

How did the fascists come to power in italy in 1922

Countries



Why did the fascists come to power in Italy in 1922? Fascism came to power in Italy in 1922 due to a number of different factors. The roots of fascism can be found in the failure of a whole political class and system to resist authoritarianism and it was a start of a big mistake made by the Italian government, even though a lot of people thought Mussolini forced his way into power, in actual fact he was invited into parliament by an incompetent and underestimating liberal party (Giolitti) who formed a coalition with the fascists party in 1921 'the national block'.

During the time the fascists came to power there was many post war problems such as political polarization, the melt down of public beliefs in the government, extreme financial problems and great concern of a Russian (Bolshevik) style revolution. One of the most important factors in the rise of fascism was the threat of socialism, which got more and more allusive during 1918-1920, (Biennio Rosso) 'the two red years'. In these years the socialists were co-ordinating general strikes in the public sector, street demonstrations, riots and the seizure of factories and land.

As the liberal government struggled to keep a lid on the dramatic events occurring daily in post war Italy, the fascist's party (Fascio di Combattimento) publicised its self as Italy's saviour thus strengthening the public's thoughts and views about the fascist's party. Such occasions were when the liberal party organised a general strike for all public workers e. g. police, firemen, bus drivers etc... , and the fascist's party stepped in and in effect ran the country, they drove the trams and bus's around for the public and literally kept the country running.

This move by Mussolini portrayed himself as Italy's knight in shining armour changing peoples perspective on the party's future. Many people started to believe that Mussolini and the Squadristi were the only people willing and capable of saving Italy from socialism and the Bolshevik rising. It was the rise of the socialist's party that ultimately gave the fascists a reason to evolve themselves as a strong political party and to gain a foothold in the political system. Another main reason for the rise of fascism was the weak political systems running Italy in the years leading up to the fascists reign.

There were no less than 6 liberal coalitions that frequently clashed. It was only a few years before that Italy's political groups were a small minority that kept itself in power by a tactic called 'Transformismo' this meant that the government was unreliable and had no solid policies that they followed and incapable of dealing with the country's catastrophic debt's and the anarchy of socialism, 'Depretis, Crispi, and Giolitti were all very skilled at this. As time went buy and public moral hit an all time low people started to see fascism to be the only way forward for Italy.

Another important factor to consider in the rise of fascism is that Italy had just came out of a war that they did not want to be entered into in the first place (ww1), to add to insult Italy missed out on allot of things that they were promised in the peace settlement of 1919. Although Italy had gained most of Istria and Trieste they lost out on African colonies they were promised such as, the African colony of Dalmatia on the Adriatic, and had the Italian speaking town of Fiume given to Yugoslavia.

The public was outraged and calling the whole farce a 'mutilated victory' as Italy was now in a huge financial crisis. The war had cost Italy 600, 000
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soldiers and the fascists and nationalists were quick to blame the Italian government for their incompetence. These events led to a protest in September 1919, Gabriele d'Annunzio led a group of black-shirted Arditi to the town of Fiume and held it captive for 15 months. The government's failure to keep order further weakened their credibility and integrity, Mussolini used this to further strengthen him in the public's eyes.

The economic decline of Italy in the post-war years influenced the rise of fascism in a number of ways. Italy was on the verge of collapse, industries run down, widespread unemployment and huge inflation which saw taxes soar to an all-time high, as well as around 1.5 million strikers in 1919. In 1920 500,000 workers staged a sit-in in the metallurgical industries. Frightened by what was happening in Russia and the barbaric activities by the socialists many respectable figures in Italian society started to fear a Russian revolution was around the corner.

All this tension added to the public's frustration and made them more open-minded about ideas on how to save Italy from national disaster. Benito Mussolini seen what was happening to the country and being the opportunist that he was played on the public's dejection and defencelessness, to secure power and fame. An enormous factor in the rise of fascism is the fascist's party and its leader Benito Mussolini. In his early days Benito Mussolini was a thorough and thorough left-winger, after failing to find satisfaction in his teaching career Mussolini turned to politics in 1912 becoming the editor of Italy's leading socialist paper "Avanti". Shortly after WW1 though Mussolini changed his tactics completely and switched from left to right when he realised that doing so would be the easiest way to power. Blinkhorn argues <https://assignbuster.com/how-did-the-fascists-come-to-power-in-italy-in-1922/>

that Mussolini's change of heart was not due to bribery but due to the limitations of the socialist's militancy and policy's, Mussolini wanted complete revolution unlike most of his socialist colleagues. Historian Stephen Lee said, 'above all else Mussolini was an opportunist and his real strength lay in him having no overall system and no ideological straight-jacket', it was this resilience and pliability that made Mussolini the great force he was. Alongside this Mussolini had great oratory skills which he used to engage with the public and portray himself in the way he wanted, this was a great advantage as Mussolini became editor of 'Il popolo d'Italia' which meant he could stir up anything he wanted and the whole of Italy would see it.

The brute force and violence that the fascists' party used was another key element that got them a foothold in the parliamentary system, many party's started to think they could use Mussolini as a pawn and use him to do the dirty work for them. The fascists party had a wide range of followers such as, the unemployed, demobilised soldiers, large land owners, industrialists and middle class people who all saw a use for the fascists party and started to finance their campaign, which gave them the edge over their rivals. His new excitement and hospitality by the 'Fascio di Combattimento' saw the numbers of fascists followers increase to around 250,000 by 1922, were as the union memberships and strikes started to decline due to the frequent sacking and burning down of socialist buildings and beatings being handed out to socialist followers. Another big importance to the rise of fascism is the mistakes that Mussolini's opponents made. It was Giolitti, the leader of the liberal party, that thought he could tame Mussolini and invited him to join forces and make a coalition.

Giolitti thought he could manipulate Mussolini when he pleaded and keep him under control, but it was Mussolini that was doing the manipulating. once he made a coalition with the liberal party he gained 35 seats in parliament, it was this turning point that brought the start of Mussolini's reign of terror. the 35 seats that he had gained got the wheel rolling for Mussolini and now that he had succeeded in getting a foothold in the parliamentary system people had gained respect for the fascists party and seen them in another light. even the Vatican, journalists, the agrari (large landowners) and industrialists were following suit. The big mistake that the socialists made was organising a general strike to combat the fascists campaign but unfortunately this backfired immensely playing into the hands of Mussolini when the government gave him the role Italy's saviour and within 24 hours the strike had been crushed and Mussolini portrayed as the hero. probably the biggest mistake was made was by the king, after the fascists planned a march on Rome to seize victory by gaining strategic points in cities.

Mussolini appointed the Quadrumvirate (committee of four generals) to coordinate the march on Rome, and hoped that force would not be needed and the threat of it would be enough to keep order in his favour and bring him to power peacefully. no more than 30, 000 poorly armed fascists were available for the march on Rome, and as they were collecting in the provinces the Prime Minister at the time, Facta, requested that the king declare martial law to allow the army to prepare themselves and be ready for the marchers. The king agreed to do so, but when Facta went to the palace to get the signature he needed the king refused to sign it. some people say that the king

changed his mind because he thought he would be replaced by his cousin (the Duke of Aosta), others say that it was because he was not convinced of the loyalty of the army and that he feared civil law, or that he underestimated the fascists support. For whatever reason the king changed his mind, his decision to do so gave the liberal party of Facta no choice but to resign. These mistakes made by his opponents made Mussolini's path to power easier than it should have been and on the 29th of October 1922 he received a phone call from the king offering him the premiership.

To summarise the events leading up to the fascists time in power it must be underlined that these events could only have taken place in this time of despair and neediness, and could only have been undertaken by an opportunist like Benito Mussolini. Dennis Mack Smith said "fascism was not a system of immutable beliefs but a path to political power" He saw what needed to be done and got it done, even if it meant going against his own beliefs, he plagued the vulnerable and needy to succeed in his own goals.