

## **BENITO MUSSOLINI 1883-1922**

**B**enito Mussolini was born in 1883 at Predappio near Forli in the Romagna district (northeast Italy - north of Florence, south of Bologna). His father was a blacksmith (+ a devoted socialist!) and his mother was a schoolmistress.

Benito was expelled from a Catholic Seminary after he had stabbed a fellow pupil.

**1901** - Mussolini graduated as an elementary school-teacher. He taught in 1901, but he was not a success. He had discipline problems!

**1902** - He went to Switzerland - to avoid the military service? In Switzerland he picked up several socialist and syndicalist ideas.

**1904** - Benito returned to Italy and completed his military service (between 1905 and 1909). He taught briefly in 1909...

**1910** - Mussolini became an editor of "*La Lotta di Classe*" (The Class Struggle). He worked hard as a local organizer for the Socialist Party.

**1911** - Jailed for condemning the Italian conquest of Libya (followed the French policy in North Africa). Mussolini meant that the Tripolitan War was an economic drain and it diverted the attention from the country's problems. He also tried to found his own revolutionary party (he criticized the Socialist Party for being too cooperative with the parliamentary democracy...)

**1912** - He rejoined the Socialist Party (after winning the congress to a more revolutionary position). He was now also the editor of the Socialist paper "*Avanti*" (Forward) and was recognized as one of the leading Italian socialists. According to Lenin later, he was the only Italian socialist capable of bringing about revolution in Italy. Mussolini's views was that a violent insurrection by a minority in order to establish authoritarian rule was favorable...

**1913** - He failed to gain election to the Assembly as the representative for the working-class area of Forli. This made him consider the means of achieve power.

**1914** - In October Mussolini formed "*Fasci d'Azione*" (Action Groups). They promoted involvement in the First World War.

**1915** - Expelled from the Socialist Party because he advocated Italian involvement against Austria-Hungary in the First World War. He thought that this involvement could lead to a revolutionary situation... After the dismissal he started a newspaper "*Il Popolo d'Italia*" (The People of Italy). This paper was financed by wealthy industrialists - who favored war (and for a while by France...)

**1915-1917** - Mussolini fought in the First World War. First as a corporal and then as a sergeant. He was injured in February 1917 - and spent six months in the hospital. After that he returned to Milan and continued editing "*Il Popolo d'Italia*".

**1919** - In February 1919 Mussolini began to form groups called "*Fasci di Combattimento*". His program called for

- an 8-hour day
- worker participation in management
- profit-sharing for workers
- vote at the age of 18
- a coalition of producers (both middle class and proletariat)

In March 1919, these groups were merged into the **FASCIST PARTY**. They demanded full implementation of Italy's claims at the 1919 Paris Peace talks. The party won little support from either the left or the right, partly as the members had to swear "*to follow without question the orders of the Duce*".

**1922** - Skillful exploitation of post-1918 discontent, his readiness to use violence and his support of the king made Mussolini Prime Minister in October 1922, even though the Fascist Party didn't do very well in the elections and had little support in the Chamber. Mussolini was only 39 years old - and he was the youngest Prime Minister in Italy ever!