

Traits of a Fascist Dictator | Sample answer

‘During the inter-war years, what were the characteristics of fascist regimes in Europe?’ 2019

Between the years of 1918 and 1939 there were many fascist leaders that sprung up. The most notable three being Italy’s Mussolini, Germany’s Hitler and Spain’s Franco. What these three had in common is that their power arose from the discontent among the general public. They also had four traits in common. The first being a heavy dependence on propaganda, the second being their use of a secret police, the third being a strong centralised economy and finally they had a severe restriction of civil liberties.

Italy’s Mussolini used a fair amount of propaganda. He developed a cult of personality and was commonly known as ‘Il Duce’ and photographed with his lioness Italia. A phrase also developed which was “Mussolini is always right!” and he was also commonly known as a model worker, a sportsman, a statesman and finally, a father of the nation. The Italian state also controlled the media. Between 1926 to 1936 the number of household radios grew from 27,000 to 1 million in order for Mussolini to spread his propaganda to families everywhere.

Hitler also used a lot of propaganda. He used the Nuremberg rallies to create a sense of national unity and loyalty to the leader with the use of empowering drums and an immaculate army and flag. He also gave many speeches which depicted a national socialist message. He also employed Joseph Goebbels as the “minister for propaganda and public enlightenment” He provided a daily press conference and instructed the news on how to present any information. He also employed Leni Riefenstahl who produced propaganda films such as “Olympia” which was about the 1936 Berlin Olympics and also “Triumph of Will” which highlighted the success of the Nuremberg rallies. Much like Mussolini, he also developed a cult of personality around him. His birthday was also a national holiday and slogans like “Ein Reich, ein Volk, ein Führer” inextricably linked German identity with the leader.

Indoctrination was very common in Italy and it was compulsory for Italian children to join the Balila which educated boys on the glories of the roman empire. Similar indoctrination was seen in

Germany. German boys joined the Hitler Jugend which trained them to become discipline soldiers. German girls, however, joined the League of German Maidens, in which they were taught a simple slogan to remember their duties, “Kinder, Küche, Kirche” or “Children, Kitchen, Church”

The use of secret police was also prominent in both countries. With Italy using the OVRA which exiled 4000 potential threats and he set up courts to deal with criminals, this was a lot less harsh than Germany’s secret police called the Gestapo. They used terror as a way of dealing with undesirables. But for Germany, between 1933 and 1939 over 16,000 criminals whom at the time were merely homosexuals, gypsies or tramps etc, were sentenced to imprisonment in camps such as Dachau.

A lack of political oppression was common between the two. In 1927, Mussolini used the Acerbo law which gave him the power to rule by decree with the fascist grand council having to vet any candidates. Basically banning all other political parties. Then Hitler combined the role of the Chancellor and the President to form the Enabling act which too, gave him the power to rule by decree. In 1934 the night of the long knives took place which was the killing of his political enemies. This led to the trade unions being replaced with state run “German labour front”. He also removed the state assemblies to set up a puppet government called the Reichstag. This was called the policy of Gleichschaltung or Coordination.

Another factor was that both countries were ultra-nationalistic. In regard to Italy, Mussolini claimed that he was going to conquer and make Italy great. He wanted Italy’s Mediterranean empire to be better than that of the Roman Empire. He also invaded Abyssinia in 1936. Hitler similarly promised to abolish the Treaty of Versailles and reclaim honour. He remilitarised the Rhineland in 1936, occupied Sudetenland in 1938 and acquired Anschluss with Austria in 1938.

The final thing they had in common was self-sufficiency. In Italy, they created a series of battles to increase production. There was a battle of wheat and a battle for land reclamation which was the draining of pointed marshes. In Germany there were synthetic materials created and material was re-used, reduced and recycled. Despite this, however, neither could fully achieve self-sufficiency as they relied too much on both oil and rubber.

In conclusion, there was a substantial difference across the fascist regimes of Europe, but the common threads were censorship, propaganda, secret police, political oppression and extreme nationalism.