

Is Fascism an Ideology?

It is impossible to judge whether Fascism fits into the category of an ideology without considering what an ideology actually is. There are many slightly different definitions of ideology Andrew Heywood's being;

“An ideology is a more or less coherent set of ideas that provides the basis for organised political action, whether this is intended to preserve, modify or overthrow the existing system of power. All ideologies therefore have the following features:

- 1. They offer an account of the existing order, usually in the form of a ‘world view’*
- 2. They advance a model of a desired future, a vision of the ‘good society’*
- 3. They explain how political change can and should be brought about – how to get from (A) to (B)”*

(Heywood, 2007)

It is clear then that fascism disobeys the majority of the defining characteristic of a traditional ideology, lacking coherence to the point of inherent internal conflicts and whilst offering an account of the existing order and a rudimentary method of political change through conflict it appears to have little idea, nor the interest in, what to do if it actually achieves its goal.

Fascism is seemingly comprised of and defined by what it disagrees with rather than its actual beliefs.

“Fascism thus has a strong ‘anti-character’: it is anti-rational, anti-liberal, anti-conservative, anti-capitalist, anti-bourgeois, anti-communist and so on.”

(Heywood, 2007)

This nihilist approach is a key challenge to Fascism's claim of political ideological status and whilst to a degree this is common of many ideologies its antagonistic nature is so pronounced that it seems to consume the majority of its doctrine, leaving it with little or no ideological substance.

“The majority of the many books on fascism written since 1945 concentrate on the historical causes of the fascist phenomenon, rather than analysing the ideology – because there is so little to analyse.”

(Goodwin, 2007)

This would therefore largely discount Fascism's ideological status as rather than comprising of a coherent set of ideas, which Heywood offers as a necessary criteria, it is more a relentless set of grievances.

Fascism, unlike any other Ideology, has an affinity for conflict and war. It is for them a method of proving their superiority but also in reality represents their only true goal, other than the contentious quest for a peasant ideology, which is constant struggle. In this light, fascism's survival is perpetuated by struggle and as has been seen in both the case of Italian and German fascism once the struggle is lost fascism generally dies out. It is a means to no end.

“Ideologies must, strictly speaking, be both idea -orientated and action -orientated”

(Heywood, 2007)

Hence the near complete focus of fascism on conflict represents an imbalance so much so that the ideological becomes simply the war mongering. Fascism therefore cannot be considered a complete ideology as it is only minimally interested in the theoretical basis which is common of all other accepted political ideologies.

Fascism does not represent a coherent set of ideas it appears to select ideas from any area of the political and scientific spectrum if they are even marginally applicable to an adopted policy. For example the core theme within Nazi fascism was the aspiration to a peasant society and a simpler existence for the German people, motivated by the Nazi hate for industrialised society as a diluter of the German *Volk*. The Nazis used this aspiration to justify their expansionist agenda which ironically caused them to industrialise massively. This begins to raise the question of whether Fascist ideological theory is simply justification acting as an opiate of the masses. Fascism also has a habit of misinterpreting ideas for the benefit of cohesion, it has adopted and abused scientific ideas such as 'Darwinism' in an attempt to justify both their constant strive for conflict and their inhumane policy of 'eugenics'. This puts the little ideological content of Fascism into doubt, it begins to look more like a series of half truths designed to breed submission and acceptance. Also Fascism has a tendency to apply beliefs of opposing ideologies, such as socialism and the use of its welfare systems, when faced with the necessity of social administration. This compromise of rival beliefs indicates an extreme form of pragmatism which is considered on large to not be a valid ideological system. This said, in the age of the British 'Third way' consensus it is impossible to judge a system for being pragmatic when this is claimed by politicians such as David Cameron, Tony Blair and now Gordon Brown to be the way forward for modern political thought.

Fascism is often discussed in the area of extreme or ultra nationalism. The two main fascist movements do seem to follow certain nationalistic tendencies such as the racialism of Nazis being akin to the beliefs of chauvinistic nationalism or the Italian Expansionist nationalism (although there is a degree of expansion in both). Nazis embrace their extreme tendency for nationalism to the degree that the endeavours of the nation are raised above normal goal and become almost fanatical and religion like. Such a focus on the importance of the nation indeed indicates that fascism is not an independent school of political thought rather and so is not an ideology. However it would be unfair to claim this as the sole reason as it does have many beliefs which contradict that of socialism such as the principle of struggle.

Fascism cannot truly be considered an ideology in the traditional sense, as unlike say, liberalism, conservatism or socialism, it has no theoretical structure. The set of ideas it does possess are either taken from other schools of thought, no matter how alien, or they are manipulated beyond belief to create a convenient mistruth of their meaning. Fascism therefore, is largely built on reactionary grounds focusing on what it sees as the evils in the world and creating a system against them. This is not the way of a political ideology and its emergence only at times of crisis and impoverishment lead it to seem more a form of national renewal through uncompromising submission to the state, hidden under a veil of political rhetoric, which it uses to hide the more precarious of its policies, for example that of social cleansing. It does also seem that the focus on the importance of the nation suggests that fascism is easier categorised as a form of nationalism rather than an independent ideology. This is only reinforced by the magnitude of difference between the two main fascist movements which were

very different on a lot of policy, such as their views on modernisation, meaning that fascism doesn't really have a central issue other than the supreme sovereignty of the state.

Reference:

Goodwin, B, (2007), *Using Political Ideas*, 5th edition, John Wiley & sons, Essex.
Page. 189

Heywood, A (2007), *Political ideologies: an introduction*, 4th edition, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, pages 11, 203, 13.