

# History

## for the IB Diploma

### Mussolini and Italy

Additional case study for  
Authoritarian and Single-Party States

**Author and series editor: Allan Todd**

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# Contents

<b>Mussolini and Italy: Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Unit 1 Origins and rise, 1900–22</b>	<b>3</b>
How did the historical context of Italy before 1919 contribute to Mussolini's rise to power?	4
What were the key stages in Mussolini's rise to power in the period 1919–22?	9
Why was Mussolini successful in his bid for power?	13
<b>Unit 2 Ideology and the nature of the state</b>	<b>18</b>
What role did ideology play in Mussolini's rise to power?	18
To what extent was Mussolini a fascist?	23
What was the nature of Italy's fascist state?	25
<b>Unit 3 Establishment and consolidation of Mussolini's rule</b>	<b>32</b>
How did Mussolini establish his power in the period 1922–24?	32
What measures were taken after 1924 to further consolidate Mussolini's power?	38
What other methods did Mussolini use to consolidate his power?	40
<b>Unit 4 Domestic policies and their impact</b>	<b>48</b>
What were the main features of Mussolini's economic policies?	49
How successful were Mussolini's economic policies?	51
What were the main social policies in Mussolini's fascist Italy?	53
What were Mussolini's policies towards women, ethnic and other minorities, and religion?	55
What impact did fascist rule have on education, young people and the arts?	59
<b>Exam practice</b>	<b>63</b>
Paper 1 exam practice	63
Paper 2 exam practice	68
<b>Further information and acknowledgements</b>	<b>75</b>



# Mussolini and Italy

## Introduction

In October 1922, Benito Mussolini became prime minister of Italy. In 1925, with the backing of his Fascist Party, he made himself dictator and ruled Italy (or, from 1943 to 1945, just the northern part of it) for the next 20 years. Yet just 75 years earlier, the newly unified state of Italy had been created amidst hopes of building a modernised and liberal nation. Ironically, it was arguably the liberals' decisions and methods of rule that – either unconsciously or consciously – did much to make the rise of Mussolini's Fascist Party possible.

**fascist** A term deriving from the Italian word *fascio* (plural *fasci*), meaning 'group' or 'band'. In 1893, in Sicily, radical groups of mostly socialist workers formed *fasci* to organise demonstrations and strikes in protest at low wages and high rents. Mussolini adopted the term for his political movement in 1919. He later claimed that it referred to the *fascies*, bundles of rods carried by *lictors* (bodyguards) in ancient Rome.

Mussolini and his **fascist** state are important, historically and politically, for a number of reasons. Mussolini claimed to have invented fascism, and was the first ruler of a single-party fascist state during the period between the two World Wars. In addition, his early ideas and political programmes, and his party organisation and methods, were all influences on Adolf Hitler who, in the early years of the formation of his Nazi Party in Germany, was one of Mussolini's strongest admirers.

The emergence of a fascist Italy, and the creation of Mussolini's dictatorship, have also provoked many historical debates. These include attempts to define what fascism is, to explain why it came to power, and to assess how successful Mussolini was in establishing the kind of state he intended.

In attempting to understand why Mussolini was able to come to power, this case study will examine the emergence of a united Italy in the last half of the 19th century, the operation of 'liberal' Italy in the years 1900–22, and the impact of the First World War. It will also explore the nature of Mussolini's fascist movement, its political methods and how Mussolini was able to consolidate his rule.

# 1 Origins and rise, 1900–22

## Key questions

- How did the historical context of Italy before 1919 contribute to Mussolini's rise to power?
- What were the key stages in Mussolini's rise to power in the period 1919–22?
- Why was Mussolini successful in his bid for power?

## Overview

- Although independence had been gained from Austria in 1861, Italy remained a divided nation in many ways. The incorporation of the papal states in 1870 resulted in Catholic hostility against the new Italian kingdom, which lasted into the early 20th century.
- In 1900, the right to vote was still very restricted. This and the liberal domination of politics via the system known as *trasformismo* ("transformism") undermined support for parliamentary democracy. There was also opposition from the growing socialist movement.
- In addition, there were significant economic and social divisions in Italy, especially between the more prosperous industrial north and the poorer agricultural south.
- Another cause of unrest was the claims made by Italian nationalists for various territories in Europe, and their demands for Italy to establish colonies in Africa and Asia.
- These problems were worsened by Italy's entry into the First World War. There were divisions between interventionists and those who wanted to remain neutral. The war led to high casualties and inflation. After the war, there was disappointment at Italy's limited territorial gains from the peace treaties, as well as higher unemployment.
- Between 1919 and 1922, many socialist-led strikes and factory occupations took place. Right-wing groups such as the Arditi and the Fasci di Combattimento used increasing violence against the left.
- In 1921, Mussolini established the National Fascist Party and then made an electoral pact with the liberals. A new wave of fascist violence was often ignored by the élites and the authorities.
- In 1922, local fascist leaders began to take over various towns and regions and, in October, their 'March on Rome' resulted in Mussolini being appointed prime minister.

## Timeline

- 1861** formation of an independent Italy
- 1870** papal states incorporated into Italian kingdom
- 1904** general strike
- 1909 Sep** Mussolini begins work as member of Italian Socialist Party
- 1911 Sep** Italy invades Libya
- 1912 Nov** Mussolini appointed editor of Socialist Party newspaper, *Avanti!*
- 1914 Jun** 'Red Week'
  - Oct** Mussolini expelled from Socialist Party
  - Nov** Mussolini founds *Il Popolo d'Italia*
- 1915 May** Italy signs Treaty of London; participation in First World War leads to inflation
- 1919 Jan** start of *biennio rosso*; first Arditi Association set up in Rome
  - Mar** formation of the Fascio di Combattimento
  - Sep** D'Annunzio takes Fiume
- 1920 Sep** wave of factory occupations; electoral victories for socialists
- 1921 May** Mussolini forms National Bloc electoral alliance with Giolitti; 35 fascists elected, including Mussolini
  - Aug** Pact of Pacification between fascists and socialists
  - Oct** formation of PNF
  - Nov** Mussolini elected leader of PNF
- 1922 Jul–Aug** general strike broken up by fascist violence
  - Oct** March on Rome; Mussolini appointed as prime minister

### Question

What can you learn from this photograph about the nature of the Italian Fascist Party in 1922?

### Benito Mussolini (1883–1945)

Mussolini followed an inconsistent political path in his early years. Initially more influenced by his father (a blacksmith with revolutionary socialist views) than by his mother (a school teacher and a devout Catholic), Mussolini drifted into socialist politics and journalism. Between 1904 and 1910, he developed a reputation as a militant as a result of articles in which he expressed traditional socialist views. The First World War led him to make a dramatic switch to extreme nationalism – which resulted in his expulsion from the Socialist Party – and then to fascism. Mussolini became Italy's first dictator, ruling from 1922 until 1943.



**Risorgimento** This Italian word means 'resurgence' or 'rebirth', and refers to the literary and cultural revival that took place in Italy after 1815. The movement also campaigned against divisions within Italy and foreign domination, and called for political unification.



Fascists in Rome, November 1922, after their triumphant 'March' on the city

## How did the historical context of Italy before 1919 contribute to Mussolini's rise to power?

Italy was the first state anywhere in the world in which a fascist party developed, and the first to have a fascist dictator, in **Benito Mussolini**.

### The problems of liberal Italy before 1914

Many of the long-term factors behind the emergence of Mussolini as fascist dictator of Italy can be found in the weaknesses of Italy's liberal monarchy in the period before 1914. In 1861, after many decades of struggle against the Austrian Empire, the **Risorgimento** nationalist movement succeeded in creating a unified and independent Italy. However, the Catholic Church retained its own separate state in Rome and the surrounding area.

The people of the new kingdom of Italy were far from united, though, and several serious underlying problems left the *Risorgimento* process incomplete in many ways.

### Italian politics and the impact of *trasformismo*

After unification, Italian politics were dominated by the liberals, who hoped to modernise Italy through social reforms such as state education (to break the conservative influence of the Catholic Church), and by stimulating economic development and progress. However, although the liberals were split into progressives and conservatives – or 'left-liberals' and 'conservative-liberals' – they were united in distrusting the masses, who had played little part in the

struggle for unification. The liberals also particularly feared the influence of socialists, anarchists and republicans on the left, and the Catholic Church on the right. All these groups were opposed to the new Italian state. Consequently, the liberals determined to keep politics firmly under their control until the old internal divisions and rivalries were overcome and the new state was secure. The electorate was thus restricted at first, with only about 2% of the adult population allowed to vote.

The resentment many Italians felt at this restricted franchise (the right to vote) was increased by the corrupt politics it encouraged. With no mass parties, and no real party discipline amongst the liberals, leading politicians formed factions that made deals with one another to alternate political control. This process became known as *trasformismo*. Even though the franchise was gradually extended, and all adult males were allowed to vote by 1912, the practice of *trasformismo* continued.

Political disunity in Italy was intensified by the hostility of the papacy towards the new Italian state. The papacy's opposition to the liberal regime was moderated during the 1890s out of fear that it might give way to socialism, and in 1904, the pope permitted Catholics to vote in constituencies where abstaining might result in a socialist victory. However, there was no real harmony between the liberal and Catholic powers.

## Regional divisions

In addition to these political problems, the people of the new kingdom of Italy were not really united. Many Italians felt more loyalty towards their own town or region than towards the national government. The mountain ranges and islands that dominated Italy's geography made communication difficult, hindering the development of a truly national identity among the country's 38 million people. This was especially true in the south, where earlier rulers had deliberately neglected road and railway development in an attempt to stop the spread of liberal and revolutionary ideas from the north.

The problems of communication and transport also contributed to economic divisions in Italy. The south was very poor in comparison with northern and central areas. Land suitable for farming in the south was restricted by geography and climate, and most of the fertile lands were part of large estates known as *latifundia*, which were owned by a small minority of wealthy landowners. The vast majority of the population was extremely poor.

In northern and central Italy agriculture was more developed, and more modern farming methods and machinery were used. Even here, however, productivity was much lower than in the countries of northern Europe. There were also significant social divisions in even the more advanced agricultural areas. Most of the land was owned by wealthy landowners known as the *agrari*, who rented out land to poorer farmers and peasant sharecroppers. At the bottom of the social scale was a large class of rural labourers. As in the south, poverty and discontent in rural areas often led to conflict between the classes. The biggest economic difference between north and south, however, was in industry.

The Fiat car company was established in 1899, and by 1913 it was exporting over 4000 cars a year. Towns and cities in the north grew rapidly. This led to the creation of a large industrial working class, a sizeable lower-middle class and a powerful class of rich industrialists and bankers. While industry expanded in the north, however, there was no real investment in the south.

### Fact

Italy's independence had been achieved largely by a small nationalist movement led by Count Camillo di Cavour, which consisted mainly of the educated professional classes and students. Individuals such as Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi also played important roles in the struggle for Italian unification. In 1861, the king of Piedmont, Victor Emmanuel II, became king of the new state of Italy.

### Question

How did the practice of *trasformismo* undermine support for parliamentary democracy in Italy before 1922?

### Fact

'The papacy' refers to the office of the pope, while 'the Vatican' refers to the central administration of the Catholic Church. *Risorgimento* was not supported by the papacy, which had previously ruled a large part of central Italy. The creation of the new kingdom deprived the papacy of all its territory except that surrounding Rome itself – and even this was seized by Italian troops in 1870 to complete Italy's unification. In 1873, the government confirmed the confiscation. The following year, the pope retaliated by banning Catholics from all involvement in politics – even voting.

### Fact

Industrial development in the newly unified Italy was limited. The north had some iron and steel concerns, but development was hindered by the lack of coal and iron ore. The south's traditional silk industry was soon wiped out by more efficient manufacturers in the north. In the 1880s, hydro-electric power in the north provided the basis for rapid industrialisation.

**terra irredenta** This term means ‘unredeemed land’. It originally referred to the areas inhabited by many Italian speakers but ruled by Austria-Hungary during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The most important of these were Trentino and Trieste, in the northern Adriatic. Later, this term would also designate other surrounding foreign territories to which Italy believed that it had a rightful claim. Those who advocated this policy of territory reclamation were called ‘irredentists’.

**Fact**

In 1889, Abyssinia signed a Treaty of Friendship with Italy, recognising Italy’s acquisition of Massawa and agreeing to use the city as its main port. However, the Italian conquest of Eritrea led the Abyssinians to oppose any Italian interference in their country’s affairs. In 1895, Italy occupied the province of Tigre in Abyssinia, but after several military clashes the Italians were heavily defeated at the Battle of Adowa in 1896. This was seen by many Italians as a terrible national humiliation.

**Triple Alliance** The military alliance formed in 1882 between Germany, Austria and Italy. Opposed to this was the Triple Entente, consisting of Britain, France and Russia.



A postcard advertising a meeting of socialists in Bologna, 1904

As with agriculture, the social and economic inequalities in the industrial towns led to frequent clashes between employers and employees. Many workers joined the socialists or the anarchists, and in 1904 a general strike took place. The dissatisfaction felt by many Italians led them to emigrate – the majority going to the USA.

**The problems of terra irredenta and the desire for empire**

After 1870, many Italians came to realise that the Risorgimento was not complete. Firstly, there were the lands in Europe known as **terra irredenta**, which many Italians wanted Italy to reclaim.

In addition, many Italians hoped unification would enable Italy to join the top rank of European powers by establishing its own empire. They

looked to the example set by Germany – newly created in 1871 – which had begun to obtain colonies in Africa and Asia. The first step in Italian empire-building was taken in 1885, with the acquisition of the port of Massawa on the Red Sea. By 1890, this had become the centre of the Italian colony of Eritrea. At the same time, Italy began the conquest of what became Italian Somaliland. However, tensions grew between Italy and the independent African state of Abyssinia (now Ethiopia), which bordered both these regions.

In 1911, Italy invaded the Turkish colony of Libya in an attempt to increase the size of the Italian empire and to block growing French influence in North Africa. In 1912, Turkey formally accepted its loss. Many Italian nationalists, still angry at their defeat by Abyssinia in 1896, continued to press for a more aggressive imperial policy.

**The impact of the First World War and the peace treaties, 1914–19**

Although Italy was a member of the **Triple Alliance**, it did not join in when the First World War began in 1914. Instead, it decided to stay neutral.

**Intervention or neutrality?**

While most Italians (especially the socialists) were in favour of neutrality, nationalists felt that intervention in the war would offer Italy an opportunity to gain more land and expand its empire. In view of its ambition to reclaim the country’s *terra irredenta*, the liberal government decided to see which side would offer the best terms in exchange for Italy’s support. Negotiations with the other two Triple Alliance nations in the period 1914–15 revealed that Austria would never concede Trentino or Trieste. However, the Entente nations promised that

in the event of their victory, these territories would be granted to Italy, along with similarly contested Austrian territory in the South Tyrol, and Istria and northern Dalmatia on the Adriatic coast.

## The Treaty of London

While the Italian parliament debated the issues, interventionists organised street demonstrations demanding Italian involvement in the war. Many were members of the *fasci*, a mixture of anarcho-syndicalists (see page 10) and national socialists who believed war would hasten revolution. They were joined by the right-wing nationalists of the **Associazione Nazionalista Italiana (ANI)** – the Italian Nationalist Association – which had previously pushed for the conquest of Libya. However, the leading liberal politicians had already decided on Italy's participation in the war. Consequently, in May 1915, Italy signed the Treaty of London and promised to join the war on the side of the Triple Entente.

## Italy's performance in the First World War

Despite the interventionists' hopes, the war did not go well for Italy. Over 5 million Italians were conscripted and, though most fought bravely, they were ill equipped and supplied. In particular, military leadership was often poor and the Italian army found itself fighting a costly war of **attrition**.

In November 1917, the Italians suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of the Austrians at the Battle of Caporetto. Over 40,000 Italian soldiers were killed and about 300,000 were taken prisoner. The nationalists blamed the government for its inefficiency and for failing to supply the troops with enough equipment. Although the Italians won a costly victory at Vittorio Veneto in October 1918, this was overshadowed by previous defeats and the high casualties suffered. In addition, with the socialists maintaining strong opposition throughout, the war had clearly failed to unite Italians.

## The economic impact of the First World War

The First World War had a significant impact on the relatively weak Italian economy. In order to finance its involvement, the liberal government had borrowed heavily from Britain and the US, and the national debt had risen from 16 billion lire to 85 billion. Even this proved inadequate, so the government printed more banknotes, causing rapid inflation – prices increased by over 400% between 1915 and 1918. This inflation destroyed much of the middle class's savings, reduced rental incomes for many landowners, and caused a drop of more than 25% in the real wages of many workers. At the end of the war the situation was worsened by high unemployment, as war industries closed down and more than 2.5 million soldiers were demobilised.

The war also deepened the economic divisions between north and south Italy. Those industries linked to war production (especially steel, chemicals, motor vehicles, and the rubber and woollen industries) did extremely well before 1918, as they were guaranteed large state contracts. When inflation began to rise, industrialists simply passed on the increases to the government.

The south, still predominantly agricultural, did not share in this prosperity. Farming was badly affected by the conscription of large numbers of peasants and farm labourers. However, during the last years of the war – in an attempt to limit the attraction of socialism and the ideology of the Russian **Bolsheviks** – the government promised a programme of land reform after the war.

### **Associazione Nazionalista Italiana (ANI)**

Italy's first nationalist party, formed in 1910. It supported war against Austria as a way of gaining the *terra irredenta*. The ANI grew close to Mussolini's Fascist Party, and merged with it in 1923.

**attrition** The process of wearing down the enemy by steady killing. Italian officers often sacrificed thousands of lives needlessly – in all, over 600,000 Italians were killed, about 450,000 permanently disabled, and a further 500,000 seriously wounded.

### **Fact**

Companies such as Pirelli (tyres) and Montecatini (chemicals) made huge profits during the war. Fiat continued to expand and, by 1918, was the largest motor manufacturer in Europe. However, the end of the war meant the loss of lucrative state contracts, as the government cut back expenditure in order to cope with mounting debts.

**Bolsheviks** The more revolutionary element of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (a Marxist party). Led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin – later joined by Leon Trotsky – they took power in Russia in November 1917. The Bolsheviks later changed their name to the Russian Communist Party, and worked hard to aid and encourage socialist revolutions in other regions, especially in more advanced capitalist countries such as Germany.

**Vittorio Orlando (1860–1952)**

Orlando was appointed prime minister a few days after the Italian defeat at Caporetto in October 1917. At the Paris Peace Conferences, Italy had expected to be granted control of the Adriatic coastline. Orlando’s failure to win this territory prompted his resignation in June 1919. His inability to secure all of Italy’s territorial expectations at Versailles was used by Mussolini and the fascists in their campaign to demonstrate the weakness of the Italian government. Orlando initially backed Mussolini in 1922, but withdrew his support in 1924.



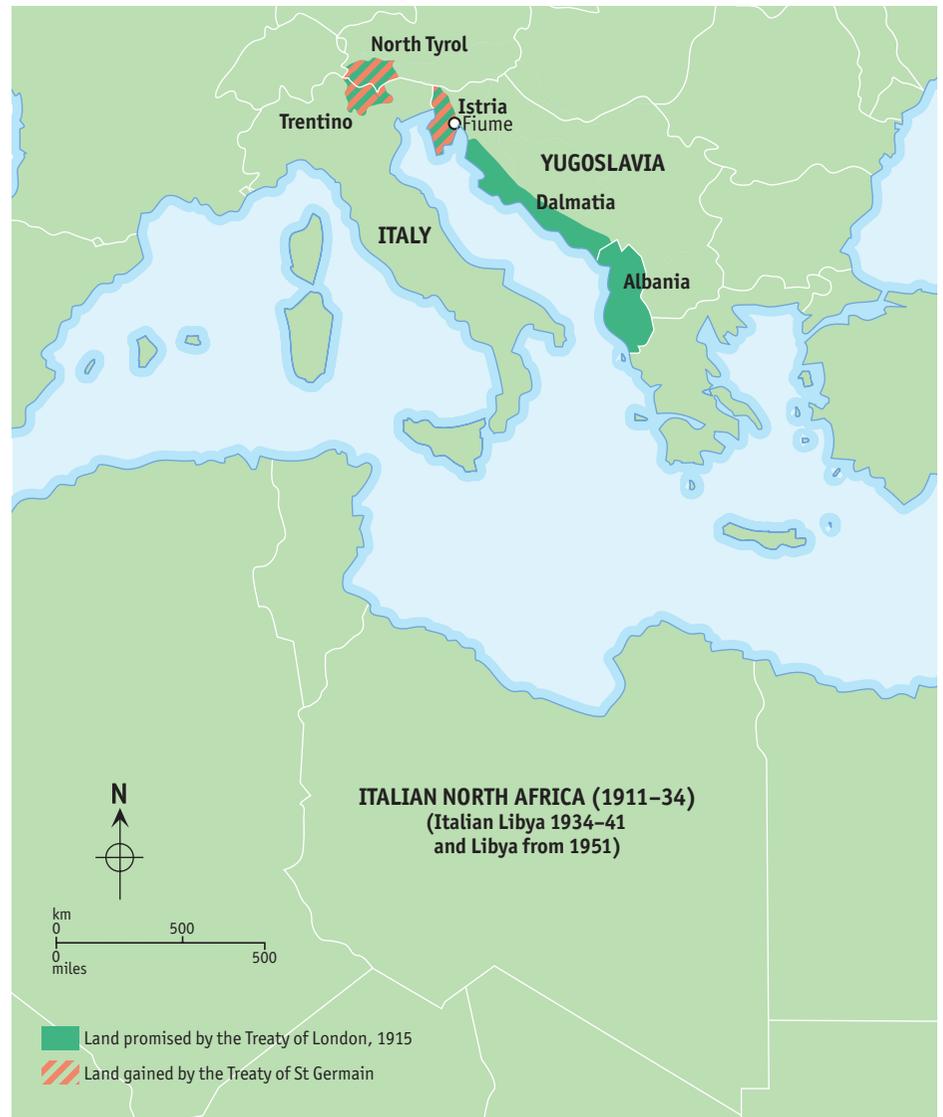
**The terms of the peace treaties**

When the war ended in November 1918, many Italians thought that their sacrifices should be repaid by substantial territorial rewards. **Vittorio Orlando**, the Italian prime minister, went to the Paris Peace Conferences in January 1919 expecting to receive all that had been promised by the Treaty of London. Under pressure from the nationalists, he also demanded the port of Fiume, on the border of Istria, as it contained a large Italian-speaking population. Finally, Orlando wanted Italy to gain a share of the former German colonies in Africa.

**Nationalists and the ‘mutilated victory’**

Although most of Italy’s post-war demands were eventually met, there were some important exceptions. The country gained no African territory, and Britain and the US refused to grant Italy Fiume and northern Dalmatia, arguing that these were vital for the development of the new state of Yugoslavia.

*A map showing the land promised by the Treaty of London in 1915 and land actually gained by Italy in the 1919 peace treaties*



Italy's long-term opponent, Austria-Hungary, had been defeated and its empire dismantled, leaving Italy the dominant power in the Adriatic. Yet Italian nationalists were disgusted once the likely terms of the peace agreements became clear, and accused the liberal government of allowing Italy to be both humiliated and cheated. The popular nationalist Gabriele D'Annunzio (see page 11) spoke for many Italians – especially war veterans – when he called it a 'mutilated victory'.

## What were the key stages in Mussolini's rise to power in the period 1919–22?

By 1919, it was clear that the liberal regime would face many problems in post-war Italy. In addition to the growing dissatisfaction of the nationalists, the liberals faced increased political opposition from other quarters. In January 1919, the papacy finally lifted its ban on the formation of a Catholic political party, leading to the foundation of the **Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI)**, or Italian Popular Party.

### The Italian Socialist Party (PSI) – the socialist 'threat'

A more serious threat to the liberal regime was posed by the Italian Socialist Party (PSI). The economic problems resulting from the First World War caused great discontent among industrial and rural workers. The Socialist Party had moved increasingly to a revolutionary position. In 1917, inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, it called for the overthrow of the liberal state and the establishment of a socialist republic. Industrial workers resented the imposition of wartime discipline in the factories, which increased working hours and banned strikes – to the benefit of the employers. With only about 50,000 members in 1914, Socialist Party membership had increased to over 200,000 by 1919. At its congress in that year, delegates talked of the need to use force in order to achieve 'the conquest of power over the bourgeoisie'. In practice, however, many socialist leaders were stronger on rhetoric than on action.

### The *biennio rosso*, 1919–20

Unemployment rose to over 2 million in 1919, and industrial workers began a wave of militant action that lasted from early 1919 to 1920. These years became known as the *biennio rosso* – the 'two red years'. Throughout 1919, strikes, factory occupations and land occupations, organised by trade unions and peasant leagues and involving over 1 million workers, swept across Italy. By the end of 1919, socialist trade unions had more than 2 million members, compared to about 250,000 at the beginning of the year.

In many areas, especially in the north, socialists seized control of local government. To many industrialists and landowners, and to the middle classes in general, it seemed that a communist revolution was about to begin. Yet the government, headed by **Giovanni Giolitti**, did little. Believing that the workers were less dangerous inside the factories than on the streets, and that militancy would soon decline, the government urged employers and landowners to make some concessions. In response to riots over the high price of food, the government set up food committees to control distribution and prices. This lack of forceful action led many of the middle and upper classes to view the government as dangerously incompetent.

### Questions

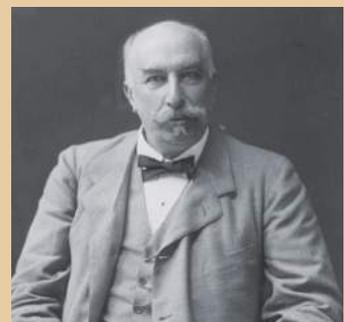
What do you understand by the term 'mutilated victory'? What areas were claimed by Italian nationalists after 1919?

### Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI)

Often known simply as the Popolari, this party was a coalition of conservative and liberal Catholics who wanted to defend Catholic interests and improve life for the peasants. It was led by the priest Luigi Sturzo, and was backed by Pope Benedict XV in order to oppose the Italian Socialist Party (PSI). In 1919, the Popolari won 20% of the vote and from 1919 to 1921, it was the second largest party in Italy after the PSI. The Popolari were generally suspicious of liberalism because of the latter's history of anti-clericalism. Some members became ministers in Mussolini's fascist government.

### Giovanni Giolitti (1842–1928)

Giolitti was prime minister of Italy five times between 1892 and 1921. Bowing to nationalist pressure, he agreed to the Italo-Turkish war of 1911–12. In 1915, Giolitti opposed Italy's involvement in the First World War, believing the country was unprepared. His last period as prime minister was 1920–21. He was supported by the fascist *squadristi*, and did not oppose their violent takeover of towns and regions. Giolitti backed Mussolini at first, but withdrew his support in 1924.



**Arditi** The term translates as ‘the daring ones’. These were the black-shirted commando (or ‘storm’) troops of the Italian army, whose officers hated the liberal political system which they felt had betrayed their wartime sacrifices by failing to obtain the land promised to Italy. These troops were demobilised in 1920, but their name – and uniform – was used by D’Annunzio’s supporters who took over Fiume in 1919 (see ‘D’Annunzio and Fiume’ below right).

**Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944)** Writer and artist Marinetti believed that art ‘can be nothing but violence, cruelty and injustice’, and proclaimed the unity of art and life. The artistic movement he founded, futurism, incorporated elements of both anarchism and fascism. Marinetti was an early supporter of Mussolini. He later distanced himself from what he saw as the more conservative aspects of fascism, but remained an important influence on fascist ideology.



**syndicalists** These were originally people who believed that the workers, not the state, should control the economy through trade unions. This form of syndicalism was most often associated with left-wing anarcho-syndicalism (such as existed in Spain in 1936–39), but some syndicalists were politically involved with early fascism.

## The threat from the right

After the war, the various militant and disaffected right-wing groups were joined by another force that was also in search of change. This comprised demobilised and unemployed officers and troops, who found it difficult to accept many aspects of post-war Italian society. One notable group was the **Arditi**.

In early 1919, the Arditi formed themselves into organised groups. The first Arditi Association was set up in Rome in January, while **Filippo Tommaso Marinetti** established another in Milan. Throughout February, many other Arditi groups were formed across Italy. They increasingly used weapons to attack socialists and trade unionists, whom they regarded as the enemies of the Italian nation.

## Mussolini and the Fascio di Combattimento

In March 1919, Mussolini – himself a member of the Arditi – tried to bring these disparate groups together. On 23 March, 118 people, representing various political groupings, met in Milan and formed a Fascio di Combattimento (‘combat’ or ‘fighting group’). These founding members later became known as the Fascists of the First Hour (see page 21). They intended to bring together nationalists and socialists, and a militant-sounding *Fascist Programme* was published on 6 June 1919, which combined various left- and right-wing demands. However, what really united these nationalists, **syndicalists**, artists and ex-servicemen was a hatred of the liberal state.

### SOURCE A

*Comments on the backgrounds of the fascist squadristi by Angelo Tasca, a member of the Italian Communist Party in the early 1920s.*

In the Po valley, the towns were on the whole less red than the country, being full of landowners, garrison officers, university students, rentiers, professional men, and trades people. These were the classes from which Fascism drew its recruits and which offered the first armed squads.

*Tasca, A. The Rise of Italian Fascism 1918–22. Quoted in Macdonald, H. 1999. Mussolini and Italian Fascism. Cheltenham, UK. Nelson Thornes. p. 17.*

## D’Annunzio and Fiume

Although Fasci di Combattimento were established in about 70 other towns, Mussolini’s tiny network of militant agitators was soon overshadowed by the actions of **Gabriele D’Annunzio** (see page 11), who led 2000 armed men to the city of Fiume – one of the areas Italy had sought but not won in the peace treaties. D’Annunzio’s force quickly took control and, in open defiance of the liberal Italian government and the Allies, they ruled the city for the next 15 months. This bold action made D’Annunzio a hero to Italian nationalists, and proved an inspiration to Mussolini. In particular, Mussolini decided to adopt the theatrical trappings used by D’Annunzio, especially the black shirts of the Arditi, the ancient Roman salute they used, and the many parades and balcony speeches they performed.



Benito Mussolini and Gabriele D'Annunzio in 1925

The relative weakness of Mussolini's *Fasci di Combattimento* was underlined by the results of the November 1919 elections. These were for appointments to the Chamber of Deputies – the lower house of the Italian parliament (the upper house was the Senate). For the first time, the elections were held using a system of **proportional representation**. Each local *fascio* was allowed to decide its own election manifesto but, despite this, not a single fascist candidate was elected. Mussolini himself won only 5000 votes out of 270,000 in Milan. So great was his disappointment at this result that he considered emigrating to the US. In all, there were probably only about 4000 committed fascist supporters throughout the entire country in 1919.

### The economic élites and emerging fascism

However, the unrest of the *biennio rosso* gave a boost to Mussolini's organisation. In an attempt to end the factory and land occupations, he offered to send in *squadre d'azione* (action squads) to help factory owners in the north and landowners in the Po Valley and Tuscany. These industrialists and landowners, frustrated and angered by the liberal government's stance of concessions and inaction, were only too pleased to give money to Mussolini's groups in return for the *squadristi*'s violent actions against the left's strikes and occupations.

### Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863–1938)

D'Annunzio was a poet and writer. As an ultra-nationalist, he supported Italy's entry into the First World War on the side of the Triple Entente. He joined up as a pilot and became something of a war hero after dropping propaganda leaflets over Vienna. He was an irredentist (see page 6), and was angered when Fiume (now Rijeka in Croatia) was handed over to the new state of Yugoslavia after the First World War.



### Activity

Carry out some further research on the ways in which D'Annunzio and the Arditi influenced Mussolini as he began to build his fascist movement.

### proportional representation

A method of voting whereby each party gains representation in parliament to a greater or lesser extent, according to the proportion of the total votes it receives in an election. Some proportional representation systems are more closely proportional than others.

**ras** An Abyssinian word meaning 'chieftain'. These were the regional fascist leaders who commanded their own action squads, and who often had a large degree of independence. They included Italo Balbo (Ferrara), Dino Grandi (Bologna), Roberto Farinacci (Cremona) and Filippo Turati (Brescia).

### **Italo Balbo (1896–1940)**

A right-wing republican, Balbo joined the PNF in 1921. He became secretary of the fascist organisation in Ferrara, and soon the *ras* there. His fascist gangs – known as the *Celbano* – broke strikes for landowners and industrialists, and attacked socialists and communists. Balbo was one of the four main planners, known as the *Quadrumirs*, of Mussolini's 'March on Rome' (see pages 15–16). In 1923, he became a member of the Fascist Grand Council.



These action squads were controlled by local fascist leaders, known as *ras*. As well as attacking strikers, the *squadristi* burnt down the offices and newspaper printing works belonging to the socialists and trade unions in many parts of northern and central Italy. They also tried to destroy the influence of the peasant leagues, which were encouraged by the more liberal elements of the Roman Catholic *Popolari* (see page 9).

This growing alliance with industrialists, bankers and landowners began to finance the building of a mass base for Mussolini's *Fasci di Combattimento* among the middle and lower-middle classes, who feared socialist revolution. However, the more radical elements (such as Marinetti and the syndicalists) were increasingly alienated from this base. Instead, as time went by, the fascist squads were mainly composed of disaffected and demobilised army officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and middle-class students. These supporters were united by their hatred of socialists and their belief in violent action, rather than by any coherent political ideology.

The practical appeal of the fascist *squadres* grew after September 1920, when a wave of factory occupations involving over 400,000 workers hit the industrial areas of the north. At the same time, agrarian strikes and land occupations continued to spread in central Italy. Then, in the local elections, the socialists won control of 26 out of Italy's 69 provinces, mostly in northern and central parts of the country. All of this greatly increased the fears of the upper and middle classes. As the fascist action squads proved effective in suppressing leftist action, *squadristi* numbers were swelled by recruits from the ranks of small farmers, estate managers and sharecroppers.

### **Fascist violence, the *ras* and Mussolini**

By the end of 1920, the factory and land occupations had begun to decline. However, *squadristi* violence had not. Mussolini had not initially ordered the attacks, which had been organised by powerful *ras* leaders such as **Italo Balbo** in Ferrara and Dino Grandi in Bologna.

However, Mussolini soon realised the political – and financial – opportunities offered by a more organised use of *squadristi*. Support for Mussolini's *Fasci di Combattimento* increased when government military action against D'Annunzio forced the latter to surrender control of Fiume in January 1921. This removed a potentially powerful rival force for Mussolini. Slowly, with much resistance at first, he began to assert central control, arguing that without his leadership and newspaper (*Il Popoli*), the various groups would fall apart. In particular, Mussolini stressed the need to depict violence as necessary to prevent the success of a Bolshevik-style revolution in Italy. In April 1921, Mussolini made a speech in which he declared fascist violence to be part of an anti-socialist crusade to 'break up the Bolshevik State' (see Source B on page 13).

While attacking the state in public, Mussolini privately reassured Giolitti and other liberal politicians that talk of fascist revolution was not to be taken seriously. As a result, Giolitti offered the fascists an electoral alliance – an anti-socialist National Bloc – for the national elections due to be held in May 1921. During the election campaign, fascist squads continued their violence, and about 100 socialists were killed.

## SOURCE B

Extracts from a speech about fascist violence by Mussolini to the fascists of Bologna, April 1921.

And, however much violence may be deplored, it is evident that we, in order to make our ideas understood, must beat refractory skulls with resounding blows ... We are violent because it is necessary to be so ...

Our punitive expeditions, all those acts of violence which figure in the papers, must always have the character of the just retort and legitimate reprisal; because we are the first to recognise that it is sad, after having fought the external enemy, to have to fight the enemy within ... and for this reason that which we are causing today is a revolution to break up the Bolshevik State, while waiting to settle our account with the Liberal State which remains.

Robson, M. 1992. *Italy: Liberalism and Fascism 1870–1945*. London, UK. Hodder & Stoughton. p. 51.

## Fact

The action squads used knives, bayonets, firearms and even grenades in their attacks. They also beat up opponents with cudgels (known as *manganelli*). Often they would tie up their victims in town squares, and then – to humiliate them in public – force them to drink large quantities of castor oil, a powerful laxative that could cause severe diarrhoea, dehydration and, in some cases, even death.

Nonetheless, the socialists remained the largest party with 123 seats; the Popolari won 107 seats. Giolitti was disappointed by the results. Mussolini, however, was pleased with the outcome of the election – his group had won 7% of the vote and had taken 35 seats. Mussolini himself was now a deputy and, significantly, all 35 fascist deputies were from the right of the movement. More importantly, holding positions in parliament gave the fascists an image of respectability as well as a foothold in national politics. With this success achieved, Mussolini announced that the fascists would not support Giolitti's coalition government after all.

## Why was Mussolini successful in his bid for power?

### Political instability, 1921–22

From May 1921, Mussolini had hopes of achieving real power and he was determined to make full use of the opportunities to do so. He realised that he needed to convince the industrialists, landowners and the middle classes of three things: that the liberals were finished as an effective political force; that there was a real threat of socialist revolution; and that only the fascists were strong and determined enough to take the necessary action, and restore order and dignity to Italy.

Denied the support of the fascist deputies, Giolitti at first managed to form a coalition with the support of the Popolari, but this collapsed within a month. Between May 1921 and October 1922, there were three weak coalition governments, none of which managed to take effective action against industrial struggles and political violence.

## The attitude of the political élites

The attitude of the élites now became increasingly crucial to the fascists' prospects of success. During the *biennio rosso*, the police and army leaders often turned a blind eye to fascist violence against socialists and industrial and agrarian militants. In fact, commanders in some areas even provided transport to take fascist squads to socialist demonstrations or congresses. In the first half of 1921, over 200 people were killed and more than 800 wounded by these action squads, and Emilia and Tuscany became fascist strongholds.

### SOURCE C

There were sectors who assisted Fascism indirectly: although they could not bring themselves to support Fascism openly they were at least prepared to tolerate it in a way which would have been out of the question with, for example, socialism. One of these groups was the political establishment ... Another was the aristocratic class, who were appeased by Mussolini's willingness to end his attacks on the monarchy. In fact, the Queen Mother, Margherita, and the king's cousin, the Duke of Aosta, were admirers of Fascism. A third sector was the Catholic Church, taking its cue from Pope Pius XI who, from the time of his election in 1922, remained on good terms with Mussolini. The Church undoubtedly considered a Communist revolution to be the main threat.

Lee, S. 1987. *The European Dictatorships, 1918–1945*. London, UK. Routledge. p. 95.

As *squadristi* violence continued to disrupt law and order into the summer of 1921, Mussolini began to worry that it might alienate the conservative élites and unify anti-fascists. His concerns grew on 31 July, when 12 *carabinieri* (police officers) managed to disperse over 500 fascists at Saranza, in north-west Italy. This was hardly the sign of a party able to impose law and order.

## The Pact of Pacification and the formation of the PNF

On 2 August, Mussolini surprised the opposition – and angered the *ras* – by signing a peace deal, known as the Pact of Pacification, with moderate socialists and the main trade union organisation, the General Confederation of Workers (Confederazione Generale del Lavoro, or CGL). He then resigned from the Fascist Central Committee in an attempt to outmanoeuvre the *ras*. This was successful and, in October 1921, Mussolini persuaded members of the Fasci di Combattimento to re-form the organisation into a political party, the Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF).

Mussolini followed up this victory in November 1921 by persuading the Fascist National Congress to elect him as leader. In return, he agreed to end the truce with the socialists, and ordered all branches to organise action squads. Although the local *ras* still had considerable influence and some autonomy, Mussolini could now present himself as the clear and undisputed leader of an organised and united political party.

## Mussolini and ‘moderation’

Mussolini’s growing control of this new party allowed him to drop what remained of the more left-wing elements of the 1919 *Fascist Programme*, especially those that had been hostile to the Roman Catholic Church. In doing so, Mussolini hoped to increase fascist support among conservatives. This was especially important as the new pope, Pius XI, did not support the leader of the Popolari and had previously – as archbishop of Milan – blessed the fascists’ banners.

Mussolini kept fascist policy statements deliberately vague, declaring his party to be against socialism and liberalism and for a strong and ordered Italy. By the end of 1921, the Fascist Party claimed a membership of over 200,000 – many of whom were shopkeepers and clerical workers who had previously supported the liberals.

## The fascists’ ‘creeping insurrection’

Despite Mussolini’s growing control over the Fascist Party and its increasing appeal to conservatives, many of the local *ras* – including **Roberto Farinacci** and Italo Balbo – continued to endorse the violence of the action squads.

Determined to avoid a split in his party, Mussolini followed a dual policy throughout 1922. He encouraged the *ras* to continue their violent activities, but he made it known to the conservatives that he had no intention of pushing for a violent seizure of power. In the spring of 1922, there was a concerted campaign of *squadristi* violence in northern and central Italy. By July, street fighting was common in most northern towns, and soon Cremona, Rimini and Ravenna were under fascist control. Once again, the police either stood by or intervened on the side of the fascists. In some areas, the police even offered the fascists weapons if it looked as though the socialists might win.

The socialists and their trade unions decided to call a general strike for 31 July, in an attempt to force the government to take action against the fascists’ violence and their ‘creeping insurrection’, which was giving the movement control of an increasing number of towns and other areas of Italy. Mussolini used this as an opportunity to prove that the socialists were still a threat and, more importantly, a threat that only the fascists could stop. Fascists immediately began to break the strike, taking over public transport and the postal service, and attacking strikers. The socialists called off the strike on 3 August.

The fascist success impressed the conservative middle classes, and led to renewed contact between Mussolini and former liberal prime ministers – such as Antonio Salandra, Vittorio Orlando, Francesco Nitti and Giovanni Giolitti – to discuss the possibility of the fascists entering a coalition government. To increase fascist respectability, in September Mussolini declared he was no longer opposed to the monarchy.

## The March on Rome, October 1922

Having obtained considerable control of northern and central Italy, the *ras* wanted to move from local to national power. Many of them had urged a coup after the collapse of the general strike, and Mussolini had struggled to restrain them. In early October 1922, the *ras* renewed their pressure. Balbo is said to have told Mussolini that the *ras* intended to march on Rome and seize power – with him or without him. To appease his more militant supporters, and to intimidate the liberal government into making concessions, Mussolini agreed to organise the March on Rome.

**Roberto Farinacci (1892–1945)** Farinacci was originally a radical nationalist, but soon became involved in the emerging fascist movement. He was the *ras* in Cremona, publishing his own newspaper (*Cremona Nuova*), and his action squads were among the most brutal in 1919. In 1922, Farinacci declared himself mayor of Cremona. Mussolini made him PNF secretary in 1925. Farinacci was anti-clerical and anti-Semitic, and after 1938, he strongly enforced anti-Jewish legislation.

### **Luigi Facta (1861–1930)**

A liberal, Facta held various ministerial posts before and immediately after the First World War. He initially favoured neutrality, but later supported the war effort. Facta became prime minister in February 1922. Dismissed in July, he was soon reappointed, as no one else could form a government. He was the last prime minister of Italy before Mussolini began his rule.



Local squads were organised into a national militia, under Balbo and Grandi, and a plan was drawn up by which four *ras* – Balbo, Bianchi, Cesare De Vecchi and General De Bono – would seize control of major towns and cities in northern and central Italy. Once this had been achieved, some 40,000 fascists would converge on Rome from three different cities.

On the night of 27 October, fascist squads took over town halls, railway stations and telephone exchanges across northern Italy. The following day, prime minister **Luigi Facta** persuaded the king, as commander-in-chief of the army, to declare a state of emergency. This meant that the government could use the military as well as the police to stop the fascist columns assembling in Rome.

Initially, roads and railways were blocked, and army troops met little resistance as they began to take back control of some buildings seized by the fascists. Fascist commanders, including De Vecchi, began to waver. The prefect of Milan was instructed to arrest Mussolini, who was in the city as a precautionary measure (Mussolini would be able to escape from Milan into Switzerland if things went wrong).

However, Mussolini was not arrested. The king changed his mind and refused to sign the papers authorising martial law. Facta resigned in protest. The king then asked the conservative Salandra to form a government, but Mussolini rejected the offer of four cabinet posts for fascists. He wanted the post of prime minister for himself. Salandra advised the king to appoint Mussolini and the king conceded. Mussolini accepted on 29 October 1922.

In fact, the March on Rome was more myth than reality. Mussolini himself did not march at the head of the fascist columns, but arrived in Rome by train, having already accepted the position of prime minister. The fascist militia did not reach the city until the following day, 30 October, when about 70,000 Blackshirts celebrated their victory in the streets of Rome.

### **Victor Emmanuel III and fascism**

Mussolini owed his success in October 1922 more to the role of the king, **Victor Emmanuel III**, than to the strength of his fascist militia. The king himself claimed that he refused to sign the declaration of martial law because he could not depend on the army's loyalty to him. However, he had been assured that his soldiers were faithful, and that they could easily disperse the fascist marchers.

Historians are still undecided as to why the king acted as he did. Some argue that he was uncertain of the reaction of the military, that he had little faith in the liberal politicians, that he genuinely feared the outbreak of civil war, and that he was worried about being replaced by his cousin, the duke of Aosta, a known fascist supporter. Other historians have pointed out how leading industrialists, landowners and senior churchmen favoured compromise with the fascists (the queen mother, Margherita, was a fervent fascist) and how the king himself regarded the fascists as a bulwark against the threat of communist revolution.

Whatever the king's motives, by October 1922 Mussolini had become prime minister by legal, constitutional means – assisted by the fascist violence on the streets.

### **Victor Emmanuel III (1869–1947)**

Victor Emmanuel was the last king of Italy, largely due to his role during the rise and rule of fascism. After 1922, the king made little comment on fascist violence, anti-Semitic laws or the destruction of democracy. In 1944, he handed most of his powers to his son, Umberto, and abdicated in his favour in May 1946. In June, 54% of Italians voted for a republic, and Victor Emmanuel went into exile in Egypt.



## End of unit activities

- 1 Create a spider diagram to illustrate the economic, political and social problems Italy faced in the period 1900–19.
- 2 Divide into two groups. One group should present the case that Mussolini's rise to power in 1922 was inevitable, given the context of Italian history and politics in the period 1919–22. The other group should present arguments to show it was not inevitable – for example, could opponents of fascism have acted differently? Each group should present its findings in preparation for a class debate.
- 3 Use the internet and any other resources you have to find copies of Mussolini's speeches and interviews during the period 1919–22. Then carry out an analysis to show both consistencies and inconsistencies.

### Historical debate

According to historians such as Renzo De Felice, Mussolini's rise to power in 1922 – and his ability to retain control until 1943 – had much to do with support from the élites (referred to as 'the Establishment men, the conservative trimmers and office-holders' by Martin Clark). Do you think this is a fair statement about the significance of the élites compared to popular support for fascism in Italy in explaining Mussolini's success?

### Discussion point

Working in pairs, develop arguments for a class presentation on the ways in which non-fascists might have been able to prevent Mussolini's rise. For each one you come up with, try to assess its likely success.



### Theory of knowledge

#### History and the role of individuals

Does an examination of Mussolini in the period 1919–22 provide adequate proof of the 'great person' theory of history? Or does a study of his rise during this period show instead the greater importance of economic factors – or even chance?

## 2 Ideology and the nature of the state

### Timeline

**1914 Jun** 'Red Week'

**Aug** Fasci di Azione Rivoluzionaria set up

**Nov** founding of *Il Popolo d'Italia*

**1915 May** 'Radiant Days of May'

**1917 Nov** *Manifesto to the Nation* published

**1918 Jul** Mussolini formally renounces socialism

**1919 Mar** formation of Fascio di Combattimento in Milan

**Jun** *Fascist Programme* published

**Nov** first use of proportional representation in elections; no fascists elected

**1921 May** Giolitti forms electoral bloc with fascists; Mussolini and 34 other fascists elected

**Oct** formation of National Fascist Party

**1922 Sep** Mussolini's speech in Udine

**Oct** March on Rome; Mussolini becomes prime minister

**1923 Dec** Chigi Palace Pact

**1925** *Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals* published; Vidoni Palace Pact

**1926 Jul** Ministry of Corporations established

**Oct** Turati replaces Farinacci as party secretary; Rocco's Law

**1927 Apr** Charter of Labour introduced

**1928 May** new electoral law introduced

**1930 Mar** National Council of Corporations established

**1933** *The Doctrine of Fascism* published

**1938** Chamber of Fasci and Corporations replaces Chamber of Deputies

### Key questions

- What role did ideology play in Mussolini's rise to power?
- To what extent was Mussolini a fascist?
- What was the nature of Italy's fascist state?

### Overview

- Many of the (often contradictory) ideas that eventually formed fascist ideology in Italy had their origins in 19th-century thought.
- Mussolini's own political views covered the entire political spectrum, from revolutionary socialism before 1914, to nationalism and then to fascism by 1919.
- In the early days of fascism, Mussolini placed much more emphasis on action than on ideology. From 1919 to 1922, the more radical elements of fascist programmes and policies were increasingly moderated.
- After he became prime minister in 1922, Mussolini continued to distance himself from early fascism.
- From 1926 onwards, the more radical members of the PNF were purged, and the party came increasingly under Mussolini's personal control.
- Even the creation of the corporate state – although apparently a concession to party 'radicals' – was carried out in a way that emphasised the power of the Italian state and of employers over employees.
- During the 1930s, Mussolini made efforts to issue clearer statements of fascist ideology. However, by this point, Italy had become a personal rather than a party dictatorship.

### What role did ideology play in Mussolini's rise to power?

The question of fascist ideology, and the role it played in Mussolini's rise to power, is somewhat confused. This is firstly because there is no clear or consistent ideology connected to Mussolini's fascist movement, and secondly because Mussolini started on the left of the political spectrum and eventually moved to the extreme right. In fact, Mussolini once described fascism as 'action and mood, not doctrine'. As late as 1932, he wrote that when he formed the Fasci di Combattimento in 1919, fascism was 'not a doctrine'.

## SOURCE A

Yet if anyone cares to read over the now crumbling minutes giving an account of the meetings at which the Italian Fasci di Combattimento were founded, he will find not a doctrine but a series of pointers.

Extract from *The Doctrine of Fascism*. 1932. Giovanni Gentile and Benito Mussolini. p. 23.

## Was fascism an ideology?

Many historians argue that there is no coherent and unified ideological root for fascism, in the way that there is for Marxism, for example (see pages 10–11 of the coursebook). Mussolini did not make a concerted effort to define the basic beliefs of his movement until after he became prime minister. In fact, it was not until 1925 that Mussolini began to draw up a clear statement of fascist doctrine. Under the leadership of the philosopher **Giovanni Gentile**, over 200 intellectuals met in Bologna and put together the *Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals*.

However, this attempt to bring together the diverse and often contradictory ideas of fascism was not particularly effective. A more determined effort came in 1932, ten years after Mussolini became prime minister of Italy, when Gentile (with some help from Mussolini) wrote a lengthy entry on fascism for the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, of which he was editor. The first part of this was published separately as *The Doctrine of Fascism*, under Mussolini's name. However, this was as much a statement of what fascism was *against* (essentially liberalism, socialism, democracy and pacifism) as about what it stood *for* (action, the nation, authority and the state). In the section entitled 'Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism', Gentile explained that fascism was anti-communist, anti-socialist, and strongly opposed to the 'economic conception of history' and the centrality of 'class war' – both of which are fundamental to Marxist and communist ideology. He went on to explain that fascism was also opposed to democracy. The text stressed the authoritarian aspect of fascism: 'The foundation of fascism is the conception of the State. Fascism conceives of the State as an absolute.'

## SOURCE B

Fascism [is] the precise negation of that doctrine which formed the basis of the so-called Scientific or Marxian Socialism.

After Socialism, Fascism attacks the whole complex of democratic ideologies ...

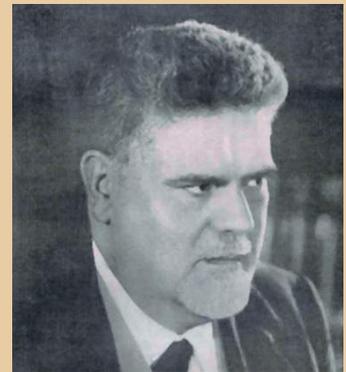
Fascism denies that the majority, through the mere fact of being a majority, can rule human societies; it denies that this majority can govern by means of a periodical consultation ...

Fascism is definitely and absolutely opposed to the doctrines of liberalism, both in the political and economic sphere.

Extracts from *The Doctrine of Fascism*. 1932. Giovanni Gentile and Benito Mussolini. pp. 30–32.

### Giovanni Gentile (1875–1944)

Known as the 'philosopher of fascism', Gentile's philosophy of 'actual idealism' corresponded to the fascist liking for action. Gentile became minister of public education under Mussolini in 1923. He was also an important member of the Fascist Grand Council, and remained a loyal supporter of Mussolini after the foundation of the Salò Republic in 1943. He was killed the following year by anti-fascist partisans.



Yet Mussolini's fascism served as the model for many other fascist parties that emerged elsewhere in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s. In his early days, Adolf Hitler was an admirer of Mussolini. In 1934, Mussolini even set up a Fascist International, which funded emerging fascist parties. While the main factors in Mussolini's rise were undoubtedly the instability in Italy, the violence of the fascist action squads and the supporting role of the élites, fascist aims and pronouncements also played a part.

### **Mussolini's early political views**

It was during the wave of socialist militancy from 1919 to 1922 that the man who was to become the fascist prime minister of Italy founded his political movement. Yet, at first, Mussolini was involved with the Socialist Party. He frequently attacked the Roman Catholic Church and repeatedly called for a deepening of the class struggle and violent revolution.

At this time, Mussolini opposed militarism and Italian imperialism, supporting international solidarity instead. In 1911, during violent demonstrations against the Italian war on Libya, he was imprisoned for his part in attempting to provoke an insurrection in protest against the war. On his release in 1912, he became editor of the Socialist Party's newspaper *Avanti!* in Milan. His articles advocated revolutionary violence against the liberal state. He also helped expel pro-royalists and reformists from the Socialist Party. However, Mussolini was not a Marxist, and his 'socialism' was largely anti-clerical republicanism. Syndicalism and anarchism (see page 10) were far less important aspects of his 'ideology'.

#### **SOURCE C**

*Comments by Angelica Balabanoff, a Marxist who had an affair with Mussolini, and who had some influence on his ideas in the early years.*

I soon saw that he [Mussolini] knew little of history, of economics or of Socialist theory ... Mussolini's radicalism and anti-clericalism were more a reflection of his early environment and his own rebellious egoism than the product of understanding and conviction.

*Quoted in Hite, J. and Hinton, C. 1998. Fascist Italy. London, UK. Hodder Education. p. 39.*

The outbreak of the First World War soon led Mussolini to make a dramatic political U-turn – the first of many. The Socialist Party (like the Russian Bolsheviks) stuck to the principles of revolutionary internationalism and therefore condemned the war as an inter-imperialist conflict, urging the working class and the Italian government to remain neutral. Yet, in August, many of Mussolini's friends in republican and syndicalist groups supported Italy's entry on the Franco-British side. They set up the *Fascio Rivoluzionario di Azione Internazionalista* (Revolutionary Group of International Action). Mussolini soon dropped the idea of class struggle and rapidly moved towards an extreme nationalist position, advocating Italian involvement in the war.

In November 1914, Mussolini was sacked as editor of *Avanti!* and set up his own newspaper, *Il Popolo d'Italia* ('The People of Italy') to campaign in favour of war. The paper was financed by wealthy Italian companies such as Fiat (which expected to gain lucrative war contracts), as well as by the French government. Later, the paper was partly financed by Britain and Tsarist Russia. Shortly after the establishment of *Il Popolo*, Mussolini was expelled from the Socialist Party.

Despite advocating intervention in the war, Mussolini did not volunteer for the army. He was conscripted in September 1915, and invalided out of the army in 1917, after an accident during a training exercise. He then resumed his role as editor of *Il Popolo*, blaming the liberal government for military incompetence and calling for a dictator to take charge of the war effort. His *Manifesto to the Nation*, published in November 1917 after the defeat at Caporetto (see page 7), called for a 'national union' to work for victory in the war.

The following month, some senators and deputies set up a *Fascio Parlamentare di Difesa Nazionale* (Parliamentary Group of National Defence). This coalition of nationalists, right-wing liberals and republican 'interventionists' set up various local *fasci* to take tough action against the 'enemy within' – for example, neutralists and socialist revolutionaries. Although Mussolini still advocated social reform, he was rapidly moving away from a socialist position and closer to the emerging nationalist movement. In July 1918, he formally renounced socialism.

## Fascist beliefs in 1919

Having already moved from his pre-war opposition to nationalism and imperialism to a pro-war expansionist position after 1915, Mussolini's political 'ideology' continued to shift. As seen in Unit 1, in March 1919 Mussolini set up a *Fascio di Combattimento* in Milan. The founder members of this group later became known as the **Fascists of the First Hour**. Soon, over 70 such *fasci* had been established in northern and central Italy. Their *Fascist Programme*, published in June, was an incoherent mixture of left-wing and right-wing policies. It was designed to hold these very different groups together, and to appeal to as wide an audience as possible.

**Fascists of the First Hour** As the meeting took place in a hall on Piazza San Sepolcro, these early fascists were also known as the *sansepolcrista*. Historians disagree about the actual numbers who attended this foundation meeting. In 1923, Mussolini stated there were only 52.

### SOURCE D

- 1 A new national Assembly [will be set up] ...
- 2 Proclamation of the Italian Republic ...
- 4 Abolition of all titles of nobility ...
- 9 Suppression of ... joint stock companies ... Suppression of all speculation by banks and stock exchanges.
- 10 Control and taxation of private wealth. Confiscation of unproductive income ...
- 12 Reorganisation of production on a co-operative basis and direct participation of the workers in the profits.

Extracts from the 1919 Fascist Programme. Quoted in Robson, M. 1992. *Italy: Liberalism and Fascism 1870–1945*. London, UK. Hodder & Stoughton. p. 48.

According to historian Alexander De Grand, Mussolini's fascism was a mixture of five, often contradictory, ideas and beliefs:

- 1 **National syndicalism** At first republican, vaguely socialist and anti-clerical.
- 2 **Technocratic fascism** Accepting and wholeheartedly embracing the industrial revolution and modernism (these included the futurists).
- 3 **Rural fascism** Anti-urban, anti-modern and anti-industrial.
- 4 **Conservative fascism** Essentially non-ideological and pragmatic, favouring tradition, monarchy and the Catholic Church.
- 5 **Nationalist fascism** The most coherent element, favouring an authoritarian political system and an aggressive foreign policy in order to achieve territorial expansion.

**Fact**

In the 1919 elections, the results for the fascist candidates – and for Mussolini himself (his fascist list in Milan got only 1.7% of the vote) – were so poor that the socialists in Milan organised a fake funeral for Mussolini and his fascist movement.

As Mussolini's political ambitions grew after 1919, the more radical aspects of the *Fascist Programme* began to be dropped in favour of right-wing elements. This process began in earnest after the fascists' poor performance in the 1919 elections.

By 1921, Mussolini had cut the number of fascist 'enemies' down to the socialists and the alleged 'threat' of imminent communist revolution. Previously, the list of fascism's enemies had included capitalism and big business, the monarchy and the Catholic Church. In fact, one way in which ideology played a significant part in Mussolini's rise was the way he cleverly both exaggerated and exploited the people's fear of those who supported Marxist and communist ideologies.

**Questions**

How do you account for the differences between the two statements of fascist programmes and policies in Source D (on page 21) and Source E opposite? What impact do you think Source E might have had on the conservative élites and classes?

**SOURCE E**

Our programme is simple: we wish to govern Italy. They ask us for programmes, but there are already too many. It is not programmes that are wanting for the salvation of Italy, but men and will-power ...

Our [Italy's] political class is deficient. The crisis of the Liberal State has proved it ... We must have a state which will simply say: 'The State does not represent a party, it represents the nation as a whole, it includes all, is over all, protects all.' This is the State which must arise from the Italy of Vittorio Veneto ... a state which does not fall under the power of the

Socialists ... we want to remove from the state all its economic attributes.

*Extracts from a speech made by Mussolini in Udine in September 1922. Quoted in Robson, M. 1992. Italy: Liberalism and Fascism 1870–1945. London, UK. Hodder & Stoughton. pp. 53–54.*

**SOURCE F**

The threat of Bolshevism was exploited cunningly by Mussolini and it is difficult to overestimate its importance in bringing Fascism to power. Yet in truth, the threat in Italy was almost entirely illusory. No master plan of revolution existed; peasants and workers acted without premeditation and on a local basis only ... By the last quarter of 1921, the worst of the post-war depression was past; so was the worst of proletarian unrest. By the time, a year later, that Mussolini arrived in office to save Italy from Bolshevism, the threat, if it ever existed, was over.

Cassels, A. 1969. *Fascist Italy*. London, UK. Routledge & Keegan Paul. pp. 24–25.

## Fascist 'ideology', 1921–22

After the May 1921 elections, in which Mussolini and 34 other fascist deputies from the right wing of the movement were elected, he became increasingly concerned with appeasing the conservative classes and controlling the *ras*.

In fact, Mussolini had been distancing himself from the more radical policies of early fascism since 1920. In October 1921, he successfully pushed for the establishment of a more disciplined political party – the National Fascist Party (PNF). This new party had a clear right-wing programme. It appealed to Mussolini's capitalist backers but it angered the *ras*, who wanted to destroy the existing political system, not participate in it. They became increasingly violent – a 'creeping insurrection', according to historian Philip Morgan. The socialists' general strike at the end of July 1922, which was intended to force the liberal government to take action against fascist attacks, merely served to frighten the conservatives and 'justify' further violence from the fascists.

## Squadristo

During 1921, Mussolini's 'ideology' was focused much more on the cult of fascist violence – which came to be known as *squadristo* – than on political policies and programmes. After the bloc with the liberals and the May elections of 1921, Mussolini began to play on the conservatives' exaggerated fear of the socialists. In November, in another shift away from the radicalism of early fascism, Mussolini made a direct attempt to appease Catholics. The earlier left-wing and anti-clerical aspects of the 1919 programme were dropped: now the PNF opposed divorce and supported the Popolari's demands for better treatment of peasants.

From 1921 onwards, Mussolini's speeches and articles concentrated on what fascism was *against* – socialism and liberalism – rather than what it was *for*. However, Mussolini did stress fascism's commitment to strong government, patriotism and imperial expansion. Fascist violence increased during 1921–22.

## To what extent was Mussolini a fascist?

Having looked at Mussolini's views and his movement's actions in the previous pages, it should now be possible to assess to what extent Mussolini himself can be described as a fascist. To draw any conclusions, it is necessary to examine how historians have attempted to define fascism, and to identify the movement's core beliefs. In particular, it is necessary to investigate what has been called 'generic fascism' – and how Mussolini's views relate to such academic definitions.

## Generic fascism

In general terms, when considering 'generic fascism', many historians – such as Roger Griffin and Stanley Payne – have isolated a core set of aspects of fascist ideology, which identifies what fascists stood for. At the heart of fascism lie at least four key elements:

- a populist – even revolutionary – form of ultra-nationalism
- a desire to destroy the existing political system
- a belief in a strong leader (the *Führerprinzip*, or 'leadership principle')
- a belief in the positive values of vitalism (action) and violence.

However, Roger Eatwell and others have often found it easier to identify fascist ideology by isolating what they were *against*, thus focusing on the negative and reactionary aspects of the movement. These include a rejection of the liberal ideas of the 18th-century Enlightenment, and 19th-century positivism, both of which had stressed rationalism, reason and progress.

## Proto-fascism

**proto-fascism** This early, incomplete form of fascism, which began to emerge before 1919, included elements of syndicalism found in the writings of philosopher Georges Sorel (1847–1922). However, fascists soon replaced Sorel's idea of a general strike fought by revolutionary unions (known as *syndicats*) with the 'big idea' of a powerful, united nation. There was also the idea of 'vitalism', which stated that emotion and action were superior to reason. It was the latter aspect in particular that led Mussolini and his followers to emphasise the need for action and violent combat.

Some historians have described the period before the First World War as the 'incubatory period of fascism'. Initially, the **proto-fascism** that developed from the late 19th century was opposed to the growth of liberal (i.e. unrestricted or 'free market') capitalism, which tended to negatively affect smaller businesses and artisans. Parliamentary democracy, which often came in the wake of industrial capitalism, was seen as a way for the wealthy – and for the organised labour movement – to influence politics in a way that harmed the 'small man' and 'the nation'. Certainly, it was from these quarters that Mussolini, and later Hitler, drew the majority of their active support and formed their mass movements.

Many nationalists and 'small men' were moving towards a form of reactionary ultra-nationalism. The nationalist and imperialist Italian Nationalist Association was particularly important in this shift. Dissatisfied nationalists and frightened conservatives longed to return to a more glorious Italian past (recalling the empire of ancient Rome), and feared the growth of socialism and the threat of communist revolution. Such views were widespread amongst the upper and middle classes in Italy – not just among the industrial, financial and landowning élites, but also shopkeepers, small farmers and clerical workers. Many despised the weak liberal coalitions and wanted a stronger, more authoritarian government to defend their interests.

## Activity

Carry out further research on the historical debates surrounding proto-fascism and generic fascism.

*Fascist Blackshirts from a Fascio di Combattimento (battle group)*



**SOURCE G**

We allow ourselves the luxury of being aristocrats and democrats; conservatives and progressives; reactionaries and revolutionaries; legalitarians and illegalitarians, according to the circumstances of the time.

Mussolini, commenting on the content of fascist ideology in 1919. Quoted in Pearce, R. 1997. *Fascism and Nazism*. London, UK. Hodder & Stoughton. p. 7.

**Question**

What does Source G reveal about the importance of ideology in the Italian Fascist Party?

**SOURCE H**

Born in the womb of bourgeois democracy, fascism in the eyes of the capitalists is a means of saving capitalism from collapse. It is only for the purpose of deceiving and disarming the workers that social democracy denies the fascistisation of bourgeois democratic countries and the countries of the fascist dictatorship.

Extract from the plenum on fascism of the Communist International, December 1933. Quoted in Griffin, R. (ed). 1995. *Fascism: a Reader*. Oxford, UK. Oxford Paperbacks. p. 263.

**Activity**

Assess the value and limitations of Source H as evidence of the role played by fascist movements, and the reasons for fascist violence, in Italy during the 1920s.

## What was the nature of Italy's fascist state?

When he became prime minister in October 1922, Mussolini almost immediately took steps towards the construction of his fascist state. By 1924, Italy was on the way to becoming a fascist dictatorship.

**SOURCE I**

The Fascist conception of the State is all-embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value. Thus understood, Fascism is totalitarian, and the Fascist State – a synthesis and a unit inclusive of all values – interprets, develops, and potentiates the whole life of a people ... The Fascist State lays claim to rule in the economic field no less than in others; it makes its action felt throughout the length and breadth of the country by means of its corporate, social, and educational institutions, and all the political, economic, and spiritual forces of the nation, organised in their respective associations, circulate within the State.

Extracts from the 1935 edition of *The Doctrine of Fascism*. pp. 14 and 41.

Source I on page 25 makes extravagant claims as to the nature of the state that Mussolini attempted to establish after 1922. However, such claims were often not an accurate reflection of reality. Nonetheless, by December 1924, the crisis following the murder of Giacomo Matteotti (see page 36) led some more militant fascists to present Mussolini with an ultimatum – establish a fascist dictatorship, or they would replace him with someone who would. After some hesitation, Mussolini agreed to declare himself dictator, but only on his own terms. He was determined to enforce a dictatorship that would be independent of the *ras*. The authoritarian regime that Mussolini presided over between 1925 and 1945 was thus a personal rather than a Fascist Party dictatorship.

*Mussolini and Catholic priests; as Mussolini's rule progressed he won over Church leaders, largely through the Lateran Agreements of 1929 (see page 58)*



### **The Fascist Party**

In fact, Mussolini deliberately restricted the influence of the PNF by using members of the traditional conservative élites to maintain law and order. This included the police, the judicial system, the civil service and the army. Mussolini made no serious attempt to 'fascistise' the system of government by restricting appointments to leading fascists, as some of his followers wanted.

However, Mussolini did instigate a purge of the judiciary, and many judges were sacked for lack of loyalty or for following an overly independent line. Mussolini frequently intervened in legal cases, and imprisonment without trial was

common. The chief of police was another position filled by career politicians rather than fascists. In the provinces, it was the prefects (the senior civil servants who ran the administration, suppressed 'subversives' and controlled the police) who appointed the *podesta*. The prefects had to be loyal to the government, but also to the local élites. Between 1922 and 1929, only 29 of the 86 new *podesta* appointed were fascists. Most were career civil servants.

At first, the *ras* resisted these developments, especially in central Italy. As late as 1927, local fascist leaders were able to insist on some power sharing. By 1930, however, Mussolini claimed this conflict had been resolved in favour of the prefects. Disputes between prefects and local party leaders still broke out occasionally, though.

After Farinacci's forced resignation in October 1926 (ostensibly for another outburst of *squadristi* violence, but really because he had begun to push for a 'second wave' of fascist revolution), the prefects and the *podesta* set about stamping out *squadristo*. In January 1927, Mussolini issued instructions that all Italians, including fascists, should offer the prefects total obedience.

## The 'taming' of the PNF

In 1926, the new party secretary, **Augusto Turati**, began a purge of more militant fascists. At the same time, he opened membership to people who merely wanted to further their career. In just one year, party membership rose from about 640,000 to just under 940,000. For the first time, fascist branches were established in southern Italy.

Most of these new members came from the same local élites that had previously belonged to or supported the liberals. Soon there were very few Fascists of the First Hour left in important positions. At the same time, over 100,000 party members left – many of them disgusted by what was happening to their party.

These developments continued in the 1930s under Turati's successors, Giovanni Giuriati and Achille Starace. The PNF became a mass party, with almost 5 million (mainly inactive) members by 1943. However, most were white-collar employees, while the workers and peasants (who had once made up 30% of the party's membership) dropped to a small minority. The Fascist Party thus increasingly became a tame and loyal base of support for Mussolini. At the same time, party posts were filled by appointment from above, rather than through election by party members.

This gradual weakening of the PNF was due in part to internal divisions and disunity, which had existed from its foundation. According to the historian Richard Thurlow, there were at least five different factions within the party. These included the militant *ras*, who (like sections of the *Sturmabteilung* in Nazi Germany) wanted a 'second wave' of fascist revolution to replace state institutions with fascist ones, and the 'left' fascists, who wanted to establish a corporatist, or national syndicalist, state.

Opposed to these two factions were the fascist 'revisionists', led by Dino Grandi, Massimo Rocca and Giuseppe Bottai, who were prepared to co-operate and merge with the existing political system. Mussolini was able to play off these factions against each other to enhance his own power. At the same time, he manipulated different sectors of state personnel to ensure that no one could challenge his authority.

### Fact

In 1927, only about 15% of the civil service were said to be fascists: both the interior minister (Luigi Federzoni) and the minister of justice (Alfredo Rocco) were conservative ex-nationalists. In the 1930s, civil servants often proclaimed loyalty to the Fascist Party merely to retain their jobs.

**podesta** The *podesta* were the local mayors. After elected local councils were abolished in 1926, the prefects – whose powers were greatly increased – appointed all the mayors in their province. They usually chose 'respectable' landowners or ex-army officers, rather than local fascists. *Podesta* received no payment, so needed to be financially independent.

### Augusto Turati (1888–1955)

Turati was an ex-syndicalist, an irredentist, a supporter of Italy's entry into the First World War, and a journalist. He joined Mussolini's Fascio di Combattimento in 1920, and became the PNF boss of Brescia. He was National Party secretary from 1926 to 1930. His purge of party members affected both provincial and non-provincial branches. In 1927, for example, 7000 of Rome's 31,000 members were purged. In his first year as party secretary, Turati expelled 30,000 members, and by 1929, that number had risen to over 50,000. Later, he opposed Italy's entry into the Second World War, and did not support Mussolini's Salò Republic.

**Edmondo Rossoni (1884–1965)** Rossoni was initially a revolutionary syndicalist, who was imprisoned for his activities in 1908. He became a socialist and then a nationalist, joining Mussolini's PNF in 1921. Rossoni was the most prominent of the fascist labour leaders and, as head of the Confederation of Fascist Syndicates, he wanted genuine workers' representatives who would share power with employers. After his dismissal in 1928, he continued in fascist politics, serving as under-secretary to the president of the Fascist Grand Council from 1932 to 1935. Later, he supported Dino Grandi's coup and voted against Mussolini in 1943.



## The corporate state

Those fascists who believed that their movement was a 'third way' between capitalism and communism favoured the creation of a corporate state. Sometimes known as the corporative state, the aim of corporativism was to replace the politics of traditional parliamentary democracy with that of corporations representing the nation's various economic sectors. These corporations, each with equal representation for employers and employees, were supposed to overcome class conflict. By thus avoiding strikes and other labour disputes, the corporate state would instead give prime consideration to the interests of the nation. Although there would be elements of increased state control, there was no thought of eradicating private ownership.

### SOURCE J

Fascism is therefore opposed to Socialism to which unity within the State (which amalgamates classes into a single economic and ethical reality) is unknown, and which sees in history nothing but the class struggle. Fascism is likewise opposed to trade unionism as a class weapon. But when brought within the orbit of the State, Fascism recognises the real needs which gave rise to socialism and trade-unionism, giving them due weight in the guild or corporative system in which divergent interests are coordinated and harmonised in the unity of the State.

*Extract from The Doctrine of Fascism. 1932. Giovanni Gentile and Benito Mussolini. p. 15.*

## The fascist syndicates

During their rise to power in the years 1920–22, the fascists closed down the traditional labour movement trade unions in the areas they controlled. They replaced these unions with fascist-controlled syndicates, which were still supposed to represent workers' interests. By 1922, a Confederation of Fascist Syndicates had been set up, headed by **Edmondo Rossoni**, who wanted to create corporations that would force industrialists to make some concessions to workers' demands. These corporations would be established for each industry, and made up of government representatives, employers' organisations and representatives from the fascist syndicates.

However, this 'leftist' fascist aspiration – unlike their attacks on the traditional trade unions – was opposed by the Confindustria, the organisation that represented the main industrialists in Italy. In December 1923, when Mussolini had been prime minister for 14 months, the Chigi Palace Pact was made. In this agreement, the industrialists promised to co-operate with the Confederation of Fascist Syndicates, but they insisted on maintaining their own independent organisations.

Despite this, many employers were not prepared to make any significant concessions to workers, and this provoked a series of strikes in 1925. The resulting Vidoni Palace Pact confirmed that the Confindustria and the Confederation of

Fascist Syndicates were the only organisations allowed to represent employers and employees respectively. It was also made clear that workers were not to challenge the authority of employers and managers. All workers' factory councils were closed down and non-fascist trade unions were abolished. In 1926, Alfredo Rocco's law made all strikes illegal – even those by fascist syndicates – and declared that industrial disputes must be settled in special labour courts. The law also stated that there could only be one organisation (a fascist syndicate) of workers and employers in each branch of industry, and identified seven main areas of economic activity.

## The corporations

Following these developments, in July 1926 Mussolini established a Ministry of Corporations, with himself as the minister. Each corporation was made up of representatives of employers and workers of the same economic or industrial sector (e.g. mining), with the state's representatives acting as referees and final adjudicators. In practice, this new ministry was run by the under-secretary, **Giuseppe Bottai**, who produced the Charter of Labour (written mainly by Rocco) in April 1927. This document guaranteed fair judgement of labour disputes and promised to carry out social reforms such as improved health care and accident insurance schemes (although none of these measures had the force of law).

In May 1927, Mussolini delivered a speech in which he claimed that a corporate state had been established. He even promised that the corporations would elect half the members of the next Chamber of Deputies. In May the following year, a new electoral law was passed – a compromise between party and syndicalist views. It allowed for 1000 names to be recommended to the Fascist Grand Council, which would select 400 as candidates for the March 1929 election.

As Mussolini feared, the corporations weakened the fascist syndicates. In 1928, Rossoni was dismissed and the Confederation of Fascist Syndicates was abolished. In 1929, Bottai took over as minister of corporations and, in March 1930, he set up the National Council of Corporations (NCC), which represented the seven largest corporations. In 1932, Mussolini resumed control of the Ministry of Corporations, and the number of corporations slowly grew, reaching 22 by 1934.

Despite all the reorganisation, Mussolini usually made the important decisions himself. In particular, most of the decisions on policies to deal with the effects of the Great Depression (see page 40) had nothing to do with the corporations – including the decision to cut wages. Furthermore, as most trade unionists experienced in industrial negotiations and disputes were socialists or communists (and were therefore either dead, in prison or in exile), the employers had a greater influence in the corporations. Many were 'tame' members of the fascist syndicates, or even middle-class careerists. In addition, the employers were nearly always supported by the three government-appointed Fascist Party members, who were supposed to remain neutral.

In 1938, in a belated attempt to give more credibility to the corporate state, Mussolini decided to abolish the Chamber of Deputies and to put in its place the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations. Mussolini hoped to establish a new form of politics, in which people were given a voice according to their economic function or occupation, rather than their territorial location. In reality, however, this had little substance or power, being dominated by fascists appointed from above.

### Giuseppe Bottai (1895–1959)

Bottai met Mussolini in 1919 and helped set up a *fascio* in Rome, where he acted as editor of Mussolini's paper, *Il Popolo d'Italia*. He took part in the March on Rome, and his unit was responsible for the deaths of several anti-fascists. From 1926 to 1929, Bottai was deputy secretary of corporations. From 1936 to 1943, he served as minister for education and mayor of Rome. He was responsible for implementing several anti-democratic and anti-Semitic measures, including removing all Jewish students and teachers from schools and universities. In 1943, Bottai sided with Grandi in the coup against Mussolini.

### Fact

In the March 1929 election, electors could only vote 'yes' or 'no' to the Grand Council's list. Of the original 1000 names recommended by syndicates, employers' associations, ex-servicemen and a few other groups, the employers got 125 of their nominees 'elected', while the workers' syndicates only managed 89. Mussolini employed his usual methods of 'persuasion', resulting in a 90% turnout, with 98.3% voting in favour of the list presented to them. One of the few politicians to speak out against the new electoral law was Giolitti.

### Historical debate

Historians are divided over the nature of Italian fascism and its ideology. One broad interpretation has tended to examine fascist ideology and its corporate state in a serious way, and largely on its own terms. Another has been much more sceptical, considering its ideology to be incoherent and its declared 'achievements' mainly unfounded propaganda claims. Since the works of historians Renzo De Felice and Emilio Gentile, a third 'revisionist' strand has returned to the idea of fascist ideology and its stated purposes as relatively coherent and worthy of serious study.

### Was Mussolini an all-powerful dictator?

Despite Mussolini's claims, and despite having established control over the PNF, the reality was that he had to share power with the traditional groups that had wielded power in Italy long before 1922. These included the monarchy, the Catholic Church, the civil service and the courts, and the industrial and financial élites and their organisations. For example, after other fascist leaders began moving against Mussolini, it was the king who eventually ordered his arrest, on 25 July 1943.

#### SOURCE K

The existence of autonomous, conservative interests – monarchy, industry, agrari, armed forces and Church – was thus integral to Mussolini's regime as it entered the 1930s. Their continued influence made the regime, in its essential character, less profoundly 'fascist' and less totalitarian in scope than it claimed to be and than outward appearances suggested.

*Blinkhorn, M. 2006. Mussolini and Fascist Italy. London, UK. Routledge. p. 52.*

#### SOURCE L

Mussolini gave the impression of being all-powerful, but he could not rule alone, and the Fascist Party as such was little help to him in running the country. The civil service, the courts, the armed forces and the police remained in the hands of career officials whose commitment to Fascism was usually nominal.

*Tannenbaum, E. 1973. Fascism in Italy. London, UK. Allen Lane. p. 93.*



### Theory of knowledge

#### History and propaganda

Is it possible to examine Italian fascist ideology and the nature of Mussolini's state with any degree of certainty? Or does the propaganda that surrounded Mussolini's statements and policies put such a 'spin' on these issues that it is almost impossible for historians and students of history to arrive at any accurate and objective judgements?

#### SOURCE M

The new system was a personal dictatorship under Mussolini, yet still legally a monarchy ... The government ruled by decree ... Local elections were eliminated; all mayors were now appointed by decree. Yet the basic legal and administrative apparatus of the Italian government remained intact. There was no 'Fascist revolution', save at the top.

*Payne, S. 1995. A History of Fascism, 1914–45. London, UK. UCL Press. pp. 116–17.*

## End of unit activities

- 1 Carry out further research on the thinkers and ideas that contributed to the development of fascism. Then produce a poster to summarise this information.
- 2 Draw up a chart to show the extent to which Mussolini's fascist ideology seemed to offer:
  - a new form of society
  - a new economic and social structure
  - new values.
- 3 After 1924, Mussolini made increasing efforts to reduce the influence of the more radical sections of his party. List the ways in which he did this, and the possible reasons for his actions.
- 4 Find out more about the various steps in the creation of the corporate state in Italy from 1926 to 1932. Then write a few paragraphs to explain why the more radical sections of the PNF, such as Edmondo Rossoni, were disappointed by these developments.

### Discussion point

Was there any coherent ideology behind Italian fascism and Mussolini's fascist state? Divide the class into two groups. One group should prepare a presentation that argues that there was a coherent fascist ideology. The other group should argue that there was no clear or consistent ideological framework. After the presentation, take a vote on which argument was the most convincing.

# 3 Establishment and consolidation of Mussolini's rule

## Timeline

**1922 Nov** Mussolini given emergency powers

**Dec** establishment of Fascist Grand Council

**1923 Jan** formation of national fascist militia

**Jul** Acerbo Law

**1924 Mar** fascist violence against opposition

**Apr** elections held in which fascists and their allies win a large majority

**Jun** Matteotti abducted and murdered

**Aug** Aventine Secession

**1925 Jan** end of 'Matteotti crisis'

**Feb** Farinacci becomes secretary of PNF

**Jul** control of press exerted

**Aug** fascist *podesta* control provinces

**1926 Jan** Mussolini takes power to rule by decree

**Apr** Rocco's Law on labour relations passed

**Jul** formation of Ministry of Corporations

**Oct** trade unions and all opposition parties banned

**Nov** internal exile (*confino*) for political prisoners

**1927 Apr** Charter of Labour revealed; formation of OVRA

**1928 May** restriction of franchise to males belonging to fascist syndicates; powers of king reduced

**1939 Jan** Chamber of Fasci and Corporations replaces Chamber of Deputies

**1940 Jun** Italy enters Second World War

**1942** Allied bombing of Italy

**1943 Jul** Mussolini brought down by coup

**Sep** Italy surrenders; formation of Salò Republic (Italian Social Republic)

**1945 Apr** Mussolini arrested and shot

## Key questions

- How did Mussolini establish his power in the period 1922–24?
- What measures were taken after 1924 to further consolidate Mussolini's power?
- What other methods did Mussolini use to consolidate his power?

## Overview

- By 1922, Mussolini was prime minister, but he was still not head of a fascist government. He began to take steps to increase his power over both the state and his own party.
- Securing the support of the Catholic Church and industrialists, in 1923 Mussolini pushed through a reform of the electoral system. In the 1924 election, using a variety of methods, the PNF became the largest party.
- After surviving the 'Matteotti crisis' of 1924, the following year Mussolini began a series of measures designed to establish a one-party state, including banning trade unions and all opposition parties, and taking control of local government.
- At the same time, repression, censorship, control of the media and various forms of propaganda all helped create Mussolini's personal dictatorship by the late 1920s.
- However, Italy's entry into the Second World War in 1940 led to increased opposition to Mussolini, and his downfall in 1943.
- Mussolini was eventually captured and shot by partisans in 1945.

## How did Mussolini establish his power in the period 1922–24?

Although Mussolini was now prime minister, Italy was not a fascist state – for that to happen, he needed to change the constitution. To achieve this he set out to win new political allies, doing everything in his power to widen the political appeal of fascism. Such a move was essential, as Mussolini's government was essentially a Nationalist–Popolari–Liberal coalition that could fall at any time if one of these parties withdrew. There were only four fascists in the cabinet. In addition, the king had the power to dismiss Mussolini as prime minister. Both the king and the other political leaders believed Mussolini could be tamed, transformed and used to their own advantage.

## Early moves

Mussolini had no intention of being tamed. Instead, he wished to establish a one-party fascist state, with himself as dictator.

### SOURCE A

For all his willingness to compromise, at least temporarily, with the Italian establishment, Mussolini certainly had no wish or intention to relinquish the power he now held. Nor, however, can he be regarded as one of those Fascist maximalists like Farinacci, Rossoni or Balbo who – in their different ways – from the start dreamed of a radical 'Fascist revolution'. Probably, at this early stage, Mussolini envisaged, rather than a complete political revolution, a drastic revision of the existing system to ensure the repeated renewal of his authority. For a time at least this would have satisfied his new conservative supporters, for whom a Fascist-led government may have been a blessing, and the prospect of greater authoritarianism attractive.

*Blinkhorn, M. 2006. Mussolini and Fascist Italy. London, UK. Routledge. pp. 30–31.*

In his first speech to parliament on 16 November 1922, Mussolini made a veiled threat about the strength of the Fascist Party (he claimed 300,000 armed and obedient members). He also spoke of his desire to create a strong and united Italy, and asked for emergency powers to deal with Italy's economic and political problems.

### SOURCE B

And so that everyone may know ... I am here to defend and enforce in the highest degree the Blackshirts' revolution ... I could have abused my victory, but I refused to do so. I imposed limits on myself ... With 300,000 youths armed to the teeth, fully determined and almost mystically ready to act on any command of mine, I could have punished all those who defamed and tried to sully fascism ... I could have transformed this drab silent hall into a camp for my squads ... I could have barred the doors of Parliament and formed a government exclusively of Fascists. I could have done so; but I chose not to, at least not for the present.

*From Mussolini's first speech as prime minister, 16 November 1922. Quoted in Hite, J. and Hinton, C. 1998. Fascist Italy. London, UK. Hodder Education. p. 73.*

The deputies, including ex-prime ministers Giolitti, Salandra and Facta, gave Mussolini an enormous vote of confidence and emergency powers for a year.

**Fascist Grand Council** This was declared to be the supreme decision-making body within the Fascist Party. It could discuss proposals for government action, but Mussolini insisted on sole power over appointments to his council. In effect, he was attempting to establish total control over fascist policy-making.

## The élites or the party?

In order to increase his support amongst the conservative élites, Mussolini appointed the liberal Alberto de Stefani as finance minister. De Stefani's economic policies (reducing government controls on industry and trade, and cutting taxation) pleased the industrialists and shopkeepers. However, many on the left of the Fascist Party were angered, as they would have preferred to see significant social reforms. Partly as an attempt to increase his control over the Fascist Party, in December Mussolini established a **Fascist Grand Council**.

The following month, in January 1923, Mussolini succeeded in getting the Fascist Grand Council to agree that the regional fascist squads should be formed into a national militia, funded by the government. This militia, called the National Security Guards (MVSN), swore an oath of loyalty to Mussolini, not the king. This gave Mussolini a paramilitary organisation of over 30,000 men, which he could deploy against anti-fascists. At the same time, it considerably reduced the power of the provincial *ras*.

### SOURCE C

What he did was to dissolve the squads and incorporate the *squadristi* into a new body, the Militia (Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale, MVSN), organised by De Bono at the Interior. The Militia would 'defend the Fascist revolution', would protect the Fascist regime from its enemies, would give the *squadristi* status, pay and some local power, and would also discipline them: the ordinary *ex-squadristi* would supposedly find themselves serving under the command of ex-army officers. It was, therefore, an ambiguous body, part reward, part constraint; it was also part Fascist, part state, and it had ambiguous functions, part military, part police. However, it soon became clear that neither the army nor any of the various police forces was willing to let the MVSN muscle into its territory.

Clark, M. 2005. *Mussolini*. London, UK. Pearson. p. 67.

### Question

How did the creation of the Fascist Grand Council and the MVSN help Mussolini to control his own party?

### Fact

The Nationalist Party had close links to big business and the army. Ex-nationalists such as Enrico Corradini, Luigi Federzoni and Alfredo Rocco brought with them a desire for an authoritarian government and a much-enlarged Italian empire.

However, the Fascist Grand Council also worked alongside the government's Council of Ministers – fascist ministers took important decisions, which were then passed on to the Council of Ministers for official approval. In addition to his role as prime minister, Mussolini also acted as interior and foreign minister.

By early 1923, the employers' organisation – the Confindustria – had pledged its support for Mussolini. This was largely due to his announcement that there would be no serious measures taken against tax evasion, which was widely practised by wealthy companies and individuals. In March 1923, the small Nationalist Party (a member of the coalition) merged with the Fascist Party.

This merger brought the fascists additional paramilitary forces (the Nationalists' Blueshirts), but it also confirmed Mussolini's increasing shift to the right, towards the conservative élites. Once again, this disturbed the more militant fascists.

## The Vatican

At the same time, from April to June 1923, Mussolini worked to gain greater support from the Catholic hierarchy, in order to widen the fascists' political base and to weaken the position of the Popolari, another key member of the coalition government. Mussolini announced measures that included renouncing atheism, making religious education compulsory, banning contraception and punishing swearing in public places. Pope Pius XI, already a fascist sympathiser, signalled his willingness to withdraw his support for the Popolari.

### SOURCE D

Mussolini alone has a proper understanding of what is necessary for his country in order to rid it of the anarchy to which it has been reduced by an impotent parliamentarianism and three years of war. You see that he has carried the nation with him. May he be able to regenerate Italy.

*Comments made by Pope Pius XI to the French ambassador, shortly after Mussolini was appointed prime minister. Quoted in Hite, J. and Hinton, C. 1998. Fascist Italy. London, UK. Hodder Education. p. 75.*

In April 1923, Mussolini sacked all Popolari ministers from his government, claiming that they refused to give him full support. In June, the pope forced the priest Don Luigi Sturzo, a Popolari leader, to resign. Support for the Popolari among the conservative Catholics declined and, by the summer of 1923, the party had lost most of its political importance.

## Changing the constitution – the Acerbo Law

More secure in his position, Mussolini announced his intention to reform the electoral system in a way that he hoped would strengthen his status even further. On his instructions, the under-secretary of state, Giacomo Acerbo, outlined a new electoral law that gave the party or alliance that won the most votes two-thirds of the seats in parliament, as long as the percentage was no less than 25% of the votes cast. According to Mussolini, this would give Italy the strong and stable government it needed. In fact, the law was clearly intended to give the fascists total, but legally acquired, control over Italian politics. Given the intimidation and violence that could be expected from the fascists and the fact that, as minister of the interior, Mussolini could order the police not to intervene, there was little likelihood of the fascists' opponents ever being able to vote them out of office.

To ensure the passage of this law, Mussolini overcame the opposition (who greatly outnumbered the 35 fascist deputies) by threatening to abolish parliament, and by placing armed fascist guards on the doors to intimidate the deputies. Liberal leaders such as Giolitti and Salandra advised their supporters to approve the law, and it was passed by a large majority in July 1923. Most Popolari deputies abstained. With the Acerbo Law in place, Mussolini now needed to ensure his party would win the most votes in the next election. He was helped by the events of August 1923 that became known as the Corfu Incident.

### Fact

The Corfu Incident occurred when an Italian general was murdered on Greek soil while making maps of a disputed area. Mussolini took advantage of this to demand that Greece pay 50 million lire as compensation, and make a full apology. When Greece refused to pay (as they had not been responsible), Mussolini – ignoring criticism from the League of Nations – ordered Italian marines to invade the Greek island of Corfu. The Greek government paid the fine. Many Italians regarded Mussolini as a national hero after this incident.

### **Amerigo Dumini (1894–1967)**

Dumini was born in the USA, after his parents emigrated there from Italy. He travelled to Florence at the end of the First World War, and became involved in the local Fascio di Combattimento. He was soon known as 'Il Duce's hit man'. In 1924, Dumini headed the group that kidnapped and then murdered Giacomo Matteotti, leader of the Socialist Party. In 1943, after Mussolini's overthrow, Dumini gave his support to the establishment of the Salò Republic.

**Giacomo Matteotti (1885–1924)** Born into a wealthy family, Matteotti studied law at the University of Bologna. He soon became active in socialist politics, and opposed Italy's entry into the First World War, in line with the official position of the Italian Socialist Party. He was first elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1919, and eventually became leader of the United Socialist Party. He was an outspoken critic of fascist violence.



## **The election of April 1924**

It was not until April 1924 that Mussolini decided to hold new elections. In January he set up a secret gang of thugs and gangsters to terrorise anti-fascists both in Italy and abroad. Known as the Ceka, this group was led by **Amerigo Dumini**, who had his own office within the ministry of the interior.

The elections were announced in March, and Dumini's gang unleashed a wave of terror against anti-fascists, in which over 100 people were killed. In addition to this, voting certificates were seized, fascists voted on behalf of dead people, and ballot boxes were stolen in areas where fascists feared electoral defeat. As a result, the fascists (and the right-wing liberals, including Salandra and Orlando, who had formed an electoral alliance with the fascists) won almost 65% of the vote. The number of fascists in the 535-seat chamber rose from 35 to 374. Yet despite the intimidation and vote-rigging, over 2.5 million Italians still voted for opposition parties, mainly the socialists and the communists.

## **The Matteotti crisis**

When the new parliament met for the first time, on 30 May 1924, **Giacomo Matteotti**, an independent and much-respected socialist, strongly condemned the fascist violence and corruption that had occurred during the election. He even dared to produce evidence, and called the results a fraud.

On 10 June 1924, Matteotti was abducted in Rome. Although there was no hard evidence, it was widely assumed that he had been murdered by Dumini's fascist thugs, and many began to distance themselves from Mussolini's regime. For a time, it seemed as though revulsion at Matteotti's murder might actually cause Mussolini's downfall. He was sufficiently worried to suspend parliament in order to prevent a debate. To win back support, Mussolini ordered the arrest of Dumini and his gang on 15 June and, on 18 August, Matteotti's body was found. Although Dumini was found guilty of the murder and imprisoned, newspapers began to print evidence of Mussolini's involvement.

*The body of Giacomo Matteotti is carried out of the woods outside Rome*



This evidence led most of the opposition deputies – mainly socialists, communists and radical Popolari – to boycott parliament in protest, under the leadership of the liberal Giovanni Amendola. This became known as the **Aventine Secession**, and was intended to force the king to dismiss Mussolini. At first, the king refused to consider such an action and instead blamed the opposition (most of whom were republicans, and thus disliked by the king) for unconstitutional behaviour.

### SOURCE E

The Aventine [Secession] was undermined by its own contradictions. For the members of the opposition, genuine democrats who had not understood that Fascism represented a radically new element in political life, there was no choice but to await the constitutional monarch's pleasure ... Therefore, and as much in order to avoid frightening the king as out of fear of revolution, they rejected the call for a general strike and the proclamation of the Aventine as the sole legal Parliament of the country ... They hoped to bring about a Cabinet crisis and the dismissal of Mussolini. It was now December, seven months after the murder of Matteotti, and the Aventine moderates had not yet learned that on the parliamentary battleground Mussolini was bound to win because the king was determined to uphold him.

Gallo, M. 1974. *Mussolini's Italy*. London, UK. Macmillan. pp. 189–91.

The pope also supported Mussolini, and condemned the Popolari deputies who had participated in the Aventine Secession. He was joined by Giolitti and Salandra and other leading liberals and conservatives, all of whom saw this as a way of reasserting influence over a now-weakened Mussolini. They also feared that Mussolini's fall might be followed by a revival of the revolutionary left-wing parties. Perhaps most significantly, leading industrialists were opposed to any change of government, especially as Mussolini had begun to reduce state involvement in the economy.

### SOURCE F

Mussolini clearly feared his days were numbered. Yet the king declined to act ... He had quickly come to value Mussolini ...

Mussolini was under considerable pressure, but he was far from resigning. He countered by making changes in the government to reassure moderates ... Damage limitation was helped by the Vatican ... Many leading members of the clergy were grateful to Fascism for breaking the Left ... Industrialists too stayed largely faithful, reflecting their basic satisfaction with government policy.

Eatwell, R. 1995. *Fascism: a History*. London, UK. Chatto & Windus. p. 52.

**Aventine Secession** This was named after similar events in ancient Rome, when a group of politicians set up a rival assembly on the Aventine Hills above Rome. The opposition deputies of 1924 walked out of the Chamber and set up an alternative parliamentary assembly, claiming they were now the true and democratic representatives of the Italian people.

### Historical debate

There has been some debate amongst historians about Mussolini's involvement in Matteotti's assassination. De Felice and Emilio Gentile argued that Mussolini had not ordered the death of Matteotti. De Felice even claimed that Mussolini was the victim of a political plot to threaten his power and frustrate his plans to create a more broad-based government. Other historians, including Denis Mack Smith, thought Mussolini was probably aware of the assassination plot but that it was ordered and organised by someone else. However, some studies have suggested that Mussolini did order the murder, to stop Matteotti publishing documents containing details of corruption involving the selling of oil rights to a US company.

### Question

What reasons can you give for the failure of the Aventine Secession?

In July 1924, industrialists, liberals and conservatives supported Mussolini's moves towards press censorship, and then his ban on meetings by opposition parties in August 1924. When further evidence of fascist violence emerged, Mussolini felt it necessary to promise to get rid of the thugs in the Fascist Party, and he sacked three fascist ministers from the government. However, in November, some leading liberals joined the opposition in criticising the continued press censorship.

These actions provoked a revolt by leading *ras* and some 50 senior officers of the MVSNI in December 1924. At a meeting on 31 December, they presented Mussolini with a clear choice: either he stop any further investigations of fascist violence and become dictator of Italy, or they would overthrow him and replace him with a more hard-line fascist leader.

## **What measures were taken after 1924 to further consolidate Mussolini's power?**

### **The establishment of the dictatorship, 1925–28**

On 3 January 1925, Mussolini addressed the Chamber of Deputies. He denied having set up the Ceka, and condemned the actions of Dumini's gang. However, as prime minister and leader of the PNF, he assumed ultimate responsibility for Matteotti's murder. Nonetheless, he made it clear that, rather than resigning, he would continue to rule Italy – by force 'if necessary'.

#### **SOURCE B**

I declare before all Italy that I assume full responsibility for what has happened ... If Fascism has turned out to be only castor oil and rubber truncheons instead of being a superb passion inspiring the best youth of Italy, I am responsible ... Italians want peace and quiet, and to get on with its [sic] work. I shall give it all these, if possible in love, but if necessary by force.

*Extract from a speech given by Mussolini, 3 January 1925. Quoted in Robson, M. 1992. Italy: Liberalism and Fascism 1870–1945. London, UK. Hodder & Stoughton. p. 66.*

#### **SOURCE A**

For even as Farinacci continued to press for a Fascist takeover, his enthusiastic centralization of the party – intended to prepare it for its revolutionary destiny – actually had the effect of undermining the power and autonomy of provincial bosses like himself and neutralizing the *squadristo* of which he had previously been chief spokesman. By the time he was manoeuvred into resigning in April 1926 he had fulfilled what Mussolini had expected of him and the PNF was well on the way to being domesticated.

*Blinkhorn, M. 2006. Mussolini and Fascist Italy. London, UK. Routledge. pp. 36–37.*

In February 1925, Mussolini became seriously ill. During his illness and recovery, power was exercised by Roberto Farinacci, the notorious *ras* of Cremona who had recently been appointed as party secretary by Mussolini. In fact, Mussolini disliked Farinacci, who was in favour of a total fascist takeover, but his appointment proved to be a shrewd move on Mussolini's part.

## A new wave of violence

Farinacci launched a new campaign of *squadristi* violence against members of the Socialist and Communist Parties, as well as the more radical sections of the Popolari. Several people were killed, including Amendola, and many others decided to go into exile. Farinacci also supervised a purge of PNF members and local leaders (the latter in particular) who were considered to be insufficiently loyal to Mussolini.

## Controlling the press

The first step in establishing a fascist dictatorship was taken in July 1925, when Mussolini, now recovered from his illness, imposed a series of laws designed to control the press. Anti-fascist newspapers were shut down, while other newspapers were only allowed to print articles approved by the government. From December 1925, all journalists were required to be on a register drawn up by the Fascist Party.

## Local and central government

In August 1925, Mussolini began the next step in establishing his dictatorship, this time focused on local and central government. In the 93 provinces of Italy, elected mayors and councils of towns and cities were replaced by appointed fascist officials known as *podesta* (see page 27). Although the *podesta* were Fascist Party members, they were mainly conservatives, drawn from the traditional landowning and military élites. In this way, Mussolini excluded the more militant fascists from real power in the provinces. Fascist political control was further established on 3 August, when all meetings by opposition parties were banned.

Mussolini also moved to increase his personal power in central government. On 24 December 1925, he made himself 'head of government', a new official title. He also assumed formal powers over his ministers, who became responsible to him rather than to the Chamber of Deputies. In January 1926, Mussolini assumed the power to issue decrees without parliamentary approval, making him responsible only to the king. The new law also stated that the king must secure Mussolini's personal approval before appointing new ministers. Soon, Mussolini insisted on being called *Il Duce* ('The Leader').

By 1929, Mussolini held eight ministerial posts himself, thus excluding many other fascist leaders. However, in practice, it was the traditional conservative civil servants who ran these state departments rather than Mussolini or the Fascist Party.

## Creation of a one-party state, 1926

Despite increased control, Mussolini's position was still not totally secure. The king and the Chamber of Deputies still had influence, as did the increasingly harassed opposition parties. So in October 1926, after yet another failed assassination attempt on Mussolini, all parties other than the PNF were banned, and their deputies expelled from the Chamber. At the same time, trade unions were outlawed and a new law court (the Special Tribunal) was established to deal with political offences, some of which carried the death penalty. In 1927, Mussolini formed the *Organizzazione per la Vigilanza e la Repressione dell'Antifascismo* (Organisation for Vigilance and Repression of Anti-Fascism, or OVRA), a secret police force charged with suppressing political opponents.

### Fact

The OVRA was not a specifically fascist organisation, being essentially an adaptation of the Interior Ministry's existing secret police section. So OVRA was not the equivalent of the Nazi SS or Gestapo, as it was under state, not party, control.

### Activity

Carry out some further research on the methods and activities of the OVRA. To what extent was it similar to the Gestapo in Nazi Germany?

In May 1928, when new elections were due, Mussolini took further measures to ensure that the Fascist Party won and that Italy remained a one-party state. These included changes to the electoral system so that only men aged 21 or over who belonged to fascist syndicates (see page 28) could vote. The Fascist Grand Council drew up a list of 400 candidates from lists approved by confederations of employers and employees, and voters only had the choice of voting either for or against this list. Fear of fascist violence meant most Italians voted 'yes', as fascist officials in the polling stations were able to identify those who voted 'no' (the voting slips were different colours). Having secured a clear electoral victory, Mussolini was established as dictator of Italy. The Chamber contained only fascist deputies, and the king's power was drastically reduced.

## What other methods did Mussolini use to consolidate his power?

As well as these political measures, Mussolini took other steps to secure his power. These included methods of indoctrination and propaganda, as well as increased measures against opposition.

### Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (OND)

The fascists believed that it was important to influence the minds of the adult population of Italy. To this end, they established organisations to control leisure activities. The Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (OND), a national recreational club, was set up in 1925. *Dopolavoro* is Italian for 'after work'. The OND soon had a vast network of clubs, libraries and sports grounds, and organised concerts, dancing and summer holiday activities in most towns and villages. Overall, about 40% of industrial workers and 25% of peasants were members of the OND. Sport was given particular emphasis, and Italy began to do well internationally in motor racing, cycling, athletics and football.

The main function of the OND was to increase acceptance of fascist ideology. However, although its activities did lead to some popular support – many Italians enjoyed the subsidised sports, outings and holidays – most local organisers ignored the indoctrination aspects.

### L'inquadramento

To build on the activities of the OND, and to increase fascist influence amongst the masses, there was a concerted attempt to expand membership of the party and its associated organisations. This process of uniting and incorporating the people was known as *l'inquadramento*. From 1931 to 1937, during the worst of the **Great Depression**, the Fascist Party established its own welfare agencies to provide extra relief, and also began setting up women's *fasci* to help run these agencies. Although these new agencies and networks led to increased party contact, surveillance and control, party membership did not increase dramatically. According to some, by 1939, only about 6% of the population belonged to the party.

### The Romanità movement

Another propaganda ploy to build up the prestige and popularity of Mussolini and the fascists was to link them to the earlier greatness of ancient Rome and its emperors. This became known as the *Romanità* ('Romanness') movement. Fascist writers, artists and scholars portrayed fascism as a revival of, and a return to, ancient Roman civilisation. From 1926, Mussolini was increasingly spoken of as a new Caesar.

**Great Depression** Following the 1929 Wall Street Crash, the entire world entered a prolonged economic downturn that resulted in a contraction of economic activity and mass unemployment. This became known as the Great Depression. All major countries – with the exception of the USSR – were badly affected during the 1930s.

In 1937, the *Mostra Augustea della Romanità* exhibition was held to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of the emperor Augustus. Over the entrance to the exhibition was a quote from Mussolini: 'Italians, you must ensure that the glories of the past are surpassed by the glories of the future.'

### SOURCE 1

Rome is our point of departure and our point of reference. It is our symbol and, if you like, our myth. We dream of a Roman Italy, an Italy that is wise and strong, disciplined and impersonal. Much of the spirit of Ancient Rome is being born again in Fascism: the Lictorian *fasces* are Roman, our war machine is Roman, our pride and our courage are Roman too. *Civis Romanus sum* ['I am a Roman citizen'].

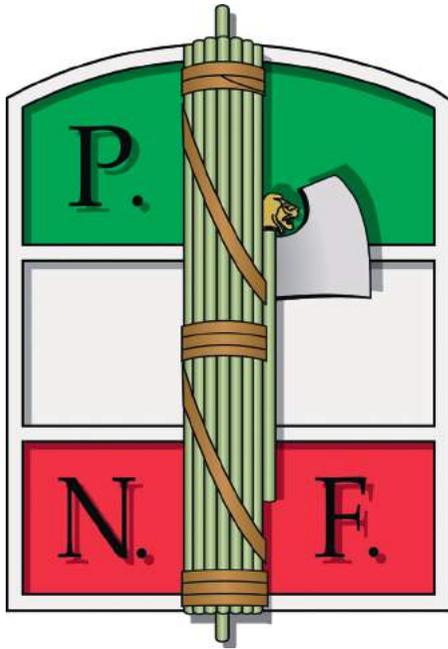
Extract from a speech delivered by Mussolini in 1935. Quoted in Hite, J. and Hinton, C. 1998. *Fascist Italy*. London, UK. Hodder Education. p. 106.

Mussolini reviving the ancient glories of Rome; he is viewing a statue of Julius Caesar installed in the recently excavated forum



As part of this cult, Mussolini adopted the *fasces* as the fascist emblem, and had it incorporated into the national flag. In addition, much emphasis was placed on the need to establish a second empire – 'the resurrection of the empire'. According to *Romanità*, the fascist 'New Man' was a modern version of the idealised Roman centurion.

The fasces emblem was taken from ancient Rome; a bundle of rods and an axe were used by the lictor (Roman bodyguards) and symbolised authority, discipline and punishment



42

**Question**

How was the *Romanità* movement meant to create the fascist 'New Man'?

**Fact**

Unlike the efficient propaganda machine developed by Hermann Goebbels in Nazi Germany, propaganda in fascist Italy was marked by bureaucratic inefficiency. Mussolini's creation of a fascist propaganda machine was a gradual process. Significantly – and again unlike Nazi Germany – a number of non-fascist newspapers and radio broadcasts were allowed to continue, including those produced by the Vatican.

**Ducismo: the cult of *Il Duce***

To create this 'New Man', Mussolini wanted fascism to penetrate every aspect of Italian life and society. To achieve this, he concentrated on building up and projecting his own image, and widely publicised the 'achievements' of fascism.

Almost as soon as Mussolini's dictatorship was established, he began to understand the importance of good publicity. Consequently, a press office was set up to ensure that photographs and newspaper articles projected a positive image of Mussolini and his activities. He was portrayed as youthful, energetic and an expert in a wide range of specialist areas and pursuits. He even gave instructions to the press on how he should be reported. Although initially sceptical of the value of radio, Mussolini eventually established a state radio network in 1924; this rapidly expanded. However, by 1939, there were still only around 1 million radios in Italy – about one for every 44 people. To deal with this, public-address systems were set up in cafés, restaurants and public squares, so that more people could listen to *Il Duce's* speeches. Free radios were also given to schools.

Mussolini was slow to realise the potential of film, but in 1924, a government agency (L'Unione Cinematografica Educativa, LUCE) was established to produce documentaries and newsreels. Soon, Mussolini was making full use of film. He insisted that the state-sponsored newsreel films (from 1926, these had to be played in all cinemas as part of the programme) showed him addressing large crowds of enthusiastic supporters, and that he was filmed from below, in order to disguise his lack of height.

**SOURCE J**

The most powerful force, over the last three years, which has hastened the development of this attitude [to think and act out of regard for the nation] has been our film production. The new national film production is acquiring an international reputation and meaning because it expresses our time in history, which is truly Italian and Fascist.

*Comments made by Luigi Freddi, director of the General Directorate of Cinematography, in 1937. Quoted in Hite, J. and Hinton, C. 1998. Fascist Italy. London, UK. Hodder Education. p. 110.*

**Fascist propaganda**

Throughout the 1930s, the press office extended its role to cover not just radio and film, but all aspects of culture. In 1933, Mussolini's son-in-law, Galeazzo Ciano, took over the running of the office. In 1935, it was renamed the Ministry for Press and Propaganda – in part an imitation of developments in Nazi Germany.

Two years later, in 1937, the office was renamed again, this time as the Ministry of Popular Culture (nicknamed Minculpop). This was an attempt to broaden its influence and ensure that all films, plays, radio programmes and books glorified Mussolini as a hero and the fascists as Italy's saviours. However, Minculpop's attempts to regulate the arts were not very successful. Traditional liberal culture proved too strong, and this led to compromises and thus only partial control by

the fascists. While Minculpop managed to rally support for the Abyssinian War (1935–36), it failed to gain much popular support for Mussolini's alliance with Nazi Germany, or for the anti-Semitic policies he began to disseminate in 1938 (see pages 56–57).

At the same time, Achille Starace, appointed as party secretary in 1930, was also active in projecting an image of Mussolini as a hero. Lights were left on in the dictator's office to suggest that he worked 20 hours a day for Italy, while photographs and posters of *Il Duce* appeared in public buildings, streets and workplaces. Great prominence was also given to various catchphrases reflecting fascist ideals, such as *Credere, Obbedere, Combattere* ('Believe, Obey, Fight') and 'Mussolini is always right'.

At press conferences, Mussolini was always accompanied by Blackshirt bodyguards, while all public appearances were attended by what soon became known as the 'applause squad', who whipped up 'enthusiasm' for Mussolini's speeches, sometimes even resorting to prompt cards. Public events such as mass rallies and meetings were deliberately turned into political theatre, and full use was made of lighting and music to enhance the drama.

### Opposition to fascist rule after 1925

Although trade unions and all opposition parties had been banned in 1926, there was still limited opposition and resistance. One organised group that remained was the Communist Party of Italy, which had been set up in 1921. In 1924, with many leading Communist Party members already arrested by Mussolini's regime, **Antonio Gramsci** became its leader, and was even elected to the Chamber of Deputies.

Gramsci set up a Communist Party newspaper called *L'Unità* ('Unity') and called for a united front to defeat fascism. However, in November 1926, he was arrested and imprisoned under the new emergency laws (see page 29), and eventually died in prison in 1937.

During the late 1920s and the 1930s, opposition to Mussolini in Italy, though often courageous, was weak. Such opposition was mainly carried out by isolated individuals, small clandestine groups and remnants of the trade unions. After 1926, political opponents who were caught were often sent into internal exile (known as *confino*) to remote parts of Italy. While fascist treatment of active opposition was brutal, it was not as excessively repressive as in Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia, although it became more extreme after Italy's entry into the Second World War in 1940.

Several anti-fascist groups went into self-imposed exile so they could organise opposition from abroad, especially in France. They smuggled anti-fascist literature into Italy and, during the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), over 3000 Italian anti-fascist volunteers fought as part of the International Brigades on the side of the Republican government against Franco's forces, which included troops sent by Mussolini. Their Garibaldi Legion defeated Mussolini's troops at the Battle of Guadalajara in March 1937.

Mussolini's Ceka often disrupted the activities of these *fuorusciti* (exiles or 'escapees'), sometimes by assassinating leaders in exile. For example, the Rosselli brothers, Carlo and Nello, established the *Giustizia e Libertà* (Justice and Liberty) group in 1929. They were murdered in France in 1937, probably on Mussolini's orders, by members of *La Cagoule* (The Cowl), a French fascist group.

#### Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937)

Born in Sardinia, in 1911 Gramsci went to the University of Turin to study literature and linguistics. In 1913, he joined the Italian Socialist Party, and in 1916 became co-editor of the Piedmont edition of the socialist newspaper *Avanti!* He supported the Socialist Party's decision to join the Communist Third International in 1919, and the establishment of the Italian Communist Party. Gramsci was a highly original Marxist theoretical thinker, and wrote various important books, some while he was in prison. One of his most important theories was that of cultural hegemony, the idea that the ruling capitalist classes construct and manipulate cultural norms to maintain a state that protects private property and their own interests.



**Fact**

Mussolini was persuaded by Hitler to declare war on Britain and France in June 1940, and then on the US in December 1941. However, Italy's forces performed badly in Greece and Yugoslavia, and suffered several setbacks in North Africa in 1942–43, eventually losing control of Libya. Allied bombing of Italy began in 1942, and after the Allied invasion of Sicily in 1943, more and more Italians turned against the fascist regime. To help stop the Allied invasion, Nazi Germany sent troops into Italy in the early summer of 1943.

**nepotism** The promotion of relatives because of their family connections rather than their ability to do a job. Many Italians resented the nepotism Mussolini demonstrated towards relatives of his mistress, Clara Petacci.

## **The re-emergence of opposition at home, 1940–43**

Italy's entry into the Second World War in 1940 initiated the first signs of real renewed internal opposition, characterised by the outbreak of strikes.

By 1942, Germany was taking more from Italy than it was offering in military aid. In addition to coal and iron, about 50% of the 350,000 workers sent to Germany by Mussolini were skilled workers. The food he ordered to be sent to Germany caused serious shortages in Italy, and rationing was introduced in 1941. The inefficiency and inadequacy of the rationing system led to the rise of the black market (the ration of 150 grams of bread per person was the lowest in Europe, with the exception of the USSR). Towards the end of 1942, Allied bombing of Italy increased. Poor anti-aircraft defences resulted in widespread destruction which in turn led to increased working hours and greater factory discipline. Inevitably, a great wave of strikes occurred in March 1943.

Italy's military situation deteriorated during 1943. Axis troops in Africa were forced to surrender in May, resulting in the loss of Libya. Then, in July, the Allies invaded Sicily and began bombing Rome. The invading Allies met only token resistance as many Italians blamed Mussolini for their army's defeats and the dire situation on the home front. They had also grown to dislike the German armies that had begun moving onto Italian soil. Most Italians, including the industrialists and lower middle classes who had been the backbone of fascism, were disillusioned by the regime's inefficiency and corruption. The **nepotism** that Mussolini frequently used was particularly unpopular.

Between February and April 1943, Mussolini took a hard line in dealing with this disaffection – sacking or demoting several ministers and high-ranking members of the Fascist Party, including Grandi, Ciano and Bottai. However, this only led to plots against him. Many were critical of Mussolini's strategy, feared his close relationship with Nazi Germany, and wanted him removed from power altogether. However, another group of fascists, which included Farinacci and the new PNF secretary Carlo Scorza, wanted to forge closer ties with Germany.

## **Mussolini's fall, July 1943**

The military setbacks of May and July 1943 finally triggered a coup against Mussolini on 24 July 1943, when the Fascist Grand Council voted 19 to 7 to remove him from power. On 25 July, the king formally ordered Mussolini to resign. He was arrested and imprisoned. The ease with which his overthrow was achieved emphasised the fact that Mussolini had never been able to impose a totalitarian regime. He was replaced by Marshal Pietro Badoglio who, on 8 September 1943, announced Italy's surrender to the Allies.

## **The Italian Social Republic**

In September 1943, Mussolini was 'rescued' from his enforced isolation in a mountainous region of eastern Italy by German paratroopers. They took him to Germany, where Hitler persuaded him to set up the **Italian Social Republic**. This was a new fascist state in the German-controlled north-eastern part of Italy, which was not yet under Allied occupation.

Although Mussolini was nominally leader of the new republic, in practice the important decisions were taken by Rudolf Rahn, the German ambassador, and by SS general Karl Wolff. There was much SS and Gestapo brutality, especially against Jewish people, while thousands of Italian men were sent to Germany

**Italian Social Republic** This was soon contemptuously known as the Salò Republic, after the town where Mussolini had his headquarters. It was little more than a German puppet state, despite Mussolini's claims to be returning to the social idealism of his original fascism.

as forced labour. At the same time, fascist extremists made a determined effort to round up those who had planned and carried out Mussolini's overthrow. Several were captured, taken to the Salò Republic and then executed, including Mussolini's own son-in-law Galeazzo Ciano.

## Mussolini's death

During 1944, the Allies continued to push up through Italy from the south. In April 1945, they captured the northern city of Bologna, and the Germans decided to pull out of Italy. Mussolini tried to flee with the Germans, but was recognised by a group of Italian partisans and arrested on 27 April. The following day, he was taken by another, communist-led, group of partisans and he and his mistress were shot. Also executed were 15 other fascist leaders and ministers, including Farinacci and Starace. The bodies were hung upside down outside a garage in Piazzale Loreto in Milan, where a group of partisans had previously been executed by the Germans for resistance activities.

## End of unit activities

- 1 Create a diagram to show the various stages and steps in Mussolini's construction of a fascist dictatorship in the years 1922–29.
- 2 Carry out some additional research about the roles of both the king and the Catholic Church in the consolidation of Mussolini's control. Why do you think they acted in the ways they did?
- 3 Find out more about the Rosselli brothers. How far was what happened to them typical of Mussolini's regime and his treatment of opposition?

### Historical debate

Immediately after the end of the Second World War, most histories of the Italian fascist movement focused on the periods of active opposition to Mussolini (1919–25 and 1943–45). However, some revisionist historians focused on the period 1926–43 when, they argued, the fascists achieved a degree of both success and at least passive support. In fact, Martin Clark has even compared Mussolini – in his defeat of the left and trade union power, and his attempts to increase patriotism – to Margaret Thatcher, the British prime minister from 1979 to 1990. How convincing do you find this argument?



### Theory of knowledge

#### History and bias

There are various historical interpretations about Mussolini and his fascist state. Some recent reinterpretations have given a more positive view of his actions, considering Mussolini as one of Italy's most successful 20th-century politicians. To what extent is it possible for historians and students of history not to be influenced by their own political views, or by the contemporary historical context in which they are writing?

### Discussion point

Working in pairs, develop arguments for a class presentation on the effectiveness of the fascist policy of *l'inquadramento*. Concentrate on two aspects:

- the various policies connected to *l'inquadramento*
- the degree of success/failure of each one.

## Paper 1 exam practice

### Question

According to Source A below, what were the roles of the PNF in Mussolini's Italy?

[2 marks]

### Skill

Comprehension of a source

#### SOURCE A

Fascist Italy may thus have been a one-party state, but it was not a 'party state' along the lines of Soviet Russia or even, eventually, Nazi Germany ... Quite apart from its mundane yet important role of providing job opportunities for the Italian middle class, the Party [PNF] came to perform numerous vital administrative and politically educative tasks ...

Through the elaborate bureaucracy of the Dopolavoro ('After-work') organization it supervised and even enlivened the leisure and social activities of the working population, seeking to compensate workers for their falling wages with a variety of fringe benefits and in the process to 'cure' them of socialism.

*Blinkhorn, M. 2006. Mussolini and Fascist Italy. London, UK. Routledge. p. 38.*

### Examiner's tips

Comprehension questions are the most straightforward questions you will face in Paper 1. They simply require you to understand a source *and* extract two or three relevant points that relate to the question.

As only 2 marks are available for this question, make sure you do not waste valuable exam time that should be spent on the higher-scoring questions by writing a long answer here. Just a couple of brief sentences are needed, giving the necessary information to show that you have understood the message of the source. Try to give one piece of information for each of the marks available for the question.

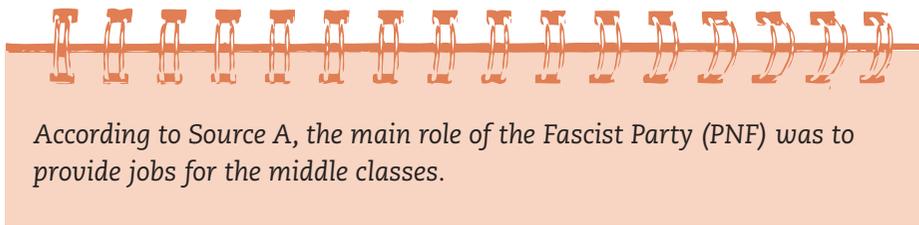
### Common mistakes

When asked to show your comprehension/understanding of a particular source, make sure you don't comment on the *wrong* source! Mistakes like this are made every year. Remember – every mark is important for your final grade.

## Simplified markscheme

For **each item of relevant/correct information** identified, award 1 mark – up to a **maximum of 2 marks**.

## Student answer



## Examiner's comments

The candidate has selected **one** relevant and explicit piece of information from the source that clearly identifies one important role of the PNF. This is enough to gain 1 mark. However, as no other point/role has been identified, this candidate fails to get the other mark available.

## Activity

Look again at the source and the student answer above. Now try to identify one other piece of information from the source, and try to make an overall comment about the source's message. This will allow you to obtain the other mark available for this question.

# 4 Domestic policies and their impact

## Timeline

- 1922** law to break up large estates (not enforced)

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- 1924** Battle over the Southern Problem

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- 1925** Battle for Grain; Vidoni Pact

---

- 1926** Battle for Land; Battle for the Lira

---

- 1927** Battle for Births; formation of the ONB; Charter of Labour

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- 1928** Catholic Scout organisation banned

---

- 1929** Lateran Treaty and Concordat

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- 1931** same-sex relations made illegal; laws passed against divorce and abortion

---

- 1933** IRI set up

---

- 1936** Rome–Berlin Axis signed between Italy and Nazi Germany

---

- 1937** membership of GIL made compulsory

---

- 1938 Jul** Charter of Race drawn up
  - Sep–Nov** racial laws and decrees carried out

## Key questions

- What were the main features of Mussolini's economic policies?
- How successful were Mussolini's economic policies?
- What were the main social policies in Mussolini's fascist Italy?
- What were Mussolini's policies towards women, ethnic and other minorities, and religion?
- What impact did fascist rule have on education, young people and the arts?

## Overview

- Once in power, Mussolini launched a number of economic 'battles', many of which were intended to make Italy self-sufficient and strong enough to pursue an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy.
- These 'battles' had varying degrees of success. In addition, other economic policies tended to benefit some social classes and groups more than others.
- From the late 1920s, despite various social policies and the creation of an Institute of Industrial Reconstruction (IRI) in 1933, many Italians experienced a decline in their standard of living.
- Women were particularly affected by fascist policies – the 'Battle for Births' attempted to restrict women to the traditional 'housewife/mother' role.
- Mussolini's government maintained generally good relations with the Catholic Church. However, disputes did arise – mainly over fascist attempts to control Catholic youth movements, and then over the introduction of anti-Semitic laws after 1938.
- Concerted efforts were made to control education, and to establish strong fascist youth movements for boys and girls. In 1937, membership of these groups was made compulsory.

## What were the main features of Mussolini's economic policies?

Mussolini had no real understanding of, or interest in, economics. However, he realised the importance of a strong economy to consolidate his regime, and lay the foundations for an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy. Thus, in many respects, Mussolini's main concern was not so much to create fascism as a viable 'third way', as it was to make Italy a rich and great power.

To achieve this, Mussolini believed it was necessary to make Italy economically self-sufficient in both food and in raw materials for industry. This would require not only overcoming problems of poverty and improving agriculture at home, but also conquering a large empire to supply Italy with raw materials.

### SOURCE A

Fascism was not, and never claimed to be, an economic system ... Throughout the life of the Fascist regime, it is true, a minority in the Party and the corporate structure continued to feed the guttering flame of Fascist 'leftism' with somewhat qualified anti-capitalist rhetoric. Such restlessness, and the implicit challenge to private wealth it contained, had its uses for Mussolini in his dealings with the captains of industry, agriculture and finance – just as long as he could be seen to possess the power equally to suppress, control or release it ... From his crucial initial compromise with big business and the agrari in 1920–2 down to his fall in July 1943, Fascist 'leftism' was never allowed significantly to influence major policy decisions or initiatives.

Blinkhorn, M. 2006. *Mussolini and Fascist Italy*. London, UK. Routledge. pp. 43–44.

**third way** In its early stages, fascist leaders often claimed that fascism was a 'third way' between capitalism on the one hand and revolutionary socialism on the other. However, most historians agree that, once it became the dominant power, fascism supported capitalist interests. This often caused problems with more radical fascists, who had believed earlier promises about helping the 'little man'.

### Question

To what extent does Source A support the view that fascism did not represent a 'third way'?

## Mussolini's economic 'battles'

To achieve the economic greatness he desired, Mussolini decided to launch a series of initiatives or campaigns he called 'battles'. The first of these was announced in 1924 and was directed at the widespread poverty in southern Italy. It was known as the Battle over the Southern Problem, and promised the building of thousands of new villages in Sicily and the south. It also included attempts to destroy the power of the Mafia.

In 1925, a much more serious campaign, the Battle for Grain, was launched in response to a poor harvest and a consequent increase in grain imports. The aim was to get Italian farmers to grow more cereals (especially wheat), in order to reduce Italy's dependence on foreign imports.

### Fact

The poverty and social problems in the south gave criminals an easy field in which to operate, and the most notorious of these criminals belonged to the Mafia. Although a 'Battle against the Mafia' began in 1925, it soon stopped pursuing Mafia leaders because several important members of the Italian élites had connections to the Mafia. The Mafia leadership simply went underground. In 1943, they co-operated with US forces and soon reclaimed their former power.



Mussolini encouraging harvesters at Aprilla during the Battle for Grain

### SOURCE B

Wheat was the vital commodity that could feed an army, and Italy did not grow enough of it. In the early 1920s about 2.5 million tonnes a year, nearly one-third of the requirement, had to be imported, at a cost of almost 3 billion lire. This was about one-fifth by value of all imports. Italy already had to import coal and oil; and could not import basic foodstuff as well.

Clark, M. 2005. *Mussolini*. London, UK. Pearson. p. 130.

As well as imposing import controls (which really just ensured that the inefficient farmers in the south could continue farming without having to modernise), more land was made available for growing grain. This was done by ploughing up pasture land, olive and citrus orchards, and vineyards. In addition, medals were awarded to the most productive farmers, and their stories were reported

in the newspapers. In the more prosperous north, farmers began growing wheat rather than maize, and farms became more mechanised. The increased use of tractors and fertilisers also benefited industrial firms such as Fiat, Pirelli Rubber and Montecatini Chemicals.

The following year, 1926, saw the start of the Battle for Land – a further attempt to increase the amount of available farmland. Marshes and swamps were drained, most notably the Pontine Marshes near Rome. This allowed the establishment of many small farms. The farming itself, financed from public funds, created work for the unemployed.

On 18 August 1926, the Battle for the Lira began when the value of the Italian currency dropped. To restore its value abroad (and thus help stop internal price rises), and to increase Italian prestige, the lire was re-valued. This allowed Italy to continue importing coal and iron for armaments and shipbuilding.

### SOURCE C

We will conduct the defence of the lira with the most strenuous decisiveness, and from this piazza [square] I say to the whole civilised world that I will defend the lira to the last breath, to the last drop of blood ... The Fascist regime is ready, from the chief to its last follower, to impose on itself all the necessary sacrifices, but our lira, which represents the symbol of the nation, the sign of our riches, the fruit of our labours, of our efforts, of our sacrifices, of our tears, of our blood, is being defended and will be defended.

*Extract from a speech made by Mussolini in 1926. Quoted in Hite, J. and Hinton, C. 1998. Fascist Italy. London, UK. Hodder Education. p. 128.*

## How successful were Mussolini's economic policies?

### Were the battles won or lost?

Most of Mussolini's economic 'battles' were far from successful, often because they were fought inconsistently. New villages had been promised in the Battle over the Southern Problem, but none was actually built. Although the Battle for Grain succeeded in almost doubling cereal production by 1939, making Italy self-sufficient in wheat, it also involved misallocation of resources. This resulted in Italy having to import olive oil, while exports of fruit and wine, and numbers of cattle and sheep, dropped. The Battle for Land only reclaimed one significant area (the Pontine Marshes).

The Battle for the Lira, which involved artificially raising the value of the lira, also resulted in declining exports – and thus increased unemployment – as Italian goods became more expensive. Car exports, in particular, were badly hit. It also began a recession in Italy, which was worsened by the Great Depression (see page 40).

Thus, most of Mussolini's 'battles', which were intended to achieve **autarchy**, caused at least as many problems as they solved.

**autarchy** Sometimes spelled 'autarky', this means self-sufficiency. It usually applies to countries or regimes that try to exist without having to import particular foods, fuels, raw materials or industrial goods. It can also refer to the attempt to be totally self-sufficient in all important areas, as happened in Italy and Nazi Germany. Invariably, such attempts had limited success.

### Historical debate

One of the many areas in which debate continues amongst historians relates to the effects of Mussolini's economic policy in terms of it being a 'modernising dictatorship'. A. J. Gregor, among others, controversially claimed that Italian fascism was similar to Stalin's regime in the USSR, in that it attempted to carry out the rapid industrialisation of a backward economy. Others do not share this extreme view, but do consider that fascism played some part in 'modernising' Italy's economy. However, many historians believe that fascism failed to modernise because of its deference to 'traditional' economic interests. Carry out some further research on this topic. Which, if any, of these views do you share?

### Fascism and state intervention

Before the Depression, Mussolini had not interfered with private enterprise, and had favoured large companies and heavy industry. However, once the Depression started to take effect, he began to consider some state intervention, at first by encouraging job-sharing schemes. By 1933, unemployment had risen to over 2 million, while millions more (especially in the rural south) suffered from under-employment. More than 30% of labouring jobs in agriculture were lost, and many women were forced to give up their jobs to unemployed men. The situation in the countryside was made worse by controls on migration to the cities. This was designed to keep the problem of unemployment hidden within less populated rural areas. By 1930, Mussolini had to drop earlier claims that his regime had improved the living standards of working-class Italians. In 1931, Mussolini's government decided to use public money to help prevent the collapse of banks and industries hit by the Depression.

#### SOURCE D

We must rid our minds of the idea that what we have called the days of prosperity may return. We are probably moving toward a period when humanity will exist on a lower standard of living.

*Extract from a speech made by Mussolini in 1936. Quoted in Robson, M. 1992. Italy: Liberalism and Fascism, 1870–1945, London, UK. Hodder & Stoughton. p. 101.*

### The Institute per la Ricostruzione Industriale (IRI)

The Institute per la Ricostruzione Industriale, or Institute of Industrial Reconstruction (IRI), was set up in 1933. At first, it took over various unprofitable industries on behalf of the state. By 1939, the IRI had become a massive state company, controlling most of the iron and steel industries, merchant shipping, the electrical industry and even the telephone system. However, Mussolini never intended for these industries to be permanently nationalised. Parts were regularly sold off to larger industries still under private ownership, resulting in the formation of huge capitalist monopolies. Examples of this were the large firms Montecatini and SINA Viscasa, which ended up owning the entire Italian chemical industry.

### Autarchy in the 1930s

The effects of the Depression led Mussolini to adopt increasingly protectionist measures and to strengthen the push towards fascist autarchy. These policies became even more important to the fascists in 1935, when several countries belonging to the **League of Nations** imposed some economic sanctions on Italy after its invasion of Abyssinia (see page 53).

As Mussolini involved Italy in more military actions, the push for autarchy increased – as did the problems associated with this struggle for self-sufficiency. Nonetheless, there were some moderate achievements: by 1940, for example, industrial production had increased by 9%. As a result, industry overtook

### Question

How did the IRI help large-scale private companies?

**League of Nations** Set up by the peace treaties that ended the First World War, the League was intended to avoid future wars through 'collective security'. Member nations imposed economic sanctions on aggressive nations, to force them to end conflict through negotiations.

agriculture as the largest proportion of GNP for the first time in Italy's history. In addition, between 1928 and 1939, imports of raw materials and industrial goods dropped significantly. Overall, however, fascist economic policy did not result in a significant modernisation of the economy, or even increased levels of productivity. Italy experienced a much slower recovery from the Depression than most other European states. Once Italy became involved in the Second World War, its economic and industrial weaknesses grew increasingly apparent.

## What were the main social policies in Mussolini's fascist Italy?

### The social impact of fascism

According to the 'third way' ideal, fascism was supposed to replace class conflict with class harmony. It should have brought equal benefits to employers and employees, working in partnership for the good of the nation, the state and the Italian people. In particular, it was claimed that workers would no longer be exploited, and would enjoy an improved status under the corporate state.

### How were the different classes affected?

#### Industrial workers

In the early years of Mussolini's rule (1922–25), male workers experienced a drop in unemployment and an improvement in living standards. This was due in part to the cautious economic policies followed by **Alberto de Stefani**, but the general economic revival in Europe in the early 1920s also contributed to this improved situation in Italy.

In 1925–26, workers lost their independent trade unions and their right to strike. The promises that had been made about the corporate state (see page 29) failed to materialise. Instead of ending class conflict, Mussolini's fascist state merely prevented workers from defending their interests, while employers were able to manage their companies without either interference from the state or opposition from their employees. For example, as the economy began to decline in the second half of the 1920s, employers ended the eight-hour day and extended the working week. At the same time, wages were cut: from 1925 to 1938, the level of real wages dropped by over 10%.

By 1939, it was clear that only a small minority had benefited significantly from fascist rule. The standard of living and the general quality of life for most Italians, especially the working classes, declined under fascism.

Unemployment rose after the Great Depression, and even the public work schemes had little effect. Workers were afraid of protesting about their working conditions in case they lost their jobs altogether.

Some social welfare legislation was passed in the fascist era, including the introduction of old-age pensions and unemployment and health insurance. There was also a significant increase in education expenditure. However, these improvements did not make up for the loss of wages and poor working conditions experienced by many.

#### Fact

In October 1935, Italy launched an invasion of Abyssinia (now Ethiopia), which was sandwiched between the Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somaliland. Mussolini sent 500,000 troops, who used tanks, bombers and poison gas against people often only armed with spears. Abyssinia appealed to the League of Nations. Britain and France were reluctant to impose sanctions as, at this time, Mussolini was regarded as a useful ally against the rise of Nazism in Germany. In 1934, Mussolini had joined British and French leaders in opposing Hitler's attempted takeover of Austria. Some sanctions were imposed, but these were limited. For example, the League did not ban Italy from exporting oil or from using the Suez Canal.

**Alberto de Stefani (1879–1969)** Originally a liberal, de Stefani later supported Mussolini, and was appointed minister of finance in 1922. He was in charge of Mussolini's economic programme from 1922 to 1925, favouring free trade, lower taxes (especially for private companies and the wealthier classes) and a reduction of government 'interference' in the economy. However, when wages started to drop and the economy began to show signs of crisis in 1925, de Stefani was replaced by Count Giuseppe Volpi.

#### Question

How did the living standards of most working-class Italian families change under fascism?

**Fact**

There was no serious attempt to redistribute land. By 1930, 0.5% of the population owned 42% of land, while 87% of the rural population (mainly small landowners) owned only 13%.

### **Peasants and agricultural workers**

Despite Mussolini's claim to love the countryside and his promises to 'ruralise' Italy, the situation in rural areas actually worsened under the corporate state. Mussolini's policies clearly benefited large landowners rather than small farmers and agricultural labourers. In 1922, a law was introduced to split the large estates and redistribute the land, but this was never acted on. Agricultural wages dropped by more than 30% during the 1930s.

In an attempt to escape rural poverty, many Italians emigrated. Over 200,000 Italians moved to the USA in the period 1920–29. The situation in rural Italy worsened when the US drastically reduced its immigration quotas from the mid-1920s, making it more difficult for Italians to find relief abroad. Not surprisingly, many rural workers ignored government decrees intended to stop migration to the towns. Those workers often ended up in the slums of Milan, Turin and Rome.

### **The lower-middle classes**

The lower-middle classes, who had formed the backbone of the Fascist Party, were affected in different ways. Many small business owners were hit hard by the Depression and by Mussolini's economic policies. However, those who entered the administrative bureaucracy of the state or the Fascist Party enjoyed relative prosperity, with good wages and considerable benefits, as well as the opportunity to increase their income through corrupt means.

### **Industrialists and landowners**

Large industrialists and landowners benefited most in fascist Italy. The Vidoni Pact of 1925 and the Charter of Labour of 1927 increased the power and freedom of employers, while preventing workers from defending – let alone improving – their living standards. Even during the Depression, large firms benefited in many ways, either through government contracts or the IRI, which offered them financial assistance.

#### **SOURCE**

While plainly damaging to some sectors of the economy, Fascist policies unquestionably benefited other, powerful interests whose ability to influence government long predated fascism and on whose continued acquiescence the regime's chances of permanence partly depended: heavy industry, the *agrari* of the Po Valley, and the less enterprising big landowners of other regions.

*Blinkhorn, M. 2006. Mussolini and Fascist Italy. London, UK. Routledge. p. 45.*

Wealthy landowners flourished under the fascist system. In 1935, as part of an ongoing attempt to restrict the migration of rural workers to cities, special workbooks (*libretti di lavoro*) were printed. These had to be signed by the local prefect before a worker could move to a new area. Such measures kept unemployment high in rural areas, a situation exploited by landowners in order to cut wages.

## What were Mussolini's policies towards women, ethnic and other minorities, and religion?

### Women and families

One group that suffered more than most under fascism was women. Their status was deliberately and consistently downgraded, especially by the Battle for Births, which stressed the traditional role of women as housewives and mothers, and caused a downturn in employment opportunities for women.

#### SOURCE F

- Women must obey ... In our state, she does not count.
- Intellectual women are a monstrosity.
- Higher education for women should just cover what the female brain can cope with, i.e. household management.
- Child bearing is women's natural and fundamental mission in life. [Women's work] distracts from reproduction, if it does not directly impede it, and foments independence and the accompanying physical-moral styles contrary to giving birth.

*Various statements made by Mussolini during the 1930s. Quoted in Hite, J. and Hinton, C. 1998. Fascist Italy. London, UK. Hodder Education. p. 165.*

#### Activity

Carry out research to find out how Italian fascist views about women compared to the views advocated by Hitler in Nazi Germany. To what extent do they differ from attitudes and policies relating to women in *either* Stalin's Russia *or* Castro's Cuba?

The Battle for Births was launched in 1927, in an attempt to increase the Italian population to create a large future army that would help expand Italy's empire. Mussolini aimed to increase the population from 40 million in 1927 to 60 million by 1950. To achieve this, the fascists encouraged early marriage, offered generous maternity benefits, exhorted women not to work, and gave jobs to married fathers in preference over single men. They also gave prizes to those women in each of Italy's 93 provinces who had the most children during their lives.

*Mussolini with his wife and children, setting an example during the Battle for Births*



**Fact**

Some jobs held by women were seen by fascists as especially 'unnatural'. These included teaching in schools, office work and the professions. From as early as the mid 1920s, women began to be excluded from certain teaching jobs.

Taxation policy was also used to encourage large families. Bachelors (especially those between the ages of 35 and 50) had to pay extra taxes, while couples with six or more children paid none. Newly married couples were given cheap railway tickets for their honeymoon. Later, in 1931, same-sex relations were outlawed, and new laws against abortion and divorce were imposed.

A series of decrees was imposed to restrict female employment. In 1933, it was announced that only 10% of state jobs could be held by women; in 1938, this was extended to many private firms. Although this policy was partly intended to solve the problem of male unemployment, it was also a reflection of fascist attitudes towards women.

Despite fascist statements and policies, however, many women were able to retain their pre-1922 positions in the economy. It is also important to note that the two key fascist policies relating to women (increasing the birth rate and reducing the number of women in the workforce) both failed to meet their targets. The number of births actually declined – dropping from 29.9 per 1000 in 1925 to 23.1 in 1940. In addition, nearly one-third of Italy's paid workforce was still female by 1940. In part, this was because Mussolini's military adventures resulted in the conscription of large numbers of men.

**SOURCE G**

The female experience of the Fascist period was marked by its sheer diversity ... When they [the fascists] tried to intervene explicitly to mould gender roles, in their bid to stem or even reverse trends towards female emancipation through highly misogynous [anti-female] rhetoric and policy, they were far from successful ... despite the enormous amount of attention paid to gender roles in Fascist rhetoric, it seems that particular patterns of industrialisation, commercialisation, and urbanisation had more power to shape female experiences in this period than the crude tools of Fascist ideology and policy.

Willson, P. 'Women in Fascist Italy'. Quoted in Bessel, R. (ed). 1996. *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*. Cambridge, UK. Cambridge University Press. pp. 92–93.

**Racism and anti-Semitism**

While neither explicit racism nor anti-Semitism were characteristics of the early fascist movement, there was a general racist attitude underlying the fascists' nationalism and their plans for imperialist expansion. Racism was also a strong element in the *Romanità* movement (see pages 40–41). Mussolini believed that the Italian 'race' was superior to those African 'races' in Libya and Abyssinia. In September 1938, in the newspaper *Il Giornale d'Italia*, Mussolini claimed that 'prestige' was needed to maintain an empire. This, he said, required a clear 'racial consciousness' that established ideas of racial 'superiority'.

Until 1936, when Mussolini joined Nazi Germany in the alliance known as the Rome–Berlin Axis, anti-Semitism had not played a part in fascist politics. In fact, in an interview given as late as 1932, Mussolini said, 'Anti-Semitism does

not exist in Italy. Italians of Jewish birth have shown themselves good citizens and they fought bravely in the war.' In the *Historical Dictionary of Fascist Italy*, Mussolini dismissed anti-Semitism as 'unscientific'.

Furthermore, some leading fascists were Jewish, and almost 30% of Jewish Italians were members of the Fascist Party. Mussolini had previously appointed the Jewish Guido Jung as minister of finance. At one point, Mussolini himself had a Jewish mistress, **Margherita Sarfatti**.

Mussolini's move towards anti-Semitism was signalled in July 1938 by the issue of the ten-point Charter of Race, which was drawn up by Mussolini and ten fascist 'professors', and issued by Minculpop (see pages 42–43). This manifesto claimed to offer a 'scientific' explanation of fascist racial doctrine, based on the fact that Italians were 'Aryans'. Thus, Jewish people were not members of the Italian 'race'. The charter was followed by a series of racial laws and decrees, initiated between September and November 1938. These anti-Semitic laws excluded Jewish children and teachers from all state schools, banned Jews from marrying non-Jews, and prevented Jews from owning large companies or landed estates. The laws also expelled foreign Jews, including those who had been granted citizenship after 1919.

#### SOURCE H

Admittedly the definition of 'Jew' was not too rigorous: those with two Jewish parents, or with one but practising the Judaic religion. Hence the children of mixed marriages could become 'Aryan' by being baptised, and there were 4000–5000 conversions in autumn 1938 (many of them so that children might be admitted to Catholic schools, having been expelled from state ones). There were also plenty of 'exemptions' allowed for war service or exceptional merit, brought in to placate the king: more than 20 per cent of Jewish families were exempted in this way.

Clark, M. 2005. *Mussolini*. London, UK. Pearson. p. 221.

These laws were never fully implemented in the period 1938–43, mainly because at a local level they were largely ignored by many Italians. However, they were strongly and publicly opposed by the pope. As well as the Catholic leadership, several senior fascists were unhappy about the introduction of these racial laws.

In 1943, an extreme form of racial persecution began under the Italian Social Republic (Salò Republic), which was nominally ruled by Mussolini following his overthrow as prime minister (see page 44). In fact, it was mainly the German Gestapo and the SS who carried out this much more brutal persecution of the Jewish people living in northern Italy.

Many historians regard the adoption of anti-Semitism as either a momentary aberration or simply the consequence of Mussolini's desire to imitate and impress his new ally, Hitler. Other historians argue that anti-Semitism stemmed from certain deep-rooted aspects of fascism.

#### Fact

There were few Italian-born Jews. Only about 37,000 Italians had two Jewish parents, while around 10,800 had one parent who was Jewish. Jews were well integrated in Italian society, and were not seen as a threat to established interests. Later, however, leaders of several anti-fascist opposition groups – such as the *Giustizia e Libertà* – were Jewish.

#### Margherita Sarfatti (1883–1961)

Sarfatti was a member of the wealthy Grassini family from Venice. Extremely intelligent, she was initially a radical socialist and feminist, as well as a talented art critic. Sarfatti first met Mussolini in Milan in 1911, before he was expelled from the Socialist Party, while she was working as a journalist and art critic for *Avanti!* She supported him after 1915, and is believed to have influenced the moderation of his policies after 1922. However, as Mussolini became more anti-Semitic after 1938, Sarfatti went into exile until the end of the Second World War.



### SOURCE I

His decision to formulate a policy which would weld together racism and anti-Semitism was purely voluntary and flowed naturally from the confluence of Italy's imperial policies, the ideological tenets of Fascism, and Italian national interests as enunciated by Il Duce ...

The emergence of official anti-Semitism ... must be viewed not as a momentary aberration on the part of Mussolini or the Grand Council ... It was rather cut from the same cloth as the rest of Fascism's final costume.

Bernardini, P. *The Origins and Development of Racial Anti-Semitism in Fascist Italy*. In Marrus, M. (ed). 1988. *The Nazi Holocaust: the Final Solution Outside Germany*. Toronto, Canada. University of Toronto Press. pp. 230 and 238.

### Question

Why were the anti-Semitic laws of 1938 not rigorously enforced in fascist Italy before 1943?

## The Church

When it came to the Roman Catholic Church, Mussolini was a little more successful in widening the base of fascist support. Mussolini never really shed his anti-religious views, but as most Italians were Catholics he realised that he needed to reach an understanding with the Church. As early as 1921 (before he became prime minister), Mussolini began presenting the Fascist Party as an alternative to the traditionally anti-clerical liberals, and the atheistic communists and socialists. The Catholic hierarchy was particularly pleased by the fascists' defeat of the socialists and communists, and saw benefits in ending the conflict between Church and state.

Once installed as prime minister, Mussolini restored Catholic education in state primary schools, which encouraged the papacy to end its support for the Catholic Popolari. The real breakthrough, however, came in 1929, following a series of secret negotiations between the fascists and Cardinal Gasparri, a senior Vatican official.

These negotiations resulted in three Lateran Agreements, which finally ended the conflict and bitterness that had existed between the papacy and the Italian state since 1870. By the terms of the Lateran Treaty, the government accepted papal sovereignty over Vatican City, which became an independent state. In return, the pope formally recognised the Italian state, and its possession of Rome and the former papal states. In a separate but related agreement, the state gave the pope 1750 million lire (£30 million) in cash and government bonds as compensation for the loss of Rome. Finally, the treaty agreed that Roman Catholicism would be the official state religion of Italy, with compulsory Catholic religious education in all state schools, and that the state would pay the salaries of the clergy. In return, the papacy agreed that the state could veto the appointment of politically hostile bishops, and that the clergy should not join political parties. It was also agreed that no one could get divorced without the consent of the Church, and that civil marriages were no longer necessary.

## Collaborators or rivals?

While the Lateran Agreements meant that Catholicism remained a potential rival ideology to fascism, thus preventing the establishment of a truly totalitarian dictatorship, Mussolini was satisfied. The pope and the Catholic Church gave its official backing to him as *Il Duce*.

The Lateran Agreements have led many people to regard the Catholic Church as a fascist collaborator. Indeed, priests would give the fascist salute and participated in Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB) activities (see page 60). However, relations were not always smooth. In 1928, rivalry between Catholic and fascist youth movements led to the banning of the Catholic Scout organisation, and this tension continued even after the Lateran Agreements. In 1931, the government attempted to suppress the Church's Catholic Action youth organisation, provoking further conflict. Eventually a compromise was reached, but only after the pope had publicly criticised the fascist oath of loyalty and interference in educational and family matters. From 1938, disagreements also emerged over the fascists' anti-Semitic policies. Thus it was clear that Mussolini never fully controlled the Church.

### SOURCE J

To opponents of Fascism, the Church seemed ... inextricably implicated in Fascist policy ... Even the denunciations of particular Fascist policies were expressed in temperate tones ...

Yet the Church ... did resist the persistent attacks on the remaining forms of Catholic Action and did formally denounce Mussolini's racial policy in late 1938. No opposition to a complete totalitarianism was more formidable.

Grew, R. 'Catholicism in a Changing Italy'. In Tannenbaum, E. (ed). 1974. *Modern Italy: a Topical History Since 1861*. New York, USA. New York University Press. p. 268.

## What impact did fascist rule have on education, young people and the arts?

### 'Fascistisation' – education and indoctrination

Central to Mussolini's 'Cult of Personality' was his portrayal of the fascists as the only force that could unite all Italians and make their country great. Mussolini also adopted various other methods to manipulate and control the public, including indoctrination. He gave prime importance to the younger generation, which – he believed – needed to be 'fascistised'.

In infant schools, children started the day with a prayer that began, 'I believe in the genius of Mussolini'. In primary schools, children were taught that Mussolini and the fascists had 'saved' Italy from communist revolution. In 1929, it became compulsory for all teachers in state schools to swear an oath of loyalty to both the king and to Mussolini's fascist regime. Two years later, this oath was extended to university lecturers. Only 11 chose to resign rather than take the oath.

**Fact**

In 1926, 101 out of 317 history textbooks were banned. By 1936, under the minister of education, Giuseppe Bottai, there was only one official history textbook.

**Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB)**

The main youth group in Italy from 1926, apart from those run by the Catholic Church. 'Balilla' was the name given to Giovan Battista Perasso, the Genoese schoolboy who – according to legend – began the revolt against Habsburg rule by throwing stones at Austrian troops in 1746.

Mussolini's attempts at indoctrination were less successful in secondary education. However, all school textbooks were carefully reviewed, and many were banned and replaced with new government books that emphasised the role of Mussolini and the fascists.

Fascist attempts to indoctrinate secondary school children were not helped by the first fascist minister of education, Giovanni Gentile, who decided to continue focusing on traditional academic education. Gentile also introduced exams that made it very difficult for most children to progress to secondary education at all. As a result, the numbers of children reaching secondary school, and thus university, declined significantly.

**Fascism and youth movements**

Mussolini and the fascists also tried to indoctrinate young people by setting up youth organisations. In 1926, all fascist youth groups were made part of the **Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB)**. Within the organisation were different sections for boys and girls, according to age. For boys: the Sons of the She-Wolf (4–8), the Balilla (8–14) and the Avanguardisti (14–18). For girls, there were the Piccole Italiane and the Giovani Italiane. There was also the Young Fascists for boys aged 18–21, after which they could apply to become members of the Fascist Party.

*Members of the Balilla (fascist youth) greet Mussolini in 1939*



In 1937, the ONB merged with the Young Fascists to form the Gioventù Italiana del Littorio (GIL), and membership was made compulsory for all young people aged 8 to 21. By this time, the ONB's membership had risen to over 7 million. While all groups followed physical fitness programmes and attended summer camps that included pre-military training, older children also received political indoctrination. All members of the ONB – and of the GUF (the Fascist University Groups) – had to swear loyalty to Mussolini.

However, the impact on schoolchildren was not as great as Mussolini had intended. Some 40% of 4–18 year olds managed to avoid membership. In particular, private and Catholic schools tended not to enforce ONB membership. Also, because of the entrance exams required for secondary education, many children left school at the age of 11. Contempt for – and even resistance to – fascist ideals was not uncommon in the universities.

**SOURCE K**

The regime is and intends to remain a regime of the young ... The regime intends to prepare spiritually all the youth of Italy, from whom successive selections there must issue tomorrow the ranks of the governing classes of Italy, and for this purpose it has created, alongside the civil Militia of the party, the organisation of the Balilla, the Avanguardisti and the University groups. The totalitarian principle of the education of youth, systematically demanded by Fascism, responds to this supreme necessity of Fascist Revolution which intends to last.

*Extracts from the 'Order of the Day', issued by the PNF secretary in 1930. Quoted in Hite, J. and Hinton, C. 1998. Fascist Italy. London, UK. Hodder Education. p. 157.*



**Theory of knowledge**

**History and emotion**

Strong emotions can affect perception and reason. Study Source F on page 55 again. Your attitudes to the position of women in society are probably very different from those put forward by Mussolini in the 1930s. Do his views make you angry? If they do, does this mean it is impossible for you to make an objective assessment of fascist policy towards women?

A regime that lasted 21 years could not fail to have some impact on the Italian youth. However, the speed with which support for fascism declined after Mussolini's downfall indicates that, for all the propaganda, the targeting of young people for fascist converts was ultimately yet another policy failure.

**End of unit activities**

- 1 Draw up a table to show the main economic problems facing Italy between 1922 and 1943, and the degree of success Mussolini had in dealing with them. Use the table below as an example.

	Problem	Policy	Success?	Failure?
1922–24				
1925–43				

- 2 Divide into five groups, with each group researching the impact of Mussolini's economic policies on *one* of the various social groups:
  - large landowners
  - industrialists and bankers
  - industrial workers
  - agricultural workers
  - peasants/small farmers.

Each group should present their findings to the class.

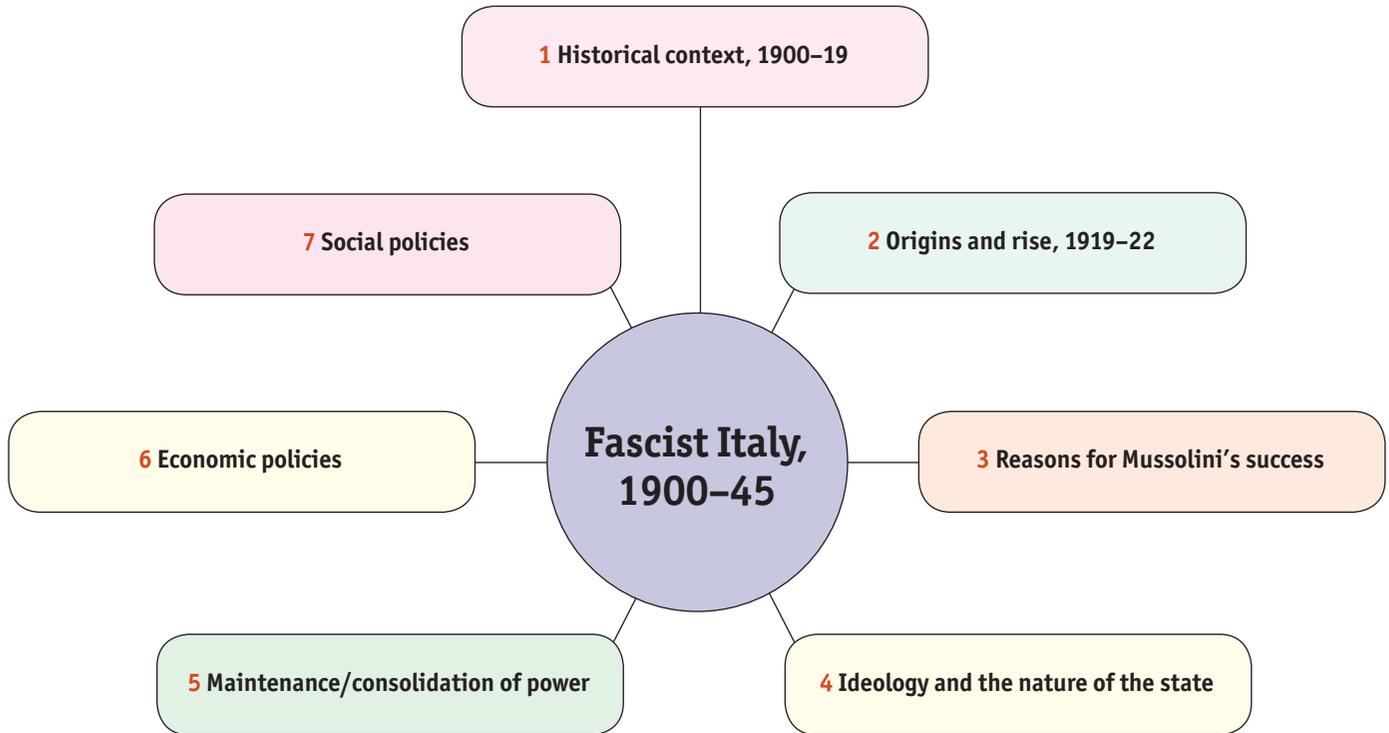
- 3 Carry out some additional research to find out how Italian women were affected by the fascist regime.
- 4 Find out more about the co-operation and conflicts between the fascist state and the Catholic Church.
- 5 Work in pairs to produce a Powerpoint presentation on how Mussolini's regime tried to indoctrinate young people.

**Discussion point**

In pairs, develop two sets of arguments about the role and the attitudes of the Catholic Church in fascist Italy – one to show they were mainly collaborators, and one to argue that they were rivals. Then present these arguments in a class debate. Make sure that each of the two views is critically examined in relation to the evidence presented.

## Summary activities

Draw your own spider diagram and, using the information from this case study and any other material available, make brief notes under the relevant headings. Where there are differences between historians concerning these various areas, make a note of their names and a brief summary of their arguments.



## Paper 2 practice questions

- 1 Analyse the methods used and the conditions that helped Mussolini in his rise to power.
- 2 Assess the importance of ideology for Mussolini and Castro.
- 3 Assess the methods used by Mussolini to maintain his regime.
- 4 Evaluate the successes and failures of Mussolini's policies from 1922 to 1940.
- 5 Examine the status of women in Mussolini's Italy's and either Mao's China or Castro's Cuba.
- 6 In what ways, and for what reasons, did the economic and social aims and policies of Mussolini and Hitler differ?

# Paper 1 exam practice

## Paper 1 skills and questions

Paper 1 contains four types of question. These are:

- 1 Comprehension/understanding of a source** – some will have 2 marks, others 3 marks. For such questions, write only a short answer (scoring 2 or 3 points); save your longer answers for the questions carrying the higher marks.
- 2 Cross-referencing/comparing or contrasting two sources** – try to write an integrated comparison, e.g. comment on how the two sources deal with one aspect, then compare/contrast the sources on another aspect. This will usually score more highly than answers that deal with the sources separately. Try to avoid simply describing each source in turn – there needs to be explicit comparison/contrast.
- 3 Assessing the value and limitations of two sources** – here it is best to deal with each source separately, as you are not being asked to decide which source is more important/useful. But remember to deal with **all** the aspects required: **origins, purpose, value and limitations**.
- 4 Judgement questions/synthesis of source evaluation and own knowledge** – this fourth type of Paper 1 question requires you to produce a mini-essay to address the question/statement given in the question. You should try to develop and present an argument and/or come to a balanced judgement by analysing and using these **five** sources **and** your own knowledge.

At the end of Unit 3, you were able to practise answering a Paper 1 source-based comprehension question. In this section, you will gain experience of dealing with the longer Paper 1 judgement question, which requires you to use sources and your own knowledge to write a mini-essay.

In order to analyse and evaluate sources as historical evidence, you will need to ask the following **W** questions of historical sources:

- **Who** produced it? Were they in a position to know?
- **What** type of source is it? What is its nature – is it a primary or secondary source?
- **Where** and **when** was it produced? What was happening at the time?
- **Why** was it produced? Was its purpose to inform or persuade? Is it an accurate attempt to record facts, or is it an example of propaganda?
- **Who** was the intended audience – decision-makers or the general public?

## Question

Using Sources A, B, C, D and E, and your own knowledge, analyse the reasons for Mussolini's rise to power by 1922.

[8 marks]

Band		Marks
1	<b>Developed and balanced</b> analysis and comments using <b>BOTH</b> sources <b>AND</b> own knowledge. References to sources are precise; sources and detailed own knowledge are used together; where relevant, a judgement is made.	8
2	<b>Developed</b> analysis/comments using <b>BOTH</b> sources <b>AND</b> some detailed own knowledge; some clear references to sources, but sources and own knowledge not always combined together.	6–7
3	<b>Some developed</b> analysis/comments, using the sources <b>OR</b> some relevant own knowledge.	4–5
4	<b>Limited/general</b> comments using sources <b>OR</b> own knowledge.	0–3

### SOURCE B

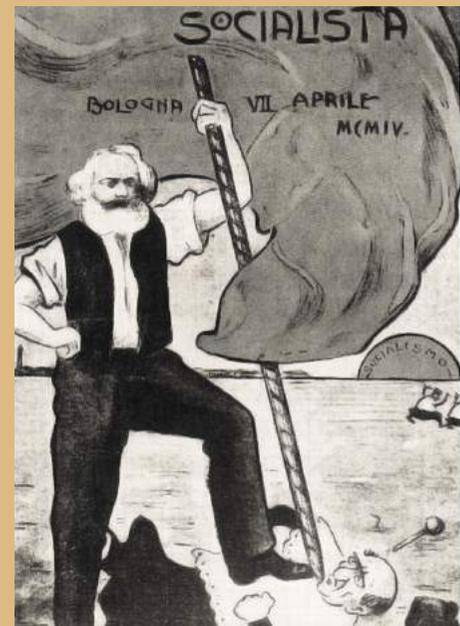
Comments on the backgrounds of the fascist squadristi by Angelo Tasca, a member of the Italian Communist Party in the early 1920s.

In the Po valley, the towns were on the whole less red than the country, being full of landowners, garrison officers, university students, rentiers, professional men, and trades people. These were the classes from which Fascism drew its recruits and which offered the first armed squads.

Tasca, A. *The Rise of Italian Fascism 1918–22*. Quoted in Macdonald, H. 1999. *Mussolini and Italian Fascism*. Cheltenham, UK. Nelson Thornes. p. 17.

### SOURCE A

A postcard advertising a socialist meeting in Bologna, 1904.



### SOURCE C

*Extracts from a speech about fascist violence by Mussolini to the fascists of Bologna, April 1921.*

And, however much violence may be deplored, it is evident that we, in order to make our ideas understood, must beat refractory skulls with resounding blows ... We are violent because it is necessary to be so ...

Our punitive expeditions, all those acts of violence which figure in the papers, must always have the character of the just retort and legitimate reprisal; because we are the first to recognise that it is sad, after having fought the external enemy, to have to fight the enemy within ... and for this reason that which we are causing today is a revolution to break up the Bolshevist State, while waiting to settle our account with the Liberal State which remains.

Robson, M. 1992. *Italy: Liberalism and Fascism 1870–1945*. London, UK. Hodder & Stoughton. p. 51.

### SOURCE D

*The March on Rome.*



### SOURCE E

There were sectors who assisted Fascism indirectly: although they could not bring themselves to support Fascism openly they were at least prepared to tolerate it in a way which would have been out of the question with, for example, socialism. One of these groups was the political establishment ... Another was the aristocratic class, who were appeased by Mussolini's willingness to end his attacks on the monarchy. In fact, the Queen Mother, Margherita, and the king's cousin, the Duke of Aosta, were admirers of Fascism. A third sector was the Catholic Church, taking its cue from Pope Pius XI who, from the time of his election in 1922, remained on good terms with Mussolini. The Church undoubtedly considered a Communist revolution to be the main threat.

Lee, S. 1987. *The European Dictatorships, 1918–1945*. London, UK. Routledge. p. 95.

## Student answer

Those parts of the student answer that follow will have brief examiner's comments in the margins, as well as a longer overall comment at the end. Those parts of the student answer that make use of the sources will be **highlighted in green**; those parts that deploy relevant own knowledge will be **highlighted in red**. In this way, you should find it easier to follow why particular marks were – or were not – awarded.

### Examiner's comment

This is a good introduction, showing a clear understanding of the topic and the question.

The main reasons for Mussolini's rise to power were the old political system, the impact of the First World War, fear of socialism and the growing violence of Mussolini's Fascist Party.

### Examiner's comment

There is clear use of Sources A and B, with a little precise own knowledge.

Source A is a postcard advertising a socialist meeting in Bologna in 1904. The Italian Socialist Party had grown rapidly since the late 19th century, and by the time the First World War broke out, it was gaining over 20% of the vote. There were also many socialist-controlled unions – in 1904, the year of the postcard in Source A, there was a general strike. It was developments like that which worried the wealthy élites and the Catholic Church. This is why the social groups mentioned in Source B – the landowners, officers and professional people – began to look for a force to deal with this socialist 'threat'. This was because the liberal government did very little.

### Examiner's comment

Again, there is good explicit use of Sources C and D, but there is limited precise own knowledge.

Source C is linked to this, as Mussolini refers to the 'enemy within' and the 'Bolshevist State'. The fear of socialism and communism increased amongst the wealthy élites in Italy after the Bolshevik Revolution in November 1917. These upper classes – and the Church – would have greatly appreciated the violence Mussolini talks about in Source C. Source D, taken shortly after the success of his so-called 'March on Rome', confirms Source C, as it shows the paramilitary nature and strength of Mussolini's Fascist Party. It was groups like these that beat up, and killed, opponents on the left, often forcing them to drink castor oil (sometimes in such quantities that the victims died).

Source E ties in with the other sources – especially Source B – as it confirms that the political establishment and the Catholic Church gave support (whether passive or active) to Mussolini's party. These élites included the royal family, as Source E says. In fact, many historians argue that the main reason the March on Rome was successful was because the king refused to declare a state of emergency, as requested by Facta, the liberal prime minister. The reason they gave Mussolini support, despite the violence of the fascist squads (led by local ras such as Balbo and Grandi), and their takeover of many towns and cities, was because of their fears of socialism, and their loss of faith in the Liberal Party.

#### Examiner's comment

This is a better section, with explicit use of Source E and some precise own knowledge, which is integrated to produce a synthesis of both source and own knowledge.

However, the political system that existed in Italy before 1922 and the impact of the First World War were also important reasons for Mussolini's rise to power in 1922. Since unification in 1861–70, the Liberal Party had kept power through a rather corrupt system called *trasformismo*. Also important in Mussolini's rise to power was the rise in nationalism – especially after the peace treaties of 1919–20 had failed to give Italy what had been promised by the Treaty of London in 1915. Many called the outcome of the treaties the 'mutilated victory'. In 1919, d'Annunzio had led a force of blackshirted Arditi and captured Fiume, one of the areas claimed by Italian nationalists. Many of these Arditi later joined Mussolini's party.

#### Examiner's comment

There is some relevant and precise own knowledge here, but this is an 'add-on' rather than being integrated with the sources.

## Overall examiner's comments

There is good and clear use of sources throughout, but the use and/or integration of precise own knowledge to both explain and add to the sources is rather limited. The overall result is an answer clearly focused on the question, but with own knowledge which, in the main, is not integrated with the sources. The candidate has done enough to reach Band 2 and be awarded 6 or 7 marks.

## Activity

Look again at all the sources, the simplified markscheme on page 64, and the student answer above. Now try to write your own answer to this question. See if you can use the sources to make some extra points, and integrate some additional own knowledge, to give a fuller explanation of the reasons behind Mussolini's rise to power.

# Paper 2 exam practice

## Paper 2 skills and questions

For Paper 2, you have to answer two essay questions from two of the five different topics offered. Very often, you will be asked to comment on two states from two different IB regions of the world. Although each question has a specific markscheme, a good general idea of what examiners are looking for in order to be able to put answers into the higher bands can be gleaned from the general 'generic' markscheme. In particular, you will need to acquire reasonably precise historical knowledge in order to address issues such as cause and effect, or change and continuity, and to develop the ability to explain historical developments in a clear, coherent, well-supported and relevant way. You will also need to understand – and be able to refer to – aspects relating to historical debates and interpretations.

Make sure you read the questions carefully, and select your questions wisely – it is a good idea to produce a rough plan of each of the essays you intend to attempt, before you start to write your answers. That way, you will soon know whether you have enough own knowledge to answer them adequately.

Remember, too, to keep your answers relevant and focused on the question – e.g. don't go outside the dates mentioned in the question, or answer on individuals/states different from the ones identified in the question. Don't just describe the events or developments – sometimes, students just focus on one key word or individual, and then write down all they know about it. Instead, select your own knowledge carefully, and pin the relevant information to the key features raised by the question. Also, if the question asks for 'reasons' and 'results', or two different countries, make sure you deal with *all* the parts of the question. Otherwise, you will limit yourself to half marks at best.

### Examiner's tips

For Paper 2 answers, examiners are looking for clear and precise analysis and a balanced argument linked to the question, with the accurate and relevant use of own knowledge. In order to obtain the highest marks, you should be able to refer to different historical debates/interpretations or relevant historians' knowledge, making sure it is relevant to the question.

### Common mistakes

When answering Paper 2 questions, try to avoid simply describing what happened – a detailed narrative, with no explicit attempts to link the knowledge to the question, will only get you half marks at most.

Also, if the question asks you to select examples from *two* different regions, make sure you don't choose two states from the *same* region. Every year, some candidates do this, and so limit themselves to – at best – only 12 out of the 20 marks available.

Band		Marks
1	Clear analysis/argument, with very specific and relevant own knowledge, consistently and explicitly linked to the question. A balanced answer, with references to historical debate/historians where appropriate.	17–20
2	Relevant analysis/argument, mainly clearly focused on the question, and with relevant supporting own knowledge. Factors identified and explained, but not all aspects of the question fully developed or addressed.	11–16
3	<b>EITHER</b> shows reasonable relevant own knowledge, identifying some factors, with limited focus/explanation – but <b>mainly narrative</b> in approach, with question only implicitly addressed <b>OR</b> coherent analysis/argument, but limited relevant/precise supporting own knowledge.	8–10
4	<b>Some limited/relevant</b> own knowledge, but <b>not linked effectively</b> to the question.	6–7
5	<b>Short/general</b> answer, but with very <b>little accurate/relevant knowledge and limited understanding</b> of the question.	0–5

## Student answers

Those parts of the student answers that follow will have brief examiner’s comments in the margins, as well as a longer overall comment at the end. Those parts of the answers that are particularly strong and well-focused will be **highlighted in red**. Errors/confusion/loss of focus will be **highlighted in blue**. In this way, you should find it easier to follow why marks were – or were not – awarded.

## Question 1

Account for Mussolini’s rise to power in 1922.  
[20 marks]

### Skill

Analysis/argument/assessment

### Examiner’s tip

Look carefully at the wording of this question, which asks for an *explanation* of the *reasons* for Mussolini’s rise to power by 1922. This will involve consideration of a *range* of factors, with precise supporting knowledge. Also, try to assess relative importance – this will help ensure you take an *analytical* approach, thus avoiding simple narrative.

**Examiner's comment**

This introduction is quite well thought through. It identifies a range (though not a full range) of valid factors – although it was not the Treaty of Versailles, but the two Paris peace settlements of 1919–20, dealing with Austria and Hungary, which caused discontent. It also indicates which factors might be considered more important. This introduction suggests that the answer as a whole is likely to be analytical rather than descriptive in approach.

**Examiner's comment**

There is some precise own knowledge here, and a reasonable consideration of one important factor, which succeeds in avoiding simple listing or description. However, there are some mistakes/misunderstandings (e.g. over Versailles/the peace treaties) and, at times, the comments are rather general.

**Examiner's comment**

This examines a relevant factor, but is a less effective paragraph, as it is rather vague/general and – despite some valid points and supporting evidence – a significant error (Italian industries were *not* destroyed by the war).

**Student answer**

Benito Mussolini was the fascist leader of Italy during the inter-war years of the 20th century. It is often said that he simply 'marched' into power, but there are other reasons that allowed Mussolini to rise to power. These factors include **the discontent towards the Versailles Treaty, the poor economic state of Italy, the role of the socialists, and the timidity of the Italian king.**

The first reason Mussolini rose to power was because of the discontent in Italy caused by the **Versailles Treaty**. The Italians were extremely unhappy about the results, as they **gained nothing** from it. During the First World War, **Italy was coaxed to the side of the Triple Entente (Britain, France and Russia) by the offer of Austrian territories in the event that Austria and Germany were defeated. This was why the Italians switched sides.** However, when the **Versailles Treaty** was drawn up, **there was no mention of Italy or the gains it had been promised. No Austrian land was given to it. To make matters worse, the Italians weren't even invited to Versailles.** This made the people extremely unhappy, **especially the war veterans. They began to wonder whether they had fought for nothing. This made the liberal Italian government extremely unpopular with the people.** The state of the Italian economy was to make matters worse.

The Italian economy after the First World War was in shambles. There was **massive unemployment because many of the soldiers who had fought in the war were demobilised. In fact, unemployment reached 2 million – while many Italian industries had been destroyed by the war.** The war also caused many of the pre-war economic achievements to be set back. Italy was back to square one. This also made Italians unhappy with the liberal government, and ready to look for a new leader.

The Italian government and the king also allowed Mussolini to come to power. The Italian government during the war was a parliamentary government which consisted of innumerable parties; the only way it could run was by coalitions. However, coalitions were extremely weak because they were only formed out of self-interest – hence they easily fell apart. This weakness caused the king, who was timid by nature, to seek someone who was strong and could lead the country. That was when Mussolini entered the picture. *When his fascists marched to Rome in October 1922 to try to gain power, the king had the option to declare martial law, as requested by Facta, the prime minister at the time, so that the army could stop them. The king, however, refused to sign the order, and Facta resigned. The king then asked Mussolini to form a government. The king clearly thought Mussolini was strong enough to run the country.*

### Examiner's comment

Another valid factor is identified, and there is a bit more precise knowledge here. However, there are also some vague sections where the point is not clear enough.

Mussolini also rose to power not just because of the king and people's unhappiness, but also because of the mistakes of the Italian socialists. *This can be seen in the murder of a leading socialist, Matteotti, who was an outspoken critic of Mussolini and fascist violence. When he was murdered, many of the opposition walked out of parliament in protest. This was very naïve, as Mussolini was able to ignore the walkout – this helped him come to power. The king could have dismissed Mussolini at this stage, but did not, as he wanted Mussolini to stay as a strong leader. Also, the king did not like the socialists.*

Thus Mussolini rose to power through discontent over the *Versailles Treaty* and the economy, the weakness of the government and the king, and the mistakes of the socialists.

### Examiner's comment

This is a much weaker paragraph, as it consists mainly of irrelevant (though generally accurate) own knowledge. Matteotti's murder relates to 1924 and the *consolidation* of Mussolini's rule, not his rise to power. There is a brief but reasonable conclusion – though it does not attempt to identify the relative importance of factors.

## Overall examiner's comments

This answer examines some relevant factors, with some precise own knowledge, and has an analytical approach. However, parts of the answer are rather general, and it does not mention factors such as the pre-war political system, fear of communism, the support of the élites, fascist promises or fascist violence. Overall, the candidate has done enough to get into Band 3, possibly scoring 9 or 10 marks. To improve it, other factors would need to be discussed (with more precise supporting own knowledge), while some mention of relevant historians/historical interpretations would be necessary to secure a Band 1 mark.

## Activity

Look again at the simplified markscheme on page 69, and the student answer above, and identify where it can be improved to ensure a Band 1 mark of 20. Try to provide a little more linkage and analysis, as well as integrating some references to relevant historians/historical interpretations.

## Question 2

Examine and assess the success of Mussolini's economic policies between 1922 and 1943.

[20 marks]

### Skill

Analysis/argument/assessment

### Examiner's tip

Look carefully at the wording of this question, which asks for an examination of Mussolini's economic policies in the period 1922–43, *and* an assessment of their relative success. Remember, if high marks are to be achieved you must not just *describe* the policies.

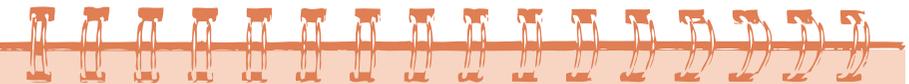
### Student answer



Mussolini came to power in 1922, becoming prime minister of a coalition government in which his Fascist Party was only a small minority. As one of the reasons he had come to power was because of Italy's poor economy, he came up with several policies. In the main, these were a **variety of economic 'battles' – some of which were more successful than others.**

#### Examiner's comment

This is a brief but clear and well-focused introduction, indicating a good grasp of the key requirements of the question.



Mussolini's first 'battle' was the **Battle of the Southern Problem, an attempt to overcome the serious poverty that existed in southern Italy.** Then, in 1925, he launched the **Battle for Grain.** For many years, Italy had had to import wheat. So import controls were put on, while farmers were encouraged to plough up land previously used for olive or fruit growing. To encourage higher production, farmers were given medals and their achievements were published in the papers. To help this 'battle', Mussolini also launched the **Battle for Land** the following year, in order to get even more land available for growing wheat. For instance, the swamps around Rome were drained.

#### Examiner's comment

There is some accurate relevant supporting own knowledge here of various economic policies. As yet, though, there is no assessment of success/failure.

There was also a **Battle for the Lira, to stop the value of the lira declining.** It was re-valued, to stop price rises, and to allow Italy to import coal and iron, which Mussolini wanted so Italy could produce weapons.

Apart from these policies, Mussolini *did not interfere with private firms, and he particularly helped the larger ones. He did this by reducing their taxes, as well as by banning trade unions and strikes.* However, after the Great Depression began and unemployment rose, he did start to take more action. For instance, *job-sharing was encouraged*, but many women were forced out of work so that men could take their places. Also, *state money was given to banks and companies to prevent closures that would lead to even more unemployment.*

*In 1933, Mussolini set up the IRI, to take state intervention even further. At first, the government took over several unprofitable industries – by 1939, it controlled several important industries. However, various bits were then sold off to the larger private firms. This created large capitalist monopolies, for instance, in the chemical industry.*

#### Examiner's comment

This is still focused on the question, and there is relevant knowledge about several economic policies. However, it is still essentially a listing and description – there is no analysis of the extent of success of these policies.

Another important economic policy was *autarchy, to help make Italy economically self-sufficient. This was particularly important if Italy was going to be able to have an aggressive foreign policy, designed to create a large Italian empire, which was one of Mussolini's aims. This was highlighted after 1935, when the League of Nations placed sanctions on Italy because of its invasion of Abyssinia.*

#### Examiner's comment

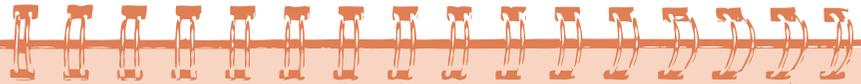
Another valid economic policy has been identified, and briefly explained.

However, despite all these economic policies, *success was mainly limited. For instance, the Battle over the Southern Problem did nothing to end the great poverty and under-employment in the region, and the promise of many new villages was never met. The Battle for Grain, though, was more successful. Cereal production almost doubled by 1939, and Italy did become self-sufficient in wheat. But this badly affected other aspects of Italian agriculture. For example, olive oil had to be imported, while exports of fruit, wine and meat all declined.*

*Though several new farms were created after the draining of the Pontine Marshes near Rome, this was really the only new area of land produced by his Battle for Land. As regards the Battle for the Lira, because the currency was over-valued, it caused Italian export products to become more expensive. As they declined, unemployment increased.*

#### Examiner's comment

The answer is now moving on to the question of success/failure. There is good, precise supporting knowledge, and some analytical comments.



Finally, Mussolini's *attempts at autarchy were sometimes successful. For instance, by 1940, industrial production was up by nearly 10% and, for the first time, industry overtook agriculture as the biggest part of the economy. Also, imports of many industrial goods and raw materials fell between 1928 and 1940.*

#### **Examiner's comment**

Again, there is some relevant supporting own knowledge relating to autarchy. There is also a brief conclusion which is supported by the information and comments provided earlier.

*However, in conclusion, despite some limited successes, there was little real modernisation of the Italian economy, or any increase in productivity. Perhaps significantly, Italy recovered from the Depression much more slowly than most other European states, thus showing that fascist economic policies had done little for Italy.*

### **Overall examiner's comments**

There is relevant supporting own knowledge, with clear analysis, and both of these elements are clearly focused on the question. Although not all aspects are sufficiently developed, the candidate has done enough to be awarded the top of Band 2, i.e. 15 or 16 marks. To reach Band 1, a more detailed examination of economic policies and their effects would have helped. Finally, mention of the arguments/points of *relevant historians/historical interpretations* would be useful – for instance, the extent to which Mussolini and his fascist regime carried through a modernisation of Italy during their time in power.

### **Activity**

Look again at the simplified markscheme on page 69 and the student answer above. Now try to write a few extra paragraphs to push the answer up into Band 1, and so obtain the full 20 marks. As well as making sure you address all aspects of the question, try to integrate some references to relevant historians/historical interpretations.

## Further information

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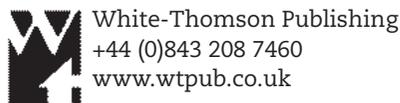
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Series editor: Allan Todd  
Editor: Sonya Newland  
Designer: Clare Nicholas  
Picture researcher: Alice Harman  
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