

—*Benito Mussolini, 1935, The Doctrine of Fascism*

Introduction:

Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) started his political life as a socialist and in 1912, was appointed editor of Avanti, a leading socialist newspaper. During the Great War, Mussolini was expelled from the Socialist Party for advocating Italy's entrance into battle. He organized the Fascist Party immediately following the war. By exploiting general fears of labor unrest and communism, Mussolini gained his followers among war veterans and the middle class. Mussolini organized his March on Rome in 1922 in order to bring down the government. King Victor Emmanuel, fearful of a civil war, appointed Benito Mussolini prime minister.

Excerpts from *The Doctrine of Fascism*:

Granted that the 19th century was the century of socialism, liberalism, democracy, this does not mean that the 20th century must also be the century of socialism, liberalism, democracy. Political doctrines pass; nations remain. We are free to believe that this is the century of authority, a century tending to the 'right', a Fascist century. If the 19th century was the century of the individual (liberalism implies individualism) we are free to believe that this is the 'collective' century, and therefore the century of the State."

The Fascist conception of the **State** is all-embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value. Thus understood, Fascism is **totalitarian**, and the Fascist State—a synthesis and a unit inclusive of all values—interprets, develops, and potentiates the whole life of a people.

Fascism is therefore opposed to **Socialism** to which unity within the State (which amalgamates classes into a single economic and ethical reality) is unknown, and which sees in history nothing but the class struggle. Outside the State there can be neither individuals nor groups (political parties, associations, syndicates, classes).

After Socialism, Fascism attacks the whole complex of **democratic ideologies** and rejects them both in their theoretical premises and in their applications or practical manifestations. Fascism denies that the majority, through the mere fact of being a majority, can rule human societies; it denies that this majority can govern by means of a periodical consultation; it affirms the irremediable, fruitful and beneficent inequality of men, who cannot be levelled by such a mechanical and extrinsic fact as universal suffrage. Individuals form classes according to the similarity of their interests, but they form first, and above all, the State, which is not to be thought of numerically as the sum-total of individuals forming the majority of a nation. And consequently Fascism is opposed to **Democracy**, which equates the nation to the majority, lowering it to the level of that majority; nevertheless it is the purest form of democracy if the nation is conceived, as it should be, qualitatively and not quantitatively, as the most powerful idea

(most powerful because most moral, most coherent, most true) which acts within the nation as the conscience and the will of a few, even of One, which ideal tends to become active within the conscience and the will of all — that is to say, of all those who rightly constitute a nation by reason of nature, history or race, and have set out upon the same line of development and spiritual formation as one conscience and one sole will. Not a race, nor a geographically determined region, but as a community historically perpetuating itself a multitude unified by a single idea, which is the will to existence and to power: consciousness of itself, personality.

Fascism, the more it considers and observes the future and the development of humanity quite apart from political considerations of the moment, believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of Pacifism -- born of a renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. **War** alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have courage to meet it. Fascism does not, generally speaking, believe in the possibility or utility of perpetual peace. It therefore discards pacifism as a cloak for cowardly supine renunciation in contradistinction to self-sacrifice. War alone keys up all human energies to their maximum tension and sets the seal of nobility on those peoples who have the courage to face it.

Against **individualism**, the Fascist conception is for the **State**; and it is for the individual in so far as he coincides with the State, which is the conscience and universal will of man in his historical existence. Liberalism denied the State in the interests of the particular individual; Fascism reaffirms the State as the true reality of the individual. Therefore, for the Fascist, everything is in the State, and nothing human or spiritual exists, much less has value, -outside the State. In this sense Fascism is totalitarian, and the Fascist State, the synthesis and unity of all values, interprets, develops and gives strength to the whole life of the people.

Discussion questions:

- 1) How does the **fascist** concept of the **individual** and the **state** (or government) differ from **natural rights** concepts of the individual and government?
- 2) What is a **totalitarian state** and why is fascism totalitarian?
- 3) What is **socialism** and why are fascists opposed to it?
- 4) Why are fascists opposed to **majority rule**? What do they propose in its place?
- 5) How do fascists view **war**?

