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**Benito Mussolini and Fascism**

“Everything is the state”

Fascism was an authoritarian political movement that developed in Italy and other European countries after 1919 as a reaction against the political and social changes brought about by World War I and the spread of socialism and communism. Its name is derived from the fasces, an ancient Roman symbol of authority consisting of a bundle of rods and an ax.

Italian fascism was founded in Milan on March 23, 1919, by Benito Mussolini, a former revolutionary socialist leader. His followers, mostly war veterans, were organized along paramilitary lines and wore black shirts as uniforms. The early fascist program was a mixture of left- and right-wing ideas that emphasized intense nationalism, productivism, antisocialism, elitism, and the need for a strong leader. Mussolini’s oratorical skills, the postwar economic crisis, a widespread lack of confidence in the traditional political system, and a growing fear of socialism, all helped the fascist party to grow to 300,000 registered members by 1921. in that year it elected 35 members to parliament. Mussolini became prime minister in October 1922 following the “march on Rome” and 3 years of bloody violence in which he deposed King Victor Emmanuel III. In 1926 he seized total power as dictator and ruled Italy until July 1943, when he was deposed. A puppet fascist regime with Mussolini at its head nominally controlled northern Italy under the Germans until Mussolini’s execution by partisans in 1945. a neo-fascist party, the Italian social movement, was founded after World War II, but its influence was small.

Mussolini was born in Predappio, a small town in north central Italy, near the city of Forlì. He was the first son of a striving lower-class couple. His father was a blacksmith and his mother was a schoolteacher. Like many other families of this time and region, Mussolini’s family held socialist convictions and was opposed to the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. The couple named their first son after Mexican revolutionary hero Benito Juárez, and his younger brother after medieval Catholic heretic Arnold of Brescia.

As a youth, Mussolini was known for his quick temper and arrogance. Educated in local schools, he earned a diploma in 1901 that qualified him to teach elementary school. Employment prospects in the area were scarce, however, and in 1902 he moved to Switzerland.

While abroad, Mussolini studied the works of socialist thinkers such as Karl Marx and became involved with socialist groups. Returning to Italy in 1904, he drew on his exposure to leftist ideas, his quick intelligence, and his growing talent as a journalist and speechmaker to advance in local socialist circles. In 1910 he married Rachele Guidi, with whom he would have five children.

In 1911 Mussolini was jailed for leading protests against Italy’s invasion of Libya. Mussolini was government protestor and agitator in his early years. In 1911 Mussolini was jailed for leading protests against Italy’s invasion of Libya. He was outspoken against the invasion and he later became an editor of a leading socialist newspaper and was known for his explosive editorials.

The outbreak of World War I (1914-1918) occasioned Mussolini’s official break with socialism. At first Italy stayed out of the war. Most socialists, including Mussolini at the time, wanted the country to remain neutral on the grounds that the war was imperialistic and contrary to workers’ interests. However, in 1915 the Italian government decided to enter the war after the Allied Powers of Britain, France, and Russia promised Italy significant territorial gains in the Treaty of London. As Italy prepared for war, Mussolini also shifted his position, and began to support Italy’s entrance into the war. He justified his reversal by contending that wartime chaos would bring about revolution and that inaction would only isolate the socialists. Mussolini also foresaw that war would raise nationalistic passions in Italy—passions on which he could capitalize. To socialist party leaders, this turnaround smacked of pure opportunism, and they dismissed him from *Avanti!* He subsequently founded a new newspaper, *Il Popolo d'Italia* (The People of Italy), which later became the organ of the Fascist movement. When the socialists learned that the newspaper was financed by the French, who wanted Italy to enter the war, and by industrialists, who wanted to split the socialist movement, they expelled him from the Italian Socialist Party.

Italy entered the war in May 1915 and Mussolini was drafted into the army in September. He was severely wounded in February 1917 when a grenade launcher he was firing exploded, and he was released from the army in June. The time he spent under arms only made him a more convinced nationalist, completing his break with the socialist movement.

*  **What was Mussloni’s early life like?**

He was the son of a lower class family; family had socialist convictions and despised the power that the Church had on society; After education, was qualified to teach Elementary school

*  **Why did Mussolini’s views change?**

Originally, Mussolini wanted to remain neutral in his beliefs of imperialism; but then shifted his position to support Italy’s entrance to WWI.

*  **Do you think it was justified?**

Mussolini justified his shift by contending that wartime chaos would bring about revolution and that inaction would only isolate the socialist

The Philosophy of Fascism

After the War, Mussolini soon began emphasizing what is known as Fascism. Fascist ideology, largely the work of the neo-idealist philosopher Giovanni gentile, emphasized the subordination of the individual to a “totalitarian” state that was to control all aspects of national life. “Everything is the state and nothing human or spiritual exists outside the state” sums up Mussolini’s philosophy of the state’s relation with its subjects. Everything is engulfed by the state and has all power and authority. Violence as a creative force was an important aspect of the fascist philosophy. A special feature of Italian fascism was the attempt to eliminate the class struggle from history through nationalism and the corporate state. Mussolini organized the economy and all “producers” – from peasants and factory workers to intellectuals and industrialists – Mussolini ultimately, controlled all these corporations.

Fascism, like most totalitarian regimes, used propaganda to manipulate the people. They did everything to glorify the party state, and leader. Mussolini as II Duce, or the leader, tried to glorify Italy and return it to its once proud state as the Roman Empire. One example of Mussolini’s propaganda can be seen in the fascist Decalogue – the fascist’s document that tried to mirror the Ten Commandments. Here is the 1938 version:

1. 1. Remember that those who fell for the revolution and for the empire march at the head of your columns.
2. 2. Your comrade is your brother. He lives with you, thinks with you, and is at your side in battle.
3. 3. Service to Italy can be rendered at all times, in all places, and by every means. It can be paid with toil and also with blood.
4. 4. The enemy of fascism is your enemy. Give them no quarter.
5. 5. Discipline is the sunshine of the armies. It prepares and illuminates your victory.
6. 6. He who advances to the attack with decision has victory in his grasp.
7. 7. Conscious and complete obedience is the virtue of the Legionary.
8. 8. There does not exist things important and things unimportant. There is only duty
9. 9. The fascist revolution has depended on the past and still depends of the bayonets of its legions.
10. 10. Mussolini is always right.

Contrary to the regime’s propaganda claims (which it used to promote nationalism), the totalitarian state functioned poorly. Mussolini had to compromise with big business, the monarchy, and the Roman Catholic church. Although some reforms were brought forth, such as the draining marshes to cultivate more land, the building of hydroelectric plants to provide more power for industries and the implementation of a public works program to help provide work for the unemployed, the Italian economy experienced no appreciable growth. Although landowners, industrialists, and middle-class people saw Mussolini as Italy’s savior because he brought social order and enacted pro-business policies, the majority of working-class Italians saw their standard of living drop after the Fascist government gave free rein to businesses, and many remained hostile. So did many Catholics when Mussolini banned many of their organizations. The peasant population, very numerous in this still rural country, was divided: Landowners favored Mussolini, while the landless were indifferent, if not hostile to him, especially after his government halted land reform measures in 1923.The corporate state was never fully implemented, and the expansionist, militaristic nature of fascism contributed to imperialist adventures in Ethiopia and the Balkans and ultimately to World War II.

The intellectual roots of fascism can be traced back to voluntaristic philosophers such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Frederic Nietzsche, and Henrie Bergson and to social Darwinism with its emphasis on the survival of the fittest. Its immediate roots, however, were in certain irrational socialist, and nationalist tendencies of the turn of the century that combined in a protest against the liberal bourgeois ideas then holding Western Europe. The writings of Gabriele D’Annunzio, Georges Sorel, and Maurice Barres were particularly influential.

* +  **What is the fascist state?**

An ideology that the state operates in a state of “totalitarianism” and controls every aspect of individual life.

* +  **How can a decree such as Mussolini’s 10 Decalogue be useful to control a society?**

Because it acted as something much like The Ten Commandments, the Decalogue can be used to gain support by the masses. It would be used to put everyone on the same page as to what is expected of them and what consequences will come from not following. It was something that made it clear to the people where they stand with the Fascist state.

The glue that held the Fascist regime together was Mussolini’s cult of personality. Fascism never developed into a coherent doctrine, recognizing itself best by what it was against: Fascism meant antiliberalism, antisocialism, antifeminism, and, after 1938, anti-Semitism. For the general public, Fascism acquired real meaning in the larger-than-life figure of Il Duce. A vast propaganda machine directed by the Ministry of Popular Culture churned out newsreels, radio broadcasts, and newspaper stories glorifying Mussolini. The Fascist Party choreographed huge rallies at Mussolini’s Roman headquarters at Piazza Venezia, where Mussolini harangued the crowds with rousing speeches. A common propaganda axiom held that “Il Duce is always right,” and that youth should learn to “Believe, obey, fight.” Mussolini’s posturing lent itself to a kaleidoscope of propagandist images: Il Duce as family man, photographed with his five children; Renaissance talent playing the violin; hero of the peasants, harvesting grain bare-chested; brave commander in chief flying a fighter plane. Mussolini reached the peak of his personal popularity when he led Italy to victory over the Ethiopian empire in May 1936.

Mussolini joined forces with the other major Axis power nations ruled by their own dictators. However, Allied forces landed in Sicily on July 10, 1943, provoking rebellion in the Fascist ranks. On July 25 the Fascist Party’s governing body voted to hand executive power over to King Victor Emmanuel III, and the king had Mussolini arrested. As the Italian government surrendered to the Allies in early September, the German army began occupying the Italian peninsula. Hitler ordered the rescue of his old ally, and on September 12, in a daring aerial raid, German commandos successfully plucked Mussolini from his mountain prison at Gran Sasso, high in the Apennines. In the northern territories occupied by German forces, the Germans installed Mussolini as the leader of a new government called the Italian Social Republic, headquartered at Salò. From there, he boasted of reinvigorating Fascism and returning it to its rightful position in power in Italy. In reality, however, the Italian Social Republic was a mere puppet of the Nazis. In April 1945 as the ranks of Italian partisans, or resistance fighters, swelled and the Allied armies advanced north, Mussolini fled toward Switzerland hidden in a retreating German army convoy. Near Lake Como, partisans captured him. The next day, April 28, 1945, at Giulino di Mezzegra, Mussolini was executed with his mistress, Clara Petacci.

* **What is “a cult of personality”?**

Something that defines who a person is and what they can accomplish based upon their personality. Mussolini for example, had a way about him. His way about him gained support from the masses. Those masses that followed Mussolini started to act and believe the same way Mussolini did. Thus making this Fascist regime like a cult, because everyone bought into the system by the means of one man and his personality leading to following of others

* **How did Mussolini develop and utilize his cult of personality?**

Mussolini used the Fascist beliefs (anti-liberalism, anti-socialism, anti-feminism, anti-Semitism) as a means of gaining support. His personality (out-going, brash, arrogant, loud, motivating, energetic and engaging) was evident when he was in public