

## **The Reforms of Mussolini:**

### Situation in Italy had been, before Mussolini came to power:

1. Economically— Italian industry crippled by war debt (22% income of war, c/f France 14%, Britain 8%). 59% of merchant fleet also lost. Exacerbated traditional problem between European North and agrarian, Silician south. Allied aid had ceased in November 1918.
  2. Socially— Social cohesion was gone from Italy as a result of the war. In 1860 only 30% had spoken Italian, and since then there had been little improvement in education. 620,000 emigrated in 1920.
  3. Politically— There was limited nature of both Italian liberal democracy and instability of parliamentary majorities. Waves of strikes and demonstrations with 320 deaths from clashes with police, for example.
    - 6 Governments between 1919–22— none was tied to a stable source of power, eg. Church or Army, or masses.
- At first lack of any specific governmental or domestic policy. Instead set out to eliminate any potential opposition (which did control any potential political problems), through the Blackshirt squads.

### Economic Reforms:

- Italy had not had a steady economic climate since the Risorgimento of 1870. Mussolini provided the first elements of continuity in the Italian economy. Even by 1936 Italy's industrial capacity was only half that of France, one third of Germany and one quarter of Britain (Clark)
- Italians praise the fact that financial strength grew during Mussolini's rule, but Western economists & some historians claim that "in Italy, Mussolini's early years of rule coincided with a great upsurge in trade and output." (Overy) Thus, they claim, it was due to the goodwill of the West that the Italian economy grew during this time.
- Great Depression never really hit Italy:
  - Maintenance of Gold Standard until 1936.
  - Mussolini did not allow free exchange of currency— funds could not leave the country— Italy had no export industries, all were devoted to state production of arms and motorways and the effective development of the army and navy.
  - All industry and production was answerable to the government-founded commission on industry (*Instituto per la Reconstruzione Industriale*) (IRI). This was a non-fascist organisation, a compromise of the Fascists not taking over all state industry.
  - Compulsory mergers on small businesses in the same trade.
  - Wage controls stopped a price hike and made a chasm between wages and emerging prices. Also 'voluntary wage cuts'.
  - Various economic "battles"— which helped bring the economy into line with national expectations and needs:
    - By 1929 Italy self-sufficient in chemical production.
    - Steel production in 1929 2,122,000 tonnes compared to 982,000 in 1921.
    - Had to import iron due to lack of iron resources however.
- Agricultural reforms in general were a failure, eg. Italy between 1918-30 lost 18% of sheep, 20% of cattle and 23% of citrus/olives/vineyards.
- Cost of living fell, and autarky was achieved in many fields.
- However most economic policies were failures. There were:
  1. Chronic shortage of raw materials.
  2. Inefficient agriculture.

3. Lire valued far too high and lost exports.
  4. Real wages fell 10–20%.
  5. Welfare services were poor. No health insurance, inadequate unemployment payments.
  6. High corruption.
- It was only through the massive arming in 1938–9 and obligation to ally with Germany that the economy collapsed in 1939 on the eve of war.

#### Social/Political Reforms:

- Introduced “total employment”, in keeping with fascist ideology. Where there were no jobs, Mussolini created them through public works or other enterprises such as road-building (which doubled from 1929–33) or the car industry).
- Fascist Italy avoided political instability like Nazi Germany. Fascists had cemented their position through careful and great displays of fascist wealth and power through parades and festivals and had won the support of people through lowering the cost of living. Rearmament and empire drives had material benefits for the people.
  - People were encouraged to be proud of the regime.
- Rigorous use of censorship got rid of all social discontent:

Reports of crime, or suicide, or traffic accidents, disappeared from the newspapers. Nothing was allowed to disturb the national harmony.

- Traditional institutions and values remained as part of Fascism, eg. religion & family sentiment.
- Little was spent on modernising the army— when Italy declared war in 1940 there were antiquated 1891 rifles, WW1 artillery, lack of social equality, only 1000 planes and a shortage of fuel, and modern ships without oil resources or any reserves. There was total inadequacy in war preparation. Every campaign from the Balkans to North Africa which Italy took part in was lost, yet once Mussolini had fallen they Italian guerilla fighters were very dangerous and harassing to the German army in the North of Italy. Italy gave only the pretence of being a military state.
- No sufficient attempt was made to reorder the legal system. New penal code was written which was never enacted.
- There was no true effect on the social classes in Italy— the traditional distinctions continued to be shown. Many writings from the period highlight a lack of change.
- Eugenics— women given medals for large families.
- Impressive public works program— including motorways, bridges, housing flats, sports stadiums and schools.