

Revisiting History

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During the rule of the Roman Empire the *fascia*, a bundle of sticks surrounding a spear, bound together with twine, was the symbol of the power of the Caesars. Any time the Roman Empire went to war, the *fascia* accompanied the army. The spear represented the might of the Roman military which would be deployed to defeat all external enemies. The sticks represented the internal power that the Empire would use to beat her citizens into submission to Roman law. These two powers - external and internal - were bound together to symbolize that the whole was stronger than the individual parts of the bundle.

Benito Amilcare Andrea Mussolini was born on July 29, 1883 in central Italy and moved to Switzerland in 1902, where he became involved in socialist politics. He returned to Italy in 1904, and over the next ten years worked as a journalist and eventually became editor of the Italian socialist newspaper *Avanti*. He was drafted into the Italian army in September 1915. Following World War I, where Mussolini reached the grade of corporal in the Italian army, Mussolini formed the Fascist Party, a coalition of hard-line nationalist political groups which won the support of many unemployed war veterans. Mussolini's form of government bundled the police and military power of the state with the economic power of industry. This new form of corporate/state partnership was called Fascism, referring to the old Roman *fascia*. According to Mussolini, "Fascism should more appropriately be called corporatism because it is a merger of state and corporate power." He gradually dismantled the institutions of democratic government and in 1925 made himself dictator, "Il Duce". His aim was to re-establish Italy as a great European power - the next Roman Empire.

Fascism won great appeal in other countries and the fascist system was adopted by Spain, Japan, and Germany as a "solution" to the worldwide economic depression of the 1930's. Adolf Hitler was a big admirer of Mussolini and patterned his Nazi (National Socialist) Party after Mussolini's Fascists. Hitler's Brown Shirts were a copy of Mussolini's armed squads which were known as Black Shirts, who terrorized and eliminated their political opponents. Fascism supposedly worked so well in Germany that Adolf Hitler was named *TIME* magazine's *Man of the Year* in February, 1939. Cole Porter wrote a song, "Anything Goes", which helped turn "Il Duce" into a pop icon, "You're the top!... you're Mussolini". From history, we know what followed.

Today people are nervous about another worldwide economic crisis - with good reason. We have recently witnessed massive government intervention into the American economy. The Federal Reserve Bank of New York provided an emergency loan to the investment bank Bear Stearns, the government bailed out insurance giant American International Group (AIG) to the tune of \$85 billion, the automotive industry received a \$25 billion government-backed loan guarantee program, and the American taxpayers got stuck with a \$700-plus billion bailout of quasi-government entities FMAE and FMAC. Meanwhile bankruptcies and foreclosures are at their highest levels since the Great Depression. Many believe we're sliding into a worldwide economic disaster similar to the 1930's which led to the rise of Fascism in Europe and around the world.

America is not-so-slowly moving in the direction of the corporate-state partnership. In a classic example of the fox guarding the henhouse, executives from regulated industries are heading up the agencies that are supposed to regulate them. Corporations and their agents have become the largest contributors to politicians and political parties. Chris Dodd, head of the Senate Banking Committee, has received more than \$165,000 (the largest recipient) and presidential candidate Barack Obama has received more than \$125,000 (the third largest recipient) in campaign donations from employees and political action committees of Freddie and Fannie.

Obama believes that we need to "spread the wealth around". It is not the role of a democratic government to redistribute income but Obama wants to institute government-run health care, government control of energy, government handouts for education, and government policing of AM talk-radio ("The Fairness Doctrine"). The federal government will essentially become intertwined with education, energy, media, health care, and the banking industry, in addition to the military. History has shown that whenever government and private industry get bundled together the results are disastrous. If all of Obama's plans are realized, the federal government will have come close to reproducing the policies of Mussolini - "a merger of state and corporate power" - and we will most likely encounter similar consequences.

"Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it." - *George Santayana*, philosopher, poet, literary and cultural critic.

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