

**Political Ideologies: Contexts, Ideas, and Practices**  
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**Lecture 01**  
**Fascism Introduction and Main Ideas**

Well, we are going to start with the topic of fascism. It is the first of the 12 topics we shall cover on in this course on Ideologies and we shall take them all similarly with a brief historical background, followed by the main ideas of each ideology. And then we'll look at the main problems in them and any further issues that arise. There will be a broad conceptual sequence to the topics we cover, and you will see that as we go along.

But we shall start with fascism. It is a very good launching point. Well, historically all societies have had and continue to have fascist elements and fascistic groups; there is nothing new about those. They only rarely hold political power; political parties have occasionally held office in fascist systems. A few have even been elected in democratic systems but they have not usually remained in office for long.

They have however, held and exerted considerable social and political influence and that is often shown by specific developments such as the spread of a climate of fear and intimidation without obvious or widespread physical violence. To create such climates as we shall see, fascist movements often use particular phrases or other forms of language which express veiled or indirect or menacing threats. The use of violence, often carefully targeted and often with the help of sympathetic public officials, does help to propagate a climate of fear and it is a notable feature of fascist movements. In modern times there have been only four explicitly fascist states.

These are Italy, Germany, Spain and Portugal. Italy, from 1921 to 1945, the leader was Benito Mussolini also called 'Il Duce', Italian for the 'The leader'. Germany, from 1933 to 1945, the leader was Adolf Hitler also called 'der Führer', 'The leader'. Spain was the longest lasting of these and the fascist government there lasted from 1936 to 1975, the leader was 'Francisco Franco' also called 'el Generalissimo', 'The high commander', or 'El Caudillo' 'The Leader'.

Portugal also had a long-lasting fascist government from 1939 to 1974. The leader from 1932 to 1968 was Antonio Salazar. In several other countries political and cultural life has at times taken on a fascistic character. Among these are Imperial Japan especially during the Second World

War, Argentina under Juan Peron 1945 to 55, and India during the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party, The BJP, in the 1990s and then during the period of BJP-led coalition government from 1998 to 2004.

The same is being said again about the BJP government, which has been in office since 2014. Indeed one feature of fascism which has been very noticeable in India since the early 90s is the use of specific forms of language to obliterate the differences between the terms Bharatiya, Hindu and Indian with the declared intention of equating the meanings of all three terms. This strategy had been explicitly stated as early as 1950. It is possible that similar will occur during the tenure of the current BJP government, which as I said was first elected in 2014 and returned to office in 2019 with an increased majority. I shall provide other examples as we proceed, so as to show the ways in which fascist tendencies and climates were and are created and maintained,

Well, we need to move on to the main ideas; what are the main ideas in fascism? Well, there are these, I shall list them first and then we shall do them turn by turn. 'Symbolism', 'the nation as an organic unity', that is the second one. 'Ultra-nationalism', 'anti-rationalism' as well, 'action springing solely from the will', 'the glorification of war', 'the leader principle' and 'permanent struggle'. We shall do these one by one.

We start with symbolism. Symbolism is a strong feature of all fascistic symbol groups, I beg your pardon, of all fascist systems and fascistic groups. The word fascism is derived from the Latin word *fasces*, 'F A S C E S', which meant an axe pointing through a bundle of rods tied together at one end. The axe-blade so to speak cut through the image of the rods. This was the symbol of the magistracy in ancient Rome and by the late 19th century the Italian word *fascia* 'F A S C I A' was being used for political groups or bands, most of these at the time were made up of revolutionary socialists.

The term became more explicitly associated with what we today call fascistic ideologies, when Mussolini formed paramilitary groups during and after the First World War. Today, this is the most common connotation of terms like 'fascist or fascistic'. All fascistic movements set great store by their particular symbols, and particularly by the dissemination, the broadcasting and transmission of a small number of symbols. 'The Nazi Swastika' is probably the most famous

fascist symbol, but others include, for example, the black shirts worn by followers of Sir Oswald Mosley who read, who led the British Union of Fascists in the 1930s.

Similarly, the BJP in India and other Hindu revivalist parties have explicitly adopted saffron-coloured and other symbols such as the trident or *trishul*, which have long occurred in many forms of Hinduism. What the BJP have done is to attempt to create an almost exclusive association between such symbols and the parties and movements involved. This kind of strategy is also part of fascistic movement's evocation of the past, which we shall now move to.

The second main theme in fascism is the nation as an organic unity. Fascist doctrines rely heavily upon an assertive and exclusivist or exclusionist conception of the nation. According to this concept, nations are not bodies among other nations; other nations in the modern system would be at least formally equal in respect of treaties, systems of international law and in multilateral bodies such as the United Nations or other groupings of countries. In those kinds of contexts, nations are called states and all of them today are constituted bodies with highly articulated internal systems. The Republic of India is an obvious example.

Instead, in fascism the theory takes the nation not as a constituted body, but as an organic unity among many nations. For fascism, other nations are not equal but they are permanently hostile to our particular nation. And they would even overwhelm or destroy our nation. Fascism therefore, requires I quote, "An intense and militant sense of national identity as a matter of survival and regeneration through the repeated reassertion of national unity."

For fascism, this national regeneration is founded on the idea that national membership is racial membership, and it is therefore, defined by racial purity or purity of descent. The idea of race as the unifying or defining principle of nationhood has taken different forms in different fascist systems. The basis of Italian Fascism was the supremacy of the fascist state. In that fascist state, the will of Mussolini ruled over the individual. At least in theory, this did not involve any theory of rank order or hierarchy between different races, and Mussolini's anti-Semitic laws - passed after 1937 - were created mainly to placate Hitler.

Nazi Germany on the other hand had as one of its key principles an explicit theory of racial hierarchies. This is a form of racialism inherited from 19th century and other theories of racial categories, according to which there are inherent or innate differences between the different races of the world. Such theories identify racial differences by skin colour, physiognomy, physical appearance that is, and other features. Secondly, such theories also see cultural

differences as resulting from biological differences. According to Nazi theory specifically, all races fell into a hierarchy.

For example, Nazism took the highest race to be white skinned and also took it that for white skinned people the only term to be used was the term 'Aryan' - in Sanskritic languages, that is 'Aryan'. The Nazis took the term 'Aryan' from the work of the French racialist thinker Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, and the term 'Aryan' then came to have an even narrower sense. And it referred to white-skinned, blond-haired, blue-eyed people. All other races, according to the Nazis, were considered inferior, and the hierarchy listed Slavs, Balts, Jews, and others in descending order with gypsies, Asians, and Africans below all the others.

This meant that for the Nazis, race was the essential and defining element of nationhood and national membership, and only those descended from one race could be members of any one given nation. This theory of purity by descent or by blood, therefore, meant that intermarriage between races amounted to contamination or defilement, or pollution and even degeneracy. Hitler saw Jews in particular as destroyers of the culture created by what he considered the Aryan master race.

While the Nazis were particularly extreme in their thinking on this, all fascistic thought - we must remember, all fascistic thought - involves purity by descent with the attendant fear of contamination or worse through interbreeding. The theory of racial unity also involves a claim to long inheritance over many generations of life in one country or area. The Nazis in particular called this principle that of blood and soil, or in German *Blut und Boden*. Nevertheless, the concept of race as the unifying organic principle of a nation leads to what has been called ultra-nationalism; that is the third of the main ideas in fascism.

What is ultra-nationalism? It is the idea that because nations are based on racial membership, they transcend state boundaries. Hitler himself saw the 'Aryan Nation' as encompassing including German's Nordic peoples, and British Peoples. The Nazi annexation, the *Anschluss*, of Austria in March 1938, and from October 1938 onwards, the annexation and invasion of Czechoslovakia where large numbers of Ethnic Germans lived were part of Hitler's attempt to unify the 'Aryan Nation' within one territory.

It follows that for fascism, state borders are irrelevant. The Nazis considered the 'Aryan Nation' to be one nation irrespective of where Aryan people lived, and they held the same to be true of all other nations. At one time, Hitler thought he could unite all Aryans. In the 1930s sections of

the British ruling classes, including certain members of the royal family, greatly admired Hitler and the tabloid newspaper the *Daily Mail* - still one of the country's biggest-selling papers - openly supported him. Hitler seriously believed that Great Britain – the world's greatest imperial power - would join his Aryan cause.

Well, there was another unifying principle involved, and this requires glorification of the past, the idea of reunifying the nation in its scattered modern form, the idea of reunifying that also means that fascist movements see the contemporary world, today's world, as having been corrupted by the geographical coexistence of different races. For the Nazis, that meant that the Aryan Nation's identity and purity were under permanent threat from lower and lesser races.

Fascist theories and Nazi theories in particular responded by asserting that at some unspecified time in the past the Aryan Nation had existed in a state of purity - that is, before other nations had corrupted it or tried to contaminate it. For the Nazis, this past was a rural or pastoral idyll in which Aryan peasants lived peacefully in the countryside, innocent of the threats and corruptions of modernity. Such visions of an idyllic agrarian past, incidentally, mark a significant difference between Nazism and Italian Fascism, because 'Mussolini' saw fascism as providing a way to unify Italy and modernize it through industrialization.

We shall come back to that theme of industrialization shortly. What about permanent struggle and permanent mobilization for war? All forms of fascism regard national purity as being under permanent threat, that is of contamination or pollution by contact and interbreeding with so-called lesser races. Therefore, fascism requires that nations be permanently ready for war, and that could also mean invading other people's territory and subjugating them.

The Nazis in particular ran a huge rearmament programme; this substantially aided their public popularity as it provided industrial employment on a national scale - which helped the country to recover from the Great Depression. It also served to revive national confidence, which had been severely damaged and severely harmed by the harsh, even punitive or vindictive, terms of the Treaty of Versailles; that was the Treaty which ended The First World War.

This form of industrialization through militarization suited the German private corporations very well, as they made enormous profits by manufacturing weapons and other industrial goods for

the state. Moreover, as other countries developed their own armaments, Nazi Germany needed constantly to update and refine its own weapons. This comprehensive national preparation for war also meant that all men were regarded as part of the military. Military or military-style training was compulsory for men. The whole of society had to be organized on fascist lines, and fascist societies almost always have sharp divisions in gender roles.

The task of men is to be ready for war and they must be willing to go to war to save the nation. Women's role is to run the home and give birth to the next generation of nation-saving warriors. These separate and sharply separated gender roles were particularly obvious in Nazi Germany during the 1930s, when women were sent to camps for training in how to be good Nazi wives and mothers, housewives and mothers if you like. During the war however, women were increasingly drafted into industrial jobs as part of the war effort, especially as more and more men were sent to the front lines.

During the Red Army siege of Breslau, now the Polish city of Wrocław in January 1945, children as young as ten were forced to join the Nazi war effort. Well, how does this tie up with anti-rationalism? The idea of a glorious past and of racial purity went beyond permanent mobilization for war and beyond a permanent fear of racial contamination. The Nazis, like other fascists, saw modernity as weakening and corrupting, because they associated democracy with modernity; they saw democracy as producing endless negotiations and compromises, and these often led to a feeling of paralysis and helplessness.

The situation in 1930, or in the 1930s in Germany, gave the Nazis a lot of evidence to support that. In 1930 unemployment had reached 6 million or nearly 10 percent of the population. Farmers were heavily indebted, businesses were collapsing, and parliamentary government had become impossible, with several different parties each getting only a small share of the vote. Governments began to rule by decree and the army often intervened in politics. According to the Nazis, democracy - which they considered a political system based on reasoning - had led to the state of affairs.

Furthermore, the Nazis saw all intellectual life, including scientific inquiry, as cold and lifeless; by implication, that of course included science and technology and all other forms of reasoning. This amounts to a comprehensive form of anti-rationalism. This anti-rationalism therefore, makes the will the sole wellspring of action. In contrast to the lifelessness of reason and the

messy inconclusive compromises of democracy, a life based on the expression of the will is according to fascism honest and direct.

This applies equally to nations and individuals. And for nations the national will is expressed by the will of the leader. Therefore, clashes of will can only be resolved by struggle, as compromise means enslavement or reduction to subordinate, even subhuman, status, this struggle has to be a struggle to the death. Every dispute then has to be and can only be resolved by a struggle to the death, a fight to the death.

This is also expressed in the policy of permanent mobilization for war, and in the highly militarized life men, especially young men, are supposed to and often made to lead in fascist or fascistic societies. The wider consequences can be and often have been truly terrible. If the very existence of another will is a threat to any individual's will, then the very existence of another nation or culture or - as the Nazis had it another race - is a threat to the very existence of the nation. For fascist theory, the only response is the extermination or enslavement of any and all other cultures.

While Nazi Germany is the only country openly to attempt the extermination of entire peoples, the principle of extermination is inherent in fascist ideology. The Nazi policy of extermination has come to be called the Holocaust, but Hitler himself, who was the sole author of the policy, called it 'The Final Solution', or in German *die Endlösung*. Hitler was obsessed with the idea that Jews were the greatest threat to the Aryan master race and that there was a global Jewish conspiracy, which was combining with Bolshevism to undermine the Aryan Nation.

In January 1939, he said that if Jewish finances inside and outside Europe succeeded in, I quote, "plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the Earth and thus, the victory of jury, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe." Well, after the Second World War had started with Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland on the 1st of September 1939, Hitler issued proclamations which licensed the killing of Jews in occupied Poland. He also issued decrees which licensed the ghettoization of Jews in specified areas of towns and cities and their extermination.

The Final Solution however, was comprehensive. The plan was to identify and exterminate every Jewish person in Europe, and then to repeat the process with all other races and the physically infirm or disabled of all races including the Aryan races. This plan was systematically carried out; it remains the greatest act of mass murder in history. Current estimates are that 6

million people, almost all of whom were Jewish, were murdered in a programme which covered all of occupied Europe and towards which a large part of the German state apparatus was directed.

The Holocaust even gave rise to a new word - 'genocide' - and a new crime, that of crimes against humanity, crimes against humanity as a whole. Well, there have been other genocides before a sense, but the Holocaust by itself raises most of the relevant questions. It requires the coordination of tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of administrators, military personnel, engineers, railway staff, and even civilians who exposed or denounced their Jewish neighbors to the authorities.

It seems to have been carried out almost without a question. These features have been noted in other genocides, such as the one carried out in Rwanda in 1994, and these features may well have been true of, for example, the Australian white settlers' genocide against the original Tasmanians or Aboriginal Tasmanians. The use of public documents such as electoral registers to identify and round up people for killing has been repeated in other episodes of mass slaughter. This was done to Muslim residents in Gujarat in 2002 and has been publicly and reliably documented. Some countries now offer on their electoral register the option not to make your name public.

For example, when I sign up for the British electoral register every year, I always tick the box that says 'Would you like your name not to be made public?', and I always tick the box. It is mainly for, well, so that I do not get contacted by people sending me advertising mailing and so on. But when I first saw this box I thought of the Holocaust. We hate the idea that it might happen again, but there are probably good reasons for not allowing our name to be public on any electoral register.

It depends on the countries concerned whether they allow this in the law or not; mine does, so I take the option. As for the Holocaust, the fact that ordinary people in Germany and the occupied countries had no idea that mass exterminations were taking place in the camps, often on the edge of their towns and cities, was a great shock to many of them after the war. Perhaps one lesson for us is that genocide can be carried out even near where we live or work without our realizing that it is happening.

It has also been the case that many genocides have been carried out while the rest of the world did nothing. United Nations intervention in the Rwandan Genocide was blocked by the United



States and France, both of which used the threat of a Security Council veto during discussions in Security Council subcommittees.

Well, I should perhaps spend a little more time on this point. The labour camp-cum-extermination camp at Auschwitz in southern Poland' is a case in point. It is perhaps a kilometre's walk, a kilometre and a half's walk, from the central station in the town of Oświęcim in southern Poland. And many of the people living in the town - it was then a village I suppose, a market town - had no idea what was happening so near their own town. I understand that when the mayor and his wife found out after the war, what had been happening - they were German - they went home and committed suicide; they were so horrified.

But it is a lesson to us that it is not difficult to carry out even mass extermination, close to where millions of other people live, without anyone's knowing. Well, how is all this made possible - who decides this and why do we listen to them, why do we take them so seriously? The leader principle is central to fascism and fascistic movements. In fascism the individual will is part of the national will and that in turn is expressed solely in the absolute and unquestionable will of the leader.

Both the current, currently available, versions of the Fascist Decalogue - -that is a sort of manifesto of Italy's National Fascist Party - both those versions contain the sentence 'Mussolini is always right'. One of the first watchwords in the initiation ceremony for new members of the Nazi movement was, 'The Führer is always right'. It follows that disagreement or dissent over any document or decision or ruling promulgated by or on behalf of the leader amounts to betrayal or treason. I repeat that: 'Any disagreement or dissent amounts to betrayal or treason'.

Even pointing out problems in everyday life, let alone major policies, is potentially treason, because it means that the will of the leader is not perfect or that all is not perfect in the fascist society concerned. This also means even that if physical conditions make it impossible to implement the leader's will, the failure to implement the leader's will constitutes treason. Towards the example, well, the example is, I shall repeat that, towards the end of the battle of Stalingrad which took place through the winter of 1942-43 and in which soldiers and civilians suffered hideously, the German commander General Friedrich Paulus repeatedly asked for fresh supplies, right, because the battle was starting to go against his troops. Hitler had no supplies to send, and instead promoted Paulus to the rank of Field Marshal, apparently because no German Field Marshal had ever been taken alive in battle. Hitler apparently expected Paulus

to fight on to the death or to commit suicide before the impending defeat, or I should say, I beg your pardon, I will repeat that, Hitler apparently expected Paulus to commit suicide following the impending defeat.

This time however, the newly promoted *Generalfeldmarschall* Paulus surrendered, presumably to save the lives of his troops. He later became a very public critic of Hitler and the rest of the Nazi regime. But, for the Nazis his surrender at Stalingrad would have been a treasonable act. It would also have been a treasonable act to expose the failure to send supplies to Stalingrad - because public revelation of this failure would have destroyed the myth of the Fuhrer's perfection and infallibility.

This idea of infallibility is part of what has been called charismatic authority, that is, a property of the leader's own personality, which in fascism is the source of supreme wisdom and expresses the general will of the people. That general will in turn is constantly reaffirmed by rallies and popular demonstrations. That may seem like a rather theoretical point about fascism - but the fascist requirement is that the will of the leader is supreme, and therefore, that any clash of wills must be resolved by a battle to the death, which is something Hitler in particular really meant.

By definition, the people even the most fanatical supporters can never be equal to the leader. And in the final days of the war Hitler blamed the German people for not being strong enough to keep fighting until they were all dead. We have covered the main themes in fascism, we have done a historical introduction, we have looked at the main ideas with examples wherever possible. We need to look at the problems, and there are several of these. We shall take them turn by turn. It is not an exaggeration to say that fascist societies and systems are riddled with contradictions. These have often caused them enormous problems and may well have contributed to the collapse of some of them.