The Rise of Fascism: A Comparison of Mussolini and Hitler

Fascism is an authoritarian political ideology that gives total control to the government, usually under a strong leader. It was especially popular in the early 20th century when two prominent dictators came to power – Benito Mussolini in Italy and Adolf Hitler in Germany. Both fascist leaders shared many characteristics and goals.

Benito Mussolini

Mussolini became the Prime Minister of Italy in 1922 after his party, the National Fascist Party, enjoyed a landslide victory in the parliamentary elections. After World War 1, the economic landscape in Italy was dire. Inflation was very high and citizens' savings decreased sharply in value.

Mussolini promised economic reform and a return to prosperity for Italy. When he took office, he implemented reforms such as increased state control over industry. Banking, steel and construction were put under government control. This allowed the profits to be used to lower the country's debt and to begin public work projects, such as introducing electricity across the country.

Mussolini also sought to restore Italian pride by reclaiming its former colonies, which led to his invading Ethiopia in 1935-36. This campaign was ultimately unsuccessful, but it made Mussolini appear strong and powerful both domestically and internationally.

In mesmerizing speeches, Mussolini promised the people a return to the greatness of the Roman empire. After successfully conquering Ethiopia and Eritrea in Northern Africa he spoke to thousands of citizens from his balcony:

"Italy finally has its empire. It is a fascist empire, an empire of peace, an empire of civilization and humanity."

Adolf Hitler

Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933 after his Nazi party won a majority of seats in Parliament following contentious elections held during Germany's Great Depression. Hitler sought to

restore Germany's greatness by raising its military strength. He also began rebuilding its economy with investments from private firms, establishing labor unions to increase wages for workers, and creating social welfare programs for citizens.

Hitler also instituted anti-Semitic policies such as prohibiting Jews from certain professions and creating racism laws that limited Jews' rights greatly. His "Final Solution" was to gain living space for the "true" German people. This included white, Protestant Germans. Everyone else would be killed or controlled.

He used propaganda to drive home his ideas, promising the German people a return to greatness. Censorship and terror were used against his opponents.

He also started a massive military buildup that led to his occupation of part of Czechoslovakia and eventually into World War II. This conflict cost millions of lives on either side and devastated much of Europe until 1945 when America liberated it from German occupation.

Despite their many similarities, Mussolini and Hitler had different methods of ruling their respective countries – but both were characterized by an authoritarian rule which undermined freedom of speech and other civil liberties while striving towards their own idea of national greatness despite worldwide condemnation of their actions.