



# REVISION – FASCIST ITALY



## LONG-TERM CAUSES

### SHORT-TERM CAUSES

### CONSOLIDATION OF POWER

**MATERIAL:** Old Morris (HL) = 286-302 Newest Morris (SL) = 297-327 Traynor = 171-202/252-305

### LONG-TERM CAUSES:

- **Debased and corrupt parliament – Transforism:** Italy had a debased and corrupt form of parliamentary system - *”Transforism”* - welding together large and sometimes unlikely coalitions in support of ministries. They lacked true party spirit and ruled out any real clash to alternative party principles:\_\_\_\_\_
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- **Social and Economic problems:** Italy had enormous social and economic problems especially in the backward power-stricken south... The problems in Italy led to mass emigration. In 1914 six million Italians (out of 41 million) lived and worked abroad.:\_\_\_\_\_
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- **Fear of Socialism:** The growing force of socialism (stimulated by the industrial growth of the late 1880’s and the early 1890’s) had about 25% of the electoral votes before WWI. They were weakened by constant divisions and many of the leaders preferred reforms in stead of revolution:\_\_\_\_\_
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- **Catholic Church:** The Pope and the Catholic Church opposed Italy since it’s unification. The Church instructed ”good Catholics” to boycott the elections. This policy was relaxed in 1904 - not because any increased regard for the state, but from fear of the increasing influence of socialism. Therefore the church became a potential ally of the more conservative elements in the state...:\_\_\_\_\_
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- **Nationalists:** Constant attacks from a resurgent nationalist party. They were more an intellectual influence (especially from the support of writer Gabriele D’Annunzio) than an electoral success... This nationalism was stimulated by the Tripolitan War 1911-1912.:\_\_\_\_\_
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### SHORT-TERM CAUSES:

- **Dissatisfaction with the treaties after WWI** - Italy had lost 700.000 men and 1 million men were wounded. After the war Italy therefore made extensive claims. They received South Tyrol, Istria and Trieste. They also claimed but did not receive Dalmatia, several Aegean islands and the town of Fiume. This made Italians frustrated and was used in the propaganda of the nationalists. The exservicemen became an important ingredient in the fascist combat groups\_\_\_\_\_
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- **Dissatisfaction with the economic situation** - 3 million men were de-mobilized after the war. This led to widespread unemployment - By November 1919 Italy had 2 million unemployed. This together with the poverty in the south (especially among the landless

peasants) and a huge inflation led to a very tense situation. (The inflation was 560% between 1914 and 1921...):\_\_\_\_\_

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- **General disorder - strikes and factory occupations:** In 1920 over 2000 strikes occurred (280 in Milan in 1919). Many of the wealthy landowners and industrialists feared a Bolshevik style take-over. In the south peasants began to seize land. They were ready to turn to someone that could bring order...:\_\_\_\_\_
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- **Political instability:** In 1919 Italy introduced a proportional system in the parliament. This didn't seem to change the political instability. Without a political tradition no party would gain an absolute majority. So the coalitions between different parties continued (and the quarrels continued). Italy had five different governments between 1919-1922.\_\_\_\_\_
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- **Fiume incident (or "Christmas of Blood"):** The writer and war-hero D'Annunzio (together with 2600 legionaries) occupied the town of Fiume in September 1919. They transferred it into a city-state and established an authoritarian government. There wasn't any reaction from the Italian government until December 1920 when regular troops attacked and seized the city. The public saw the late reaction as a "weakness" of the government and when they finally did something the action was viewed as "unpatriotic". (In the Treaty of Rapallo 1922 Fiume became an international city. In 1924 it was acquired by Italy in agreement with Yugoslavia):\_\_\_\_\_
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- **Fascist Party:** The Fascist Party had already been established in March 1919. At first you could see a great influence of left-wing politics (especially influences from French Syndicalism). In the program was \* Decentralisation of government \* Profit-sharing for workers \* Worker participation in management \* Coalition of producers (both middle class and proletariat) \* vote at the age of 18. 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.*" With the disappointing results of the Milan election in November 1919 (The fascists had 2 candidates but did not win any seat in the parliament) the fascist policy began to change to the right. In December 1919 the fascists had only 87 members. In 1920 Mussolini began a campaign for the parliament. In July 1921 he made the "*Pact of Pacification*" with the socialists. This pact only lasted a few months but won some respect among the population of Italy. The new "twin themes" of the Fascist Party were - Nationalism and Anti-Bolshevism. Mussolini now also supported the free enterprises. These changes gave the fascists support - both from the middle class and the wealthier upper class. Big businesses like Fiat motor Company, Pirelli tyre Company and the Italian Banking Association began to give substantial contributions to the Fascists. By late 1921 the party claimed 320.000 members...:\_\_\_\_\_
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- **Squadristo** - By the end of 1920 a paramilitary armed organization was established - "*Squadristo*". These squads took violent action against striking urban workers and rural socialist labor leagues:\_\_\_\_\_
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- **Electoral 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: \_\_\_\_\_

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- **The "General Strike" of August 1922** - 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): \_\_\_\_\_
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- **March on Rome** - On 27 October of 1922 the fascist movement mobilized, and attempted to cut off all lines of communication to the capital in order to prepare for a march on Rome to seize power in a *coup*. This *coup d'état* succeeded. Why? - It was **not** because of Mussolini's position of strength but on the *active and passive support from local governments*, the *unwillingness of the political, economic and social establishment to resist the fascists* (they had the hope Mussolini might put an end to the perceived socialist threat) and in the end *the surprising refusal of King Victor Emmanuel III to sign his prime minister's decree on martial law*. Some historians claim that the king was afraid of being replaced by his cousin - the pro-fascist "Duke of Aosta". Mussolini exploited this situation and demanded the premiership. Mussolini became the youngest Prime Minister in Italian history: \_\_\_\_\_
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### CONSOLIDATION OF POWER

- **Vote of Confidence – November 1922:** On the 16<sup>th</sup> of November the Chamber gave him a vote of confidence (306 votes to 116) in a massive reversal of his previous fortunes \_\_\_\_\_
- **Temporary powers:** On the 25<sup>th</sup> of November the king gave him dictatorial power to restore order and introduce reforms. This power was to last until the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1923: \_\_\_\_\_
- **The fascist militia becomes a part of the Italian military system:** In January 1923 the fascist squads were transformed into the "MSVN", a volunteer militia for national security. They took the oath to the state and not the king like its predecessor the Royal Guard. This provided Mussolini with a private army of 300.000 men! \_\_\_\_\_
- **Fascist indoctrination in the police forces and the local administration:** Throughout 1923 there were changes of personnel in key jobs, like the police force, the prefectures and local governments: \_\_\_\_\_
- **ACCERBO LAW:** In November 1923 the Accerbo electoral law was debated. By this law, the party that received the highest number of votes in an election, provided that it won at least 25% of the votes, would automatically receive two-thirds of the seats in the Chamber. The rest of the seats would be divided proportionally. This would put an end to the

weak coalition governments that had for so long plagued Italian politics. For this reason it was supported by Parliamentarians like Giolitti and Salandra. \_\_\_\_\_

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- **ELECTION 1924:** The election of 1924 was a huge victory for the fascist electoral alliance. Several Right-wing and liberal politicians, such as Orlando and Salandra, had joined this alliance. The fascists and their supporters won some two-thirds of the votes (4.5 million) and the divided opposition one-third (2.5 million). After this it was hard to prevent Mussolini and the fascists to do as they liked. It also provided the king to take no action against the fascists, whatever they did... The people had shown their overwhelming support for them...: \_\_\_\_\_
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- **Improved economy:** Unemployment fell by 72%. This started before Mussolini took over as a result of the general European recovery after WWI. But it was also a result of the Finance Minister 1922-1925 Alberto de Stefani. Alberto de Stefani followed a liberal economic policy with few government controls. He balanced the budget (for example by reducing the government expenditure, by rationalizing the tax system, and by giving a freer rein to industry). And brought economic growth (for example by ending government monopolies on things such as telephones and insurance): \_\_\_\_\_
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- **CRISIS – Matteotti murder:** Big business and many Catholics supported Mussolini's struggle against Communism though when Matteotti was murdered in 1924 came the first major crisis for the fascists and Mussolini...: \_\_\_\_\_
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- **Reign of Terror:** In the beginning of 1925 Mussolini addresses the Parliament and takes responsibility for Fascism and the violence (but not the Matteotti murder). He also announced that he would act within 48 hours and set up a dictatorship. This launched the "*Reign of terror*" (this had been the demand from radical fascists like the new party secretary Farinacci who was behind most of this campaign). A wave of arrests and other measures against opponents: \_\_\_\_\_
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- **PRESS LAW:** State control of the Press...: \_\_\_\_\_
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- **RULE BY DECREE:** In December 1925 Mussolini was given "Great executive powers". He could now rule Italy by decree!: \_\_\_\_\_
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- **Economic deterioration:** In July 1925 Count Giuseppe Volpi became the new Finance Minister. - His deflating policy became the beginning of the economic deterioration: \_\_\_\_\_
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- **ROCCO LAW** (April 1926) - Strikes and lockouts were banned. Any disputes should be settled by a labor court (there were 16 different kinds) against which there was no appeal. By 1926 the Fascist unions were grouped into 13 corporations (6 for employers, 6 for employees - agriculture, banking, commerce, industry, land+transport+internal navigation and sea+air transport. The 13<sup>th</sup> corporation represented the intellectuals like priests and artists). In theory the **CORPORATIVE STATE** were set up **to advise the government on economic matters and to help coordinate the economy** but in practice they were meant to facilitate **government control** (In 1934 the corporations were increased to 22): \_\_\_\_\_

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- **OVRA:** The secret police OVRA was established in September 1926:
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- **Law for the defense of the State (October 1926):** After another assassination attempt against Mussolini a formal decree - The new law for the defense of the State banned all other political parties:
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- **New Electoral Law (September 1928):** The new electoral law gave the right to the *Fascist Grand Council* (headed by Mussolini) to decide about the composition of the assembly (parliament). The Council suggested a list of 400 nominees. The electorate could accept or reject the list. Morris writes that “*it is surprising that as many as 136.000 voters rejected the list in 1929*”. After this the number of rejections fell...:
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- **Fascist Grand Council:** In December 1928 the king was deprived the right to select new Prime Minister – this right was given to the Fascist Grand Council:
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- **LATERAN ACCORDS 1929:** Mussolini and the Pope reach an agreement about the position of the Catholic Church in Italy. The Pope was granted the Vatican City and paid annually for the loss of the Papal State and Rome in 1870. Catholicism became state religion, compulsory religious education was established in secondary school and divorce outlawed:
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