

# What is Fascism?

Before we can look at the growth of Fascism, we need to understand what the term Fascism means.

You will come across many political IDEOLOGIES during your course, and some may be new to you. Fascism is the central ideology in our study of Italy, and an understanding of its broad ideas will help you identify the reasons why Mussolini, the Fascist leader, became Prime Minister of Italy in 1922.

A good place to start looking at a political belief is in its name. For example, LIBERALISM describes the belief in individual liberty. Modern Britain, France, and the USA would be termed 'liberal' states. By this we mean a state which has:

- an elected assembly (Parliament) that makes laws
- a CONSTITUTION laying down and restricting the powers of the government, with clear rules for governing the country
- a variety of political parties competing for support
- formal protection for key individual rights or liberties, such as free speech, freedom of the press, free practice of religion, and equality before the law.

Mussolini once described Fascism as 'action and mood, not doctrine'. It had no founding father who laid down its fundamental principles, as Karl Marx did for COMMUNISM. Fascism took different forms in different countries. It gained support both for what it offered, but also, significantly, for what it opposed. The word Fascism seems rather meaningless, and indeed the term does not originate from an idea about how to run society. Read the Fascio explanation on page 4, which tells us the origins of the word and gives us our first clues about the nature of Fascism.

Fascism favoured the following:

- NATIONALISM (see page 10)
- A powerful leader or dictator
- One-party government
- National unity
- PARAMILITARY organisations
- War

Initially though, it defined itself mainly by what it was opposed to:

- INTERNATIONALISM
- Liberal DEMOCRACY
- MARXIST Socialism/Communism
- Class conflict
- PACIFISM

**Activity**

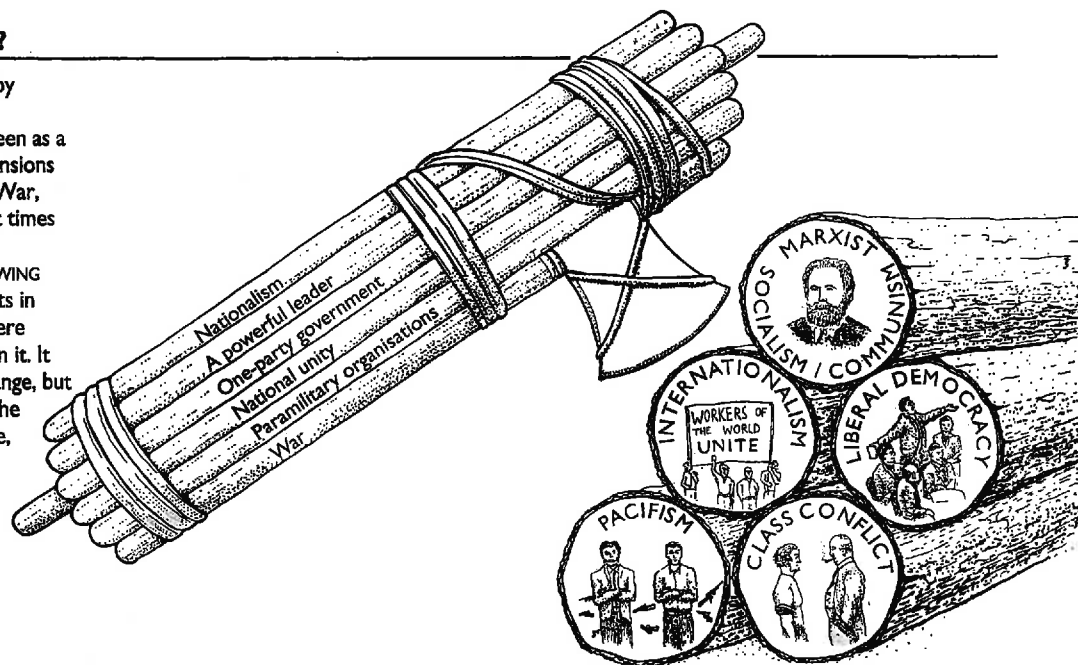
Using just the word itself, what can you deduce about the following ideologies? It may help you to look up the stem (or beginning) of the word in a dictionary.

**Liberalism** – favouring individual liberty  
**Communism** –  
**Capitalism** –  
**Conservatism** –  
**National Socialism** –  
**Imperialism** –  
**Democracy** –  
**Anarchism** –

## CHART A What is Fascism?

The first Fascist movement was founded by Mussolini in Italy, but similar movements developed elsewhere. Fascism has been seen as a response to the political and economic tensions in much of Europe after the First World War, but it has also arisen in other countries at times of strain.

Fascism is normally viewed as a RIGHT-WING movement, but it initially had some aspects in common with LEFT-WING ideologies, as there were some anti-CAPITALIST elements within it. It began as a protest movement seeking change, but where Fascists gained power, as in Italy, the regime was in some respects conservative, protecting the social STATUS QUO.



When Mussolini founded his first Fascist squads in March 1919, they were called fascio di combattimento. Their badge was the rods and axe, symbols of authority in ancient Rome. The term fascio had no precise meaning in 1919. It had been used by radicals in the late nineteenth century, and by various political groups in World War I. The literal meaning is 'bunch' or 'group', and once in power Mussolini linked it to the bound sticks or fascies which the Roman lictor (a magistrate) had used as a symbol of office. It is thought Mussolini wanted his fighting groups bound by ties as close as those that secured the sticks of the Roman lictors.

**Activity**

Divide into pairs.

- 1 In your own words describe to your partner what Fascism favoured, and to what it was opposed.
- 2 In what circumstances do you think people might support a Fascist movement?

**Talking point**

Why do you think Britain has never had a strong Fascist movement?

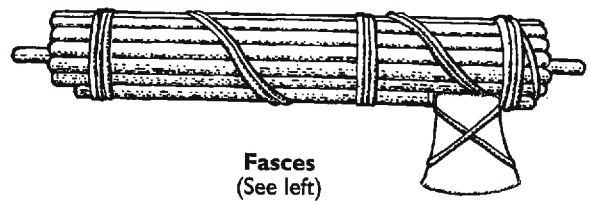
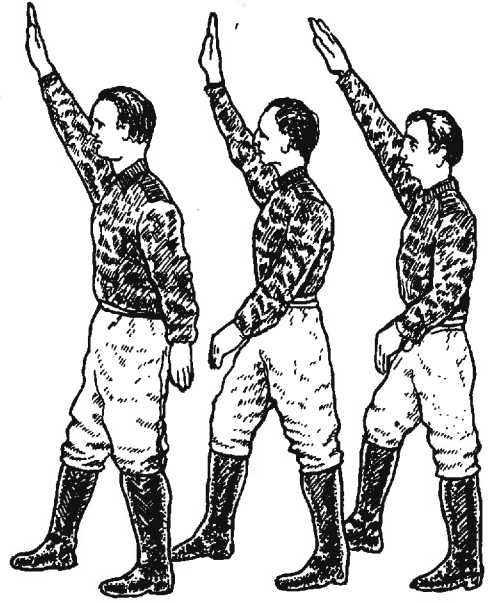


**Blackshirts**

- The uniform of the Fascist movement, worn by the Fascist squads who attacked opponents
- Copied from the uniform of the Arditi, the Italian shock troops in the First World War
- Used by d'Annunzio in Fiume (see page 27)

**Fascist salute**

- Copied from the straight-arm salute used by the ancient Romans
- Used by d'Annunzio



**Fascies**  
(See left)

## Why study Mussolini and Fascist Italy?

If you are one of the lucky ones for whom history is simply the most interesting subject you have studied (and if it is, you probably can't explain why – it just is!) you don't need any justification for studying Mussolini and Fascist Italy. For the rest of you – whose basic justification may be that it's on the syllabus – this page may persuade you that studying this topic is about even more than the very important business of getting a good grade.

The greatest justification for studying the past is that it helps us to understand and live in the present. Here are three ways in which your responses to today's issues may be sharpened by your increased knowledge of and understanding of this particular topic.

### **A** Are historical parallels with today's events accurate?

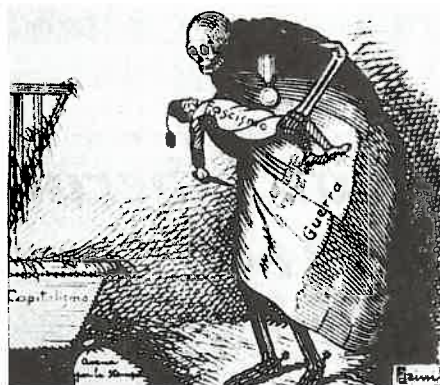
The interwar period saw the rise of several dictators and political decisions today may be affected by ideas about what happened in the 1930s. Politicians may feel they must 'stand up to' contemporary dictators because appeasement did not stop war in 1939. But is that an accurate representation of the events of the 1930s? If it isn't, are today's decisions affected by an oversimplification of past events? Once you know more about this period you will be likely to make fewer glib comparisons with the past and hence be better positioned to appraise politicians' use of the past to justify current policies.

### **B** Are they all the same?

Mussolini, Stalin, Hitler, Franco – dictators all, but were they all the same? Studies of this period should stop us generalising about people and events. The more sophisticated our understanding of the similarities and differences amongst the dictators of the 1930s, the better equipped we are to avoid sweeping generalisations about political leaders who seem similar today. The fewer generalisations we make, the better our judgements are today.

### **C** It couldn't happen here?

It is easy to look back at TOTALITARIAN regimes and feel secure within our political system. Only other people fall victims to extremist governments – or so we may think. Detailed study of the rise of a dictator like Mussolini makes us more aware of how easy it is for such a development to take place. His power was not solely the product of a dominating personality and cunning propaganda but was at least as much the result of other people's failure to stop him when they had the opportunity. This period shows how tempting it is to avoid involvement, to wait, to go along with the mood of the majority – or with what the mood of the majority appears to be. It couldn't happen here – only so long as people take action to stop such a development.



**SOURCE 4** An Italian cartoon. 'Guerra' means 'war'



**SOURCE 5** Fascist Blackshirt stamping on a Socialist flag

**SOURCE 6** Mussolini speaking about Fascism in September 1922

*Our programme is simple: we wish to govern Italy . . . The state does not represent a party, it represents the nation as a whole.*

## CHART B Timeline of Italy 1861–1922

### UNIFICATION

Till 1861	Italy is divided into eight main states, some ruled by Austria
1859	Armies of the North Italian state Piedmont and France defeat Austria and expel it from most of northern Italy
1860	Garibaldi's expedition conquers southern Italy and hands it over to the King of Piedmont, Victor Emmanuel II
1861	New united Kingdom of Italy proclaimed. New Parliament elected by two per cent of the population
1860s	Wave of peasant unrest in the South
1866	Prussia beats Austria; Italy gains Venetia
1870	Prussia beats France; Italy gains Rome Pope condemns the new Italian state

### LIBERAL ITALY

1881	Italy fails to gain Tunisia
1882	Italy joins Germany and Austria–Hungary in the Triple Alliance
1880s	Italy gains some lands in Eastern Africa
1892–94	Major peasant unrest in the South
1892	Italian SOCIALIST Party created
1896	Italy beaten by Abyssinians at battle of Adowa
1898	Major industrial unrest in the North met by fierce repression
1900	King Umberto assassinated
1900–14	Rapid industrialisation in the North
1903–14	Giolitti is Prime Minister for much of this time. Series of reforms to try to win over the masses
1911	Italy defeats Turkey and gains Libya
1912	Mussolini emerges as major leader of RADICAL Socialists Vote given to most men
1914	Wave of unrest; Red Week

### FIRST WORLD WAR

1914 Aug	Italy stays neutral when First World War breaks out
Nov	Mussolini expelled from Socialist Party for advocating that Italy should join the war. Founds his own newspaper, <i>Il Popolo d'Italia</i>
1915 Apr	Treaty of London with Allies promises Italy major gains if it joins the war
May	Italy joins Allies against Austria–Hungary and Germany
1917 Oct	Italy defeated at battle of Caporetto
1918 Oct	Italy wins battle of Vittorio Veneto

### POST-WAR TURMOIL: SOCIALISM AND FASCISM

1919 Mar	Mussolini founds a radical Fascist movement; gains some support from bitter ex-soldiers
Jun	Italy fails to make major gains in Versailles Settlement
Sept	Nationalist d'Annunzio seizes the port of Fiume
Nov	Election. Socialist Party and new Catholic Party gain over half of all votes but fail to form a government
1919–20	Two years of Socialist unrest (Biennio Rosso)
1920 Sept	Workers seize control of many northern factories Fascism gains support from frightened conservative groups and moves to the Right
1920–22	Wave of Fascist violence against opponents
1921 May	Election. Fascists linked to the government gain seven per cent of the vote. Mussolini and 34 Fascist MPs elected
Nov	Fascist Party established
1922 Oct	Fascists seize control of many northern cities Fascists plan a march on Rome to gain power Mussolini appointed Prime Minister

**SOURCE 2.3** FUTURISTS at war. Futurists like Marinetti (seen here standing on the left) welcomed the war: 'We glorify war as the sole hygiene of the world ... the world needs only heroism ... an aesthetic [theory of beauty] of violence and blood'



## The soldiers

Most of the soldiers were southern peasant CONSCRIPTS who did not understand why the war was being fought. Most skilled industrial workers were required to stay in their factories to produce war equipment. Soldiers were bitter about the 'shirkers' left at home. Low rations (600 grams bread, 250 grams meat, and 150 grams of pasta a day), low pay (½ lira a day to each soldier, and the same to his family), and the lack of modern equipment undermined morale. Thousands were killed by cholera, typhus and frostbite.

**SOURCE 2.4** Police with captured deserters. Around 290,000 soldiers were court-martialled, 4000 sentenced to death, and 750 shot



## CHART 2B Italy at war 1915-18

### Summary of the war effort

#### Military

- Five million conscripted
- Generally trench stalemate
- Eleven offensives in two and a half years
- Maximum advance twelve miles
- 600,000 Italians killed
- 1,000,000 wounded

#### Political

- Government powers increased
- Parliament was just a rubber stamp
- Close state-industry links
- Caporetto led to reorganisation and promise of major social reforms
- PSI advocated 'neither support nor sabotage'
- Pope criticised 'useless slaughter'

#### Economic

- State spent 148 billion lire
- National debt
  - 1914 16 billion lire
  - 1919 85 billion lire
- Price index 1914 = 100
- 1918 = 413

Major industries saw massive expansion, e.g. Fiat, Ansaldo (steel)

#### Social

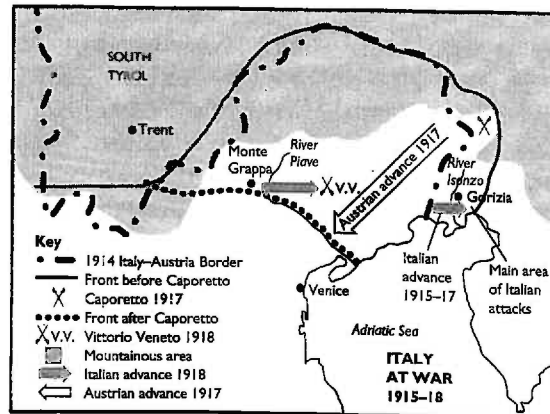
- Strict discipline in war industries
- Long hours: up to 75 hours a week
- Increased employment of women
- Real wages fell approximately 25%
- Rents frozen
- Some peasants paid off debts
- Bread riots, Summer 1917: 50 killed

**SOURCE 2.5** Mussolini on trincerismo (the camaraderie of the trenches)

*The war had taught us one lesson, the great community of the front. All class differences disappeared under its spell. There was only one people, no individuals. Common suffering and common peril had welded us together.*

### Timeline of the war

August	1914	Great Powers go to war. Italy remains neutral.
May	1915	Italy joins war on the side of the Allies.
October	1917	Italian army badly defeated at Caporetto
October	1918	Italians triumph over the exhausted Austrians at Vittorio Veneto.
November	1918	Armistice signed
September	1919	Peace terms with Austria finalised at the Treaty of St Germain



### Comparative war costs

Country	Total mobilised forces (millions)	Deaths
Italy	5.6m	600,000
France	8.2m	1,500,000
British Empire	9.5m	1,000,000
Russia	13.0m	1,700,000
USA	3.8m	116,000
Germany	13.2m	1,950,000
Austria-Hungary	9.0m	1,050,000
Turkey	2.8m	325,000



General Cadorna

## The General

General Cadorna was the autocratic, stubborn leader of the Italian army from 1915 to 1917. He implemented a series of massed infantry attacks against entrenched positions and ordered that not a yard gained should be given up. Cadorna was scornful of the soldiers' welfare. He sacked 217 generals; banned politicians from the war zone; and blamed failings on the weak government and its toleration of subversives (people plotting to overthrow the government). He was sacked after the defeat at Caporetto.

### Historians assess the impact of the war

**SOURCE 2.6** P. Morgan, *Italian Fascism 1919–45*, 1995, p. 7

*Italy's involvement in the First World War was the first great collective and national experience for literally millions of Italians, especially the largely peasant conscript army. But, partly because of the imperfect nation forming since unification, and partly because of the way Italy entered the war in 1915 and the way the war was conducted, the Great War did not bring about national integration and unity. There was no . . . temporary national and political truce for the duration of the war. Italy's wartime experience was extremely divisive; it increased popular alienation from the LIBERAL parliamentary state while heightening expectations of transforming it. Italy's national war was 'waged in an atmosphere of civil war'.*

**SOURCE 2.7** Clark, p. 200

*The Italians had been divided before, but by November 1919 they were more divided than ever: 'combatants' against 'shirkers', peasants against workers, patriots against defeatists. No conceivable form of government could suit them all.*

*The war left other major legacies. They included a thirst for justice ('land for the peasants') and a transformed industrial economy. The war also produced tens of thousands of new officers, drunk with patriotism and greedy to command. They had won the war, and did not intend to let anyone forget it.*

**SOURCE 2.8** D. Mack Smith, *Italy, A Modern History*, 1969, p. 313

*The final figure for the cost of the whole war had been 148 billion lire, that is to say twice the sum of all government expenditure between 1861 and 1913.*

*This total is a symbol for an enormous consumption of energy and natural resources, in return for which Italy obtained little joy and much grief. A great deal of idealism had gone into the war on Italy's part, and much elevated patriotism, but one need not look many years beyond 1918 to see that it had been one of the great disasters of her history. [As a result] Italy suffered 25 years of revolution and tyranny.*

**SOURCE 2.9** M. Blinkhorn, *Mussolini and Fascist Italy*, 1984, p. 9

*War also brought profound changes to Italy herself. Most significant was the rapid growth and increased concentration of those industries most closely linked with war production: metallurgy, engineering, shipbuilding and automobiles. Any suggestion of a lasting boom was nevertheless misleading, for Italy's war machine consumed industrial products of a kind and at a rate no peacetime economy was likely to match. A distorted economy potentially short of raw materials, export outlets and a healthy domestic market was a sure recipe for post-war difficulties. Returning soldiers likely then to be the sufferers would scarcely be mollified [feel calmed or compensated] by the sight of those who had got rich while they were at the front: not only financial and industrial profiteers but also ambitious peasants who had seized opportunities to buy more land. Meanwhile the political situation looked more and more discouraging . . . To many Italians, Liberal government was coming to seem ineffectual and irrelevant.*

### FOCUS ROUTE

- Using pages 23–25, write a summary of the main effects of the war on Italy 1914–18. Classify your notes under these headings: military, political, economic and social.
- This section opened with d'Annunzio's view of the 'new dawn'. Marinetti and Mussolini remained enthusiasts for war (see Sources 2.3 and 2.5). Other soldiers hated their experience of it. How can these differences be explained?



Gabriele d'Annunzio

### How significant was d'Annunzio's occupation of Fiume?

The failure of the Italian government to gain Italy's expected rewards was highlighted by dramatic events that occurred at the Adriatic port of Fiume. Italy claimed the city, but was not granted it. The nationalist poet d'Annunzio seized Fiume and ruled it for a year. D'Annunzio's seizure of Fiume is a potentially confusing incident which is often given a lot of stress, but it can also be seen as an eccentric side-show. Was it really significant?

#### The events

Fiume was a major Adriatic port. Until 1919 it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The majority of its inhabitants were Italian, but the suburbs and hinterland were mainly Croat. It had not been mentioned in the Treaty of London. After the war was won, Italian nationalists clamoured for the port to be part of Italy, but in 1918 it was occupied by Allied troops. The Italian government failed to gain Fiume at the Versailles Settlement. It became an illustration of what d'Annunzio described as the 'mutilated victory'.

In September 1919 d'Annunzio, at the head of 300 ex-soldiers, seized control of the city. The Allied troops left, although some Italian troops who supported d'Annunzio remained. The Italian government did nothing, reinforcing the image of both its weakness, and its willingness to submit to violence. D'Annunzio theatrically kissed the Italian flag and proclaimed: 'In this mad, vile world, Fiume is the symbol of liberty.' His new state has been described by the historian Mitchell as a 'mixture of MANIFESTOS, harangues, fireworks, pageants, military concerts and overstretched nerves'. It was a true 'theatre of revolution', but one probably not appreciated by the locals!

For a time it had seemed as if d'Annunzio might exploit his position to seize power in Rome. However, in December 1920 Giolitti's new government decided to reassert its authority, and sent in troops. D'Annunzio and his veterans fled (fearing either shells or an influenza epidemic that was raging) and the Italian army quickly took command. It had previously agreed with Yugoslavia that Fiume should be an international free city. Fiume remained under international supervision until Mussolini took it over in 1923.

The Fiume incident showed that force could be used to try and achieve political aims in post-war Italy. The government's inadequacy was shown as it took over a year to respond to d'Annunzio's COUP. In addition, Italians could contrast d'Annunzio's vigorous action to defend Italy's interests with the government's apparently inadequate performance at the peace conference. In the end, perhaps d'Annunzio's chief significance was as an inspirer of many of the features, both of IDEOLOGY and symbols, of Fascist Italy.

#### D'Annunzio: a potential rival to Mussolini?

Until 1922 d'Annunzio was a far more famous leader than Mussolini, and the latter considered him a rival. He was a nationalist poet, who glorified Italy's past, and condemned its existing political system as 'a heap of filth which cannot even serve to manure the nation's cabbages'. During the war, despite being over 50, he had led heroic air raids, and lost an eye. His fame peaked as Commander of Fiume, and for a time he considered marching on Rome to overthrow the decadent (decaying and corrupt) parliamentary system.

With his retreat from Fiume his prestige fell, but he remained a dangerous rival. He had criticised Mussolini for his lukewarm support over Fiume, and told his followers not to join 'thug Fascism'. Many, however, still did. In the Autumn of 1922 various politicians contacted him asking that he join a national government. Mussolini was worried about him as a possible rival. In October 1922 d'Annunzio conveniently 'fell' from a balcony, so he was out of action for some time. Mussolini gained power first. From then on, there was room for only one nationalist DEMAGOGUE and d'Annunzio became Italy's 'lost leader'.

#### Gabriele d'Annunzio, 1863-1938

- As a student he wrote poems and novels
- 1897 he was elected as an extreme RIGHT-WING candidate
- 1900 he briefly joined the extreme LEFT WING of the PSI, then he became a nationalist
- 1914-15 powerful INTERVENTIONIST speaker
- Volunteered for army aged 52
- August 1918 he dropped leaflets from plane over Vienna
- 1922 Possible rival nationalist leader; after Mussolini's appointment, he concentrated on writing
- 1937 he was made President of Royal Academy of Arts

#### What did d'Annunzio and Fiume give to Fascism?

- Heroic speeches to mass audiences from his balcony
- Rhythmic war cries, which were often incomprehensible, e.g. Eja, Eja, Alala
- His followers wore blackshirts, adopted the skull and cross-bones, and used castor oil to humiliate opponents (see page 51)
- The Roman straight-arm salute
- The song 'Giovinezza' ('Youth')
- Plans for a new organisation of all producers in a corporative state (see page 135)
- Spoke of 'our Mediterranean', and 'Italy or Death'
- Discussed a march on Rome
- Overall, d'Annunzio put on a great display, and made great claims for his mini-state; much of this was make-believe





**Activity**

Study Charts ID and IE.

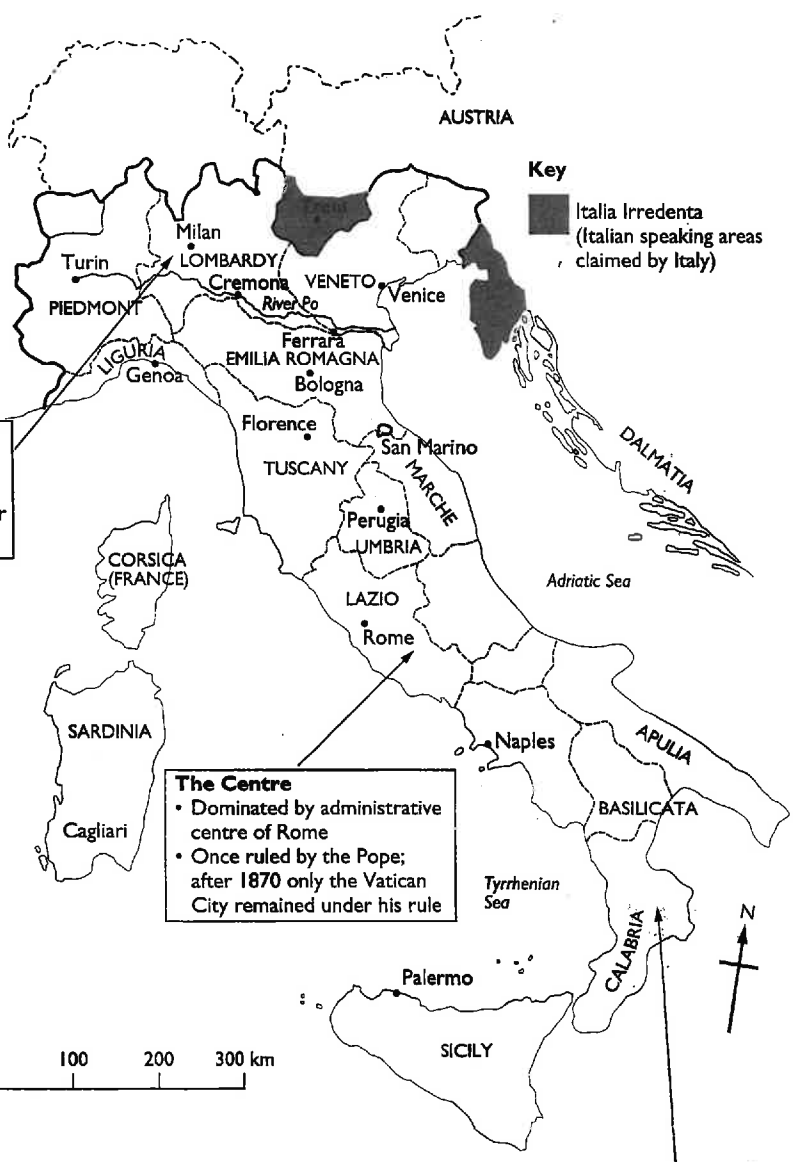
- 1 Mark the following key features on an outline map of Italy.
  - a) Three major industrial cities
  - b) One major administrative city
  - c) The most important southern city
  - d) Italy's most important river
- 2 Around the outline map, make a list of evidence showing:
  - a) Italy's backwardness
  - b) signs of modernisation
  - c) regional differences
  - d) Italy's comparative military might.
- 3 a) What evidence is there to suggest why so many people emigrated?
  - b) How might emigration actually help the stability of the state? Refer to:
    - emigration's influence on unemployment
    - its influence on wages
    - the impact of remittances (money sent back from abroad) from emigrants
    - the idea of emigration as a safety valve.

**B Had Liberal governments created a more united nation by 1900?**

'We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians.' D'Azeglio, a government minister, made this statement after Italy had been formally unified. Much needed to be done by the Liberal governments that ruled Italy after 1861 to overcome the problems they inherited. The newly unified Italian people needed to see success in both domestic and foreign policy if they were to be won over to the new state. You are now going to try and assess the problems facing the governments and how far they had overcome the divisions and backwardness by the turn of the twentieth century.

**The problems facing Italian governments**

**CHART ID** Italy in c. 1900



**The North**

- Industrial, especially engineering centres of Milan, Turin, Genoa
- 1880s widescale migration to growing towns
- Po Valley: area of advanced agriculture based around major river
- Medium-sized farms, commercial farming

**Regional variations in 1861**

Area	Agric. km	Rail km	Road km	Illiteracy %	Education
North	170	1370	38,000	68	80
Centre	120	360	38,000	78	34
South	80	100	13,800	87	18

Agric.: value of agricultural production, lire per hectare (10,000 m<sup>2</sup>)  
Educ.: % primary school attendance

**The Centre**

- Dominated by administrative centre of Rome
- Once ruled by the Pope; after 1870 only the Vatican City remained under his rule

**Examples of dialect variations**

	'Thursday'	'boy/child'
Italian	Giovedì	Bambino
Lombardy	Giuedi	Bagai
Tuscany	Zovedi	Bimbo
Lazio	Giovedì	Regazzino
Sicily	Ioviri	Picciottu

**Agriculture**

- Majority of population was rural: 1913 57% (Britain 15%).
- There were a few enterprising, large landowners (AGRARI); but most were small agricultural labourers (braccianti). There were also tenant farmers, SHARECROPPERS (mezzadri)

**The South (called in Italy the Mezzogiorno)**

- Little industry
- Once the 'grain basket' of Europe; by twentieth century soil exhausted
- Large, inefficient noble-owned estates (latifundia)
- 1914 0.01% of the population owned 50% of the land
- Frequent social unrest
- Powerful clans and Mafia

**CHART 1E How great a power was Italy? Economic and military statistics**

**Economy**

- Steel production (million tonnes)

	1890	1910
Italy	0.1	0.7
Britain	3.6	6.5
Germany	2.2	13.7
France	0.7	3.4

- Value of foreign trade (in \$ billion)

	1860	1913
Italy	0.3	1.8
Britain	2.0	7.5
Germany	0.8	4.3
France	0.5	2.2

- Railways (km)

	1880	1913
Italy	9,290	18,873
Britain	28,846	38,114
Germany	33,838	63,378
France	23,089	40,770

**Emigration, mainly to USA**

1870s	168,000
1880s	992,000
1890s	1,580,000
1900s	3,615,000

**Agriculture**

- Yields (mid-nineteenth century) low, e.g.
  - Italy average 9 hectolitres (= 100 litres) of wheat per hectare
  - France 19
  - Britain 25

**Communications**

- Most railways were confined to coastal areas.
- Few navigable rivers
- In the 1890s 90% of the South had no roads.

**Industry & trade**

- Silk and engineering were the major industries.
- Virtually no coal; little iron or other minerals; no oil discovered (until 1950s); 1890s increasing use of hydro-electric power in Alps

**Social conditions**

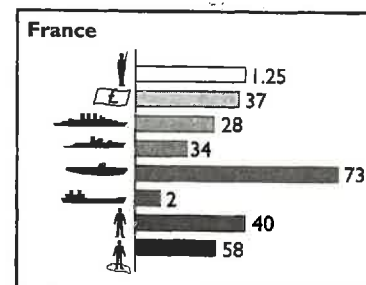
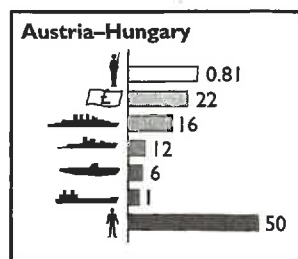
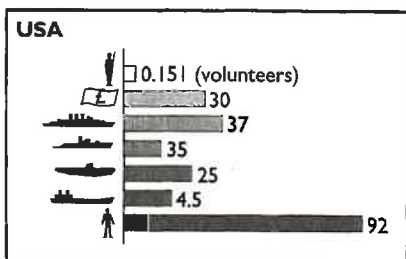
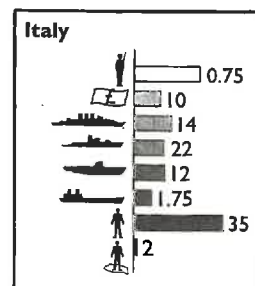
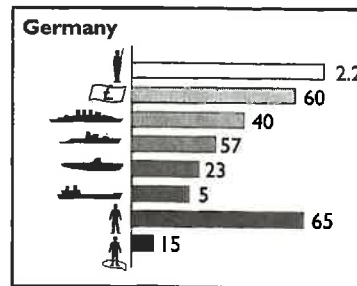
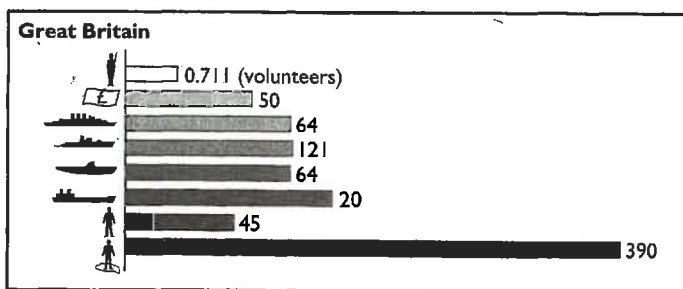
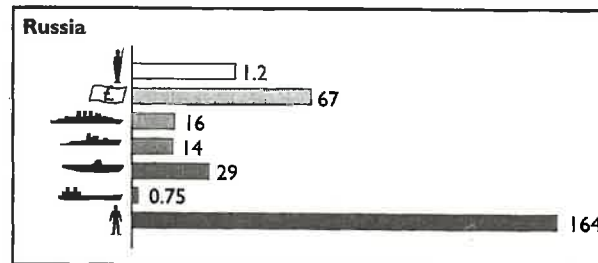
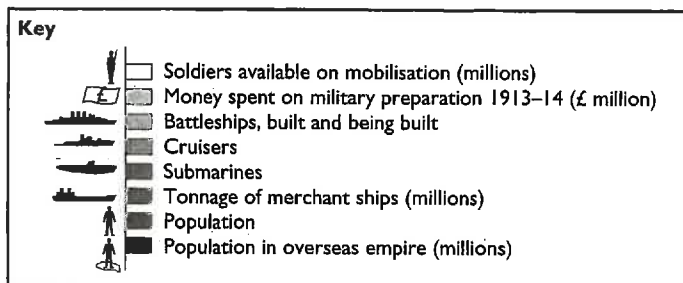
- Wealth: per capita GDP (gross domestic product) 1860–96
  - Italy increased by 4%
  - France, Germany, Britain increased by 40–50%
- Deaths per 1000 (1880s)
 

North	26	South	29	Britain	19
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**KEY PROBLEMS**

- Opposition of Church**
- The Pope told Catholics not to participate in the new state
  - Priests helped to stir up unrest amongst peasantry
- Economic problems**
- Government debt
  - High taxes on poor
  - The North–South divide was increased by northern industrialisation
  - Frequent unrest, especially in Sicily, 1860s, 1893–94 major revolts
- Political problems**
- Limited SUFFRAGE meant most Italians were uninvolved in the new state, apart from paying taxes and being conscripted into the army
  - Politicians were seen as corrupt; frequent changes of government
- Foreign policy**
- Italia Irredenta (see page 15): areas populated by Italians kept by Austria 1866
  - Government had inferiority complex
  - Defeat at Adowa in 1896 (see page 15)

**Military might in 1914**



## Activity

### 1 What did Italians feel about their position by 1914?

Match up statements 1–9 with these Italians in 1914:

a) Southern peasant

b) Northern industrial worker

c) Shopkeeper

d) Futurist painter

e) Nationalist journalist

f) Industrialist

g) Catholic bishop

h) Southern aristocrat

i) Liberal member of Parliament

1 *This Liberal regime is illegitimate and has stolen our territory, but we've got to face reality. I'm concerned about these radical socialist ATHEISTIC ideas, and so we'd better get more involved in the state.*

2 *At last I think we've got a chance of getting somewhere. My union and party have made a difference. You can see the government's frightened, as they're hurrying to give us more crumbs from the cake. But we want a complete redivision of the cake, and they can't stop us for long.*

3 *I've worked hard to get where I am, and I'm proud of my position. If only the government had worked as hard to defend Italy's interests. Instead it seems to be giving more and more concessions to the lazy masses, and encouraging big business to expand, regardless of the effects. Somebody needs to stand up for Italy and honest, hardworking Italians.*

4 *Life is continuing as normal. My peasants occasionally moan, but they can't do much. Life is hard and they must accept that as God's will. I must admit I'm pleasantly surprised how successful this new kingdom has been.*

5 *How long can this go on? We sold out our brothers in Italia Irredenta during the Risorgimento, and these feeble governments have been more concerned with appeasing the masses than really asserting Italy's power. We should be proud of our country. I suppose Libya was something, but I still can't forget Adowa. With tension building in Europe this is our chance to really make a mark on the world scene, but I can't see this spineless lot acting decisively.*

6 *Just when my business is really expanding, the government, instead of helping me, seems to be favouring the masses too much. Look what happened when our factories were occupied. They've got some dangerous new ideas, but I expect the government to follow its traditional policy of acting firmly in defence of property and law and order. This Giolitti's a bit too shifty for my liking.*

7 *Life gets no better. I still wonder whether I'm ever going to be able to support my family properly. I've heard some talk of protest, but I can't see that getting anywhere. Look what happened to old Fabio when he tried. I could emigrate, but I don't really want to leave my village where my family has always lived. The priest is right, we'll just have to accept God's will, I suppose.*

8 *Whilst not feeling complacent, I think we've done fairly well over the last decade or so. Social reforms are gradually improving the position of the masses, and they can be trusted with more of a say in the country. Balance in all things.*

9 *I'm bored. This government is pathetic; the masses are superstitious and ignorant; the middle classes think of nothing but their pockets. We need action, excitement, some purpose.*

2 Which of these people would have voted for Giolitti in 1914?

3 Who might the others have voted for?

## FOCUS ROUTE

Looking back on your work in Chapter 1:

- 1 Write a paragraph about each of the following failings of Liberal Italy 1870–1914: trasformismo; the gulf between real and legal Italy; Church–state tension; North–South divide; economic and social problems; growth of Socialism; Adowa, Italia Irredenta and assertive foreign policy; impact of Giolitti's reforms; Red Week.
- 2 Essay: 'To what extent had Liberal Italy satisfied the needs of Italians by 1914?'

### Activity

Look at this list of four developments in pre-war Italy (D1–4), and the reactions they caused (R1–4). Match them up, and then link them with one of the four aspects of Fascist appeal (A1–4).

#### Development

- D1 Failure of Liberal Italy to live up to Risorgimento expectations
- D2 Giolitti's reforms
- D3 Masses alienated from state
- D4 Economic advance

#### Reaction

- R1 Growth of insecure petty bourgeoisie
- R2 Economic elite concerned about losing control of the state
- R3 Growth of Socialism
- R4 Growth of assertive nationalism

#### Fascist appeal

- A1 End class warfare
- A2 Smash Socialism
- A3 Establish strong state
- A4 Make Italy great

Let us now try and pull together the key issues from this chapter.

## Key points from Chapter 1

- 1 United Italy had been created without involving the mass of the Italian people.
- 2 Liberal politicians represented a narrow, educated elite, and their quarrelling led to frequent changes of government.
- 3 Liberal Italy failed to make sufficient social reforms to win the support of the masses. Nationalism remained weak amongst the masses.
- 4 The powerful Catholic Church remained opposed to the Liberal state.
- 5 Formal unification failed to overcome the historic North–South divide.
- 6 When unified, Italy had failed to gain Italia Irredenta.
- 7 In her search for Great Power status, Italy suffered a humiliating defeat at Adowa in 1896.
- 8 Giolitti's limited reforms tried but failed to overcome fully Italy's deep-seated problems.
- 9 Italy was wracked by major crises in the 1890s, and again in 1914.
- 10 By 1914 the Liberal regime was being challenged by the socialist Left and nationalist Right.

## A look ahead

As well as examining how united Liberal Italy had become, we have also been encountering points that help explain the later appeal of Fascism. The activity should help pull these ideas together.

In the 1920s many Italians were to be attracted to Fascism as it offered:

- a) to smash Socialism and end class warfare
- b) to establish a strong state
- c) to make Italy a great power.

You have seen some trends in Italy before the First World War which help explain the appeal of these ideas. Without these developments it is unlikely that Fascism would have become a powerful force. A historian might call these factors PRECONDITIONS for the growth of Fascism.

## B Fascism 1919–22: an overview

Before we look in depth at how Mussolini managed to gain support and ac power it will be worth reading the following overview of the complex development of Fascism from 1919 to 1922. This will provide you with a cl structure within which to locate some of the key issues, and help you mas the more detailed survey which follows.






### Some key questions to consider as you study these events in more detail

- Why did the elite support the Fascists when their 1919 programme was radical?
- How did the Fascists get support by promising to restore order and discipline when they were chiefly responsible for the post-war violence?
- Did Fascism move to the Right and then get elite support, or get elite support and then move to the Right? Or did it do both at the same time?

**CHART 3B** The development of Fascism 1919–22

#### Key groups in the rise of Fascism

The following symbols represent various groups who by active support, collaboration or lack of action assisted the growth of Fascism. When their contribution becomes important, their symbol is added to the relevant stage.

-  Mussolini
-  Original Fascists, e.g. ex-soldiers
-  The industrial elite
-  The agricultural elite
-  Ras and squads
-  Petty bourgeoisie, e.g. peasants, public servants
-  The Liberal establishment
-  The local authorities, e.g. prefects, police
-  The King

#### Stage 2 (1919)



The movement attracted a mixed collection of people dissatisfied with the status quo. The movement's main mouthpiece was Mussolini's paper, *Il Popolo d'Italia*. In April 1919 the Fascists burnt the *Avanti!* offices, and engaged in other acts of violence against the hated Socialists. Standing on a radical programme in the 1919 elections, Mussolini failed miserably, gaining only 2% of the vote in Milan. The radical vote went to the PSI.

#### Stage 3 (1920)



By Summer 1920 the industrial and rural elite were worried by the Socialist threat, and by government inaction. Some saw the Fascists as the best bulwark against Socialism, and started to give funds to Fascist squads who were fighting Socialists.

#### Stage 1 (1919)



In March 1919 Mussolini set up a *fascio di combattimento*, or combat group, formed mainly from ex-soldiers. The Fascists said they would provide new leadership in a national revolution. They were a movement not a party, and sought support from all patriotic Italians.

Their programme expressed radical social ideas, stemming from their experience of war. It thus provided a nationalist, socialist alternative to the PSI who were seen as traitors.

#### Stage 4 (1920)




Mussolini saw an opportunity. He wanted change; he wanted power. It seemed he might achieve these by appealing to people frightened by the Socialists. This would mean playing down his left-wing ideas, and shifting his programme to appeal more to the Right.


THE LEFT


**Ras**  
 The ras were powerful local leaders of the Fascist squads. The word comes from the name for Ethiopian tribal leaders.

**FOCUS ROUTE**


- Key points on Fascism 1919–22**  
 Study Chart 3B and choose the more appropriate end to the following sentences.
- 1 Fascism began
    - a) as a broadly LEFT-WING, NATIONALIST movement
    - b) as an attempt to create a mass RIGHT-WING party.
  - 2 Fascist attacks on Socialists
    - a) lost it much of its support
    - b) attracted support from the economic elite and many peasants.
  - 3 Fascism
    - a) remained essentially left wing
    - b) gradually moved to the Right, where its support was increasingly coming from.
  - 4 Mussolini
    - a) exploited the preparedness of LIBERAL politicians to co-operate with Fascism
    - b) rejected any involvement with Parliament.
  - 5 Mussolini's relations with the RAS
    - a) were sometimes tense
    - b) were good since they accepted his dominance as the founder of Fascism.
  - 6 Mussolini
    - a) used the threat of violent squads to be legally appointed Prime Minister
    - b) took power through violence.


**Stage 6 (1921)**  
  
 Some original Fascists were concerned about how the bourgeoisie were joining the movement and Mussolini's move to the Right. Many dropped out of the movement. Several ras, who were not under Mussolini's control, protested. However, as the movement grew, they realised how important Mussolini, with his paper *Il Popolo Italia*, was for unity and strength.


**Stage 7 (1921)**  
  
 Prime Minister Giolitti hoped he could absorb the movement, which was becoming a major force in the country. He gambled by including Fascists on the list of candidates recommended by the government in the May 1921 election. (This was the last election before Mussolini was appointed Prime Minister.) They gained 35 seats, and Mussolini entered parliament. Giolitti hoped to tame the Fascists by offering Mussolini a government post, but Mussolini refused to join the government as a junior partner. He was more ambitious.

**Stage 10 (1922)**  
  
 The Fascists planned the takeover of local governments and a march on Rome, in order to seize power. Meanwhile many in the elite were arguing that the Fascists should join the government. Mussolini would only accept becoming Prime Minister. On 29 October King Victor Emmanuel invited Mussolini to form a government. The Fascists marched on Rome to celebrate their victory.

**THE RIGHT**

**Stage 5 (1920–21)**  
  
 In late 1920 Fascism took off, especially in the rural areas in North and Central Italy. Local leaders, or ras, set up their own squads of fascists. They attracted not just the agrarian elite, but also many small landholders harmed by Socialist local government and worried about a Socialist revolution. Fascist anti-Socialist violence made Fascism a mass movement.

**Stage 8 (1921)**  
  
 Tension was developing between those Fascists wanting to gain power legally and those supporting seizure of power. Mussolini was concerned about the growing Fascist violence which threatened his position as a respectable member of parliament and his control over the Fascist movement. On 2 August 1921 he signed a 'pact of pacification' with the Socialists. Ras pressure forced him to back down. In November he formed the National Fascist Party, which acknowledged the role of the squads but recognised Mussolini as the indispensable Duce. His new programme was right-wing. Mussolini was looking for power. This meant becoming more respectable.

**Stage 9 (1922)**  
  
 By 1922 the Fascist squads had broken Socialist power in many areas of the North and Centre. They were often assisted by the authorities, who were pleased to see the Socialists smashed. Mussolini was under pressure from some ras to seize power; he also realised that if Fascism did not gain power it could soon break up. He hoped to use ras pressure on the government to become appointed Prime Minister legally. In September 1922 he announced his support for the monarchy.

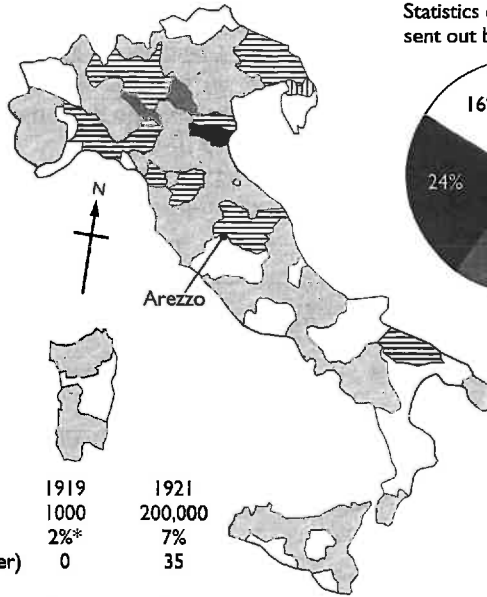
**CHART 3D The growth of Fascism**

**Key**

Fasci per province, 31 March 1921

- 1-4
- 5-11
- 12-24
- 25-41
- 42-60

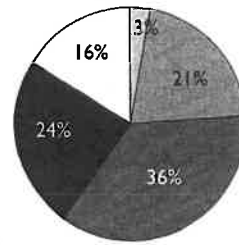
0 250 km



	1919	1921
Members	1000	200,000
Votes in elections	2%*	7%
Deputies (in Chamber)	0	35

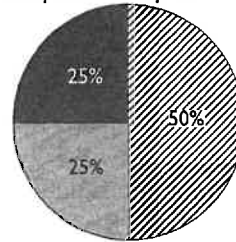
(\*Average in areas where Fascists stood)

Statistics on the social composition of the Fascist Party, 1921 (from a questionnaire sent out by the Fascist secretariat and completed by about half of the Party's members)



- Industrialists
- Professionals, especially students and teachers
- Small landowners, tenants, agricultural workers
- Petty bourgeoisie, e.g. artisans, shopkeepers and civil servants
- Industrial and transport workers

The Arezzo squadristi. This is just one example of the social composition of squad.



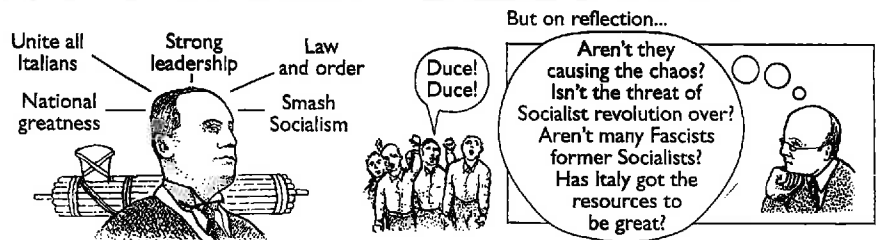
- Lower-middle-class shopkeepers, traders, employees
- Professional classes, students
- Other

**What did Fascism offer?**

From 1920 Mussolini began to drop his more radical policies. He presented a more acceptable face of Fascism: a movement and a party pledged to restore Italian power and prestige; to develop the economy by increasing productivity; to abolish harmful state controls; to re-establish strong leadership and law and order by curbing left-wing subversives. The abandonment of republicanism was announced in September 1922, closely followed by the ending of ANTI-CLERICALISM, and the dropping of the demand for votes for women and for taxes on war profits. Increasingly the emphasis was placed on nationalism, an active foreign policy and a strong state.

Mussolini never spoke favourably of party political programmes. He claimed Italy had had enough of politics and programmes and wanted action instead. Furthermore, it would be difficult to unite his diverse collection of supporters around a detailed political programme. In temperament, too, he was more interested in action than being tied to a specific party MANIFESTO. However, the Fascists did draw up various programmes and you can see the evolution of the Fascist programme between 1919 and 1921 on page 50.

**CHART 3E The appeal of Fascism in 1922**



**SOURCE 3.16** D. Mack Smith, 'Sleeping Car to Power', a 1990 article

*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.*

*Fascism was not a doctrine, not ideas, not ideology, but was really a means for winning power by a single man.*

**Activity**

Read Source 3.16. Which aspects of the programmes on page 50 support this view?

### Activity

Look at Sources 3.12–15 and Chart 3D. What do they reveal about:

- who supported the movement and why
- the areas of greatest Fascist strength
- the influence of the war on the development of Fascism
- why Fascists were prepared to use violence?

attracted to a rival organisation. The Fascists also attracted working-class support by retaining some aspects of their original social radicalism. They could still talk of giving land to the peasants, and fair wages and prices. Employers tolerated such talk as it served to weaken support for Socialism by attracting some workers; and in practice little came of these ideas.

It is useful at this stage to distinguish between two groups vital to Fascism's development: those who actually joined the Fascist movement (the real Fascists) and those who were prepared to support it for their own ends, but not through commitment to its cause (these can be called tactical Fascists, or users of Fascism). Many of the joiners were disaffected, looking for change. The users, the elite, were discontented since they feared change, and wanted to preserve the threatened status quo. The lower middle class provided a mass basis for power, but Fascism was to gain power through the support it won from industrialists and landowners.

An interesting insight into the nature of the Fascist movement is given by the following contemporary analyses (Sources 3.12–15).

**SOURCE 3.12** The Milan prefect, describing the reaction of the Director of the Milan Tramway Company in 1921

*[He] deplored the actions of the government [over a draft bill on workers' control over factories] and explained that the industrialists supported the Fascists in order to fight against the government and hinder its activity which was harmful to industry's interests.*

**SOURCE 3.13** An article in the Liberal newspaper *La Stampa* in May 1921 describes the composition of a Fascist crowd

*[Demobilised ex-officers] who have sought and not found employment; [it is] a compound of repressed hope and desperation, [of forgotten heroes] convinced that they can harangue [speak angrily to] a community as they harangued a battalion in the field; [of] public employees scarcely able to eat compared with whom a peasant, a league organiser, a trade-union secretary is a gentleman; of swarms of brokers, shopkeepers, and contractors, hit by the slump, who detest with a deadly hatred the labour and consumer co-operatives, [of] students and young graduates with no clients and grandiose ideals, convinced that their misfortunes were due to the sinister plots of senile [old] politicians; [of bands of] incredible adolescents, aged 16–19, envenomed [made bitter] by bad luck which made the war finish too soon . . . because they wished to . . . do great deeds; [and finally of] bands of ex-revolutionaries who had become war enthusiasts in 1915 . . . anxious to recapture a position of command.*

**SOURCE 3.14** The Fascist Lanzillo analysed the growth of Fascism in his book *The State and the Post-War Social and Financial Crisis*, 1920

*The fasci of Milan are composed, in the very great majority, of employees, small shopkeepers and lesser and middling professional men . . . Fascism is composed in large cities of new men. They formed the crowd which before the war watched political events with indifference and apathy and which has now entered the contest. Fascism has MOBILISED its forces from the twilight zones of political life and from this derives the unruly violence and juvenile exuberance of its conduct.*

**SOURCE 3.15** Mussolini acknowledged the importance of rural Fascism in 1922

*The SHARECROPPER or leaseholder tries with all his strength to become an owner . . . The peasants are conquering the land by their own strength. It is clear that these serried phalanxes [close ranks] of new small owners cannot but detest Socialism. Instead, they have everything to hope for from Fascism and nothing to fear . . . During the RISORGIMENTO the rurali [the agricultural population] were either absent or hostile . . . But the great war of 1915–18 recruited the rurali in their millions. However, their participation in events was on the whole passive. Now Fascism has transformed this rural passivity . . . into active support for the reality and sanctity [holiness] of the nation.*