

ENGLISH LEARNING
FOR CURIOUS
MINDS



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Episode #343

Benito Mussolini | Il Duce

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[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:11] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:20] I'm Alastair Budge, and today it is part two of our three-part mini-series on European dictators.

[00:00:28] In part one, we looked at the life of The Grey [Blur](#)¹, Joseph Stalin.

[00:00:33] In today's episode, we are going to go to the other side of the [political spectrum](#)², to the far-right, and look at the life of Benito Mussolini, the father of fascism.

¹ someone that couldn't be seen or understood clearly

² range or scale of political opinions

[00:00:45] And in part three, well you can probably guess who it's going to be, the leader of Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler.

[00:00:52] Now, clearly it would be incredibly difficult to give a thorough, [blow-by-blow](#)³ account of Mussolini's entire life, and it certainly won't be possible in this episode.

[00:01:03] So today, I'll give a broad overview of his life and place in Italian and European history, whilst also trying to give you a sense of the type of man Mussolini was, and how his early years shaped the dictator he became.

[00:01:19] So, let's get into it and talk about Benito Mussolini, the father of fascism.

[00:01:27] In the early hours of the 29th of April, 1945, a crowd was gathering in the Piazzale Loreto in Milan.

[00:01:37] There was a sea of top hats, military helmets, men in long coats, and military vehicles.

[00:01:44] In the middle of the square, a [furious](#)⁴ mob gathered around something on the floor.

[00:01:50] They screamed, cheered, and [jeered](#)⁵.

³ giving all the details in the order in which they happened

⁴ extremely angry

⁵ shouted rude words or insults

[00:01:54] Two dead bodies lay on the floor. The crowd pushed forward, trying to get closer, hoping to catch a [glimpse](#)⁶ of one body in particular.

[00:02:06] [Jostling for position](#)⁷, the people who had managed to push past the soldiers were confronted by the face of Italy's fascist leader, Benito Mussolini.

[00:02:18] People [spat](#)⁸ on him, trying to kick his body, [hurling](#)⁹ abuse at the [corpse](#)¹⁰.

[00:02:25] Firemen arrived and [dispersed](#)¹¹ the crowd with jets of water.

[00:02:29] People began to move back, and order was restored.

[00:02:34] But then the crowd pushed forward again, took Mussolini's body, [dragged](#)¹² him across the square, and hung him up from a petrol station.

[00:02:45] The [mutilated](#)¹³ body of the man who had ruled Italy with an iron fist was there for all to see.

⁶ quick look

⁷ pushing each other to get a better position

⁸ forced out the liquid in their mouths

⁹ throwing

¹⁰ dead body

¹¹ broke up, disbanded

¹² pulled

¹³ seriously damaged

[00:02:53] Il Duce was dead.

[00:02:55] It was an end so **brutal**¹⁴, so **undignified**¹⁵, that historians believe it was one of the reasons Hitler decided to **commit suicide**¹⁶, rather than risk falling into the hands of his enemies and **enduring**¹⁷ a similar fate.

[00:03:12] It was an unlikely fate for many reasons, and completely likely for many others.

[00:03:20] This man, Benito Amilcare Andrea Mussolini was born on the 29th of July, 1883, in Predappio, in central Italy.

[00:03:31] His father, Alessandro, was a **blacksmith**¹⁸ and **committed**¹⁹ socialist, and his mother, Rosa, a **devout**²⁰ Catholic.

¹⁴ very violent

¹⁵ shameful, humiliating

¹⁶ kill himself

¹⁷ suffering

¹⁸ a person whose job was to make and repair metal things by hand

¹⁹ loyal

²⁰ having deep religious feelings

[00:03:41] In fact, Mussolini's father wasn't just a [fly-by-night](#)²¹ socialist, but left-wing enough to name his son after Benito Juárez, Mexico's liberal President and the first indigenous head of state anywhere in post-colonial Latin America.

[00:03:57] His middle names, Andrea and Amilcare, were given to him after Andrea Costa and Amilcare Cipriani, two famous Italian socialists.

[00:04:09] As you'll know, he would go in an altogether different direction to his [namesakes](#)²².

[00:04:16] In school, he was known as a shy and good student but one with a violent [temper](#)²³.

[00:04:23] At 10 years old he [stabbed](#)²⁴ another student, and then, at 14, in 1897, he again [stabbed](#) a classmate with a [pen knife](#)²⁵ and was [suspended](#)²⁶ from school.

[00:04:36] After leaving school Mussolini worked briefly as a school teacher but didn't enjoy the job, and in 1902 his prospects were so poor that he moved to Switzerland.

²¹ passing, temporary

²² names of other people that were given to him

²³ mood, tendency

²⁴ hit with a sharp object

²⁵ a small pocket knife

²⁶ kept out, removed

[00:04:48] He would spend the following two years travelling around Switzerland and, following his father's lead, became involved in socialist politics, often [clashing](#)²⁷ with police in the process.

[00:05:01] A couple of years later, in 1904, Mussolini returned to Italy and continued to do bits of teaching, remaining active in socialist politics, before moving to Austria-Hungary where he edited a socialist newspaper but was deported back to Italy for [violating](#)²⁸ freedom of press laws.

[00:05:22] As we'll see from his own behaviour later on, this is somewhat ironic.

[00:05:29] Historians believe that Mussolini saw himself as a bit of an [intellectual](#)²⁹. He read philosophy, learned French and German, and clearly thought himself to be something of a grand thinker.

[00:05:43] These grand thoughts would end up leading him to the complete opposite side of the [political spectrum](#).

[00:05:50] But let's not [get ahead of ourselves](#)³⁰.

²⁷ fighting

²⁸ breaking, ignoring

²⁹ someone clever who knew a lot of things

³⁰ talk about that yet or too early

[00:05:52] At this time, Mussolini was still a [committed](#) socialist and a [committed](#) anti-imperialist.

[00:06:00] In 1911 he spent six months in prison for [inciting](#)³¹, or encouraging violence at a rally against Italy's war in Libya.

[00:06:10] But even then Mussolini had visions of [grandeur](#)³², of big plans for himself, and used his time in prison to begin writing his autobiography, which reportedly included descriptions of his many romantic, sexual, conquests.

[00:06:28] Even back then Mussolini was keen to boast about his [womanising](#)³³, and much like a more recent Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, he was keen to use it as part of his macho image.

[00:06:42] Clearly, there was truth behind it, with one biographer estimating that he slept with around 5,000 women during his life.

[00:06:52] If you're wondering how you make time for this while running a country, well according to one account, he slept with at least one woman every day at his office while he was running the country.

³¹ encouraging

³² big plans for himself

³³ having a lot of sexual relations with women

[00:07:04] Perhaps he would have ruled for a bit longer if he had swapped this daily office activity for something else, who knows.

[00:07:12] Anyway, when he was finally released from prison, Mussolini continued working on several socialist newspapers, but he supported Italy's involvement in the First World War, a position that [put him at odds](#)³⁴, or in contrast to, [mainstream](#)³⁵ Italian socialists.

[00:07:30] This view of war, and general [enthusiasm](#)³⁶ for violence and militarism, would lead to his departure from the Socialist Party in 1914, and his [swing](#)³⁷ to the right.

[00:07:45] With [civil unrest](#)³⁸ spreading across the country, Mussolini's view of the world began to change, moving away from his socialist emphasis on social class to believing that national identity was more significant.

³⁴ put him in contrast to

³⁵ normal, typical

³⁶ great interest or approval

³⁷ change, move

³⁸ fighting between different groups

[00:08:01] He was drafted into the Italian army in September of 1915 where he fought on the [front lines](#)³⁹ and was promoted to the rank of [corporal](#)⁴⁰ before being [discharged](#)⁴¹, or released, after being wounded.

[00:08:16] Upon his return to civilian life, Mussolini the [corporal](#) became Mussolini the journalist again, and by 1917 he was [agitating](#)⁴² for Italy to remain in the war and support the [allies](#)⁴³.

[00:08:31] It would be the start of his route to power, but you might be surprised to hear that he owes much of it - arguably all of it - to the British intelligence services.

[00:08:43] Yes, that's right - archived records have revealed that Mussolini was paid by Britain's famous MI5, the British Intelligence Services, to write [propaganda](#)⁴⁴ articles encouraging support for Italy's continued participation in World War I.

³⁹ the military lines that was closest to the enemy

⁴⁰ a low ranking officer

⁴¹ released

⁴² arguing, campaigning

⁴³ the countries that had agreed to help each other during the war

⁴⁴ containing information presented in a way that could affect people's opinion

[00:09:01] He was paid £100 per week by MI5 - which is around €10,000 a week in today's money, which also went towards paying supporters to go and [beat up](#)⁴⁵ and [intimidate](#)⁴⁶ anti-war protestors in Milan.

[00:09:17] And Mussolini's political views had done an [about turn](#)⁴⁷, they were completely different.

[00:09:24] By the following year, in 1918, he was publicly stating that a dictator could, and should, take control of Italy.

[00:09:35] He began to organise the different fascist groups around Italy into a national organisation known as the Fasci Italiani di Combattimento, which you could translate as something like the Italian Fighting Groups.

[00:09:50] The group [appealed](#)⁴⁸ particularly to war [veterans](#)⁴⁹ and the unemployed, and encouraged violence, mainly against socialists, and Mussolini became the [de facto](#)⁵⁰ leader of the Fascists.

⁴⁵ hurt badly

⁴⁶ frighten or threaten

⁴⁷ turnaround, change in direction

⁴⁸ was attractive to

⁴⁹ experienced soldiers

⁵⁰ in fact, in effect whether by right or not

[00:10:05] In late 1919, he ran as the Fascist candidate in the Italian general election but lost in a large Socialist victory.

[00:10:14] In the [aftermath](#)⁵¹ of the election, he was arrested for collecting weapons and planning to [overthrow](#)⁵² the government, but was released.

[00:10:23] Then, in 1921, with the country [gripped](#)⁵³ by political instability and fascists fighting communists in the streets, The King, Victor Emmanuel III [dissolved](#)⁵⁴ the Italian Parliament.

[00:10:37] The following election saw big wins for the Fascists, and Mussolini won a seat in Parliament.

[00:10:43] Fascism was entering the political mainstream.

[00:10:48] Encouraged by their electoral success, the party changed its name to the Partito Nazionale Fascista - the National Fascist Party.

⁵¹ the period after the event

⁵² remove from power using force

⁵³ affected, taken over

⁵⁴ ended, disbanded

[00:10:58] In 1922 Mussolini's men, the same ones that had been paid with British money to violently disrupt anti-war rallies, changed to their famous black shirt uniforms and were put in squads that [resembled](#)⁵⁵ Roman army groups.

[00:11:16] In fact, Mussolini's vision of fascist Italy relied heavily on romanticised [notions](#)⁵⁶ of the Roman Empire and what he saw to be Italy's rightful place among world powers.

[00:11:30] In Parliament, he continued his calls for a strong leader, and became known as a [charismatic](#)⁵⁷ and powerful public speaker, [delighting](#)⁵⁸ huge crowds with dramatic [gestures](#)⁵⁹ and facial expressions.

[00:11:46] Giving a speech in Naples in October of 1922, Mussolini promised the 40,000 fascists in the crowd that, "Either the government will be given to us, or we will [seize](#)⁶⁰ it by marching on Rome."

⁵⁵ looked like

⁵⁶ ideas

⁵⁷ attractive, charming

⁵⁸ pleasing greatly

⁵⁹ movements of his hands or head

⁶⁰ take

[00:12:01] As the country **deteriorated**⁶¹ into further civil and political **unrest**⁶², several Italian cities were seized by Fascist squads.

[00:12:10] And then, on the night of the 27th of October, 1922, 30,000 Fascist blackshirts gathered to demand the **resignation**⁶³ of Prime Minister Luigi Facta.

[00:12:23] King Victor Emmanuel, Vittorio Emanuele, could only watch as thousands of armed Fascists entered Rome, though Mussolini wasn't one of them himself - he didn't actually go.

[00:12:35] The King quickly **dissolved** the government and asked Mussolini to form a new one.

[00:12:42] And just like that, Mussolini became not only Prime Minister, but the Minister of the Interior and Minister for Foreign Affairs.

[00:12:52] The journalist, the school teacher and former-socialist, had become the most powerful man in Italy.

[00:13:00] But he wasn't a **fully-fledged**⁶⁴, a real, dictator just yet.

⁶¹ was getting into a worse situation

⁶² fighting, disagreement

⁶³ the act of giving up or leaving his position

⁶⁴ complete, real

[00:13:05] Over the next couple of years, Mussolini built up more and more power, [sidelining](#)⁶⁵ democratic institutions and rivals until he could destroy them altogether.

[00:13:17] During this period there were several unsuccessful assassination [plots](#)⁶⁶ against him, and in response he had all Communist members of Parliament arrested.

[00:13:27] Even those who couldn't be found guilty of any crimes were [detained](#)⁶⁷ for up to five years.

[00:13:34] After dealing with the Italian left - his former [comrades](#)⁶⁸, it must be remembered - Mussolini turned his attention to his other former passion: the press.

[00:13:44] And let's not forget, he was a former journalist, so he was [acutely](#)⁶⁹ aware of the power of the written word, of the press.

[00:13:53] As Mussolini began to [tighten his grip](#)⁷⁰ on the country, the freedoms of the press were [muzzled](#)⁷¹, or silenced, and cinemas were made to show government [propaganda](#).

⁶⁵ putting them in a less powerful position

⁶⁶ secret plans

⁶⁷ kept in prison

⁶⁸ friends, companions

⁶⁹ in a way that showed great understanding

⁷⁰ control it in a more strong or strict way

⁷¹ silenced

[00:14:05] Fascists owned the majority of newspapers and controlled how things were reported in the media, issuing editorial guidelines and arresting editors who didn't follow them.

[00:14:17] Being aware of the power of an image, he was also very [conscious⁷²](#) about how he was [portrayed⁷³](#) in the press. And, as you may know, he was not a tall man, he was 1.69 m, and he would insist on photographs of him being taken from above, or standing on a box, or on a horse - anything to make him seem more [heroic⁷⁴](#) and grand.

[00:14:44] Now, historians generally say that Mussolini confirmed his total control of Italy, and grip on the country's institutions, a few years later, on the 3rd of January, 1925, when he made a speech to the Italian parliament declaring his right to [supreme⁷⁵](#) power of the country.

[00:15:03] In just a few years, Mussolini had [assumed⁷⁶](#) full control of Italy and become the world's first fascist dictator.

[00:15:12] But what would he do next?

⁷² aware of, having the knowledge

⁷³ represented, described

⁷⁴ brave and fearless like a hero

⁷⁵ having the highest rank or level

⁷⁶ begun to have

[00:15:14] In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Mussolini further developed his [personality cult⁷⁷](#), giving seemingly endless public speeches.

[00:15:25] Carefully creating a hyper-masculine image, Mussolini tried to establish himself as an 'Übermensch' - a philosophical concept of a person who is almost superhuman and has powers ordinary people don't have.

[00:15:41] This concept was actually created by Friedrich Nietzsche, a philosopher historians believe Mussolini was fond of, and one used by other fascist dictators as a means of justifying their [brutality⁷⁸](#).

[00:15:55] In fact, it is thought that Hitler himself gave Mussolini the complete works of Nietzsche for his 60th birthday.

[00:16:04] Now, on the subject of Hitler, it is worth considering the relationship between the two of them for a moment.

[00:16:09] It is well-known that Hitler was a great admirer of Mussolini in the early days, and that Italian fascism was seen as the ideological 'big brother' of Nazism.

[00:16:22] Hitler particularly admired Mussolini's March on Rome - in fact his failed [putsch⁷⁹](#) in Munich in 1923 was Hitler's attempt to do the same.

⁷⁷ image as a great leader

⁷⁸ violent behaviour

⁷⁹ violent attempt or try to remove the government

[00:16:33] In their early meetings, however, Mussolini wasn't particularly impressed by Hitler.

[00:16:40] After their first meeting in Venice in 1934 - during which he refused a translator and struggled with Hitler's thick Bavarian accent - Mussolini reportedly described the German dictator as a 'mad little [clown](#)⁸⁰.'

[00:16:57] Over time, however, and as Hitler grew in power, their partnership developed and Mussolini embraced some of Hitler's foreign policy ideas and his [anti-semitism](#)⁸¹.

[00:17:10] Yet, despite what the [propaganda](#) at the time showed, the relationship between the two was a 'marriage of convenience', or in other words, a relationship for [mutual](#)⁸² gain, an agreement that helps both parties.

[00:17:24] The biggest [implication](#)⁸³ of their relationship, of course, would come a few years later.

[00:17:30] But Mussolini wasn't just the ideological father of fascism for Hitler; he was the father of fascism [full-stop](#)⁸⁴, and an example for every European fascist that would follow.

⁸⁰ foolish person

⁸¹ hate against Jewish people

⁸² experienced by both of them

⁸³ result, consequence

⁸⁴ used to suggest that there is nothing more to say about it

[00:17:42] And Mussolini knew it.

[00:17:46] With the fascist general Franco [plunging](#)⁸⁵ Spain into Civil War, and fascism also on the rise in Germany, Mussolini began to look beyond his own borders and consider the bigger picture, and his place in it.

[00:18:01] In October of 1935, Mussolini ignored the League of Nations and ordered Italian [troops](#)⁸⁶ to invade Ethiopia - then known as Abyssinia – forcing the country's Emperor, Haile Selassie, into hiding.

[00:18:15] Mussolini, the man who just years ago was an active anti-imperial [campaigner](#)⁸⁷, declared Abyssinia, along with the territories of Somaliland and Eritrea, part of a new Italian Empire.

[00:18:30] During the conflict Mussolini proved himself to be particularly [ruthless](#)⁸⁸, ordering the Italian forces to use chemical weapons, including [mustard gas](#)⁸⁹, as they [slaughtered](#)⁹⁰ 50,000 people.

⁸⁵ pushing, bringing

⁸⁶ soldiers

⁸⁷ supporter, advocate

⁸⁸ showing no pity or compassion

⁸⁹ a very dangerous, poisonous gas used as a chemical weapon

⁹⁰ killed (for a large amount of people)

[00:18:43] It would prove to be his only real military success, and was against an enemy with significantly **inferior**⁹¹, worse, weapons than the Italians.

[00:18:54] Now, back in Europe, as the Spanish Civil War **intensified**⁹², Mussolini sent tens of thousands of men to support the fascists, which further **alienated**⁹³ Italy from other European powers.

[00:19:08] Mussolini instead grew closer to another European dictator: his old friend, the ‘mad little **clown**’ Adolf Hitler, who was no longer the fascist little brother, but a valuable European partner.

[00:19:22] When Italy invaded Abyssinia, Germany had, after all, been the second country to recognise Italy’s claim to it.

[00:19:30] Both Hitler and Mussolini **sided**⁹⁴ with Franco in the Spanish Civil War, and in 1937 Italy left the League of Nations **in solidarity with**⁹⁵ Germany.

[00:19:41] In March of 1938, with Mussolini’s support, Hitler invaded Austria.

⁹¹ worse

⁹² became more serious

⁹³ turned away

⁹⁴ supported

⁹⁵ in agreement with

[00:19:47] And despite having had an [on-off](#)⁹⁶ affair with a Jewish author and academic for many years, and Italian fascism not [initially](#)⁹⁷ being [anti-semitic](#), Mussolini's increasing closeness to Hitler and Nazism increased his own [anti-semitic](#)⁹⁸ views.

[00:20:06] In 1938, Mussolini wrote an article supportive of the German concept of the Aryan race, and soon after, he called for the [expulsion](#)⁹⁹ of Jews from Italy.

[00:20:18] In 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland, Britain and France declared war against Germany but Mussolini remained neutral, for now.

[00:20:29] When Germany took Denmark and Norway, however, Mussolini became convinced that Hitler would win the war, and after the Nazis [steamrolled](#)¹⁰⁰ through Holland and Belgium, Italy and Germany signed the “Pact of Steel” officially creating the Axis powers, on May 22, 1939.

[00:20:48] Now, to skip forward a few years, by 1943 it was clear that Italy was losing the war, and that the Italian army wasn't particularly well organised or effective.

⁹⁶ not continuous or steady

⁹⁷ at the beginning

⁹⁸ showing hate against Jews

⁹⁹ removal

¹⁰⁰ proceeded with great force

[00:21:01] And as Italians realised this, Mussolini's **grip**¹⁰¹ on power began to **wane**¹⁰², or decrease.

[00:21:09] Even his **propaganda** machine began to fall apart, and Italians increasingly listened to and read foreign media to find out what was really going on in the war.

[00:21:20] On July 25th, of 1943, Mussolini was voted out of power by his own Grand Council, arrested, and thrown into prison.

[00:21:30] When the new Italian Prime Minister began secret peace talks with the Allies, Hitler sent German **troops** into Italy.

[00:21:38] Then, in September of 1943, allied forces landed in Italy with the aim of liberating the **peninsula**¹⁰³.

[00:21:47] Fearful of being found by the advancing allied troops, on the 12th of September of 1943 Mussolini was rescued by an **elite**¹⁰⁴ unit of German SS **paratroopers**¹⁰⁵ and taken to German-occupied northern Italy.

¹⁰¹ tight hold or control

¹⁰² decrease

¹⁰³ piece of land that extends from the mainland and is surrounded by water

¹⁰⁴ selected, special

¹⁰⁵ soldiers trained to be dropped from an aircraft

[00:22:02] There he was made Hitler's **puppet leader**¹⁰⁶, creating the Italian Social Republic - known as the Salò Republic.

[00:22:10] Though he claimed to be in full control during the next year and a half, Mussolini was effectively **put under house arrest**¹⁰⁷ and guarded by SS troops - in his own country.

[00:22:22] How **the tables had turned**¹⁰⁸ - how the situation had reversed - since Hitler and Mussolini's first meeting.

[00:22:30] And by June of 1945, allied forces were rolling through Italy, and Mussolini tried to escape to Spain with his lover, Claretta Petacci.

[00:22:42] And, this all takes us back to the beginning of the episode, Mussolini's **gruesome**¹⁰⁹ end.

[00:22:49] Though he was **strung up**¹¹⁰ in the Piazzale Loreto in Milan, he didn't actually die there, he was already a dead man when he arrived.

¹⁰⁶ a leader with little power who just followed Hitler's commands

¹⁰⁷ held as a prisoner in his house

¹⁰⁸ the situation had reversed

¹⁰⁹ extremely unpleasant, shocking

¹¹⁰ hung by the neck

[00:22:59] On the 27th of April, 1945, a couple of days before, a group of communist [partisans](#)¹¹¹ had stopped a [convoy](#)¹¹² near the village of Dongo on Lake Como.

[00:23:12] Mussolini was found hiding in the back of a truck, trying to [disguise](#)¹¹³ himself in a German army overcoat and helmet, but his [distinctive](#)¹¹⁴ shaved head and [jawline](#)¹¹⁵ [gave him away](#)¹¹⁶.

[00:23:25] Autopsy reports suggest he was shot dead the following day, on April 28th, 1945.

[00:23:33] His body was then driven to Milan and displayed for all Italians - indeed the world - to see

[00:23:42] Now, we need to jump forward almost 80 years to the modern day - to 2022, as debatably more so than Stalin and Hitler, the [spectre](#)¹¹⁷ of Benito Mussolini [looms](#)¹¹⁸ more closely over his country than either of the other subjects of this mini-series.

¹¹¹ members of a secret armed group

¹¹² group of vehicles

¹¹³ look like a German

¹¹⁴ characteristic, easily recognisable

¹¹⁵ the bottom edge of his face

¹¹⁶ revealed or exposed his identity

¹¹⁷ shadow or threat

¹¹⁸ appears in a frightening way

[00:24:02] In October 2022, as you may know, a lady called Giorgia Meloni became Italy's first female Prime Minister.

[00:24:12] Her party, the Brothers of Italy, is generally described as a far-right or post-fascist party, and Meloni has publicly expressed her admiration of Mussolini.

[00:24:26] As a teenager, Italy's current Prime Minister said, and I quote, "Mussolini was a good politician, in that everything he did, he did for Italy."

[00:24:37] Her party won 26% of the vote, so one in four Italian voters decided that she, a woman who had openly expressed her admiration for Mussolini, she was the best choice for leader.

[00:24:52] Now, this is not to say that this means a quarter of Italy is fascist, of course, but rather to point out that the legacy of Benito Mussolini is still alive and well.

[00:25:04] Yet, as we have discussed today, Mussolini's legacy went beyond the borders of Italy.

[00:25:10] He was, put simply, the original fascist dictator.

[00:25:15] It was his violence, his [personality cult](#), his [charismatic](#) public speaking, his [strongman](#)¹¹⁹ one-party state and his march on Rome that really gave birth to fascism and inspired similar movements across Europe in the inter-war years.

¹¹⁹ a leader who ruled by using threats, force, or violence

[00:25:34] Though he's not the most [infamous](#)¹²⁰ of the fascists, Mussolini was a [brutal](#) dictator who ordered the death of his political opponents and imprisoned and [tortured](#)¹²¹ anyone who [dared](#)¹²² to oppose him.

[00:25:47] By some calculations, he was indirectly responsible for the deaths of 300,000 people.

[00:25:55] His greatest, most dangerous, legacy, however, is the fact that he started the fascist movement, inspired its rise, and created the political divisions that - in Italy and around the world - remain to this day.

[00:26:11] When put like this, perhaps he holds responsibility for the deaths of tens of millions more.

[00:26:20] Ok then, that's it for today's episode on Benito Mussolini, the Italian dictator who started fascism and met a [gruesome](#) end at the hands of his own people.

[00:26:32] I hope it was an interesting one, and whether you knew a lot about Mussolini, or this was the first time you'd heard anything about him, well I hope you learned something new.

[00:26:42] As always, I would love to know what you thought about this episode.

¹²⁰ famous for something bad

¹²¹ caused extreme pain

¹²² was brave enough

[00:26:46] We have lots and lots of members from Italy, so my question to you is this:
what is the legacy of Benito Mussolini on modern Italy?

[00:26:56] Do you think that Italy ever really had to deal with its role in the Second
World War?

[00:27:01] Are there any [saving graces¹²³](#), any positive things to be taken, from the rule
of Benito Mussolini?

[00:27:08] I would love to know, so let's get this discussion started.

[00:27:12] You can head right into our community forum, which is at
community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:27:20] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo
English.

[00:27:25] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

¹²³ positive things

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Blur	someone that couldn't be seen or understood clearly
Political spectrum	range or scale of political opinions
Blow-by-blow	giving all the details in the order in which they happened
Furious	extremely angry
Jeered	shouted rude words or insults
Glimpse	quick look
Jostling for position	pushing each other to get a better position
Spat	forced out the liquid in their mouths
Hurling	throwing
Corpse	dead body
Dispersed	broke up, disbanded
Dragged	pulled

Mutilated	seriously damaged
Brutal	very violent
Undignified	shameful, humiliating
Commit suicide	kill himself
Enduring	suffering
Blacksmith	a person whose job was to make and repair metal things by hand
Committed	loyal
Devout	having deep religious feelings
Fly-by-night	passing, temporary
Namesakes	names of other people that were given to him
Temper	mood, tendency
Stabbed	hit with a sharp object
Pen knife	a small pocket knife
Suspended	kept out, removed
Clashing	fighting

Violating	breaking, ignoring
Intellectual	someone clever who knew a lot of things
Get ahead of ourselves	talk about that yet or too early
Inciting	encouraging
Grandeur	big plans for himself
Womanising	having a lot of sexual relations with women
Put him at odds	put him in contrast to
Mainstream	normal, typical
Enthusiasm	great interest or approval
Swing	change, move
Civil unrest	fighting between different groups
Front lines	the military lines that was closest to the enemy
Corporal	a low ranking officer
Discharged	released
Agitating	arguing, campaigning

Allies	the countries that had agreed to help each other during the war
Propaganda	containing information presented in a way that could affect people's opinion
Beat up	hurt badly
Intimidate	frighten or threaten
About turn	turnaround, change in direction
Appealed	was attractive to
Veterans	experienced soldiers
De facto	in fact, in effect whether by right or not
Aftermath	the period after the event
Overthrow	remove from power using force
Gripped	affected, taken over
Dissolved	ended, disbanded
Resembled	looked like
Notions	ideas
Charismatic	attractive, charming

Delighting	pleasing greatly
Gestures	movements of his hands or head
Seize	take
Deteriorated	was getting into a worse situation
Unrest	fighting, disagreement
Resignation	the act of giving up or leaving his position
Fully-fledged	complete, real
Sidelining	putting them in a less powerful position
Plots	secret plans
Detained	kept in prison
Comrades	friends, companions
Acutely	in a way that showed great understanding
Tighten his grip	control it in a more strong or strict way
Muzzled	silenced
Conscious	aware of, having the knowledge

Portrayed	represented, described
Heroic	brave and fearless like a hero
Supreme	having the highest rank or level
Assumed	begun to have
Personality cult	image as a great leader
Brutality	violent behaviour
Putsch	violent attempt or try to remove the government
Clown	foolish person
Anti-semitism	hate against Jewish people
Mutual	experienced by both of them
Implication	result, consequence
Full-stop	used to suggest that there is nothing more to say about it
Plunging	pushing, bringing
Troops	soldiers
Campaigner	supporter, advocate

Ruthless	showing no pity or compassion
Mustard gas	a very dangerous, poisonous gas used as a chemical weapon
Slaughtered	killed (for a large amount of people)
Inferior	worse
Intensified	became more serious
Alienated	turned away
Sided	supported
In solidarity with	in agreement with
On-off	not continuous or steady
Initially	at the beginning
Anti-semitic	showing hate against Jews
Expulsion	removal
Steamrollered	proceeded with great force
Grip	tight hold or control
Wane	decrease

Peninsula	piece of land that extends from the mainland and is surrounded by water
Elite	selected, special
Paratroopers	soldiers trained to be dropped from an aircraft
Puppet leader	a leader with little power who just followed Hitler's commands
Put under house arrest	held as a prisoner in his house
The tables had turned	the situation had reversed
Gruesome	extremely unpleasant, shocking
Strung up	hung by the neck
Partisans	members of a secret armed group
Convoy	group of vehicles
Disguise	look like a German
Distinctive	characteristic, easily recognisable
Jawline	the bottom edge of his face

Gave him away	revealed or exposed his identity
Spectre	shadow or threat
Looms	appears in a frightening way
Strongman	a leader who ruled by using threats, force, or violence
Infamous	famous for something bad
Tortured	caused extreme pain
Dared	was brave enough
Saving graces	positive things

We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com