

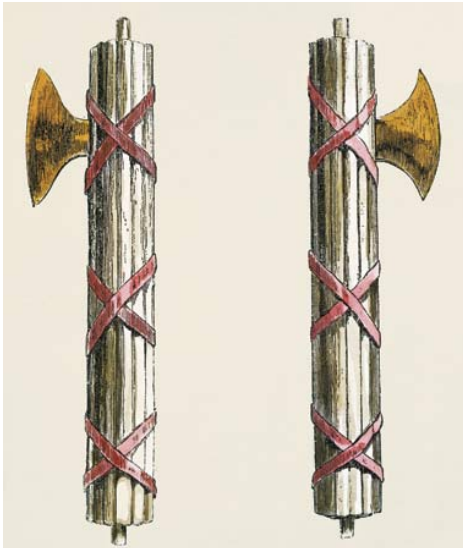
Mussolini's Italy

This is just the overview - use the book (pp 3-16) for detail



Early life

- From a traditionally socialist (opposite of fascist) family and was initially socialist himself
- Was expelled from Socialist movement in 1914 for advocating joining WWI; joined war himself, injured, developed interest in politics



Fascism

1919 - founded Fascio di Combattimento - symbol fasces

anti-communist, raised-arm salute, Blackshirts, violent, hyper nationalist.

Won no seats in 1919 gen. election - M. eradicated extreme left element of party and focused exclusively on extreme right.

Industrialists began to support his Fascists in opposition to Communist threat - financial support v. imp.

Squadristi formed 1919 - 1921

violent paramilitary groups used to intimidate trade unions and political enemies

1921 - Membership of party at 320,000; 35 seats won in election

March on Rome, 1922

- Poor economic conditions lead to Socialist-led strike, opposed by Fascists - created impression they had saved country from devastating Communist takeover (not government)
- Plans made to march on Rome to seize power; PM Facta asked king to impose martial law and stop it, resigned when this was refused
- New government needed but M. refused to enter any unless he was PM - 29 Oct 1922 king asked M. to form new gvt.
- M. never actually marched - took train. March by some Blackshirts was in reality victory parade, not coup.

Mussolini in Power

- Slow beginning - Fascists were only 35 out of 535; liberals reassured
- Massive vote of confidence - right to rule by decree for one year granted by king
- Acerbo Law - 2/3 of parliament reserved for party that won most seats (NB!) - people wanted stable governments.
- 1924 - Gen. election; fascists gain control through use of Acerbo Law.
- Fascists came to control all appointments to key jobs; M. was Foreign Minister and Min. for the Interior; King and constitution retained, but dictatorship being established
- Murder of Socialist Matteotti, 1924, by Fascists proved lengths to which they would go. M. denied knowledge / involvement
- Developed persona of Il Duce - cult of leader encouraged
 - propaganda central to developing image of 'superman'
- 1926 - right to rule by decree granted by Parliament. End of democracy; full-blown dictatorship
 - High levels of corruption and questionable leadership - M. was v. arrogant - would lead to his downfall

- Opposition banned (political parties / press censorship) - OVRA (secret police) enforced compliance but crimes against opponents of fascism went unpunished.
- Penal colonies / concentration camps set up, but nothing on Nazi scale -Pre-1940, only 10 executions of pol. prisoners, fewer than 4,000 sent to camps.
- No genuine interest in anti-Semitism, but passed Race Law, 1938, through Hitler's influence (barred Jews from high office or owning large businesses)

Church-State Relations

- Creation of Italian state had caused deep rift with Catholic Church - M. hoped to gain politically by healing this rift, despite his own atheism.
- Gained approval from Church for: legal measures against abortion and contraception; religion taught in primary schools; crucifixes displayed in classrooms and courts.
- M. had his children baptised and had a church wedding (had been married civilly for 10 years)
- Church moved support to Fascist party from Catholic Popular Party (too liberal) (already hated the 'godless communists')
- 1929 Lateran Treaty
 - Pope's control of Vatican city recognised - own courts, army and post
 - Pope recognised Italian state and gave up claims on Italian territory
 - Catholicism as state religion; Church had control of RE in schools
- Close relationship with Church brought huge public support
- Relations cooled by late 1930s - Church opposed anti-Semitic legislation of 1938 and during WWII Church quietly but firmly resisted excesses of Fascist regime

Economy

- 1922-1925: Minister for Finance, de Stefani introduced simpler tax system and attracted foreign investment; reduced gvt expenditure and achieved budget surplus for the first time since the war, trade increased, unemployment dropped. Massive benefits for M.'s popularity
- M. followed policy of 'autarky' - self-sufficiency in food and raw materials - through battles for grain, land, lira and births
 - Battle for Grain: Doubled grain production between 1925 and 1929, but protectionism reduced modernisation. Grain production rose at expense of fruit, olive oil and livestock
 - Battle for Land: Pontine Marshes drained and land developed
 - Battle for the Lira: 1926, lira revalued after dismissal of de Stefani. Industry boomed briefly, but exports were too dear leading to severely depressed economy and devaluation of lira in 1936
 - Battle for Births: Soldiers for the planned empire were needed so early marriage and large families were encouraged and financially supported. Bachelors had to pay extra taxes and homosexuality was outlawed. Battle a failure.
- Corporate State
 - Corporations were semi-state bodies set up in order to achieve the economic recovery of Italy while avoiding trade unions (communist). Every profession / industry had its own corporation, comprising employer delegates, employee delegates and 3 Fascist Party members
 - Strikes and lock-outs forbidden - negotiation to be used to solve problems
 - Employers benefitted, not employees - 1925-38 10% drop in wages; living standards among lowest in Europe
- Successful policies
 - Trains 'ran on time'; autostrada built; infrastructure generally modernised

- and improved
- Improvements in education - school leaving age raised; more schools built; PE emphasised; but - indoctrination widespread
- Power of Sicilian mafia curbed by ruthless Fascists - many Mafiosi emigrated to US
- Ultimately, economic policies only partially successful - could not cope with strain of WWII.

Foreign Policy

- Initially, limited - consolidation within Italy before looking further afield
- Ambitions to re-institute Roman Empire - M. as new Caesar: "I want to make Italy great, respected and feared."
- Temporary occupation of Corfu ('23); later occupation of Fiume ('24), but overall moderate actions in 1920s
- 1935 - invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) - part of plans for African empire, but ally needed for further efforts
- Mussolini and Hitler
 - Cool relations at first - M. feared German interest in Italian territory; blocked Anschluss in '34
 - '35 marked turning point - common ground as Fascists; M. invaded Abyssinia and H. entered Rhineland
 - 1936 - Rome-Berlin Axis signed
 - 1937 - Italy joined Germany and Japan in Anti-Comintern Pact (anti-Communist)
 - 1939 - Pact of Steel - military alliance (delayed until '39 due to comparative Italian military weakness)
 - Both supported Franco in Spanish Civil War. (This, coupled with Abyssinia campaign meant Italy was militarily and economically exhausted before WWII)
 - Sept. 1939 - M. breaks Pact of Steel - Italy not ready for war until 1940 (by which time M. considered a German victory certain). Italian army underwhelming in Greece and N. Africa.

Mussolini deposed

- 1941 - 400,000 Italian soldiers had surrendered to British in N. Africa
- 1942 - Italy had lost most of its African possessions
- 1943 - Allies took Sicily, then invaded mainland Italy
- M. was Minister for War as well as PM - many Italians held him directly responsible for the disasters of the war. Removed as PM by the king and Fascist Grand Council, and arrested.
- 1943 - new PM (Marshal Badoglio) surrendered to the Allies and declared war on Germany
- M. rescued by German paratroopers and used to head a puppet Italian gvt. in N. Italy
- 1945 - faced with Allies progressing northwards, M. tried to escape country, but was captured with his mistress by Italian resistance and executed. Bodies brought back to Milan and left hanging in public.

Legacy

- Retained power for over 20 years with popular support until 1940. Restoration of Italian pride
- Certain amount of economic success and social reform, but no substance to economy

Style over substance - propaganda ahead of solid policies



imposing (sword, big

considerably less celestial

Final humiliation. After execution
Petacci, were hung upside down
they'd donned in their attempt

