Chapter 7
Fascism

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Origins and development

The term ‘fascism’ derives from the Italian word fasces, meaning a bundle of rods with an axe-blade protruding that signified the authority of magistrates in Imperial Rome. By the 1890s, the word fascia was being used in Italy to refer to a political group or band, usually of revolutionary socialists. It was not until Mussolini (see p. 228) employed the term to describe the paramilitary armed squads he formed during and after the First World War that fascismo acquired a clearly ideological meaning. Nevertheless, perhaps no political terms are used so randomly and with such little precision as ‘fascist’ and ‘fascism’. They are usually used pejoratively and are sometimes just all-purpose terms of political abuse. ‘Fascist’ and ‘dictator’, for example, are commonly used as if they are interchangeable, to refer to anyone who possesses or expresses intolerant or illiberal views. However, fascism should not be equated with mere repression. Fascist thinkers have been inspired by a specific range of theories and values, and the fascist regimes that emerged in the 1920s and 1930s developed historically new forms of political rule.

Whereas liberalism, conservatism and socialism are nineteenth-century ideologies, fascism is a child of the twentieth century, some would say specifically of the period between the two world wars. Indeed, fascism emerged very much as a revolt against modernity, against the ideas and values of the Enlightenment and the political creeds that it spawned. The Nazis in Germany, for instance, proclaimed that ‘1789 is Abolished’. In Fascist Italy slogans such as ‘Believe, Obey, Fight’ and ‘Order, Authority, Justice’ replaced the more familiar principles of the French Revolution, ‘Liberty, Equality and Fraternity’. Fascism came not only as a ‘bolt from the blue’, as O'Sullivan (1983) put it, but also attempted to make the political world anew, quite literally to root out and destroy the inheritance of conventional political thought.

Although the major ideas and doctrines of fascism can be traced back to the nineteenth century, they were fused together and shaped by the First World War and its aftermath, in particular by a potent mixture of war and revolution. Fascism emerged most dramatically in Italy and Germany. In Italy a Fascist Party was formed in 1919, its leader, Benito Mussolini, was appointed prime minister in 1922, and by 1926 a one-party Fascist state had been established. The National Socialist German Workers' Party, known as the Nazis, was also formed in 1919, and under the leadership of Adolf Hitler (see p. 221) it consciously adopted the style of Mussolini's Fascists. Hitler was appointed German chancellor in 1933 and in little over a year had turned Germany into a Nazi dictatorship. During the same period, democracy collapsed or was overthrown in much of Europe, often being supplanted by right-wing, authoritarian or openly fascist regimes. By 1938, Czechoslovakia was the only remaining democracy in eastern and central Europe, with

Hungary and Romania moving steadily towards fascism and collaboration with Nazi Germany. In Portugal a dictatorship was set up under Salazar in 1928, and in Spain the Nationalist victory in the Civil War, 1936–9, led to the establishment of the Franco dictatorship. Regimes that bear some relationship to fascism have also developed outside Europe, notably in the 1930s in Imperial Japan and in Argentina under Perón, 1945–55.

The origins and meaning of fascism have provoked considerable historical interest and often fierce disagreements. No single factor can, on its own, account for the rise of fascism; rather, fascism emerged out of a complex range of historical forces that were present during the interwar period. In the first place, democratic government had only recently been established in many parts of Europe, and democratic political values had not replaced older, autocratic ones. Moreover, democratic governments, representing a coalition of interests or parties, often appeared weak and unstable when confronted by economic or political crises. In this context, the prospect of strong leadership brought about by personal rule cast a powerful appeal. Second, European society had been disrupted by the experience of industrialization, which had particularly threatened a lower middle class of shopkeepers, small businessmen, farmers and craftsmen, who were squeezed between the growing might of big business, on the one hand, and the rising power of organized labour, on the other. Fascist movements drew their membership and support largely from such lower middle class elements. In a sense, fascism was an 'extremism of the centre' (Lipset, 1983), a revolt of the lower middle classes, a fact that helps to explain the hostility of fascism to both capitalism and communism.

Third, the period after the First World War was deeply affected by the Russian Revolution and the fear amongst the propertied classes that social revolution was about to spread throughout Europe. Fascist groups undoubtedly drew both financial and political support from business interests. As a result, Marxist historians have interpreted fascism as a form of counter-revolution, an attempt by the bourgeoisie to cling on to power by lending support to fascist dictators. Fourth, the world economic crisis of the 1930s often provided a final blow to already fragile democracies. Rising unemployment and economic failure produced an atmosphere of crisis and pessimism that could be exploited by political extremists and demagogues. Finally, the First World War had failed to resolve international conflicts and rivalries, leaving a bitter inheritance of frustrated nationalism and the desire for revenge. Nationalist tensions were strongest in those 'have not' nations that had either, like Germany, been defeated in war, or had been deeply disappointed by the terms of the Versailles peace settlement, for example Italy and Japan. In addition, the experience of war itself had generated a particularly militant form of nationalism and imbued it with militaristic values.

Fascist regimes were not overthrown by popular revolt or protest but by defeat in the Second World War. Since 1945, fascist movements have achieved only marginal success, encouraging some to believe that fascism was a specifically interwar phenomenon, linked to the unique combination of historical circumstances that characterized that period (Nolte, 1965). Others, however, regard fascism as an ever-present danger, seeing its roots in human psychology, or as Erich Fromm (1984) called it, 'the fear of freedom'. Modern civilization has produced greater individual freedom but with it the danger of isolation and insecurity. At times of crisis, individuals may therefore flee from freedom, seeking security in submission to an all-powerful leader or a totalitarian state. Political instability or an economic crisis could therefore produce

conditions in which fascism could revive. Fear, for example, was expressed about the growth of neofascism in parts of eastern Europe following the collapse of communist rule, 1989–91. Similarly, the pressures generated by economic and cultural globalization and increasing transnational population movements have sometimes created opportunities for far right or fascist-style political activism. As the combination of economic crisis, political instability and frustrated nationalism has provided fertile ground for fascist movements in the past, it would be foolish to discount the possibility of a resurgence of fascism in the future. The prospects for fascism are discussed in the final section of the chapter.

Strength through unity – central themes

Fascism is a difficult ideology to analyse, for at least two reasons. First, it is sometimes doubted if fascism can be regarded, in any meaningful sense, as an ideology. Lacking a rational and coherent core, fascism appears to be, as Hugh Trevor-Roper put it, 'an ill-assorted hodge-podge of ideas' (Woolf, 1981, p. 20). Hitler, for instance, preferred to describe his ideas as a Weltanschauung, or 'world view', rather than a systematic ideology. In this sense, a world view is a complete, almost religious set of attitudes that demand commitment and faith, rather than invite reasoned analysis and debate. Fascists were drawn to ideas and theories less because they helped to make sense of the world, in an intellectual sense, but more because they had the capacity to stimulate political activism. Fascism may thus be better described as a political movement or even political religion, rather than an ideology. Nevertheless, as explained below, the characteristic fascist emphasis upon action not ideas, on the soul not the intellect, was itself a product of an important intellectual and philosophical shift, namely a backlash against the rationalist ideas of the Enlightenment

Second, so complex has fascism been as a historical phenomenon that it has been difficult to identify its core principles or a 'fascist minimum', sometimes seen as generic fascism. Where does fascism begin and where does it end? Which movements and regimes can be classified as genuinely fascist? Doubt, for instance, has been cast on whether Imperial Japan, Vichy France, Franco's Spain, Perón's Argentina and even Hitler's Germany can be classified as fascist. As discussed in the final section of the chapter, particular controversy surrounds the relationship between modern radical right groups, such as the Front National in France, and fascism: are these groups 'fascist', 'neofascist', 'post-fascist', 'extreme nationalist' or whatever? Among the attempts to define the ideological core of fascism have been Ernst Nolte's (1965) theory that it is a 'resistance to transcendence', A. J. Gregor's (1969) belief that it looks to construct 'the total charismatic community', Roger Griffin's (1993) assertion that it constitutes 'palingenetic ultranationalism' (palingenesis meaning rebirth) and Roger Eatwell's (1996) assertion that it is a 'holistic-national radical Third Way'. While each of these undoubtedly highlights an important feature of fascism, it is difficult to accept that any single-sentence formula can sum up a phenomenon as resolutely shapeless as fascist ideology. Perhaps the best we can hope to do is identify a collection of themes that, when taken together, constitute fascism's structural core. The most significant of these include the following:

- Anti-rationalism
- Struggle
- Leadership and elitism

- Socialism
- Ultranationalism

Anti-rationalism

Although fascist political movements were born out of the upheavals that accompanied the First World War, they drew upon ideas and theories that had been circulating since the late nineteenth century. Amongst the most significant of these were anti-rationalism and the growth of counter-Enlightenment thinking generally. The Enlightenment, based upon the ideas of universal reason, natural goodness and inevitable progress, was committed to liberating humankind from the darkness of irrationalism and superstition. It was reflected in the ideas of the French Revolution and was embodied, more generally, in liberalism and socialism. In the late nineteenth century, however, thinkers had started to highlight the limits of human reason and draw attention to other, perhaps more powerful, drives and impulses. For instance, Friedrich Nietzsche proposed that human beings are motivated by powerful emotions, their 'will' rather than the rational mind, and in particular by what he called the 'will to power'. In Reflections on Violence ([1908] 1950), the French syndicalist Georges Sorel (1847–1922) highlighted the importance of 'political myths', and especially the 'myth of the general strike', which are not passive descriptions of political reality but 'expressions of the will' that engaged the emotions and provoked action. Henri Bergson (1859–1941), the French philosopher, advanced the theory of vitalism, based upon the idea that living organisms derive their characteristic properties from a universal 'life force'. The purpose of human existence is therefore to give expression to the life force, rather than to allow it to be confined or corrupted by the tyranny of cold reason or soulless calculation.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)

German philosopher. A professor of Greek at Basel at the age of twenty-five, Nietzsche abandoned philology and, influenced by the ideas of Schopenhauer (1788–1860), he attempted to develop a critique of traditional religious and philosophical thought. Deteriorating health and growing insanity after 1889 brought him under the control of his sister, Elizabeth, who edited and distorted his writings.

Nietzsche's complex and ambitious work stressed the importance of will, especially the 'will to power', and anticipated modern existentialism in emphasizing that people create their own world and make their own values – 'God is dead'. A fierce critic of Christianity and an opponent of egalitarianism and nationalism, his ideas have influenced anarchism and feminism as well as fascism. Nietzsche's best known writings include Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883–4), Beyond Good and Evil (1886) and On the Genealogy of Morals (1887).

Although anti-rationalism does not necessarily a right-wing or proto-fascist character, fascism gave political expression to the most radical and extreme forms of counter-Enlightenment thinking. Anti-rationalism has influenced fascism in a number of ways. In the first place, it gave fascism a marked anti-intellectualism, reflected in a tendency to despise abstract thinking and revere action. For example, Mussolini's favourite slogans included 'Action not Talk' and 'Inactivity is Death'. Intellectual life was devalued, even despised: it is cold, dry and lifeless. Fascism, instead, addresses the soul, the emotions and the instincts. Its ideas possess

little coherence or rigour, but seek to exert a mythic appeal. Its major ideologists, in particular Hitler and Mussolini, were essentially propagandists, interested in ideas and theories very largely because of their power to elicit an emotional response and spur the masses into action. Fascism thus practises the 'politics of the will'. However fascism is not mere irrationalism. What is distinctive about fascism is not its appeal to non-rational drives and emotions, but rather the specific range of beliefs and values through which it attempts to engage the emotions and generate political activism.

Second, the rejection of the Enlightenment gave fascism a predominantly negative or destructive character. Fascists, in other words, have often been clearer about what they oppose than what they support. Fascism thus appears to be 'anti-philosophy' – it is anti-rational, anti-liberal, anti-conservative, anti-capitalist, anti-bourgeois, anti-communist and so on. In this light, some have portrayed fascism as an example of nihilism, literally a belief in nothing, a rejection of established moral and political principles. Nazism, in particular, has been described as a 'revolution of nihilism'. However, fascism is not merely the negation of established beliefs and principles. Rather, it is an attempt to reverse the heritage of the Enlightenment. It represents the darker underside of the western political tradition, the central and enduring values of which were not abandoned but rather transformed or turned upside-down. For example, in fascism, 'freedom' came to mean unquestioning submission, 'democracy' was equated with absolute dictatorship, and 'progress' implied constant struggle and war. Moreover, despite an undoubted inclination towards nihilism, war and even death, fascism saw itself as a creative force, a means of constructing a new civilization through 'creative destruction'. Indeed, this conjunction of birth and death, creation and destruction, can be seen as one of the characteristic features of fascism.

Third, by abandoning the standard of universal reason, fascism has placed its faith entirely in history, culture and the idea of organic community. For example, the counter-Enlightenment German philosopher, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), had rejected universalism as ahistorical: each nation is animated by its collective spirit, its Volksgeist, a product of its unique history, culture and particularly language. Communities are therefore organic or natural entities, shaped not by the calculations and interests of rational individuals but by innate loyalties and emotional bonds forged by a common past. In fascism, this idea of organic unity is taken to its extreme. The national community, as the Nazis called it, the Volksgemeinschaft, was viewed as an indivisible whole, all rivalries and conflicts being subordinated to a higher, collective purpose. The strength of the nation or race is therefore a reflection of its moral and cultural unity. This prospect of unqualified social cohesion was expressed in the Nazi slogan, 'Strength through Unity.'

Struggle

The ideas that the UK biologist Charles Darwin (1809–82) developed in The Origin of Species ([1859] 1972) had a profound effect not only on the natural sciences, but also, by the end of the nineteenth century, upon social and political thought. The image of species developing through a process of 'natural selection' was developed by the liberal philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) into the idea of the 'survival of the fittest', the belief that competition amongst individuals would reward those who work hard and are talented, and punish the lazy or incompetent. The notion that human existence is based upon competition or struggle was

particularly attractive in the period of intensifying international rivalry that eventually led to war in 1914. Social Darwinism also had a considerable impact upon emerging fascism. In the first place, fascists regarded struggle as the natural and inevitable condition of both social and international life. Only competition and conflict guarantee human progress and ensure that the fittest and strongest will prosper. As Hitler told German officer cadets in 1944, 'Victory is to the strong and the weak must go to the wall.' If the testing ground of human existence is competition and struggle, then the ultimate test is war, which Hitler described as 'an unalterable law of the whole of life'. Fascism is perhaps unique amongst political ideologies in regarding war as good in itself, a view reflected in Mussolini's belief that 'War is to men what maternity is to women.'

Darwinian thought also invested fascism with a distinctive set of political values, which equate 'goodness' with strength and 'evil' with weakness. In contrast to traditional humanist or religious values, such caring, sympathy and compassion, fascists respect a very different set of martial values: loyalty, duty, obedience and self-sacrifice. When the victory of the strong is glorified, power and strength are worshipped for their own sake. Similarly, weakness is despised and elimination of the weak and inadequate is positively welcomed: they must be sacrificed for the common good, just as the survival of a species is more important than the life of any

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945)

German Nazi dictator. The son of an Austrian customs official, Hitler joined the German Worker's Party (later the NSDAP or Nazis) in 1919, becoming its leader in 1921. He became chancellor in 1933 and declared himself Führer (Leader) of Germany the following year. His regime was marked by relentless military expansionism and the attempt to exterminate European Jewry.

By no means an original thinker, in Mein Kampf (My Struggle) Hitler nevertheless drew together expansionist German nationalism, racial anti-Semitism (see p. 233) and a belief in relentless struggle into a near-systematic Nazi programme. The central feature of his world view was a theory of history that highlighted the endless battle between the Germans and the Jews, respectively representing the forces of good and evil.

single member of that species. In contrast, humanist values encourage a debilitating sympathy for weakness. Weakness and disability must not be tolerated; they should be eliminated. This was most graphically illustrated by the programme of eugenics, or selective breeding, introduced by the Nazis in Germany, whereby mentally and physically handicapped people were first forcibly sterilized and then, between 1939 and 1941, systematically murdered. The attempt by the Nazis to exterminate European Jewry from 1941 onwards was, in this sense, an example of racial eugenics.

Finally, fascism's conception of life as an 'unending struggle' gave it a restless and expansionist character. National qualities can only be cultivated through conflict and demonstrated by conquest and victory. This was clearly reflected in Hitler's foreign policy goals, as outlined in Mein Kampf ([1925] 1969): 'Lebensraum [living space] in the East', and the ultimate prospect of world domination. Once in power in 1933, Hitler embarked upon a programme of rearmament in preparation for expansion in the late 1930s. Austria was annexed in the Anschluss of 1938;

Czechoslovakia was dismembered in the spring of 1939; and Poland invaded in September 1939, provoking war with the UK and France. In 1941, Hitler launched Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union. Even when facing imminent defeat in 1945, Hitler did not abandon social Darwinism, but declared that the German nation had failed him and gave orders, never fully carried out, for a fight to the death and, in effect, the annihilation of Germany.

Leadership and elitism

Fascism also stands apart from conventional political thought in its radical rejection of equality. Fascism is deeply elitist and fiercely patriarchal; its ideas were founded upon the belief that absolute leadership and elite rule are natural and desirable. Human beings are born with radically different abilities and attributes, a fact that emerges as those with the rare quality of leadership rise, through struggle, above those capable only of following. Fascists believe that society is composed, broadly, of three kinds of people. First and most importantly, there is a supreme, all-seeing leader who possesses unrivalled authority. Second, there is a 'warrior' elite, exclusively male and distinguished, unlike traditional elites, by its heroism, vision and the capacity for self-sacrifice. In Germany, this role was ascribed to the SS, which originated as a bodyguard but developed during Nazi rule into a state within a state. Third, there are the masses, who are weak, inert and ignorant, and whose destiny is unquestioning obedience. Such a pessimistic view of the capabilities of ordinary people put fascism starkly at odds with the ideas of liberal democracy (despite, at times, an opportunistic willingness to exploit electoral politics for their own purposes). Nevertheless, the idea of supreme leadership was also associated with a distinctively fascist, if inverted, notion of democratic rule.

The fascist approach to leadership, especially in Nazi Germany, was crucially influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of the Übermensch, the 'over-man' or 'superman', a supremely gifted or powerful individual. Most fully developed in Thus Spoke Zarathustra ([1884] 1961), Nietzsche portrayed the 'superman' as an individual who rises above the 'herd instinct' of conventional morality and lives according to his own will and desires. Fascists, however, turned the superman ideal into theory of supreme and unquestionable political leadership. Fascist leaders styled themselves simply as 'the Leader' – Mussolini proclaimed himself to be Il Duce, while Hitler adopted the title Der Führer – precisely in order to emancipate themselves from any constitutionally defined notion of leadership. In this way, leadership became exclusively an expression of charismatic authority emanating for the leader himself. While constitutional, or, in Max Weber's term, legal-rational authority operates within a framework of laws or rules, charismatic authority is potentially unlimited. As the leader was viewed as a uniquely gifted individual, his authority is absolute. At the Nuremburg Rallies the Nazi faithful thus chanted 'Adolf Hitler is Germany, Germany is Adolf Hitler.' In Italy the principle that 'Mussolini is always right' became the core of fascist dogma.

The 'leader principle' (in German, the Führerprinzip), the principle that all authority emanates from the leader personally, thus became the guiding principle of the fascist state. Intermediate institutions such as elections, parliaments and parties were either abolished or weakened to prevent them from challenging or distorting the leader's will. This principle of absolute leadership was underpinned by the belief that the leader possesses a monopoly of ideological wisdom: the leader, and the leader alone, defines

Perspectives on …

Authority

Liberals believe that authority arises 'from below' through the consent of the governed. Though a requirement of orderly existence, authority is rational, purposeful and limited, a view reflected in a preference for legal-rational authority and public accountability.

Conservatives see authority as arising from natural necessity, being exercised 'from above' by virtue of the unequal distribution of experience, social position and wisdom. Authority is beneficial as well as necessary, in that it fosters respect and loyalty and promotes social cohesion.

Socialists, typically, are suspicious of authority, which is regarded as implicitly oppressive and generally linked to the interests of the powerful and privileged. Socialist societies have nevertheless endorsed the authority of the collective body, however expressed, as a means of checking individualism and greed.

Anarchists view all forms of authority as unnecessary and destructive, equating authority with oppression and exploitation. Since there is no distinction between authority and naked power, all checks on authority and all forms of accountability are entirely bogus.

Fascists regard authority as a manifestation of personal leadership or charisma, a quality possessed by unusually gifted (if not unique) individuals. Such charismatic authority is, and should be, absolute and unquestionable, and is thus implicitly, and possibly explicitly, totalitarian in character.

Religious fundamentalists see authority as a reflection of unequal access to religious wisdom, authority being, at heart, an essentially moral quality possessed by enlightened individuals. Since such authority has a charismatic character it is difficult to challenge or reconcile it with constitutionalism (see p. 41).

the destiny of his people, their 'real' will, their 'general will'. A Nietzscheian theory of leadership thus coincided with a Rousseauian belief that there is a single, indivisible public interest. In this light, a genuine democracy is an absolute dictatorship, absolutism and popular sovereignty being fused into a form of 'totalitarian democracy' (Talmon, 1952). The role of the leader is to awaken the people to their destiny, to transform an inert mass into a powerful and irresistible force. Fascist regimes therefore exhibited populist-mobilizing features that set them clearly apart from traditional dictatorships. Whereas traditional dictatorships aim to exclude the masses from politics, totalitarian dictatorships set out to recruit them into values and goals of the regime though constant propaganda and political agitation. In the case of fascist regimes, this was reflected in the widespread use of plebiscites, rallies and popular demonstrations.

Socialism

At times both Mussolini and Hitler portrayed their ideas as forms of 'socialism'. Mussolini had previously been an influential member of the Italian Socialist Party and editor of its newspaper, Avanti, while the Nazi Party espoused a philosophy it called 'national socialism'. To some extent, undoubtedly, this represented a cynical attempt to elicit support from urban workers. Nevertheless, despite obvious ideological rivalry between fascism and socialism, fascists did have an affinity for certain socialist ideas and positions. In the first place, lower middle-class fascist activists had a profound distaste for capitalism, reflected in a resented of the power of big business and financial institutions. For instance, small shopkeepers were under threat from the growth of departmental store, the smallholding peasantry was losing out to large-scale farming, and small businesses were increasingly in hock to the banks. Socialist or 'leftist' ideas were therefore prominent in German grassroots organizations such as the SA, or Brownshirts, which recruited significantly from amongst the lower middle classes. Second, fascism, like socialism, subscribes to collectivism, putting it at odds with 'bourgeois values' of capitalism. Fascism places the community above the individual; Nazi coins, for example, bore the inscription 'Common Good before Private Good.' Capitalism, on the other hand, is based upon the pursuit of self-interest and therefore threatens to undermine the cohesion of the nation or race. Fascists also despise the materialism that capitalism fosters: the desire for wealth or profit runs counter to the idealistic vision of national regeneration or world conquest that inspires fascists.

Third, fascist regimes often practised socialist-style economic policies designed to regulate or control capitalism. Capitalism was thus subordinated to the ideological objectives of the fascist state. As Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists, put it, 'Capitalism is a system by which capital uses the nation for its own purposes. Fascism is a system by which the nation uses capital for its own purposes.' Both the Italian and German regimes tried to bend big business to their political ends by policies of nationalization and state regulation. For example, after 1939, German capitalism was reorganized under Hermann Göring's Four Year Plan, deliberately modelled upon the Soviet idea of Five Year Plans.

However, the notion of fascist socialism has severe limitations. For example, 'leftist' elements within fascist movements, such as the SA in Germany and Sorelian revolutionary syndicalists in Italy, were quickly marginalized once fascist parties gained power, in the hope of cultivating the support of big business. This occurred most dramatically in Nazi Germany, through the purge of the SA and the murder of its leader, Ernst Rohm, in the 'Night of the Long Knives' in 1934. Marxists have thus argued that the purpose of fascism was to salvage capitalism rather than to subvert it. Moreover, fascist ideas about the organization of economic life were, at best, vague and sometimes inconsistent; pragmatism not ideology determined fascist economic policy. The revolution that fascists sought to bring about was not a social revolution, aimed at changing the system of ownership, but rather a revolution of the psyche, a 'revolution of the spirit', aimed at creating a new type of human being (always understood in male terms). This was the 'new man' or 'fascist man', a hero, motivated by duty, honour and self-sacrifice, and prepared to dissolve his personality in that of the social whole. Finally, anti-communism was more prominent within fascism than anti-capitalism. A core objective of fascism was to seduce the working class away from Marxism and Bolshevism, which preached the insidious, even traitorous, idea of international working-class solidarity and upheld the misguided values of cooperation and

equality. Fascists were dedicated to national unity and integration, and so wanted the allegiances of race and nation to be stronger than those of social class.

Ultranationalism

Fascism embraced an extreme version of a tradition of chauvinistic and expansionist nationalism that had developed before the First World War, expressed in European imperialism and forms of pan-nationalism. This tradition regarded nations not as equal and interdependent entities, but as natural rivals in a struggle for dominance. Fascist nationalism did not preach respect for distinctive cultures or national traditions, but asserted the superiority of one nation over all others. In the explicitly racial nationalism of Nazism this was reflected in the ideas of Aryanism, the belief that the German people are a 'master race'. Between the wars such militant nationalism was fuelled by a sense of bitterness and frustration. Italy, a victor in the First World War, had failed to achieve territorial gains at Versailles. Germany had been both defeated in war and, Germans believed, humiliated at Versailles by reparations, the loss of territory and the deeply resented 'war guilt clause'.

Fascism seeks to promote more than mere patriotism, the love of one's country; it wishes to establish an intense and militant sense of national identity, which Charles Maurras (1868–1952), the leader of Action Française, called 'integral nationalism'. Fascism embodies a sense of messianic or fanatical mission: the prospect of national regeneration and the rebirth of national pride. Indeed, the popular appeal that fascism has exerted has largely been based upon the promise of national greatness. According to Griffin (1993), the mythic core of generic fascism is the conjunction of the ideas of 'palingenesis', or recurrent rebirth, and 'populist ultranationalism'. All fascist movements therefore highlight the moral bankruptcy and cultural decadence of modern society, but proclaim the possibility of rejuvenation, offering the image of the nation 'rising phoenix-like from the ashes'. While fascism may be a revolt against modernity, it does not succumb to reaction or the allure of tradition. Instead, it fuses myths about a glorious past with the image of a future characterized by renewal and reawakening, hence the idea of the 'new' man. In Italy, this was reflected in attempts to recapture the glories of Imperial Rome; in Germany, the Nazi regime was portrayed as the 'Third Reich', in succession to Charlemagne's 'First Reich' and Bismarck's 'Second Reich'.

However, in practice, national regeneration invariably meant the assertion of power over other nations through expansionism, war and conquest. Influenced by social Darwinism and a belief in national and sometimes racial superiority, fascist nationalism became inextricably linked to militarism and imperialism. Nazi Germany looked to construct a 'Greater Germany' and build an empire stretching into the Soviet Union – 'Lebensraum in the East'. Fascist Italy sought to found an African empire though the invasion of Abyssinia in 1934. Imperial Japan occupied Manchuria in 1931 in order to found a 'co-prosperity' sphere in a new Japanese-led Asia. These empires were to be autarkic, based upon strict self-sufficiency. In contrast to the liberal belief that economic progress results from international trade and interdependence, fascists held that economic strength is based upon the capacity of the nation to rely solely upon resources and energies it directly controls. Conquest and expansionism are therefore a means of gaining economic security; an autarkic empire will contain vital raw materials, guaranteed markets and a plentiful supply of cheap labour. National regeneration and economic progress were therefore

intimately tied up with military power. The logic of this was most clearly understood in Germany, where Hitler ensured that rearmament and preparation for war were a consistent political priority throughout the lifetime of the Nazi regime.

Fascism and the state

Although it is possible to identify a common set of fascist values and principles, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany nevertheless represented different versions of fascism and were inspired by distinctive and sometimes rival beliefs. Fascist regimes and movements have therefore corresponded to one of two major traditions: one, following Italian Fascism, emphasizes the ideal of an all-powerful or totalitarian state; the other, reflected in German Nazism or national socialism, stresses the importance of race and racialism.

The totalitarian ideal

Totalitarianism is a controversial concept. The height of its popularity came during the Cold War period, when it was used to draw attention to parallels between fascist and communist regimes, highlighting the brutal features of both. As such, it became a vehicle for expressing anti-communist views and, in particular, hostility towards the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, totalitarianism remains a useful concept for the analysis of fascism. Generic fascism tends towards totalitarianism in at least two respects. First, the extreme collectivism that lies at the heart of fascist ideology, the goal of the creation of 'fascist man' – loyal dedicated and utterly obedient – effectively obliterates the distinction between 'public' and 'private' existence. The good of the collective body, the nation or the race, is placed firmly before the good of the individual: collective egoism consumes individual egoism. Second, as the fascist leader principle invests the leader with unlimited authority, it violates the liberal idea of a distinction between the state and civil society. An unmediated relationship between the leader and his people implies active participation and total commitment on the part of citizens; in effect, the politicization of the masses. However, the idea of an all-powerful state has particular significance for Italian fascism.

The essence of Italian fascism was a form of state worship. In a formula regularly repeated by Mussolini, the idealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile

Totalitarianism

Totalitarianism is an all-encompassing system of political rule that is typically established by pervasive ideological manipulation and open terror and brutality. It differs from autocracy, authoritarianism and traditional dictatorship in that it seeks 'total power' through the politicization of every aspect of social and personal existence. Totalitarianism thus implies the outright abolition of civil society: the abolition of 'the private'. Fascism and communism have sometimes been seen as left-and right-wing forms of totalitarianism, based upon their rejection of toleration, pluralism and the open society. However, radical thinkers such as Marcuse (see p. 136) have claimed that liberal democracies also exhibit totalitarian features.

Benito Mussolini (1883–1945)

Italian Fascist dictator. A teacher and journalist in his early life, Mussolini became a leading member of the Socialist Party before being expelled in 1914 for supporting intervention in the First World War. He founded the Fascist Party in 1919, was appointed prime minister in 1922, and within three years had established a one-party Fascist state.

Mussolini liked to portray himself as the founder of fascism, though his speeches and writings were often prepared for him by scholars. Basic to his political philosophy was the belief that human existence is only meaningful if sustained and determined by the community. This, however, required that the state be recognized as 'the universal ethical will', a notion embodied in totalitarianism (see p. 227). Outside the state, 'no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value'.

(1875–1944) proclaimed: 'Everything for the state; nothing against the state; nothing outside the state.' The individual's political obligations are thus absolute and all-encompassing. Nothing less than unquestioning obedience and constant devotion are required of the citizen. This fascist theory of the state has sometimes been associated with the ideas of the German philosopher Hegel (1770–1831). Although Hegel was liberal-conservative, he did not accept the social contract theory that the state is merely a means of protecting citizens from one another. Rather, it is an ethical idea, reflecting the altruism and mutual sympathy of its members. In this view, the state is capable of motivating and inspiring individuals to act in the common interest, and Hegel thus believed that higher levels of civilization would only be achieved as the state itself developed and expanded. Hegel's political philosophy therefore amounted to an uncritical reverence of the state, expressed in practice in firm admiration for the autocratic Prussian state of his day.

In contrast, the Nazis did not venerate the state as such, but viewed it as a means to an end. Hitler, for instance, described the state as a mere 'vessel', implying that creative power derives not from the state but from the race, the German people. However, there is little doubt that the Hitler regime came closer to realizing the totalitarian ideal in practice than did Mussolini regime. Although it seethed with institutional and personal rivalries, the Nazi state was brutally effective in suppressing political opposition and succeeded in extending political control over the media, art and culture, education and youth organizations. On the other hand, despite its formal commitment to totalitarianism, the Italian state operated, in some ways, like a traditional or personalized dictatorship rather than a totalitarian dictatorship. For example, the Italian monarchy survived throughout the fascist period; many local political leaders, especially in the south, continued in power; and the Catholic Church retained its privileges and independence throughout the Fascist period.

Corporatism

Although, in common with all forms of fascism, Italian fascism looked to a past model of national greatness, it also had a more explicitly modernizing face than German fascism. Although fascists revere the state, this does not extend to an attempt to collectivize economic life. Fascist economic thought is seldom systematic, reflecting the fact that fascists seek to

transform human consciousness rather than social structures. Its distinguishing feature is the idea of corporatism, which Mussolini proclaimed to be the 'third way' between capitalism and socialism, a common theme in fascist thought that was embraced by Mosley in the UK and Perón in Argentina. Corporatism opposes both the free market and central planning: the former leads to the unrestrained pursuit of profit by individuals, while the latter is linked to the divisive idea of class war. In contrast, corporatism is based upon the belief that business and labour are bound together in an organic and spiritually unified whole. This holistic vision was based upon the belief that social classes do not conflict with one another, but can work in harmony for the common good and the national interest. Such a view was influenced traditional Catholic social thought, which, in contrast to the Protestant stress upon the value of individual hard work, emphasizes that social classes are held together by duty and mutual obligations.

Social harmony between business and labour offers the prospect of both moral and economic regeneration. However, class relations have to be mediated by the state, which is responsible for ensuring that the national

Corporatism

Corporatism, in its broadest sense, is a means of incorporating organized interests into the processes of government. There are two faces of corporatism. Authoritarian corporatism (closely associated with Fascist Italy) is an ideology and an economic form. As an ideology, it offers an alternative to capitalism and socialism based upon holism and group integration. As an economic form, it is characterized by the extension of direct political control over industry and organized labour. Liberal corporatism ('neocorporatism' or 'societal' corporatism) refers to a tendency found in mature liberal democracies for organized interests to be granted privileged and institutional access to policy formulation. In contrast to its authoritarian variant, liberal corporatism strengths groups rather than government.

interest takes precedence over narrow sectional interests. Twenty-two corporations were set up in Italy in 1927, each representing employers, workers and the government. These corporations were charged with overseeing the development of all the major industries in Italy. The 'corporate state' reached its peak in 1939 when a Chamber of Fasces and Corporations was created to replace the Italian parliament. Nevertheless, there was a clear divide between corporatist theory and the reality of economic policy in Fascist Italy. The 'corporate state' was little more than an ideological slogan, corporatism in practice amounting to little more than an instrument through which the Fascist state controlled major economic interests. Working-class organizations were smashed and private business was intimidated.

Modernization

The state also exerted a powerful attraction for Mussolini and Italian fascists because they saw it as an agent of modernization. Italy was less industrialized than many of its European neighbours, notably the UK, France and Germany, and many fascists equated national revival with economic modernization. All forms of fascism tend to be backward-looking, highlighting the glories of a lost era of national greatness, in Mussolini's case Imperial Rome. However, Italian fascism was also distinctively forward-looking, extolling the virtues of modern

technology and industrial life and looking to construct an advanced industrial society. This tendency within Italian fascism is often linked to the influence of futurism, an early twentieth-century movement in the arts – led by Filippo Marinetti (1876–1944) – that glorified factories, machinery and industrial life. After 1922, Marinetti and other leading futurists were absorbed into fascism; bring with them a belief in dynamism, a cult of the machine and a rejection of the past. For Mussolini, the attraction of an all-powerful state was, in part, that it would help Italy break with backwardness and tradition and become an future-orientated industrialized country.

Fascism and racialism

Not all forms of fascism involve overt racialism, and not all racialists are necessarily fascists. Italian fascism, for example, was based primarily upon the supremacy of the Fascist state over the individual and submission to the will of Mussolini. It was therefore a voluntaristic form of fascism, in that, at least in theory, it could embrace all people regardless of race, colour or indeed country of birth. When Mussolini passed anti-Semitic laws after 1937, he did so largely to placate Hitler and the Germans, rather than for any ideological purpose. Nevertheless, fascism has often coincided with, and bred from, racialist ideas. Indeed, some argue that its emphasis on militant nationalism means that all forms of fascism are either hospitable to racialism, or harbour implicit or explicit racialist doctrines (Griffin, 1993). Nowhere has this link between race and fascism been so evident as in Nazi Germany, where official ideology at times amounted to little more than hysterical, pseudo-scientific anti-Semitism.

The politics of race

A ‘nation’ is a cultural entity, a collection of people who share the same language, religion, traditions and so on. The term ‘race’, on the other hand, reflects a belief in biological or genetic differences amongst human beings. While it may be possible to drop a national identity and assume another by a process of ‘naturalization’, it is impossible to change one's race, determined as it is at birth, indeed before birth, by the racial identity of one's parents. The symbols of nationality – citizenship, passport, language and perhaps religion – can all be accepted by choice, voluntarily; however, the symbols of race – skin tone, hair colour, physiognomy and blood – are fixed and unchangeable. The use of racial terms and categories became commonplace in the West during the nineteenth century as imperialism brought the predominantly ‘white’ European races into increasingly close contact with the ‘black’, ‘brown’ and ‘yellow’ races of Africa and Asia. These races were thought of as separate human communities, biologically distinct from one another. Racialist thinkers have often denied the existence of a single human species and treated races as if they were separate species.

Racialism

Racialism is, broadly, the belief that political or social conclusions can be drawn from the idea that humankind is divided into biologically distinct ‘races’. Racialist theories are thus based on two assumptions. The first is that there are fundamental genetic, or species-type, differences amongst the peoples of the world. The second is that these genetic divisions are reflected in cultural, intellectual and/or moral differences, making them politically or socially significant. Political racialism is manifest in calls for racial segregation (for instance, apartheid) and in

doctrines of 'blood' superiority or inferiority (for example, Aryanism or anti-Semitism). 'Racialism' and 'racism' are often used interchangeably, but the latter is better used to refer to prejudice or hostility towards people because of their racial origin, whether or not this is linked to a developed racial theory.

In reality, racial categories largely reflect cultural stereotypes and enjoy little if any scientific foundation. The broadest racial classifications, for example those based upon skin colour – white, brown, yellow and so on – are at best misleading and at worst simply arbitrary. More detailed and ambitious racial theories, such as those of the Nazis, simply produced anomalies, the most glaring of which was perhaps that Adolf Hitler himself certainly did not fit the racial stereotype of the tall, broad-shouldered, blond-haired, blue-eyed Aryan commonly described in Nazi literature. The Nazis themselves, who gave the question of race more attention than most, were never fully agreed about how the 'master race' should be defined. Some described it as 'Aryan', implying a racial similarity between the peoples of northern Europe, possibly extending to the peoples of the Indian subcontinent, others preferred the term 'Nordic', which incorporates the Germans but also most of the fair-skinned peoples of northern Europe. 'Germanic' was also used, but this came close to defining race in terms of language, culture or citizenship.

The core idea of racialism is that political and social conclusions can be drawn from the idea that there are innate or fundamental differences between the races of the world. At heart, genetics determines politics: racialist political theories can be traced back to biological assumptions. A form of implicit racialism has been associated with conservative nationalism. This is based upon the belief that stable and successful societies must be bound together by a common culture and shared values. For example, Enoch Powell in the UK in the 1960s and Jean-Marie Le Pen in France since the 1980s have argued against 'non-white' immigration into their countries on the grounds that the distinctive traditions and culture of the 'white' host community would be threatened. Such views portray racial prejudice as a natural, indeed inevitable, expression of national consciousness. However, more systematic and developed forms of racialism are based upon explicit assumptions about the nature, capacities and destinies of different racial groups. In many cases, these assumptions have had a religious basis. For example, nineteenth-century European imperialism was justified, in part, by the alleged superiority of the Christian peoples of Europe over the 'heathen' peoples of Africa and Asia. Biblical justification was also offered for doctrines of racial segregation preached by the Ku Klux Klan, formed in the USA after the American civil war, and by the founders of the apartheid system (apartheid meaning 'apartness' in Afrikaans), which operated in South Africa from the 1940s until 1993. In Nazi Germany, however, racialism was rooted in biological and therefore quasi-scientific assumptions. Biologically-based racial theories, as opposed to those that are linked to culture or religion, are particular militant and radical because they make claims about the essential and inescapable nature of a people that are supposedly back up the certainty and objectivity of scientific belief.

Nazi race theories

Nazi ideology was fashioned out of a combination of racial anti-Semitism and social Darwinism. Anti-Semitism had been a force in European politics, especially in eastern Europe, since the dawn of the Christian era. Its origins were largely theological: the Jews were responsible for the death of Christ, and in refusing to convert to Christianity they were both denying the divinity of

Jesus and endangering their own immortal souls. The association between the Jews and evil was therefore not a creation of the Nazis, but dated back to the Christian Middle Ages, a period when the Jews were first confined in ghettoes and excluded from respectable society. However, anti-Semitism intensified in the late nineteenth century. As nationalism and imperialism spread throughout Europe, Jews were subject to increasing persecution in many countries. In France, this led to the celebrated Dreyfus affair, 1894–1906; in Russia, it was reflected in a series of pogroms carried out against the Jews by the government of Alexander III.

The character of anti-Semitism also changed during the nineteenth century. The growth of a 'science of race', which applied pseudo-scientific ideas to social and political issues, led to the Jews being thought of as a race rather than a religious, economic or cultural group. Thereafter, the Jews were defined inescapably by biological factors such as hair colour, facial characteristics and blood. Anti-Semitism was therefore elaborated into a racial theory, which assigned to the Jews a pernicious and degrading racial stereotype. The first attempt to develop a scientific theory of racialism was undertaken by the French social theorist Joseph-Arthur Gobineau (1816–82), whose Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races ([1854] 1970) claimed to be a 'science of history'. Gobineau argued that

Anti-Semitism

By tradition Semites are descendants of Shem, son of Noah, and include most of the peoples of the Middle East. Anti-Semitism refers specifically to prejudice against or hatred towards the Jews. In its earliest systematic form, anti-Semitism had a religious character, reflecting the hostility of Christians towards the Jews, based on their complicity in the murder of Jesus and their refusal to acknowledge him as the Son of God. Economic anti-Semitism developed from the Middle Ages onwards, expressing a distaste for the Jews as moneylenders and traders. The nineteenth century saw the birth of racial anti-Semitism in the works of Wagner and H. S. Chamberlain, who condemned the Jewish peoples as fundamentally evil and destructive. Such ideas provided the ideological basis for German Nazism and found their most grotesque expression in the Holocaust.

there is a hierarchy of races, with very different qualities and characteristics. The most developed and creative race is the 'white peoples' whose highest element Gobineau referred to as the 'Aryans'. The Jews, on the other hand, were thought to be fundamentally uncreative. Unlike the Nazis, however, Gobineau was a pessimistic racialist, believing that by his day intermarriage had progressed so far that the glorious civilization built by the Aryans had already been corrupted beyond repair.

The doctrine of racial anti-Semitism entered Germany through Gobineau's writing and took the form of Aryanism, a belief in the biological superiority of the Aryan peoples. These ideas were taken up by the composer Richard Wagner and his British-born son-in-law, H. S. Chamberlain (1855–1929), whose Foundations of the Nineteenth Century ([1899] 1913) had an enormous impact upon Hitler and the Nazis. Chamberlain defined the highest race more narrowly as the 'Teutons', clearly understood to mean the German peoples. All cultural development was ascribed to the German way of life, while the Jews were described as 'physically, spiritually and morally degenerate'. Chamberlain presented history as a confrontation between the Teutons and

the Jews, and therefore prepared the ground for Nazi race theory, which portrayed the Jews as a universal scapegoat for all of Germany's misfortunes. The Nazis blamed the Jews for Germany's defeat in 1918; they were responsible for its humiliation at Versailles; they were behind the financial power of the banks and big business that enslaved the lower middle classes; and they behind the working-class movement and the threat of social revolution. In Hitler's view, the Jews were responsible for an international conspiracy of capitalists and communists, whose prime objective was to weaken and overthrow the German nation.

Nazism, or National Socialism, portrayed the world in pseudo-religious, pseudo-scientific terms as a struggle for dominance between the Germans and the Jews, representing respectively the forces of 'good' and 'evil'. Hitler himself divided the races of the world into three categories. The first, the Aryans, were the Herrenvolk, the 'master race'; Hitler described the Aryans as the 'founders of culture' and literally believed them to be responsible for all creativity, whether in art, music, literature, philosophy or political thought. Second, there were the 'bearers of culture', peoples who were able to utilize the ideas and inventions of the German people, but were themselves incapable of creativity. At the bottom, were the Jews, who Hitler described as the 'destroyers of culture', pitted in an unending struggle against the noble and creative Aryans. Hitler's world view was therefore dominated by the idea of conflict between good and evil, reflected in a racial struggle between the Germans and the Jews, a conflict that could only end in either Aryan world domination or the final victory of the Jews.

This ideology took Hitler and the Nazis in appalling and tragic directions. In the first place Aryanism, the conviction that the Aryans are a uniquely creative 'master race', dictated a policy of expansionism and war. If the Germans are racially superior they are entitled to dominate other races. Other races are biologically relegated to an inferior and subservient position. The Slavs of Eastern Europe, for instance, were regarded as 'sub-humans', suited only to carrying out manual labour for the benefit of their German masters. Nazi ideology therefore dictated an aggressive foreign policy in pursuit of a racial empire and ultimately world domination. As such it contributed to a policy of rearmament, expansionism and war.

Second, the Nazis believed that Germany could never be secure so long as its arch-enemies, the Jews, continued to exist. The Jews had to be persecuted, indeed they deserved to be persecuted because they represented evil. The Nuremburg Laws, passed in 1935, prohibited both marriage and sexual relations between Germans and Jews, supposedly preventing Jewish people from undermining Germany biologically by 'polluting' the racial stock and threatening what Hitler called the 'vital sap'. After Kristallnacht ('The Night of Broken Glass') in 1938, Jewish people were effectively excluded from the economy. However, according to the logic presented in Mein Kampf, German greatness could never be assured until the final elimination of the Jewish race was achieved. Nazi race theories therefore drove Hitler from a policy of persecution to one of terror and, ultimately, genocide and racial extermination. In 1941, with a world war still to be won, the Nazi regime embarked upon what it called the 'final solution', an attempt to exterminate the Jewish population of Europe in an unparalleled process of mass murder, which led to the death of some six million Jewish people.

Peasant ideology

A further difference between the Italian and German brands of fascism is that the latter advanced a distinctively anti-modern philosophy. While Italian fascism was eager to portray itself as a modernizing force and to embrace the benefits of industry and technology, Nazism reviled much of modern civilization as decadent and corrupt. This particularly applied in the case of urbanization and industrialization. In the Nazi view the Germans are in truth a peasant people, ideally suited to a simple existence lived close to the land and ennobled by physical labour. However, life in overcrowded, stultifying and unhealthy cities had undermined the German spirit and threatened to weaken the racial stock. Such fears were expressed in the 'Blood and Soil' ideas of Walter Darré. They also explain why the Nazis extolled the virtues of Kultur, which embodied the folk traditions and craft skills of the German peoples, over the essentially empty products of western civilization.

This peasant ideology had important implications for foreign policy. In particular, it helped to fuel expansionist tendencies by strengthening the attraction of Lebensraum. Only through territorial expansion could overcrowded Germany acquire the space to allow its people to resume their proper, peasant existence.

This policy was based upon a deep contradiction, however. War and military expansion, even when justified by reference to a peasant ideology, cannot but be pursued through the techniques and processes of modern industrial society. The central ideological goals of the Nazi regime were conquest and empire, and these dictated the expansion of the industrial base and the development of the technology of warfare. Far from returning the German people to the land, the Hitler period witnessed rapid industrialization and the growth of large towns and cities so despised by the Nazis. Peasant ideology thus proved to be little more than rhetoric. Militarism also brought about significant cultural shifts. While Nazi art remained fixated with simplistic images of small-town and rural life, propaganda constantly bombarded the German people with images of modern technology, from the Stuka dive-bomber and Panzer tank to the V-1 and V-2 rockets.

Fascism in the twenty-first century

Some commentators have argued that fascism, properly understood, did not survive into the second half of the twentieth century, still less could it continue into the twenty-first century. In the classic analysis by Ernst Nolte (1965), for instance, fascism is seen as a historically-specific revolt against modernization and the advance of nationalism, linked to the desire to preserve the cultural and spiritual unity of traditional society. Since this moment in the modernization process has passed, all references to fascism should be made in the past tense. Hitler's suicide in the Fuhrer bunker in April 1945, as the Soviet Red Army approached the gates of Berlin, may therefore have marked the Götterdämmerung of fascism, its 'twilight of the gods'. Such interpretations, however, have been far less easy to advance in view of the revival of fascism or at least fascist-type movements in the late twentieth century, although these movements have adopted very different strategies and styles.

The Front National in France, led by Jean-Marie Le Pen, has attracted growing electoral support since the 1980s for a platform largely based on resistance to immigration. In 2002, Le Pen gained 5 million votes and got through to the run-off stage in the presidential election. In Austria in 2000, the far right Freedom Party, under the leadership of Joerg Haider, won 27 per cent of the vote in the general election and became a member of a coalition government. In Italy, Gianfranco Fini's Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) attempted in 1994 to ditch its fascist past by transforming itself into the Alleanza Nazionale (AN), officially embracing a 'post-Fascist' agenda. Radical nationalist and anti-foreign groups in Germany, for example the Republikaner party, have attracted significant support since reunification in 1990, usually based upon hostility towards increased immigration from the former communist East. In the UK, the anti-immigration 'new racism' of the National Front was revived in the 1980s and 1990s by the British National Party (BNP). Far right, anti-immigration parties have become an important feature of politics in Belgium and Denmark and in the Netherlands, associated with the leadership of Pim Fortuyn, who was assassinated in 2002.

In some respects, the historical circumstances since the late twentieth century bear out some of the lessons of the inter-war period, namely that fascism breeds from conditions of crisis, uncertainty and disorder. Steady economic growth and political stability in the early post-1945 period had proved a very effective antidote to the politics of hatred and resentment so often associated with the extreme right. However, uncertainty in the world economy and growing disillusionment with the capacity of established parties to tackle political and social problems have opened up opportunities for right-wing extremism, drawing on fears associated with immigration and the weakening of national identity. The end of the Cold War and the advance of globalization have, in some ways, strengthened these factors. The end of communist rule in eastern Europe allowed long-suppressed national rivalries and racial hatreds to re-emerge, giving rise, particularly in former Yugoslavia, to forms of extreme nationalism that have exhibit fascist-type features. Globalization, for its part, has contributed to the growth of insular, ethnically- or racially-based forms of nationalism by weakening the nation-state and so undermining civic forms of nationalism.

On the other hand, although far right and anti-immigration groups have taken up themes that are reminiscent of 'classical' fascism, the circumstance that have shaped them and the challenges

which they confront are very different from those found during the post-First World War period. For instance, instead of building on a heritage of European imperialism, the modern far right is operating in a context of postcolonialization. Multiculturalism (see p. 67) has also advanced so far in many western societies that the prospect of creating ethnically or racially pure 'national communities' appears to be entirely unrealistic. Similarly, traditional class divisions, so influential in shaping the character and success of inter-war fascism, have given way to the more complex and pluralized 'post-industrial' social formations. Finally, economic globalization acts as a powerful constraint upon the growth of classical fascist movements. So long as global capitalism continues to weaken the significance of national borders, the idea of national rebirth brought about through war, expansionism and autarky will appear to belong, firmly, to a bygone age.

However, what kind of fascism does modern fascist-type parties and groups espouse? While certain, often underground, groups still endorse a militant or revolutionary fascism that proudly harks back to Hitler or Mussolini, most of the larger parties and movements claim either to have broken ideologically with their past or deny that they are or ever have been fascist. For want of a better term, the latter can be classified as 'neofascist'. The principal way in which groups such as the Front National, the Freedom Party in Austria, the British National Party and the MSI or AN in Italy claim to differ from fascism is in their acceptance of political pluralism and electoral democracy. In other words, 'democratic fascism' is fascism divorced from principles such as absolute leadership, totalitarianism and overt racialism. In some respects, this form of fascism may be well positioned to prosper in the twenty-first century. For one thing, in reaching an accommodation with liberal democracy it appears to have buried its past and is no longer tainted with the barbarism of the Hitler and Mussolini period. For another, it still possesses the ability to advance a politics of organic unity and social cohesion in the event of the twenty-first century bringing economic crises and further political instability. Such a form of politics appears to be particularly attractive when the prospect of strong government is embodied in a charismatic leader, as cases such as Le Pen, Haider and Fortuyn appear to demonstrate.

Evaluating the prospects for neofascism, however, requires that two possibilities are examined. The first is that it is questionable whether fascism can remain true to established fascist principles whilst at the same time moving towards an accommodation with liberalism. The emphasis on the organic unity of the national community gives fascism a distinctly anti-liberal emphasis and puts it at odds with ideas such as pluralism, tolerance, individualism and pacifism. This creates the possibility, perhaps parallel to the development of democratic socialism, that the struggle for electoral viability will gradually force 'democratic' fascist parties progressively to abandon their traditional values and beliefs. Democracy will thus prevail over fascism. The second possibility is that the fascist accommodation with liberal democracy is essentially tactical. This implies that the genuine spirit of fascism lives on and is only being concealed by neofascists for the purpose of gaining respectability and winning power. This, after all, is the time-honoured strategy of fascism. Hitler and the Nazis, for example, continued to proclaim their support for parliamentary democracy right up to the time that they gained power in 1933. Whether neofascist parties and movements are using democracy merely as a tactical device will only be revealed if they are similarly successful.

Further reading

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