

# Fascism

Mussolini defined fascism as being a right-wing collectivistic ideology in opposition to socialism, liberalism, democracy and individualism. He wrote in *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism*:

*Anti-individualistic, the fascist conception of life stresses the importance of the State and accepts the individual only in so far as his interests coincide with those of the State, which stands for the conscience and the universal will of man as a historic entity. ... The fascist conception of the State is all-embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value. ... Fascism is therefore opposed to that form of democracy which equates a nation to the majority, lowering it to the level of the largest number. ... 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. (a version of the text is here).*

Since Mussolini, however, there have been many conflicting definitions of the term "fascism." Merriam-Webster defines fascism as "a political philosophy, movement, or regime (as that of the Fascisti) that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition".

Two particular definitions reflect the view that Fascism is an extreme right-wing ideology:

(1) "A system of government that exercises a dictatorship of the extreme right, typically through the merging of state and business leadership, together with belligerent nationalism."

(2) "Extreme right-wing totalitarian political system or views, as orig. prevailing in Italy (1922-43)."

Fascism is associated by many scholars with one or more of the following characteristics: a very high degree of nationalism, economic corporatism, a powerful, dictatorial leader who portrays the nation, state or collective as superior to the individuals or groups composing it.

Stanley Payne's *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (1980) uses a lengthy itemized list of characteristics to identify fascism, including the creation of an authoritarian state; a regulated, state-integrated economic sector; fascist symbolism; anti-liberalism; anti-communism; anti-conservatism.

Most scholars hold that fascism as a social movement employs elements from the political left, but many conclude that fascism eventually allies with the political right, especially after attaining state power. For example, Nazism began as a socio-political movement that promoted a radical form of *National Socialism*, but altered its character once Adolf Hitler was handed state power in Germany. A minority of scholars and political commentators argue that fascism is a form of socialist dictatorship similar to that in Soviet Union.