

A Palermo marketplace, around 1900. A vendor of goat's milk serves up a drink. In the south, there were few roads, almost no money, and the vast majority were illiterate. "The saying went," historian Denis Mack Smith has written, "that a donkey cost more to maintain than a man." Italy has come a long way since then.

Italy

In the United States, Italy seldom makes headlines—unless, of course, Red Brigades terrorists abduct a U.S. general and hold him for 42 days (James Dozier in 1981), or Italian voters elect a porn queen to Parliament (“Cicciolina” in 1987), or the government falls again. After a Socialist-led coalition collapsed last year, the *New York Times* said that the Christian Democrats, who formed a new coalition, would “resume the old ways of muddle and fuddle, collusion and drift.” Indeed, the new coalition soon broke up. Nonetheless, Italy represents one of Western Europe’s surprising success stories. Here, Joseph LaPalombara tells how the Italians put the Fascist era behind them and created a vigorous economy and a highly stable (if bewildering) democracy; and Charles Delzell ponders the legacy of Benito Mussolini’s 21-year effort to restore the Roman Empire.

PARTITOCRAZIA

by Joseph LaPalombara

In March 1985, Bettino Craxi, then Italy’s prime minister, visited Washington. President Ronald Reagan greeted him with a firm handshake and a (somewhat) facetious question: “How’s your crisis going?” Craxi replied, “Very well, thank you.”

No doubt his other NATO allies had asked Craxi, the Socialist Party leader, the same question. When Americans or Canadians or Germans think of Italy, many imagine a sunny, picturesque Mediterranean landscape whose inhabitants are in chronic disarray. Judged by U.S. headlines, or by the accounts of its own newspapers, this republic of 57 million people seems always to be undergoing *una crisi*.

There are sudden strikes or Cabinet reshuffles. Organized crime—the Mafia in Sicily, the 'Ndrangheta in Calabria, the Camorra around Naples—are only the leading players—has gained ground not just in the south but in Milan, Turin, and other northern cities. In a rash of violence that began in 1969 and continued into the mid-1980s, right- and left-wing terrorist groups murdered more than 400 innocents: train passengers, businessmen, professors, even an ex-prime minister. Aldo Moro, the Christian Democratic Party leader, was kidnapped, held for 55 days,

then shot to death in Rome in 1978.

Government in Italy seems feckless at best. Large budget deficits loom over the economy. Despite progress by government leaders in curbing tax evasion, the “underground” economy, where goods are traded and services performed out of the taxman’s view, accounts for perhaps a fourth of Italy’s gross domestic product (GDP). And, during the four postwar decades since the Republic was created, its wobbly parliamentary regimes have lasted, on average, a mere 10 months.

The Family, Inc.

After being asked to form a new government last July (Italy’s 47th in the postwar era) and then having to endure two weeks of parliamentary maneuvering, Christian Democrat Giovanni Gorla announced the makeup of his coalition Cabinet on television. At the end of his talk, the prime minister muttered an expression meaning roughly “Oh Lord, wish us luck.”

But Italy, I believe, needs less luck than many tidy-minded outsiders might claim.

The Italian nation-state is relatively young. Little more than a century has passed since the *Risorgimento*—that period of upheaval and cultural nationalism that led to the unification of Italy’s duchies and principalities. It culminated in the creation of the Italian kingdom in 1861 and its acquisition of Rome from the Pope in 1870. Yet the nation-building had only begun. “We have made Italy,” said the nationalist Massimo d’Azeglio. “Now we must make Italians.”

The process was fitful, first under six decades of chaotic parliamentary rule and later, after World War I, under Benito Mussolini’s Fascist dictatorship. Then came World War II and its aftermath.

Italy suffered no Dresdens or Hamburg firestorms, but its industrial centers and railroads were bombed out. The Allies had fought the Germans from Sicily to the Po Valley, and the countryside bore the scars. The surviving Italians were exhausted, morally and psychologically, by war and occupation, as attested by such bleak postwar films as Roberto Rossellini’s *Open City* and Vittorio de Sica’s *The Bicycle Thief*.

But four decades later, Italy has been transformed. Economic growth (2.7 percent in 1987) is close to the United States’ level. Foreign customers welcome such Italian products as Pirelli tires, Olivetti office equipment, and clothing from Benetton, a family firm near Venice that began distributing homemade wool sweaters during the 1950s and now has outlets in 60 countries. Italy produces a fifth of the world’s wine. And although they till Western Europe’s smallest farms (average size: 18.5

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Italians cheer Communist Party leader Enrico Berlinguer in Rome's St. John's Square in 1976, during the heyday of "Eurocommunism." Critics called the PCI "the other Church"; its "Pope" and "Holy See" were in Moscow.

acres), Italians harvest more wheat and corn than any other farmers (except the French) in the 12-nation Common Market.

Last year, Italy's National Institute of Statistics calculated that the country had surpassed Britain to become the Free World's fifth largest producer of goods and services. "*Il sorpasso*" was vigorously applauded by Italian pundits and politicians; Prime Minister Craxi even summoned his finance minister home from a conference in Paris after the latter was excluded from a special "Group of Five" meeting of his U.S., West German, Japanese, French, and British counterparts.

The British dispute the Italians' claim ("rubbish"), noting that they included dubious figures on the *underground* economy. Even so, Italy's economic achievements have been notable and under-reported, especially for a country that has few natural resources except sunshine and some large deposits of mercury.

Progress has undermined many of the old clichés about Italy.

As late as 1950, nearly 40 percent of the population lived on the land; now less than 13 percent are employed in agriculture. In the chronically underdeveloped south, where most of Italy's 2,600,000 jobless live, large estates were broken up during the 1950s so that parcels could be given to landless *mezzadri* and *braccianti* (tenant farmers and day

laborers). But the peasants, now used to living in villages and “dormitory” cities and working for wages, were not eager to become agricultural entrepreneurs. Land reform failed. By the early 1980s, some five million Italians were abroad—toiling in West German auto plants, as brick-makers in Britain, and at other factory jobs.

Another eroded cliché is the Italians’ alleged live-for-today mentality. The 19th-century poet Giacomo Leopardi complained that his countrymen’s “vivacity of character” equalled their unconcern for the future. Federico Fellini’s film *La Dolce Vita* (1960) renewed the charge.

Actually, concern about (or confidence in) the future among Italians has never been greater, to judge by Italy’s savings rate. It is higher than those of all other industrial democracies except Japan.

Eighty percent of all savings are accumulated by what Italian social analysts have come to call “The Family, Inc.”—families that include two or more income earners, including children. Partly because women now account for 35 percent of the work force (versus 45 percent in the United States), the numbers of such families are at a peak. A 1986 survey found that the *average* family had \$124,000 tucked away: \$85,000 in real estate, \$18,000 in bank accounts, \$15,000 in fixed-income securities, \$6,000 in stocks traded on the lively Milan exchange or in mutual funds, which in Italy are sold door-to-door.

Five Men, 29 Governments

Stocks are winning acceptance as an inflation hedge. But the Italians’ favored investment remains real property. They are not quite as apt as Americans (51 percent to 64 percent) to own their residences, but they vie with the French as Europe’s leading second-home owners. For a Family, Inc. in an apartment in bustling Rome or Milan, a retreat in Tuscany or on the Adriatic coast is not *la dolce vita* but a necessity.

One reason that Italians have more to invest may be that they have fewer mouths to feed. Italy’s once-robust birth rate is now only half of Ireland’s, and roughly on a par with the low Danish and West German rates. The Pill and the legalization of abortion (1978) are only two factors. Although 97 percent of all Italian babies are still baptized in the church, only 30 percent of adults are practicing Catholics and fewer observe church dictums against birth control. Moreover, the young find many reasons to postpone marriage—for example, Italy’s fast-expanding university system, which now embraces 47 campuses. It has more than one million students, four times as many as Britain.

Another change involves the old drive to become *sistemato*, “fixed for life.” A “safe” job was the highest ambition of most Italians, especially those in the poor south. There, a public service job, because it carried life tenure as well as high status, was the epitome of *sistemazione*. Such posts required a politician’s favor; as in other Latin countries, the average man’s quest for security helped make patron-



Roughly the size of Arizona, Italy is the world's 15th most populous nation (57.4 million). About half of its land area is under cultivation. Over 50 percent of Italians live in five of the nation's 20 provinces: Lombardy, Campania, Latium, Sicily, and Piedmont. The three largest cities: Rome (2.8 million), Milan (1.5 million) and Naples (1.2 million).

client relationships a mainspring of political power.

The “get-fixed” drive survives, but less strongly among Italians who did not see the Depression. Thanks to other opportunities, they are less likely to view a government job as the best possible career—or to look to the state or to political parties for sustenance.

Even so, Italians still prize stability. Divorce was legalized in 1970 and supported by 60 percent of the voters in a 1974 referendum, but Italy’s divorce rate is the lowest of any West European country save Ireland (where divorce is not permitted). The incidence of murder, rape, armed robbery, and other violent crimes, as well as drug addiction and alcoholism, is low, notably in comparison with U.S. levels. The many competent municipal governments, in Bologna, Padua, Verona, Florence, and elsewhere, keep the streets clean and the buses running on time.

Unlike France, Italy has stuck loyally to NATO; unlike Greece and Spain, she has not made a fuss over U.S. bases.

So how to account for Italy’s odd mix of private prudence and apparent governmental chaos? While West German or Anglo-Saxon pundits smugly assert that Italians have the kind of government they deserve, I would argue that they have the kind of government they *prefer*.

True, Italian prime ministers enjoy little job security. Nonetheless, Italy has been, since World War II, one of Western Europe’s most stable democracies. Heeding the 1948 Constitution, which holds voting to be a “civic duty,” nearly 90 percent of the electorate (everyone over 18) casts ballots in national elections. And if governments come and go, their leaders do not. Since the war, five men—Christian Democrats Alcide de Gasperi, Amintore Fanfani, Aldo Moro, Mariano Rumor, and Giulio Andreotti—have served as prime minister five or more times. That they headed, all told, 29 different governments is almost irrelevant.

Ousting the King

The French may prize Reason, and often strive to exercise it in politics; the Italians value ambiguity. It is useful in a society riven by age-old regional, class, and ideological disparities. Asked how things are going, an Italian may reply, *si tira avanti*—“life goes on.” And how are problems solved? *Ci arrangiamo*—“we improvise.”

The improvising began during the 19th century. After Italy was unified, Giuseppe Garibaldi (whose “Redshirts” conquered Sicily and Naples), Count Camillo Benso di Cavour, Giuseppe Mazzini, and other leaders of the *Risorgimento* struck a deal: Northern liberals would dominate the new Italy’s politics and economy; the *latifondisti* (large landowners) concentrated south of Rome would be allowed to continue their feudal ways (the cause of southern Italy’s chronic underdevelopment).

The northerners undertook to keep government in their hands via *trasformismo*. This was a practice of forming loose, shifting governing coalitions that may or may not have had much relation to election out-

comes or to distinctions between majorities and minorities in the legislature, but ensured that power would remain held by those used to wielding it. What Italians still call *la classe politica* was born.

The political class was sidelined—or co-opted—when Benito Mussolini took power during the popular turmoil after World War I. But when King Victor Emmanuel III ousted the *Duce* in 1943, the leaders of the renascent parties, united in their hatred of Fascism, agreed to put aside their differences and form a Committee for National Liberation.

To almost everyone's surprise, in their first postwar election (1946) Italians ousted the monarchy. In the voting for the Constituent Assembly, the Christian Democrats, founded in 1942–43 as the party of the Vatican, led with 35 percent of the ballots. That made the party's leader, Alcide de Gasperi, head of a provisional coalition government whose Cabinet also included Socialists, Communists, and Republicans.

'Christ or Communism'

The Socialists, who were the first (after World War I) to build a mass party, and the Communists assumed that Italy would soon become a "people's republic," much like those being established under Soviet auspices behind the Iron Curtain. That assumption seemed plausible, given the Italian Left's growing strength, the anti-Fascist sentiment that permeated postwar Europe, and the general expectation that the United States' occupation troops would quickly be brought home.

But de Gasperi proved to be a virtuoso at *trasformismo*. Deftly cutting deals with other party chieftains, he survived to head eight governments, still a record for an Italian prime minister. His anti-Fascist credentials were impeccable. A legislator in pre-Mussolini times representing the Catholic *Popolari* party, de Gasperi, like many *Popolari*, spent time in prison under the *Duce*. Released in 1929, he took refuge in the Vatican, where he worked as a librarian and helped launch the Christian Democratic Party.

Under his shrewd leadership, the Christian Democrats presided over a striking postwar economic recovery* and successfully championed regional governments, progressive taxation, land reform, and freedom for workers to form unions. The party was fiercely anti-Communist, an attitude that still prevails among many of its leaders and even more of its voters. Although it began as the legislative voice of the Catholic church hierarchy, the party attracted such disparate folk as wealthy industrialists, shopkeepers, farmers, and ordinary laborers. (The intelligentsia, then as later, sided with the Left.)

*The recovery's architect was economist Luigi Einaudi, governor of the Bank of Italy after 1944 and the first president elected under the postwar Constitution. While other Europeans (e.g., the British) set about creating a welfare state, Einaudi pressed an austerity program that cut inflation, stabilized the lira, and ended protectionism. Low labor costs helped produce high exports; Italy was fully competitive when Common Market entry came in 1957.

As the Cold War gained momentum elsewhere, power-sharing in Rome's Chamber of Deputies and Senate became difficult. In 1947, de Gasperi resigned and formed a one-party government—excluding the Communists and Socialists. A month later, the Truman administration offered \$1.5 billion in Marshall Plan aid, which was accepted. Echoing Josef Stalin, the Communists condemned the U.S. aid, which revived Italy's economy, as “an imperialist attempt to enslave the country.”

The election of April 1948, occurring just two months after the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia, became a referendum on “Christ or Communism.” The Moscow-line Communist Party replaced the Socialists as the most potent force on the Left. They would go on to win one in three ballots cast in Italian elections. But to keep the Left out of power, millions of Italians voted “against their own identity” and for de Gasperi's party. The Christian Democrats won 48 percent of the vote and a small majority in the Chamber of Deputies. But rather than try to govern alone, de Gasperi chose to name Cabinet ministers from smaller parties—Republicans, Liberals, and Social Democrats.

The coalition tradition he thus established would help ensure that Italy's democracy would be unlike any other.

Moreover, de Gasperi's decision to face “the problem of Communism” and the party's pro-Soviet ideology by barring its deputies (and



A Fiat factory in Turin today. “Turin is a city of workers, employed by the biggest industry in the land,” said Giorgio Fattore, editor of La Stampa, not a place where “old ladies . . . meet to sigh over pastries.”

the neo-Fascists' too) from Cabinet posts has been continued. All but four postwar regimes have been led by Christian Democrats;* all since May 1947 have excluded the Communists.

During the 1960s, Italy's first postwar economic *miracolo*, wrought by exports of inexpensive Fiats and refrigerators and other appliances, began to fade. The Communists had gained strength under Palmiro Togliatti, their leader until his death in 1964. The party, which had accepted the Kremlin's crushing of the 1956 Hungarian revolt, was careful to condemn the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, as well as the rising political violence at home.

Craxi's Grit

A still-unexplained December 1969 bomb blast on Milan's Piazza Fontana began a decade and a half of terrorism. Its most notorious actors were the Red Brigades, who had much in common with other "revolutionary" groups that sprouted in the West during the 1960s. The Brigades' founders were middle-class intellectuals—among them faculty members and sociology students at the University of Trento, such as Renato Curcio, a disillusioned Catholic student movement veteran. Far more focused than West Germany's Baader-Meinhoff gang, the Brigades aimed to "strike at the heart of the state" through violence; this would spur harsh repression that would, in turn, lead to a proletarian uprising against capitalism. But they got little encouragement from the Communist leaders, who included big-city mayors and regional officials.

Thus, even outside the Cabinet, the Communists had a strong if indirect influence on government. Then as now, few decisions in Rome were taken without consultation with their leaders. And the Communists could exercise influence through party-affiliated organizations, notably the 4.5 million-member CGIL (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*), the largest of Italy's three trade unions, all of which have political ties. It was the unions (including the CGIL) that in 1969 forced the enactment of the celebrated Workers' Statute, under which employees could be absent from work and still demand pay, and which made job reassignment subject to their approval.

But under Enrico Berlinguer, an appealingly professorial deputy from Rome who became the party's secretary general in 1972, the Communists mounted a strong bid for representation in the Cabinet.

Seeking to broaden the party's appeal, Berlinguer espoused "Eurocommunism": The Marxist parties in Western Europe could be fully independent of Moscow and, if in power, would accept continued membership in the Common Market and in NATO. In 1973, Berlinguer suggested that it was time for a "historic compromise," a power-sharing agreement with the Christian Democrats.

*The other four have been led by Giovanni Spadolini (two governments during 1981-2), head of the Republican Party, and by Socialist chief Bettino Craxi (two governments, 1983-7).

THE ITALIAN-AMERICANS

Boston's North End, New York's Mulberry Street, San Francisco's North Beach. These are, perhaps, the United States' best-known Italian neighborhoods. Ironically, most of the nearly four million people who emigrated from Italy to the United States between 1880 and 1920 did not think of themselves as "Italian." Hailing from Sicily, Calabria, and other southern provinces, they regarded themselves and their new enclaves as Sicilian, Calabrian, etc.

Thus, when sociologist Harvey Zorbaugh visited "Little Hell"—an Italian slum on the Near North side of Chicago—in 1929, he did not find a "Little Italy," but transplanted Sicilian towns and villages. "From the various towns of western Sicily they have come," Zorbaugh wrote. "Larrabee Street is a little Altavilla; the people along Cambridge [street] have come from Alimena and Chiusa Sclafani; the people on Townsend [street] from Bagheria . . ."



Mario Cuomo

Most Italians who migrated to the United States were southerners, forced by poverty and political circumstances to leave their homeland. Once in America, *contadini* (farm workers) provided new muscle for the nation's burgeoning construction, railroad, and mining industries. Italian-American *padroni* (labor agents) recruited many of the first immigrants and shipped them off to Pennsylvania's coalfields or New York's docks, where they sometimes faced hostile workers on strike. On their own, others found work as stevedores in New Orleans, as clerks and bartenders in Chicago, as fishermen in Providence, Rhode Island, and Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Few found the streets paved with gold. Large families wound up crammed into dilapidated walk-up tenements in Little Italies in Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia. Once the immigrants mingled with compatriots from other Italian locales, as historian Humbert S. Nelli has observed, they began "to think of themselves as *Italians* rather than as members of a particular family or emigrants from a particular locality."

Partly because the Irish already dominated the Catholic churches, even in Italian neighborhoods, Italian-Americans founded mutual aid societies, such as the Order of the Sons of Italy, which supported their members when they were sick and arranged funerals when they died. They also published newspa-

The Christian Democrats seemed to ponder the idea seriously, especially after the 1976 election, when the Communists polled a record (for them) 34.4 percent of the vote. But how would Italy's allies view the first inclusion of Communists in a NATO government? Although the prospect of a Red role in the key country on NATO's already soft southern flank alarmed many in the alliance, the new Carter administration in Washington equivocated on the matter for some time.

Finally, in January 1978, when it seemed that the "historic compromise" might actually occur, the White House declared the United States

pers, notably New York's *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* (1880).

Like the Irish and the Jews before them, the Italians quickly moved into skilled trades and professions, working as clerks, mechanics, salesmen, masons, painters, and plasterers. Some started their own hardware stores, restaurants, and trucking companies. Despite lingering prejudices, fostered by headlines and movies about the Mafia, second- and third-generation Italian-Americans made rapid progress after World War II; many attended urban colleges such as St. John's (Jamaica, New York), Loyola (Chicago), Fordham (the Bronx), and the City University of New York.

By 1963, about half of all Italian-American workers were employed in white-collar occupations—as doctors, dentists, and lawyers. They now live in comfortable suburbs such as Oak Park, Illinois, and Manhasset, New York. A 1980 Census Bureau study found that Italian-American families enjoyed a higher median income (\$21,842) than their Irish-American counterparts (\$20,719), and higher than American families overall (\$19,917). Italian-American executives have run Fortune 500 companies (Chrysler's Lee Iacocca) and major universities (Yale's former president A. Bartlett Giamatti).

With the Irish in control of the Democratic parties in New York, Boston, and Chicago, Italian-Americans made slower progress in politics. Some turned to the G.O.P. As historian Arthur Mann wrote about Fiorello H. La Guardia, New York's ebullient reform mayor (1933–45): "A Republican, he emerged as the first Italo-American successfully to challenge the political reign of Irish-Americans . . . [and] gave the lie to bigots who held that Italo-Americans were fit only for ditchdigging and organ grinding."

Thirty-six Italian-Americans, including Senator Alfonse D'Amato (R.-N.Y.) and Representative Peter Rodino (D.-N.J.), now serve in Congress. The nation's most prominent Italian-American politician: New York's Democratic governor, Mario Cuomo.

Thanks to hard-won material success, Italian-Americans, especially since the end of World War II, have been steadily moving out of their old urban enclaves. "When I was a kid, North Beach was 95 percent Italian, mostly from southern Italy, and there were many fisherman," Luigi Marciano, a 57-year-old chef at San Francisco's Green Valley Restaurant recently told the *New York Times*. "The Orientals came in and bought the land from the young ones . . . The Italian way has gone; the old are gone, and mostly the kids have moved and gone to [affluent] Marin County."

opposed to Communist representation in any Italian Cabinet. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, had persuaded his chief that the precedent set by such a power-sharing could become the United States' "greatest political problem" in Europe.

The appeal of a "historic compromise" and of Eurocommunism, possibly exaggerated at the time, faded with Moscow's crackdown on Solidarity in Poland and its invasion of Afghanistan. In last year's election, the Italian Communists wooed environmentalists and women (some 40 percent of their candidates were female). Yet they won less than 27

percent of the vote*—a “broad rejection,” as party analyst Stefano Draghi observed, of the Communists’ “image and credibility.”

Despite their best efforts, the Communist leaders’ vague espousal of a “third way,” differing from both capitalism and democratic socialism, has only intensified most Italians’ anxieties. Then there is the name problem. “The best proof that Italy does not want to be entirely modern,” Guido Rossi, a Milan Communist, has said, “is that the biggest party on the left continues to call itself Communist.”

Communists have also suffered from the popularity of Socialist leader Bettino Craxi, whose achievements include the postwar era’s longest-lived government (two years, 10 months). Craxi showed the *grinta* (“true grit”) and *decisionismo* (decisive leadership) that Italians admire. He introduced American-style campaign promotion—not of the party but of the standard-bearer’s personality. In one television ad, a mock interviewer asked Craxi about nuclear energy. Said the staunchly anti-Communist Socialist chief: “Well, after Chernobyl even I was frightened, and I don’t think I am someone who frightens easily.”

Today, a number of academics worry that Italy suffers from what they call either “blocked democracy” or “stable instability.” There is no sweeping change in Italian politics, as Antonio Martino, a University of Rome economist, wrote recently, because in every election, the voters confront the same question: Will the Christian Democrats manage to keep the Communists out of government?

“No matter how inefficient, unstable or corrupt” are the coalitions formed under the Christian Democratic leadership, Martino noted, most Italians prefer them to allowing Communists into government.

The Sharpshooters

Thus, from election to election, gains or losses by the major non-Communist parties are slight. “Victory” and “defeat” are largely a matter of perception. When the Christian Democrats won only 32.9 percent of the vote in 1983 (down from 38.3 percent in 1979), the Rome newspapers concluded that the party had suffered “an earthquake.”

In any case, to a degree that baffles Americans, election results have little impact on proceedings in the Chamber of Deputies.

The final vote on any legislation before the whole house must be secret, theoretically to make it easier for deputies to follow their consciences. In practice, secrecy weakens party discipline. While governments usually fall when one of the coalition parties withdraws, it may also occur when they lose a vote on a bill in Parliament. Very often, they are done in by “sharpshooters,” defectors from the ruling parties who

*Numerous parties have voices in the 630-seat Chamber of Deputies and the coequal 315-seat Senate. Currently, the deputies include 234 Christian Democrats, 177 Communists, 94 Socialists, 35 neo-Fascists, 21 Republicans, 17 Democratic Socialists, 13 Radicals, 13 Greens, 11 Liberals, eight Proletarian Democrats, and seven others. In regional elections, voters may find 15 or more parties represented. Communists participate in “Juntas of the Left” that run Milan, Bologna, and Florence.

quietly vote against their own coalition government. After such a collapse, pundits and politicians spend days trying to identify the “traitors.”

Protracted legislative debates and sharpshooters-in-ambush cannot keep the Cabinet from enacting laws by executive decree (which the Constitution permits, if the laws later win parliamentary approval). Nor can they prevent parliamentary *committees* from enacting laws by a vote of the committee’s members. Thousands of measures are thus approved every legislative session, and some are passed unanimously; that is, members of the government and of the so-called opposition (including the Communists) actually do much collaborating.

Once a Sicilian . . .

Such off-the-floor horse trading by the parties’ powerful chiefs is the form that *trasformismo* takes today. *Trasformismo* flourishes when parliamentary factions are not clear cut, governmental coalitions are loose and shifting, and the formation of public policies need only be marginally related to election results.* To an untrained observer, it may appear that Italy’s political system is in a prolonged process of collapse. In fact, underneath the surface pyrotechnics, the business of government, like the economy, carries on.

The fact that Italy changes, in political terms, very slowly, is not surprising. Italians are, after all, conservative by nature. Italy remains a society in which a narrow circle of families control most of the wealth and much of the political power. While universal suffrage and mass-based parties have brought democracy to ordinary Italians, they have not unseated *la classe politica*—the ruling political class. A small number of northern families—e.g., the Agnellis and Olivettis of Turin, the Pirellis of Milan—still dominate industry; for the most part, southerners run the Italian bureaucracy.

The traditional family still anchors Italian society. To be sure, younger women are entering the workforce in increasing numbers. But, generally, conventional familial relationships prevail. The men, the breadwinners, go to work; the women cook and run the household. In the evening, the men stroll through the streets, often arm in arm, and crowd the small bars and *trattorie*, while the women (except in the big cities) stay home or visit friends and relatives. And unlike their restless American or West German counterparts, Italian college students usually live at home—where they often stay until they marry.

Italians, simply put, are not adventurous people. They prize church, community, family. They do not move very often, and when they do, they still cherish their provenance. A resident of Milan, whose *grandparents* migrated from Palermo would consider himself—and be recog-

*Any citizen who gets 500,000 signatures on a petition may have an issue turned over to the voters in a direct referendum. It was thus that, during the 1970s, Italians approved the legalization of divorce and of abortion, both of which were ardently opposed by the Christian Democrats.

nized by the Milanese—as Sicilian. The Italians have a distinctive way of identifying themselves. A Milan resident born in Lucca would first say that he is Luccan, and second that he is Tuscan, the region in which Lucca is located. He would also say, with more than a little vehemence, that he is a northerner, and *not* from the south.

When in 1984 the Rome and Liverpool soccer teams were to play an important match in the Italian capital, a writer for the city's daily *Il Messaggero* advised visiting British fans that they "shouldn't be surprised" if "you find your team supported by a majority of Italians." Rome, he explained, "is foreign in Italy."

Bail-out Socialism

Italians, unlike the Scandinavians or West Germans, generally take their vacations at home, in Italy—perhaps in the Dolomite Mountains, or along the Amalfi coast south of Naples. In their habits Italians are conformists. Rome, Milan, Turin, and other major Italian cities, unlike Paris, Frankfurt, or New York, are not teeming with ethnic restaurants. When Italians dine out, they do so not to experiment with foreign foods, but to enjoy better Italian fare.

Such provincialism, which Italians call *campanilismo*, is not unrelated to the postwar strength of Italian democracy. "Italy survives," British journalist Robert Harvey noted, because Italians have "a cohesive set of social values." To them, "it is unacceptable to treat your children badly; it is unacceptable to dump grandma in an old folks home. Violence (except to settle family scores) is unacceptable."

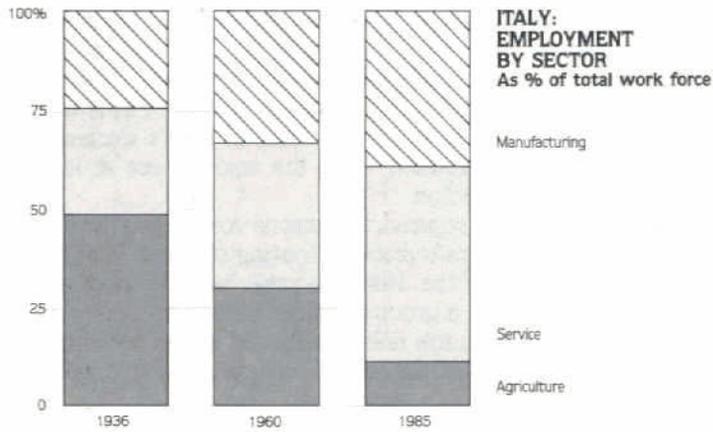
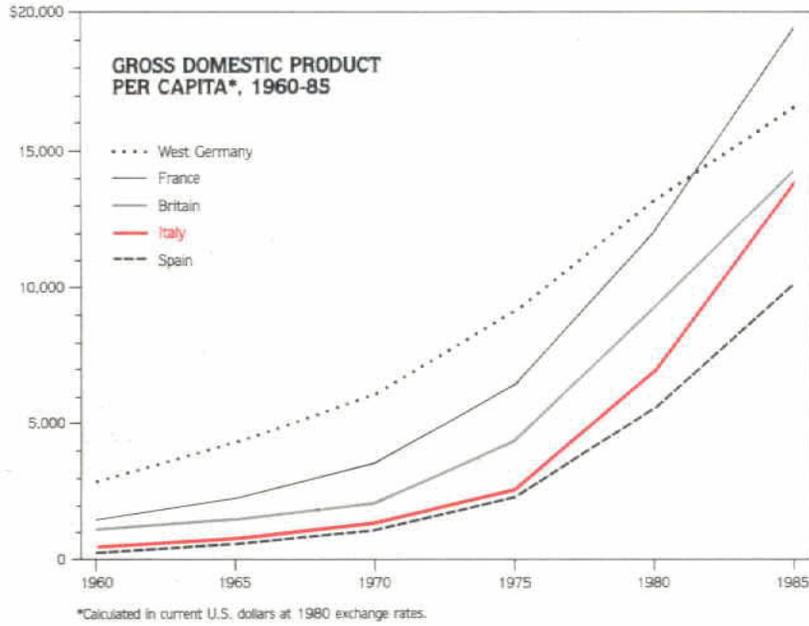
The Italians' essential conservatism is evident in industry too. It was the state, not risk-taking entrepreneurs, that created the nation's steel and textile industries during the 19th century. Today, government-owned firms account for about a fourth of Italy's GDP; prior to a recent spate of nationalizations in France, Italy's economy was the most "socialist" in the West after Austria's.

Rome does not own industries because some leftists thought the state should destroy Italy's capitalists; Rome bailed out the capitalists.

In 1933 Mussolini's Fascist regime set up the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction (IRI), initially to rescue three major banks that had invested their customers' money unwisely. Though meant to be a temporary expedient, the IRI established large holdings in other industries. Today it controls shipbuilding, the airlines, and 80 percent of the steel and metal-working sectors. In 1953 Rome set up another company, *Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi* (ENI), to command Italy's energy industries. With some 120,000 employees and overseas oil projects in Libya, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the Soviet Union, ENI now boasts annual revenues of about \$20 billion.

Managers at IRI and ENI owe their jobs to the *lottizzazione*, a patronage system whereby the major parties in the ruling coalition con-

THE ITALIAN ECONOMY: CATCHING UP



Italy's economy is now more like Britain's than Spain's. Because many Italians work "underground," said then-Treasury Minister Giovanni Goria in 1987, such "negative indicators" as high joblessness "should be taken with a grain of salt."

trol a certain number of jobs in the state-owned industries, in rough proportion to the parties' electoral strength. In banking, for instance, the ratio of Christian Democratic to Socialist managers now stands at roughly eight to one. But other parties have their fiefdoms too. Socialist leaders, for example, have much to say about who gets the top jobs at ENI. Economic efficiency is a secondary consideration.

'Propaganda of the Deed'

The parties actually wield more power than the central government itself. Hence many political scientists call Italian democracy a *partito-crazia*, or "partyocracy." The parties decide not only who gets patronage jobs but also such matters as control of broadcasting (the Christian Democrats, Socialists, and Communists each have leading roles at one of the three official RAI TV channels), which artists receive government aid, and even who performs at *La Scala*.

Of Milan's opera, a University of Rome historian once observed, "The members of the board are all representatives of the political parties, to the point that when they enroll the musicians, they ask what political party they belong to—yes, the players."

Neither this cozy system nor Italy's remarkable economic progress has eroded unemployment or helped the unions. Their membership peaked at about 12 million workers—more than half of the labor force—during the mid-1970s. Today, membership in the three major labor confederations is, by official count, under nine million. Some 100,000 manufacturing jobs are disappearing every year, owing largely to the decline of steel-making, shipbuilding, and other basic industries hurt by competition from lower-wage nations in Asia and elsewhere. Most employees now work for local governments, universities, banks, and in other hard-to-unionize, service-oriented organizations. Firms with 100 staffers or fewer now employ some two-thirds of Italy's workers.

As elsewhere in the industrialized West, the unions were at least partly to blame for their own decline.

With the Workers' Statute secured, the unions scored another victory in 1975. This involved the *scala mobile* ("moving staircase"), a pay-escalator system devised during the 1940s to raise wages periodically without disputes or strikes. With a group of business leaders (headed by Fiat chairman Giovanni Agnelli), the unions achieved an agreement to link the *scala mobile* to increases in the cost of living in a way that would bring every worker a *quarterly* increase in pay.

These victories were costly. By one reckoning, wage increases accounted for roughly 40 percent of the rise in the prices of Italy's manufactured goods between 1977 and 1979. And, ironically, with the Workers' Statute and the pay escalator in place, wage earners had less interest in paying union dues. And because the revised *scala mobile* acted to flatten the differences between high- and low-paid employees,



Italy's most durable postwar Christian Democratic prime ministers (clockwise from upper left): Alcide de Gasperi (led 8 governments), Amintore Fanfani (6), Aldo Moro (5), Mariano Rumor (5), and Giulio Andreotti (5).

skilled workers began to demand raises via under-the-table deals made at the plant level. The unions began to lose both members and influence.

Of all the paradoxes about Italian democracy, perhaps the most striking is that, while party politics permeates society, society seems to change so little. How can this be? Basic Italian conservatism is only one explanation. Another theory is that Italian politics is largely a *spettacolo*, a continuing drama, more talk than action, which pervades life on the peninsula. In the *spettacolo* of politics, Italians are not only spectators but also participants, not only the severe critics of politics and politicians but also their enthusiastic adherents.

In the theater of the Italian *spettacolo*, the urban *piazza*, or central square, is a stage. Rome, Milan, and even medium-sized cities such as Florence, Bologna, and Catania boast squares where a million or more persons may assemble. The right that Italians enjoy to "go down to the *piazza*," to voice one's views, is one that they exercise often and with relish. The *spettacolo* sometimes takes place via the media. In 1986 the government began a mass prosecution of 452 accused Mafia members in Palermo. The "maxitrial" became a *spettacolo*, as the defendants

watched the proceedings from cages erected in the courtroom, and Italians everywhere followed the trial on nationwide TV broadcasts. (In December 1987, 338 of the *Mafiosi* were convicted.)

Italy's terrorists skillfully exploited the *spettacolo* phenomenon to call attention to themselves. Following the 1969 Milan bombing, terrorist squads kidnapped, "kneecapped," maimed, wounded, or killed 1,775 victims in dozens of cities. The most serious and prolonged *spettacolo* began in Rome in March 1978, when the Red Brigades abducted Aldo Moro, killing five of his bodyguards in the process.

The Brigades probably struck at Moro because he had helped negotiate a "national solidarity" pact under which the Communists agreed to support the Christian Democratic government. In any case, from the carefully timed release of Moro's letters to family members to the announcement of his "trial"—and the cryptic message ("The Mandarin Is Rotten") that announced his death—the terrorists showed that what they most desired was "the propaganda of the deed." Moro's body was left curled up in the back of a car, around the corner from the Christian Democratic and Communist Party headquarters in downtown Rome.

"The more we grew militarily," observed Alberto Franceschini, one of the Red Brigades' founders, "the more we were living" in the headlines. "The society of the *spettacolo*," he claimed, "was using us as elements of the *spettacolo* itself." The enemies of the state, "the 'terrorists,' became the favorite actors of the state."

Laws, Loopholes, Logic

The Moro tragedy proved a *doccia scozzese* (cold shower) for the ruling elite. Despite Moro's pleas that the Christian Democrats negotiate with his captors, they refused. So did the Communists, the Republicans, and the Liberals. But the Socialists, with Bettino Craxi's approval, rashly tried, via intermediaries, to make contact with the Red Brigades. One Socialist leader, Claudio Signorile, later admitted to an investigating parliamentary committee that by "going against the current [in the Moro case], we also hoped to gain some political space."

As it happens, the record of Italy's intellectuals on terrorism has been even worse than that of the Socialists. Beginning during the late 1960s, reflecting similar "cultural revolutions" elsewhere in the West, leading writers and university professors began engaging in attacks on the state. At Padua University, for instance, Toni Negri, a specialist on Kant and Spinoza who came to be regarded as the intellectual guru of the most extreme terrorists on the Left, openly condoned political violence.* From such intellectuals, susceptible students absorbed theories

*Negri became an emblem of Italian tolerance. Awaiting trial for being one of the Red Brigades' "brains," he was freed after winning immunity by being elected a deputy in 1983 under the banner of the Radicals (a small party whose flamboyant leader has espoused free heroin to thwart the Mafia). Later, after fleeing to France, Negri complained of being sent only half his parliamentary pay.

that, in effect, justified attacks on Italy's institutions.

These theories ranged from Friedrich Nietzsche's argument that the creation of anything worthwhile requires destruction first, to French historian Michel Foucault's distinction between "constructive" and "destructive" violence. Such abstract ideas did not fade in the face of real bombs and victims. During the Moro abduction, Leonardo Sciascia, a leading ex-Communist intellectual, chillingly declared himself "neither with the state nor with the Red Brigades."

Yet in combatting violence, officials in Rome, remembering Mussolini, took care not to turn the nation into a police state. "We respected civil rights," recalled former interior minister Virginio Rognoni of his antiterrorist work after the Moro affair. "There were no special tribunals." A law allowing suspects to be held for long periods without charges was repealed; it was "not proving useful against terrorism."

Indeed, the miracle of Italian democracy is this: Living in a pluralistic, divided society, with a high potential for conflict, Italians, in the end, manage to relieve tension and prevent strife. The ways in which they do so often seem illogical, devious, corrupt, and inefficient. Rules are made to satisfy various groups. Entrepreneurs run their businesses "underground," beneath the reach of Italian officialdom. In government and in state-owned industry, positions are filled first on the strength of the applicant's party membership, then on the formal basis of merit. Evading taxes or onerous regulations, ordinary citizens, at the very least, habitually skirt the letter of the law. "*Fatta la legge, trovato l'inganno*," goes a well-known Neapolitan saying: "Made the law, found the loophole."

The signs of such thinking are often highly visible. Especially in the south, the countryside is stippled with half-completed houses. They are built by poor folk who take years to complete them, one floor at a time, but have erected the basic framework quickly because the law bars the arbitrary demolition of any structure with a roof on it. Indeed, the flouting of building codes is so endemic that at one point the Rome government invited transgressors to confess their code violations, ask (and receive) forgiveness, and pay a fine. The time limit for the violations that could be forgiven *postdated* the law. Thus, citizens who had not yet sinned were given a chance to do so—a quintessentially Italian gesture.

Not all Italians have been content with the sometimes baffling or slipshod aspects of Italian democracy. The Communists, for a time, hoped to remake the society according to Marx and Lenin. Earlier in this century, Benito Mussolini believed he could transform the Italian peninsula into the cornerstone of a second Roman empire. During their 21-year reign, the Fascists were guilty of many sins, against logic and against humanity. In the end, it was their own countrymen whom the *Duce* and his followers, with disastrous results, failed to understand.

REMEMBERING MUSSOLINI

by Charles F. Delzell

After meeting Benito Mussolini in Rome in 1927, Winston Churchill, then a Conservative member of Parliament, said that had he been an Italian, he would have "wholeheartedly" supported the Fascist leader's "triumphant struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism." In 1940, however, when he was prime minister of an embattled Britain, Churchill called the *Duce* a "jackal," and blamed this "one man alone" for dragging Italy into World War II and disaster.

There have been few, if any, dictators of the Right or Left in our century whose rise to power owed more to the myopia of democratic statesmen and plain citizens. Mussolini's fall from power was as dramatic as his ascent, and the Fascist era merits our reflections today.

Many younger Americans may think of Mussolini only as actor Jack Oakie portrayed him in Charlie Chaplin's classic 1940 film, *The Great Dictator*: a rotund, strutting clown, who struck pompous poses from his Roman balcony and tried to upstage Adolf Hitler when they first met, in Venice in 1934.

Yet the caricature should not blind us to history. Perhaps the most sobering aspect of Benito Mussolini's career was how much applause he once enjoyed from highly respected intellectuals, journalists, and politicians, abroad and at home. Exasperated by Italy's fragile, fractious parliamentary democracy, worried about increasing popular unrest, and fearful of the Socialists' rising popularity, statesmen such as the Liberal Party leader Giovanni Giolitti and King Victor Emmanuel III welcomed Mussolini's advent to power in 1922. And the King supported him during most of the 21 years that the *Duce* ruled in Rome.

Mussolini's strong-man appeal—and that of the Fascism he espoused—grew out of the postwar disorder and economic hardship which reigned in Italy and much of Europe. It also stemmed in some measure from the fact that during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Italy had been governed by squabbling legislators. By 1883, the year Mussolini was born, the various kingdoms and duchies on the Italian peninsula had only recently been unified under Victor Emmanuel II, King of Sardinia-Piedmont. "The patriotism of the Italians," as the 19th-century Neapolitan historian Luigi Blanch has observed, "is the love of a single town, not of a country; it is the feeling of a tribe, not of a nation."

Indeed, Italy was heir to long-embedded regional differences; these were aggravated by poor transportation and great disparities in education, wealth, and class. During the early 20th century, the church was powerful almost everywhere. And every corner of the country had its



The Duce at work in Palazzo Chigi, c. 1925. Mussolini disliked small talk and expressed a "physical repulsion" to human contact. "A leader can have no equals, no friends," he said, "and must give his confidence to no one."

own traditions, customs, and dialect. The north-south contrasts were striking: At the turn of the century, for example, there were no primary schools in the south; in fact, nearly 80 percent of all southerners were illiterate. Many peasants lived in a kind of Third World poverty, subject to drought, malaria, and the vagaries of absentee landlords.

The nation was politically fragmented too. In rural Italy, especially in the central "Red" Romagna region where Mussolini was born, anarchist-socialist ideas had spread rapidly. By the 1890s, a Marxist brand of socialism won favor among workers in northern Italy's new "industrial triangle." By 1919 Italy's Socialist Party—"revolutionary" and "revisionist" factions—held more seats than any other single party (though still not a majority) in the Parliament, thanks to the introduction of universal manhood suffrage and proportional representation. The Roman Catholic Church, meanwhile, was at odds not only with the Socialists but also with the kingdom of Italy itself. The kingdom had annexed the papal states of Rome and central Italy between 1861 and 1870, prompting Pope Pius IX to proclaim himself a "prisoner of the Vatican."

In the eyes of his early Fascist supporters, Benito Mussolini was the man who was restoring order and establishing national unity.

His origins were no more auspicious than Hitler's or Stalin's. He

was born on July 29, 1883, into a poor but politically active household. His father, Alessandro Mussolini, was a blacksmith and an anarchist-socialist who helped organize a local group of the Socialist International, and who read aloud parts of *Das Kapital* to his family. Benito's mother, Rosa, was a pious Catholic schoolteacher who insisted that the family speak high Italian, rather than the Romagna dialect. Benito lived with his parents and a younger brother and sister in two rooms on the second floor of a small, shabby building outside of Predappio, about 50 miles southeast of Bologna. Two pictures hung on a wall in the parents' bedroom: one of the Virgin Mary and one of the Italian nationalist and anticlerical agitator Giuseppe Garibaldi. The parents named their eldest son not after a saint but after Benito Juarez, the Mexican revolutionary who had helped overthrow Santa Anna's dictatorship in 1855.

In his youth, Benito was moody at home and a bully at the Catholic boarding school he attended in nearby Faenza. Indeed, he was expelled after stabbing a fellow student with a knife and assaulting a priest who tried to discipline him. Benito was, nevertheless, an academic achiever; in 1901 he got his diploma from another school, in Forlimpopoli, and later became a part-time school teacher. At age 19, Mussolini left Italy for Switzerland ("that republic of sausages"), partly to avoid compulsory military service. "I was a bohemian in those days," he later wrote. "I made my own rules and I did not keep even them."

Changing Tunes

At first, Mussolini lived a vagabond's life in Switzerland—moving from town to town, doing odd jobs to survive, sometimes sleeping in public lavatories and parks. But the young man's interest soon turned to politics. In 1903 Mussolini took up residence in Bern; he began contributing articles to socialist journals, organized a strike of masons, and fought a (harmless) pistol duel with a fellow socialist.

After wandering through Switzerland, France, and Germany, Mussolini returned to Italy to do his military service. In 1909 he decided to move to Italian-speaking Trento in Austria-Hungary. There he edited a weekly socialist newspaper, *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore* ("The Workers' Future"). Later, in Forlì, Italy, he edited another socialist weekly, *La Lotta di Classe* ("The Class Struggle"), and translated Pyotr Kropotkin's *Great French Revolution*. By 1910, displaying a natural talent, he was one of Italy's best-known socialist journalist-polemicists. That year he also began to live with Rachele Guidi, the 17-year-old daughter of a widow with whom Benito's father had lived after the death of his wife.

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Their civil marriage would not take place until 1915.

Mussolini's early commitment to socialism, or to any other *ism*, should not be taken too seriously, despite his passionate rhetoric. Mussolini would repeatedly demonstrate his willingness to change his political stance whenever it advanced his prospects. As a young man he read the works of Niccolò Machiavelli, Friedrich Nietzsche, Georges Sorel, and others. But he was mostly interested in ideas that he could appropriate for his own use. Like other Italian socialists, Mussolini at first condemned World War I as an "imperialist war." His country's involvement, he said, would constitute an "unpardonable crime." But after France's amazing survival at the Marne in September 1914, he reversed his position. In *Avanti!*, the Socialist Party newspaper that he then edited in Milan, he urged that Italy enter the conflict on the side of Britain and France. The Socialists promptly expelled him as a traitor.

Fasci di Combattimento

Now a maverick "national" socialist, Mussolini quickly founded his own newspaper in Milan, *Il Popolo d'Italia* ("The People of Italy"). The paper was financed, in part, by local industrialists. Slogans on the paper's masthead read: "Whoever has steel has bread" (from the French revolutionary Auguste Blanqui) and "The Revolution is an idea which has found bayonets!" (from Napoleon). When the government declared war on Austria-Hungary in May 1915, Mussolini hailed the event as "Italy's baptism as a great power" and "a culminating point in world history."

Mussolini's own role in the conflict—he was drafted in August 1915 and served in the Alps—would provide him with a lode of (mostly imaginary) stories about his heroics in combat. Never involved in any major battles, the young sergeant was injured on February 22, 1917, when a mortar accidentally exploded in his trench, spraying his backside with 44 pieces of shrapnel. After recovering, Mussolini returned to *Il Popolo*, where he pounded out fiery editorials in favor of the war effort and against bolshevism. He considered Lenin a "man of straw" and observed that "only a Tartar and Mongolian people could fall for such a program as his."

As time went on, Mussolini became increasingly nationalistic. Insisting upon Italy's "great imperial destiny," he demanded the annexation of the Austro-Hungarian territories where Italian was spoken, such as the port of Trieste, the Italian Tyrol, and most of Dalmatia. With strong business support, Mussolini changed the subtitle of *Il Popolo d'Italia* from "a socialist newspaper" to "the newspaper of combatants and producers." And in a speech in Rome in February 1918, Mussolini declared that Italy needed "a man who is ferocious and energetic enough to make a clean sweep, with the courage to punish without hesitation, particularly when the culprits are in high places."

Although Italy emerged as a victor in World War I, the conflict had

wreaked havoc on Italian society. Some 650,000 soldiers had perished. Returning veterans swelled the ranks of the unemployed; nearly two million Italians found themselves out of work by the end of 1919. A wave of industrial strikes broke out in the north. Some workers, stirred by the news of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, urged a "dictatorship of the proletariat" for Italy. Meanwhile, in Rome, one feeble Liberal Party coalition government after another tried vainly to restore stability.

With the Great War at an end, and the fear of bolshevism widespread, Mussolini cast about for a new nationalist cause to lead. On March 23, 1919, he founded Italy's Fascist movement in a businessmen's club off Milan's Piazza San Sepolcro. His *Fasci di Combattimento* ("Fighting Fasces") took their name from the bundle of rods with protruding axe-blades that had been the symbol of authority and discipline in ancient Rome. About 120 people were present at the Milan meeting, including veterans of the *arditi*, a group of wartime shock troops. "We, the survivors who have returned," Mussolini wrote, "demand the right of governing Italy." The Fascists chose as their uniform the same black shirt Romagna laborers had favored.

Though Mussolini's Fascist movement was always anti-Marxist, anti-Liberal, and virulently nationalistic, it would endorse (and quickly drop) many causes. At first Mussolini called for a republic and universal suffrage, and criticized the Roman Catholic Church. Later, he would endorse the monarchy, render elections meaningless, and cozy up to the church. The Fascist movement attracted unemployed youths, frightened members of the bourgeoisie, industrialists, landowners, and, especially, war veterans who believed that Italy, at the 1919 Paris peace conference, had not gained all of the territories she was due.

"When I came back from the war," Italo Balbo, a noted Fascist, would later recall, "I, like so many others, hated politics and politicians, who, it seemed to me, had betrayed the hopes of the fighting men and had inflicted on Italy a shameful peace . . . Struggle, fight to return the country to Giolitti who had bartered every ideal? No. Better [to] deny everything, destroy everything in order to build everything up again from the bottom."

Cudgels and Castor Oil

The Fascist movement's ability to straddle, however awkwardly, Italy's conventional political divisions between Right and Left proved to be one of its greatest initial strengths. During the "Fascism of the First Hour," Mussolini's program did not differ much from that of the Socialists, except that the Fascists had favored Italy's wartime role and still praised it. But when the Fascist movement failed to elect even one of its candidates to Parliament in the November 1919 election, Mussolini decided to shift to the Right.

To win more support from Catholics, he muted his anticlerical rhet-

oric and said that Rome should subsidize churches and religious schools. The Liberal government's decision to withdraw troops from Albania, which they had occupied since 1914, Mussolini said, represented a "disgusting exhibition of national cowardice." Above all, Mussolini intensified his anti-Socialist rhetoric and berated the Liberal government for "doing nothing" when, in September 1920, metal workers in the north forcibly occupied the factories and set up Soviet-style workers' councils. The Fascists, Mussolini promised, would restore "law and order."

Mussolini's message won over many employers, who believed that the Fascists could keep militant labor at bay. Bands of Fascist thugs, known as *squadristi*, launched "punitive expeditions" against Socialist and Catholic leagues of laborers and farmworkers. They beat some members with cudgels and forced castor oil down their throats. By official count, the Fascists destroyed 120 labor union offices and murdered 243 persons between January and May of 1921.

The ruling Liberals were happy to look the other way. Local police officers even supplied the Blackshirt militias with weapons. And when Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti called for new elections, to take place on May 15, 1921, he proposed to the Fascists that, following the election, they should join his constitutional bloc in Parliament. This time,



Italian troops march through Rome, bound for Ethiopia, in October 1935. The British, Mussolini assured his countrymen, would not go to war to defend "an African country... without a trace of civilization."

Mussolini's Fascist Party would win 35 seats.

By 1922, Mussolini was impatient to seize power in what seemed more and more like a political vacuum. In October of that year, the Fascist Party held a congress in Naples, where Mussolini and his colleagues drew up plans for a "March on Rome." Under the plan, Fascist militias would lead the march while Mussolini prudently remained close to the Swiss border in case the attempted coup d'état failed. "Either we are allowed to govern," Mussolini warned in a speech to the Fascist militiamen, "or we will seize power by marching on Rome" to "take by the throat the miserable political class that governs us."

Taking Power

The weak coalition government led by Luigi Facta knew that Mussolini was planning a coup, but at first the prime minister did not take the Fascists' intentions seriously. "I believe that the prospect of a March on Rome has faded away," Facta told the King. Nor were all of the Socialists eager to confront the Fascist threat. Indeed, some radical Marxists hoped that Mussolini's "reactionary buffoonery" would destroy both the Socialists and the Liberals, thus preparing the way for a genuine Communist revolution. For their part, the Liberals worried most about the Socialists, because of their anticapitalist ideology. Indeed, Liberals and Socialists were "as anxious to scuttle each other," as historian Denis Mack Smith has observed, "as to prevent a Fascist revolution."

The Fascists initiated the "March on Rome" on the night of October 27–28, 1922. The militias began taking over telephone exchanges and government offices. Luigi Facta wanted the King to declare a state of siege, but in the end no showdown occurred. Unconvinced that the army could or would defend Rome from the Fascists, or that the Liberals could provide effective leadership, Victor Emmanuel refused to sign a formal decree declaring a state of emergency. Instead, he telegraphed Mussolini, asking him to come to Rome to form a new government.

Boarding a train in Milan, Mussolini informed the stationmaster that he wanted to depart "exactly on time [because] from now on everything must function perfectly"—thereby giving rise to the myth that he made Italy's trains run on time. Upon his arrival in Rome, the *Duce* proceeded at once to the Palazzo del Quirinale. Still wearing a black shirt, he told the 53-year-old monarch (who had expected him to appear in formal dress): "I have come from the battlefield."

Thus, on October 31, 1922, at age 39, Mussolini became the youngest prime minister in Italy's short parliamentary history. With the Fascists holding only 35 seats in the 510-member Chamber of Deputies, he headed a cabinet of "national concentration" composed mostly of Liberals, socialist Democrats, and Catholic *Popolari*. In his first speech to the deputies, who gave him an overwhelming vote of confidence, he boasted: "I could have transformed this drab hall into a bivouac for my

squads . . . I could have formed a government exclusively of Fascists, but I chose not to, at least not for the present."

Despite the *Duce's* threats, many veteran politicians in Rome thought that, in time, they could co-opt Mussolini. Even Giovanni Giolitti and Antonio Salandra, the two senior members of the Liberal Party establishment, favored Mussolini's ascension to power. Luigi Albertini, the editor of Milan's *Corriere della Sera* voiced his delight that Fascism had, above all, "saved Italy from the danger of Socialism."

Others were pleased that, finally, Italy enjoyed strong leadership, of whatever kind. "The heart of Fascism is the love of Italy," observed the Liberal senator and philosopher Benedetto Croce in January 1924. "Fascism is overcoming the traditional indifference of Italians to politics . . . and I value so highly the cure which Italy is undergoing from it that I rather hope the patient will not get up too soon from his bed and risk some grave relapse."

In Britain, France, and the United States, many conservatives also gave their blessings. The *New York Tribune* remarked that "the Fascisti movement is—in essentials—a reaction against degeneration through socialistic internationalism. It is rough in its methods, but the aims which it professes are tonic." Even the *New York Times* suggested that Mussolini's coup was of a "peculiar and relatively harmless type."

The Matteotti Crisis

Now at the center of power, Mussolini increasingly became a solitary figure. During his first five years in office, the *Duce* lived alone in a small rented apartment; his wife Rachele remained in Milan, where she cared for their five children. He lived austere, dined on vegetarian meals, and, partly to avoid irritating a gastric ulcer, eschewed alcohol and tobacco. (He once bragged of his "utter contempt for the lure of money.") An inveterate womanizer, Mussolini evinced little genuine affection for the opposite sex, or for people in general. "I have no friends," he once admitted to the German publicist Emil Ludwig, "first of all because of my temperament; secondly because of my views of human beings. That is why I avoid both intimacy and discussion."

Mussolini managed to project a more congenial image to the outside world. He contrived frequent "photo opportunities," posing at the controls of an airplane, grinning behind the wheel of a sports car, or taming a lion cub in its cage at the zoo. Many Americans saw him as an Italian Teddy Roosevelt—a stout-hearted advocate of the strenuous life.

But "image" was not enough. Eager to put more Fascists in Parliament, Mussolini called for an election, to take place on April 6, 1924. During the campaign and voting, the *squadristi* engaged in widespread intimidation. "When it is a matter of the Fatherland or of Fascism," Mussolini said on January 28, 1924, "we are ready to kill and die."

In the election, the Fascists claimed to have won 64.9 percent of

the votes. But on May 30, Giacomo Matteotti, the widely respected leader of the Unitary Socialist Party, courageously stood up in Parliament to read a list of incidents in which Blackshirts had threatened voters and tampered with the ballot boxes. Fascist deputies, now in the majority, taunted him, yelling "Hireling!", "Traitor!", "Demagogue!" Ten days later, Fascist toughs who were closely linked to Mussolini's press office kidnapped Matteotti near his home in Rome, stabbed him, and then half buried his corpse in a grove outside the capital.

The assassination precipitated the most serious crisis of Mussolini's early days in power. Many Italians, after all, believed that Mussolini had at least incited, if not ordered, the murder. The anti-Fascist opposition—Socialists, Catholic *Popolari*, Republicans, and Constitutional Democrats—boycotted the Parliament, forming the "Aventine Secession." It was time for the King, they believed, to dismiss Mussolini and call for new elections.

But the ever-timid King, who was weary of the governments of the past, refused to intervene. Nor did the Vatican support the oppositionists. Pope Pius XI himself warned Italians against "cooperation with evil" (i.e. the Socialists) for "whatever reason of public welfare."

In a fit of wishful thinking, many foreign commentators did not blame Mussolini for the murder. They preferred to cite certain "gang-



The Duce and the Führer meet for the first time in Venice, June 1934. Afterward, Mussolini described Hitler as "a gramophone with just seven tunes and once he had finished playing them he started all over again."

ster elements" among the Fascists. "The Matteotti incident," lamented the *New York Times* "is of a kind that may kill a movement by depriving it at one stroke of its moral content."

In Rome, Mussolini taunted his hapless, divided opponents during a speech to Parliament:

But after all, gentlemen, what butterflies are we looking for under the arch of Titus? Well, I declare here before this assembly, before the Italian people, that I assume, I alone, the political, moral, historical responsibility for everything that has happened

By failing to oust Mussolini during the Matteotti crisis, his foes effectively entrenched the *Duce* as Italy's all-powerful leader.

On January 3, 1925, Mussolini launched a counter-offensive, announcing in an impassioned half-hour speech to Parliament that "force" was the "only solution" to the threat of disorder. Under a series of "exceptional decrees," Mussolini censored the press and outlawed all opposition parties, including the Socialists and Liberals. He replaced labor unions with Fascist syndicates. His Special Tribunal for the Defense of the State sentenced thousands of opposition activists (especially Communists and anarchists) either to long prison terms or to internal exile in the south. Youngsters were recruited by Fascist youth organizations—a future model for Germany's Hitler Youth—which stressed indoctrination and discipline, and exhorted them to "Believe! Obey! Fight!"

All the while, Mussolini continued to garner praise abroad. "Mussolini's dictatorship," observed the *Washington Post* in August 1926, "evidently appeals to the Italian people. They needed a leader, and having found him they gladly confer power upon him."

Giving Italy Back to God

Mussolini called his regime the Totalitarian State: "Everything in the State, Nothing outside the State, Nothing Against the State!" But his "totalitarianism," harsh and noisy as it often was, was far less brutal than that of Stalin's Russia or Hitler's Germany—partly because the King retained control of the Italian Army and the right to dismiss the prime minister. Not until 1938 did the regime begin to discriminate against the nation's roughly 40,000 Jews; many would lose their jobs in government and academia. But Mussolini did not seek a "final solution" to Italy's "Jewish problem"—as the Germans did after they occupied northern Italy in September 1943.

On the economic front, Mussolini's "Corporative State" tried to foster "class conciliation." The regime set up parallel Fascist syndicates of employers and workers in various sectors of the economy. Labor courts settled disputes under a system of compulsory arbitration.

In 1933, the regime established the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction (IRI) as a holding company to shore up failing industries. State-subsidized (or "parastate") industrial organizations would soon furnish about 17 percent of all goods and services. To stimulate the economy, Mussolini built roads, sports stadiums, and government buildings. The government launched numerous programs for mothers and children and developed a land reclamation scheme, which was responsible for draining the Pontine Marshes near Rome. Mussolini initiated a much-publicized "battle for grain"; newsreel cameramen filmed him pitching straw, bare from the waist up. Perhaps most significantly, the *Duce* began an ill-fated effort to rebuild the nation's army, navy, and air force.

Despite Mussolini's promise to restore "the Augustan Empire," he generally failed to push Italy's backward economy forward. The regime's cartels sometimes hindered economic advance by discouraging innovation and modernization. The *Duce* demoralized workers by cutting wages, raising taxes, and banning strikes and other forms of protest. Even as the government took over industries and prepared for war, unemployment remained high. Fully half of those who did work were employed in agriculture. Italian families, meanwhile, were spending 50 percent of their incomes on food.

Mussolini, however, sought (and gained) amicable relations with the Catholic church by signing the Lateran Pacts with the Vatican in February 1929. The pacts created the State of Vatican City, within which the Pope would be sovereign. They established Roman Catholicism as Italy's state religion, bestowing on it extensive privileges and immunities. The *Duce's* star soared throughout the Catholic world; devout Italian peasants flocked to church to pray for the man who had "given back God to Italy and Italy to God." Ignoring the suppression of civil liberties, Pope Pius XI referred to Mussolini as "a man whom Providence has caused to meet us" and sprinkled him with holy water.

Grabbing Ethiopia

By the late 1920s, the *Duce* had solidified support for his regime, both in Rome and abroad. Soon after entering the White House in 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote that he was "deeply impressed" by this "admirable Italian gentleman," who seemed intent upon "restoring Italy and seeking to prevent general European trouble."

Indeed, until the mid-1930s, Mussolini stayed (for the most part) out of foreign ventures. But great nations, Mussolini believed, could not be content with achievements at home. "For Fascism," as he wrote in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* in 1932, "the growth of empire . . . is an essential manifestation of vitality, and its opposite a sign of decadence. Peoples which are rising, or rising again after a period of decadence, are always imperialist: any renunciation is a sign of decay and death."

Mussolini would become increasingly obsessed with foreign con-



U.S. G.I.'s in Rome on June 5, 1944, the day after they liberated the Eternal City. Mussolini had begged Hitler to defend the capital—to no avail.

quests after January 1933, when Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany and soon won dictatorial powers. Although Mussolini and Hitler, as fellow Fascists, admired each other, their alliance would be marked by periodic fits of jealousy on the *Duce's* part. Hitler, as biographer Joachim C. Fest has written, "aroused in Mussolini an inferiority complex for which he thereafter tried to compensate more and more by posturings, imperial actions, or the invoking of a vanished past."

Mussolini's first major "imperial action" would occur in Africa. The *Duce* had long coveted Emperor Haile Selassie's Ethiopia, which an Italian army had failed to conquer in 1896. On the morning of October 2, 1935, as 100,000 troops began moving across the Eritrea-Ethiopia border, Mussolini announced that "A great hour in the history of our country has struck... forty million Italians, a sworn community, will not let themselves be robbed of their place in the sun!"

Paralyzed by economic depression and public antiwar sentiment, Britain's Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin refused to intervene, despite the inherent threat to British colonies in Africa. The League of Nations denounced the Fascist aggression. However, lacking any coherent leadership or U.S. support, the League stopped short of closing the Suez Canal or imposing an oil embargo on Italy. Either action, Mussolini said later, would have inflicted "an inconceivable disaster."

The barefooted Ethiopian levies were no match for Italy's Savoia

bombers and mustard gas. The *Duce's* pilot son, Vittorio, told journalists in Africa that the Ethiopian soldiers, when hit from the air, "exploded like red roses." Addis Ababa fell in May 1936. With this victory, Mussolini reached the pinnacle of his popularity at home. Speaking to an enormous crowd from his Palazzo Venezia balcony, the *Duce* declared that his "triumph over 50 nations" meant the "reappearance of the Empire upon the fated hills of Rome." Signs everywhere proclaimed *Il Duce ha sempre ragione* ("The leader is always right").

Emboldened by his Ethiopian success, Mussolini began to intervene elsewhere. He dispatched aircraft and some 70,000 "volunteers" to help Generalissimo Francisco Franco's Falangist insurgents in the Spanish Civil War. He pulled Italy out of the League of Nations and decided to line up with Hitler's Germany, which had already quit the League. Thus, in June 1936, Mussolini's 33-year-old foreign minister and son-in-law, Count Galeazzo Ciano, negotiated the Rome-Berlin Axis, which was expanded into a full-fledged military alliance, the "Pact of Steel," in May 1939. Both countries also established links with Japan through the Anti-Comintern Pact. The *Duce* now belonged to what he called the "most formidable political and military combination that has ever existed."

Humiliations in the Desert

Mussolini's military forces, however, could not be described as formidable. Lacking coal, iron, oil, and sufficient heavy industry, Italy's economy could not support a major war effort. The *Duce*, who spoke of "eight million bayonets," proved a better propagandist than military planner. On the eve of World War II, the Italian Army owned 1.3 million outdated rifles and even fewer bayonets; its tanks and artillery were obsolete. By June 1940, the Italian Navy boasted fast battleships and Western Europe's largest fleet of submarines. But it sadly lacked radar, echo-sounding equipment, and other new technologies. And Mussolini's admirals and generals were better known for their political loyalty than for professional competence.

When Hitler quickly annexed Austria in March 1938, and Czechoslovakia in March 1939, Mussolini complained to Count Ciano: "The Italians will laugh at me. Every time Hitler occupies a country, he sends me a message." The *Duce*, ignoring Catholic sensibilities, ordered the invasion of Albania on Good Friday, April 7, 1939, bringing that backward Adriatic country into his empire.

When Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, thereby launching World War II, Mussolini knew that Italy was not ready to fight. He initially adopted a position of "non-belligerency." The list of needed war supplies that the *Duce* requested from Berlin, noted Count Ciano, "is long enough to kill a bull." But as Hitler's Blitzkrieg brought Denmark, Norway, the Low Countries, and France to their knees in 1940, Mussolini decided he had little to lose, and perhaps some spoils to gain.

On June 10, 1940, without consulting either his cabinet or the Fascist Grand Council, Mussolini declared war on both France and Britain. In joining the conflict, Mussolini inadvertently let Hitler become the master of Italy's fate.

The Italian people soon felt the pain. The battlefield performance of Mussolini's armed forces reflected the homefront's lack of zeal. One debacle after another ensued. Under Field Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, Italy's much-touted armored brigades in Libya attacked the British in Egypt, hoping to capture the Suez Canal. But in the seesaw battles across the desert, as well as in naval engagements in the Mediterranean, the outnumbered British inflicted repeated humiliations on the Italians, who had to beg the Germans for help. By the end of 1941, the British had also shorn Mussolini of Italian Eritrea and Somalia, as well as Ethiopia, reinstating Haile Selassie as emperor.

The King Says Good-bye

Italy's invasion of Greece, launched from Albania on October 28, 1940, did not fare much better. Saying he was "tired of acting as Hitler's tail-light," Mussolini launched the attack without notifying Berlin. The war against the Greeks, the *Duce* predicted, would be little more than a "military promenade." But the Italians were bogged down in the mountains for months, until Hitler's spring 1941 invasion of the Balkans rescued Mussolini's lackluster legions. And Italy's participation in Germany's 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union yielded few triumphs. Mussolini dispatched three infantry divisions and one cavalry division. At least half of the 240,000 Italian soldiers sent to the Eastern front never returned.

For Italy, the beginning of the end came on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, bringing the United States into the war against the Axis powers. Although Mussolini seemed delighted to be fighting "a country of Negroes and Jews," he knew that his regime was now in deep trouble.

Across the Mediterranean, in November 1942, General Dwight Eisenhower put Allied forces ashore in Morocco and Algeria. He began a push to meet Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's British Eighth Army, which had already broken through Axis defenses at el-Alamein. The German *Afrika Korps* fought a tough delaying action. But when the North Africa campaign ended in May 1943, some 200,000 Italians had been taken prisoner; few had fought the Allies with much enthusiasm.

New bases in North Africa enabled Allied airmen to step up the bombing of Italian cities and rail centers, which left the nation's already hard-pressed economy in tatters. Tardily, the regime rationed food supplies and restricted the consumption of gas and coal. Despite wage and price controls, inflation soared, and a black market flourished. Ordinary Italians began to demonstrate their disaffection. In early 1943, public employees in Turin and Fiat workers in Milan went on strike. "In Italy,"

Mussolini would later write, “the moral repercussions of the American landing in Algiers were immediate and profound. Every enemy of Fascism promptly reared his ugly head”

By the time the Allies invaded Sicily on July 10, 1943, even those Italian politicians who had long enjoyed privileges and perquisites were fed up; plots were being hatched in Rome to oust Mussolini and turn over political power to King Victor Emmanuel. All this came to a head on the night of July 24–25, when the Fascist Grand Council met at the Palazzo Venezia to decide Mussolini’s fate. Some Fascist councillors criticized the shaken dictator to his face for being too indecisive; others berated him for not ridding the government of incompetents. Nothing was working, they said, and the Germans in Italy, coping with Anglo-American advances, regarded their sagging ally with contempt.

In a two-hour monologue, the *Duce* tried to defend himself, saying that “this is the moment to tighten the reins and to assume the necessary responsibility. I shall have no difficulty in replacing men, in turning the screw, in bringing forces to bear not yet engaged.” But the Council adopted a resolution, which had been supported by Count Ciano, calling upon the King to take over the leadership of the nation.

The next afternoon, Mussolini went to the King’s villa, hoping to bluff his way through the crisis. But the King had decided, at last, to



Voting in Italy's first postwar parliamentary elections, in Rome on April 18, 1948: Italian-Americans wrote to their friends and relatives in Italy, urging them to reject the Communists in favor of Christian Democrats.

separate himself from the Fascist regime. He quickly informed Mussolini that he had decided to set up a royal military government under the 71-year-old Army Marshal, Pietro Badoglio. "Then everything is finished," the *Duce* murmured. As the ex-dictator left the Villa Savoia, a *Carabiniere* officer motioned him into an ambulance, pretending this was necessary to avoid "a hostile crowd."

Mussolini was taken to a police barracks, unaware that he was under arrest. At 10:45 a government spokesman announced over the radio the formation of the new regime by the King and Badoglio. Jubilant crowds rushed into the streets to celebrate. But they were dismayed by Badoglio's statement that "the war continues"—a statement made to ward off German retaliation.

Rescuing the Duce

Marshal Badoglio placed the former *Duce* under guard. Later, he was transferred to a ski resort atop Gran Sasso, the tallest peak in central Italy. He remained there for almost a fortnight, while the new regime secretly negotiated an armistice with the Allies. The armistice was announced on September 8—even as American and British troops landed against stiff German resistance at Salerno, near Naples.

Thereafter, events moved swiftly.

Anticipating Italy's about-face, Hitler had dispatched strong *Wehrmacht* reinforcements across the Alps; the Germans were able quickly to disarm and intern the badly confused Italian troops. Fearing capture, the King and Badoglio fled Rome before dawn on September 9 to join the Allied forces in the south. Six weeks later the Badoglio government, now installed in Brindisi, declared war on Germany.

On September 12, 1943, Captain Otto Skorzeny, leading 90 German commandos in eight gliders and a small plane, landed outside the mountaintop hotel on Gran Sasso where the sickly *Duce* was still being kept. Skorzeny's men brushed aside the Italian guards, and took Mussolini to Munich, where Hitler met him. Henceforth, the *Duce* would be one of Hitler's lackeys, a "brutal friendship" as Mussolini put it.

The *Führer* ordered Mussolini to head up the new pro-Nazi Italian Social Republic (RSI) at Salò, in German-occupied northern Italy. The Italian Fascists would help the Nazis deport, and later exterminate, over 8,000 Jews. From Munich, Mussolini appealed by radio to his "faithful Blackshirts" to renew Axis solidarity, and purge the "royalist betrayers" of the regime.

But few Italians willingly backed the "Salò Republic." Instead, most hoped for a swift Allied victory. A determined minority even joined the partisans—the armed anti-German and anti-Fascist resistance—in northern Italy. But Mussolini did manage to punish the "traitors of July 25." In Verona, a special Fascist tribunal put on trial Mussolini's son-in-law, Count Ciano, and others in his party who had voted for "the elimina-

tion of its *Duce*." Rejecting the pleas of his daughter Edda, Mussolini decreed that Ciano and his co-conspirators be shot to death, and so they were, on January 11, 1944.

At last, in April 1945, the grinding Allied offensive, having reached northern Italy, overwhelmed the Germans, whose homeland was already collapsing under attack from East and West. At this point, Mussolini tried to save himself by negotiating with anti-Fascist resistance leaders in Milan. But when he learned that they insisted on an "unconditional surrender," he fled with several dozen companions to Lake Como, where he was joined by his mistress, Clara Petacci. From there, they planned an escape to Switzerland.

Per Necessità Familiare

Unable to cross the border, Mussolini and his band decided to join a German truck convoy that was retreating toward Switzerland through the Italian Alps. But Italian partisans halted the convoy near Dongo. Ever the actor, Mussolini donned a German corporal's overcoat, a swastika-marked helmet, and dark glasses, and climbed into one of the trucks. But the partisans identified Mussolini, arrested him and his companions, and let the Germans proceed unmolested.

The next day, Walter Audisio, a Communist resistance chief from Milan, arrived, claiming he had orders to execute the *Duce* and 15 other Fascist fugitives. He summarily shot Mussolini and his mistress at the village of Giulino di Mezzegra on April 28. Their corpses were taken to Milan and strung up by the heels in Piazzale Loreto, where an infuriated mob repeatedly kicked and spat on the swinging cadavers.

Looking back on Mussolini's career, it might be said that he changed Italy more than he changed the Italians. Indeed, the *Duce* left behind a network of paved roads, reclamation projects, and a vast centralized bureaucracy. The IRI holding company and other para-state corporations that Mussolini founded still exist today; they account for the most inefficient 20 percent of the nation's economy.

But Mussolini convinced few Italians for long that Fascism was the wave of the future. To be sure, many had supported the *Duce* enthusiastically, especially from the time his regime signed the concordat with the Pope (1929) through the easy conquest of Ethiopia (1936). And a small neo-Fascist party, the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI), still wins roughly five percent of the popular vote in national elections today.

Most Italians quietly turned their backs on Mussolini once it became clear that he had engaged the nation in costly ventures that could not succeed. (More than 400,000 Italians lost their lives in World War II.) During the *Duce's* foolish expeditions against the Greeks, the British, and the Soviets, many Italians considered themselves to be "half-Fascists," who had taken out their Fascist Party membership cards only *per necessità familiare* (for the good of the family).

On June 2, 1946, the first time that Italians got a chance to vote in a postwar election, they chose to oust the monarchy. They could not forgive King Victor Emmanuel for inviting Mussolini to take power, and for supporting the *Duce's* imperial ambitions—even if they forgave themselves. The voters elected a constituent assembly, which drafted a new constitution for the republic, providing for a prime minister, a bicameral parliament, and a system of 20 regional governments.

Mussolini and his ideology proved influential beyond Italy's borders. As the world's first and perhaps most popular Fascist leader, he provided the model for other aspiring authoritarian rulers in Europe and Latin America, who, for a time, would make fascism seem an attractive alternative to socialism, communism, or anarchy.

In Germany, Adolf Hitler called Mussolini's 1922 March on Rome "one of the turning points of history." The mere idea that such a march could be attempted, he said, "gave [Germany's National Socialists] an impetus." When Nazis did their outstretched arm salutes, or when Spanish Falangists cried "Franco! Franco! Franco!", they were mimicking their counterparts in Italy. Juan Perón, Argentina's president (1946–1955), echoed the sentiments of many another ambitious Latin strongman when he called Mussolini "the greatest man of our century."

Just before Mussolini came to power, Italians, like citizens of several troubled European societies after World War I, faced a choice—either muddling through disorder and economic disarray under often inept, yet essentially benevolent democratic regimes, or falling in line behind a decisive but brutal dictatorship. Italians chose the latter. They embraced the strong man's notions of a grand New Age. But Mussolini's intoxicating vision of Italy as a great power, they eventually discovered, was a disastrous delusion.

The Fascist era serves to remind Italians and others of something important: that national well-being may not come from charismatic leadership, revolutionary zeal, or military might. Indeed, Italy's peculiar greatness today may lie in its citizens' tolerance of regional and economic differences, in their ability to cope with the inefficiencies of democratic government, in their pragmatic acceptance of human foibles—and, most of all, in their appreciation of the rich texture of everyday life.

BACKGROUND BOOKS

ITALY

"Physical geography has endowed Italy with few advantages. Within natural frontiers formed by the Mediterranean and the awesome barrier of the Alps, four-fifths of the territory consists of mountains and hills. Not only the great Alpine arc, sweeping west to east from the Mediterranean to the Adriatic, but . . . the Apennines, stretching . . . down the length of Italy . . . set permanent barriers to the possibilities of cultivation."

So writes Stuart Woolf in **A History of Italy, 1700–1860** (Methuen, 1979). Indeed, it was the diversity of Italy's physical and climatic characteristics that shaped "the varying forms of human settlements" and made the achievement of nationhood so difficult. But the peninsula's mid-Mediterranean location, Woolf adds, also gave Italians "a virtual monopoly" over East-West trade for centuries: "Spices and silks, saints' remains and heresies, ancient manuscripts and contemporary plagues, all passed through Italian ports—Amalfi, Pisa, Genoa, Venice—and inland cities—Milan, Pavia, Bologna, and Florence."

Despite its divisive geography, Italy did, of course, achieve unity. How this happened is told in Denis Mack Smith's excellent surveys, **The Making of Italy, 1796–1870** (Harper, 1968) and **Italy: A Modern History** (Univ. of Mich., 1969). "There was a feeling of *italianità* which thinkers were beginning to rationalize and statesmen to exploit," Mack Smith writes, describing the sentiments that permeated 19th-century Italy. "There was the liberating wind from the French Revolution . . . [and] an expanding commercial and agricultural middle class."

No individual played a more crucial role in the *Risorgimento*, or "Resurgence," than did Count Camillo Benso di Cavour (1810–61), the premier and for-

eign minister of Victor Emmanuel II, King of Sardinia-Piedmont. It was di Cavour who met with the French emperor, Napoleon III, in July 1858 at Plombières, France, to discuss what the emperor "could do for Piedmont and Italy."

Shepard B. Clough and Salvatore Saladino's documentary **History of Modern Italy** (Columbia, 1968) describes what happened at that fateful meeting: After eight hours of talks, Napoleon III agreed that Piedmont would provoke Austria into war. France would join the conflict, force the Austrians out of Italy, and Victor Emmanuel II would head a kingdom of Upper Italy. On January 1, 1859, at a New Year's reception in Paris, Napoleon III told the surprised Austrian ambassador, Baron Hubner: "I regret that our relations with your government are not so good as formerly."

In the ensuing Franco-Austrian War of 1859, the French managed to wrest Lombardy from the Austrians, then handed it over to Victor Emmanuel. Several other pieces of the new Italian nation soon fell into place, thanks to di Cavour's skill: The citizens of Tuscany, Modena, Parma, and Romagna decided, in a series of plebiscites, to join Sardinia-Piedmont. And in 1860, the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Garibaldi took over Sicily and Naples by defeating the ruling Bourbon regime. A parliament representing all of the provinces met in Turin, and on March 17, 1861, conferred the title "King of Italy" on Victor Emmanuel II. The kingdom annexed Venice in 1866 and Rome in 1870.

The new monarchy was eager to keep up with its European neighbors in acquiring overseas possessions, as Christopher Seton-Watson points out in **Italy from Liberalism to Fascism, 1870–1925** (Methuen, 1967). "Italy must be ready," declared the Italian newspaper *Il Diritto* on January 1, 1885. "The year

1885 will decide her fate as a great power. It is necessary to feel the responsibility of the new era."

Later that year, as Robert L. Hess's **Italian Colonialism in Somalia** (Univ. of Chicago, 1966) explains, Italy's foreign minister, P. S. Mancini, organized an expedition to Ethiopia's Red Sea port of Massawa—a venture he justified before Parliament by declaring that "the keys to the Mediterranean lie in the Red Sea." (Mancini's opponents suggested that he find the keys by asking Moses to drain the Red Sea.) Although the Ethiopians later crushed Italian forces (killing 8,000 men) at the Battle of Adowa in March 1896, Rome maintained small colonies in Eritrea and Somalia.

The Italians would wait 15 years before launching a second imperial adventure. On September 29, 1911, the Liberal Party government of Giovanni Giolitti declared war on Turkey and invaded Turkish-controlled Libya, as Claudio G. Segrè explains in **Fourth Shore** (Univ. of Chicago, 1974). The Italian Navy quickly seized control of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and the formerly Turkish Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean Sea.

The invasion, Martin Clark observes in **Modern Italy, 1871–1982** (Longman, 1984), was "taken for reasons of internal policy, to placate the Nationalists and the 'clerico-moderates.'" And many priests, he says, had preached a crusade "against the heathen Turk."

By 1930, when Benito Mussolini was in power, some 50,000 Italians were living in Rome's African colonies. According to Denis Mack Smith's **Mussolini's Roman Empire** (Viking, 1976), the Africans did not fare too badly under Italy's Fascist regime. Indeed, the Italians,

Mack Smith says, "built a large network of roads; and by the legal abolition of slavery, the control of pestilence and famine, and the administration of justice, they sometimes gave the local population more active help than their neighbours in nearby British colonies."

Seeking revenge for the disaster at Adowa and yearning to expand his "empire," Mussolini would send his troops to Ethiopia in October 1935. A. J. Barker describes the *Duce's* short-lived Ethiopian conquest in **The Civilizing Mission** (Dial, 1968).

World War II, of course, ended Italy's love affair with imperialism and Fascism. But what would the future hold in store? Several studies cover the crucial post-war years, during which the Italians established a republic, chose the Christian Democrats over the Communists, joined NATO, and became closely linked to the West. These books include H. Stuart Hughes's **United States and Italy** (Harvard, 1979); Norman Kogan's **Political History of Postwar Italy** (Praeger, 1983); and F. Roy Willis's **Italy Chooses Europe** (Oxford, 1971).

Finally, John Haycraft's lively **Italian Labyrinth** (Penguin, 1987) and Luigi Barzini's vivid (if stereotypical) **Italians** (Atheneum, 1986) probably provide the best sketches of Italian manners, mores, and everyday life. "In the heart of every man," writes Barzini, "wherever he is born, whatever his education and tastes, there is one small corner which is Italian, that part which finds regimentation irksome, the dangers of war frightening, strict morality stifling, [and] which loves frivolous and entertaining art, admires larger-than-life-size solitary heroes, and dreams of an impossible liberation from the strictures of a tidy existence."

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Professor Charles Delzell suggested many of the titles in this essay.*