will eventually exhaust the capacity of the nation to win victory after victory. In the case of Italian Fascism, this exhaustion set in quickly.

A **f**ifth feature of Italian Fascism was its attempt to achieve a totalitarian synthesis of politics, art, society, and culture, although this was a conspicuous failure. Italian Fascism never created a true new man. Modern societies have a mixture of people with differing values and experiences. This diversity can be suppressed but not reversed. The vast majority of Italians may have temporarily embraced Fascist nationalism because of the movement's initial successes, but the people were never truly Fascistized. In short, in its militarized version between World War I and World War II, the fascist vision was bound to lead in practice to a widening gap between rhetoric and reality, goals and achievements.

Finally, the fate of Italian Fascism illustrates how the overall goal of a fascist utopia has always turned to nightmare. Tragically for Italy and the international community, Mussolini embarked on his imperial expansion just as Hitler began his efforts to reverse the Versailles Treaty and re-establish Germany as a major military power. This led to the formation of the Axis alliance, which gave Hitler a false sense of security about the prospects for his imperial schemes. The formation of this alliance helped lead to World War II, and it committed Mussolini to unwinnable military campaigns that resulted in the Allied invasion of Italy in 1943. The death, destruction, and misery of the fighting in Italy was inflicted on a civilian population that had come to reject the Fascist vision of Italian renewal, but whose public displays of enthusiasm for the regime before the war had kept Mussolini in power.

Fascism in Germany: National Socialism:

The only fascist movement outside Italy that came to power in peacetime was Germany's National Socialist German Workers Party—the Nazis. The core of the National Socialist program was an ideology and a policy of war against Germany's supposed moral and racial decay and a struggle to begin the country's rebirth. This theme of struggle and renewal dominates the many ideological statements of Nazism, including Adolf Hitler's book *Mein Kampf* (1925; *My Struggle*, 1939), speeches by propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, and Leni Riefenstahl's propaganda film *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the Will, 1935).

All of the Nazi government's actions served this dual purpose of destroying the supposed sickness of the old Germany and creating a healthy new society. The government abolished democratic freedoms and institutions because they were seen as causing national divisions. In their place the government created an authoritarian state, known as the Third Reich, that would serve as the core of the new society. The Nazis promoted German culture, celebrated athleticism and youth, and tried to ensure that all Germans conformed physically and mentally to an Aryan ideal. But in order to achieve these goals, the Nazi regime repressed supposedly degenerate books and paintings, sterilized physically and mentally disabled people, and enslaved and murdered millions of people who were considered enemies of the Reich or 'subhuman.' This combination of renewal and destruction was symbolized by the pervasive emblem of Nazism, the swastika—a cross with four arms broken at right angles. German propaganda identified the swastika with the rising sun and with rebirth because the bars of the symbol suggest perpetual rotation. To its countless victims, however, the swastika came to signify cruelty, death, and terror.

A. Main Features:

There were two features specific to Nazism that combined to make it so extraordinarily destructive and barbaric once in power. The **first** feature was the Nazi myth of national greatness. This myth suggested that the country was destined to become an imperial and great military power. Underpinning this myth was a concept of the nation that blended romantic notions about national history and character with pseudo-scientific theories of race, genetics, and natural selection. It led naturally to a foreign policy based on the principle of first uniting all ethnic Germans within the German nation, and then creating a vast European empire free of racial enemies. These ideas led to international wars of unprecedented violence and inhumanity.

The **second** important feature of Nazism was that it developed in the context of a modern economy and society. Even after Germany's defeat in World War I, the country was still one of the most advanced nations in the world in terms of infrastructure, government efficiency, industry, economic potential, and standards of education. Germany also had a deep sense of national pride, belonging, and roots, and a civic consciousness that stressed duty and obedience. In addition, the nation had a long tradition of anti-Semitism and imperialism, and of respect for gifted leaders. The institutions of democracy had only weak roots in Germany, and after World War I democracy was widely rejected as un-German.

B. Hitler's Rise to Power:

The dangerous combination of Germany's modernity and its racist, imperialist ultranationalism became apparent after the economic and political failure of the Weimar Republic, the parliamentary government established in Germany following World War I.

Unlike Mussolini, Hitler took control of a country that had a strong industrial, military, and governmental power base that was merely dormant after World War I. Hitler also became more powerful than Mussolini because the Nazis simply radicalized and articulated widely held prejudices, whereas the Fascists of Italy had to create new ones. Although the Nazi Party won control of the German legislature after a democratic election in 1932, in 1933 Hitler suspended the constitution, abolished the presidency, and declared himself Germany's *Führer* (leader).

Once in control, Hitler was able to insert his fascist vision of the new Germany into a highly receptive political culture. The Third Reich quickly created the technical, organisational, militaristic, and social means to implement its far-reaching schemes for the transformation of Germany and large parts of Europe.

The Nazis' attempts to build a new German empire led to the systematic killings of about six million civilians during the 1940s, and the deaths of millions more as the result of Nazi invasion and occupation—a horror rivalled only by Josef Stalin's rule in the Soviet Union during the 1930s. The Nazis primarily killed Jews, but also targeted homosexuals, people with disabilities, and members of religious minorities such as the Jehovah's Witnesses. All of this killing and destruction stemmed from the Nazis' conviction that non-Germans had sapped the strength of the German nation.

At the same time, the Nazis attempted to take control of most of Europe in an effort to build a new racial empire. This effort led to World War II and the deaths of millions of soldiers and civilians. After early successes in the war, Germany found itself facing defeat on all sides. German forces were unable to overcome the tenacity and sheer size of the Soviet military in Eastern Europe, while in Western Europe and North Africa they faced thousands of Allied aircraft, tanks, and ships. Facing certain defeat, Hitler killed himself in April 1945, and Germany surrendered to the Allies in the following month.

C. Significance:

Although scholars generally view Italy under Mussolini as the benchmark for understanding fascism in general, the German case shows that not all fascist movements were exactly alike.

German National Socialism differed from Italian Fascism in important ways. The most important differences were Nazism's commitment to a more extreme degree of totalitarian control, and its racist conception of the ideal national community.

Hitler's visionary fanaticism called for the *Gleichschaltung* (coordination) of every possible aspect of life in Germany. The totalitarianism that resulted in Germany went further than that of Italy, although not as far as Nazi propaganda claimed. Italian Fascism lacked the ideological fervour to indulge in systematic ethnic cleansing on the scale seen in Germany.

Although the Italian Fascist government did issue flagrantly anti-Semitic laws in 1938, it did not contemplate mass extermination of its Jewish population. In Italy Fascism also was marked by pluralism, compromise, and inefficiency as compared to Nazism. As a result, in Fascist Italy far more areas of personal, social, and cultural life escaped the intrusion of the state than in Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, both Italian Fascism and German National Socialism rested on the same brutal logic of rebirth through what was seen as creative destruction. In Italy this took form in attempts by the Fascist Party to recapture Roman qualities, while in Germany it led the Nazis to attempt to re-Aryanize European civilization.