

Fascism and its Parallels with Communism

Romm, Mikhail, “*Ordinary Fascism*,” YouTube, 1965, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIAFJ7QIU7k>.

“*Ordinary Fascism*” or better known as “*Triumph Over Violence*” in the United States is a 1965 Soviet documentary film by Mikhail Romm focusing on the rise of fascism, its ideology, and its ultimate downfall. Although the film touches on fascism in different countries, such as Italy and the United Kingdom, its main focus lies within Nazism in Germany. The sources used in the film are footage of Nazi chronicles accessed from film archives of Berlin.¹ The commentator, who also happens to be the director (Mikhail Romm) makes commentaries on the featured footage, often in a sarcastic manner, mocking fascism and its followers. Mikhail Romm’s film is trying to answer how fascism emerged in Europe, how people responded to it, and how fascism became so popular. The film is also trying to explain how Nazis functioned in Germany and how Nazi ideology ultimately led to the destruction of millions of innocent lives. Finally, the film is trying to answer what led to the failure of fascism. While it seems that “*Ordinary Fascism*” is created to portray how evil and destructive fascism ideology is and to also critique the United States, the hidden meaning of the film draws parallels between fascism and Communism.

Before I start a further discussion of the film “*Ordinary Fascism*,” I need to mention that even though the movie does a great job explaining fascism, and more specifically Nazi ideology, how it spread, and how it failed, the film, like everything else in life, is not perfect. For example, Mikhail Romm mentions that Martin Bormann, Hitler’s deputy, was able to escape to Argentina.² A 1972 DNA analysis proved that Martin Bormann did not escape and most likely died on May 2, 1945.³ However, the “*Ordinary Fascism*” was made before it was proven that Martin Bormann did not escape and the widespread theory in 1965 was that Martin Bormann is residing in Argentina. Moreover, Mikhail Romm does not give credit to all the countries who fought against Nazi Germany and only focuses on the Soviet Union. But we should keep in mind that this is a Soviet film and the Soviet Union was not in the best relationship with the United States and the United Kingdom during the making of the film. The Soviet Union also suffered the most from the Nazis and it is natural for Romm to only focus on the achievements of the Soviet Union.

As the title of the film suggests, “*Ordinary Fascism*” portrays how fascism became popular and how horrible fascist ideology is. The film states that the success of fascism, and more specifically Nazism, came from Nazi leaders affecting the simple emotions in their subjects.⁴ In other words, propaganda allowed the Nazis to be revered by millions of Germans. Everything was carefully constructed to portray Nazis as good leaders who will lead Germany to a bright future. The film showed how Hitler was practicing his speeches and that Hitler would

¹ Shakirov, Mumin, “Mikhail Romm’s Book ‘Ordinary Fascism,’ has been Published,” Radio Freedom, February 22, 2007. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/377841.html>.

² Romm, Mikhail, “*Ordinary Fascism*,” YouTube, 1965, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIAFJ7QIU7k>.

³ Anonymous, “DNA Test Closes Book on Mystery of Martin Bormann,” The Independent, May 3, 1998, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/dna-test-closes-book-on-mystery-of-martin-bormann-1161449.html>.
<https://www.rbth.com/arts/333125-lenin-director-romm-fascism>.

⁴ Romm, Mikhail, “*Ordinary Fascism*,” YouTube, 1965, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIAFJ7QIU7k>.

stage his followers giving him flowers.⁵ Hitler's speeches and Hitler taking flowers were just attempts to show how much Hitler likes Germany and the Germans, which is just stirring powerful yet simple emotions in the Germans. Those powerful emotions allowed Germans to view Hitler as a god. To execute Hitler's orders without questioning him. To not be able to think, to not have a feeling of self and just be a part of a barbaric 'mass,' like Hitler liked calling people, whose purpose is to serve and kill for their Führer.⁶ Hitler was able to create a sense of national unity by creating an illusion that he himself believed; that Germans are superior to other nationalities and that Germans need to subdue and enslave those other nationalities.⁷ Hitler introduced the Germans to common enemies which in turn united Germans even more.⁸ To sum it up, Nazi ideology sought destruction and killings by creating selfless barbaric murderers. But eventually, this ideology of being superior from other ethnicities led to the destruction of Hitler's Reich. Turns out that people with 'wrong skulls' (like Romm sarcastically named people of non 'Aryan' ethnicities to mock the Nazi notion of 'right' or 'wrong' skulls)⁹ were able to defeat the Aryan with 'good skulls.'

"*Ordinary Fascism*" also critiques the United States. Throughout the film Mikhail Romm states that the Nazis created animals from people.¹⁰ Footage of Nazi era sculptures shown in the film prove that Nazis highly praised warriors; those who can mercilessly kill and destroy.¹¹ When the film showed contemporary footage, it also included training of the United States Marine Corps. The men from the footage were aggressive and somewhat frightening. While showing the footage, Mikhail Romm says, "They are trying to create animals from people."¹² Mikhail Romm draws a comparison between the United States and the Nazi Germany. He is trying to portray the United States as a danger. And this is understandable because this Soviet film was made in 1965, during the Cold War. Naturally, the United States would not be praised in a Soviet film of that time.

"*Ordinary Fascism*" is made to draw parallels between fascism and Soviet Communism. Although this is not explicitly stated in the film due to strict Soviet censorship, this is even later admitted by Maya Turovskaya, one of the screenwriters of the film. According to her in a 2021 interview,

Of course, they [reviewers] were writing about it as a film made about Nazi Germany. But when me and Yura [Yuri Khanyutin, one of the screenwriters] were thinking about the creation of the film, we, at any rate, did not hide this from ourselves. That our questions are not only addressed to Nazi Germany but to our own country. We meant every form of totalitarianism, and, generally speaking, the film is made that way.¹³

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Borisov, Strugatsky, "Iron Hand, Bone Leg, and Other Charms of Order," rusf.ru, 2019, <https://www.rusf.ru/abs/books/publ47.htm>.

⁹ Romm, Mikhail, "*Ordinary Fascism*," YouTube, 1965, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIAEJ7OIU7k>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Turovskaya, Maya, "They Demanded From Romm That the Word 'Jew' Not Be Mentioned in the Film at All," Guild of Documentary Film and Television, 2021.

<https://rgdoc.ru/materials/intervyu/22559-mayya-turovskaya-ot-romma-potrebovali-chtoby-slovo-evrey-voobshche-v-filme-ne-upominalos/>.

This critiquing comparison between Nazism and Soviet Communism can be seen when Romm would sarcastically say things like, “Führer said and we execute because we have taken an oath and we are not allowed to think.” Drawing parallels between Nazism and Soviet Communism can also be seen when the film shows how Germans were eagerly trying to touch Hitler’s hands, revering him like a god. Like the publicist Vadim Zaidman wrote in 2019, “Footage of Nazi chronicles with deification of Hitler immediately called on in memory similar frames of Soviet chronicles.”¹⁴ Communist, and to be more specific Stalinist propaganda aimed at portraying Stalin as a deity, a deity devoted to his nation. Therefore, people had to revere this god and execute every order he made. This is, frankly, what the Nazi propaganda did. But the similarities between Soviet Communism and Nazism do not end there. Romm also critiqued the Nazi regime for destruction of books that did not align with Nazi ideology. But this is also what happened in the Soviet Union; books that did not align with Soviet ideology were censored.¹⁵

So is the movie suitable for education? Well, it depends. If the purpose is to teach how fascism emerged, how fascist ideology worked, and how similar Nazi ideology is to Soviet Communist ideology, then I think that the film is excellent, especially for older audiences since the footage used can be very disturbing. “One of the best film tapes of modern cinematography which is nowhere comparable to dumb American parody-comedies, nor with modern mocking films that cause in me a sense of outrage,”¹⁶ said a reviewer of this film. Although this sounds a bit harsh, I wholeheartedly agree with the author. Yet, if the purpose of the film is to teach about Holocaust, then the film does not focus on it much. However, the film does mention that the Nazis implemented death camps to destroy people whom they deemed inferior to them. And according to Maya Turovskaya, Romm was told to not use the word ‘Jew’ in the film.¹⁷ However, when Romm did use the word ‘Jew,’ he used it along with other nationalities (in the Soviet Union Jews were considered a nationality). However, the film also faced criticism. Journalist Dmitry Gubin said, “Now I will put the blame on Mikhail Romm for the film *“Ordinary Fascism,”* where Romm constantly laughs on Hitler... But one should be horrified by the banality of evil and that Hitler can be revived in the heads of his victors.”¹⁸ But I personally think that ridiculing evil does not interfere with the fear of ‘reviving Hitler in the minds of his victors.’ And I also think that Romm expressed this fear when, for example, he mentioned that Americans are trying to create animals from people when showing the footage of Marine Corps training.¹⁹

Word Count: 1425

¹⁴ Zaidman, Vadim, “Last of Mohicans,” Kasparov.ru - Internet-Newspaper of Free Russia, 2019.

<http://www.kasparov.ru/material.php?id=5C88E6B1B377B>.

¹⁵ Moore, Eleanor, “Banned, Censored, Exiled,” Shapero Rare Books, February 24, 2023,

https://shapero.com/en-us/blogs/bookshop-blog/censorship-of-books-in-the-soviet-union?srsId=AfmBOopqt3DZxydGo5JtxRTAbh_IklorEwiozLHCxtG54yUxCJS7J43u.

¹⁶ Anonymous, “Ordinary Fascism (1965),” Kinopoisk.ru, Accessed March 1, 2025.

https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/14062/?utm_referer=www.google.com.

¹⁷ Turovskaya, Maya, “They Demanded From Romm That the Word ‘Jew’ Not Be Mentioned in the Film at All,” Guild of Documentary Film and Television, 2021.

<https://rgdoc.ru/materials/intervyu/22559-mayya-turovskaya-ot-romma-potrebovali-chtoby-slovo-evrey-voobshche-v-filme-ne-upominalos-/>.

¹⁸ Gubin, Dmitry, “Laugh and Sin,” Borders.ru, Accessed March 13, 2025.

<https://graniru.org/opinion/m.286595.html>.

¹⁹ Romm, Mikhail, “Ordinary Fascism,” YouTube, 1965, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIAFJ7OIU7k>.

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<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/dna-test-closes-book-on-mystery-of-martin-bormann-1161449.html>.

This website explains the controversy surrounding Nazi deputy Martin Bormann's death. The popular theory before 1972 was that Martin Bormann escaped to Argentina. However, a 1972 DNA analysis proved that he indeed did not escape.

Anonymous, "Ordinary Fascism (1965)," Kinopoisk.ru, Accessed March 1, 2025.
https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/14062/?utm_referrer=www.google.com.

This anonymous reviewer gives a brief overview on how the film "*Ordinary Fascism*" was made. He/she praises the film and how it ridicules Nazis. The author considers it a masterpiece that is nowhere close to comparison with mockery films about Nazism. Since this is written in Russian, I had to translate it myself.

Borisov, Strugatsky, "Iron Hand, Bone Leg, and Other Charms of Order," rusf.ru, 2019.
<https://www.rusf.ru/abs/books/publ47.htm>.

This sci-fi author who watched "*Ordinary Fascism*" is interpreting the hidden meaning of the film. According to him, the film is drawing parallels between fascism and Soviet Communism. Therefore, this film has a powerful debunking nature. Since this is written in Russian, I had to translate it myself. This source was found in Wikipedia.

Gubin, Dmitry, "Laugh and Sin," Borders.ru, Accessed March 13, 2025.
<https://graniru.org/opinion/m.286595.html>.

This journalist is critical of the film "*Ordinary Fascism*." He thinks that it is unnecessary to critique the evil that is Nazism. He thinks that this film set a precedent on mocking the enemies of Russia. Since this is written in Russian, I had to translate it myself. This source was found in Wikipedia.

Moore, Eleanor, "Banned, Censored, Exiled," Shapero Rare Books, February 24, 2023.
https://shapero.com/en-us/blogs/bookshop-blog/censorship-of-books-in-the-soviet-union?srsId=AfmBOopqt3DZxydGo5JtxRTAbh_IklorEwiozLHCxtG54yUxCJS7J43u.

This website explains how Soviet authorities starting 1922 started banning books that did not align with Soviet ideology. This pattern increased under Stalin's rule. The restrictions became less severe after Stalin's death.

Romm, Mikhail, “*Ordinary Fascism*,” YouTube, 1965,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIAFJ7QIU7k>.

This film explains the beginning of fascism in Europe, how its ideology worked, and how it faced demise. The film is in Russian so I had to translate it myself. The film’s main focus lies on Nazims in Germany.

Shakirov, Mumin, “Mikhail Romm’s Book ‘Ordinary Fascism,’ Has Been Published,” Radio Freedom, February 22, 2007, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/377841.html>.

This website uses an interview by one of the screenwriters of the film. The screenwriter explains how the film was made. Since this is written in Russian, I had to translate it myself. This source was found in Wikipedia.

Turovskaya, Maya, “They Demanded From Romm That the Word ‘Jew’ Not Be Mentioned in the Film at All,” Guild of Documentary Film and Television, 2021.
<https://rgdoc.ru/materials/intervyu/22559-mayya-turovskaya-ot-romma-potrebovali-chtoby-slovo-evrey-voobshche-v-filme-ne-upominalos-/>.

This is an interview by one of the screenwriters of “*Ordinary Fascism*”. In this interview she talks about the process of the film making and the difficulties. She admits that the film was meant to compare fascism with Soviet Communism. Since this is written in Russian, I had to translate it myself. This source was found in Wikipedia.

Zaidman, Vadim, “Last of Mohicans.” Kasparov.ru, Internet-Newspaper of Free Russia, 2019.
<http://www.kasparov.ru/material.php?id=5C88E6B1B377B>.

This publicist reviews the “*Ordinary Fascism*” He mentions that Nazi and Soviet propaganda footage look similar. He realizes that the movie is meant to be a comparison between fascism and Soviet Communism. Since this is written in Russian, I had to translate it myself. This source was found in Wikipedia.