# Modern History Sourcebook: Benito Mussolini:What is Fascism, 1932

*Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) over the course of his lifetime went from Socialism - he was editor of* Avanti*, a socialist newspaper - to the leadership of a new political movement called "fascism" [after "fasces", the symbol of bound sticks used a totem of power in ancient Rome].*

*Mussolini came to power after the "March on Rome" in 1922, and was appointed Prime Minister by King Victor Emmanuel.*

*In 1932 Mussolini wrote (with the help of Giovanni Gentile) an entry for the Italian Encyclopedia on the definition of fascism.*

Fascism…believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of Pacifism -- born of a renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have courage to meet it. All other trials are substitutes, which never really put men into the position where they have to make the great decision -- the alternative of life or death....

...The Fascist accepts life and loves it, knowing nothing of and despising suicide: he rather conceives of life as duty and struggle and conquest, but above all for others -- those who are at hand and those who are far distant, contemporaries, and those who will come after...

...Fascism [is] the complete opposite of…Marxian Socialism, the materialist conception of history of human civilization can be explained simply through the conflict of interests among the various social groups and by the change and development in the means and instruments of production.... Fascism, now and always, believes in holiness and in heroism; that is to say, in actions influenced by no economic motive, direct or indirect. …And above all Fascism denies that class-war can be the preponderant force in the transformation of society....

The foundation of Fascism is the conception of the State, its character, its duty, and its aim. Fascism conceives of the State as an absolute, in comparison with which all individuals or groups are relative, only to be conceived of in their relation to the State.

**Add these questions to your notes:**

1. What do Fascists believe about peace, according to Mussolini? What does he say makes people noble?
2. According to the second paragraph, how does the Fascist conceive of life?
3. How is Fascism different from Communism, according to Mussolini?
4. What is the relationship of the individual and the state in Fascism?
5. Based on what you know about the Enlightenment philosophers (IMPORTANT: Karl Marx is NOT an Enlightenment philosopher!!!!!), what would they have thought about Fascism?