

Fascism

A political, cultural, and intellectual movement that flourished in twentieth century Europe. Most notably, adherents of Fascism ruled Italy from 1922 to 1945, but in fact, the word Fascism actually describes a range of extreme right-wing movements that were active in various countries throughout Europe and in other parts of the world.

Fascism developed as a result of the social changes and intellectual revolution that took place in the Western world at the turn of the twentieth century. It was a type of original, modern thought that reflected change and the need for something new and different amongst the young people of Europe, who disdained their parents' middle class values. Fascist ideas spread all over Europe and gained force during the depression of the 1920s and 1930s.

As an ideology, Fascism represents a synthesis of nationalism (devotion to one's nation as the highest ideal) and socialism (communal ownership of economic enterprises), and the rejection of materialism, liberalism, Marxism, and democracy. It calls for the absolute political rule of the leaders, and deplores the democratic ideal of the common people making important decisions. The state government is how national unity—the major Fascist value—is manifested. Fascism tries to create a new civilization, based on the total community, in which all sectors and classes of the population will find their niche. As a result, the nation will be revitalized and strengthened, and each individual will be nothing more than a cell in the communal organism. Fascism even poses as a type of spiritual revolution.

Fascism came up with two tools that would help maintain "the unity of the nation"—corporatism and totalitarianism. In a corporative state, a country's political, social, and economic power is held by a group of corporations, made up both of employers and employees. This group of corporations plans the economy and settles differences between social classes. In a totalitarian state, the government has total control over and can intervene in every aspect of an individual's life. Using these two instruments, the nation would easily be maintained as the highest ideal.

The phenomenon of Fascism evolved out of an awareness of a major societal problem: the exclusion of the working man from the community ideal. According to Fascist ideology, the nation will not become a completed unit as long as the working class is not assimilated into it, and until a way is found to harness each individual in a joint effort to achieve the common good. Fascism is also a reflection of certain values of the time: namely, emotions and spontaneity as opposed to reason—reason being the basis of democratic thought. In Fascism, the idea that emotions and the subconscious are more important in politics than reason is totally acceptable. An offshoot of this "cult of the emotions" is the Fascist philosophy of action, energy, intuition, and violence.

Although Fascism was put into power in Italy under the Fascist leader, Benito Mussolini, the movement made waves all over Europe—and was different in each country it visited. Fascism was found in France, where the first Fascist movement outside Italy was founded in 1925; in Great Britain; Belgium; Spain, where the Fascist Francisco Franco won the Spanish Civil War and took control of the government in 1939; and Romania. Nazism was an extreme form of Fascism, whose adherents took on antisemitism as a central component of their ideology. However, antisemitism is not a fundamental element in pure Fascist ideology. The racist nationalism invoked in Fascism is definitely receptive to antisemitic tendencies, but not a necessary part of Fascist belief. In its early period, Italian Fascism did not include antisemitism, and only when Mussolini allied himself with Hitler did he begin touting antisemitic rhetoric.