A-Level History Revision Courses

Booking Form

Residential or non-residential places available

Our residential fee covers all tuition, course materials, dinner, bed and breakfast in single study rooms for three days and two nights. For a small additional fee, you can also book an extra night’s accommodation for the evening before the course starts.

Classes start at 9.30am each day and finish at 6.00pm.

Non-residential  £179
Residential (2 nights)  £249
Residential (3 nights)  £274

How to book

Places on our revision courses are available on a first-come, first-served basis and can be reserved on payment of a £25 deposit.

To reserve your place, either complete and return the booking form below with your £25 deposit, or book online at www.philipallan.co.uk

We will then confirm your booking and invoice you for the balance of the course fee.

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April 2000

Mussolini’s Rise to Power

What was the interplay of conditions, people and events that permitted Mussolini to rise to power?

The extraordinary speed of Mussolini’s rise to power has understandably led to much analysis of those critical events after 1919 that effectively sealed the fate of liberal Italy. In an equally short space of time after Mussolini became Prime Minister in 1919, Italy became a fascist state run by a leader sourcing dictatorial powers.

Yet such fundamental changes in state ideology and method of governance do not just happen. To appreciate fully Mussolini’s rise to power an examination must be made of not only these short-term ‘decisions’, but also those long-term structural ‘preconditions’ and the medium-term ‘accelerations’ that laid the seeds for change. By examining the interplay between these factors it becomes clear that Mussolini’s rise to power can only be explained as a multi-causal phenomenon.

Long-term structural ‘preconditions’

The existence of structural preconditions sets the necessary backdrop for fundamental change without predetermining its nature or timing. Two such interrelated preconditions are of significance in this respect: Italian unification and industrialisation.

Italian unification was completed by 1870, when the last independent territories, Rome, fell to Italian troops. Italy was thus ‘born’ as a liberal-dominated constitutional monarchy, in which government social and economic reforms prompted 30 years of domestic peace and economic growth. Yet the top-down process of unification that had created Italy had not yet created Italians.

The liberal ‘model’ of unification and governance stood up well for the future. Republi- cans and radicals felt the new liberal regime was a betrayal of the principles of the Risorgimento, the movement for the unification of Italy in the nineteenth century. The Catholic Church dismayed itself from the new unincorporated Kingdom of Italy, taking with it much of the population. The electorate was small (only 2% of the population), fragmented (only 2% spoke Italian) and largely illiterate (four-fifths of the population were illiterate in 1861). The bottom-up involvement of peasants and industrial workers was discouraged. There also existed a widespread suspicion and resentment, especially in the south of Piedmont, the state that had dominated the unification process and imposed its brand of governance and high taxation on the whole of Italy.

As a result of this restricted unification, the Italian political system post 1870 took on the appearance of being narrowly based and dominated by the conservative/liberal/radical politics of Cavour, Depretis, Crispi, d’Azeglio and Cipriani. Furthermore, liberal dominance was maintained by a process of loose parliamentary coalition building (fascism). Although resulting in the instability of 35 different cabinets between 1881 and 1896, this maintained the liberal status quo, despite claims of patronage, nepotism, paranoia and electoral corruption. The process of industrialisation exacerbated these underlying problems inherent within Italy’s social, economic and political sphere. The 20 years of peace and economic growth gave way to domestic upheaval by the 1890s. Mitigating developments elsewhere in Europe, a new wave of class-consciousness and organisation based upon fulfilled expectations swept over Italy. The nature of Italian parliamentary liberalism became challenged by three powerful developments in Italian politics after 1890.

First, a new and aggressive socialist political party and trade union movement emerged that was critical of the restricted, narrow-based liberal ethos embedded within the system. Secondly, a new form of political Catholicism developed out of the previously sharpest of Italian Catholic Church, which was fearful of a tacit complicity with a rapidly changing political system. This movement was known as the PPI. Finally, a nationalistic movement, encouraged by involvement in Abyssinia in 1896, grew in size, confidence and expectations.
The economic impact of war cannot therefore be regarded as the key accelerator determining the fate of Italy. Rather, an analysis of the political impact of war must be made.

The original decision in 1915 to join the war on the side of the Entente powers rather than the Alliance further compounded the structural political weaknesses evident in prewar Italy. Neutrality had been generally popular, yet liberal and nationalistic ideals had sought a more aggressive stance. The Catholics gave half-hearted support to the war, while the socialists were anti-interventionist.

The war recoiled itself, culminating in the humiliating defeat at Caporetto, further reinforced internal divisions and recriminations. Eventually victory over Germany and Austria-Hungary did not bring peace. The destabilization of the political system brought about by the rise of new politics in the 1920s further complicated the First World War and its effects, both real and illusory.

The economic impact of war was very real, yet it was proportionately no greater than in France, Germany and Britain as Italy lost 6.2% of its male working population in the war, compared with over 10% in France. Inflation rates until 1922 were comparable with France and Britain. Unemployment peaked in Italy in about 3% of the labour force in the period 1919-22, compared with 25% in Britain. Both industrial and agricultural levels in Italy also compared favourably with those in Britain, France and Germany.

Only disproportionate balances of trade figures and high interest rates distinguish Italy from the other combatants. Although not insignificant, the economic impact of war cannot therefore be regarded as the key accelerator determining the fate of Italy. Rather, an analysis of the political impact of war must be made.

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