

3 Fascism Rises in Europe

TERMS & NAMES

- fascism
- Benito Mussolini
- Adolf Hitler
- Nazism
- *Mein Kampf*
- *lebensraum*

MAIN IDEA

In response to political turmoil and economic crises, Italy and Germany turned to totalitarian dictators.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

These dictators changed the course of history, and the world is still recovering from their abuse of power.

SETTING THE STAGE Many democracies, including the United States, Britain, and France, remained strong despite the economic crisis caused by the Great Depression. However, millions of people lost faith in democratic government. In response, they turned to an extreme system of government called fascism.

Fascist Beliefs and Policies

This new, militant political movement called **fascism** (FASH-IHZ-uhm) emphasized loyalty to the state and obedience to its leader. Fascists promised to revive the economy, punish those responsible for hard times, and restore national pride. Their message attracted many people who felt frustrated and angered by the peace treaties that followed World War I and by the Great Depression.

Unlike communism, fascism had no clearly defined theory or program. Nevertheless, most Fascists shared several ideas. They preached an extreme form of nationalism, or loyalty to one's country. Fascists believed that nations must struggle—peaceful states were doomed to be conquered. They pledged loyalty to an authoritarian leader who guided the state. In each nation, Fascists wore uniforms of a certain color, used special salutes, and held mass rallies.

In some ways, fascism was similar to communism. Both systems were ruled by dictators who allowed only their political party (one-party rule). Both denied individual rights. In both, the state was supreme. Neither practiced any kind of democracy. However, unlike Communists, Fascists did not seek a classless society. Rather, they believed that each class had its place and function. Communism claimed to be a dictatorship of the working class. In most cases, fascist parties were made up of aristocrats and industrialists, war veterans, and the lower middle class. Also, Fascists were nationalists, and Communists were internationalists, hoping to unite workers worldwide.

Mussolini Comes to Power in Italy

Fascism's rise in Italy was fueled by bitter disappointment over the failure to win large territorial gains at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. Rising inflation and unemployment also contributed to widespread social unrest. Italy's upper and middle classes feared a Communist revolution, as in Russia. To growing numbers of Italians, their democratic government seemed helpless to deal with the country's problems. They wanted a leader who would take action.

The Rise of Mussolini A newspaper editor and politician named **Benito Mussolini** boldly promised to rescue Italy by reviving its

HISTORY MAKERS



Benito Mussolini
1883–1945

Mussolini was a dazzling orator. Because he was of modest height, he usually chose a location for his speeches where he towered above the crowds—often a balcony high above a public square. He then roused audiences with his emotional speeches and theatrical gestures and body movements.

Vowing to lead Italy “back to her ways of ancient greatness,” Mussolini peppered his speeches with aggressive words such as “war” and “power.”

Mussolini wanted to win support for an overseas empire in Africa and a militaristic state at home. So he often used settings and symbols from the period of Italy's glory—the Roman Empire.

economy and rebuilding its armed forces. He vowed to give Italy strong leadership. Mussolini had founded the Fascist Party in 1919. At first, he failed to win widespread support. As economic conditions worsened, however, his popularity rapidly increased. Finally, Mussolini publicly criticized Italy's government. Groups of Fascists wearing black shirts attacked Communists and Socialists on the streets. This campaign of terror weakened his opponents. Because Mussolini played on the fear of a workers' revolt, he began to win support from the middle classes, the aristocracy, and industrial leaders.

In October 1922, about 30,000 Fascists marched on Rome. They demanded that King Victor Emmanuel III put Mussolini in charge of the government. The king decided that Mussolini was the best hope for his dynasty to survive, so he let Mussolini form a government. Thus, after widespread violence and a threat of armed uprising, Mussolini took power "legally." At the time, a foreign diplomat described him as "an actor, a dangerous rascal, and possibly slightly off his head."

Il Duce's Leadership Mussolini was now Il Duce (ihl DOO-chay), or the leader. He abolished democracy and outlawed all political parties except the Fascists. Secret police jailed his opponents. Government censors forced radio stations and publications to broadcast or publish only Fascist doctrines. Mussolini outlawed strikes. He sought to control the economy by allying the Fascists with the industrialists and large landowners.

Under his leadership, Italy became the model for Fascists in other countries. However, Mussolini never had the total control achieved by Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union or Adolf Hitler in Germany.

HISTORY MAKERS



Adolf Hitler
1889–1945

Like Mussolini, Hitler could manipulate huge audiences with his fiery oratory. Making speeches was crucial to Hitler. He believed: "All great world-shaking events have been brought about . . . by the spoken word!"

Because he appeared awkward and unimposing, Hitler rehearsed his speeches. Usually he began a speech in a normal voice. Suddenly, he spoke louder as his anger grew. His voice rose to a screech, and his hands flailed the air. Then he would stop, smooth his hair, and look quite calm.

In the 1930s, a foreign diplomat described Hitler: ". . . he was all violence . . . with a fierce energy ready at no provocation to pull down the universe. . . . [His] face was the face of a lunatic."

Hitler Takes Control in Germany

When Mussolini became dictator of Italy in the mid-1920s, **Adolf Hitler** was a little-known political leader whose early life had been marked by disappointment. Born in a small town in Austria in 1889, he dropped out of high school and failed as an artist. When World War I broke out, Hitler found a new beginning. He would fight to defend Germany and crush its opponents. He volunteered for the German army and was twice awarded the Iron Cross, a medal for bravery.

The Rise of the Nazis At the end of the war, Hitler settled in Munich. In early 1920, he joined a tiny right-wing political group. This group shared his belief that Germany had to overturn the Treaty of Versailles and combat communism. The group later named itself the National Socialist German Workers' Party, called Nazi for short. Its policies, supported by people in the middle and lower middle classes, formed the German brand of fascism known as **Nazism**. The party adopted the swastika, or hooked cross, as its symbol. The Nazis also set up a private militia called the storm troopers or Brownshirts.

Within a short time, Hitler's success as an organizer and speaker led him to be chosen *der Führer* (duhr FYUR-uhr), or the leader, of the



The swastika, which means "well-being" in Sanskrit, was an ancient good-luck symbol. Forms of it had been used by Hindus, Buddhists, early Christians, and Native Americans.

"Heil Hitler!" Hitler Youth members salute their Führer at a rally in the 1930s. Hitler skillfully manipulated the enthusiasm of his followers.

Nazi party. These skills also helped make the Nazis a growing political force. Inspired by Mussolini's march on Rome, Hitler and the Nazis plotted to seize power in Munich in 1923. The attempt failed, and Hitler was arrested. He was tried for treason, but sympathetic judges sentenced him to only five years in prison. He served less than nine months.

While in jail, Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*). This book set forth his beliefs and his goals for Germany. It became the blueprint, or plan of action, for the Nazis. Hitler asserted that the Germans, especially those who were blond and blue-eyed—whom he incorrectly called “Aryans”—were a “master race.” He declared that non-Aryan “races”—such as Jews, Slavs, and Gypsies—were inferior or subhuman. He called the Versailles Treaty an outrage and vowed to regain the lands taken from Germany. Hitler also declared that Germany was overcrowded and needed more *lebensraum*, or living space. He promised to get that space by conquering eastern Europe and Russia.

After leaving prison in 1924, Hitler revived the Nazi party. Most Germans ignored him and his angry message until the Depression ended the nation's brief postwar recovery. When American loans stopped, the German economy collapsed. Factories ground to a halt and banks closed. Nearly six million people, about 30 percent of Germany's work force, were unemployed in 1932. Civil unrest broke out. Frightened and confused, Germans now turned to Hitler, hoping for security and firm leadership.

Hitler Becomes Chancellor The Nazis had become the largest political party by 1932. Conservative leaders mistakenly believed they could control Hitler and use him for their purposes. In January 1933, they advised President Paul von Hindenburg to name Hitler chancellor. Only Hitler, they said, could stand up to the strong Communist party in Germany. Thus Hitler came to power legally. Soon after, General Erich Ludendorff, a former Hitler ally, wrote to Hindenburg:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

By naming Hitler as *Reichschancellor*, you have delivered up our holy Fatherland to one of the greatest [rabblers] of all time. I solemnly [predict] that this accursed man will plunge our Reich into the abyss and bring our nation into inconceivable misery.

ERICH LUDENDORFF, from a letter to President Hindenburg, February 1, 1933

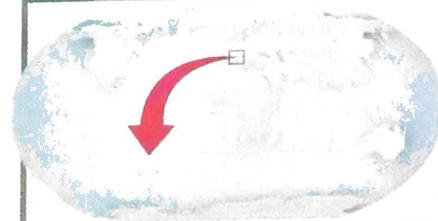
Once in office, Hitler acted quickly to strengthen his position. He called for new elections, hoping to win a parliamentary majority. Six days before the election, a fire destroyed the Reichstag building where parliament met. The Nazis blamed the Communists. By stirring up fear of the Communists, the Nazis and their allies won a slim majority.

With majority control, Hitler demanded dictatorial, or absolute, power for four years. Only one deputy dared to speak against the resulting Enabling Act. Hitler used his new power to turn Germany into a totalitarian state. He banned all other political parties and had opponents arrested. Meanwhile, an elite, black-uniformed unit called the SS (*Schutzstaffel*, or protection squad) was created. It was loyal only to Hitler. In 1934, the SS arrested and murdered hundreds of Hitler's enemies. This brutal action and the terror applied by the Gestapo, the Nazi secret police, shocked most Germans into total obedience.

The Nazis quickly took command of the economy. New laws banned strikes, dissolved independent labor unions, and gave the government authority over business and labor. Hitler put millions of Germans to work. They constructed factories, built highways, manufactured weapons, and served in the military. As a result, unemployment dropped from about 6 to 1.5 million in 1936.

The Führer Is Supreme Hitler wanted more than just economic and political power—he wanted control over every aspect of German life. To shape public opinion and to win

Global Impact



Fascism to Argentina

Juan Perón served as Argentina's president from 1946 to 1955 and again in 1973 and 1974. The two years he spent in Europe before World War II greatly influenced his strong-man rule.

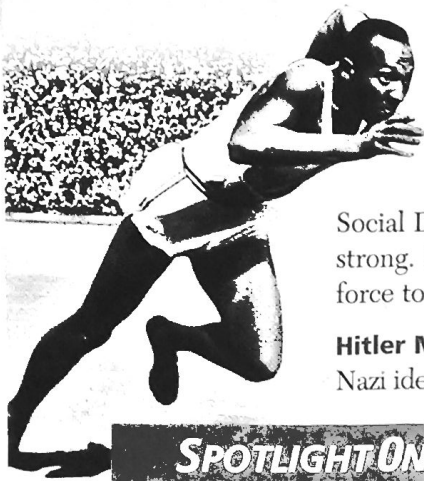
A career army officer, Perón went to Italy in 1939 for military training. He then served at the Argentine embassy in Rome. A visit to Berlin gave Perón a chance to see Nazi Germany. The ability of Hitler and Mussolini to manipulate their citizens impressed Perón.

When Perón himself gained power, he patterned his military dictatorship on that of the European Fascists. Like them, he restrained his opponents through press censorship and suppression of civil rights. But he never achieved the same total control as his fascist role models.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY
5. Summarizing
What were the key ideas and goals that Hitler presented in *Mein Kampf*?

Vocabulary
chancellor: the prime minister in certain countries.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY
C. Making Inferences
Why did Germans at first support Hitler?



SPOTLIGHT ON

The 1936 Olympics

The 1936 Summer Olympics were held in Berlin, Nazi Germany's capital. Hitler built a new \$30 million stadium for the Games. To hide from the world his persecution of Jews, he took down all anti-Semitic signs in Berlin.

Prior to the Olympics' opening, Hitler announced that the Games would show the world Aryan superiority and the inferiority of Jews and blacks. Hitler's plan failed, however, in part because of the successes of African-American runner Jesse Owens. A sprinter and long jumper, Owens won four gold medals.

When Owens or other black athletes won medals, Hitler left the reviewing stand. He did not want to be seen congratulating them.

praise for his leadership, Hitler turned the press, radio, literature, painting, and film into propaganda tools. Books that did not conform to Nazi beliefs were burned in huge bonfires. Churches were forbidden to criticize the Nazis or the government. Schoolchildren had to join the Hitler Youth (for boys) or the League of German Girls. Hitler was greatly influenced by Social Darwinism. He believed that a continuous struggle brought victory to the strong. He twisted the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche to support his use of brute force to maintain power and his glorification of war.

Hitler Makes War on the Jews Hatred of Jews, or anti-Semitism, was a key part of Nazi ideology. Although Jews were less than one percent of the population, the Nazis used them as scapegoats for all Germany's troubles since the war. This led to a wave of anti-Semitism across Germany. Beginning in 1933, the Nazis passed laws depriving Jews of most of their rights. Violence against Jews mounted. On the night of November 9, 1938, Nazi mobs attacked Jews in their homes and on the streets and destroyed thousands of Jewish-owned buildings. This rampage, called *Kristallnacht* (Night of the Broken Glass), signaled the real start of the process of eliminating the Jews from German life. (See Chapter 16.)

Other Countries Fall to Dictators

While Fascists took power in Italy and Germany, the nations formed in eastern Europe after World War I also were falling to dictators. The parliamentary governments that had been set up in these countries rarely lasted. In Hungary in 1919, after a brief Communist regime, military forces and wealthy landowners joined to make Admiral Miklós Horthy the first European postwar dictator. In Poland, Marshal Joseph Pilsudski (pihl-SOOT-skee) seized power in 1926. In Yugoslavia, Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania, kings turned to strong-man rule. They suspended constitutions and silenced foes. In 1935, one democracy, Czechoslovakia, remained in eastern Europe.

Elsewhere in Europe, only in nations with strong democratic traditions—Britain, France, and the Scandinavian countries—did democracy survive. With no democratic experience and severe economic problems, many Europeans saw dictatorship as the only way to prevent instability. Although all of these dictatorships restricted civil rights, none asserted control with the brutality of the Russian Communists or the Nazis.

By the mid-1930s, the powerful nations of the world were split into two antagonistic camps—democratic and totalitarian. And to gain their ends, the Fascist dictatorships had indicated a willingness to use military aggression.

Background
The term anti-Semitism is derived from the fact that the earliest Jews were Semites (people who spoke a Semitic language).

Section 3 Assessment

1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- fascism
- Benito Mussolini
- Adolf Hitler
- Nazism
- *Mein Kampf*
- *lebensraum*

2. TAKING NOTES

Draw a chart like the one below. Compare Mussolini and Hitler by completing the chart.

	Hitler	Mussolini
Method of taking power		
Style of leadership		
Handling of economic crisis		
Goals		

Were the two more alike or different? Explain why.

3. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Why did a movement like fascism and leaders like Mussolini and Hitler come to power during a period of crisis?

THINK ABOUT

- what problems Italy and Germany faced
- political traditions in each country
- the state of the world at the time

4. THEME ACTIVITY

Power and Authority
Imagine you live in Italy and it is 1933, ten years since Benito Mussolini became dictator. In Germany, President Paul von Hindenburg is considering appointing Adolf Hitler, a Fascist like Mussolini, chancellor of Germany. What would you write a letter telling him what has happened in your country since a fascist dictatorship.