

Notes On Fascism

Fascism is an ideology, a movement, and a form of government

Fascism is a reactionary, authoritarian ideology placing extreme emphasis on nationalism, irrationalism and force

Often fascism is an extreme, even perverted version of traditional values

Nazism is best understood as a variant of fascism. Fascism+racism=Nazism

The intellectual roots of fascism grew in the Counter Enlightenment of the 19th Century

The Counter Enlightenment rejected the Enlightenment values of universalism, humanism, reason and progress

They argued that there was no essential humanity that unites all people. Instead the peoples of the world are defined by their differences and are locked in perpetual conflict because of these deep seeded differences

Hence nationalism. The belief that the peoples of the world fall into distinct groups, or nations.

Fascists would take nationalism in an exclusive and chauvinistic direction. The glorification of one's own nation at the expense of others.

This would also lead to a subordination of the individual to the nation and ultimately to the state

Irrationalism. The Counter Enlightenment also rejected the optimistic notion that people were rational. Thus, reason was not a reliable vehicle for reaching the truth, that people's actions were driven by emotions, drives and myths. Reason cannot inspire.

Thus in fascism there is an extreme anti intellectualism. Intellectuals are seen as lacking moral clarity. They indulge in subtlety, paradox and ambiguity. Intellectuals see the world in shades of gray, when they should be seeing clear contrasts of black and white.

Also in fascism there is an excessive reliance on emotion and myth. Mussolini said "The myth is a faith, it is a passion. It is not necessary that it be a reality." The purpose of the myth is to mobilize the masses and channel their energy into action

We can see where this leads. The masses are worked into a frenzy by inflammatory rhetoric. Science and authority are attacked. Books are banned, scapegoats are made, outsiders are deemed enemies.

National unity is essential to fascism. The nation must be unified. Individual liberty is meaningless. Freedom for the fascist is freedom for the nation. The nation must be free to prosper, to grow to achieve their destiny

Fascism rejects pluralism. Conflict between interest groups threatens unity.

The state is the legal and political embodiment of the nation. The power of the state can overcome division and unite the nation.

This is not about the state providing a framework for the peaceful resolution of social conflict. This is about the state eliminating social conflict in the name of national unity.

This requires an authoritarian state. Ideally, it would be totalitarian. Perhaps a fascist state could be majoritarian but such a state would be incompatible with civil liberties like freedom of speech or the press. Protecting the rights of those who dissent weakens the state and threatens the nation. Due process(protecting the rights of the accused) also weakens the state and cannot be allowed.

The relationship between capitalism and fascism is complex. On the one hand, fascism rejects the individualism inherent in capitalism and demands that the individual be submitted to the needs of the state

In practice, business could prosper as long as it served the needs of the state.

Religion? It depends. If the church serves the interests of the state, if it promotes national unity, there is no problem. However, if the church becomes a rival to the state, or a critic of the state, it will be suppressed.

Force is essential to fascism. This leads to militarism and a glorification of war. Hyper-masculinity runs rampant. As Mussolini said “Believe, in the state, obey the state, fight for the state”

Imperialism Nations are not equal. Strong nations must triumph over weak nations.

The Leader. Just as the nation is the embodiment of the people, and the state is the embodiment of the nation, the leader is the embodiment of the state.

The Party serves as a vehicle for the leader. The party is a means through which individuals can serve the leader, the nation and the state.

Fascism in Germany took the form of Nazism.

Officially Nazism was called National Socialism. However, it was definitely not socialist. For Hitler socialism was just a term for nationalism. For Nazi's the nation meant the Volk or the race.

For other fascists, a nation could be multi ethnic as long as the different ethnics groups were assimilated. But for the Nazis, such assimilation was impossible. Merely being a citizen of Germany or speaking the language did not make you a member of the race.

Nazism borrows from racialism(“theories’ that justify racism) These “theories” contend that humankind is divided into biologically distinct groups or “races” Such racists believe that there are fundamental genetic, almost species like, differences between the races. Nazi’s believe that these genetic differences are reflected in cultural, intellectual and moral differences. There is a superior race and there are inferior races.

For example, Hitler claimed that Jews, blacks and Gypsies were responsible for the destruction of civilization. These “inferior” people and their “inferior” ideas were a threat to the superior race and ultimately there must be a “final solution” .

As we know these forces of hatred culminated in the Holocaust

“...that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good: that it can lie dormant for years....that it bides its time....and perhaps the day would come when,it would rouse up its rats again....” Albert Camus The Plague