Benitto Mussolini as a lider of Italy

Cours: Contemporary Italy

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Benito Mussolini was one of the important and the most interesting figures in Italian history. He was a teacher, journalist, socialist and also a fascist. His father Alessandro Mussolini was a blacksmith and a socialist. It had an important influence on the Mussolini's future life. Mussolini as a young boy had a rebellious behaviour and was expelled from school. He continued his study in the other school and finished it. One of his favorite philosopher was the German philosopher Nietzsche. Mussolini used to say that Nietzsche's ideas are "spiritual eroticism". He was an intelligent person although there are a lot of legends about Mussolini's life. It is said that he was very diligent, worked from 18 to 20 hours per day and always remembered about all meetings and Italy's problems. It wasn't really true and he urged the journalists to write about his diligence. In reality he was a sleepy person and slept 10 hours per day. There was an official statement that he took holidays only one day during the year or never. He convinced people that he had nearly 525 meetings during a year and during 7 years he took care of 1887112 matters. When he wished, he was very nice to the people.

In 1900 Mussolini decided to become a member of the Socialist Party. Then he started to be the editor of Avanti newspaper. It was a newspaper of the Socialist Party. He was expelled from it because of his promotion of participation of Italy in the First World War. Mussolini founded his own newspaper called Popolo d'Italia.

He was also called to the Army and after getting injured he rest at home.

After the First World War the Italian government had not only territorial dissatisfaction, but also a lot of economic problems. It gave Mussolini the chance to introduce his ideas of the radical changes in Italy.

In 1919 Mussolini adopted a new policy. He left socialist thoughts and started to spread new Fascism ideology. Among his comrades were war combatants, former socialists and other people unsatisfied with Italy's bad situation. Mussolini always maintained that fascism was republican in tendency. They used so called fascio to spear their ideology between the peasants and workers.

However during 1919's elections for the Chambers of Deputies he failed. In spite of it in 1921 he decided to form the National Fascist Party. In the next May elections he won already 35 seats from 355.

To attract attention of Italian people to his policy Mussolini needed something effective: In 1922 he organized the so called "March on Rome" or "March of black skirts" on the streets of Italian capital. During the march the fascist assaults those wearing black skirts were carry out by 'action squads'. In this squads were war veterans, students and especially extreme young fascists. When Mussolini came to power the fascist stood the violence and used it to blackmail the government. This violence was far more than just a tool of war. The Italian politicians felt under threat and the Italian king Emanuel III was the one who avoided the civil war. He didn't use an army for stopping the demonstration. "March on Rome" gave the fascists chance to take over the power in Italy. It was rather political blackmail than a serious revolutionary or military operation. The Italian king gave his permission and assigned Mussolini as Prime Minister in the new government which contains only few fascist.

However in the short time Mussolini became very popular because of his popular internal policy. He promised the poor classes of society improvement of their situation and from other side the upper classes finishing strikes and some worker's privileges. He started to develop Italian army, fight against mafia delinquency and preached returning of Rome Empire. He was convinced that the role of Fascism in 20s had to be an "absolute and regional". He had a style and when he spoke it had a "viva voce" on the audience.

The Fascist improvement launched a passionate appeal for a "Fascio of National Education' of schools and teachers. It was also an instrument of propaganda. Mussolini used to say that fascism needs to be treating as a private work. He also said that manage the Italians is not so hard but it is just needless. Although the Italian government used police and gangs for it. In spite of it, the Italian philosopher Benedetti Croce believed that Fascism brought people a lot of happiness than it would bring the socialist. Fascism has to stay of head still when the people haven't been under socialist threat.

After came to power Mussolini started to change economic system using fascist ideology. He thought that Fascist ideology is better than socialist for reforms. At that times Italy was a weak country with a lot of economical problems. Mussolini tried to lower unemployment in Italy. He started changing tax system and cooperates with workers. For a long term Mussolini was a prime minister but King Viktor Emanuel III was not all the time content with his work. Especially because during 1925-1926's Mussolini kept country under threat and ruled it how he wanted. Until 1925 after one of socialist leaders – Matteotii was murdered, all oppositional parties were forbidden. Mussolini became a dictator and continued to develop his second Rome Empire. Like Hitler he was called Commander -Duce and was surrounded with bombastic gestures. He started also aggressive foreign policy and continued it with invasion on Abyssinia in 1935.

During 1921-1922 Mussolini started to change his treatment to the Catholics. Mussolini didn't have any predilection to the church but he showed his respect. He started to show it when he decided to get married and christen his children.

Mussolini understood that the church has a high influence on the people and on this way he could avoid problems with the Italian Catholics.

In 1929 Mussolini and Cardinal Pietro Gasparii signed the Lateran Treaty which ended a long term conflict between Vatican and Italy. According to this treaty Italian government and Italian King were obliged to give the Pope Vatican city and obey its sovereignty. Besides that, the Lateran treaty defined other important matters in mutual relations. Italian government had to recognize the Catholic church, religion, its territories and properties.

Since 1930 the Fascism ideology was spread in the Europe. Mussolini like Hitler was threat for a world peace and democracy. It was time when people in Italy finished their correspondence with words "Viva et Duce" which was like "Hail Hitler" in Germany. Duce wanted to create a new civilization after war. With his minister of Foreign Affairs Grandi thought that the Italy could prepare war against France. They had also plan to annex Tunisia, Corsica and French Somalia. In April 1934 in Venice first meeting between Hitler and Mussolini took place. Hitler wanted to clarify the Fascist policy to foreigners and he created a common front. His visit was an unofficial but Mussolini invited to Venice journalists from different countries. Cooperation of these two Fascist leaders was developing also during the Spanish Civil War. In 1936 and 1939 they sighted anticommunist and cooperation pacts which were widened with Japan in 1940. Mussolini was the one who called 1939 pact as Steel Pact.

In the first days of war Mussolini tried to explain to Hitler, that he wanted to blockade the Great Britain. For Mussolini the British were a natural enemy and he thought that by helping Hitler he could weaken Great Britain. Although he also started to doubt if it could solve the Italian problems and informed Hitler that his country is not fully prepared to the war operations. In spite of it in July 1940 Italy entered for a Second World War. From the beginning the Italian Army didn't have any special successes and often called for German help. In the country opposition developed towards Mussolini and the Fascists and he started losing esteem in Italian society.

Hitler and Mussolini also could not understand each other. They had some confusing situations during the war. Mussolini was proud and didn't recognize Hitler's domination. He didn't want to be a Hitler's vessel. He had his own plans related with war but they failed when the Alliance Power entered Sicily.

In 1943 his situation becomes very difficult when the king ordered to arrest him. He escaped with Hitler’s help and for a moment governed some puppet state. At that time Italy declared war to Germany. Italian soldiers at war fronts were treated by Germans as traitors and assassinated. Growing resistance movement against German occupation and progress of Alliance army forced Mussolini to escape. In 1945 Mussolini tried to force his way to Switzerland. However he was recognized by the partisans and was shot to death. Duce's history finished in Mediolan where his and his lover Clara Petacci bodies were hung head down.

Addendum Mussolini maybe was not a great man as he wanted to be recognized. During his life he had an increasing and a decreasing. Through 20 years when he was in authority he was admired by the people and then hated. There was a saying that if something was bad Fascism was blamed and if something was well it was made by Mussolini. He tried to develop Italy and changed its weak economic situation through fascism ideology. Mussolini said that nobody is enemy or friend and he could not understand the world without fascism.

There is a statement that nobody didn't contribute to Fascism spread deeper than he was. Unfortunately, his megalomania, dictatorship and inclination to expansion caused the participation of Italy in war and totally ruined country. Although from other side he had also some economic success in countries under Italian rule, improve situation of the poorest people by organized public works. He was really dictator who floored opponent ruthlessly but was not agreed with the killing of people on the ground of race and he objected Hitler to kill the Italian Jews. From the other side, his campaign in Abyssinia was very bloody, cruel and a lot of Abyssinian civilians lost their lives. Until his dead from communist partisan's hand, in spite of a lot of defeats, Mussolini continued to be a great orator who was able to attract attention of his audiences. His ideas, tempestuous political and personal life were base for a lot of books and articles all over the world. Until today, he stayed one of the most interesting people in the world and European history.

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