

## OTHER NATIONS

## *Fascism in Italy And Germany*

"Conquest, Foreign and Domestic, in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany" by MacGregor Knox, in *Journal of Modern History* (Mar. 1984), University of Chicago Press, P.O. Box 37005, Chicago, Ill. 60637.

Among scholars, decades of debate have made it harder to see what Adolf Hitler's Germany and Benito Mussolini's Italy had in common and what distinguished their fascism from the other major totalitarian ideology of the 20th century—Marxism.

Knox, a University of Rochester historian, says that the confusion arises because scholars refuse to take the two dictators at their word. But, he argues, Hitler and Mussolini both "expressed at the beginning of their careers coherent ideologies that were not necessarily entirely popular or plausible. . . . The steady radicalization of their policies suggests an attempt to bring practice into line with theory."

What distinguishes fascism from other forms of "political gangsterism," in Knox's view, is its peculiar strategy. Mussolini and Hitler both believed that to achieve revolution at home, conquest abroad was necessary. "Domestic policy must secure the inner strength of a people so that it can assert itself in the sphere of foreign policy," Hitler declared, "Foreign policy must secure the life of a people for its domestic political development."

Both Hitler and Mussolini advocated war as a means of national redemption that would prove the superiority of *das Volk* or *il Popolo* over the peoples of other nations. Hitler's goals were unlimited; he sought world domination. Mussolini's designs were more modest; he sought to erase Italy's image as "a small nation, disorderly, noisy, and fidgety," as he explained in 1925. Italy would extend its political rule over the Mediterranean (Mussolini's costly invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 was a first step in this direction) and recapture the glory of Rome to establish its cultural supremacy in Europe.

Mussolini had far more powerful domestic opponents than did Hitler, but neither dictator could eliminate all internal foes—in Mussolini's case, they included the Catholic Church, the military establishment, and King Victor Emmanuel III. Nor could either leader count on the unquestioning support of his people. Hitler, standing on the Reich Chancellery balcony to review Nazi troops on their way to occupy Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland in September 1939, was stunned to find the civilian spectators not ecstatic but "silent and sullen," Knox writes. War was the most effective way to keep potential dissidents quiet and to mobilize public support for fascism.

For most communist totalitarian states, Knox writes, "Ideology may dictate expansion, but in practice, foreign conquest is a bonus, not the indispensable prerequisite for transformation." Hitler could murder millions of Jews, but it took an all-out war effort to overcome the reservations of some clergymen, army officers, and other members of the German establishment. Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot, by contrast, were not constrained to accept any domestic opposition at all after they took power.