

**Olli Lecture**  
**July 30, 2013**  
**“Twilight of the Duce”**

April 1924 – Elections were held on a national basis to approve the fascist government list of candidates. It gained 65% approval; not an unusual procedure except that much intimidation and violence occurred in the proceedings.

June 10 – Giacomo Matteotti (1885-1924), an outspoken critic of the regime and the elections, is kidnapped and murdered.

June 13 – the Socialists, some Popolari, and some Liberals stage the Aventine secession, storming out of parliament.

August 16 – Matteotti’s shallow grave found

January 3, 1925 - Mussolini addressed what’s left of the Chamber of Deputies. “Italy wants peace and quiet, and calm in which to work. This we shall give her, by love if possible, by force if necessary.”

1925-1928: Ministerial responsibility abolished; Grand Council of Fascism replaces most of the functions of parliament; local elections suspended, replaced by appointed *podesta*; independent trade unions outlawed; free press regulated.

February 1929: Lateran Accords give the Catholic Church equal control of Italian education to its existing secular schools and regulates relations between the Italian state and the Vatican.

1929 – Great Depression begins.

1932 – Publication of Enciclopedia Italiana which Vol. XIV has an essay on fascism allegedly authored by Mussolini, but what was probably written by Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944, embracing the idea

of corporativism and coining the word “totalitarianism.” Some of its memorable lines were: *For the Fascist, the State is all-embracing; outside it no human or spiritual values exist, much less have worth. In this sense Fascism is totalitarian, and the Fascist State—a synthesis and a unity of all values—interprets, develops, and gives power to the whole life of the people.*

Not so, wrote Alberto Aquarone in his 1965 classic, *L'organizzazione dello Stato totalitario*: *The Fascist state proclaimed itself constantly and with great vocal exuberance a totalitarian state; but it remained until the end a dynastic and Catholic state, and therefore not totalitarian...*”

1938 – Parliament replaced by the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations.

Of this rearrangement of Italian institutions, historian Alan Cassels has concluded: *“Plainly...Fascism had not changed the nature of Italian government at all: the machinery of the Italian corporate state, like that of the pre-1922 liberal regime, was oiled by bribes, the sale of favors, and corruption in general.”*

January 1933 – Hitler comes to power in Germany and quickly establishes a dictatorship.

July 1934 - Austrian Nazis attempt a coup against the Dolfuss regime in Vienna, hoping for *Anschluss* and Mussolini mobilizes Italian troops on the border, thus frustrating Nazi designs.

April 1935 – Stresa Conference in Italy brings together the Duce, the French and British prime ministers to uphold the Versailles treaty’s provisions on German armaments. It failed to mention Italy’s colonial conflicts with Ethiopia. Mussolini took this as Allied assent to his ambitions in that part of Africa. It also meant his ducking of German designs on Austria.

October 1935 – the League of Nations votes that Italy was an aggressor nation in Ethiopia and invokes sanctions on the Italian economy.

December 1935: the secret Hoare –Laval agreement allots Italy 2/3 of Ethiopia.

May 5, 1936 – Italian troops occupy Addis.

July 1936 \_ The Spanish civil war begins and Italy is deeply involved.

November 1, 1936 – Mussolini in a public speech refers to a “Rome/Berlin Axis”

November, 1937 – Italy joins the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany and Japan.

March 1938 – Germany occupies Austria and Mussolini congratulates him. Cassels: *“The Anschluss of March 13, 1938 marked the beginning of the end of the Fascist regime in Italy...Fascist Italy...was ready to become a satellite of Nazi Germany.”*

June 10, 1940- Italy declares war on France/Britain and invades southern France. Losses 110,000.

December 11, 1941 – Italy declares war on the United States in tandem with Germany.

February 1943 – Giovanni Messe (1883-1968) is appointed to replace Rommel as commander of Axis forces in North Africa. He had already served in the Ethiopian campaign, had commanded 200,000 Italian forces in the invasion of Russia, and in the Afrika Korps provided leadership to three Italian troops to every single German soldier. He surrendered his forces to General Patton on May 12, 1943.

July 1943 – Allies invade Sicily and after suffering 25,000 casualties and attacked Italy across the Straits of Messina.

July 24 , 1943 – Mussolini is defeated as prime minister in a meeting of the Grand Council of the Fascist Party and is immediately arrested with the assent of the King, Emmanuel III. He was imprisoned at Gran Sasso and Marshall Pietro Bagdolio (1871-1956) appointed to head the new regime.

September 8, 1943 – The king flees to Brindisi and Bagdolio negotiates an armistice with the Allies and thereafter (October 13, 1943) declares war on Germany.

September 12, 1943 – Mussolini is freed from imprisonment by a daring raid of German special forces under the command of Colonel Otto Skorzeny (1908-1975) and returned to organize the Republic of Sola; that part of Italy still occupied by the Germans.

June 4, 1944 – Rome is liberated by Allied forces.

April 27, 1945 – Mussolini, his mistress Clara Potacci, and a fascist following are captured by Italian partisans as they attempt to flee to Switzerland. The following day they were all executed and their bodies publicly hung in a gas station in Milan.

May 2, 1945 – the German army evacuates its positions in Italy.

May 9, 1945 – King Victor Emmanuel III abdicates in favor of his son, Umberto and leaves the country for Egypt where he died in 1954.

June, 1946 – Having been governed by a Resistance government (Christian Democrats, Socialists, and Communists) since the collapse of the Fascist regime, Italians take part in a referendum that: decides to abolish the monarchy and establish a constitutional republic. The decision empowered Alcide De Gaspari (1881-1954) to become prime minister through 8 coalition governments between 1945-1953.

1945-1954 – The De Gaspari governments negotiate:

- A peace treaty with the Allies in 1947.
- Accept Marshall Plan aid in 1948.
- Join NATO in 1949.

- And begin negotiations on a European Union in 1949 that would lead to the Treaty of Rome (January 1959), the founding document of the Common Market.

The structure of Italian politics and society has not changed much since these astonishing post-war creations. Except, of course, for the rise of rise of Silvio Berlusconi (1936--) head of the *Pueblo de Libertad* Party with major backing from Northern industrialists. He is the longest serving Italian prime minister (1994-95, 2001-2006, 2008-2011) in the republic's history (except for Mussolini and Giolitti). Today Berlusconi had been replaced by Prime Minister Mario Monti.