

## Unit 2: The Collapse of Liberal Italy and Mussolini's Rise to Power, 1915-1922

- Italy's war effort: aims and expectations; military campaigns; Caporetto; the impact of war and defeat on the Home Front
- Italy and the 'Mutilated Victory': reactions within Italy to the post-war peace settlement and treaties; the seizure of Fiume by d'Annunzio
- The post-war economic crisis and social unrest : unemployment and inflation; government instability; the rise of the PSI, the Popolari and the Fascist Party
- Political breakdown and the rise of extremism: strikes; political violence and the collapse of parliamentary government

### How will you be assessed?

One exam that will take 2 hours 30 minutes.

You are advised to spend around:

- **60 minutes** on the first section (question one based on 3 sources)
- **1 hour 30 minutes** on the second section (answer 2 essay questions)

### **7 key questions underpin this course:**

- How stable, secure and united was Italy by 1900?
- How stable, secure and united was Italy by 1915?
- How did the First World War make the problems of Liberal Italy worse?
- Why was Mussolini appointed Prime Minister of Italy in 1922?
- How did Mussolini consolidate his power in the years 1922 to 1926?
- To what extent did Mussolini create 'a nation of fascists'?
- Why did Mussolini fall from power?

### KEY PEOPLE

**Duke of Aosta** Cousin of King Emmanuel III and support of the Fascists. The King believed that Aosta would seize power if he acted against Mussolini.

**Italo Balbo (1896-1940)** Joined the National Fascist Party (PNF) when it was founded in 1921. He was an enthusiastic participant and organiser of the squadristi and later became involved in key developments such as the March on Rome. In 1933, he was appointed Governor-general of Libya. Balbo was the only member of the Fascist regime to oppose legislation against the Jews. He also disagreed with the alliance with Hitler, preferring that Italy ally with Britain instead.

**General Luigi Cadorna (1850-1928)** – Italian Commander-in-Chief who presided over Italy's defeat at Caporetto. He refused to let politicians visit the war zone and refused to discuss military strategy with the government. He had poor relations with his senior officers and blamed the defeat at Caporetto on the cowardice of his troops, he had several hundred shot. He was sacked by Prime Minister Orlando following this defeat.

**Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938)** A patriotic and well known playwright, novelist and poet. He glamorized a romantic ideal of nationalism and a life of action and military commitment as the way forward for modern industrial states. He supported Italy's entry into WWI and served as an officer even though he was in his 50s. The flight he made over the enemies capital of Vienna in 1918 received much attention in Italy and helped to make him a national hero. He was horrified by what he saw as Italy's 'mutilated victory' in 1919 and in that year he invaded and occupied the Fiume, establishing the Italian Regency of Carnaro in this disputed territory. His radical actions and methods were admired by many Italians and he was a key influence on Mussolini.

**Roberto Farinacci (1892-1945)** Was one of the most radical Fascists and was involved in organizing the squadristi. He was important in establishing Fascist dominance in 1922 and became Secretary of the Fascist party in 1925. He urged Mussolini to join with the Axis powers. In 1943, Farinacci collude with other members of the Grand Council of Fascism to bring about Mussolini's arrest.

### KEY PEOPLE

**Antonio Gramsci** broke away from the Italian Socialist Party to form the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in 1921. He was tried by the 'Special Tribunal for the Defence of the State' in XXX and was sentenced to Confino for 20 years. This meant that he was imprisoned in a camp on one of Italy's Mediterranean islands. Mussolini personally intervened in his trial.

**Dino Grandi (1895-1988)** Joined the Blackshirts in 1920 and was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1921 alongside 34 other Fascists. He was involved in the March on Rome. Grandi was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1929. He was always one of the more radical Fascists, supporting violent squadristi action. Grandi spearheaded the removal of Mussolini at the Fascist Grand Council in July 1943.

**Francesco Nitti (1868-1953)** Prime minister June 1919- June 1920. He did not take military action against D'Annunzio's illegal occupation of Fiume because he was afraid that the army would not obey the government's orders. (He had previously annoyed the army by cutting military spending and pardoning army deserters.) He served in parliament until 1924. He opposed Mussolini and fascism and from the mid-1920s, was forced to live in exile in France. Returned to Italy after the Second World War and served as a Senator in 1948.

**Vittorio Orlando** Liberal politician who became Prime Minister 1917-1919. He was a strong supporter of Italy's involvement in the First World War and led the Italian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference. His failure to secure additional territory for Italy led to his resignation. He supported Mussolini's appointment as Prime Minister in October 1922 but went into exile in 1925. He returns to Italy in 1943 when Mussolini is removed from office.

**Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922)** was largely concerned with the divisions within his international flock, caused by WWI.

**Luigi Sturzo 1871-1959** A priest who became the leader of the Catholic party founded in 1919, the Popular Party (PPI). He was driven into exile in 1923 because of his opposition to fascism and only returned after the fascist era in 1946. He then played a key role in founding the influential Christian Democrat Party.

## KEY WORDS

**Arditi** – Special groups of Italian commandoes who carried out raids behind enemy lines, they became military heroes and were politically important after the war.

**Armistice** - an agreement to cease fighting.

**Balkans** - Area of south-eastern Europe including Greece, Albania and Yugoslavia.

**Biennio Rosso** – means two 'red years' and is a phrase used to describe the outbreak of socialism in Italy in the years 1919-1920.

**Blackshirts** - Armed Fascist Militia.

**Capporetto, 1917** – a huge Italian defeat in WWI. Italian soldiers lost 160km of land and over 300,000 Italian soldiers were captured. This was a national humiliation and weakened the credibility of the Liberal State after the war.

**Chamber of Deputies** - The lower, but most important, house in the Italian parliament. Similar to the British House of Commons.

**Coalition** - Where no single party has a majority in the Italian parliament and parties have to work together in order to pass laws and govern the country effectively.

**General Strike** – A strike involving millions of workers in a very wide range of industries. General strikes usually have a political motive, they are not just about pay and conditions of work.

**Irredentism** – The demand that Italy seize from Austria those lands on its northern and eastern borders where a majority of the population spoke Italian.

**March on Rome** – In October 1922, the PNF gave the impression that a revolution was underway to overthrow the existing regime and replace it with a Fascist one. Four marching columns of Blackshirts, each headed by a Fascist leader or Quadrumvir would set out from different fascist strongholds and converge on Rome, gathering strength and support as they marched. It was a direct challenge to the power and authority of the state and was part of Mussolini's bid for power.

**Mutilated Victory** - The claim that Italy had been denied its rightful territorial gains in the peace settlement after the First World War.

## KEY WORDS

**National Fascist Party (PNF)** – Founded in October 1921 by Mussolini to unite the Fascist movement and to increase his control over local Fascist squads and their leaders.

**Pact of Pacification** – a deal signed in August 1921 between the fascist and socialist trade unions to help end violence and hoped by Mussolini to make the fascists look more respectable and committed to using democratic means to achieve power.

**Popolari** – Catholic political Party founded in January 1919.

**Proportional representation** – A fairer way of electing politicians. Ensures smaller parties have better representation in the parliament. However, this can often lead to no one party having a majority in parliament and increased the need for coalition governments.

**Ras** – Local Fascist leaders, usually with their own Fascist Squads.

**Squadristi** - Violent Fascist gangs or squads.

**Squadristo** – The violent attacks of Fascist gangs, or squads.

**Treaty of Rapallo** In November 1920 this treaty was negotiated by Giolitti and the newly formed state of Yugoslavia to end D'Annunzio's illegal occupation of Fiume.

**Victory of Vittorio Veneto** – a much publicised Italian victory in WWI, named after the first large town captured during the advance against Austrian lines in 1918.

**Yugoslav State** – Yugoslavia was created in 1919 from former Austrian Lands. The modern states of Serbia and Croatia were part of Yugoslavia.

## KEY EVENTS

**1915** May Intervention Crisis, Italy joins the war on the side of the Allies after signing the Treaty of London. Italy declares war on Austria

**1916** Aug. Italy declares war on Germany

**1917** Oct. Italian defeat at Battle of Caporetto  
Vittorio Orlando formed a new government

**1918** Oct. Italian victory at Vittorio Veneto caused Austria to sue for peace  
Nov. First World War ended with Italy on the winning side  
Dec. Universal male suffrage introduced in Italy

**1919** Widespread industrial unrest  
Creation of the Catholic Popular Party (PPI)  
Mar. Fasci di Combattimento launched  
Jun. Francesco Nitti became prime minister  
Food riots in northern and central Italy  
Aug. Party list electoral system (and proportional representation) introduced  
Sept. Treaty of St. Germain with Austria Invasion of Fiume by Italian Nationalists led by Gabriele D'Annunzio  
Nov. Election: Socialists became largest party; Liberals unable to rule alone and lose control of the Chamber; Fascists failed to win any MPs

**1920** Jun. Giovanni Giolitti became prime minister  
Sept. Occupation of the factories by 400,000 engineering workers  
Nov. Fascist squad violence began  
Treaty of Rapallo between Italy and Yugoslavia signed  
Dec. Italian government ends occupation of Fiume by force

**1921** Jan. Italian Communist Party founded (PCI)  
May. Fascists gained 35 seats in general election (The fascists had joined Giolitti's 'National Block' for the election.)  
Aug. Mussolini signed a 'Pact of Pacification' with the parliamentary PSI (Socialist Party) and General Confederation of Labour  
Oct. National Fascist Party (PNF) organisation created. Mussolini abandons the 'Pact of Pacification'

**1922** Election of Pope Pius XI  
Increasing Fascist violence  
Jul. 24-hour general strike called by socialist trade unions, republicans and radicals  
Oct. Fascist 'March on Rome' planned and carried out  
Mussolini appointed Prime Minister

## Example Question 1:

This will always be based on 3 sources and will be worth 30 marks. You should spend about 60 minutes on this type of question. You have to answer question 1!

Source Based Question:

With reference to this source and your understanding of the historical context, assess the value of this source to an historian studying support for fascism in 1922.

Source A

From Bruno Palamenghi's diary, March 1924. Palamenghi was a professional soldier in the First World War, becoming a Colonel. He joined the Fascists days before the March on Rome.

Who can forget the state of degeneration to which the masses had been reduced in 1920–22? There were continuous strikes. The railway workers had become absolute masters of the railways. Everything that got dispatched was damaged, wrecked, stolen. Property was not respected. Gangs spread terror in every town, freely carrying out brutality of every kind, robberies, murders and other things. And all this because of the weakness of the governments at that time. Just a few months more of that regime and this beautiful Italy of ours would have been finished. Without the March on Rome Italy would have fallen prey to Bolshevism, anarchy, bankruptcy, poverty, and we would have become the laughing stock and joke of other nations.

## Example essay question:

The next 2 questions are essays and you choose 2 from 3 possible questions. They are worth 25 marks each. You should spend around 45 minutes on each question. Here is an example:

Example Essay Question:

'The rise of Fascism in the period 1919-1922 was more to do with the weaknesses of their opponents.' Assess the validity of this view. (25marks)