

The Rebirth of Fascism
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Two political systems were born early in the 20th century: Fascism and Communism. They behaved as enemies throughout the century, although they shared a common goal: defeat of liberal democracies. In retrospect, however, they shared more qualities than differences.

To discuss these movements, definitions are needed. Liberal democracies (United States, Britain, France) had political systems that provided for regular changes of leadership through elections; equal power among head of state, an elected Congress or Parliament, and an independent justice system. Liberal here means liberty and the protection of it.

Essential for monitoring this system was an independent press that served as a check against abuse of power or corruption. This system also depended upon a public that was literate and largely middle class, thus saving it from populism of the less educated or from undue power of the most wealthy.

Communism was based on a political philosophy that promised "power to the people," taking the wealth from the rich and giving it to the poor, and a promise that in the future, the state would wither away and goodness would prevail. Its obvious appeal was the promise of fairness and equality. Communism had obvious appeal to idealists, mostly highly educated, with support from the lower social orders of peasants and workers, both of them long abused.

Fascism, unlike Communism or Liberal Democracy, is not a real political system. It is more a power cult based on promises to disgruntled people of revenge against perceived enemies (the wealthy, minorities among them, and intellectuals?the elites) who had governed them. Its main element was a powerful leader who would provide all good things and to whom the people owed total obedience. This power structure most resembles the old system of mafias and other criminal organizations that ruled through protection and threats.

Fascism was the creation of an Italian journalist with theatrical gifts, Benito Mussolini, who was a master of demagoguery that appealed to Italians unhappy with the condition of their country after World War I. He used ancient Roman trappings (faschi, the staffs carried by guards protecting the leader) and he assumed the straight-arm salute that he believed was used by the Romans to their leaders. Using the chaos and anarchy following the war, Mussolini and his black-shirted thugs intimidated the country into accepting him as their "great leader." Unfortunately, show-biz was not enough to help Italy, but by that time, his control was total.

A much more effective Fascism arose in Germany, much more orderly than Italy, and one with far more economic possibility. Adolph Hitler, whose gifts at rabble-rousing were honed in Munich beer-houses, had a bold sense of theatre: torchlight parades, mesmerizing rants that focused on the "enemies of the people," and a symbol, the Swastika, that represented German origin from the Aryan tribes of antiquity. His appeal was to the populist mobs, promising "pure Aryans" the world.

Fascism, Nazism, and Communism converge in their methods of seizing and holding power, which required discrediting their former or traditional systems of power. The first need was a charismatic and convincing leader (Mussolini, Hitler, and Lenin) who could make convincing attacks on the existing system. Next, it needed to monopolize the means of information: discrediting the press and replacing news and analysis with propaganda. Third, discredit the justice system, firing or murdering judges and replacing them with compliant rubber stamps. Finally, intimidate the public by establishing roundups and imprisonment of potential dissidents, Jews, or enemies of the state.

All of these systems were consolidated by going to war, which makes people support the current government.

Fascism, Nazism, and Communism all collapsed, the first two losing World War II, and the third at the end of the Cold War. However, within the next 20 years, Fascism has had a remarkable revival. Russia, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, Italy, and the Philippines have all replaced forms of liberal democracy with authoritarian governments. "Great Leaders" have returned, along with rebirth of conspiracy theories, populism, intimidation of the press, and attacks or replacements of the judiciary.

History repeats, and these systems have no real future. Our own will not survive

without our knowledge and full support.

689 words

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