

THE RISE AND RULE OF THE SINGLE PARTY STATE IN ITALY

NB Mussolini is not a named individual on the Paper 2 syllabus but can be used in open questions which are set on single party and authoritarian states.

The Origins of the Single Party State

Overview

Italy was only formed as a unified country in 1861. Prior to that it had been made up of a series of independent states and a bloc of territory, Lombardy and Venetia, belonging to the Austrian Empire. The 1859 War between Austria, on the one hand, and Piedmont and France, on the other, launched the unification process, which, by 1861, incorporated most, but not all, of the Italian peninsula. In 1866 Italy fought alongside Prussia against Austria and was rewarded with Venetia. The new Italian state was a constitutional monarchy under the House of Savoy. Initially the capital was Turin, the capital of Piedmont, which had led the process of unification. However, in 1870 the French troops garrisoning Rome were removed and Rome became the new capital of Italy. The Pope withdrew to the Vatican and, from then until 1929, relations between the Italian state and the Papacy were hostile.

The period between 1861 and 1922 is normally referred to as 'Liberal Italy'. During the First World War, Italy at first remained neutral but, after bitter arguments during the 'Intervention Crisis', Prime Minister Antonio Salandra led Italy into the war on the side of Britain and France in 1915. The post-war years were marked by economic and political crises and saw the emergence of the Fascist movement.

In 1922 King Victor Emmanuel III appointed Benito Mussolini, the leader and founder of Fascism, Prime Minister in a coalition government. Three years later Mussolini established a Fascist dictatorship, which was to last until 1943. Mussolini allied Italy to Hitler's Germany and the Second World War led to Mussolini's downfall after Italy's disastrous performance in the war. In 1943, Mussolini was dismissed by King Victor Emmanuel III and arrested, but he was then rescued by German troops and installed as the puppet ruler of the Salo Republic in northern Italy. In 1945 Mussolini was captured and shot by Italian communist partisans.

Q. What conditions led to the establishment of a single party state in Italy?

'Liberal Italy' suffered from a number of chronic weaknesses, which formed part of the context out of which Fascism emerged in 1919. However, these weaknesses did not make the rise of Fascism inevitable. Other factors need to be considered in order to explain why parliamentary rule failed and why, when it failed, it was replaced by a Fascist dictatorship, rather than by a socialist republic or a more authoritarian monarchy.

1. Long-term causes/weaknesses 1861-1914

- (a) The process of unification had been largely artificial and only a minority of Italians had a developed sense of national consciousness. As D'Azeglio commented, shortly after unification, "*We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians.*"

To a large extent Piedmont had absorbed the rest of the Italian states and then imposed its laws, political system and administration on the rest of the peninsula. Consequently regional loyalties remained strong, particularly in the South, and the government based in Rome commanded little in the way of popular support. The 'question of the South' remained a huge issue throughout the period, as the peasants of the South continued to live in poverty and illiteracy while the North forged ahead economically and socially.

- (b) The mass of Italians had no involvement in, and, little interest in, the political system that operated in Italy prior to 1912.

Historians agree that in this period there was a fundamental division between 'legal' Italy - the upper and middle classes who dominated the political system and 'real' Italy - the peasant masses and the small but growing industrial proletariat. Until 1881 only half a million Italians out of a total population of 32 million had the vote; the electorate was then expanded but still only comprised about 2 million voters until the 1912 the electoral law enfranchised all men aged over 30.

- (c) There was a damaging rift between the Italian state and the Catholic Church, which undermined support for the former among the mass of devout churchgoing Italians.

This stand-off was the result of both the absorption of the Papal States and Rome by the Italian kingdom during the process of unification and the anti-clerical (anti-Church) policies pursued by the liberals. Until 1904 the Vatican instructed Catholics not to vote in parliamentary elections.

- (d) Government during the period of 'Liberal Italy' had a reputation for corruption and pursuing narrow class interests.

Although there were frequent changes of government, these rarely constituted a different political direction as most politicians, as the historian John Pollard put it, were "merely of different shadings of a broadly liberal-conservative hue." The system by which the different liberal leaders constructed their governments, using patronage networks, bribery and vote-rigging, is known as '*trasformismo*'. The liberal politicians represented the interests of the upper and middle classes and did little for the masses, for example, responding to industrial unrest in the 1890s with brutal repression.

- (e) There was growing working-class and peasant unrest from the 1890s, culminating in the General Strike of 1914.

In the late 19th century Italy, particularly the South, was backward economically, both in terms of its agriculture and industry. However, from the 1890s major economic changes began to occur. Agriculture in parts of the North, particularly the fertile Po Valley, started to modernise with the introduction of chemical fertilisers and machinery. This put immense strain on small peasant farmers who struggled to compete with the bigger landowners who were turning to capitalist farming methods. Industry also

took off from 1896 onwards, particularly in the North-West, with the rapid growth of heavy industries such as steel, shipbuilding and hydro-electric power. This led to the development of a growing industrial proletariat.

These socio-economic changes led to the development of working-class movements; trade unions and peasant leagues proliferated. In 1892 the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) was founded. A down-turn in the world economy in the 1890s, combined with bad harvests, sparked off strikes and land seizures, which the liberal government met with force, closing down many trade unions and even banning the PSI for a time.

- (f) The failure of liberal governments to reconcile the masses.

The only liberal politician who recognised the need to reconcile the mass of the Italian people to the government was Giovanni Giolitti who dominated Italian politics in the first decade and a half of the 20th century (he was Prime Minister three times in the period 1903-14). Unlike other liberal politicians, Giolitti tried to create a working relationship with the moderate wing of the PSI and win popular support by means of welfare and electoral reform. Giolitti also sought to improve relations with the Papacy by permitting religious education in schools where the local authorities approved.

Unfortunately, after some initial success, Giolitti's strategy failed partly because the economic growth of the early 1900s gave way to a serious recession (1909 onwards) and partly because Giolitti's decision to pursue colonies led him to seize Libya from Turkey, which infuriated the PSI. In 1912 the PSI, which was split between a revolutionary 'Maximalist' wing and a more moderate 'Reformist' wing, swung towards the extreme left and rejected the idea of working with the liberal parties.

- (g) Giolitti's decision to broaden political participation backfired.

Giolitti decided to extend the vote to the majority of adult males in 1912 in the hope that this would give the mass of Italians a stake in the political system. However, the liberal parties proved incapable of adapting to democratic politics and it was the PSI who benefited most by the enlargement of the electorate. This trend was increased after the First World War when the PSI and PPI (a Catholic party founded in 1919) became the largest parties, leaving the liberals struggling to maintain their domination of the Italian Chamber (the lower house of Parliament).

- (h) Many Italians blamed the liberal governments before the First World War for failing to make Italy either a great or an imperial power. Furthermore, Italian nationalists regarded unification as incomplete because many Italian-speakers still lived in 'unredeemed' parts of the Austrian Empire.

After unification many Italians expected Italy to become one of the great European powers. However, its economic backwardness and relatively small population meant that Italy did not achieve that status. The late 19th century saw the European powers engaged in the 'scramble for Africa'; however, Italy made only meagre gains in the shape of Eritrea (1885) and part of Somaliland (1889). The attempt to conquer Abyssinia ended in disaster and humiliation at the Battle of Adowa in 1896. Giolitti did succeed in wresting Libya off Turkey in 1911 in a very expensive campaign.

The failure of the liberal governments to make Italy into a Great Power, led to the rise of Nationalism as an aggressive and restless force in Italian politics, critical of the weakness of the government. The Italian Nationalist Association was established in 1910, with Enrico Corradini its leading figure. At the same time, the poet, Filippo Marinetti, founded an influential artistic movement, known as Futurism. The Futurists glorified mechanisation and war and criticised 'Liberal Italy' for its feebleness.

2. Medium and Short-Term Causes: 1914-22

(a) The Impact of the Intervention Crisis (1914-15)

Italian politicians were bitterly divided by the 'Intervention Crisis'. When the First World War broke out in August 1914, Italy remained neutral. Since 1882, it had been part of the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary. However, over the course of autumn 1914 through to spring 1915, a political debate raged over whether Italy should join the war.

Those who favoured intervention included:

- Right-wing liberals, notably the Prime Minister, Antonio Salandra and the Foreign Minister, Sidney Sonnino. They hoped that intervention on the side of the Triple Entente (Britain, France and Russia) would result in Italy gaining Italian-speaking areas of the Austrian Empire, such as Trieste and the South Tyrol. They also expected the war to strengthen the Liberal state by rallying Italians around the government's war effort. Salandra was the driving force behind the Treaty of London (April 1915), which Italy signed with Britain and France. Salandra persuaded King Victor Emmanuel to approve the treaty but the Italian Chamber was not consulted in the negotiations.
- The Nationalists and Futurists who believed war would galvanise and unite the Italian people and lead to the 'redemption' of the Italian-speaking areas still under Austrian rule.
- Left-wing interventionists included revolutionary syndicalists who had either broken away from the PSI in the years before the war or did so in 1914-15. In the latter category, the most important figure was the editor of the Socialist newspaper, *Avanti*, Benito Mussolini who had originally opposed the war but from October 1914 argued in favour of intervention. He was promptly expelled by the PSI. Revolutionary syndicalists argued that the war would transform society, possibly lead to revolution and, in the process, destroy 'Liberal Italy'.

Mussolini founded the newspaper '*Popolo d'Italia*' to press for intervention. Left-wing interventionists formed *fasci di azione rivoluzionaria* (revolutionary action groups) to campaign and demonstrate in favour of intervention; these groups can be seen as the forerunners to the later Fascist movement.

Those who opposed intervention included:

- Giolitti and his supporters among the liberals. Most of the Chamber opposed the decision to sign the Treaty of London. Giolittians saw no advantage to be gained from entering the war.
- The PSI attacked the war as an imperialist war and campaigned against intervention.
- On the whole, the Catholic Church was not in favour of Italy joining the war, particularly as Catholic Austria would be Italy's main enemy in the war.

(b) The Impact of the First World War on Italy (1915-18)

The Italian army fought on a front in Northern Italy against the Austrians and Germans. Three years of largely static, trench-warfare cost Italy 600,000 dead. In October 1917 Italy suffered a major defeat at Caporetto, which saw the Austrians and Germans advance over 100 kilometres. Right at the end of the war in October 1918 Italy scored a victory over the Austrians at Vittorio Veneto.

- The war widened the political and social divisions within Italy, rather than uniting Italians as many of the interventionists had hoped. The intervention crisis split the liberals irrevocably.
- 5 million Italians served in the armed forces and many of them, particularly the junior officers and NCOs who were drawn largely from the lower middle class, were politicised by the experience. They blamed the liberal politicians for mismanaging the war and hated the Socialists for failing to support the war.
- The Italian economy was mobilised to support 'total war'. Industrial output expanded rapidly, for example, Fiat's production of vehicles went up by 500% during the war, whilst its workforce grew from 4000 to 40,000. Inevitably this would lead to huge economic dislocation when the war ended and the economy reverted to a peace-time footing.
- Inflation and food shortages became serious issues, with prices quadrupling between 1914 and 1918. To finance the war, the Italian government borrowed greatly. The government spent 148,000 million lire on the war; that was twice the total government expenditure in the entire period 1861-1914.
- There was growing unrest among the industrial working class as they suffered from price inflation, shortages and military-style discipline in factories producing war-related goods. In August 1917, the police and army killed 50 protestors in Turin after working-class demonstrations against prices and shortages. The increased militancy of the industrial workers was reflected in the expansion of trade union membership and the growth of the PSI.

(c) The Post-War Crisis (1918-22)

Italy faced serious economic, social and political crises after the First World War. These crises provided Mussolini with the opportunity to create, and, then rapidly expand, his new Fascist movement. There was nothing inevitable about Mussolini's rise to power but what is certain is that the liberal politicians who had controlled Italy for the past 50 years proved incapable of coping with the difficult post-war conditions.

Although, at first sight, post-war Italian politics saw 'business as usual' with 4 of the 5 governments of the period 1918-22 led by liberal politicians - Orlando, Nitti, Giolitti and Facta (Bonomi, a moderate socialist was the odd man out) - this impression is highly misleading.

The Liberals' grip on power was very fragile as their traditional political control was undermined by the following:

1. The advent of democracy and mass politics; an end to 'trasformismo'

During the war, the Liberals had promised the extension of the vote to all adult males and duly introduced universal male suffrage (December 1918) and proportional representation (August 1919). However, the Liberals did not adapt to

the new era of mass politics. As the historian Martin Kitchen has observed, it was *'no longer possible to control parliament by the traditional liberal methods of political horse trading and influence peddling known as trasformismo'*. In the 1919 elections, the Liberals gained less than half the seats in the Chamber while the PSI and the newly formed Catholic party, the PPI, or Popolari, emerged as the biggest parties. The Popolari won 100 seats whilst the PSI gained 156 and its membership expanded from 50,000 to 200,000 in 1918-20.

The governments of 1918-22 were all highly unstable because the three major groups or groupings (the Liberals were not a united party as such) proved incapable of working together to form strong coalition governments. The PSI and the Popolari were unwilling and unable to work together because the Socialists (PSI) were hostile to the influence of the Catholic Church. Furthermore, the Liberals could not create an effective working partnership with either the Popolari – because the Liberals were anti-clerical – or the Socialists because of the Socialists' commitment to extensive (indeed radical in the case of the PSI's left-wing) social and economic reform. The PPI did join some of the Liberal coalitions of the period but the PPI-Liberal partnership was always fraught with difficulties and so none of these coalitions endured long.

Italian politics became increasingly fragmented in the post-war period, with the Liberals struggling to construct majorities in the Chamber to support the government. The result was a series of short-lived coalition governments, which undermined many Italians' confidence in the democratic parliamentary system. In 1921, the rise of the Fascists as an electoral force and the breakaway by revolutionary socialists to found the Italian Communist Party (PCI) increased the political polarisation and instability. The 1921 elections saw the PNF (Fascists) win 35 seats in the Chamber, the PSI (Socialists) and PCI (Communists) win 138 and the PPI 108. In all, there were 13 different groupings in the Chamber in 1921.

2. The 'mutilated victory'

Italian Nationalists were furious at the terms of the peace treaties signed in Paris in 1919 and they were able to create the impression that the Italian army's victories had been betrayed by Italy's Allies who failed to give Italy greater gains and by the Italian government of Vittorio Orlando for not standing up sufficiently for Italy's interests. Italy was granted South Tyrol, Trieste and Trentino but did not receive Fiume or Dalmatia.

The nationalist poet, Gabriele D'Annunzio, coined the phrase 'the mutilated victory', to characterise the disappointment Italian patriots felt at having won the war but 'lost the peace'. D'Annunzio led a force of 2000 ex-soldiers, Nationalists and Futurists, and occupied Fiume in September 1919 in protest at the Italian government's decision to hand it over to Yugoslavia as the Treaty of St Germain dictated. The government of Francesco Nitti felt unable to drive D'Annunzio out, so the occupation continued until Giolitti returned as Prime Minister and ejected D'Annunzio and his paramilitaries in December 1920.

3. Economic crisis and social unrest

The transition from wartime to peacetime economy proved very painful for Italy. Inflation continued to rise rapidly - prices increased by 50% in 1918-20, hitting those on fixed incomes and those with savings particularly hard. Unemployment rose steeply as 2.5 million Italian soldiers were demobilised and many found no jobs to return home to. Unemployment peaked at 2 million in late 1919. In 1921 the US government placed strict restrictions on immigration into the USA; this worsened the plight of the poor in southern Italy, many of who had in the past sought escape in the form of emigration to the USA.

The Rise of Mussolini and Italian Fascism

Mussolini's political career up to 1918

Mussolini joined the Socialist Party in 1910 and achieved prominence as editor of the Socialist newspaper *Avanti!* Mussolini was then expelled from the PSI in 1914 for advocating that Italy should intervene in the war; he argued that the war would lead to revolution in Italy.

Mussolini founded and edited *Il Popolo D'Italia* in November 1914, with financial backing from Milanese businessmen and the French government. He used *Il Popolo* to campaign for intervention. When Italy joined the war in 1915, Mussolini joined the Italian army but was wounded and left the army in 1917.

1919: Mussolini founded a left-wing Fascist movement

When the war ended, Mussolini decided to create a new left-wing political movement, to which he hoped to recruit ex-servicemen, dissident socialists and syndicalists. However, right from its inception, the Fascist movement contained very diverse elements, which included:

- » Revolutionary syndicalists who had broken away from the PSI. Radicals like Edmondo Rossoni, the head of the Fascist Union Confederation, wanted to sweep away Liberal Italy and create a new state in which employers and employees came together to control the economy by means of 'corporations'.
 - » Militants like Roberto Farinacci and Italo Balbo who wanted a Fascist revolution, which would involve the Party taking over the state and fundamentally altering Italy.
 - » Ex-Nationalists who advocated a more authoritarian system of government and prioritised making Italy into a great power.
- Clerico-Fascists who were hostile to the Socialists and sought to heal the longstanding rift between church and state by means of the Fascist Party.

In March 1919 Mussolini set up the *Fasci di Combattimento* in Milan. The word 'fascio' means 'group' or 'bundle' and derives from the bundle of rods carried as a symbol of office by magistrates in ancient Rome. At this stage, Mussolini deliberately avoided calling the fascists a 'party' as he wanted to suggest that the Fascists were rejecting the traditional party structure, which, by 1919, was so discredited in the eyes of many Italians.

Initially Mussolini proved unable to attract more than several hundred followers and he suffered total humiliation in the November 1919 elections, when the Fascists did not win a single seat.

Mussolini's 1919 programme was anti-capitalist, anti-clerical and republican:

- » Abolition of the Senate (the upper house of parliament, which the King nominated)
- » The election of a National Assembly to draw up a new constitution
- » Universal suffrage (male and female)
- » A guaranteed minimum wage
- » Worker involvement in running factories
- » Confiscation of war profits
- » Confiscation of church property

Following the disaster in the November 1919 elections, Mussolini's support began to dwindle and it looked as if the movement would collapse.

1920-21: Mussolini moved Fascism to the Right

However, Mussolini immediately began to move the movement's programme to the right, a process that continued through to 1922. Crucially for the Fascists, late 1920 onwards saw the movement make rapid progress in winning support in rural areas of northern and central Italy as the Fascists organised 'squads' to attack the socialists, Catholic unions and peasant leagues. The Fascists were, therefore, able to appeal to the landed classes as champions of property rights. Simultaneously, but with not quite such success, the Fascists challenged the socialists and trade unions in the cities and major towns of the industrial north. Fascist support and influence in the South was much more limited.

Mussolini increasingly posed as a respectable politician and courted support from the elites and liberal politicians. In April 1921, Giolitti offered Mussolini the opportunity to join the government's 'national bloc' in the forthcoming elections. The PNF now began to develop as a parliamentary party as they won 35 seats in the May 1921 elections. Giolitti's new coalition was highly unstable and in July 1921 it collapsed when the Popolari withdrew. Giolitti was replaced as Prime Minister by a moderate socialist, Ivanoe Bonomi, but Bonomi's coalition proved no more durable than Giolitti's.

In June 1921, in his maiden parliamentary speech, Mussolini publicly renounced the Fascists' earlier anti-clericalism, declaring that, *'Fascism neither practises nor preaches anti-clericalism...I believe...that the Latin and Imperial traditions of Rome are today represented by Catholicism'*.

As part of Mussolini's search for political respectability, he concluded the Pact of Pacification with the Socialists in August 1921. However, this led to a rift with the Ras who regarded Mussolini's negotiations with the liberals and elites as a betrayal of their commitment to a more extreme transformation of Italy. Mussolini briefly resigned as Fascist leader (but not as leader of the Fascist group within the Chamber), probably calculating that the Ras would eventually recognise that the Fascism could not survive without him; that he was the 'cement' that bound the disparate elements of Fascism together into a national movement. In November, at the third Fascist Congress, Mussolini publicly rejected the Pact of Pacification and was reinstated as Fascist leader or '*Duce*'.

In October 1921, Mussolini relaunched the Fascist movement as a predominantly right-wing party, the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (the PNF), which emphasised a fervent nationalism and a hatred of socialism.

The 1921 Fascist programme advocated:

- » The privatisation of all sectors of industry currently under state control (e.g. the railways)
- » The right to private property to be guaranteed
- » Resolving industrial and agrarian disputes by creating corporations representing all classes
- » The incorporation of any Italian-speaking areas still not part of Italy; Italy to play a dominant role in the Mediterranean

1922: Mussolini appointed Prime Minister

Bonomi's coalition government fell apart in February 1922 and was succeeded by a very weak liberal-conservative coalition led by Luigi Facta. Fascist violence increased in 1922 and Facta's government was unable to restore order. The Socialists and Communists called a general strike for August 1922 as a protest against the Fascists but this backfired disastrously because the Fascist squads then broke up the general strike and many of the propertied classes were now strengthened in their conviction that only a government containing Mussolini could maintain law and order. In September 1922, in a speech in Udine, Mussolini made clear his commitment to supporting the monarchy.

By late 1922, Mussolini was walking a political tightrope, under intense pressure from the Ras, the regional Fascist bosses, to seize power by force and then create a dictatorship. However, at the same time, Mussolini was negotiating with liberal and conservative politicians to win support for his appointment as prime minister; in October 1922, Mussolini demanded 5 cabinet posts.

The March on Rome (October 1922) was a successful bluff on Mussolini's part. The Fascists mobilised 30,000 poorly armed squadristi for the March on Rome. They would have been no match for the regular army. On October 27, Facta asked King Victor Emmanuel to declare martial law in preparation for suppressing the Fascist march. Crucially, after initially agreeing to Facta's request, King Victor Emmanuel lost his nerve and cancelled the order. Facta immediately resigned. Victor Emmanuel probably feared that civil war might break out if the Army was ordered to confront the Fascist squads and he seems to have been concerned lest the Army prove unreliable (although all the evidence suggests the Army would have obeyed orders to suppress the squads).

Liberals and conservatives close to the King, such as Luigi Federzoni, then advised him to appoint Mussolini as Prime Minister; they believed that Mussolini could be 'tamed' and that, in power, as part of a coalition with the Liberals and Nationalists, the Fascists could be induced to moderate their behaviour and programme. In a word, the liberal-conservative politicians were resorting to their traditional '*trasformismo*' tactics. Mussolini was duly appointed Prime Minister on 29 October. The Fascist squads were then invited to march through Rome on 30 October as a victory parade.

Q. Why did the Fascist movement grow so rapidly between 1919 and 1922, propelling Mussolini to the premiership by October 1922?

The rise of Fascism is a remarkable phenomenon; from just a few hundred members in 1919, the movement grew to over 300,000 by October 1922.

- Mussolini was a brilliant journalist and orator. He had the ability to whip up emotions and the 'common touch', in stark contrast to the liberal politicians. Mussolini offered charismatic, authoritarian leadership, promising to restore national greatness and revive the glory of ancient Rome.

Mussolini's posturing and his dynamism helped create an exaggerated impression of how powerful the Fascists were. Serrati, the Socialist leader, described Mussolini as, '*a rabbit - a phenomenal rabbit; he roars. Observers who do not know him mistake him for a lion*'.
- Mussolini was pragmatic and flexible – he once declared that, '*Only maniacs never change*'. His transformation of the Fascists' programme, from predominantly left-wing in 1919 to predominantly right-wing by late 1921, illustrates that and explains the growing appeal of Fascism to the middle classes. Mussolini made clear his lack of attachment to any particular ideological position in a speech to the chamber in December 1921 in which he stated that, '*the Fascist programme is not a theory of dogmas...our programme is a process of continual elaboration and transformation*'.
- Mussolini and the Fascists exploited bourgeois and upper class fears of socialist revolution, which appeared to many during the Biennio Rosso to be imminent. For many property-owners, the squadristi seemed to offer the best defence against a left-wing revolution.
- Many of the Fascists were recruited from the middle class and, even more so from the lower middle classes – small farmers, skilled craftsmen, shopkeepers, teachers and civil servants. This social group had dominated the ranks of the junior officers and NCOs during the war and the war politicised them. After the war, they resented the privileged position and power of the ruling classes but were also hostile to the trade unions and socialists, fearing that they would be levelled down to the status of the labouring classes.
- Mussolini was the 'glue' that held the various and competing strands of Fascism together. Although, his authority over the movement was often challenged by the independently-minded Ras, ultimately no-one else emerged as a credible alternative leader. It was Mussolini who had the political skills required to negotiate with the established politicians and it was Mussolini who made Fascism into a national movement, rather than a jumble of regional groups.

The leading British historian Denis Mack Smith characterised the disparate nature of Fascism in the following terms:

'Fascism had elements of both [Left and Right]...It was revolutionary, but could also sometimes claim to be conservative. It was monarchist but also republican, at different times. It was Catholic, but also anti-clerical; it claimed to be Socialist, but could also be strongly capitalist whenever it suited the Duce to be so...'

- Mussolini was able to appeal to and balance elite support (e.g. that of the industrialist Alberto Pirelli) and that of the squadristi. This was an extremely difficult juggling act for Mussolini. If he leaned too much towards the violent authoritarianism of the Ras or the radicalism of the ex-revolutionary syndicalists, he risked alienating his supporters among the elites. Conversely, if he appeared too much the moderate and the defender of the ruling classes, he might lose the backing of the Ras.
- The violence of the squads was both an asset and a liability for Mussolini. The squads' destruction of the unions and socialist organisations met with the approval of many big landowners, industrialists and leading figures within the armed forces, police and the Vatican. However, too much violence threatened a descent into anarchy and alarmed the propertied classes. This explains the Pact of Pacification that Mussolini signed with the reformist wing of the PSI in the summer of 1921. However, the Pact was denounced by the *Ras*, the powerful regional Fascist bosses like Italo Balbo of Ferrara, who continued their attacks on the socialists. Mussolini, therefore, abandoned the Pact.

Sometimes Mussolini was forced to go further and faster than he wanted by the Ras, e.g. Mussolini was pushed into the March on Rome (October 1922). Italo Balbo told Mussolini, *'We are going, either with you or without you.'*

- Increasingly Mussolini was able to win the backing of powerful elements within the ruling elites who did not become Fascists but saw in Mussolini a valuable ally in the fight against socialism. In 1922, there was a new pope, Pius XI, who was sympathetic to Mussolini and sensed in him an opportunity of improving church-state relations.
- The police and Army were favourably inclined towards the squadristi and helped them in their battles with the Socialists, either by turning a blind eye to squad violence or by supplying the squads with weapons.
- The Liberals miscalculated, they thought they could use Mussolini; therefore, the 1921 elections saw the PNF invited to join the government list by Giolitti. Similarly, Salandra, in October 1922, advised Victor Emmanuel to appoint Mussolini Prime Minister, wanting to prevent his longstanding rival, Giolitti, from coming to power and believing that the Fascists could be tamed.

The Establishment of Single-Party Rule

From Prime Minister to Duce (1922-26)

When Mussolini was appointed Prime Minister in October 1922, his government was a coalition in which there were just three Fascists; the rest of the cabinet comprised Nationalists, Popolari, Liberals and two generals. Mussolini's position was therefore far from unassailable as he depended on the continuing support of the King and, within the Chamber, the Fascists only held 7% of the seats.

Yet by the end of 1926 Mussolini had instituted a single party state in Italy. During the first three years of Mussolini's tenure as Prime Minister, it remained unclear whether Mussolini would pursue constitutional methods or whether he would look to achieve a complete Fascist takeover of the state and society. This ambiguity about the nature of Fascist rule – moderate or revolutionary – was only resolved in 1925-26.