

## DEFINING FASCISM

Fascism is an ideology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that is almost best defined by what it opposes. It is a paradoxical outgrowth of the horrors of World War I—paradoxical in the sense that it is at once a reaction to the horrific conditions and massive death and disfigurement of the war and an embracing of the sense of strong bonding and companionship that grew in the trenches. It embraces war and violence as a means to express the anger, betrayal and frustration felt as a result of the outcomes of the First World War. Fascism takes on many guises—Fascism in Italy, Nazism in Germany, Arrow Cross in Hungary, Falange in Spain, *Rex Party* in Belgium, Iron Guard in Romania, *Action Francaise* in France, among others.

### Fascism:

- **Is anti-egalitarian.** It believes in a natural hierarchy of leaders and followers and expects blind obedience from the followers. The leader (duce/fuhrer) take on mythic proportions. The basis for superiority can be racial or personal in nature. Fascism does not seek to achieve and actively rejects political, social, economic, sexual and intellectual equality.
- **Is anti-communist.** This grows out of its rejection of notions of equality but also out of its rejection of money as the main motivator of history or men. It supports capitalism (as a “competitive” system) but demands that the competitiveness not be a detriment to the “state.” It bases economic organization on “syndicalism” (by labor group) with a strong government direction.
- **Is anti-democratic.** Because of its belief in natural leaders, it follows that those who follow are expected merely to follow, not to question, criticize, or dare to advise. Thinking for oneself is antithetical to all that fascism stands for.
- **Is anti-liberal.** Personal liberties and civil rights are seen as detrimental to the community of fascists and to the power of the state.
- **Is anti-individualist.** Fascism values conformity and support of the whole over any of its parts.
- **Is anti-feminist.** Its values of war and violence are seen as masculine values; women are perceived to have worth only as they fulfill their “role” as breeders of fighters. It is an arrogant, swaggering machismo, and male bonding (usually through aggressive behavior) is central.
- **Is anti-rational.** It believes in action, not in thought and reason.
- **Is nationalist.** Fascism takes nationalism to its (ill-)logical conclusion. The State is the entire reason for existence, which leads to the following belief.
- **Is etatist.** Fascism sees the State (or the Volk, in the case of Germany) as an entity with an eternal and transcendent existence separate from the people who make it up. It expects ultimate sacrifice on the part of the individual for the sake of the strength and survival of the state/Volk [NB: This is totally opposite from “democracy” in which the state has no meaning or existence without the people; the state is the people and “fighting for the state” really means defending (or aggressing) oneself and people like oneself.] Etatism is a kind of secular religion—to replace the traditional G-d or the G-d of Reason of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- **Glorifies violence for its own sake, and thus is highly militaristic.** It sees war as the testing ground of real men and believes that men become truly alive only in war.

Mussolini’s credo was “Credere, Obbedire, Combattere” (Believe, obey, fight). This rather sums up the essence of fascism.