

SUMMARY – ITALY 1870-1922

”The Move to Global War”

ITALIAN FASCISM: Mussolini set up the first fascist units in March 1919 – the “*fascio di combattimento*” (“*fascio*” means group and hints towards the old Roman symbol of the magistrate of sticks “*fasces*” bound together).

FASCIST IDEOLOGY: So what was the Italian “*fascist ideology*”?

Fascist ideology is not a very clear ideology... Fascism promoted nationalism, a strong leader (dictator), single-party government, empire building and war. It was anti-communist, against class-struggle, against internationalism, against a multi-party liberal democracy and against pacifism.

Key features of Italian fascism under Mussolini:

NATIONALISM

- View of the nation state, its culture and history, as a unifying force
- Desire to move foreign influence
- Own nation seen as superior to other nations

MILITARISM

- Promotion of political violence and was a method of revitalizing society
- Violence seen as necessary in order to progress
- Development of paramilitary organizations

SOCIAL DARWINISM

- The belief that races have evolved as superior to other races
- “*Survival of the fittest*”

SOCIAL UNITY

- Opposes class-based divisions in society and promotes collective national society

AUTHORITARIANISM

- Totalitarian; the state has influence or control over all aspects of society
- The people are subservient to the state
- Mussolini: “*obedience not discussion*”

FASCIST FOREIGN POLICY: The Italian Foreign Policy under Mussolini was influenced by the fascist ideology as well as:

- Italy’s geographical position and its limited economic resources
- Previous foreign policy humiliations (especially the defeat at the Battle of Adowa in Abyssinia 1896)
- The Paris Peace Settlements after WWI
- The changing international context

BACKGROUND: Italy was first unified 1861. This unification was completed in 1870 when Venetia as well as Rome had been added to the previous unified nation. The period that followed - 1870 to 1922/1923 is an era known as “*Liberal Italy*”. This period brought along several problems:

- Lack of a common national identity (note the differences between north and south)
- Resistance from the Pope and the Catholic Church
- Working-class protest and the force of socialism (PSI – The Italian Socialist Party founded in 1892)
- WWI (Italy signed the Treaty of London 1915 with Britain, France and Russia which Italy believed had promised them South Tyrol, Trentino, Istria, Fiume, Dalmatia and some colonies. Italy received the three first territories but not Fiume, Dalmatia and any colonies)

- Nationalism which demanded a completion of the unification and a revision of the Paris Peace Settlements (The dissatisfaction led to widespread support of D'Annunzio's occupation of Fiume 1919)

WEAK POLITICAL SYSTEM AND GROWING ECONOMIC PROBLEMS: The above problems affected Italy's political system – the liberal democracy. Giovanni Giolitti (Prime Minister 1903-05; 1906-09; 1911-14) tried to find some understanding with the more moderate socialists and the Catholic Church before WWI. This was partly successful before WWI but at the same time the PSI (Italian Socialist Party) and the PPI (The Italian Catholic Party) grew and they started to ignore the liberals and the Prime Minister. The Italian participation during WWI was very much a move backed up by nationalist and the more conservative forces of Italy. PPI (The Italian Catholic Party), the liberals under Giolitti and the PSI (The Italian Socialists) were against the participation of the war. When an editor of the socialist newspaper *Avanti* in 1915 argued in favor of Italian intervention he was expelled from the party and fired from his position as editor. His name was Benito Mussolini.

The post-war political problems: After the war the weakened liberal movement started to lose control. The extension of votes made the liberals weaker and we now saw a period of several short-term coalitions which undermined the liberal democratic parliamentary system. When the Italian population realized the lack of gains from WWI it enforced their critique against the government and the political system.

The post-war depression; high inflation (that seriously hit the workers and the middle class that had to work with specific fixed wages) and unemployment made the situation worse. Emigration to the US which had been an option before WWI was halted due to new harsh US immigration restrictions.

Communism: The Russian Revolution in October 1917 led to a widespread fear and unrest in several countries in Europe. Many Italian workers frustrated over the post-war depression and the inability of the Italian government to help them started to support the growing forces of revolutionary socialism in Italy. In 1921 the PCI (the Italian Communist Party) was founded.

Southern Italy: The economic situation and the growing radicalism also affected the very poor south. In several areas the landless peasants protested and used violence against their landowners. Italy seemed to be on the edge of a Civil War or a Revolution...

FASCIST PARTY: The Fascists under Mussolini benefited from the post-war situation. They openly opposed the Socialists and Communists – not only ideologically but also were prepared to confront them on the street physically. This led to support from wealthy industrialists, landowners and the Catholic Church. Pope Pius XI backed Mussolini as a way of improving the relations between the state and church (as well as hindering the anti-religious movement of socialism and communism). In November 1921 the Italian fascists officially became a political party – the National Fascist Party (Partito Nazionale Fascista, PNF). In the 1921 election the Fascist Party (PNF) received 35 seats. The socialists (PSI) and communists (PCI) received 138 seats and the Catholic Party (PPI) received 108 seats. Italian politics was polarizing...

1922:...