

Hitler & Mussolini were primarily responsible for the growth of European tensions. Without their input, it is undoubtable that the conflict would never have occurred. However, in considering this brief, one must focus not only on the fact that these men were dictators, but also fascist dictators. The implications of this word are enormous. It essentially defines their foreign policy outlook, & the motivations behind their international machinations. In considering this, there are 3 key issues that must be addressed; firstly, the nature of fascism, secondly their aggressive foreign policy, & thirdly their determination to re-arm.

~~Mussolini~~ Fascism <sup>is</sup> ~~is~~ the brainchild of Mussolini. As a political concept, it is sheer genius. A highly rationalistic, right wing movement, with a totalitarian system of government under *Il Duce* (The Leader), and ~~a~~ no defined or set ideology, making it truly "all things to all men!" Its domestic & international policy is dominated by its <sup>first key</sup> feature, nationalism, <sup>the implications</sup> ~~connotations~~ of which are incredible pride & expensive militarism. Fascism is an inherently expansionist form of government. From this the importance of our two issues become ~~clear~~ most clear. More importantly, Fascism as a concept was new, and internationally

there was little experience in dealing with ~~it~~ it, the results of which will also be seen.

The foreign policy of both Germany & Italy were dictated by their leaders. Hitler, it is said, cared not for domestic policy. In the words of Richard J. Evans, "Foreign Policy was very much Hitler's domain". The same very much applied to Mussolini, and parallels can be seen in their respective foreign policies. Hitler's great aim was to re-establish the great Germanic Empire, to provide the ~~Third~~ Thousand-Year Reich's ~~own~~ elite Aryan race with "Lebensraum" (living space). His insatiable desire for a

great war of conquest over Eastern Europe's "bread basket" was an ideological drive set out in Mein Kampf. Similarly, Mussolini's foreign policy goal was the re-establishment of the Roman Empire; to reclaim the long lost glory of the Italian people. It was this goal that saw him invade Abyssinia and blow off the League of Nations' sanctions at the Hoare Laval Plan. In this regard it has been argued by historians such as AJP Taylor that war was not an inevitable result of the fascist dictatorships of Hitler & Mussolini, but rather the result of ~~a~~ diplomatic mismanagement by the League of Nations, & particularly Britain

& France. This line of argument, however, fails to satisfy. The insatiable desire for Hitler's "war of conquest" which would re-establish the two as great powers is undoubtedly the root cause of the growth of European tensions.

To facilitate this war, re-armament on an enormous scale was vital. Indeed, it was their programs of ~~re-arm~~ re-armament which led to the mutual suspicion over their international aims. Under the cloak of "economic encouragement," both nations actively pursued a rearmament, utilising the Abyssinian Crisis & Spanish Civil War to test & improve tactics & equipment.

This approach is inextricably linked to the militaristic nature of the rationalised fascist ~~so~~ philosophy. In both Germany & Italy, the importance of the army as both a national symbol & vehicle of social control cannot be stressed enough. The enormous Nuremberg rallies actively engaged both civilians (through the Hitler Youth, League of German Maidens & etc) and encouraged an association with the military, while conscription in both nations served to further this militarised society. This re-emanent was pursued for domestic & international ~~as~~ reasons, but its real impact on the growth of

tensions lies in one date: 1939.

Stated by Hitler in the Hossbach Memorandum as the date after which Germany's equipment becomes obsolete, it implies a final date for the commencement of hostilities.

The war was not only ideological now; it was economic too, and like the ideological drive for land, Hitler & Mussolini both played a central role in the pursuit of the policy which led to wide scale European re-armament.

This arms race is described by Lee as reaching a "point past which it becomes necessary to use an escape valve" in 1939.

It can thus be seen that Mussolini & Hitler were indeed

primarily responsible for the growth of European tensions. The nature of their Fascist dictatorships, their ideological desire for expansion & necessity for re-armament in achieving both domestic & foreign policy goals meant that the war in Europe was inevitable. Despite arguments which state that diplomatic mismanagement was really to blame, it can only be concluded that, were it not for the presence of Hitler & Mussolini, a European crisis would never have emerged. They form the root of the problem, and are thus primarily responsible for the tensions that led to the outbreak of war in 1939.