

How much opposition was there in Fascist Italy?

FOCUS ROUTE

Answer the following questions as you study Chapter 12:

- 1 List the various forms of opposition that occurred.
- 2 Which type of opposition do you think posed the greatest danger to the regime?
- 3 Why was opposition to Fascism in the end too weak to pose a major threat?

Activity

Make a preliminary list of the forms of opposition you might expect to find operating in Fascist Italy.

CHART 12A CHAPTER OVERVIEW

12 How much opposition was there in Fascist Italy?

- A What forms did opposition take? (pp. 185–87)
- B Why was there so little effective opposition in Fascist Italy? (p. 188)

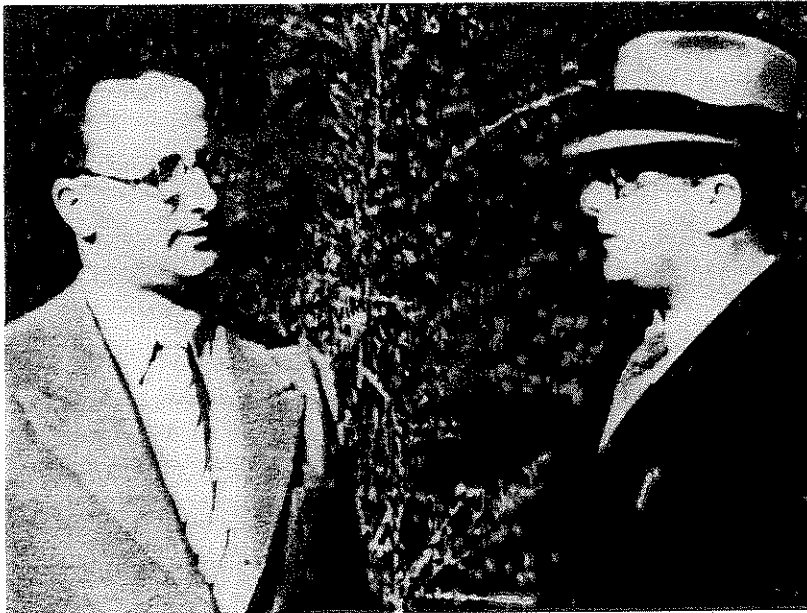
A What forms did opposition take?

Opposition to Mussolini's regime showed itself in many different forms but this must not lead us to overestimate its effectiveness.

The stories of some of the people who opposed the regime illustrate the bravery but perhaps the futility of their attempts.

You have already studied what happened to Matteotti. His colleague Amendola also died as a result of being beaten by Fascist squads, as had about 2000 others in the struggles between SOCIALISTS and Fascists in the years 1919–22. There were other brave individuals, such as the two below.

The Rosselli brothers



Carlo (born 1899) and Nello Rosselli (born 1900) came from a wealthy Tuscan Jewish family. After a period in the army and university, both became lecturers. They became increasingly horrified by Fascist violence. Carlo was more RADICAL politically; he joined the PSI, and after 1922 participated in various anti-Fascist organisations, and spread anti-Fascist propaganda. He helped opponents escape to exile, but was arrested in December 1926. Sentenced to five years' imprisonment on Lipari island, he escaped in July 1929, and fled to Paris. Nello was also briefly arrested in 1927, and remained under police surveillance.

In Paris Carlo helped set up the radical anti-Fascist group Justice and Liberty (GL). This publicised conditions in Italy, smuggled propaganda leaflets into Italy, and helped secret activity there. When the Italian government sent troops to fight for

Franco in the Spanish Civil War (see pages 222–23), he helped organise over 30,000 anti-Fascist Italians to join an anti-Fascist crusade in Spain. He made radio broadcasts to Italy about their struggle, claiming 'Today in Spain; tomorrow in Italy'. They helped inflict the defeat on Mussolini's troops at Guadalajara in March 1937. Rosselli publicised this humiliation, and helped provoke Mussolini's revenge. In June 1937 when Nello was visiting his brother they were both murdered by French Fascists, acting on Foreign Minister Ciano's orders.

CHART 12B Opposition in Fascist Italy

Anti-Fascist concentration

- Established in Paris 1927
- Mainly Socialists, some LIBERALS
- Tried to overcome previous divisions; difficult.
- Concentrated on informing Europeans of evils of Fascism via conferences and journals.
- 1934 dissolved itself, as it was losing support to the more radical GL and COMMUNIST organisations.

The Communist Party

- 1926 most leaders arrested, but local party cells, and newspaper *Unita* survived illegally.
- 2-8000 members
- Some success in North in infiltrating factories and trade unions to foment strikes and demonstrations
- Helped by Soviet money, but COMINTERN policy 1928-34 of non-collaboration with other anti-Fascist groups limited its impact
- 1930s Depression and new popular front policy meant it attracted more support.
- 1943 onwards major role in resistance movement in North Italy



Work in exile

- After 1924 many major politicians left Italy.
- Thousands of exiles (known as fuorusciti) publicised horrors of Fascism abroad, smuggled anti-Fascist literature into Italy, and planned for the overthrow of Fascism.
- From 1936 there were 3000 anti-Fascist volunteers fighting in Spain.
- Italian Garibaldi Legion defeated Italian Fascist troops at Guadalajara, March 1937.

Talking point

Is there ever justification for assassinating rulers? If so, under what circumstances?

The Church

- Despite the Concordat agreement, there was later criticism by the Catholic Church of Fascist pressure on Catholic Action (1931), and racist decrees (1938).
- Catholic Action organisations remained as potential rivals to Fascism.

The Fascist Party

- Fascism remained a diverse movement, and there was always simmering criticism from some, especially radicals, e.g. against the Concordat.
- 1943 majority of Grand Council voted to remove Mussolini from office.

The King

- Generally supportive, but privately expressed criticism of actions he saw as threatening his position, and various policies, e.g. racist decrees.
- July 1943 dismissed Mussolini.

Ethnic minorities

- Periodic protests, including bomb attacks and murders of policemen, at imposition of Italian language and culture on German and Slav minorities in Alto Adige and Venezia Giulia

Forms of opposition

Armed uprising

- 1943–45 Growing resistance movement against German occupation of the North
- Communist guerrillas shot Mussolini, 1945.

Strikes and demonstrations

- Declined 1922–25, but periodic illegal strikes:
 - a) Turin March 1943 major strike, quickly gained concessions
 - b) Bologna 1930 and 1931 protests against closing soup kitchens, and having to pay for medical injections
 - c) Trieste 1933 protests about lack of food
 - d) Forlì 1935 protests demanding public works
- 1933 numerous spontaneous demonstrations in northern cities with the slogan 'We want bread and jobs'.

Assassination attempts

- Various anarchist isolated actions; four attempts on Mussolini's life in 1925 (Rome) and 1926 (Bologna; suspected of being staged to justify 1926 repression)
- 1931 bombs in Turin, Genoa and Bologna

Open expression of criticism

- Growing public criticism of Fascist violence, culminating in the murder of Matteotti; increasingly repressed after 1925
- Parliamentary Aventine Secession 1924–25
- Some critical journals survived till 1927; then suppressed; less direct opposition via cultural journals
- Intellectual criticism persisted throughout period, especially from Croce, e.g. Manifesto of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals, 1925.
- Elements in elite periodically expressed criticism.

Propaganda

- Underground printing of anti-Fascist propaganda
- Secret Press had some success, especially in the North, but periodically disrupted by police.
- Distribution of anti-Fascist leaflets, with instructions to pass on to at least six others
- Anti-Fascist slogans on walls etc.

Non-conformity

- Hard to assess the extent, but various forms, e.g. refusal to make Fascist salute, or to wear Fascist uniform; anti-Fascist jokes; verbal insults, especially when drunk! Late 1930s non-compliance with Reform of Customs

GL (Justice and Liberty)

- 1929 founded by Rosselli in Paris
- Tried to galvanise (stir up) Italians into anti-Fascist action.
- Established underground network in Italy, but frequently smashed.
- After Rosselli brothers' murder, GL declined; then revived from 1943, during liberation struggle.

Individuals

- **Bassanesi**, GL member, flew over Milan July 1930 dropping 100,000 leaflets urging resistance. Major publicity coup for anti-Fascism.
- **De Bosis** taught himself to fly. On 3 October 1931 he dropped 400,000 leaflets over Rome telling people they should unite with the monarchy against Fascism.

B Why was there so little effective opposition in Fascist Italy?

SOURCE 12.2 Thompson, p.32

In the absence of political and economic organisations which represented an alternative, opposing view of society to that imposed by Mussolini, the great majority of these individuals who were discontented found it expedient, indeed realistic, to adapt themselves to the changed circumstances of national life. Many simply withdrew into private life, compromising themselves minimally with the regime in carrying out the tasks required of them in their jobs or professions. They went through the necessary motions of acceptance in public but reverted to their habitual way of life behind closed doors or among friends.

SOURCE 12.1 Anti-Fascist Pento explained the problems he faced

I doubted that we could succeed. We were so few and the tyranny so strong and deeply rooted . . . I did not know that there were many others . . . who were struggling for the same idea.

Although there was a wide range of forms of opposition, and dissatisfaction increased in the late 1930s, they never posed a major threat to the regime. The regime was secure until its failures in the Second World War. The chief reasons for the comparative lack of opposition are well explained by the historians Clark and Thompson.

SOURCE 12.3 Clark, pp. 252–53

Without institutions or organisations, the Italian anti-Fascists were . . . sometimes infiltrated, usually persecuted, and always harmless . . . Part of the explanation for the anti-Fascists' weakness lies in effective policing: Bocchini's [the chief of police's] informers were everywhere, and confino [imprisonment] or worse awaited dissidents. But perhaps the real reason for anti-Fascism's failure was that the Fascist regime seemed tolerable and was even popular, at least until 1937–38. It was careful not to alienate vested interests: even the workers had some safeguards, and journalists were flattered and bribed. Active resistance seemed pointless.

Activity

Study these three lists of problems facing potential opponents of a regime.

i) Strength of the government

- Strong repressive machinery
- Popular policies
- Propaganda
- Popularity of the leader

ii) Attitudes of ordinary people

- Mass apathy
- Careerism (concern to keep jobs)
- Reluctance to break the law
- Support for the government
- Fear of the government

iii) Practical problems

- Hard to organise meetings
- Hard to spread ideas

- a) Referring back to work already covered, write a paragraph about how each of the points in list i) above helped reduce potential opposition.
- b) It is harder to find firm evidence about the other points, but write a paragraph explaining why the points in lists ii) and iii) could also hinder opposition.

Key points from Chapter 12

- 1 Once Mussolini survived the Matteotti crisis, there was no major internal threat to the regime. The elite generally co-operated.
- 2 Fascist propaganda, Mussolini's popularity, policy successes and repression all served to reduce opposition.
- 3 Anti-Fascist groups in exile were relatively impotent. Mussolini survived a series of isolated assassination attempts.
- 4 Discontent with the regime grew in the late 1930s, but there was no major mass opposition until a series of strikes in 1943.
- 5 Mussolini was finally overthrown by the Fascist Grand Council and the King, not a mass movement.

The South and the Mafia: case studies in Fascist control

CHART 13A CHAPTER OVERVIEW

13 *The South and the Mafia: case studies in Fascist control*

- A Did Mussolini solve the Southern Problem? (pp. 189–90)
- B What happened to the Mafia? (p. 191)

FOCUS ROUTE

As you read Chapter 13, consider the following questions:

- 1 Why did Fascism have a limited impact in the South?
- 2 How successful was Mussolini in breaking the power of the Mafia, and making all Italians identify with the Fascist state?

A

Did Mussolini solve the Southern Problem?

Before we analyse Mussolini's success in creating a nation of Fascists let us challenge the DUCE head on, and see how successful he was in handling one of the most difficult obstacles to creating a fully unified Italy: the so-called Southern Problem.

To create a truly united nation of Fascists Mussolini would have to tackle the Southern Problem. Liberal Italy had failed to modernise this backward area which retained its own social structure and lifestyles. Any significant advances in the South would be regarded as a triumph for Fascism.

Fascism as a movement had never been strong in the South and in 1922 was virtually unknown in many areas. However, when the Fascists came to power they quickly attracted support from the southern ELITE, eager to maintain their local dominance. So they adapted to the new government (in a new version of TRASFORMISMO) and just put on blackshirts.

Some new policies filtered down to the South, but generally the impact of Fascism was very limited there. The South remained physically remote with poor communications and a lack of resources. Traditional rivalries and practices continued, with a Fascist veneer in the local administration.

Government policies had some impact, particularly on infrastructure, e.g. roads and harbours, but protection for grain production served to buttress the position of the LATIFONDISTI. Fascist institutions like ONB and OND were established in the region, but poor attendance at schools limited the regime's ability to MOBILISE children, and membership of OND was far lower in the South than elsewhere. Indeed, there was a sense of the regime washing its hands of the South as it actually banned discussion of the 'Southern Problem' and forbade damaging references in the press to poverty or crime.

What Fascism meant in the South can be well assessed from the eyewitness commentary, and the two historians' perspectives which follow.

Activity

- 1 Read Source 13.1. According to Levi, how did
 - a) the gentry
 - b) the peasants
 view the state?
- 2 Referring to the source's origin, content and tone, how reliable do you think it is as evidence of Italians' reactions?

SOURCE 13.1 An account of life in the South of Italy in the 1930s. Carlo Levi (writer, artist and anti-Fascist, who in 1943 became a COMMUNIST Senator) was sent to Lucania in 1933–35, and wrote of his experiences in *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1944)

The gentry [lesser nobility] were all party members, even the few, like Dr Milillo, who were dissenters. The party stood for power, as vested in the government and the state, and they felt entitled to a share of it. For exactly the opposite reasons none of the peasants were members; indeed it was unlikely that they should belong to any political party whatever, should, by chance, another exist. They were not Fascists, just as they would never have been Conservatives or SOCIALISTS or anything else. Such matters had nothing to do with them; they belonged to another world and they saw no sense in them. What had the peasants to do with power, government and the state? The state, whatever form it might take, meant 'the fellows in Rome'. 'Everyone knows', they said, 'that the fellows in Rome don't want us to live like human beings. There are hailstorms, landslides, droughts, malaria and . . . the state. These are inescapable evils; such there always have been and there always will be. They make us kill our goats, they carry away our furniture, and now they are going to send us away to wars. Such is life!'

SOURCE 13.2 Tannenbaum, p. 203

The schools were most ineffective in the South and in Sicily and Sardinia, which remained the semi-colonial ghettos of the northern half of the country . . . The economic and cultural gap between these regions and the north was wider than ever.

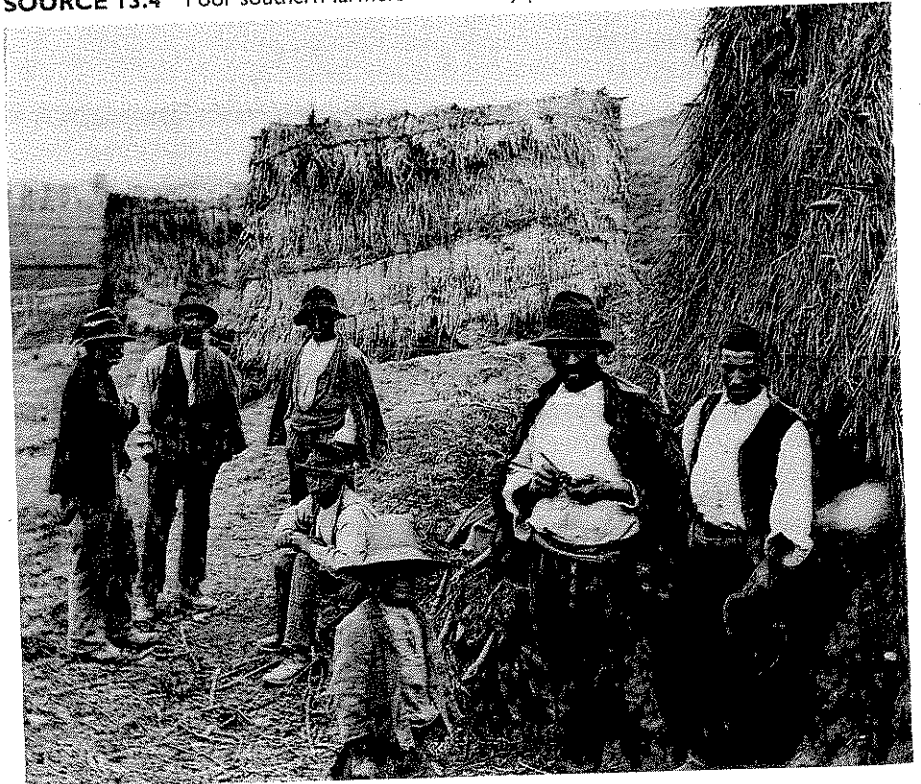
SOURCE 13.3 J. Steinberg, 'Fascism in the South: The case of Calabria' in Forgacs (ed.), pp. 85, 105

Fascism failed, as had the movement to unify Italy before it and postwar DEMOCRACY after it, to change the way the region was governed . . .

Fascism was imposed on the region, like the unification of Italy and like democracy after 1943, as something alien to be suffered passively.

The great mass of the peasantry remained beyond the reach of Fascism. Speaking dialect, still largely illiterate, unable to understand the regime's sonorous [loud] slogans but certain they meant nothing but trouble, the peasants continued to exist as they had for centuries.

SOURCE 13.4 Poor southern farmers in the early part of the century



B What happened to the Mafia?

In 1925 Mussolini sent the energetic **PREFECT** Mori to Sicily to smash the Mafia. Being informed that many ambushes occurred from behind high walls, he ordered all walls should be lowered to one metre within 24 hours! A further decree allowed the authorities to detain those with a questionable past. Mori rounded up hundreds of suspects, and laid siege to whole villages to catch fugitives. By 1928 the impact of this 'Battle against the Mafia' appeared impressive, as shown in the reported crime figures (see Source 13.5).

However, when Mori directed his inquiries towards some of the local pillars of the community who were involved in the Mafia, he was dismissed for fear of upsetting relations between the regime and Sicilian leaders. The government shied away from attacking the Mafia's top leaders; instead it concentrated on reducing the actions of its rank and file. After Mori's dismissal a less vigorous approach was pursued.

Mussolini had had to take on the Mafia because he could not tolerate competition for the control of violence, and the state had to maintain a reputation of strength by guaranteeing order. Overall, however, the Fascist regime largely attacked the outward manifestations (signs) of the Mafia, whilst leaving intact the basic network and social problems on which it thrived. Many Mafiosi just went underground. They re-emerged in 1943 and co-operated with the invading American forces, and were able quickly to resume their former influence.

Activity

- 1 There is a Sicilian proverb, 'The husband is like the government at Rome, all pomp; the wife is like the Mafia, all power.' What does this suggest about Sicily?
- 2 What broader points about the nature of the regime emerge from this account of Fascism and the Mafia?

Talking points

- 1 Why do you think the Mafia has remained so powerful a force in southern Italian society?
- 2 Can you think of any other examples of top people getting away with activities while subordinates have been prosecuted?

SOURCE 13.5 Reported crime in Palermo province

	1922	1928
Homicides	223	25
Robberies	246	14
Extortions	53	16

What exactly is the Mafia?

The term 'mafia' is used worldwide for powerful criminal groups, but it originates in Italy. The term (meaning 'swank') was probably first used in Sicily in the 1840s for a number of rural bands successfully opposing the encroaching authority of the Naples government. It developed into a network of local bosses who used threats, violence, favours and political influence to dominate their local communities. Its fluid and unstructured composition enabled it to change its form and thereby survive the many threats it encountered, whereas a more rigid and unified organisation would have failed. It was based

upon the strong family and clan links in the South. Mafiosi indulged in criminal activities, and used extortion, protection and ransom. The Mafia was protected by a code of silence reinforced by reprisals. It established close links with the local elite, and was used by the great landowners of Sicily to manage their estates.

A report in 1875 concluded that 'it is the development and perfection of strong-arm tactics aimed at all evil purposes; it is the instinctive, brutal, self-serving solidarity that brings together at the expense of the state, the laws and lawful organisations, all the individuals and social strata that prefer to

derive their existence and their well-being not from work but from violence, deceit and intimidation'.

This hostile view underplays the social community aspect of the Mafia, which helps explain its strength. It acted in support of its members, and to establish its own view of 'justice' through direct action. Raimondo Catanzaro, the author of a major study of the Mafia, called his book *Men of Respect*.

When thousands of southern Italians emigrated to the USA, Mafia groups (also known as the Cosa Nostra - Our Affair) became established there.

The Mafia remains a major problem for Italian governments seeking to reform the South.

Key points from Chapter 13

- 1 Mussolini, just like other rulers, failed to tackle the major social problems of the South.
- 2 The regime made little impact on the lives of the southern peasantry.
- 3 The southern elite quickly adapted to the Fascist regime.
- 4 Mussolini proclaimed the battle against the Mafia.
- 5 Mafia activities were restricted but it survived underground and re-emerged as a powerful force in 1943.