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II MA History

World History

The Rise of Fascism in Italy

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Fascism v. Totalitarianism: what are they?

Fascism:

- a modern form of authoritarianism
- a mobilizing regime
- Glorification of authority
- in its pure form, built on a **corporatist** state
 - *Corpera* ('corporations) or sub-sectors of society are the key units of representation: e.g The Church, the army, big business, small business agriculture...

Totalitarianism: a form of authoritarianism which tries to assert a **total** grip on society

- Eliminates any private space
- May or may not have fascist traits

Origins

Short term (1918-1922)

- Italian disappointments in the peace settlements, especially failure to obtain Fiume, Dalmatian coast
- Economic crisis (1919-20)
- D'Annunzio's Fiume expedition (1919)
- Growing disorder
 - Wave of strikes
 - Growing Socialist strength
 - Fear of red menace
- Difficulty of sustaining cabinets

Longer term

- Class, religious, regional divisions
- Incompleteness of Italian unification in 1860s, 1870s:
 - *risorgimento* v. Piedmontization
 - Problem of the *non expedit* decrees
- Weak & ineffective regime
 - Constitutional monarchy
- Dominated by Liberals, politics of *trasformismo* – buying majorities



Mussolini

- Former socialist
- Breaks with his party over its failure to support World War I
- Demagogic speaker
- Leader of *squadristi* – squads of thugs, blackshirts



Coming to power

- Ongoing government crisis, widespread social unrest, weak government during World War I
- 1921: fascists elected to parliament
- 1922: March on Rome:
 - King Victor Emmanuel II indecisive
 - fearing his army unreliable, invites Mussolini to form government

The March on Rome



Consolidating the regime:

Uses control of government to establish dictatorship

- Modification of electoral law (Acerbo Law)
- Successive elimination of opponents
 - Matteotti assassination (1924)
- Suppression of independent forces
- Opposition outlawed (1926)
- Nominations for parliament only by Fascist Grand Council (1928)
- Reorganization of state into 22 corporations (1932)

Building support:

- Mussolini builds support by modifying positions, accommodating key groups
- Gains support of business by restricting unions
- Gains support of Church by
 - abandoning anti-clerical positions
 - embracing Catholicism,
 - concluding Lateran pacts (1929)

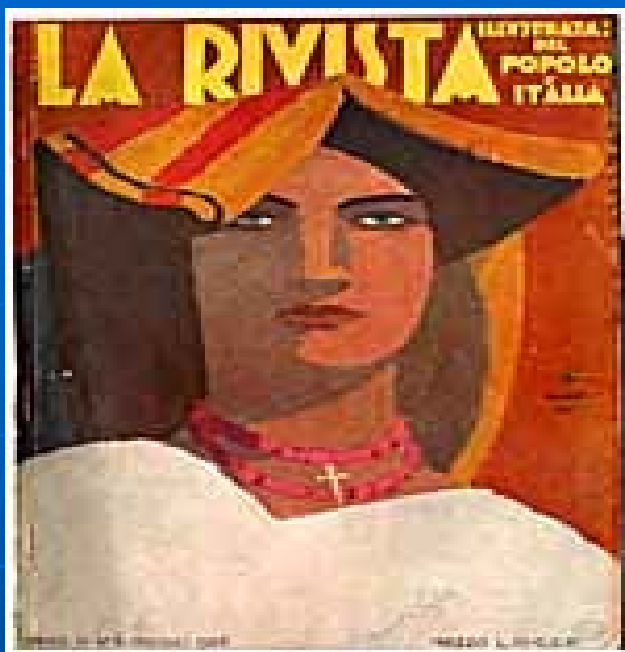
The Fascist Regime

- Evolving type
- Glorification of nation & leader
- Ostensible dispersion of power to 'independent' corporations running different segments of the economy
- Emphasis on resolving conflicts
- But use of terror to marginalize opponents

Fascist ideology

- State is absolute
- Glorification of authority
- Promises to workers, peasants, businessman
- Bottom line: opportunistic





- http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3ohjp_eur-fascist-architecture-suburb-of_travel

Putting Mussolini in context:

- Kingdom of Italy a state with low legitimacy
 - One more failed or failing state?
- Victor Emmanuel, upper & middle classes fearful
 - - Mussolini as a solution
 - Initially seen by some – intellectuals -- as better than what went before
 - Less so as regime unfolded
- Regime collapse & recourse to dictatorship a story which repeats frequently during this period
 - Hungary, Poland,
 - Spain (before & after civil war)
 - Germany