

Italy Revision 1911-1946

2.1 The Liberal state 1911-18

Introduction:

- In 1911, Italy held a series of events to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Italy's unification and to celebrate their economic progress since unification.
- However, behind the facade of cheering crowds lay a darker reality that was hard to ignore; the Catholic Church boycotted the events and refused to celebrate Italian unification, while socialists saw a united Italy as meaningless.
- There was a deep divide between the north and south, linguistically, economically and politically.
- There was partial unification in 1861, but had only been unified fully with Rome in 1870.

Problems facing Italy in the early 20th century:

Unification:

- Italy had only become a nation in 1861 and fully unified in 1870, however Italians were not used to a feeling of national identity; with 99% of Italians speaking a regional dialect and unable to understand what people from other areas were saying.
- Risorgimento= the 'rebirth' and unification of Italy between 1859-1870
- May 1898 protests against Italy's political system and growing economic problems was met by brutal government crackdown & 100 protesters killed in Milan.

The political system in Italy:

- The Italians who made up parliament were all drawn from the northern, professional, middle class and tended to represent the interests of their own class at the expense of the wider population.
- Attitude of Catholic Church and the 'Roman question' (the split between the Italian state and the Catholic Church which refused to recognise the legitimacy of the unified nation).
- Pope angered at capture of Rome (the papal state) in 1870 and refused to recognise the unified state- in 1886 the new Pope forbade Catholics from either running for office or voting in the national elections.
- Less than 25% of Italian men could vote.
- Italy's politicians shared the same liberal ideology and there were very few formal political parties, unlike Britain and France. Instead prominent politicians formed governments by offering key positions to other parliamentary members (deputies), who would then agree to support them as Prime Minister.
- Governments tended to be short lived, as politicians could simply withdraw their support for the PM if they were offered a better deal by another deputy. Therefore skill as a politician was due to the ability in forming political alliances by knowing how to buy the support of other deputies.
- This political manoeuvring was known as trasformismo and was a form of corruption, causing 29 changes of PM between 1870-1922, and an inability to pass legislation that might improve the lives of citizens.
- Any demonstrations against the govt. tended to be met with violent repression from the military- divide reinforced between 'real Italy' (the Italian people) and 'legal Italy' (the ruling classes)

- Catholic Church became less antagonistic to the state, and was cooperating with the liberals in some areas.
- Libya victory galvanised nationalist support. But Libyan War & universal suffrage had severe consequences for the government.

How successful was the Liberal Government in dealing with Italy's growing instability between 1912-1914?

Impact of the invasion of Libya:

- The Libyan war did not help Giolitti to 'absorb' the nationalists instead, the war not only increased support for the ANI, but also accentuated their opposition to the liberal govt.
- The nationalists took credit for the war, claiming that Giolitti only invaded due to nationalist pressure. They denounced the liberals, blaming their weakness and lack of patriotism as the reasons why the Italian army had lost so many men.
- The Libyan War destroyed Giolitti's cooperation with the PSI, which formed the key basis of his programme of trasformismo- they opposed the war as imperialist militarism.
- The more radical socialists expelled the members who supported the war, such as Bissolati. The revolutionary wing of the party seized control and rejected further cooperation with Giolitti.
- Mussolini (a radical socialist) appointed editor of socialist newspaper Avanti, which focused on the corrupt liberal order.
- Giolitti's attempt to absorb the socialists into the liberal state had failed.

Impact of the franchise extension of 1912:

- Giolitti's problems were accentuated by changes to the suffrage in Italy (which he had made part of the programme in 1911).
- Previously the vote had been restricted to male men over 21, but it was now hard not to give the vote to many who were fighting in Libya who were illiterate.
- 1912 a new law extended the vote to all men who had completed military service and all men aged 30 and over regardless of literacy.
- Now that 70% of Italy's voters were potentially illiterate, this was a concern, Giolitti hoped that increased suffrage would promote national unity and popularity of the liberals.
- He also believed that increased suffrage would undermine the PSI, as with greater electoral representation the WC would be less inclined to support radical ideologies.

Resignation of Giolitti:

- The first elections under the new suffrage took place in 1913 and demonstrated the overall failure of his strategy.
- Liberal deputies won only 318 seats, a loss of 71 seats from the 1909 election, with the socialists, nationalists, radicals and Catholics making gains. However, the critics problem was the liberals' links to the Catholic Church.
- The president of the Catholic Electoral Union, Count Gentiloni, had secretly asked liberal candidates to agree to seven key points in return for the Catholic vote.
- Gentiloni boasted after the election that 228 liberal deputies of the 318 elected owed their victory to Catholic support. Giolitti claimed that he knew nothing of the pact, but either way, the liberal govt. found themselves v. reliant on Catholic support.
- Italy was becoming more ideologically polarised and Giolitti's attempt to unite oppositional groups within the liberal system using trasformismo was now impossible.
- Giolitti's concessions to the Church angered the socialists and anticlerical liberals
- Spring 1914, they withdrew their support for Giolitti following Gentiloni's claims of the pact, and Giolitti chose to resign- this infuriated the Catholics who felt that with the anti-church members gone, Giolitti could have formed a pro-Catholic block.

- October 1921 the movement was organised into a formal political party called the PNF- in which Mussolini tried to centralise his control over the movement.
- The PNF founded local branches and attempted to recruit more 'respectable members' who might help advance fascism's appeal beyond the appreciation among certain classes of Italians used against the socialists.

Nature and extent of fascist support:

- By the end of 1921 the PNF had grown to 200,000 members.
- The PNF's appeal to the urban middle class, professional white collar workers and small business owners was particularly strong- these Italians feared not only socialist revolution, but also an increase in local taxes the PSI might try to implement.
- In the countryside the middle and upper classes of landowners, as well as the wealthier farmers and peasants, saw the fascists as a means of protecting their lifestyle from the socialist agitation for greater land reform.
- Financial support came from richer landowners and Italian industrialists who supported fascism's attempts to break union power and socialism.
- However fascism also appealed to some workers and peasant farmers who opposed the strength of the socialists and the violence used against those labourers who wanted to continue working during the strikes.
- Many who hated the corruption of liberal order saw fascism as a new, dynamic alternative that might bring about a revitalised society.
- This broad band of support was united by several key aspects: strong patriotism, a hatred of the socialists and the weak liberal govt. and a belief in Mussolini as the man who could sweep away the weak Italy and lead the country to a more nationally united future.

How far was fascism's rise to power due to the leadership of Mussolini between 1920 and 1922?

Taking advantage of social unrest:

- While Giolitti's history appeared to make him the best person to deal with Italy's worsening crisis, at this stage he was 80 years old and despised by nationalists due to his anti-intervention policy in WW1.
- Giolitti employed his old tactics of compromise and absorption to address the industrial unrest during the Biennio Rosso- his solution to the 1920 strike was to see compromise with the workers, pressuring Italy's banks to withdraw support for companies that would not negotiate with strikers,
- In the short term this was successful; by 25 Sept 1920 the strikes had ended and there was considerable anger from the middle classes, industrialists, nationalists, landowners and Catholics that Giolitti had 'given in' to the workers demands.
- The political and social chaos in Italy helped the fascists- the PNF were further aided by the weaknesses of their opposition.
- In Jan 1921 the more radical members of the PSI split into the PCI with support from Russia- they wanted revolution and an end to the capitalist system in Italy. The split in the PSI weakened the political strength of the left-wing movement.
- The PCI was too small to provide a political threat via either ballot box or revolution.
- In July 1922 the PSI and PCI attempted to encourage further pressure on the political system by backing a call for a 24 hour general strike across Italy - most workers did not support the strike action and so it faded out without really taking place.
- A further issue was that Giolitti's old tactics of compromise and trasformismo were proving inadequate in post-war Italy where ideological splits were more defined,

- Italy's economy was being distorted with the focus on autarky and war materials at the expense of consumer goods. Wage cuts, lack of worker representation saw wages fall below the cost of living.
- Italy was undoubtedly successful in producing more wheat in the Battle for Grain, with production rising to 7.27 mil tonnes in 1935 and imports were massively reduced.
- Ruralisation was also a failure. In areas where only marsh draining was required, such as the Pontine Marshes, where by 1935 marsh lands had been turned into a successful farming area, then the land reclamation was quite successful.
- However, in areas mainly in the south where more intense irrigation and complex work was required, it was barely attempted. Only 5% of the claimed 475million hectares was actually improved and only 10,000 landless peasants were given land.
- But, the draining of marshes reduced malaria by 50% and the huge public work project provided considerable employment during the Depression.
- Despite his aims, under Mussolini over half a million people left Italy's rural areas, and for the first time in Italy's history more than 50% of the population were not involved in the agricultural industry.
- The Battle for Births was also questionable: by 1930s fascist Italy had the highest proportion of married females in employment than any other country in Europe, despite their efforts to force women into the home.
- The govt. tried to discourage women from working in 1927 by lowering their wages, but this only encouraged employers to hire them. Cuts in mens wages during the Depression meant many women had to work to provide for their families,
- Overall the policy had little success; Italy's birth rate continued to decline and the marriage rate fell.

How far did Mussolini's relationship with the Catholic Church impact on his fascist dictatorship?

The move away from anticlerical views:

- As the early fascist movement developed it was clear to Mussolini that anticlericalism was not conducive to taking power in a strongly Catholic country like Italy. He dropped his anticlerical rhetoric along with his anti-capitalism and anti-monarchism.
- At the fascist congress of May 1920 when the new programme was set out, Mussolini declared that Catholicism could be used as a political force to drive unity and nationalism.

Pope Pius XI:

- Mussolini's relations with the Church were helped by the death of Benedict XV in Jan 1922 and his replacement by Ratti who took the title of Pope Pius XI.
- This pope was predominantly concerned with the communist threat and believed that a govt. of 'national concentration' including the fascists was the only way to save Italy from left-wing revolution.
- When Mussolini became PM he responded to the Pope's positive view of fascism through reintroducing religious education, restoring crucifixes to public buildings, and increasing the pay of priests.
- Mussolini also banned freemasonry and anticlerical journals and dropped proposed liberal policies on taxing church property.
- He got his 3 children baptised into the Catholic Church and re-married his wife Donna in a church ceremony.
- This close relationship with the church helped to undermine the PPI as Pius XI put his support behind the PNF at expense of the traditional Catholic party.

- But their progress slowed and in November M chose to replace the head of the invading army- the replacement (Badoglio) engaged in a brutal war against the Abyssinian army in a similar manner to Libya: including mass aerial bombings, the murder of prisoners of war and the illegal use of poisonous chemicals.
- 5 May 1936 his victorious army entered the capital of Abyssinia- 20 million italians listened to M's public radio broadcast on 9 May, proclaiming that Italy had at last gained its fascist empire. The immediate consequences were overwhelmingly positive for M.
- Despite the weakness of the LoN's response, the sanctions were a propaganda coup for the fascists- M was portrayed as a leader who was standing up to the whole world and defying attempts to limit Italian power.
- 18 Dec 1935 the royal family launched the 'Gold for the Patria' campaign against the sanctions- the dream of an Italian nation rallying behind the ideology had come true.
- The Queen gave her wedding ring to be melted down in order to help the campaign. Blessed by the Church, thousands of women followed the Queen in giving their wedding rings to the fascist cause.
- In return they were given steel rings symbolising their marriage to the nation. The idea of italian people wedded to the nation represented one of the key aspects of fascism and appeared to show that the true transformation of the Italian people was now taking place.
- Abyssinia was the highpoint for M's dictatorship- he had achieved true greatness for Italy and established it as a great power: the equal of Britain and France.
- The royal family and the Church all proclaimed M's greatness. It appeared as if he had fulfilled the image of a new Ceasar who was expanding the empire as the Romans did.
- However, the overwhelming success of Abyssinia in terms of M's dictatorship was distinctly short term and, overall the consequences would be mostly negative.
- Despite his grand proclamation on 9 May, Abyssinia had not been fully claimed- 2/3rds of the country were still to be occupied and the costs associated with supplying the 250,000 troops that were needed to fight an ongoing guerrilla war were considerable.
- Only around 130,000 Italians ever settled in Abyssinia and the hope that the colony would provide oil and other raw materials to fuel autarky was never materialised- the export markets never developed, with only 2% of Italian trade ever going to Abyssinia.
- The overall economic consequences of the war were massive, with the lira devalued by 40% and the budget deficit rising to 16 billion lire
- On an international stage, Italy's brutal war, which led to the death of up to 500,000 Abyssinians changed the perception of M and fascism overseas, particularly in Britain.
- Before this M was generally seen as a dictator who had been beneficial to Italy; now instead the regime was seen as a danger to European peace- his actions demonstrated the weakness of the LoN, disrupting the balance of power in Europe.
- Abyssinia was the beginning of a split in Italy's relations with Britain and France and moved Italy towards relations with Germany - enhanced by Italy's economic problems caused by the LoN's sanctions that forced a growing trade shift towards Germany.
- Abyssinia appeared to him to have shown the weakness of Britain and France and this encouraged M's belief that Italy's aggressive actions would not only enhance his domestic power but challenge the old balance of power in Europe.

Intervention into the Spanish Civil War and its consequences:

- March 1936 Hitler marched troops into the demilitarised zones of the Rhineland, thus defying one of the key elements of the TOV- GB or FB or the LoN did nothing to stop this or punish Germany afterwards- this added to M's perception of GB and FR as weak.
- M believed that a move by Italy towards Germany may draw concessions on Africa and the Mediterranean from the British and French governments to draw him back.

- This was followed by the conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet Pact on 23 Aug about which Hitler had neither consulted M nor informed him that negotiations were taking place.
- This was a non aggression pact between Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany that also incorporated secret protocols concerning the division of eastern Europe into Soviet and Nazi spheres of influence.
- For Italy, the Pact contravened the anti-comintern pact M had signed with Hitler- M had grave concerns about Italy's military position and was urged by Ciano to avoid entangling Italy into a costly war when Germany invaded Poland.
- However, the choice of neutrality was also problematic, given M's constant rhetoric linking fascism with militarism and aggression- to M fascism had been born on the battlefields of WW1; intrinsically linked to war.
- The ideology would look somewhat hollow if Italy chose to stay neutral in the European war that now appeared inevitable.
- The fact that M might be forced to make the same choice as the liberal govt. had done in 1914 also troubled him greatly, given his anger then at the liberal non-intervention.
- 26 Aug, M presented Hitler with a massive wish list of supplies that he claimed Italy would need before it could wage war with its German ally- 170 mill tonnes of goods including 150 anti-aircraft batteries with ammunition.
- It would have required around 17,000 trains to transport the goods from Germany to Italy- Hitler clearly understood that M's demands amounted to Italy's resignation to neutrality and on 27 Aug Hitler released M from his obligations of the Pact of Steel.
- 3 Sept GB and FR declared war on Germany- the fascist Grand Council etc advised M to avoid intervention into the war- under pressure M agreed but forbade the use of the word neutrality, instead calling Italy's position 'non-belligerence'.
- It was a painful choice for M who had looked to his alliance with Germany as a means to put pressure on Britain- M watched anxiously as the German army swept across Europe in a seemingly unstoppable offensive.
- March 1940 M was still unsure what direction he should take- he clearly believed that Italy had to enter the war at some point, but the possibility of siding with GB and FR still remained.
- This was unlikely, M told Ciano and the King as switching sides would bring a German attack on Italy- however the German advance of May 1940 that conquered Holland and Belgium and then moved onto France made his decision making more limited.
- Italy needed to enter the war against France in time to play a decisive part, while not allowing itself to be bogged down in any serious fighting. The decision had to be made soon, as Germany was sweeping through the country onwards victory.
- 26 May M met his chief of staff, Badoglio and informed him that he believed Germany would be victorious by Sept and that Italy required 'a few thousand dead to be able to attend the peace conference as a belligerent'.
- Despite Badoglio's grave concern at the state of the Italian army and the problems that would arise if Italy had to do any serious fighting, M had made up his mind.
- 10 June 1940 M announced to the Italian people that Italy had entered the war on the side of Nazi Germany- Ciano wrote in his diary, 'i am sad, very sad. The adventure begins. May God help Italy.'

What was the impact of Italy's decision to enter the second world war on the side of Nazi Germany in 1940?

Failures in France, North Africa and the Mediterranean:

- Italy would concentrate on the Mediterranean basin and hinterland and northern Africa, while the Germans would concentrate on northern, central and eastern Europe.

- The Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Popular Culture were established at a small town at Lake Garda called Salo, which led to the RSI being known as the Salo Republic.
- Salo controlled the richest and most populated areas of Italy: radical fascists, mainly those who had been part of the militia purged in the 1920s, and had been waiting since then to take fascism back to its violent origins.
- 14 Nov the first congress of the new fascist party was held at Verona- drew up the Verona Manifesto that attempted to take fascism back to its original form proposed in the 1919 programme.
- From 12 Feb 1944 all private companies with more than 100 employees or 1 million lire in capital would be managed equally by both workers and employees as would all state owned industry.
- However, despite M's grand gestures about returning fascism to its old radical policies, he never had the support from the Germans to do it.
- The Salo Republic was quite brutal: Jan 5 fascists who were arrested (including Ciano) were sentenced to death for treason due to involvement in the Grand Council motion that removed M. 11 Jan 1944 the executions were carried out.
- The Salo Republic organised around 7500 Jews taken from Italian camps and sent to Nazi death camps in eastern Europe where nearly 7000 were killed.
- M was still able to draw support from radical fascists- a new militia was formed known as the GNR and recruited 140,000 men. By the start of 1944 the RSI had an army of 20,000 men, an airforce of 28,000 and an anti-aircraft service of around 50,000.
- A brutal war raged in the north between Italian antifascists and German and RSI forces- the RSI did not usually fight alongside the German army, but was mainly engaged in a civil war with the partisans.
- German policy set out that for every German soldier that died 10 Italians would be killed- Partisan attacks in March 1944 killed 33 German soldiers=335 Italians dead.
- In the south, the king had established the royal govt. of the Kingdom of the South- this was effectively a client state and under control of the allied occupation that expanded as the allies pushed north.
- Now that fascism was gone, the conservatives feared a re-emergence of communism and socialism- something that the king was extremely determined to resist.
- Following the declaration of war on Germany in Sept 1943, the king and Badoglio had also made little attempt to organise an Italian contribution to the fighting- after the allied occupation of Rome in June 1944, the king was encouraged by the Allies to broaden his govt. to include antifascist parties.
- Badoglio was removed as head of govt. and replaced by former PM and antifascist leader Bonomi- his govt. tried to press ahead with Badoglio's actions in 1943 and the state of war meant that the conscription order was largely resisted.
- Although around 50,000 men from the Kingdom of the South did fight alongside the Allies, this resistance to conscription formed a clear separation between the north and south of Italy that would affect the country after war.
- The antifascist war of liberation fought by Italians was almost solely confined to the north and the differing wartime experiences between north and south accentuated their divisions in the post-war era.

German surrender and Mussolini's death:

- Despite the fact that the Salo Republic was able to organise quite a large military force, overall the popularity of the RSI was never very high, particularly as the war progressed.
- By 1944 it was clear that the Germans were losing the war, thus making the RSI's continued existence impossible- the majority of Italians did not join either the RSI or the partisans but simply tried to get on with their lives the best as they could.

- M himself was very ill, but he was still able to fulfil some of his functions as dictator- 16 Dec 1944 he gave his last important speech in Milan where he told a packed theatre that it was the king and the conservative elites who had betrayed the country and led it to defeat.
- By April 1945 the Allied forces were beginning to capture major areas of northern Italy- 18 April M left Gargano and established his capital in Milan.
- 25 April M met the partisan leaders to try to negotiate surrender- M offered surrender if he was allowed to retreat further north with 3000 loyal blackshirts.
- 27 April partisans stopped the convoy M was travelling in at the town of Dongo and discovered the Italian dictator disguised as a German soldier- M was arrested and executed on 28 April with his mistress and others.
- Their bodies were driven to Milan and displayed where huge crowds attacked M's body before hanging it upside down on the girders of the petrol station that was alongside the square.
- 29 April the German command signed the surrender documents and agreed on a ceasefire on 1 May- on the day organised for the surrender in Italy, news came throughout that Hitler was dead and on 2 May 1944 the war in Italy came to an end.

The outcomes of the referendum and elections in 1946:

- Italy ended WW2 in a worse situation than in 1918- the country's economy and infrastructure has been wrecked by the war and many Italians lacked food and clean water.
- Nearly half a million Italians had lost their lives during WW2- following Germany's surrender it is estimated that partisan revenge killings of alleged fascist supporters were around 30,000.
- The experience of the war left Italy severely divided, a major problem for the foundation of a new state to replace the fascist dictatorship.
- The fighting had also taken place predominantly in the north and thus the foundation of the new state mostly ignored the south, where the experience under the Kingdom of the South had been quite different.
- This clear division was demonstrated on 2 June 1946 when on a referendum to decide on whether Italy should be a republic.
- The king's support for M since 1922 and his inadequate action after M was removed from power in 1943 had made him massively unpopular with the Italian public.
- He abdicated but despite this move, the people still voted for an end to the monarchy and the establishment of an Italian republic by 12.7 million votes to 10.7 million- the vote was divided on geographical terms with nearly every area in the north voting for a republic and every province in the south voting to retain the monarchy.
- In the Constituent Assembly vote (included female voters for the first time), the Christian Democrats were victorious, securing 207 of the 556 seats, the PCI gaining 104 and the PSI 114 seats.
- The new constitution established a liberal democracy with civil and political freedom guaranteed- the monarchy was replaced by a president as head of state and the rule of law under an independent judiciary system enshrined in the constitution.
- However, aspects of M's rule were not forgotten, with the Lateran Pacts included in the new constitution.
- The unity of Italy's govt. was not to last- the onset of the Cold War, pressure from USA etc.
- Ridding Italy completely of fascism proved difficult- as late as 1960 most of the country's prefects, police chiefs and deputies were still the same people who worked for the fascist govt.