

THE FASCIST PARTY IN ITALY – EARLY DEVELOPMENT

March 1919 - Mussolini establish the **Fascista Italiani di Combattimento** (in Milan). This was a small cell of discontented war veterans and nationalists. They were attracted by Mussolini's liberal (in some ways socialist) ideas. You could see a great influence of left-wing politics (especially influences from French Syndicalism):

- Decentralization of government
- Profit-sharing for workers
- Worker participation in management
- vote at the age of 18
- 8-hour day
- Fulfill Italy's demands at the Paris Settlement (Nationalism)

Denis Mack Smith (Mussolini, 1981) writes in his extensive biography of Mussolini "*Fascism was not a system of immutable beliefs but a path to political power.*"

NOTE: There were over 70 different fascist small organizations with different leaders in Italy before 1921. Fascista Italiani di Combattimento under Mussolini was just one of them!

November 1919 - Failure in the first election (local participation in the city of Milan) - The fascists had 2 candidates but did not win any seat in the parliament. With this disappointment + the popularity of D'Annunzio the fascist policy changed towards the right.

The members swore "*to follow without question the orders of the Duce*". Duce was Italian for leader and Mussolini took that title. The ancient Roman symbol of the fasces was adopted (a bundle of birch sticks, usually with an axe at the centre).



Number of members in the fascist movement during the first years;

1919 December - 870 members

1920 - 20.000 members

1921 - 250.000 members

1922 (May) - 320.000 members

1920 - Mussolini began a campaign for the parliament. He now used the "**twin themes**" of **Nationalism** and **Anti-Bolshevism**. Mussolini also supported the free enterprises. These changes gave the fascists under Mussolini support - both from the middle class and the wealthier upper class. Big businesses like **Fiat** motor Company, **Pirelli tire Company** and the **Italian Banking Association** began to give substantial contributions to Mussolini.

End of 1920 - Squadristi - a paramilitary organization to Italian fascists was formed. They were not controlled by Mussolini but usually followed the local fascist leader (ras)...

April/May 1921. Success in the elections. Mussolini was part of an alliance. In 1921 the Prime Minister - liberal Giovanni Giolitti called for new elections. Under the impression of the growing support of the fascists Giolitti accepted Mussolini's offer of an electoral pact. As part of a government alliance the fascists won 35 parliamentary seats in the elections (in a parliament of 535). This was a small start but it gave Mussolini "*a new authority, and respectability and a*

valuable freedom from arrest". (Denis Mack Smith). Noticeable is that the socialists won 122 seats, the Catholic People's Party 107 seats and the small Communist Party 16 seats.

July 1921 - "Pact of Pacification". Mussolini tried to make a "truce" with the socialists. This pact only lasted a few months but won some respect among the population of Italy.

November 1921 – the Fascist Party (PNF Partito Nazionale Fascista) is formally formed. Now several of the fascist groups became part of a national movement under the leadership of Mussolini.

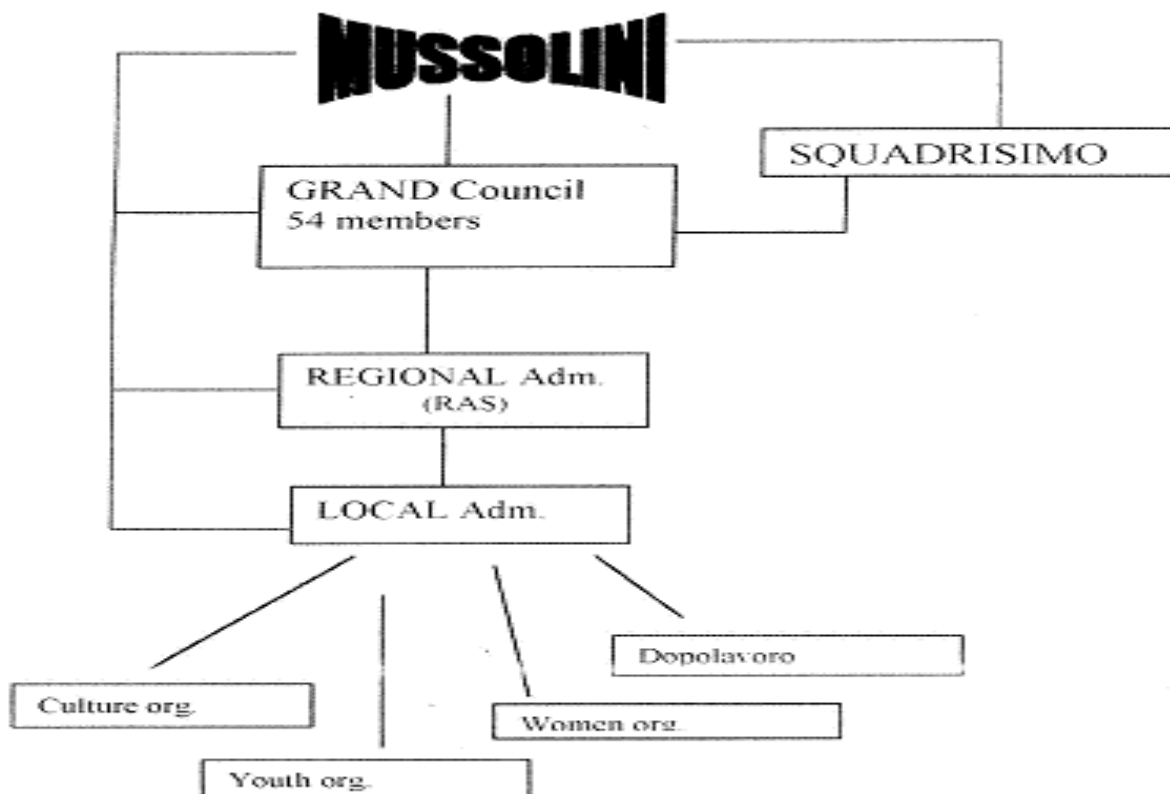
August 1922 - "General Strike" - The crisis in Italian politics continued to work at the advantage of the fascists. The "Squadristi" were very "active" against the socialists in the general strike of August 1922. The strike was badly organized and ill-led and it collapsed within 24 hours. Though the fascists got the credit for "saving" the country. The Squadristi continued the struggle against the socialists. By October they had burnt down 500 workers' meeting places and broken up about 900 meetings (esp. in Milan and Bologna)

October 1922 - March on Rome!

December 1922 - Fascist Grand Council founded. This was formally the highest organ of the Fascist State though it could do little against Mussolini's will. Nevertheless, its mere existence pointed to the fact that Mussolini was never in full control of his own party which the "incident" of 1943 shows. The Fascist Grand Council voted with seventeen against seven to support the motion of Mussolini's dismissal. He was arrested the next day, but eventually German troops liberated him...

December 1922 the Squadristi was transformed into an official paramilitary body called the Volunteer Militia for National Security (MVSN - *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale*). They took an oath of loyalty to the Italian State - not the King!!!

AFTER 1922



FASCIST INSTITUTIONS

Duce

- Appointed Prime Minister by the King and could have been dismissed by him
- Head of Government (and by 1933 head of seven ministries)
- Mussolini headed all three military ministries 1924–29, 1933–43
- Great personality cult

Fascist Grand Council

- Mussolini its President. Had the right to choose its members and the timing of meetings
- By 1928 could exclusively decide who should become a Deputy or Senator
- Could determine successor to throne and to Mussolini
- In theory the highest organ of the Fascist regime, in practice subordinate to Mussolini

PNF

- Subordinated to state bureaucracy
- Increasingly used just for propaganda purposes, not as policy-making body

MVSN and OVRA

- Fascist squads incorporated into new militia
- New secret police but limited impact

Corporations

- Complex system developed from 1926
- System extended until 1934 mixed corporations
- Regulated labour contracts but little say in economy
- 1939 new Fasces and Corporations Chamber powerless