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# Lessons from History: The Startling Rise to Power of Benito Mussolini

EMILIO IODICE, ROME, ITALY



*Democracy is beautiful in theory; in practice it is a fallacy.*

*All within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state.*

*Yes, a dictator can be loved. Provided that the masses fear him at the same time. The crowd loves strong men. The crowd is like a woman.*

*If only we can give them faith that mountains can be moved, they will accept the illusion that mountains are moveable, and thus an illusion may become reality.*

*Italian journalism is free because it serves one cause and one purpose...mine!*

*Better to live a day as a lion than 100 years as a sheep.*  
– Benito Mussolini

*What a man! I have lost my heart! Fascism has rendered a service to the entire world...If I were Italian, I am sure I would have been with you entirely from the beginning of your victorious struggle against the bestial appetites and passion of Leninism.* – Winston Churchill

*Mussolini is a brilliant thinker whose philosophy, though unorthodox, flows out of the true European tradition. If he is a myth-maker, he is, like Plato's guardians, conscious*

*that "the noble lie" is a lie.* – Richard Crossman, British Member of Parliament

*(Mussolini) The greatest genius of the modern age.* – Thomas Edison

*To Benito Mussolini, from an old man who greets in the ruler, the "Hero of Culture."* – Sigmund Freud

*Unfortunately, I am no superman like Mussolini.* – Mahatma Gandhi

## The Rise to Power

*Democratic regimes may be defined as those in which, every now and then, the people are given the illusion of being sovereign, while the true sovereignty in actual fact resides in other forces which are sometimes irresponsible and secret.*

*We have buried the putrid corpse of liberty.*  
– Benito Mussolini



*Benito Mussolini, Prime Minister of the Republic of Italy, 1922,  
Courtesy of Klimbim*

## ***It Could Not Happen Here***

Thinkers and intellectuals claimed totalitarianism was impossible in a nation that was a symbol of western civilization. Yet revolution was in the air. It was a period of growing up anger and social discontent. Fear, economic and social insecurity, and a sense of helplessness drew a fanatical minority to aggressively follow a man who preached a new way that would snuff out the rules that weakened the country. They were tired of incompetent and dishonest politicians who failed to keep promises and failed to govern effectively and courageously.

Doubts came about the ability of freedom to solve the country's problems. Foreign conflicts exhausted the Republic in more ways than one. The economy was weak; millions were searching for meaningful work, and millions more were seeking an ideology to live by that was not rooted in the policies and practices of the extreme left. Patriotism was being transformed into nationalism.

A strong sense of "US" against "THEM" was rising in the heart of the electorate. Prejudice grew against foreigners and all things alien to the society. The elites no longer influenced events. The establishment sought a savior to preserve and magnify their power and wealth. The press was vilified, coerced and then controlled. Even so, many believed that the country's institutions and leaders would resist the tidal wave that was to strike at the very heart of the Republic. They were wrong.

The arrogance, cunning and audaciousness of one man, and his supporters, would bring about a style of leadership that was the fruit of pride, insecurity, corruption, ignorance, tyranny and bigotry. The ruling classes and the people ultimately put their faith and fate in hands of a man who promised *to make his country great again*.

Less than a century ago he skyrocketed to the highest office in his land and literally swept away the liberties his people fought for in their battle to be united and free. He was 39 years old. He was the youngest Prime Minister in his nation's history. He would call himself "Il Duce," the leader. He would create the *New Testament* for modern dictatorships. For twenty years he would rule his country with cunning, fanfare, vigor, might, violence, audaciousness, and most of all, fear. Only war would bring an end to his regime. His fame would circle the globe and be forever synonymous with tyrannical rule.

His name was Benito Mussolini.

## **Creation of the Fascist Party**

*Fascism is a religion. The twentieth century will be known in history as the century of Fascism...Believe, obey, and fight.*

– Benito Mussolini



*Symbol of the National Fascist Party with the Roman "Fasces" representing unity, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

*For us Fascists, what is important is not to live long but to live with dignity.*

– Fernando Mezzasoma, Minister of Public Culture

By 1919, Benito Mussolini had been through numerous experiences as a teacher, a reporter, and Socialist Party official, soldier, and war veteran. He was 35. He had failed at nearly every endeavor. He was not a successful journalist or party loyalist. He ran for office and lost. His violent temper, endless energy, ego and lack of discipline drove him in various directions simultaneously. He changed his mind and political views from a pacifist to an interventionist; from a



*Benito Mussolini, 1919, Courtesy Biografiaonline and Istituto Luce*

socialist to a right-wing opportunist. Despite his failures, he would not give up. He moved to prepare himself for events to turn in his favor.

Mussolini formed his own newspaper and a new party composed of angry war veterans, students and former union members. They were anxious to reform Italy with a new philosophy based on a sense of pride and extreme nationalism all under the banner of Fascism. Benito Mussolini was their founder and leader.

Fascists agitated against the left in streets and neighborhoods across Italy. Socialist offices, institutions, and Party newspaper headquarters were attacked and burned. Militias organized throughout the country in anti-Bolshevik crusades, breaking up strikes, and fighting labor unions and farmer coops. The Fascist squads, dressed in black shirts and uniforms, were supported by the local police, landowners, merchants, and industrialists. They used violence to destroy any organization they felt could be in opposition to the doctrine of Fascism.



*Fascist Militia, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

“Thousands of people were beaten, killed, or forced to drink castor oil and run out of town. Hundreds of union offices, employment centers, and party newspapers were looted or burnt down. In October 1920, after the election of a left administration in Bologna, Fascists invaded the council chamber, causing mayhem and nine deaths. The council was suspended by the government. Later, Socialist and Catholic deputies were run out of parliament or had their houses destroyed. The *biennio nero* (“two black years”; 1921–22) destroyed opposition to the Fascists. Union organizations were crushed. The Federterra (farmer’s coop) shrank from some one million members to fewer than 6,000 in less than five years. Unable to defend basic democratic rights or to prevent the criminal activities of a private militia that operated openly and nationwide, the state had lost all credibility.”<sup>1</sup>

Within two years, the Fascist militia of “Black Shirts,” as they were now called, controlled areas throughout Italy. Leaders became local bosses and built power bases backed by land owners



*The Honorable Benito Mussolini, Member of Parliament, 1921, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

and members of the urban middle class as well as clerical workers and shopkeepers. The Fascists garnered support from those seeking law and order and the preservation of local and national values. With his following growing, Mussolini waited for his opportunity to enter the arena of power.

His moment arrived in 1921.

## **Election to Parliament**

*For my part I prefer fifty thousand rifles to fifty thousand votes. – Benito Mussolini*

Mussolini’s impoverished upbringing as the son of a socialist blacksmith from the small town of Predappio in northern Italy; his education as a teacher and his philosophical roots based on the writings of Nietzsche, Sorel, and Max Stirner prepared him to lead

<sup>1</sup> H. Roger Violet, Encyclopedia.com 2016.

with force, vigor and if need be, violence. He hungered for power. Mussolini campaigned vigorously in the parliamentary elections of 1921. He won a seat and headed up a group of 35 Fascist deputies. He now had a party and a platform and a voice in Italian politics. His following grew to over 250,000.<sup>2</sup>

The Fascists organized their own strategic groups so they could broaden and deepen their popular base. Trade unions were formed with postal workers, taxi drivers, and other parts of the labor community to replace Catholic and Socialist associations and increase Fascist Party membership. Mussolini had successfully organized a movement that spread to nearly every corner of Italy. Now he saw his opportunity to seize control.

## The March on Rome

*“Either the Government will be given to us or we shall seize it by marching on Rome.”*

– Benito Mussolini

After entering the Parliament, Mussolini began planning his next move. First, he formally established the National Fascist Party which boasted 320,000 members. “On 24 October 1922, Mussolini declared before 60,000 people at the Fascist Congress in Naples: ‘Our program is simple: we want to rule Italy.’”<sup>3</sup> As he spoke, Black Shirts were occupying the Po plain near Milan and major points of the country. They were organizing by the thousands to march on the Eternal City to take control of the government.



*King Victor Emanuel III, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

Two days after Mussolini’s speech in Naples, the former Prime Minister, Antonio Salandra warned the then Prime Minister Luigi Facta of Mussolini’s plans to descend on the capital with thousands of Black Shirts to demand his resignation and be appointed head of the government. Facta asked King Victor Emmanuel III permission to suppress the Fascist uprising. The King refused.

The King was afraid that any attempt to stop the Fascists could lead to civil war. Victor Emanuel was also concerned with the growth of communism which was opposed to the monarchy and had little respect for democratic and religious principles.<sup>4</sup> He believed Mussolini could fight the trend toward the extreme left and bring law and order where other governments had failed. Mussolini also had the support of the establishment including major industrialists and key political leaders. They believed that once in power they could control Mussolini and set the direction of his policies and programs. They were wrong.<sup>5</sup>



*Mussolini with his Fascist leaders during the March on Rome, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

<sup>2</sup> Encyclopedia of World Biography, the Gale Group, Benito Mussolini, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Ludwig Carsten (1982). *The Rise of Fascism*. University of California Press, p.62.

<sup>4</sup> Carsten (1982), p. 64.

<sup>5</sup> Renzo De Felice, Historian, explained that the monarchy had a nationalist tendency and was concerned about its future. See: *Mussolini il fascista - La conquista del potere* cit., 365-66.



*Fascists on the March to Rome, October 22, 1922, Courtesy Corriere Della Sera*



*"Rome or Death," Black Shirts marching to the capital October 28th, 1922, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

On October 28, 1922, Mussolini executed his plan. Each step was managed and choreographed for effect. He wanted to show the country that he and his Black Shirts were an organized force that respected the law contrary to the dangerous and destabilizing actions of the Communists and Socialists.

As hordes of Militia marched, rode and flowed from large cities, hamlets and towns from all parts of Italy, Il Duce made sure that photographers and reporters were there to see him and hear him speak about the imminent danger to peace and stability in Italy and how only he could bring security and safety.<sup>6</sup> In actuality, he remained in Milan while his followers took to the roads of Italy on their way to Rome.

Over 30,000 Black Shirts entered the walls of Rome and occupied various parts of the city. (Mussolini would claim it was 300,000) The Fascists met no resistance from the authorities. Il Duce remained in Milan waiting anxiously for the King to make the next move. The key ruling groups supported Mussolini. The military, church, business, agriculture and the monarchy saw their positions threatened by the chaos and revolutionary actions of the extreme left.

His solution was to use squads of black shirted young men to restore law and order throughout Italy and suppress the labor movement by attacking workers and stopping strikes. At the same time, he was concerned that his plans could run afoul. He worried that the army would be called out to stop the Fascist advance on the capital and he could be arrested for insurrection.

Instead, a few minutes passed midnight on October 28, 1922, Mussolini dream of power and glory come true. A telegram arrived. It read: *"His majesty, the King, has asked me to invite you to Rome with his desire to consult with you. Best wishes, General Cittadini, Assistant to His Highness, Victor Emmanuel III, King of Italy"*<sup>7</sup>



*Benito Mussolini greets King Victor Emmanuel III to become Prime Minister of Italy, October 30, 1922, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Farrell, *Mussolini: A New Life*. London: Phoenix Press, 2003, pp. 154-155.

<sup>7</sup> Europinion.it <http://www.europinione.it/mussolini-lincarico-di-governo-e-il-protocollo-di-corte/>.

## Prime Minister of Italy

Benito Mussolini rushed to Rome to meet his destiny. His train left the station of Milan at 8:00 p.m., on the night of October 29, only to arrive in Rome at 11:30 a.m. the next day. The 15-hour journey consisted of innumerable stops to greet thousands of Fascist well-wishers. At 11:45 a.m., he was received by the King. His meeting was cordial as Victor Emmanuel conferred on him the responsibility to form a new government.<sup>8</sup>



*Mussolini departing the Parliament after meeting the heads of the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, October 30th, 1922, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

That afternoon he went to work. He met with the leaders of the Senate and Chamber of Deputies and promised to create a government of unity. In two days he formed a cabinet and presented it to the King. The March on Rome was over and Benito

Mussolini was the new Prime Minister of Italy, **17 months after winning his first election.**



*Mussolini speaking before the Parliament, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

## First Speech as Prime Minister

Two weeks later, on November 16, 1922, Mussolini came before the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate to present his list of ministers. The setting was dramatic. The gallery was packed with journalists and spectators, especially Black Shirts. The great hall was filled with Italy's major political officials.

Mussolini had derided the nation's key elected leaders.

He accused them of being old and hard of hearing because most of them were elderly.<sup>9</sup>

He rose dramatically to the podium. He spoke with a rhythmic flow of carefully pronounced words that seemed like flaming arrows fired at his audience. It would be his iconic style of oratory. He would use it to hypnotize and frighten the masses. He did not look at the assembly before him. Mussolini spoke arrogantly with a dry, cold, and threatening voice. His words were brutal, menacing and ominous:<sup>10</sup>

“With 300,000 armed men, determined to carry out my orders, I could have punished those who have vilified and tarnished Fascism. I could make this *deaf and grey hall* filled exclusively with Fascists. I could. But I have not...*at least not for now.*”

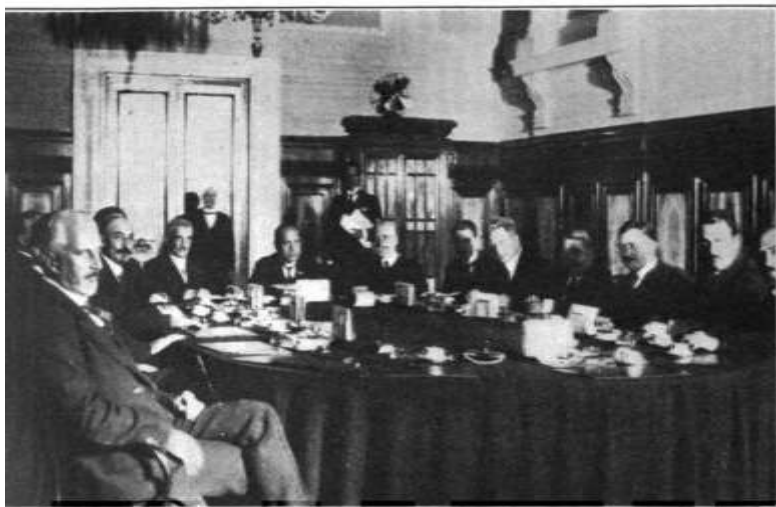
<sup>8</sup> Ibid, Europinion.it, December 29, 2013, by Lorenzo.

<sup>9</sup> Fedel Giorgio (1978). Per Uno Studio Del Linguaggio Di Mussolini, *Il Politico*, 43(3), pp. 467–495.

<sup>10</sup> Il “duro linguaggio” di Mussolini alla Camera, su [archiviola stampa.it](http://archiviola stampa.it).

He pledged a Fascist organized state to assure law and order and to strengthen the army and navy. He ended his speech by invoking the Almighty: “May God assist me in the successful completion of my arduous toil.”

LA PRIMA RIUNIONE DEL CONSIGLIO DEI MINISTRI



Da sinistra a destra: Federzoni, Gentile, De Capitani, Mussolini, Di Rovati, Acerbo, De Stefani, Rossi, Cavazzoni, Ottolenghi, Giolitti

*Mussolini's Cabinet and the first meeting of the Council of Ministers, 1922, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

bourgeoisie. Mussolini's capture of power was classic: he was the right national leader at the right historical moment.”<sup>13</sup>

## The New Government

*“No one understands him, (Mussolini). By turns shrewd and innocent, brutal and gentle, vindictive and forgiving, great and petty, he is the most contradictory man I have ever known. He cannot be explained.*

– Fernando Mezzasoma, Fascist Leader and Minister of Public Culture

“World War I left the Italian economy in chaos – runaway spending, high taxes, budget deficits, war debts, inflation and unemployment. Mussolini recognized that he probably wouldn't be able to retain power very long if the chaos continued. Lenin's communism ruined what was left of the Russian economy, so Mussolini didn't want to go down that road. Mussolini appointed Alberto De' Stefani, a man with free market economic views, as his Minister of Finance. De' Stefani simplified the tax code, cut taxes, curbed spending, liberalized trade restrictions and abolished rent controls. These policies provided a powerful stimulus. Between 1921 and 1925, the Italian economy grew more than 20 percent. Unemployment fell 77 percent.”<sup>14</sup>



*Mussolini on the cover of Time Magazine, August 6, 1923, Courtesy Time/Life*

<sup>11</sup> Remigio Izzo (2010). “Mussolini: duce si diventa,” *Gherardo Casini Editore*, Rome, ISBN 9788864100142, p.107.

<sup>12</sup> Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista - La conquista del potere* cit., pp. 528-534.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, Encyclopedia of Biography

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, Powell



The new Prime Minister moved with lightning speed to amass power in light of the severe economic and social situation. In a matter of months Mussolini managed to publicly institutionalize the National Fascist Party, the Fascist Grand Council and the Voluntary Militia for Public Security composed of Fascist “squadristi.” They would also serve as his personal army.



*Fascist Squadristi, 1923, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

By the middle of 1923, he passed the Acerbo Law that granted a two thirds majority of the seats in the Parliament to the party that gained over 25% of the votes. The new electoral law

was organized for the election of 1924. If successful, Mussolini would have a strong majority to support his plans. King Victor Emmanuel supported his moves in an effort to deal with the difficult economic and social challenges facing Italy.

Mussolini had the King issue a royal decree to institute the first form of welfare to help the poor and to provide government assistance to orphans and abandoned children. He also handled several foreign policy issues that gave him extensive popular notoriety and came to agreement with the Confederation of Industry to begin active state intervention in the economy.<sup>15</sup> At the start of 1924, he signed a treaty with Yugoslavia recognizing Italy’s territorial claims to the city of Fiume which bordered Yugoslavia in the northeast of Italy. He formally opened diplomatic relations with Russia. In the same year he signed a territorial arrangement with the United Kingdom recognizing Italian claims in Somalia.

## **Elections of 1924**

*Sometimes it is said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself. Can he then be trusted with the government of others? Or have we found angels in the form of kings to govern him? Let history answer this question. – Thomas Jefferson*

*If the people cannot trust their government to do the job for which it exists – to protect them and to promote their common welfare all else is lost. – Barack Obama*

*We do not argue with those who disagree with us, we destroy them. – Benito Mussolini*

In April, 1924, new parliamentary elections were held. The voting occurred in a climate of violence, voter fraud, and intimidation, despite Mussolini’s appeals to his Party to the contrary.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, he encouraged getting out the vote and vigorous campaigning and rallies by the Fascists to gain popular support. The final result was beyond his expectations.<sup>17</sup> The National Fascist Party, and its allies, won 275 out of 375 seats giving Mussolini a solid majority. With the new electoral law, he now had 65% of the votes in the new Parliament.

<sup>15</sup> Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista - La conquista del potere* cit., pp. 557-570.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, De Felice, pp. 406-07, 440-44, 481, 584.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, De Felice p. 563



Giacomo Matteotti, 1924,  
Courtesy Istituto Luce

One parliamentarian, Socialist Giacomo Matteotti, denounced Mussolini and his Party for the hostilities and illegalities committed during the campaign. On May 30, Matteotti courageously rose to speak in the Parliament. Amidst threatening jeers and shouts from the Fascists, he listed Mussolini and his loyalists' crimes against democracy and the Italian Constitution including rigging the election, corruption, terrorizing the electorate. He also accused Mussolini of selling out to a foreign oil company to allow drilling off the Italian coast. Matteotti demanded that the election be nullified. He shouted, "Kill me but not the ideas within me...My speech is ended. Now prepare your speech for my funeral."<sup>18</sup> Matteotti knew his fate was sealed.

Less than a month later, Giacomo Matteotti was kidnapped and murdered. Three Fascist militants were arrested, convicted, and sentenced to six years in prison. Mussolini was not implicated but was accused by the opposition of engineering the crime.<sup>19</sup> Even though he may not have ordered the murder, it was clear that Mussolini and his henchmen created an atmosphere of fanaticism and violence that led to it being committed.



Funeral of Giacomo Matteotti, June, 1924, Courtesy Istituto Luce

In the weeks following the assassination of Matteotti, many members of the Fascist Party renounced their membership and some demanded the resignation of Mussolini. They challenged his ability to govern and control events. Mussolini's political life was on the line. In response, Il Duce confronted his accusers in the Party and assured them of his devotion to the principles of the Fascist revolution.

The ferocious accusations of the opposition and the press gave him an unexpected opportunity. On January 3, 1925 he spoke before the Chamber of Deputies. The murder of Matteotti had created a grave political crisis that had to be confronted. He insisted on his innocence in the Matteotti affair yet accepted the political and moral and historic responsibility of what transpired. He dared anyone to show proof of his involvement or that of his government. With his speech, Mussolini re-established his control over the Fascist Party and his control over the affairs of the nation.<sup>20</sup> The speech also put an end to democracy in Italy. "I alone assume political, moral, and historical responsibility for all that has happened." Mussolini told Parliament. "If Fascism has been a criminal association, then I am the chief of that criminal association..."<sup>21</sup>

The next day he ordered the Prefects in every Italian city to suppress manifestations, in particular, from "communists and subversives." He instituted control of the press through censorship to deal with the political emergency facing the nation. Orders went out to Fascist

<sup>18</sup> Beppe Giuletta, Giacomo Matteotti: 'Uccidete me, non le idee che sono in me,' 10 giugno 2014, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/06/10/giacomo-matteotti-uccidete-me-non-ucciderete-le-idee-che-sono-in-me/1021581/>.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, De Felice, p. 620.

<sup>20</sup> The January 3rd speech marked the beginning of the Fascist Dictatorship according to Mussolini in: History of a Year: The Time of the Carrot and the Stick, Mondadori, 1944, p. 175 (in *Opera Omnia*, vol. XXXIV, and p. 411).

<sup>21</sup> Ruth Ben-Ghiat, An American Authoritarian, *The Atlantic*, August 10, 2016.

leaders to prohibit disorderly actions on the part of militants.<sup>22</sup> Police officers closed opposition newspapers and arrested 111 “dangerous subversives.”<sup>23</sup>



Prime Minister Benito Mussolini in his office in Palazzo Venezia 1925, Courtesy Istituto Luce

*Power tends to corrupt and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely.*

– Lord Acton

*It is true you cannot eat freedom and you cannot power machinery with democracy. But then neither can political prisoners turn on the light in the cells of a dictatorship.*

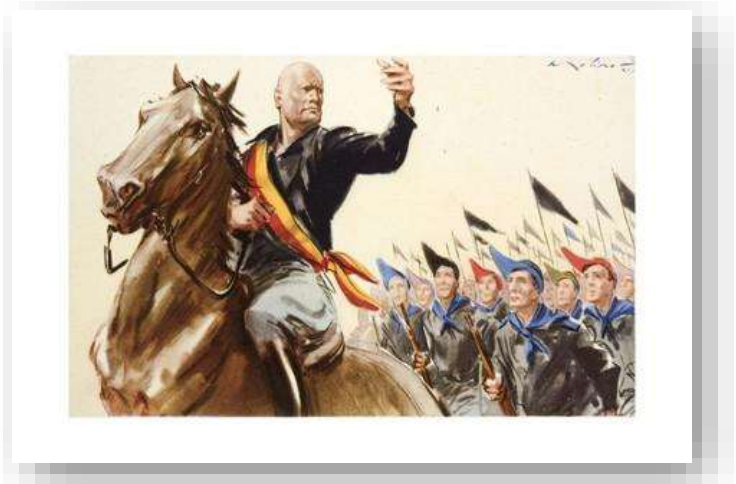
– Corazon Aquino

Mussolini’s allies from other political parties that formed part of his government resigned in protest. He immediately substituted them with Fascists.

## Dictatorship

*If I advance, follow me. If I fail, kill me. If I die, avenge me.*

– Benito Mussolini



Mussolini as the Image of “Il Duce” (The Leader) and his followers, photo credit, all posters.co.uk

Mussolini moved rapidly to establish a police state to control every aspect of Italian life. He dismantled constitutional guarantees of oversight by the Parliament. The Senate was empowered to appoint Italian Fascist leaders to head up municipalities replacing mayors and city councils.

On Christmas Eve, 1925, he formally changed his title from President of the Council of Ministers to Head of the Government. He was now responsible only to the King. *Twenty-six months after becoming Prime Minister, Benito Mussolini was now the*



Fascist Party Headquarters in Rome, Courtesy Istituto Luce

*dictator of Italy.*

Four months later, the first of several assassination attempts were made on Mussolini. Violet Gibson tried to shoot him on his way to an event. Mussolini later dropped the charges against her and she was deported to Ireland where she died in an insane



Grand Council of Fascism, presided over by Mussolini, Courtesy Istituto Luce

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, De Felice, pp. 722-23.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, De Felice, p. 726.

asylum. Gino Lucetti threw a bomb at Il Duce's car in September, 1926, resulting in several injuries but none to Mussolini. The following month, Anteo Zamboni attempted to kill him and failed. He was lynched by a mob. Five years later, a naturalized American citizen, Michele Schirru, who was born in Sardinia, plotted to kill Mussolini and was arrested. He was sentenced to death and executed.<sup>24</sup>

The assassination attempt by Zamboni in 1926 gave Mussolini the opening to outlaw all political parties. He held parliamentary elections with a single list of Fascist candidates prepared by the Grand Council of Fascism, which was now the highest constitutional authority in the state. In theory, they could remove Mussolini from office but only he could convene them and determine their agenda.



*Mahatma Gandhi meets members of the Opera Nazionale Balilla, an Italian Fascist youth organization in Italy, December 15, 1931, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

From 1926 to 1929 Mussolini worked to consolidate his hold on Italy by enacting a series of Fascist laws that concentrated more power into the hands of the regime including launching a program of Fascist indoctrination of youth beginning in elementary school.

Mussolini set up secret police and an intelligence network that permeated nearly all parts of Italian society in an effort to suppress opposition to the regime.



*Benito Mussolini, Head of the Government and Head of the Fascist Party, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

Under the Act for the Enforcement of Public Security of 1926, thousands of political opponents were arrested and convicted on vague charges. They were imprisoned or sent into exile on remote islands where they were interned and deprived of all liberties. They were often subjected to cruel treatment and inhuman punishment both physically and psychologically by their jailers. Many never returned home.<sup>25</sup>

The death penalty also returned to Italy.

## **Elements of Mussolini's Dictatorship**

*Fascist education is moral, physical, social, and military: it aims to create a complete and harmoniously developed human. – Benito Mussolini*

*The true essence of a dictatorship is in fact not its regularity but its unpredictability and caprice; those who live under it must never be able to relax, must never be quite sure if they have followed the rules correctly or not. – Christopher Hitchens, Hitch-22: A Memoir*

*Dictatorship, by whatever name, is founded on the doctrine that the individual amounts to nothing; that the State is the only one that counts; and that men and women and children were put on earth solely for the purpose of serving the state. – Harry Truman*

<sup>24</sup> Melchior Seele (11 September 2006). "1931: The murder of Michael Schirru." Libcom.org. Archived from the original on 22 January 2009. Retrieved 13 March 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Nathan Cantor, Fascist Political Prisoners, 1936, *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 27(2), Article 2, <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://it.search.yahoo.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2629&context=jclc>.

*We always have to blame our failures on somebody else, and dictatorships always need an external enemy to bind their followers together. As the man said, for every complex problem there's a simple solution, and it's wrong.* – Umberto Eco, Foucault's Pendulum

Mussolini constructed the machinery of a modern dictatorship. Each piece fit into a grand scheme of command, control, and indoctrination. The parts were like the wheels of a clock, turning and functioning in unison. The Doctrine of Fascism became the bible of tyrants and the mechanism of an authoritarian regime.

Dr. Lawrence Brit studied Fascism in great depth and developed 14 elements which were the key characteristics of Mussolini's regime. They were also adopted by other totalitarian leaders:<sup>26</sup>

**1. "Powerful and Continuing Nationalism**

Fascist regimes tend to make constant use of patriotic mottos, slogans, symbols, songs, and other paraphernalia. Flags are seen everywhere, as are flag symbols on clothing and in public displays.

**2. Disdain for the Recognition of Human Rights**

Because of fear of enemies and the need for security, the people in Fascist regimes are persuaded that human rights can be ignored in certain cases because of "need." The people tend to look the other way or even approve of torture, summary executions, assassinations, long incarcerations of prisoners, etc.

**3. Identification of Enemies/Scapegoats as a Unifying Cause**

The people are rallied into a unifying patriotic frenzy over the need to eliminate a perceived common threat or foe: racial, ethnic, or religious minorities; liberals; communists; socialists, terrorists, etc.

**4. Supremacy of the Military**

Even when there are widespread domestic problems, the military is given a disproportionate amount of government funding, and the domestic agenda is neglected. Soldiers and military service are glamorized.

**5. Rampant Sexism**

The governments of Fascist nations tend to be almost exclusively male-dominated. Under Fascist regimes, traditional gender roles are made more rigid. Opposition to abortion is high, as is homophobia and anti-gay legislation and national policy.

**6. Controlled Mass Media**

Sometimes the media is directly controlled by the government, but in other cases, the media is indirectly controlled by government regulation, or sympathetic media spokespeople and executives. Censorship, especially in war time, is very common.

**7. Obsession with National Security**

Fear is used as a motivational tool by the government over the masses.

**8. Religion and Government are Intertwined**

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<sup>26</sup> Lawrence Brit, The 14 Characteristics of Fascism, *Free Inquiry*, Spring, 2003, <https://ratical.org/ratville/CAH/fasci14chars.html>. Dr. Brit also studied the fascist regimes of Hitler (Germany), Franco (Spain), Suharto (Indonesia), and Pinochet (Chile), as well as that of Mussolini (Italy), Dr. Brit found they all had 14 elements in common. He calls these the identifying characteristics of fascism. The excerpt is in accordance with the magazine's policy. ("Fascism Anyone?" *Free Inquiry*, Spring 2003, p. 20).

Governments in Fascist nations tend to use the most common religion in the nation as a tool to manipulate public opinion. Religious rhetoric and terminology is common from government leaders, even when the major tenets of the religion are diametrically opposed to the government's policies or actions.

#### **9. Corporate Power is Protected**

The industrial and business aristocracy of a Fascist nation often are the ones who put the government leaders into power, creating a mutually beneficial business/government relationship and power elite.

#### **10. Labor Power is Suppressed**

Because the organizing power of labor is the only real threat to a Fascist government, labor unions are either eliminated entirely, or are severely suppressed.

#### **11. Disdain for Intellectuals and the Arts**

Fascist nations tend to promote and tolerate open hostility to higher education, and academia. It is not uncommon for professors and other academics to be censored or even arrested. Free expression in the arts is openly attacked, and governments often refuse to fund the arts.

#### **12. Obsession with Crime and Punishment**

Under Fascist regimes, the police are given almost limitless power to enforce laws. The people are often willing to overlook police abuses and even forego civil liberties in the name of patriotism. There is often a national police force with virtually unlimited power in Fascist nations.

#### **13. Rampant Cronyism and Corruption**

Fascist regimes almost always are governed by groups of friends and associates who appoint each other to government positions and use governmental power and authority to protect their friends from accountability. It is not uncommon in Fascist regimes for national resources and even treasures to be appropriated or even outright stolen by government leaders.

#### **14. Fraudulent Elections**

Sometimes elections in Fascist nations are a complete sham. Other times elections are manipulated by smear campaigns against or even assassination of opposition candidates, use of legislation to control voting numbers or political district boundaries, and manipulation of the media. Fascist nations also typically use their judiciaries to manipulate or control elections."<sup>27</sup>

### **Organizational Innovations**

In his 2015 book, *Out of Ashes: A new history of Europe in the 20th century*, Konrad Jarausch explained Mussolini's impact on Europe:<sup>28</sup>

*First, he went beyond the vague promise of future national renewal and proved the movement could actually seize power and operate a comprehensive government in a major country along fascist lines. Second, the movement claimed to represent the entire national community, not a fragment such as the working class or the aristocracy. He made a significant effort to include the previously alienated Catholic element. He defined public roles for the main sectors of the business community rather than allowing it to operate backstage. Third, he developed a cult of one-man leadership that focused media attention and national debate on his own personality. As a former journalist, Mussolini proved highly*

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, Brit.

<sup>28</sup> Konrad Jarausch, *Out of Ashes: A new history of Europe in the 20th century* (2015), pp. 179-80.

*adept at exploiting all forms of mass media, including such new forms as motion pictures and radio. Fourth, he created a mass membership party, with free programs for young men, young women, and various other groups who could therefore be more readily mobilized and monitored. He shut down all alternative political formations and parties (but this step was not an innovation by any means). Like all dictators he made liberal use of the threat of extrajudicial violence, as well as actual violence by his Black Shirts, to frighten his opposition.*

He eliminated local elections and abolished the right to strike. He allowed collective bargaining agreements only as sanctioned by the state. Mussolini created the Ministry of Corporations to oversee economic and industrial activity. He named himself as its first Minister. It was during this period that the Italian Lire was heavily devalued which was contrary to Mussolini's policies. He wanted a strong Lire as a sign of prestige despite conditions of austerity imposed by his regime.<sup>29</sup> (To set an example, Mussolini never took a salary which later affected the livelihood of his widow who was denied a pension because he had never received a government paycheck.)



*Mussolini signing the Lateran Treaty with Cardinal Gasparri on behalf of Pope Pius XI, February 11, 1929, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

In 1926, Mussolini began negotiations for an agreement he would consider a major achievement. Three years later, the Lateran Treaty was signed formalizing relations between the Holy See and the Kingdom of Italy. It recognized the new State of Vatican City and provided for financial terms for the Catholic Church as compensation for lands lost during the unification of Italy. The Church was exempted from taxation. The pact was an important political move on the part of Mussolini. He used it as propaganda coup to garner popular support from a nation that was over 90% Roman Catholic.



*Arresting of Mafia leaders in Sicily, 1926, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

### **Attack on the Mafia**

Mussolini was determined to eradicate the Mafia from Sicily and have complete political and social control of the island. In October, 1925, he appointed Cesare Mori, Prefect of

Palermo with special powers to eliminate organized crime. He wrote to Mori:

“Your Excellency has *carte blanche*, the authority of the State must absolutely, I repeat absolutely, be re-established in Sicily. Should the laws currently in effect hinder you that will be no problem, we shall make new laws.”<sup>30</sup> Mori conducted 11,000 arrests and thousands of convictions including some for life imprisonment. The murder rate dropped dramatically in Sicily and Mafia leaders were either sent to jail or escaped abroad.

<sup>29</sup> Denis Mack Smith, Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, Rizzoli, ISBN 978-88-17-11537-7, p 281.

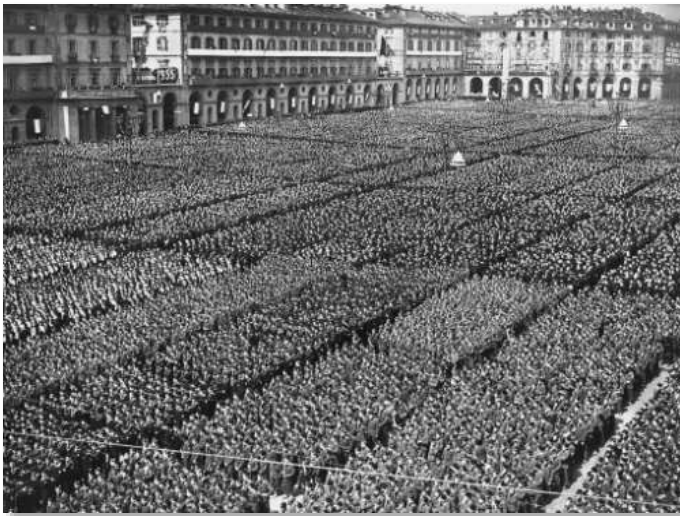
<sup>30</sup> Arrigo Petacco, (2004). *L'uomo della provvidenza: Mussolini, ascesa e caduta di un mito*, Milan: Mondadori.

He was relieved for his duties in 1929, when he discovered that Sicilian political leaders were supporting organized crime. Even so, the heart of the Mafia had been weakened and remained as long as the Il Duce was in power.

The Mafia re-emerged after World War II with the fall of Fascism. One reason for the return was the economic and social conditions that led to the growth of organized crime in the first place which were never fully addressed by Mussolini's regime.<sup>31</sup>

## The Spell Binder

Mussolini was an accomplished orator. He used his ability to sway the masses to exemplify his power and to keep his supporters enthusiastic and united. In an article entitled, *Benito Mussolini, Crowd Psychologist*, Dr. Frank Lezzi wrote:



A rally where Mussolini was scheduled to speak, Courtesy Istituto Luce  
Two examples of his style can be found in these YouTube clips:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zizi3rS85f8>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hpn9iPLbNDc>



Mussolini addressing a crowd in Piazza Venezia, Courtesy Istituto Luce

*In the annals of recorded history, there are few examples of rulers who relied as much on the art of oratory to achieve and to maintain control of their countries as Benito Mussolini. Mussolini was the first ruler in history to have at his disposal and to take full advantage of the loudspeaker electrically to amplify his voice. As a result, on occasion Mussolini was heard by mass audiences estimated at more than 400,000 people...Mussolini was thoroughly confident about his ability to move the masses emotionally, almost at will.<sup>32</sup>*

## The Cult of IL Duce

*The Fascist accepts life and loves it, knowing nothing of and despising suicide; he rather conceives of life as duty and struggle and conquest, life, which should be high and full, lived for oneself, but not, above all, for others – those who are at hand, and those who are far distant, contemporaries, and those who will come after. – Benito Mussolini*

The Fascists created a personal aura around Mussolini that penetrated deep and wide into Italian society and in some cases reached abroad. Examples come from diaries of Italians during the time of the regime. They express feelings of loyalty, trust, admiration, and even affection for Il Duce. “Of course, assessing the level or nature of ‘support’ for a totalitarian

<sup>31</sup> *The Mafia and Politics*. Archived 2009-01-04 at the Wayback Machine, by Judith Chubb, Cornell Studies in International Affairs, Occasional Papers No. 23, 1989.

<sup>32</sup> Frank Iezzi, Benito Mussolini, Crowd Psychologist, *Journal of Oratory*, August 18, 2009, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00335635909385735?journalCode=rqjs20>.



regime is notoriously difficult. With opposition forces crushed and dissent often punished, finding reliable evidence of popular opinion is very difficult. Letters can provide some information...They too present difficulties with interpretation, as diarists did not necessarily set out simply to record their unalloyed thoughts and feelings. But they offer a better chance of seeing how ordinary people viewed Fascism than most other available sources.”<sup>33</sup> The National Diary Archive in Pieve Santo Stefano, Tuscany has collected hundreds of diaries of ordinary people during the Fascist period. They were literate and often times well-educated and articulate.<sup>34</sup>



*Il Duce cast an image of a strong, man who could drive and even fly a plane, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

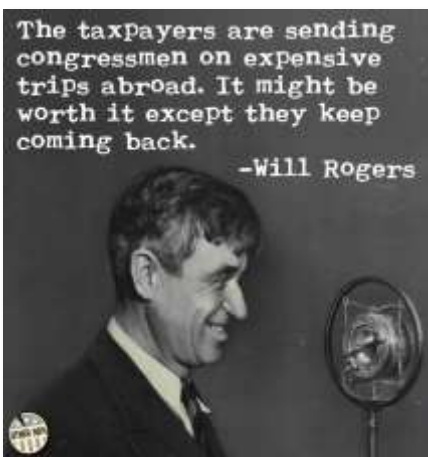
For example, these were the thoughts of a soldier from Sicily who went to hear Mussolini speak in Rome:

*Without the Fascist revolution... Italy would have fallen prey to Bolshevism, anarchy, bankruptcy, poverty – and we would have become the laughing-stock and joke of the other nations, worse than we were before the war.*

A woman in Genoa heard one of Il Duce’s radio addresses in 1938 and had this impression:

*My Duce, for a long time you have been talking of coming to Genoa... And I have such a desire to see you even if only at a distance and confirm that you are not a myth, but a man, and hear for once your passionate words not through the radio but from your lips. I am waiting for you soon, my Duce...*

“The diary of a young Tuscan woman, who confessed that the Duce made her ‘tremble with excitement’ (‘I only need to hear his words to be transported in heart and soul into a world of joy and greatness’), shows well the reverence that many Italians accorded Mussolini. In August 1939 she wrote:



*Will Rogers, Courtesy the Spiders den, and Will Rogers Quotes*

*O Duce, Duce of our life, commander of an entire people, everyone places their love in you, everyone hopes in you...Thank you, O Lord, for having given to Italy the pride and joy of a unique man, the pride and joy of having a man admired and envied by all the world.*<sup>35</sup>

The disasters that Italy subsequently faced at the hands of the Fascist state were often blamed on the betrayal of incompetent underlings and rarely on Mussolini as expressed in this diary of a Florentine hotel manager:

*Until they bring me concrete and tangible evidence, I will not be able to believe the infamy that is being hurled in the face of a man who passionately wanted our greatness. Have there been any errors... Until now he can be accused of only one, namely of having too much goodness...*<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Christopher Duggan, Mussolini's willing followers, BBC History Magazine, December, 2012, <http://www.historyextra.com/article/premium/mussolinis-willing-followers>.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, Duggan.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, Duggan.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, Duggan.

During the 20s and 30s journalists, writers and intellectuals expressed fascination and admiration for the Italian dictator. The *Saturday Evening Post* serialized his auto biography. Time had frequent stories about him as did the *New York Times* and magazines and tabloids around the world. *New York Times* reporter, Alice Rohe, said this in her interview with Mussolini shortly after he became Premier:

*Mussolini is one of the most cultured men in Italy, but he gleaned his knowledge at no age-dried fonts of learning... He knows many languages, having worked at jobs of all sorts to finance himself while he studied the literature of other lands in their native tongues... What really fascinated me most about this man of powerful personality and now Italy's Premier, was the heights and depths of culture he revealed. A man who can discuss the various periods of Etruscan frescoes with the same understanding as he can political economy, who can thrill at the wistful melancholy of a Chopin Nocturnes... surely is a man who understands much of life.*<sup>37</sup>



*Mussolini with his wife Rachele and his children, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

American humorist, author and star of stage and screen Will Rogers, visited Il Duce in 1926. “Rogers had a man-crush on Mussolini for years. ‘He has done more things for his country since the war than any hundred men in any other country,’ he wrote in 1929. Four years later, Rogers was at it again: ‘Mussolini could run this country with his eyes shut. In fact, that’s the way our Congress has been running it. Mussolini, with no money, no natural resources — no nothing — has kept his country going, while us, with a surplus of everything under the sun, are mangy with representatives and liberty. But we can’t digest either one of ’em.’”<sup>38</sup>

Fascist propaganda was all embracing. It reached deep into the lives of Italians from the school, the church, and the institutions and even into the family. It was designed to garner popular support and to justify the authority of Il Duce over the nation. Pageantry, rhetoric, and manifestations of all types were held on a daily basis somewhere in the peninsula from small townsto large cities. Local Fascist Parties were formed nearly everywhere in an effort to control, monitor, and indoctrinate. The press was geared to promote Fascist truth against those who opposed the regime from external or internal forces. The unifying theme was the cult of Mussolini.

Il Duce was portrayed as a man of action, virile, a Renaissance man, a military leader, the head of a family (even though he had numerous mistresses). “This reflected his presentation as a universal man, capable of all subjects; a light was left on in his office long after he was asleep as part of propaganda to present him as an insomniac owing to his driven to work nature.”<sup>39</sup>



*Il Duce's words were on buildings throughout Italy, Courtesy Istituto Luce*



*Il Duce the aviator, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

<sup>37</sup> Alice Rohe, Mussolini, Hope of Youth, Italy's “Man of Tomorrow,” *New York Times*, 1922.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Carlson, Encounter: Will Rogers befriends Benito Mussolini, *American History Magazine*, November 8, 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Gallo, Max (1973). *Mussolini's Italy*, Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., New York, pp. 212–13.

“Mussolini created an image of a valiant and fearless hero. He was a practitioner of various sports such as fencing, auto racing, skiing, horse riding, lion taming and swimming. Mussolini's prestige as an aviator in the manner of Charles Lindbergh was especially important, since for Fascism the airplane embodied qualities such as dynamism, energy and courage. Mussolini himself oversaw which photographs could appear, rejecting some, for instance, because he was not sufficiently prominent in a group.”<sup>40</sup>



*Il Duce portrayed as a “Futurist,”*  
by Alessandro Bruschetti,  
<http://fascionable.blogspot.it/2012/02/futurist-mussolini.html>

Fascist themes were action, war, and racial purity, the superiority of Italian civilization and the weakness of democracy and all things foreign. Education was tightly controlled to indoctrinate children and spread the word of Fascism and the cult of Il Duce.

The regime’s propaganda claimed that it had transformed Italy and the Italians into a new people and Mussolini was their guide, their father and their new emperor. Il Duce was the modern day Augustus who established an empire of peace, prosperity and made Italy *great again*.



*Mussolini at the wheel of his Alfa Romeo with Cornelius Vanderbilt, July 23, 1927, Courtesy Veloce Today and Istituto Luce*

## **The Vanderbilt Affair: A Question of Character**

At times the true character of a person is revealed by one incident. Such was the case for Mussolini in a tragic event that happened in July, 1927.

In a *New York Post* article of July 28, 1943, Cornelius Vanderbilt Jr. told the story of his ill-fated drive in the Roman country side with Il Duce on July 27, 1927. Vanderbilt was in Rome to interview Mussolini when the dictator invited him for a spin in his Alfa Romeo.

Il Duce took the wheel. He drove recklessly, according to Vanderbilt. After narrowly missing a wall, the car entered a sharp curve at nearly 100 miles an hour. Children were on the side of the thoroughfare waving flags. One child stepped into the road. Mussolini ran over her. He did not stop. Vanderbilt was shocked. He asked Mussolini to go back. Instead, Il Duce responded, “Never look back, Vanderbilt, only look forward.” The hit and run episode, that took the life of a three-year-old girl, was recounted many times and became an international incident. Mussolini denied that it ever happened. Vanderbilt stood on the details of his story until his death in 1974.<sup>41</sup>

The event showed the extent of Mussolini’s arrogance and self-centeredness. He was never held accountable for the death of this little girl who was part of a group of children there to welcome him. Mussolini’s sense of enormous self-importance would drive him to make fatal

<sup>40</sup> Falasca-Zamponi, Simonetta (2000). *Fascist spectacle: The aesthetics of power in Mussolini's Italy*, University of California Press, pp. 68-70, ISBN 0-520-22677-1.

<sup>41</sup> Vanderbilt, Cornelius (July 28, 1943). Never Look Back, Benito Said (Of One Small Life)-And Now? *New York Post*, and, *US Apologizes to Italy for General Butler's Remarks About Mussolini*, *New York Times*, January 30, 1931. General Smedley Butler claimed that a friend who was also in the car with Vanderbilt and heard Mussolini say: “It was only one life my friend. What is one life in the affairs of State?” Butler was court marshalled for this statement which caused a political incident with Italy. In 2015, P. A. Moed wrote *The Montebello Affair* (Createpace publisher) which is based on the Vanderbilt story turned into a novel.

errors that would have a lasting and calamitous effect on the life of Italians and bring him to an ignoble end.

## Mussolini's Wars: The Beginning of the End

*War alone brings up to their highest tension all human energies and imposes the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to make it. Peace is absurd. Fascism does not believe in it.*

*War is to man what maternity is to a woman.*

*There is the great, silent, continuous struggle: the struggle between the State and the Individual; between the State which demands and the individual who attempts to evade such demands. Because the individual, left to himself, unless he be a saint or hero, always refuses to pay taxes, obey laws, or go to war.*



*Mussolini with troops in Ethiopia, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

*One moment on the battlefield is worth a thousand years of peace.*

– Benito Mussolini

“Wishful thinking, megalomania, and Fascist ideology gradually overwhelmed Mussolini’s common sense. He interpreted diplomatic victories over Britain and France during the Ethiopian and Spanish wars (1935-1939) as proof of his military genius. Because of his parents’ and older brother’s short lives, Mussolini expected to die young but considered himself uniquely capable of leading Italy to greatness. Therefore, he

perceived a fleeting historical opportunity (1935-1945) for spectacular Italian aggrandizement by pitting Fascist-Nazi power against French-British decadence. Mussolini decided to gamble for a Mediterranean-African empire through war with the west. Winning Caesarian glory would gain him the prestige necessary to abolish the monarchy and create a truly totalitarian state.”<sup>42</sup>

## Conquest of Ethiopia

By 1930, Mussolini cast the image of a forceful and successful leader of his country who was bringing Italy into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The violence and oppression of Fascism was often



*Mussolini and Hitler, 1936, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

overlooked in the face of Il Duce’s huge public works projects that were creating thousands of jobs and fighting the ravages of the Great Depression. He was enormously popular and had shown positive results in the form of employment, social programs, and law and order.

The decade of the 1930s would reveal more about Mussolini and his visions of grandeur. The world would begin to lose its admiration for Il Duce as he carried Italy into one war after another. Mussolini

<sup>42</sup>Benito Mussolini History, <http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/benito-mussolini>.

promised to *make Italy great again* and restore the glory of the Roman Empire. To do so required conquest and bloodshed.

In 1935, Italy invaded Ethiopia. The Ethiopians were poorly armed, with few machine guns, their troops had mainly swords and spears. Having spent a decade accumulating poison gas in East Africa, Mussolini gave General Badoglio, who was in charge of the invasion, authority to use this murderous weapon. Mussolini was even prepared to resort to bacteriological warfare as long as these methods could be kept quiet.<sup>43</sup>

Atrocities were committed in a country that was in large part defenseless. No one would be held accountable for the thousands of innocent civilians killed by the Italian and Fascist forces in Ethiopia. Once the country fell, Il Duce claimed that Italy once again had an empire.

Italy paid a high price for its African conquest. 12,000 Italians died and the material cost was far greater than Il Duce had planned. The economic costs were a staggering blow to the Italian budget and reduced his ability to upgrade the military and deal with vital domestic issues.



*Italian postage stamp commemorating the Alliance with Germany, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

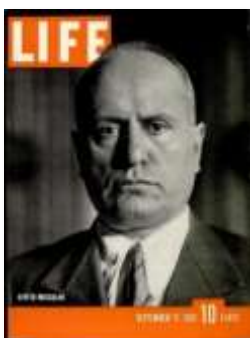
The sanctions imposed by the League of Nations drove Italy deeper into the economic and military orbit of Adolph Hitler who came to Italy's economic rescue.<sup>44</sup>

In 1936, Mussolini signed an alliance with Hitler and four years later agreed to the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis treaty in a "pact of steel," as he described it. The accord sealed the fate of Italy with that of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

## Spanish Civil War

Despite the crippling effects of the Ethiopian adventure on Italy, Mussolini decided to engage his nation in another foreign conflict. From 1936 to 1939, Italy provided supplies and assistance to the nationalist forces of General Franco.

"During the Spanish Civil War Italy sent 80,000 men, of whom almost 6,000 belonged to the Italian Air



*Mussolini on the cover of Life Magazine, September 11, 1939, Courtesy Time/Life*

Force, 45,000 to the army and 29,000 to the Fascist militia. Italy also supplied 1,800 cannon, 1,400 mortars, 3,400 machine-guns, 6,800 motor vehicles, 157 tanks, 213 bombers, 44 assault planes and 414 fighters."<sup>45</sup>



*Jewish residents of Rome, 1943, from Oro Macht Frei, Courtesy New Jersey Jewish News, November 3, 2014*

The burden on Italy of Mussolini's conflicts was staggering. "From 1935–39, Mussolini's wars cost the equivalent of \$500 US billion dollars in 1999 values, a sum that was even proportionally a larger

<sup>43</sup> Smith, Mack (1983), pp. 231–232.

<sup>44</sup> Sullivan, Barry "More than meets the eye: the Ethiopian War and the Origins of the Second World War" pp. 178–203 from *The Origins of the Second World War Reconsidered: A.J.P. Taylor and the Historians*, London: Routledge, 1999 pp. 187–188.

<sup>45</sup> Italy and the Spanish Civil War, <http://spartacus-educational.com/SPItaly.htm>.

burden given that Italy was such a poor country.”<sup>46</sup> The enormous expenses deprived the country of the ability to modernize its military as had the French and the British, especially since the specter of another great European war was on the horizon which would eclipse the agony of World War I.

World War II would be the most brutal and disastrous adventure in the history of Italy. The cost in human lives and suffering would be unimaginable. The sacrifices Italians would make in blood, treasure and pain would be many times greater than that experienced in conflicts fought from the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the end they would lose not only their “empire” but also their self-respect.



*Il Duce speaking to Fascists, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

### Racial Laws

In 1938, Mussolini recognized Hitler’s annexation of Austria. The ties with Germany grew stronger. The same year one of the blackest chapters in Italian history was written. Mussolini enacted a series of racial laws targeting the rights of Jews, banning their books, excluding them from public office and higher education plus confiscating their assets, restricting

their travel and providing for their eventual internship and treatment along the lines of political prisoners.<sup>47</sup> Many notable Italians had already left Italy in protest to Il Duce’s oppression and suppression of freedom. World famous conductor Arturo Toscanini and Physicist Enrico Fermi were among them. Many more would leave in wake of the racial decrees.

*In spite of Mussolini’s efforts to rid Italy of Jews, individual Italians not only helped to protect Jewish property but also rescued Jews from certain death by offering them a safe haven from those who planned to murder them. Some Italians made the decision to protect their Jewish friends and neighbors as a matter of conscience. As a result, approximately 80% of Italy’s Jews survived the Holocaust.*<sup>48</sup>



*Mussolini declares war, June 10, 1940, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

### World War II

*Tomorrow, the Tripartite Pact will become an instrument of just peace between the peoples. Italians! Once more arise and be worthy of this historical hour! We shall win. Blood alone moves the wheels of history.* – Benito Mussolini

### Declaration of War

*The German decision to fight is implacable. Even if they were given more than they ask, they would attack just the same, because they are possessed by the demon of destruction...Victory has a hundred fathers but defeat is an orphan.*

– Galeazzo Ciano, Foreign Minister of Italy and son-in-law of Mussolini

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, Sullivan, p. 187.

<sup>47</sup> Hollander, Ethan J. *Italian Fascism and the Jews* (PDF). University of California. ISBN 0-8039-4648-1.

<sup>48</sup> Italian Racial Laws, Italy and the Holocaust Foundation, <http://www.italyandtheholocaust.org/italian-racial-laws.aspx>.

Germany's brazen invasion of Poland in September, 1939 ended the era of peace in Europe and ushered in another great war, 21 years after World War I. Britain tried to persuade Italy to join the Allies but Mussolini was certain Germany would be victorious as the Nazi "Blitzkrieg" of lightning warfare brought one nation in Europe after another to its knees. "Convinced that the war would soon be over, with a German victory looking likely at that point, Mussolini decided to enter the war on the Axis side just as France was about to surrender. Italy declared war on Britain and France on 10 June 1940."<sup>49</sup> Franklin Roosevelt said of Mussolini's decision, "The hand that held the dagger has struck it into the



*Pope Pius XII visiting the site of the bombing of Rome of July 19, 1943*

back of its neighbor."<sup>50</sup>

Il Duce viewed the war as a struggle of ideologies: Fascism versus the world of democratic capitalism. It was a battle of the young against the old. The war was the natural outgrowth of the Fascist Revolution.<sup>51</sup> Eighteen months later he would declare war on the United States after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, forgetting that the involvement of America in the First World War turned the tide.

Italy suffered one defeat after another from the outset of the war. From the sinking of the Italian fleet in Taranto, in the south of Italy, to the sending of thousands of troops to perish in Russia to defeats in North Africa, Greece and the invasion of Italy by the Allies, Mussolini and his forces faced an endless litany of humiliating failures. When Rome was bombed in July, 1943, it was obvious that Italy could no longer sustain the massive losses.



*Newsweek Magazine, May 13, 1940, Courtesy Istituto*

## The End

*I shall make my own life a masterpiece.* – Benito Mussolini

*I am Minister of Mussolini. I shall die with him.* – Fernando Mezzasoma, Fascist Leader, in May, 1945 shortly before being executed along with Benito Mussolini by Italian partisans.



*Galeazzo Ciano, center, and other defendants at the Trial of Verona, January 11th, 1944, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

Fascist leaders along with the King plotted to overthrow Mussolini. He was forced to convene the Grand Council of Fascism for the first time in years. At the dramatic meeting in Palazzo Venezia on the night of July 25, 1943, the Grand Council voted against Il Duce and, in effect, demanded that he consign his mandate to the King.

<sup>49</sup> "Italy Declares War." ThinkQuest.org. 8 January 2008. Archived from the original on 20 December 2007.

<sup>50</sup> Franklin Roosevelt Commencement Address, University of Virginia, June 10, 1940.

<sup>51</sup> "Mussolini: Speech of the 10 June 1940, Declaration of War on France and England," 2 November 2008.

His companions in the March on Rome and even his son in law, Count Galeazzo Ciano, voted for him to resign. Il Duce was betrayed by his closest advisers and aides.

The day after the meeting of the Grand Council of Fascists, Mussolini was summoned by the King. Victor Emmanuel removed him as Prime Minister and had him arrested. Mussolini was devastated. For a short time, he was sent to the island of Ponza where he had exiled thousands of political prisoners. Later he was sent to a mountain top stronghold on the Gran Sasso Mountain where German soldiers, flying gliders, made a daring rescue of Il Duce and brought him to Hitler.

Less than six months after Il Duce was deposed, those who voted against him were tried in Verona. They were found guilty in a mock trial and sentenced to death. Last minute appeals by Mussolini's daughter to her father to save her husband were useless. Galeazzo Ciano, Il Duce son in law and father of his grandchildren, was shot along with other Fascist leaders who opposed Mussolini.

Il Duce was taken to Hitler who forced him to establish a puppet republic in the town of Salo in the north of Italy. He wanted Mussolini to encourage Italians to continue to fight the Allies since the government of Victor Emmanuel now supported the Allies against Nazi Germany. He was in Hitler's hands and the Nazi's controlled his every move. Il Duce went from being a revered leader of his country to a puppet in the hands of one of the most evil figures in history.

Il Duce called on his followers throughout Italy to be with him to continue the fight. A generation had grown up in his shadow. Thousands of young people continued to believe in him and were ready to follow Il Duce to destruction. "I am not here to renounce even a square meter of state territory," he said. "We



*Il Duce with young Fascists in the Republic of Salo, 1945, Courtesy Istituto Luce*



*Allied tank in Rome near Mussolini's office in Palazzo Venezia, June 1944, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

will go back to war for this. And we will rebel against anyone for this. Where the Italian flag flew, the Italian flag will return. And where it has not been lowered, now that I am here, no one will have it lowered. I have said these things to the *Führer*."<sup>52</sup>

Rome fell in June, 1944. Less than a year later the Allies reached the north of Italy. Mussolini was forced to flee to Switzerland to save himself and his mistress Claretta Petacci. They were both captured on the road by Italian partisans.

"In a January 1945 interview, he spoke frankly, knowing the end was near. 'Now I am a corpse. I try, yet know that all is but a farce. I await the end of the tragedy and [...] I do not feel any more an actor. I feel I am the last of the spectators.'"<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Ray Moseley, *Mussolini: The Last 600 Days*, Taylor Trade Publications, 2004, p. 26.

<sup>53</sup> Silvia Marchetti, Ponza: Beautiful island where Mussolini was held, CNN Travel, Published 1 February 2016.



Thirty years after his death, an Italian movie, "The Last Act of Mussolini," was released. It described his final days this way: "In 1945, Benito Mussolini goes to Milan to talk with Archbishop Alfredo Ildefonso Schuster to request his help in escaping from Italy. The Republic



*Mussolini abandoning the Prefecture of Milan, April 25, 1945. The last known photo of him before his execution, Courtesy Istituto Luce*

of Salò, the last bastion of fascism, is decaying, and the Americans, along with the partisans are about to win control of Milan. Mussolini flees, pursued by his lover Claretta Petacci, and manages to get to the northern village of Dongo. There he clashes with the Germans, who order him to disguise himself as an officer of Germany rather than be captured by the partisans. Mussolini accepts without objection, always hoping for a revolt of his loyal fascists, but they are in jeopardy. When Mussolini is



recognized, Walter Audisio, the leader of the partisans, initially wants to hand him over to the Americans, so that Mussolini undergoes due process. But the war crimes of the Duce are too great, so Audisio finally decides to shoot him in front of the Villa Belmonte in the village of Giulino, along with his female companion."<sup>54</sup>

*Those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger ended up inside. – John F. Kennedy*

## **Conclusion: A Betrayal of Trust**

Mussolini's meteoric rise to power should give freedom loving people a pause for reflection. We should wonder if such a phenomenon could happen again. It may not take the same shape or form but the outcome of a totalitarian state overpowering a democracy would be the same. Liberty replaced by fear, control and command and government run by the few over the many. Such an event may not be as far off as we imagine. The lesson we learn from the rise of Benito Mussolini is as fresh today as it was nearly a 100 years ago.

He managed in an incredibly short time to redefine the parameters of twentieth century leadership. He demonstrated the benefits of one-man rule and dictatorial decision-making in such a way that it became hypnotically attractive to those too naïve to see the peril ahead. Fascism became contagious. Its doctrine bounded from one nation to another. Dictatorships, following Il Duce's prescription, were established in Brazil and Nazi Germany in the 1930s and other places like Argentina and Chile years later. Modern tyrants still adhere to Mussolini's methods.

Il Duce's road map was clear: utilize a period of crisis to rise to prominence with free elections; form a strong core of dedicated and loyal supporters; consolidate power with the aid of dominant members of the establishment offering them abundance, security, and law and order; prey on a weak and disorganized opposition; savagely criticize rivals; create an environment of fear; pour constant scorn on the press and then control it; communicate actively at all levels; create a cult of personality as a foundation for the regime; and, finally, launch an autocracy with the support of the military and influential economic allies.

<sup>54</sup> Mussolini, Ultimo Atto, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b74a9081c>.

Mussolini's achievements in rebuilding the nation's infrastructure; building new cities; reclaiming marshes to create new agricultural lands; restoring and preserving the country's archeological patrimony; reorganizing government institutions; establishing new programs for the welfare of families and workers and developing a new legal and educational system were buried by the tidal wave of Il Duce's wars and the suppression of Italy's democratic principles.

A strong, competent and well-run democracy could have accomplished the same things as Mussolini. It could have done so without a loss of freedom and certainly without adventuring into wars of conquest. Instead, Italian despotism, with its inherent lack of values, engulfed its people in a tempest of sorrow, bloodshed and agony while depriving them of their liberty.

The Fascist regime left Italy in shambles. It was morally, psychologically and financially defeated. Hundreds of thousands died. Millions were homeless. The suffering from the violence, the atrocities and the madness of war was attributed to Mussolini, first and foremost. The burden rightfully fell on him and his entourage of disciples. The responsibility of failure was his. Yet it was also the fault of those who allowed him to amass power and be the ultimate decision maker. He was accountable to no one.

Some may say that Italians fell prey to the spell of Fascism because, at the time, it was a rural society with most of the population uneducated. We should recall that many intellectuals, including wealthy and highly educated men and women, became enchanted with Fascism and Il Duce.

Here was a man granted unlimited power and unlimited faith in his judgement, integrity, and sincerity. He could have used it to enrich his nation with a moral uplifting and with greater economic and political stability based on wise and ethical choices. Instead, he pursued a path to egocentric power that replaced patriotism with the uncontrollable monster of blind nationalism. He insisted on substituting war for peace and tyranny for democracy.

Benito Mussolini was the consummate risk-taker. He gambled that "burying democracy" with unleash an energy that would raise his country to higher levels of achievement. He chanced that he could create a people who would be aggressive, bellicose, and driven by imperial attitudes to restore the glory and grandeur of the past. He bet that war would bring him greatness and eternal fame. He wagered and lost. In the process, he gambled away the existence of those who believed in him.

Italians put their lives and the future of their children in his hands. He failed to preserve the most vital gift the people of a nation can give a leader: *their faith, hope and sacred trust*.

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## The Fascination with Dictatorial Leadership

### *It Can't Happen Here?*

The term “dictator” came from the era of the Roman Republic. He was appointed for a specific task and to deal with an emergency. Once the crisis was over, the leader relinquished his duties. The appointment of dictators ended with the assassination of Julius Caesar, the last supreme ruler of Rome before the beginning of the imperial age.<sup>55</sup> Today, tyrannical rule is by no means as predictable as it was in the past.

“Dictatorships are often unexpected. They have arisen among prosperous, educated and cultured people who seemed safe from a dictatorship – in Europe, Asia and South America.”<sup>56</sup>

Why is this the case? Why do intelligent, well-educated and experienced people fall under the spell of tyrannical rule? How can an active minority penetrate a democratic system and replace it with a totalitarian regime? Is our self-determination truly at risk or will our institutions and freedom loving people preserve it at all costs?

Democracies end because of incompetent, weak, inefficient, and unethical leadership. Elected leaders who fail to fulfill their duty to protect and defend civil liberties, political rights, and the nation’s constitution by doing their jobs capably, courageously and honestly sow the seeds for the end of liberty. More than 75 years ago an organization was formed to fight tyranny and to track the trends of freedom across the globe.

In October, 1941, Eleanor Roosevelt and the 1940 Republican Presidential candidate Wendell Willkie along with New York City Mayor, Fiorello H. LaGuardia and other prominent, bipartisan, civic and political leaders created Freedom House. It was originally established to support U.S. involvement in World War II to combat the Axis dictatorships.

After the war, Freedom House took up the struggle against Communism and other threats to democracy and strongly supported the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.



*Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, photo credit [paintingandframe.com](http://paintingandframe.com).*

“Since its founding, Freedom House has helped shape the debate on the most pressing issues of its time. It was an aggressive foe of McCarthyism in the 1950s. It was also an early and strong supporter of the movement for racial equality. Throughout its history, Freedom House has included among its leadership prominent civil rights leaders, most notably Roy Wilkins, the director of the NAACP, and Bayard Rustin, a leading adviser to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.”<sup>57</sup>

Each year, Freedom House prepares a special report: *Freedom in the World*, which assesses the condition of civil liberties and political rights across the globe. In its

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<sup>55</sup> *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 339 (“Dictator”).

<sup>56</sup> Jim Powell, How Dictators Come to Power in a Democracy, *Forbes*, February 5, 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/content/our-history>.

2017 study entitled, *Populists and Autocrats: The Dual Threat to Global Democracy*, the organization described the acceleration of a startling trend: *liberty is declining rapidly in “Free” nations.*<sup>58</sup>

For over a decade, nationalist and populist forces have made significant inroads in democratic countries. Setbacks happened in the protection of civil liberties and political rights from nations rated as “Free” including Brazil, Denmark, France, Hungary, Serbia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, and the United States.” Of the 195 countries assessed, 87 (45 percent) were rated Free, 59 (30 percent) Partly Free, and 49 (25 percent) Not Free... A total of 67 countries suffered net declines in political rights and civil liberties in 2016, compared with 36 that registered gains. *This marked the 11th consecutive year in which declines outnumbered improvements.*<sup>59</sup>

The trends are clear: as human rights and political freedoms erode, individual leaders will pursue their own narrow goals “without meaningful constraints, and without regard for the shared benefits of global peace, freedom, and prosperity.”<sup>60</sup> The most disturbing aspect of this trend is that it is happening in established democracies. These countries are losing their liberties at an alarming rate.

What is causing this movement toward authoritarian rule in nations with a long and revered tradition of freedom? The reasons include:<sup>61</sup>

- Poor economic policies that do not adequately distribute wealth and create a strong sense of “haves and have nots.”
- Failed foreign strategies with serious financial and social consequences.
- The constant derision of political opponents coupled with threats of repression and reprisals.
- Political leaders who seek greater powers to deal with issues that resulted from bad government decisions.
- People willing to give up freedom to have security and maintain shared values they believe have been eroded by excessive liberty.
- A growing, hard core of supporters for elected leaders who are creating a regime without the respect for the separation of powers.
- Support from religious leaders who want to preserve traditions and beliefs.
- Sharp criticism of the press and threats against journalists.
- Unfair taxation, uncontrolled government spending, wars, and economic stagnation causing anger, frustration, and social dissatisfaction.
- No way to prevent an active minority from wresting control of the political process even if they do not represent a majority of the people.
- Indifference and a lack of courage on the part of elected officials, the heads of institutions, and the electorate to fight to preserve democracy at all costs, especially in times of crises.
- Fascination with apparently strong and decisive leaders who project strength versus weakness and power over compassion and understanding with the promise to “get things done.”
- The power of social media to spread messages of nationalism, and a sense of “us against them.”

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<sup>58</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World*, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2017>.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, *Freedom in the World*, 2017, page 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, *Freedom in the World*, 2017, page 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, Powell.

Extremist political movements are growing in freedom loving nations partly because governments are unable to address the concerns of an angry citizenry that feels excluded and alienated by leaders they see as incompetent, corrupt, and indifferent. The beginnings of despotism are being planted by this electorate that is searching for leaders who will provide easy solutions.

It is dangerous and disingenuous to believe that Europe and the United States are not facing a risk to the freedom they have won after centuries of struggle to remove the yoke of oppression from monarchs and absolute rulers. If we do not recognize this threat we will live to regret it.

### ***It Can't Happen Here?***

***When Fascism comes to America it will be wrapped in a flag and carrying a cross.***

**– Sinclair Lewis**

***Speech is civilization itself... Opinions cannot survive if one has no chance to fight for them. –***

**Thomas Mann**

***Timid men prefer the calm of despotism to the tempestuous sea of liberty.***

**– Thomas Jefferson**

In 1926, German author, Thomas Mann visited Italy. It was a seashore vacation filled with the delights, sights, and sounds of one of the most beautiful places on earth. Mann studied not only the places but most of all the people. He observed the impact of the new regime of Benito Mussolini who had snuffed out Italian democracy and replaced it with a Fascist dictatorship. Mann saw the elements of psychological and physical repression.

The bullying tactics and the sense of superiority of the Fascists over the individual. He saw the cult of personality and the hypnotism of Il Duce on the masses. The time in Italy inspired Mann to write “Mario and the Magician.” It was prophetic story of a charlatan, a magician, who enchants his audiences with tricks and bullying tactics that he uses to control and dominate them. Mann’s work was a parable about Mussolini and nationalism. The story ends in sadness, sorrow and tragedy.<sup>62</sup> Mann’s point was clear: power can be intoxicating especially if put in the wrong hands and that people can be preyed upon by emotion, fear, and insecurity. Ultimately it leads to disaster. Mann was awarded the Nobel Prize three years later.

The seeds of authoritarianism can be planted in a democracy when elected leaders are weak, incompetent, corrupt, and unable to deal with national crisis. Such was the setting in Italy in 1922 when Benito Mussolini came to power. World War I was devastating. The country lost hundreds of thousands of lives and was bankrupt. It gained little from the enormous sacrifices of the conflict. Millions of angry veterans and students took to the streets protesting the severe economic and social problems facing the nation. One man came forward and offered solutions, ideas, a road map that was wrapped in the flag of nationalism, extremism, bigotry, and violence. His name was Benito Mussolini.

He was elected to the Parliament in 1921. The next year he was Prime Minister. He became head of the nation in 17 months. Less than four years later he abolished the Parliament, removed basic constitutional guarantees and declared himself dictator of Italy. The opposition was unable to stop him. Italian democratic institutions were paralyzed and could not halt the Fascist juggernaut. Mussolini was masterful in using his powers of persuasion and the media to control his followers and the people.

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<sup>62</sup> Colin Campbell, The Evil Magician Casts a Spell, Donald Trump’s eerie likeness to Thomas Mann’s Mussolini parable, *New Republic*, August 15, 2016, <https://newrepublic.com/article/136045/evil-magician-casts-spell>.

He was a spell binding and hypnotic speaker. He used oratory to convey pride over compassion and strength over reason. He ridiculed his opponents and then incarcerated them. He showed his hatred for democracy by eliminating elections and all forms of choice. The press went from being an instrument of liberty to a voice for the regime. Italians were indoctrinated with the philosophy of Fascism nearly from birth. Joining the Party and adhering allegiance to Il Duce became a requirement for survival.

Mussolini matched his dictatorship with progress. His public works projects and corporate statism created millions of jobs. He instituted social programs and promised to make his country *great again* and bring back the Roman Empire. As unemployment declined and life improved, Italians, to a large extent, followed, believed, and obeyed Il Duce. Mussolini spread his message of achievement through every form of communication. He reached into the smallest of villages and into the family, the school and the classroom, and even the church. As Italians began to feel better about themselves, he accumulated more power up to point that he was accountable to no one.

His image of himself as the most intelligent man in Italy, as the savior of his people, and of the wise, courageous and powerful leader consumed him. He began to believe his own lies which were repeated to him by a coterie of “yes” men. He saw himself as a modern Roman emperor. Battle was the true measure of a man, in his view. It was conflict that was the ultimate test of greatness. He needed wars and conquest to magnify his glory. As a result, he set out on a course of agony for the people of Italy that was far beyond anything experienced before.

First came the war in Ethiopia, then the Spanish Civil War, and then World War II. Mussolini’s wars first created “an empire” that solidified Fascism in Europe which then led to a cataclysmic defeat that turned him and his dreams of grandeur into ashes.

At the peak of Il Duce’s popularity in 1935, American author Sinclair Lewis wrote a visionary novel about the possibility of a dictatorship in America. His book, “*It Can’t Happen Here*,” was about a charismatic politician who would challenge Franklin Roosevelt for the Democratic Party nomination in 1936 and win the White House and create a dictatorship. Lewis was referring to Huey Long, the Governor of Louisiana. Long preached against capitalism and special interests and government controlled by the few over the many. He promised to fight for the rights of workers and to make “every man a king.” Huey Long was assassinated in the same year “*It Can’t Happen Here*” was published. Lewis’s point was that even in the United States, a dictatorship can come about and that no one should take liberty for granted.

America and democracies around the world do not face the same crises that Italy confronted or the U.S. went through in the 1920s and 1930s. Today our economies are stronger. Our social fabric is sounder because of welfare programs. Technology is continuing to make enormous progress in improving lives and democracy still appears healthy. In actuality, freedom is fragile and being attacked as never before. As Freedom House showed in 2017, liberty is eroding in those countries considered “free.” Nationalist influences are rising. Once again, the forces of communication are spreading the words and ideas of absolutism. Instead of speeches on balconies we now have social media. Twitter, Facebook, television, and the internet circulate rumors, falsehoods, facts, and fiction. They help the autocrat speed messages into the soul of a weak, naïve, uneducated, and suffering electorate.

The next decade in America and Europe could be a period of economic revival and growth. Wars and conflicts could subside, after exhausting us financially and morally. In such an environment, leaders who have risen to power on the message of *making our country great again* can gain even more power and influence. As prosperity advances, the significance of what they espouse could appear stronger.

As Mussolini said, if you believe, obey and fight, you will achieve greatness. Once millions return to work and find comfort in leaders who advocate autocratic ideas, then the stage is set for dictatorship. *Democracy can perish even in an atmosphere of prosperity.* Despotism in America and Europe will not be of the kind that was used by Il Duce and other dictators. There will be little pageantry. There will not be political parties with uniformed squads carrying Billy clubs to suppress and frighten the opposition.

Charismatic leaders will be elected like Mussolini was. The key to their growth will be their relationship with their followers. They will nourish and cultivate this bond to make it grow into a strong political movement that snuffs out dissent, constantly challenges the status quo, and contests the establishment and the political process as we know it. These are the seeds of repression.

It is up to us to stop the forces of tyranny before they stop us. If it is not us now, then who and when? Freedom is in danger. If we do not defend it we will lose it.

*One ought never to turn one's back on a threatened danger and try to run away from it. If you do that, you will double the danger. But if you meet it promptly and without flinching, you will reduce the danger by half. Never run away from anything. Never!*

— Winston Churchill

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## About the Author

**Emilio Iodice, Director Emeritus, Professor of Leadership, Loyola University Chicago, John Felice Rome Center, Former Executive and US Diplomat, Award Winning Author and Presidential Historian**



Emilio Iodice was born in the South Bronx in 1946. He was the son of immigrants from the island of Ponza in Italy. He grew up in a truly bi-cultural environment: living in Little Italy and America at the same time. He worked full time while studying to pay for his education from elementary school to graduate school and still managed to complete his studies at the top of his class.

Iodice received his BS in Business from Fordham University, his MBA from the Bernard Baruch School of the City University of New York and was named to BETA GAMMA SIGMA, the honorary society of distinguished graduates in Business. He conducted doctoral work in international business and applied finance at George Washington University in Washington, DC.

Iodice spent over four decades as a senior executive in the public and private sectors, as an educator and as a university administrator. Those forty years of experience included being a key official in Washington working for several Administrations, serving as a confidential adviser to the President, and reaching the top ranks of the civil service and the diplomatic corps.

He was among the most decorated officers in American history with a Gold Medal for Heroism, a Gold Medal and Silver Medal for Exemplary Service, nominations for the Bronze Medal and numerous commendations and citations. He served as Minister in key US missions abroad including Brasilia, Mexico City, Rome, Madrid and Paris and departed after being named to the list of future Ambassadors. Among his honors were being knighted by the former king of Italy.



He received Medals of Honor from Spain and Italy. At age 33, he was named by the President to the prestigious Senior Executive Service as a Charter Member. He was the youngest career public official to reach this distinction.

Before joining Loyola he was Vice President of Lucent Technologies in charge of operations in numerous countries and later taught full time as an Assistant Professor at Trinity College in Washington, DC. He joined Loyola in 2007 as Director of the John Felice Rome Center. After one year he was promoted to Vice President. After serving for nine years as Vice President and Director, he was awarded the title of Director Emeritus and Professor of Leadership on June 30th, 2016.

He spoke several languages and traveled across the globe. His passions in life were the Rome Center, its students, faculty and staff, Loyola University, good music, writing and reading, his family and, in particular, his four grandchildren and god-children. His academic field of study was “leadership.”

He wrote and published numerous peer reviewed articles on leadership in the Journal of Values Based Leadership of Valparaiso University in Indiana that have been read across the globe.

In 2012 his bestselling book on tenor Mario Lanza was published entitled, “A Kid from Philadelphia, Mario Lanza: The Voice of the Poets.” In 2013 his second book, “Profiles in Leadership from Caesar to Modern Times” was published by North American Business Press along with “Sisters,” the story of two extraordinary people, his mother and aunt. In 2014 he published “Future Shock 2.0, The Dragon Brief 2020,” and “Reflections, Stories of Love, Leadership, Courage and Passion.” In 2016 he launched, “2016, Selecting the President, The Most Important Decision You Will Ever Make. 2016.” In 2017, his new book was published: “When Courage was the Essence of Leadership, Lessons from History and reached number one bestseller status in the world in the field of leadership. Profiles in Leadership from Caesar to Modern Times and Reflections were translated into Italian and published in 2017 and immediately reached best seller status. His works can be found on this Amazon site: [https://www.amazon.com/Emilio-Iodice/e/B00HR6PNFW/ref=db\\_s\\_p\\_pbk\\_rwt\\_abau](https://www.amazon.com/Emilio-Iodice/e/B00HR6PNFW/ref=db_s_p_pbk_rwt_abau).

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