

KS3 History

Lesson 2 of an enquiry of 4 lessons.

Fascist support in the 1920s

Enquiry: Why did fascists gain support?

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Entering the First World War

In August 1914, the European countries went to war with one another. The Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy faced the Triple Entente of Britain, France and Russia. Although Italy was a member of the Triple Alliance, the government in Rome (the Italian capital city) claimed that Austria-Hungary had broken an earlier agreement. So the Italian government said they were not willing to join the war in support of the Triple Alliance. Following negotiations with Britain and France, the Italians signed the Treaty of London and entered the First World War in May 1915 in support of the Triple Entente. In return for Italian support, Britain and France had promised Italy that it would make **territorial gains** including the areas of Trentino, Trieste and Dalmatia if they won the war.



The impact of the First World War

During the war five million men served in the Italian army. They experienced appalling conditions, high casualties and little food or pay. Around 650,000 Italian men died during the conflict and a further one million men were seriously wounded. After three years of fighting, the war ended in victory for the Italians and an **armistice** was signed between Austria-Hungary and Italy in November 1918. The Italian government was hopeful that they would now receive the new territory they had been promised in 1915. However, these new lands did not all materialise. Although the Italians did receive some land, the British and French refused to hand over Dalmatia and did not give the Italians any of the German colonies in Africa. As a result the outcome of the war was referred to as a '**mutilated** victory' and the **nationalists** were angered that Italy had been humiliated.



Domestic problems

The First World War also caused large economic problems in Italy. The cost of the war had been huge and as a result the government's debt had increased to 85 billion **lire** in 1919. To resolve this problem, the government started printing money which caused **inflation**. This meant prices rose rapidly. People with savings, such as the middle classes, lost a lot of their wealth. Although some industries such as munitions and vehicle manufacturers did well during the war, their profits decreased after the war as fewer people wanted to buy these goods. As soldiers returned from the war, they found it difficult to find jobs in the struggling economy. As a result, by 1919, two million people were unemployed. Therefore the war had left Italy with severe domestic problems that were difficult to overcome.



Growth of fascist support

The problems caused by the war led to political divisions in Italy as people looked for a new beginning. The existing Liberal government had become extremely unpopular. The government was criticised for mishandling the war and the problems it caused. Many workers began to support the Socialist Party who were inspired by the Russian Revolution of 1917. The Socialists called for the overthrow of the Liberal government and for wealth to be shared. However, some people including students, wealthier peasants and **demobilised** soldiers turned to the Fascists to overcome their problems. By the end of 1921, the Fascist Party, led by Mussolini, had over 200,000 active supporters. Whilst the majority of its supporters were ex-soldiers, the Fascist Party also attracted the middle classes and the young who saw the Fascists as a positive contrast to the weak Liberal government and the dangerous Socialists.



Growth of fascist support

The Fascist Party appealed to ex-soldiers and the middle classes as it offered strong leadership under Mussolini and promised to restore Italy to greatness following the mutilated victory of World War One. The Fascists promised to restore the economy and increase productivity. The Fascists also declared their opposition to the socialists which helped them to gain the support of the middle classes and small farmers. Many Italians feared that the socialists would take away their wealth and land. During this period, local groups of active supporters formed **fasci** of fascist squads. These *fasci* appealed to ex-soldiers, workers and the middle classes who had a sense of insecurity during the economic problems of the 1920s. Whilst some of these groups truly believed in the fascist ideology, others joined the movement simply because they were looking for change.



Glossary

Armistice: an agreement to stop fighting that is made between two countries

Demobilised: released from the armed forces, often after a war

Fasci: a local branch of the Fascist Party in Italy

Inflation: a continuing increase in prices

Lire: a unit of money in Italy during the twentieth century



Glossary

Mutilated: severely or violently damaged, often with a missing part

Nationalist: a person who strongly believes their country is better than others

Territorial gains: to gain ownership of a particular area of land



Comprehension questions

1. When did Italy enter the First World War?
2. What had Britain and France promised the Italian government in return for their support?
3. What impact did the First World War have on Italy's economy?
4. Who began to support the fascists in the 1920s?
5. Challenge question - Why was the the outcome of World War One referred to as a 'mutilated victory'?



Why did the fascists gain support following World War One?

Sentence starters	Key words
<p><i>After World War One, the fascists gained more support in Italy.</i></p> <p><i>One reason why support for the fascists grew was...</i></p> <p><i>For example, ...</i></p> <p><i>Another reason why...</i></p>	<p><i>Nationalist</i></p> <p><i>Strong leadership</i></p> <p><i>Restore Italy to greatness</i></p> <p><i>Strengthen the economy</i></p> <p><i>Demobilised soldiers</i></p> <p><i>Middle classes</i></p>

