



Benito Amilcare Andrea Mussolini was born on July 29, 1883 at Varano di Costa a hamlet overlooking the village of Dovia in the commune or county of Predappio, in the province of Romagna in the northeast section of Italy.



His father Alessandro, although a fierce anticlericalist and an ardent politicalist, was a man not without compassion. His heart and mind were always filled and pulsing with socialistic theories. A dark-haired, good natured man, not slow to laugh, with strong features and steady eyes. The affection of the masses, their poverty, their inadequate nourishment, unemployment, and the social conditions which forced them to emigrate, all moved him to tears and constant protest.

The Mussolini family led a life of poverty. They possessed almost no furniture and in the winter could afford virtually no heating. There was also very little to eat; on weekdays there was only vegetable soup for lunch and chicory for supper. On Sundays, they had a pound of mutton for broth.

#### MIS EN SCÈNE

The new Italy, in which Alessandro and his son Benito lived and grew up, was faced with constant economic and social difficulties and this public dissatisfaction found expression in constant revolts. Garibaldi's unification in 1861 and winning the Capital of Rome in 1870 had not brought about the progress and social benefit to the Italian nation expected by its citizens. It was a poverty stricken land, with no railways, no major industries, and no primary schools in the South. After forty years of unification 48 percent of its citizens were still illiterate, much higher in the South. Although Italy was politically unified, there was, as yet, no sense of national unity. In 1877 and in 1879 serious disorders, which required intervention by the military, broke out in the South and in Sicily.

During this formative period of his life Mussolini was a young, intelligent man of words and ideas, fully capable of manifesting, in script, the nature of the social and economic problem facing his young nation of Italy and began an illustrious career of newspaper journalism.

On August 31, 1915 Mussolini was called up with his military class and was assigned as a private to the 11th Bersaglieri. He arrived at the front on September 16 and began his duty in trench warfare.

Mussolini was determined to revive the valor and spirit of his former comrades and scheduled a meeting in a small hall in Milan. This initial meeting was to eventually give birth to the new political party of Italy, known as the Fasci di Combattimento. The date was March 23, 1919; one hundred and forty-five men attended.

What was clear to Mussolini was his hunger to see Italy extend her territories and assume the power and status of a Great Nation. He would work for the equalization of wealth while strenuously opposing the philosophy and workings of communism, as he was in sympathy with the aspirations of the working classes of Italy. He was impressed with the wealth and power of America and saw in this new country great economic and international potential.

*In 1919 in a speech in Milan he said,*

*Today the only way not to live in fear of revolution is to think that we are now in the full swing of one. I am not afraid of the word I am a revolutionary and a reactionary. I am afraid of the revolution which destroys and does not create. **I fear going to extremes, the policy of madness, at the bottom of which may lie the destruction of our fragile mechanical civilization, robbed of its solid moral basis, and the coming of a terrible race of dominators who would reintroduce discipline into the world and re-establish the necessary hierarchies with the cracking of whips and machine guns.** At the same time, as regards reaction and revolution, I have a compass in my pocket which guides me. All that which tends towards making the Italian people great finds me favourable and, vice versa, all which tends towards lowering, brutalizing, and impoverishing them finds me opposed.*