

Fascism in Italy

Chapter 13, Section 3

CLASS COPY

Regime Basics

- **Regime Type:** Fascist
- **Leader:** Benito Mussolini
- **Summary:** Italy may have been on the winning side of WWI, but they did not come out the war with a healthy economy. Benito Mussolini came to power with the guarantee that he could fix Italy's problems. What he offered in reality was a totalitarian government that kept people in line using fear.



Italy after WWI

Italy had been on the winning side in WWI and gained territories from Austria after the war. But, soldiers came home to economic turmoil, political corruption, and unemployment. France and Britain had not kept all their war years promises to Italy and many Italians, inspired by the Russian Revolution, revolted against conditions in Italy. Workers went on strike, peasants seized lands, trade declined and taxes rose.

Promises of a Better Italy

It was in this turmoil that Benito Mussolini emerged into the political spotlight. He organized veterans of WWI and other Italian citizens discontent with life in Italy into the Fascist Party. It was so named after the *fascis*, an ax made of a bundle of sticks that came to represent unity and authority in ancient Rome.

Mussolini was a charismatic, fiery speaker who spoke of returning Italy to the greatness of Rome. Mussolini's speeches convinced Italians that he could revive the economy, rebuild the military, and expand Italy.



Mussolini Gains Control

To do this, Mussolini organized his supporters into “combat squads.” They became known as the Black Shirts after their style of dress. They became the Fascist Party’s militant group that favored violence. They broke up socialist rallies, smashed leftist presses, and attacked farmers’ cooperatives (basically they violently attacked anything socialist).

In 1922, Fascists demanded changes to the government. The Italian king, Victor Emmanuel III, feared war and, therefore, asked Mussolini to become prime minister of Italy.



Mussolini's Rule

By 1925, Mussolini had assumed more power in the Italian government, even taking the title Il Duce ("The Leader").

His Rule was characterized by:

- Muzzling the press
- Rigging elections
- Replacing elected officials with his Fascist ones
- Critics thrown in prison, forced into exile, or murdered
- A secret police and propaganda to make sure his ideology were followed

The Italian Economy

To end conflicts between owners and workers, Mussolini brought the economy under government control. However, he did preserve capitalism. Under Mussolini's corporate state, representatives of business, labor, and the Fascist party controlled industry, agriculture, and trade.

His system favored the upper classes and industrial leaders. Workers were forbidden to strike and wages remained low. Despite this, production did increase.

The Individual and the State

Loyalty to the state was all important in Mussolini's system. The state was all-important. The individual only existed as a benefit to the state and was unimportant in all other ways.

Men were urged to be ruthless, selfless warriors fighting for the glory of Italy. Women were told to "win the battle of motherhood." Working women were forced out of jobs. Those who bore 14 or more children were given a medal. Citizens were constantly bombarded with messages of "Believe! Obey! Fight!"

Children were taught from a very young age loyalty to the state. Youth groups taught them to obey strict military discipline, marched in parades, sang patriotic songs, and chanted, "Mussolini is always right." By the early 1930s, Mussolini had an army of young soldiers ready to fight.

