The development of dictatorship

Government/Parliament
- Cabinet initially included representatives of every party except PSI and PCI. By mid-1923 most had left.
- 1922 7% MPs Fascists, Apr 1924 66%
- Mussolini given great powers; could legislate by decree
- Responsible to King not Parliament
- Parliament lost power to initiate laws.
- 1925 All-Fascist Cabinet

Administration/Local government
- Immediate purge of opponents in civil service but no major change
- Local Socialist councils replaced
- Mussolini proclaimed the prefect supreme over the local party
  - Judges, civil servants, teachers purged
  - Elected municipal councils eliminated
  - 7000 government-appointed podestas replaced elected mayors
  - Powers of prefects extended

The steps to dictatorship
1 Oct 1922 Mussolini appointed Prime Minister of new 'National Government' with three other Fascists.
2 Nov 1922 Government easily wins vote of confidence in Parliament, and is voted emergency powers to reform the administration and tax system.
3 Dec-Jan Fascist Grand Council and Militia set up
4 Feb 1923 Nationalists join Fascist Party.
5 July 1923 Acerbo Election Law
6 April 1924 New elections. Government wins 66% of the votes.
7 June 1924 Matteotti murdered. Major crisis
8 3 Jan 1925 Mussolini addresses Parliament, and takes responsibility for violence. Series of arrests. Most MPs withdraw in opposition. Mussolini under attack from all sides; major crisis; then...
10 Nov 1925-Jan 1927 Exceptional Decrees increase repression, with new Special Tribunal, secret police (OVRA).

Judiciary/repression
- Existing court system used
- Hostile press, politicians intimidated
- Judiciary lost independence
- Special Tribunal for political crimes
- Law for Defence of State
- Administrative powers widely used (a government official could order an arrest without justification)
- Secret police OVRA created
- Free press ended

Trade unions
- Tolerated but intimidated
- Number of strikes fell
- 1926 Law on Corporations (see page 137)
- Fascist unions recognised as sole representatives of workers
- Strikes, lockouts illegal

The Fascists
- Fascist militia, MVSN, set up from squads. Paid by state; took loyalty oath to Mussolini
- Fascist Grand Council set up as rival to Cabinet
- Fascists merged with Nationalists
- Mussolini centralised the Party.

Other parties
- Mussolini exploited tension between PSI and Pope, to weaken them; 1923 they left the government.
- PSI, PCI were tolerated, but activities liable to disruption.
- All non-Fascist parties suppressed

Other policies 1922-27
Church
- Concessions to Catholic Church (see pages 174-75)

Economy
- From 1922, economic recovery
- Laissez-faire policies favouring industrialists (see page 128)

Foreign policy
- Intimidated Greece by invading Corfu, 1923 (see page 212)
- Gained Fiume, 1924 (see page 212)
Learning trouble spot
Explanations
You were asked on page 82 to write an essay explaining why Mussolini set up a dictatorial system. Your first concern may be to gather lots of information and to get the story of the events of 1922–27 clear in your mind. This is vital, but the task does not just need knowledge. Even if you know every detail of all the events you have studied in this chapter you could still score a low mark if you just tell the story of what happened in chronological order. If you do that, you may not fit in the explanation that is needed.

So what do you need to think about in terms of explanation? Here are some issues that are central to this essay. They aren’t the answers, but they may help you think along the right lines.

a) Did events turn out the way they did because Mussolini planned them that way?
b) Did the actions of his opponents – or their failure to act – affect the way the regime developed?
c) Was there a key point when several different outcomes were possible? If so, why did a dictatorship develop rather than the other possibilities?
d) Did anything happen to influence events that was outside the control of Mussolini or his opponents?
e) Who was most responsible for the development of a dictatorship – Mussolini or his opponents? Where did the balance of responsibility lie?

Key points from Chapter 4
1 Mussolini was in a potentially weak position on his appointment.
2 He was under pressure from radicals for a Fascist revolution, but he was concerned to reassure the elite.
3 He carefully mixed conciliation and threats in his early actions, and worked largely within the existing system from 1922 to 1924.
4 He set up new Fascist bodies, the Grand Council and MVSN, but exercised tight control over them.
5 His restoration of firm government, and economic growth, won the support of the elite.
6 A mixture of genuine support, a modified electoral system and intimidation helped the government win a large majority in the 1924 elections.
7 The murder of Matteotti in June 1924 provoked a prolonged political crisis.
8 His opponents failed to exploit the situation, and he eventually used it to establish a personal dictatorship.
9 Between 1925 and 1927 Mussolini gained the power to issue decrees; elected local government was replaced, other parties abolished and the OVRA was created.
10 By 1927 the key features of Mussolini’s dictatorship had been established.

A look ahead
You have now studied how Mussolini established his personal dictatorship. After 1927 there were some political changes, but none of them were very significant. The overall structure was established. So we can now leave this largely chronological account of political developments, and look at how Mussolini’s personal dictatorship really operated during the Fascist regime.
Mussolini as a leader

**Activity**

1. Study Mussolini’s statements about how to rule. Summarise in your own words his views on leadership.
2. What are
   a) the strengths
   b) the weaknesses of this style of leadership?

**Activity**

Does Chart 5D suggest that one of the models on page 85 was correct?

---

How much power did Mussolini have? Chart 5D shows how Mussolini by 1927 had been granted great formal powers. He had the power to issue decrees with the full authority of the law. He appointed and dismissed his ministers, and was able to take over these positions virtually at will. He was not challenged over any major decision. He also increased his control over the Fascist movement, although some of the Ras remained a cause for concern.
Let us now try to penetrate beneath the image to get closer to reality. Mussolini believed that communication was at the heart of the political process. He was skilled at inspiring crowds, and devoted much time to propaganda. His exhibitionism fascinated many Italians, impressed by his supermasculinity and sexuality. Unfortunately his gesturing did not produce the policies and actions which his ambitions for Italy required.

He did not lead an efficient government team. His advisers served one key function: to bolster his own image of himself. He did not want to hear contrary opinions. Discussion was not part of the ‘Fascist style’. He wanted acclaim not criticism. He was increasingly protected from unpleasant truths. This was especially so after 1951 when his brother Arnaldo, one of the few people prepared to tell Mussolini the truth, died.

Like many dictators, Mussolini sowed discord amongst his ministers and encouraged them to tell tales about each other. Distrustful, he failed to train any deputy leaders, or a successor. By 1953 he had dismissed arguably his most able ministers – such as Rocco, Federzoni, Bottai, Grandi and Turati – replacing them with more servile (submissive) officials. He treated officials with contempt, requiring them to run the twenty metres to his desk in his office.

His reliance on his intuition (instinct), his MONOPOLISING of so many positions, and his concern for trivia all militated against effective policy making. The chasm between his portrayal as a superhuman ruler and his administrative inadequacies says a lot about Fascist Italy – strong on style and weak on substance. Mussolini, indeed, considered the former more important. His orders were meant to impress; he frequently failed to check whether they were carried out.

However, when you consider the career of Mussolini, both how he became Prime Minister, and how he then held power for far longer than any other modern Italian leader, you have to acknowledge his political skill. As well as his obvious abilities as a speaker, he was able to hold together a heterogeneous movement (one made up of many different parts). He knew how to compromise with the traditional elites by satisfying their essential self-interest, yet led a potentially revolutionary movement. He won domestic and international praise for his work.

**Historians’ assessments of Mussolini**

Let us now consider how some historians have assessed Mussolini’s qualities as leader.

**SOURCE 5.10 A. de Grand, Italian Fascism, its Origins and Development, 1982, p. 42**

Mussolini was an extraordinary political tactician, but his skill at manoeuvre was due in part to the absence of any ethical foundation or an overall political vision. Every individual or institution became an instrument to be used only as long as it served his immediate purpose. Unlike Adolf Hitler, he was not mentally unbalanced. He operated on the level of ordinary calculation and rationality. In his case, however, the myth of his own indispensability corroded and corrupted to the point that during the 1930s he had to be consulted when the Roman police wanted to wear summer uniforms earlier than usual.

**SOURCE 5.11 T. Koon, Believe, Obey, Fight, 1985, pp. 4, 9, 245**

Mussolini’s greatest talent, perhaps his only genuine talent, was his ability to manufacture and communicate myths and slogans that captured the popular imagination. Mussolini was a consummate, very skilled, propagandist, actor and stage manager. His political style reflected his thought processes, which were less intellectual than instinctual. In politics he relied on his own understanding of group psychology and his intuition, what he referred to as his ‘animal instinct’, rather than on strict adherence to IDEOLOGY and logic. His approach to politics was not based upon principles, at best useful nails on which to hang a particular policy, but rather on an intuitive grasp of what he perceived as the psychological needs of the masses...
Mussolini was a man tragically out of touch with reality. He had no tolerance for real administration but an inexhaustible capacity for trivial detail. He was supposed to be all-powerful, and yet he constantly changed his mind. He wanted no bad news, but because after a certain point the news was almost all bad, he heard little truth.

**SOURCE 5.12** A. J. P. Taylor’s video, *Men of Our Time: Mussolini*

He liked the glamour of his public appearances. Others did the work . . . Mussolini only appeared when treaties had to be signed and the cameras began to run . . . The one thing that Mussolini worked at was the strengthening of his own power . . . There was only one man in Italy, Mussolini.

**SOURCE 5.13** Cassels, p. 54

Demagoguery [whipping up popular feeling] came easily to him . . . The facial contortion and the trick of rolling his eyes . . . proved effective when viewed from the piazza . . . His voice was his major asset. Trained in hundreds of street-corner speeches, it was at once powerful and flexible . . . It was a series of sharp, usually unconnected statements, declamatory rather than persuasive . . . The presentation was everything. All who heard him, friend and foe alike, have testified to his unerring ability to establish rapport with a crowd and to stimulate it. He possessed that mystic quality of leadership known as charisma.

Although he might move men to action, Mussolini himself shied away from it . . . It was not that he was devoid of physical courage . . . but in a crisis his habit was to stand aside. He seemed to lack self-confidence . . . The picture of the strong, resolute Duce that was sold to the world was the work of a superb public relations expert whose forte [strength] lay in words and images, not in deeds and actuality.

**SOURCE 5.14** Clark, p. 240

Mussolini proved to be a rotten manager. He had a lively journalistic intelligence, but he was impulsive. He oversimplified and dramatized everything, and had no patience for prosaic [matter of fact] long-term planning. He was also distressingly vulgar and vulnerable to flattery. Corruption and incompetence were tolerated, even encouraged. Intensely suspicious of rivals, he dismissed most of his competent subordinates . . . He deliberately isolated himself . . . He worked long hours, but to little purpose. Much of his time was spent reading newspapers, or deciding trivial questions . . . His initial M was needed on every document, and it was rarely refused. Senior civil servants and ministers pursued their own policies, often quite contradictory to those of their rivals, and each of them would produce an initialled paper from the Duce to overcome his colleagues’ opposition. The Council of Ministers met only once a month, and even then did not co-ordinate policy. Perhaps Mussolini had grown bored; perhaps he was simply too contemptuous of arguments and of men to keep everyone dependent on him. At any rate, it was no way to run a country.


His popularity with ordinary Italians, particularly during his early years of power, cannot be overestimated. He had considerable personal charm and a hypnotic personality; large crowds filled the piazzas whenever he spoke, listeners raptly awaiting every word. His technique was superficial, flamboyant and vulgar, but it worked – though not always with people of taste and culture, who often abhorred him . . .

Mussolini’s principal weakness as head of state was that he based his decisions on whether they would increase his own popularity and that of the Fascist Party; the well-being of the Italian nation came only second.
Finally, what was Mussolini like as a person? Did Mussolini the man fit the image created by Ducismo (the cult of the Duce)?

Physically he was no superman. He was only 5ft 6ins (1.67m) tall, (fortunately still 6 inches [15cm] taller than the King!) so he tried to be viewed whenever possible from below. This action man was actually a heavy sleeper, needing nine hours a day, and suffered from periods of mental paralysis when under stress. Although when appointed in 1922 he was Italy's youngest-ever Prime Minister (aged 59), and though the Fascist movement cultivated an image of itself as youthful and dynamic, age caught up on Mussolini and his regime. By the 1930s the press was not allowed to refer to Mussolini's age nor to other apparent blemishes.

He suffered from several medical problems. In his youth he had contracted syphilis, and after 1926 he increasingly suffered from a gastric ulcer. This led his doctor to virtually ban him from eating meat and drinking wine. He relied increasingly on eating grapes and drinking three litres of milk a day. By 1942 his medical problems were acute and he was confined to his bed for long periods.

Mussolini was very superstitious and stored charms to ward off evil spirits. Although he was injudiciously and cruelly, and proposed a]): such as an inferiority complex and a craving for power, he was far less cruel than his fellow dictators.

Finally, let us consider Cassels' assessment:

**SOURCE 5.16 Cassels, p. 52**

*Since he was young, his hairline had receded rapidly; this threw into relief his gauze, round face whose main features were a jutting jaw, large mobile mouth, and dark protuberant eyes. This less than impressive appearance he contrived to offset by his mannerisms. To disguise his short stature he always stood ramrod straight, pushed out his lower lip and jaw, and tilted back his head; thus his eyes seemed to look down, never up, at a person...*  

He had a sentimental attachment to his children... yet he was anything but a family man. [His wife] Rachele was a plain, honest country woman with no interest in politics... She bore him five children. She put up stoically [bravely and resignedly] with his neglect and his endless infidelities [unfaithfulness]. Mussolini was openly proud of his sexual prowess. He was never at a loss for a mistress. His office was his favourite trysting [meeting] place. He would seize his partner roughly, throw him to the hard floor, and make love to her there and then; apparently many of his conquests relished his primitive approach.

Almost certainly Mussolini suffered from an outsized inferiority complex. His outward self-assertiveness was doubtless a psychic compensation for his inner timidity. This personality trait seems to have been reflected in the policies which he imposed on Italy. For the most part, they were pretentious [seemed impressive] when first announced but tended to be lethargically executed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Now that you have read pages 87–93, do you think it is likely that Model 1 (page 85) describes the real structure of power in Italy? Give reasons for your answer.</td>
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</table>
How far did Mussolini's power depend upon repression?

How many people did Mussolini's government kill and imprison? If this question is asked of Stalin's Russia or Hitler's Germany one gets an immediate response of several millions. Mussolini's record was quite different from those of Stalin and Hitler. Comparatively few people died because of their opposition to his regime. The best estimate seems to be around 400 killed, 'legally' and through murder, during the Fascist regime (considerably fewer than those killed in 1919–22). However, it would be unwise to conclude from this that Italian Fascism was 'just another despotism' which was 'really not so bad after all'.

Fascist violence was generally more prominent between 1920 and 1925, but although less obvious afterwards, the regime still used repression. As Morgan has said, 'Repressiveness was not the most distinctive feature of the Fascist TOTALITARIAN system, but it was an essential and inescapable component of it'. The police's preventive and repressive powers were extensive and sought to create a real climate of fear. Policing increasingly came to involve information gathering and comment on practically everything which talked or moved.

It is hard to assess accurately the extent to which Mussolini's power depended on repression. In Chapter 8 you will be looking at the comparatively small amount of opposition in Fascist Italy. This could be used to support either the view that this reflected considerable repression, or that little repression was needed. Clearly Mussolini had an array of legal powers and repressive institutions which buttressed his power, but there is evidence to suggest that several broadly popular policies and successful propaganda were more important than repression in sustaining the regime, at least until the 1940s.

**CHART 5G** How repressive was Fascist Italy?

- **Special Tribunal**
  - Applied summary justice (immediate judgments, without a full trial) outside normal court system
  - 21,000 people tried 1926–43, mainly for trivial political crimes; three-quarters acquitted
  - 1927–39 3596 sentences were passed, totalling 19,309 years – so the average sentence was approximately five years

- **Censorship**
  - Anti-Fascist propaganda viewed as treason
  - Journalists had to be registered with government; critics removed
  - Hostile newspapers liable to be shut down

- **OVRA (secret police)**
  - Operated independently of the regular police authorities
  - 20,000 actions weekly. Hundreds of arrests and detentions per week
  - Vast network of informants and agents
  - Morgan: 'Police harassment and surveillance became habitual and continuous, affecting even the most mundane areas of daily life, especially in working-class districts'

- **MVSN (militia) and squads**
  - 50,000 armed militia, intimidated opponents
  - Although squadrist violence was severely reduced after 1925, Fascists were still able to beat up and threaten selected victims, and to destroy property

- **Political prisoners**
  - 1922–43 about 5000 imprisoned
  - About 10,000 in 'confino' (internal exile), many on islands, especially Lipari and Lampedusa

- **Exiles**
  - Many opponents forced into exile; some were killed there by Fascist agents, e.g. Rosselli brothers (see page 185)

- **Deaths**
  - About 400 people killed by the state for political reasons
  - 1922–40 9 political executions
  - 1940–43 17 political executions

- **Controls**
  - Internal migration had to be approved
Activity

1 Study Chart 5G. 'The small number of political prisoners in Fascist Italy illustrates how popular the regime was.' Do you agree?
2 Does the evidence justify the historian Payne's view that the regime was 'brutal and repressive, but not murderous and bloodthirsty'?
3 How might a historian sympathetic to Fascism use some of these sources to show the strengths of Mussolini's regime?

Talking Points

1 Most totalitarian societies establish what could be called an 'informers' society.' Why might this be a successful way of strengthening a regime?
2 Who is more likely to be affected by repression — the masses or the educated elite? Why?

Source 5.18 Public Safety Decree, November 1926

If they are a danger to public safety, the following persons may be assigned to compulsory domicile under police supervision [house arrest], with an obligation to work:

i) Those who have received a warning

ii) Those who have committed or have shown a deliberate intention of committing any act calculated to bring about violent disturbance to the national, social or economic regulations of the state . . . or to impede the carrying out of the functions of the state in such a manner as to injure in any way the national interests either at home or abroad.

A sentence of compulsory domicile will last no less than one nor more than five years, and will be carried out either in a colony or a commune [village or small town] of the kingdom other than the normal residence of the sentenced person.

Source 5.19 Police Chief Bocchini

Without an efficient police the dictatorship would not be able to continue to exist.

Source 5.20 The exiled Socialist writer Ignazio Silone, in his 1936 novel Bread and Wine, describes the atmosphere in Fascist Italy

It is well known that the police have their informers in every section of every big factory, in every bank, in every office. In every block of flats the porter is by law a stool pigeon [informers] for the police . . . Informers are legion [very many], whether they work for a miserable pittance or whether their only incentive is the hope of the advancement of their careers. This state of affairs spreads suspicion and distrust throughout all classes of the population. On this degradation of man into a frightened animal, who quivers with fear and hates his neighbour in his fear, and watches him and betrays him, sells him and then lives in fear of discovery, the dictatorship is based. The real organisation on which the system is based is the secret manipulation of fear.

Source 5.21 The Socialist politician Salvemini describes squad violence

When the Militia is on regular service, or in attendance on official ceremonies, its members wear a uniform. But when they are out to burn, beat and kill, uniforms are left behind. They are no longer militia but squadristi.

Source 5.22 Mussolini in a telegram to the Turin Prefect, March 1924

I hear that Gobetti [a critical editor] who was recently in Paris is now in Sicily. Please keep me informed, and be vigilant in making life difficult again for this stupid opponent of the Government and of Fascism.

Source 5.23 Sarto, a Roman worker, describes intimidation by the authorities

During the last ten years I have been arrested hundreds of times, charged with being a conspirator, a dynamiter, a dangerous criminal. Every time they used to keep me in prison a couple of days and then let me go. In consequence I wasn't able to work regularly and soon I could no longer find any work at all. People were afraid to employ me because of the suspicion with which the police surrounded me.

Source 5.24 Salvemini describes a trial

On 3 May 1926, the case was heard of a Communist, Achille Pepe, who had already spent five months awaiting trial. The accused was acquitted of criminal conspiracy, but received six months imprisonment for inciting class hatred. As the defence lawyer left the court a crowd of Fascists overwhelmed him with insults and threats . . . He was beaten and wounded . . . It would be naive to ask whether the assailants were ever brought to justice.

Source 5.25 A French cartoon, 1929, copied from the Italian underground newspaper Becco Giallo. The caption was:

Voter: 'Excuse me, where do I go to vote against?'
Polling officer: 'Opposite, to the cemetery.'
**Early economic policies**

Mussolini was initially fortunate. In the early years of Fascism the economy improved for a variety of reasons:

- A general European economic recovery
- Laissez-faire policies favouring industry
- The ending of the threat of Socialist revolution, which increased the confidence of the economic elite
- The weakening of trade unions

Mussolini appointed de Stefani, an Economics professor, as his Economics Minister. He adopted Liberal policies, reducing government intervention in the economy, and trying to stimulate investment. Public spending was reduced, and efforts were made to balance the budget. Taxes on war profits were reduced or abolished. Industrialists were pleased with these actions.

Mussolini knew the economy was significant for his longer-term ambitions. The question was, should he continue with these policies, or follow the Radical Fascists, who wanted a major reorganisation of the economy, along Syndicalist lines? The creation of the one-party state after 1925 seemed to offer a new opportunity. However, when he dismissed de Stefani in 1925, Mussolini did not turn to the radicals but replaced him with the Industrialist and financier Count Volpi. The Duc later claimed that new economic structures were established in his state, but in practice CONINDUSTRIA ensured that industry’s interests were largely safeguarded.

**How successful were Mussolini’s economic battles?**

How were Mussolini’s economic objectives to be met? Certainly not by the implementation of specific economic theories. As a dictator he tended to believe in will power as the driving force of a society which could overcome all obstacles. Consequently the Italian people were mobilised in a series of battles, and exhorted to struggle to achieve their targets.

**CHART 7C The Battle for the Lira**

**SOURCE 7.1** A Fascist cartoon. The caption reads 'It was going down ... but something has stopped it and is pushing it up again'.

**SOURCE 7.2** Mussolini, in a speech in 1926

> We will conduct the defence of the lira with the most strenuous decisiveness, and from this piazza I say to the whole civilised world that I will defend the lira to the last breath, to the last drop of blood. The Fascist regime is ready, from the chief to its last follower, to impose on itself all the necessary sacrifices, but our lira, which represents the symbol of the nation, the sign of our riches, the fruit of our labours, of our efforts, of our sacrifices, of our tears, of our blood, is being defended and will be defended.
Aims
- To boost cereal production to make Italy self-sufficient in grain
- To reduce the balance of trade deficit
- To free Italy 'from the slavery of foreign bread'
- To make Italy less dependent on imports when war came
- To show Italy as a major power

Actions
- Battle announced in 1925: high TARIFFS put on imported grain
- New marginal land used (land that was expensive to farm)
- Government grants to farmers to buy machinery and fertilisers

Effects
- Cereal production increased (doubled from 1922 to 1939) but at the expense of other forms of agriculture, e.g. animals and viticulture (vine growing)
- Wheat imports fell by 75% 1925–35
- Italy became almost self-sufficient in cereals by 1940, but not in fertilisers
- Raised cost of grain and bread in Italy
- Decline in quality of Italian diet
- Protection benefited Italian grain producers, especially inefficient southern landowners
- Increased imports of meat and eggs
- Cereal production fell during the war as imported fertilisers were restricted

Success in this battle was ... another illusory propaganda victory won at the expense of the Italian economy in general and consumers in particular.

Aims
- To show dynamic government in action; impress foreigners
- To increase land available for cereal production
- To provide more jobs
- To improve health by reducing malaria

Actions
- Laws passed (1923, 1928, 1933) on reclamation, extending previous schemes
- Private landowners encouraged to co-operate with drainage schemes

Effects
- 1928–38 only 80,000 hectares (hectare = 10,000 m²) reclaimed, one-twentieth of propaganda claim of one-sixth of the land of Italy
- Pontine marshes near Rome drained
- Three-quarters of land reclaimed was in North; South neglected
- Ambitious plans blocked by southern landowners
- New towns — Latina and Sabaudia — created as showpieces
- Bigger impact in providing jobs and improving public health than in boosting farming
Corporativism: ‘new way’ or ‘elaborate fraud’?

Why was a new way of organising the economy needed?

The stability of post-war Europe seemed to contemporaries to be precariously balanced against the backdrop of the tension between capitalism and socialism. Would the interests of capitalists or the working class win out?

Fascists believed they had the answer in promoting the national interest above sectional interests. They wanted a society where all people involved in economic activity (i.e. both employers and workers) could all work together in the national interest, which in the end would bring the best for all. This was to be based on a system of corporations.

SOURCE 7.12 Alfredo Rocco, Minister of Justice, and a leading Fascist theorist

The corporation in which the various categories of producers, employers and workers are all represented... is certainly best fitted to regulate production, not in the interest of any one producer but in order to achieve the highest output, which is in the interests of all the producers but above all in the national interest.

Mussolini claimed that his Corporative State provided the advantages of both capitalism and Socialism, whilst avoiding each one’s weaknesses. It was thus a new ‘third way’.

Activity

1. Complete a chart like the one below, which at the moment just identifies the supposed benefits of Corporativism. Use the points below to fill in 1–4 in the table on the claimed benefits and disadvantages of capitalism and Socialism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>Supposed benefits</th>
<th>Supposed weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capitalism</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialism</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporativism</td>
<td>• Economic regulated</td>
<td>5.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
<pre><code>   | • National interest advanced |
   | • Class conflict ended |
   | • Everyone’s interests protected |
   | • Problems solved by conciliation, not struggle |
</code></pre>

2. Look at your completed chart. Does the idea of Corporativism look more attractive than capitalism or Socialism?

3. After you have studied Corporativism in practice, see what points you can add to the weaknesses of Corporativism (5).
How did the corporative structure work?
The concept of the Corporative State was not totally new. It brought together a variety of existing ideas and practices about the organisation of production (see Chart 7).

An elaborate structure was built on the corporative principle. The corporations were:

- organisations consisting of all workers and employers in a particular field of economic activity
- self-governing, and supposed to discuss all matters concerned with production, working conditions, pay, etc. in their sector
- represented at the National Council of Corporations, and later the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations which made policy decisions affecting the entire country.

**Chart 7** The ingredients of Corporativism

- a) Older ideas of economic co-operation, e.g. both medieval guilds and the Catholic Church tried to encourage the harmonious co-operation of workers and employers to assist production
- b) The revolutionary idea of syndicalism, where syndicates would organise production to ensure a fairer society
- c) More conservative, nationalist ideas of the need to combine workers and employers in corporations in order to increase national production (productivist ideas)
- d) Employers seeing corporations as a means to control workers so as to safeguard their own interests

**Chart 7** The Corporative State: the final structure

Who represented whom?

- The national interest was represented by the Ministry of Corporations and Party Officials
- Employers were represented by Fascist party representatives, i.e. Fascist officials rather than workers
- Workers were represented by themselves

Corporation represents all those engaged in a particular area of activity: employers (Federations) and workers (syndicates) were equally represented, plus experts acted as advisers, and there were three Fascist Party members.

Presided over by the Minister of Corporations (Mussolini 1934) - who had to approve representatives of workers and employers.

The system in operation

Two key weaknesses:
1. Representation within corporations was unbalanced:
   - Employers represented themselves
   - Workers were represented by Fascist Party members
2. Powers subordinate to Mussolini: the corporations just discussed issues, while Mussolini made the real decisions

Mussolini: the claims
- 'Third way', new synthesis
- Reconcile conflicting interests
- Unite all to produce for nation

A critical historian: the reality
- Elaborate facade
- Exploitation of workers
- Vast bureaucracy, often duplicating government agencies
- Grave burden on national economy
CHART 70  How was a working-class family affected by the Fascist regime?

PLUS
- Sense of belonging to a great nation/empire
- Family allowances (1934 onwards)
- Winning the World Cup!

MINUS
- Periodic wage cuts
- Strikes banned
- Hours periodically cut
- Expensive bread
- No political power
**Activity**

1. Read Sources 7.35–38.
   a) List the points made in support of the view that Fascism had a distinctively positive impact on the Italian economy.
   b) What counterpoints are made?
   c) What overall conclusions do you draw?

2. Look again at Mussolini’s claims for the economy at the start of this chapter (page 125). Martin Clark has written of Mussolini: ‘He relied on intuitions not appraisals; he mouthed slogans instead of analysing situations; he was obsessed with his own prestige rather than his country’s interests ...’ Was this true of Mussolini’s economic policies? Give reasons for your answer.

**Talking points**

1. Why is it important when assessing Fascist economic policy 1922–43 to consider what happened in the economy before and afterwards, and in other countries at the same time?

2. Do you think most people place ‘bread and butter’ issues, and national greatness, above political freedoms? If so, can this be used to justify Mussolini’s policies?

**Review: How successful were Mussolini’s economic policies?**

**Historians’ assessments**

**SOURCE 7.35** Tannenbaum, p. 128

Economically Fascism was a failure. The most serious ideological and constitutional innovation of the regime, the Corporative State, did nothing to reduce class antagonisms or improve economic conditions; in fact it never functioned at all except on paper ... Italy became almost self-sufficient in wheat production at the expense of the rest of her agriculture. IRI ... served mainly to perform a salvage operation (not to stimulate economic growth) ... Italy’s performance (in conservation and recovery) was worse than that of any major country. The main reason for this bad performance was that Italy was poorer to start with, but the fact remains that the Fascist regime did more to hinder than to aid economic growth and modernisation ... Even before the disastrous losses of the Second World War, growth in national income was retarded by restrictive cartels, discouragement of urban growth, the Battle of Grain, the spread of autarky and promotion of war industry.

**SOURCE 7.36** C. Maier, In Search of Stability, 1987, pp. 94–96, 113

The rhythm of Italian industrial development does not, therefore, seem particularly tied to the Fascist regime ... Fascist interventions were part of a longer pattern of periodic public initiatives ... Italian Fascism ... encouraged spurts of development when it came to power and as it switched to autarky. The Fascist experience produced few results in terms of modernisation that other governments might not have achieved ...

The Italian Fascists took charge of a country still dualist in structure, still ripe for the major transformations associated with industrialisation. Nevertheless, the Fascists did not really succeed in pushing through structural changes outside the regions already on their way to development. Moreover, the governments before and after the Fascist era chalked up more impressive records. The Italian Fascists, in effect, presided over further advances, at a moderate pace, in the already modernised regions of the country. Likewise, their performance in terms of quantitative growth rate was typical of other areas. The regime enjoyed two growth spurts, 1922–25 and 1935–39; between the two, the Fascists suffered from the same stagnation that afflicted all the capitalist economies and that had repeatedly hobbled long-term Italian growth.

**SOURCE 7.37** S. di Scala, Italy, From Revolution to Republic, 1995, p. 245

Fascist economic policies had their failures, particularly in agriculture and in the field of wages. But those policies also stimulated important modern industries such as electricity, steel, engineering, chemicals and artificial fibres. Italy’s profile began to resemble that of modern European countries to a greater degree than in the past.

**SOURCE 7.38** M. Vajda, The Rise of Fascism in Italy and Germany, 1972

Under Fascist rule, Italy underwent rapid capitalist development with the electrification of the whole country, the blossoming of automobile and silk industries, the creation of an up-to-date banking system, the prospering of agriculture ... Italy’s rapid progress after World War II ... would have been impossible without the social processes begun during the Fascist period.
**Review: Did Fascism capture the hearts and minds of the young?**

To attempt to answer the question above, we need first to look at how extensive membership of Fascist youth organisations was. It increased considerably during the regime, helped by a 1928 decree saying only youths who had been in the ONB could join the Fascist Party. By 1929 about 60 per cent of northern youths were members; the proportion was far lower in the South. In 1935 membership became compulsory. However, passing a law was one thing; ensuring all youths joined was far harder.

Organisation was very tied to the school system. Teachers were urged to become ONB leaders. This close tie with schools meant membership of the ONB was disproportionately male and middle class, as many girls and poorer boys left school when they were 12-14 years old, and thus found it easier to escape the ONB system. This particularly applied to peasant children. The ONB was organised on a neighbourhood basis so there was little mixing of classes.

The strong position of Catholicism in Italy also served to limit the spread of Fascist youth movements. Catholic schools did not properly enforce membership until the 1950s, and Catholic Action youth organisations continued to exist, though they were not allowed to duplicate key ONB activities such as sports.

It is even more difficult to assess the ideological impact of Fascist youth policies. There is some conflicting evidence, which partly reflects individuals' different responses to ONB membership and activities. Some contemporaries complained that male youths remained more lovers than fighters, and that they were just time-servers, not genuine enthusiasts. There was a growing number of reports from PNF secretaries and police of dissatisfaction amongst youth in the late 1950s, and especially during the unpopular German alliance and war.

On the other hand, the sheer length of time the Fascists were in power meant that all Italians born between about 1910 and 1930 experienced Fascist propaganda at school during their formative period, and this probably served to strengthen the regime, if not necessarily convert millions to Fascism.

Certainly, the extent to which support for Fascism disappeared after the overthrow of Mussolini in 1943 adds weight to the arguments of those who believe that Fascist youth policies had limited success.

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**Activity**

1. Study Chart 8D. What does it reveal about the impact of Fascist youth policies?
2. Study Chart 8E.
   a) Roughly what percentage of Italians by the late 1930s would have experienced over five years of 'Fascist' education?
   b) What does this suggest about the value of using the education system as a means of creating a nation of Fascists?
   c) What evidence does the chart provide as to how successful Fascist youth policy was?
   a) Make notes in a chart like the one below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historian</th>
<th>Assessment of success or failure</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Koon</td>
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<td>Tannenbaum</td>
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<td>Thompson</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

b) Do you detect any major disagreements between the historians?
4. You are a civil servant in the Ministry of Education in 1936. Mussolini has demanded
   a) a report on the success of his attempts to create young Fascists, and
   b) plans for ensuring further success.
   Your job is to prepare both documents using the material in this section.
**CHART 8.9 Youth in Fascist Italy: key aspects**

**FASCIST PRESSURE ON YOUTH**

- Teachers
- Curriculum
- School structure
- Universities

Youth organisations
ONB: Opera Nazionale Ballila

Aims
- To control all children in Fascist organisations
- To make teachers loyal servants of the regime
- To indoctrinate the young to be true Fascists and to see life as a struggle, won by the strong
- To equip Italian children to serve the needs of the nation
- To prepare Italians for war
- To develop an elite to maintain Fascism

**Extent of education**
- Elementary: leaving age raised from 12 to 14 in 1923, but not properly enforced
- Secondary: numbers fell in the 1920s, then increased considerably
- Numbers of university students
  - 1921: 54,000
  - Declined until 1934, then rose to 165,000 in 1942

**Illiteracy (% of population)**
- 1921: 27%
- 1931: 21%
- 1936: 17%

**Expenditure (% of government expenditure)**
- 1922: 4%
- 1926–35: 8%

**SOURCE 8.19** Fascist Party Secretaries’ internal comments on the Ballila

a) 1931 Turin provincial Party Secretary

"Unfortunately instead of diminishing, the gap between Fascism and the youth sector seems to be growing ... There is an aversion [hostility] to what Fascism represents."

b) 1936 Savona Party Secretary

"The Fasci Giovanili were a joke from all points of view ... Discipline did not exist and I was forced to resort to ... severe punishments to get them to show up at meetings."

c) Turin Party Secretary 1937

"The Young Fascists are deserting the meetings ... only the books are full of members, but the truth is that the young no longer go to the groups."
How did the regime treat women?

Employment

During the late nineteenth century, as in other industrialising nations, some mainly middle-class women had begun to organise to advance their political and economic rights. The First World War had increased women's employment opportunities, but afterwards measures were taken to restrict their employment, especially after the rise in unemployment from 1927. The main target was women in 'unnatural' occupations (such as school teachers, office workers and professionals). From the mid-1920s women were excluded from certain teaching jobs. In 1935 the state imposed a limit of ten per cent on state jobs for women; in 1938 this was extended to many private firms, though it was reversed during the war. The Fascists did not, however, challenge women's traditional importance in agriculture, and had to accept that millions worked in industry. Indeed, to help women combine this with their chief child-rearing function, several laws were passed protecting women at work.

Education

Education for women was seen as training to stay at home, to be effective housekeepers and mothers. Women were excluded from the most prestigious posts in secondary schools – teaching Latin, Italian, History and Philosophy – so more taught Maths and Science. Perversely the lack of job opportunities led to an increase in women at university (from only six per cent of students in 1914 to fifteen per cent in 1938).

Personal life

The Fascists held firm views on what women should look like. Well-rounded and sturdy rather than thin, elegant women were required. Salvemini sardonically described Fascist pressure on women's appearance as the 'Battle for Fat'. The state criticised cosmetics, high heels, trousers for women, and Negro and rhythm dancing. Yet though the National Committee for Cleaning Fasion might campaign against the 'horrid vice' of indecent and scandalous dress, millions of Italians went to cinemas where they could catch glimpses of American actresses' breasts, and thousands of women performed scantily dressed in athletic parades.

Fascists had a confused attitude to female sport; it could promote health, vigour, discipline and national pride, but it also might distract women from their main job of child production, and encourage lesbianism, and female liberation. Mussolini feared female involvement in sports (riding, skiling, cycling) because it was believed they caused infertility!

Politics

The Fascists also had an ambivalent attitude to women's involvement outside the family. When the franchise was extended to all males in 1919, women still could not vote. In 1925 the Fascist-dominated Parliament gave women the vote in local elections; but then ended such elections! Mobilising women politically might distract them from their primary role in the home. Some women set up fem Fascist groups. An attempt by their secretary Elisa Rizzioli to increase their influence was blocked, and the Fasci Femminili remained a vehicle to spread socially reactionary policies of the regime's male politicians, under the slogan 'Woman into the home'. This was reinforced by Pope Pius XI in his 1930 Encyclical Casti Conubii. He criticised the decline in paternal authority, and stressed the role of women as obedient wives and caring mothers.

There were still opportunities for women to broaden their involvement, however. Women served on committees of ONMI, a state organisation desit to help mothers, particularly disadvantaged ones. They were encouraged to engage in charity work, and to run home economics courses for women workers. Women were enlisted in the campaign against the League of Nati sanctions (1935), culminating in exchanging their gold wedding rings for t bands (see Source 14.12). Women were encouraged to attend rallies, and h
Activity
1 Study Chart 9B. Were Fascist policies the only major influence on women’s position in society?
2 Were the other influences assisting or hindering Fascist policies?

In the 1950s the PNF tried to ‘reach out to the people’, and in an effort to fascists the nation hoped to involve groups as yet uncommitted. In 1955 they set up the Massaie Rurali (rural housewives) for peasant women, and in 1958 the Section for Factory and Homeworkers (SOLD). Thus alongside a conservative stress on women staying at home to raise children, the regime did, in its TOTALITARIAN quest for mass involvement, try to involve millions of women in wider affairs.

Women in Fascist Italy: influences and policies

The position of women in Fascist Italy: the broader context
Factors influencing the position of women
- Fascist views and policies
- Mussolini
- Economic developments, especially Depression, decline of textile industry, growth in retail trade
- Wars
- Catholic Church
- Traditions
- Growth of mass culture (via urbanisation, radio, cinema, periodicals, department stores, advertising)

The ideal Fascist woman
- No cosmetics
- Clean kitchen
- Breast feeding
- Tin ring, replacement for gold wedding ring donated to state during Abyssinian War
- Italian-produced, simple clothes, no foreign fashion
- Sewing
- Flat shoes
- Children

Key
- Factor assisting emancipation of women
- Factor resisting/retarding emancipation of women

Political
- ‘To the people’; attempt to include more Italians in Fascist organisations
- Development of mass culture
- Declining fertility
- Economic
- Growth of mass education
- Increased educational opportunities
- Growing urbanisation

1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1945

Welfare policies
Fascist policies on population and employment
First World War
Second World War
Growing of tertiary sector in the economy
Increasing unemployment
Increased educational opportunities
Declining fertility
Development of mass culture
Catholic Church
‘To the people’; attempt to include more Italians in Fascist organisations
Economic
Economic
Political
Political
Social
Social

Flat shoes
Children