

(All Rights Reserved - James O. Richards)

## The Shaping of the "Second Europe" 1914 - Present

### Fascist Totalitarianism and the Revolt Against Europe

---

#### Outline of Lecture

- I. Introduction
  - II. The Roots of Fascism
  - III. The Fascists in Power in Italy and Germany
  - IV. The Basic Principles of Fascist Doctrine and Policy
  - V. The Corporate State
  - VI. Fascist Totalitarianism and the Second Europe
- 

#### Introduction

We have already seen the idea of revolt against reason in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche exalted the idea of the will as a means of discovering truth and a pattern for living. Nietzsche was not a fascist, not even a proto-fascist. He could not abide any ideology which told the individual to submit to a leader or a party or a state. But his anti-rationalism was the type of thinking that could be used to justify Fascism, as we will see a little later. Like all forms of totalitarianism, Fascism is anti-rational. It was formulated as a political philosophy (however imperfectly) to rebut Marxism and democracy. Both these ideologies were based on the belief that the world and human actions could be explained rationally. They stressed reason and logic. Fascism emphasized the power of the irrational, of the human will and emotions. It said that men were driven by myths about leadership, race and nation to transcend individual or class interests. Under the leader people could give themselves to the corporate state and its needs rather than their own. While Communist totalitarianism stresses the class, and the party as representative of the highest interests of society, Fascist totalitarianism emphasizes the leader, the race, the state. In Fascism the state is all-powerful. The individual has no right to resist.

First, a short definition of Fascism. It is the totalitarian organization of a state and society by a single

party dictatorship which stresses racism, nationalism, and war as national policy. In Germany Fascism is sometimes called Nazism. In Italy the term is Fascism. But both forms were essentially the same, and the label Fascism covers both. The name itself comes from the [fasces](#) (an ax blade protruding from a bundle of rods) used by Roman magistrates to denote their authority. Why did it suddenly appear in the 1920's and 30's?

## **The Roots of Fascism**

Fascism developed in Italy and Germany, countries with some experience of democracy and with relatively advanced industrial systems. Both these countries had the technological know-how to create mass support. They also had the kind of industrial and urban populations where Fascism could take root. We will look in a few minutes at the rise of Fascism in both countries. But for now let us say simply that Fascism offered to resolve a number of problems in both Italian and German societies:

(1) Strife between management and labor. Fascism appealed to wealthy industrialists and landowners who wanted to be rid of labor agitation and be free of unions which were often communist-led.

(2) The resentment of military leaders and former soldiers at their status following the World War I. This mood was strongest in Germany, but it existed in Italy too which had been on the winning side in World War I but had gained virtually nothing in territory for its heavy sacrifice of life. The German military as part of the Versailles settlement was downgraded to a small home defense force with strict limits on its air force, army and navy. They bitterly resented their status in the Weimar Republic which replaced the Kaiser's rule. And they were receptive to the Fascist promise to restore their strength and regain Germany's greatness.

(3) The problem of the social and economic status of the lower middle class. They too found Fascist ideas attractive. Not considering themselves working class and not wanting to fall into that status, they were insecure about their status and resentful of those they thought were beneath them.

(4) The problem of urban and industrial rootlessness. Fascism offered meaning to those whose values and purpose had been destroyed by urbanization and industrialization. It told them that they did belong to something greater than themselves, a master race and a superior state. It put them in uniform and turned them against a conspiracy it said was responsible for the problems of society and their own plight: the Jews and the communists.

(5) The psychological problem of the authoritarian personality, a situation particularly acute in a society where the authoritarian tradition is strong. This too was primarily a German problem but not unnoticed in Italy as well. Perhaps this personality has best been described by Adorno, T. W. et al., The Authoritarian Personality (New York, Harper Books, 1950) which notes the following characteristics:

- (a) Rigid, unthinking adherence to traditional ideas of right and wrong. The primary values are obedience, cleanliness, success, inhibition or denial of emotions (including love), discipline, respect for parents and leaders, abhorrence of immoral sexual feelings.
- (b) Unquestioning submission to any authority--parents, teachers, religion, bosses, or any leader. The authoritarian personality wants a strong leader and wants all to revere and follow the leader blindly.
- (c) Taking anger out on an outsider, a scapegoat. I cannot be compliant, subservient, unquestioning all the time. But since I cannot question or be angry at the leader, I am angry at the outsider, one who is

- not like me. (Jews and Communists, for example). Who the outsider is depends on the society or group.
- (d) Not trusting people. Those who are different are unworthy, evil. Therefore, harsh laws, authorities and the army are necessary if chaos is to be avoided.
  - (e) Believing in the necessity of a powerful leader and a powerful group to belong to. Depending on the tradition, the powerful group may be the "strongest country," or the "master race," or the "communist movement." The leader is revered, and the authoritarian who becomes a leader expects to be held in awe too.
  - (f) Obeying orders unreflectingly and believing that what one is told is the truth. A kind of "If only" thinking: "If only we could get rid of the Jews, or Capitalists, or Communists." All basic ideas are taboo: there is one explanation. The call for any other explanation is something only the leader would understand.
  - (g) Opposition to any new ideas, to anything unconventional or imaginative. Anyone who thinks is dangerous. Government should keep an eye on those people. The media should be censored, particularly if they are critical of the leader(s).
  - (h) Those not like me are evil. Any kind of behavior that I think is unthinkable is what outsiders are guilty of. Criminal behavior is expected; the outsider is out to hurt you.
  - (i) Ethnocentrism: I can do everything better than you. My country, my church, my race, my family, my--(whatever), and I are better than you and yours.

Germany especially had this kind of tradition and Fascism appealed to it.

---

?

1. Your reaction to the roots of Fascism?
  2. The "authoritarian personality"? Tell me what you think about this personality. Do you recognize any of these traits in your own experience with people?
- 

## **The Fascists in Power in Italy and Germany**

Italy was the first state to become Fascist. Following World War I Italy's economy was in a shambles. The Paris Peace Conference gave Italy very few of the territories she had joined the alliance to get. So both economic trouble and resentment fed the growth of revolutionary feeling on the left and the rise of Fascism on the right. Fascist bands known as the *Fascisti* outfitted in black uniforms, led by [Benito Mussolini](#) (1883-1945), and communist and socialist revolutionaries began to fight for control of the streets and public opinion. It was a question of which group could out-terrorize the other, and the Fascists won. In 1922 Fascists had enough strength to force the Italian King Victor Emmanuel III to call on Mussolini to form a government. Once in power he quickly silenced his opponents and ended parliamentary rule.

By 1928 Italy was a Fascist state. In the 1930's Mussolini put the corporate state into effect, creating 22 "corporations" to supervise every aspect of the economy. Each corporation consisted of representatives of labor, management, and the government to make the economy efficient and to strengthen the state. Abroad Mussolini embarked on a policy of imperialism in Africa. In 1935 he attacked Ethiopia, a backward kingdom ruled by Haile Selassie, and one of the few African areas not governed by a European power. The war went badly, despite the Italian military superiority, and revealed some serious

weaknesses in the Italian military and economy.

Upon Germany's rise under Hitler, Mussolini became an ally and minor participant in Germany's campaign to dominate Europe. When the actual fighting began, however, Italy was more a liability than an effective ally. The heavy cost of fighting alongside Germany and the hardships at home caused by the war, weakened him as an effective leader. When the Allies invaded Italy in 1943 his own government threw him out of office. He spent the rest of the war, first imprisoned by the Italians and then after being rescued on Hitler's personal orders, as head of a puppet regime in Northern Italy. When the war ended in 1945, partisans caught him trying to flee to Switzerland. They [killed him](#), together with his mistress, and [strung them up](#), feet first, for public viewing and defilement.

Fascism came to power in Germany more slowly than in Italy. The conditions in Germany, however, favored Fascism, as in Italy. Germany, a loser in the war, was stripped of her colonies, forced to disarm, and compelled to pay heavy reparations to the victors. Political parties fragmented under the pressure of these circumstances, keeping the Weimar government from achieving broad support for its policies. As in Italy, extremists on the left and right openly attacked each other in the streets in a battle for power. Many Germans came to think that the only thing standing between them and political anarchy was the National Socialist (Nazi) Party, led by Adolf Hitler (1889-1945). Hitler's leadership of the party and appeal to the German people was based not only on the desire for order and an end to violence, but also on Hitler's gifts as an [orator](#) and propagandist. He touched the German people's yearning for national pride and vengeance and stirred such strong feelings that he secured a unique status as a leader. So strong did his hold on the German people become that even in the last days of the Third Reich the people did not abandon him.

Hitler's chance at power came in 1933 when President Hindenburg appointed him as Chancellor to form a government. As was true with Mussolini, Hitler once in office acted quickly to end all opposition and to cancel parliamentary government.

With an extraordinary [Enabling Act](#) all parties but the Nazi party were outlawed. Hitler proclaimed himself [the "Fuehrer"](#) (Leader) whose orders ([Fuehrerbefehlen](#)) became law. He revived the military and rearmed Germany despite the stipulations of the Versailles Treaty. He imprisoned his opponents. He rounded up Jews and sent them to concentration camps such as [Auschwitz](#) and [Dachau](#) after having [racial laws](#) passed. (For another link to Auschwitz, [click here](#).) He put into effect the same corporate state system we saw in Italy. And for the same purpose, war.

At the same time as he was consolidating power internally, Hitler began to expand Germany's borders against the weak and irresolute democratic states. In 1938 he seized Austria, declaring it to be a German state and part of the Greater Reich. Also in 1938 at Munich he blustered the western powers into dividing up Czechoslovakia, the German-speaking region of which he seized. In 1939 he seized the rest. That same year he invaded Poland. At which the democracies declared war. For the first three years of the war (1939-42) everything went Germany's way. Hitler defeated France and the rest of continental Europe. He attacked Russia and marched his armies almost to the gates of Moscow. Then in the last 3 years (1942-45) the tide turned. The Russians began steadily to push the Germans back and the Allies, joined by the United States, invaded western Europe in 1944. In spring 1945, with Russian armies closing in on [his bunker](#) in Berlin, Hitler [committed suicide](#) (avoiding Mussolini's fate). At war's end Germany was divided and occupied by the victorious Allies. Surviving leaders of Nazi Germany were [put on trial](#) for war crimes.

## The Basic Principles of Fascist Doctrine and Policy

For authoritative statements of Fascist doctrine and policy one has to turn to the writings of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. Neither wrote a systematic statement of Fascism, similar to Karl Marx's. But Hitler in [Mein Kampf](#) (My Battle) and Mussolini in the [Doctrine of Fascism](#) do give us basic ideas about Fascist beliefs and plans. Those basic ideas might be stated as follows:

(1) Fascism is anti-rationalist. The Fascist distrusts reason. He rejects the whole rational tradition of Europe going back to the Greeks. Instead, the Fascist stresses the sentimental, the emotional, the irrational, the willing element in man. Thus the Fascist is fanatical, not reflective; closed-minded, not open-minded. The Fascist believes that on every basic issue of life there is only one answer, one position. There is only one master race, one superior nation, one infallible leader, etc. In Italy between 1922 and 1944 a picture of Mussolini hung in every school room with the slogan: "Mussolini is always right."

(2) Fascism denies the basic equality of mankind. The Fascist declares that *inequality* is a fact and affirms that as an ideal. He rejects the Judaeo-Christian and European concept of equality as weak and ridiculous, believing that inequality runs through all life: men are superior to women; soldiers to civilians; party members to non-party members; one's own nation to another's; the strong to the weak; the victors in war to the defeated. Let me quote [Heinrich Himmler](#), leader of the German SS, who said about the Jews in 1943:

I shall speak to you here with all frankness of a very serious subject. We shall now discuss it absolutely openly among ourselves, nevertheless we shall never speak of it in public. I mean the evacuation of the Jews, the extermination of the Jewish race.

It is one of those things which is easy to say. 'The Jewish race is to be exterminated,' says every party member. 'That's clear, it's part of our program, elimination of the Jews, extermination, right, we'll do it.'

And then they all come along, the eighty million good Germans, and each one has his decent Jew. Of course the others are swine, but this one is a first-class Jew. Of all those who talk like this, not one has watched, not one has stood up to it.

Most of you know what it means to see a hundred corpses lying together, five hundred, or a thousand. To have gone through this and yet - apart from a few exceptions, examples of human weakness - to have remained decent fellows, this is what has made us hard. This is a glorious page in our history that has never been written and shall never be written, for we know how difficult we should have made it for ourselves, if - with the bombing raids, the burdens and the deprivations of war - we still had Jews today in every town as secret saboteurs, agitators and trouble-mongers. We would now probably have reached the 1916/17 stage when Jews were still in the national body.

We have taken from them what wealth they had. I have issued a strict order, which SS-Obergruppenführer Pohl has carried out, that this wealth should, as a matter of course, be handed over to the Reich without reserve.

We had the moral right, we had the duty to our people, to destroy this people which wanted

to destroy us.

Altogether, however, we can say, that we have fulfilled this most difficult duty for the love of our people. And our spirit, our soul, our character has not suffered injury from it."

(3) Fascism uses violence and lies to achieve its goals, in all areas of life. Politics is not the art of the possible, the compromise that wins assent to tough issues. Politics is dealing with enemies or possible enemies: one does not compromise with an enemy; one destroys an enemy. Hence the central place of concentration camps and slave laborers in Fascist societies. Any show of compromise by the Fascist is only to wait for a better time to destroy his enemy.

(4) Fascism proclaims government by an elite. The Fascist believes that only a small group, the party, is capable of understanding what the nation needs. Ultimately, only the leader, Il Duce, Der Fuehrer, really knows. He is infallible, gifted with insight and wisdom, only he. Why? Because he is the leader. He alone is qualified to carry out the general will of the people (a myth going back to Jean Jacques Rousseau, first used in the French Revolution, and later adopted by almost all modern dictators).

(5) Fascism establishes total control of all life. The Fascist believes in, and submits to, the regulation of every phase of life, from the cradle to the grave. He believes that women have three places in life: bearing and rearing children; running the home; and, if they wish, church. The proper roles and places for women in the Nazi slogan are *Kinder, Kuchen, and Kirchen* (children, cooking, and church). The Fascist is anti-feminist and encourages women to bear children outside marriage which is, he believes, a Jewish-Christian prejudice. Only the practical restrictions of exerting state authority kept Fascist totalitarianism from being any more extensive than it was. The Fascist recognizes no real or legal limits to what the state could do.

(6) Fascism practices racialism and imperialism as foreign policy. This principle was the extension of the ideal of inequality to foreign relations. The master race, having dominated its weaker neighbors, is justified in doing whatever it wanted to with them. Hitler in Mein Kampf called for the conquest and enslavement of certain peoples not of the elite Aryan race and the elimination of the others. Look at Himmler's speech again.

(7) Fascism views war as an ideal. The Fascist state is organized to put it on a permanent war footing. War is not a tragic mistake, a failure of diplomacy. It is an ideal state for the betterment of mankind as the master race eliminates and uses up the weak and defective peoples for its own ends. Mussolini said: "War alone brings up to their highest tension all human energies and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it." The Fascist may appear to compromise or cooperate, but that is only to prepare for a better time to defeat his opponents. One of Hitler's first actions upon becoming Chancellor of Germany in 1933 was to withdraw Germany from the League of Nations. Italy withdrew in 1937 after the League opposed his aggression against Ethiopia.

---

?

We need to discuss each of these doctrines.

---

## The Corporate State

The Fascist state in action is the corporate state which applies totalitarianism to the organization and control of the economy to put the state on a permanent war footing. In the corporate state the economy is divided into state controlled associations or syndicates of capital and labor. Each syndicate has a monopoly in its trade, occupation, or sector. The state regulates these syndicates through corporations. The latter are government agencies whose task it is to see that the syndicates under its supervision are running efficiently, effectively and without disruption. In the Fascist state there are no labor unions or workers organizations. They were eliminated immediately because workers have no rights against the state. Nor does capital or management. To be sure, businessmen sympathized with Fascist control; they made profits and had guaranteed contracts. But it was for the purpose of producing what the state needed, not what they wanted.

### **Fascist Totalitarianism and the Second Europe**

You will not have a hard time answering this, will you? Fascism is totally opposed to every Enlightenment belief and ideal. From its view of man, to its view of the state, to its exaltation of the leader as God, Fascism rejects all the Enlightenment tradition. More, it seeks to destroy every aspect of that outlook, citing its own creed as the only valid alternative.

Fascists did believe that the future belonged to them. Is that pro-Enlightenment in a sinister way? After all, the future would be better than the present or past as Fascism swept the world and destroyed communists, [Jews](#), gypsies, [the mentally ill](#), [the physically handicapped](#), [the terminally ill](#), and so forth. Better for whom?