

# FASCISM IN ITALY

## Post War Italy (1918-1922)

**TASK 1:** Italy was one of the four main winning powers of the First World War. Can you remember why Italy joined the war? What was promised to Italy by the **Treaty of London**? How successful was the Italian army?

### Post war problems:

- Heavy casualties and war debt .....
- Industrial crisis .....
- Disillusionment with the Treaty of Versailles .....
- Growing influence of the Communists .....
- Political instability .....

} Ideal conditions for radicals to seize power



## Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) and Fascism

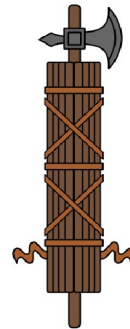
Benito Mussolini had quite a colourful background. As a child he was thrown out of his basic school because he stabbed his classmate. However, he became a teacher. Unable to maintain order in class he used to give the pupils sweets to buy their attention. He was a member of many revolutionary groups with reputation for violence and unpredictability. He then worked as a popular and successful journalist for the socialist tabloid **Avanti**. As a socialist he opposed war but later for unknown reasons he changed his mind, edited a pro war, nationalist newspaper **Il Popolo di Italia** and joined the army.

In the post war turmoil he worked in Milan, where in **1919** he set up the **Fascist** movement.

## Fascism

The word Fascism reflects on the symbol of power in Ancient Rome – **Fasces**

**TASK 2:** Study the picture of Fasces. What symbolic meaning does it have?



**TASK 3:** Read the extract from Mussolini's *Le dottrina del Fascismo* (1941) and try to identify the distinctive features of Fascism.

*Being anti-individualistic, the Fascist system of life stresses the importance of the State and recognizes the individual in so far as his interests coincide with those of the State, which stands for the consciousness and universality of man as an historic entity. It is opposed to classic Liberalism. ... Liberalism denied the State in the name of the individual; Fascism reasserts the rights of the State as expressing the real essence of the individual. And if liberty is to be the attribute of living men and not that of abstract dummies invented by individualistic Liberalism, then Fascism stands for liberty and for the only liberty worth having, the liberty of the State and of the individual within the State. The Fascist conception of the State is all-embracing; outside it no human or spiritual values may exist, much less have any value. Thus understood Fascism is totalitarian and the Fascist state, as a synthesis and a unit which includes all values, interprets, develops and lends additional power to the whole of life of the people.*

### The main principles of Fascism:

- **Extreme nationalism** – everything subordinate to the interest of the nation, competition of nations
- **Totalitarian system** – state, collective more important than an individual, the states has a total control over the people, not only political but attempts to control their thinking, leisure time
- **One party, one leader** – only a strong, charismatic leader – **Il duce** – can save the nation
- **Economic self-sufficiency**
- **Militarism and violence** – celebration of war, slogans like: *'Might is Right'*, *'One minute at war is more than whole life in peace'*

### Mussolini's Rise to Power (1918-1922)

Post war Italy with all its post war problems was an easy prey for radical groups. There were five weak, ineffective governments in three years, unable to deal with the crisis.

The support and popularity of **Socialist Party** was rapidly growing, especially in industrial Northern Italy, deeply shaken by the crisis.

- the Socialists were in control of 26 out of 69 provinces and 2000 town councils
- they joined the communist '**Third International**', and cooperated with Moscow
- they organized many strikes and were involved in illegal seizures of land

**The Fascist Party** organized its **squads of actions (blackshirts)** to oppose and attack the socialists. Violence broke out in the streets of north Italian cities.

- Dec 1920 – May 1921 200 dead and 800 wounded
- In two years 3 000 socialists and 300 fascists killed
- The government doesn't interfere

1921 Fascists win 5% (35 seats) in the elections but refuse to join the liberal government

Summer 1922 – Socialists organize a **general strike** to protest against fascist violence, but the strike is ignored by the government and broken by Mussolini and his Squads.

Summer 1922 – no one wants to be appointed prime minister

October 28-30 **Fascist March on Rome** – attempt to seize power by violence but:

- Oct 29 King Victor Emanuel invited Mussolini to Rome (came by train, in suit) and appointed him Prime Minister
- Oct 30 Fascist blackshirts allowed to march through the streets of Rome

**TASK 4:** *Why did not the king defeat the March on Rome? Why did not he sent army, that remained loyal to him, to suppress the 20 000 badly equipped, badly organized and very undisciplined blackshirts?*

## Consolidation of Power

Mussolini was named the **Prime Minister** of a wide coalition government of Fascists, Catholics, Right-wingers and even of Social-Democrats.

- Nov 16, 1922 **vote of confidence** for Mussolini's government – 306 for, 116 against
- Nov 25, 1922 Mussolini given extra power to **rule by decree** (without the .....)  
in order to introduce reforms and restore order.
- Jan 1923 Fascists impose their people on all important posts in the police, local government and senate with help of paramilitary **MUSN** (Volunteer Militia for National Security)
- Nov 1923 **Acerbo electoral law**: the party that would win the elections and get at least 25% of all the votes would get automatically 2/3 of the seats in the parliament to enhance reforms.
- April 1924, **elections** – Fascists got 375 out of 511 seats
- Fascists introduce their reforms introducing totalitarian system of government
  - censorship introduced
  - change of electorate
  - Prime Minister responsible directly to the King, not to the parliament
- Jan 31, 1926 **Rule by decree, parliament** no longer needed.

## **Fascism and the Church**

**1929 Lateran Treaties =**

**Concordat** – Christianity confirmed as the state religion, religious education compulsory at schools

## **Education**

Under the supervision of the Fascist Party, censorship, manipulation of history (Italian textbooks of that period for example claimed that in the First World War Italy saved Britain and United States from imminent defeat.)

**Youth Organisations: Balilla** (8-14)

Avanguardisti (14-18)

National Fascist Party (18+)

Adults: **Dopolavoro** – an umbrella organization of all clubs, societies, music groups, state controls every aspect of leisure time

**TASK 5:** *Why did the Fascists attempt to control every aspect of everyday life of the inhabitants of Italy? What would be your definition of the **Totalitarian regime** then?*

## Economy – the Corporate State

Fascist economy could be best described as a **State controlled capitalism**. Mussolini was drawing support from the rich, so he had to satisfy them. His aim was to achieve **self-sufficiency** of Italy and his method how to achieve it was:

### **Corporate State**

Every branch of industry formed one corporation (eg. Car industry), All together there were 22 corporations (21 for industry, agriculture and trade, one for artists)

The corporations were presided by a committee consisting of:

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Strikes were forbidden in 1925.

Mussolini introduced so called '**Battles**' to enhance the reforms.

**Public works** played an important role. Building electrified railroads, motorways.

## Foreign policy – *„I want to make Italy great, respected and feared.“*

1923 Corfu incident

1924 Pact of Rome, Italy gained Fiume from \_\_\_\_\_

1934 Rome Protocols –

1925 **Locarno Treaties** –

1935 Stresa Plan

1935 **Abyssinia**

1936 Spanish Civil War

1936 **Rome-Berlin Axis**

**TASK 6:** *How would you interpret the cartoon.*

