

Fascism in Italy

1. The unification of Italy was only completed in 1870, however, the new state suffered from economic and political weaknesses.
2. The First World War (1914-18) was a great strain on her economy, and there was bitter disappointment at her treatment by the Versailles settlement.
3. Between 1919 and 1922 there were five different governments, all of which were incapable of taking the decisive action that the situation demanded.
4. In 1919 Benito Mussolini founded the Italian Fascist Party, which won 35 seats in the 1921 elections.
5. At the same time there seemed to be a real danger of a left-wing revolution; in an atmosphere of strikes and riots, the fascists staged a 'March on Rome' which culminated in King Victor Emmanuel inviting Mussolini to form a government (Oct., 1922); he remained in power until July 1943.
6. Gradually Mussolini took on the powers of a dictator and attempted to control the entire way of life of the Italian people.
7. At first it seemed as though his authoritarian regime might bring lasting benefits to Italy, and he won popularity with his adventurous and successful foreign policy. Later he made the fatal mistake of entering the Second World War on the side of Germany (June, 1940) even though he knew Italy could not afford involvement in another war.
8. After the Italians suffered defeats by the British, who captured her African possessions and occupied Sicily, they turned against Mussolini. He was deposed and arrested (July, 1943), but was rescued by the German (Sep., 1943) and set up as ruler in northern Italy, backed by German troops.
9. In April, 1945, as British and American troops advanced northwards through Italy towards Milan. Mussolini tried to escape to Switzerland but was captured and shot dead by his Italian enemies (known as partisans).