

THE UNIFICATION OF ITALY

Part 1 Moves towards Independence after 1815

The Nine States

Italy was not united under one monarch until 1860, following the lead of Sardinia. Previously the country was a collection of separate states, almost all of which were controlled by foreign rulers, and it was the desire for independence, that eventually pointed the way to the alliance of these states into one nation.

After Napoleon was finally defeated in 1815, the great powers of Europe met together at the Congress of Vienna to re-assert their influence. Austria, being the leading Continental State with more than a score of territories under her flag, was particularly repressive of all aspirations towards liberty and nationalism. This brought an extended system of spies and secret police, and the curbing of the press, the church, and the universities in the subject countries. Under the Austrian diplomat, Metternich, all agitators were condemned to exile, imprisonment or execution, and revolution was formally outlawed.

Of the States that in 1815, were to make up the future Italy, independence existed only in the Kingdom of Sardinia, which then included Piedmont and Genoa – and in the Duchy of Lucca. Lombardy and Venetia were completely under the heel of Austria. The States of the Church centred on Rome, and the Two Sicilies which meant the island plus all Southern Italy, were both under strong Austrian rulers. Sporadic risings were inevitable, though initially ineffective, and voluntary exile was the only way for revolutionaries to escape imprisonment or death.

Secret Societies

In the south of Italy where refugees had earlier fled from the rule of Joseph Bonaparte to the Abruzzi and Calabria, a secret society took root. Its members were known as 'Carbonari' and the movement became so widespread in the Army that by 1820 General Pepe had raised five thousand revolutionary Militia. They were, however, defeated at the battle of Rieti in March 1821, and Pepe was sentenced to death in Naples and all his property confiscated. He managed to escape, reaching Spain, and then London. His former Neapolitan friends were condemned to thirty-two years imprisonment in chains. Many of the rank and file must have fled into hiding.

While in the south the Carbonari had aimed at driving out the foreign ruler and gaining independence, in Piedmont they were mainly Royalists who strove for a constitution, with perhaps a possible union of the northern provinces. Insurrection again met with disaster and after a battle at Novara in April 1821 their supporter, Santa Rosa, the Minister for War, was taken prisoner. He was rescued and fled via Genoa to Spain, afterwards passing through Switzerland to Paris and then to London.

In Lombardy, resistance took a literary form, but the movement's magazine 'Conciliatore' was soon suppressed by the Austrian government, and their schools in Mantua, Milan and Pavia, perceived as hotbeds of liberalism were also closed. This stimulated political action and leading members of the society such as Counts Porro, Arrivabene and Pecchio worked to support the planned rising in Piedmont. Following its failure, Pecchio was accused of high treason. He was cited to appear before a Special Commission in Milan as being the propagator of the secret society 'Federati Italiani' and for planning an alternative government. Sentence of death on the gibbet was passed in October 1823 but Pecchio and his friends were, by then, safely in England.

Disturbances were widespread by 1830. The July Revolution in France that year was followed by further problems in Italy. The States of the Church rose up against the Pope and Parma and Modena against their Hapsburg sovereigns but Austrian troops quickly restored order. Risings in Savoy were encouraged by Joseph Mazzini who was a former member of the Carbonari. He formed an organisation called 'Young Italy' whose purpose was the creation of a Republic. After suffering imprisonment and banishment, he got to London some time after 1836/7, returning to Italy to continue the struggle some ten years later.

The Revolutionary Year in Europe

In 1848 revolution broke out in much of Europe, to such effect that within a few months half the monarchs were deposed or forced to concede to liberal reforms. In Italy valiant efforts were again made to throw off the yoke. Lombardy expelled a garrison and Venice proclaimed itself a Republic. The King of Sardinia took the lead in declaring war on Austria but though support came from Parma, Modena and Tuscany and from the States of the Church and the Two Sicilies, his army was badly beaten at the Battle of Novara in 1849. Mazzini, who had set up a Republic in Rome, came to grief at the hands of a French army and underwent a second exile in London.

Despite these setbacks, Italy was on the verge of 'Risorgimento'.

It is hoped to describe in a further article the events which from 1859 to 1871 finally brought unification and independence to the country and also the acquisitions of the twentieth century.

Elena Bates

Sources: Various works on European History
Italian Exiles in London 1816-1848 by Margaret Wicks
Memoirs and letters of Pepe, Arrivabene, etc
The Times March/April 1821.

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PART II REVOLUTION OR DIPLOMACY

Sardinia's lead

By the middle of the 19th century, Italy was still struggling to free herself from foreign rule, but without success. Armed conflict in Piedmont and Lombardy had resulted in defeat. The republic set up in Rome, and heroically defended by **Mazzini**, was overthrown by government forces. Strong resistance in Venetia with **Daniele Manin** had also ended in capitulation.

Many proposals had been put forward, notably those by **Abbe Gioberti**, for a Federal Union of the Italian States with the Pope as both spiritual and secular head. These failed to come to fruition. **Pius IX** had begun in 1846 by introducing political reforms, but felt unable to oppose Austria, and eventually became altogether anti-liberal.

One possibility remained, that of a union of the Northern States under the King of Sardinia. This independent kingdom had already adopted a liberal constitution, and when **Count Cavour** became its Prime Minister in 1852, he set to work to enlist aid from France and England against Austria.

Aid from France

It was France who helped to tip the balance. In 1848 Louis Napoleon had become President of the Second French Republic, but soon turned himself into **Napoleon III**, hereditary Emperor of France, and virtually a dictator. Seeking Napoleonic glory, he agreed to support Cavour's plan to make a combined attack on the occupying power.

War was declared in May 1859, and success at the battles of Magenta and Solferino finally forced Austria to give up control of Lombardy. At this point Napoleon III abandoned the plan to free all the Northern States, and made a separate Peace Treaty with **Franz Joseph of Austria**, by which Austria ceded Lombardy to France but retained Venetia.

Meanwhile, Cavour was able to establish provisional governments in central Italy when the people of Modena, Parma, Tuscany and also the Romagna, expelled their rulers and declared for annexation to Piedmont. Napoleon III agreed to this and in return for Savoy and Nice, in 1860, he ceded Lombardy to Piedmont. Plebiscites were held in the areas concerned and within the year, with the exception of Venetia and Rome, all northern Italy was united under **Victor Emmanuel of Sardinia**.

Garibaldi's Campaign

Next, dramatic events occurred in Southern Italy, when the already heroic figure of **Garibaldi** came to the fore. A native of Nice, he had already fought in defence of **Mazzini's** republic at Rome and in the battle for Lombardy. When fighting broke out in Sicily, against Bourbon rule from Naples, in 1860, **Garibaldi** went to the aid of the rebels. Taking, it is said, 1,000 red-shirted volunteers with him, he conquered the island by July. The Red-shirts then crossed to the mainland and by September that year had taken Naples, thus liberating the Two Sicilies.

To restore order and maintain the authority of Piedmont, Cavour sent in troops and took over from the volunteers. The next year, 1861, saw the meeting of a national parliament at Turin, and Victor Emmanuel of Sardinia was made King of Italy.

When in 1862 Garibaldi marched on Rome to free the States of the Church, he found himself halted by government forces at the conflict of Aspromonte, as the country sought stability.

The final stages

In the brief Austro-Prussian war of 1866, Italy allied herself with the emerging Prussia and from the Treaty of Prague finally gained Venetia. In a plebiscite of the Venetians there were only 69 votes against the change.

The Franco-German war of 1870/1 compelled Napoleon III to withdraw his French troops from Rome and an Italian garrison immediately took their place. An immense majority of the inhabitants voted for annexation to the monarchy. Rome became the capital city of Italy and later a great monument was erected there to Victor Emmanuel II. Pius IX refused to recognise the Italian government and retired to the Vatican.

Thus by 1871 unification, independence and representative government for Italy had been achieved, except in the 'Trentino' (that is the district around the River Trent) and Trieste (at the head of the Adriatic). Known as 'Italia Irredenta' it remained under Austrian rule though largely occupied by Italian people and was not contested until Italy entered World War I in 1915.

But that is another story.

Elena Bates

Sources: *Mind Alive* Marshall Cavendish Encyclopedia
Henry James on Italy (Visits in the 1870s)

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PART III Italy as a European power

Colonial expansion

Major changes took place in Italy after the former separate States were united, and not all of them were popular. Resentment of the new centralized government and its taxes was apparent. On the plus side trade increased as internal customs' barriers were dismantled, a national railway network developed, and tourists multiplied.

Externally, Italy wished to compete in Europe, and began to look for areas to colonise. All Europe was Empire-building, especially in Africa, and Italy was disappointed when France took Tunisia in 1881. So the next year Italy joined the Triple Alliance against France and Britain. When these countries moved into the Horn of Africa, Italy followed, taking Eritrea and South Somaliland where Italian settlers were introduced and commercial agriculture fostered. The attempt to expand into Ethiopia failed when rebels obtained its independence in 1896.

Meanwhile territories were being lost in North Africa by the declining Ottoman Empire, enabling Italy to colonise Tripolitania and Cyrenaica from 1911/12.. These areas on the coast became known as 'Libya Italiana'. At this time Italy also occupied Rhodes and the islands known as the Dodecanese.

Another kind of settlement overseas occurred through the emigration of people looking for new opportunities in America, and elsewhere. Large numbers of Italians settled in the American cities, especially say from 1885 to the First World War.

Italy in World War I

In 1914 when the European rivalries turned into war, Italy reverted to its former allegiance, declaring war on Austria in 1915, and on Germany in 1916, as did San Marino, the small but independent State in Central Italy. Germany invaded Italy in August 1917. On the N.E. borders prolonged fighting against Austrian armies occurred, until General Diaz defeated Austria and entered the Trentino and Trieste, finally ending Hapsburg dominance. November 3 became a National holiday.

Italy also tried to gain a foothold in Asia Minor, but after attacks by Kemal Ataturk gave up any claim to the mainland.

By various treaties after the Peace of 1919, Italy gained the Trentino and Trieste and adjacent islands. Possession of Rhodes and the Dodecanese was disputed after 1923. In 1925 Italy ceded Eritrea and part of Somaliland including Jubaland. Although on the winning side, Italy had suffered great losses, some 600,000 men, for a relatively small gain.

The Rise of Fascism

Post-war conditions were difficult, and promoted the growth of national, socialist, and communist organisations. Benito Mussolini and his right-wing private army broke a general strike of workers in 1922, and then with surprising ease took over when the government resigned.

Mussolini's Fascist party stood for strong central government, and by 1928 had virtually destroyed all Parliamentary opposition, taking severe measures against opponents. But they introduced successful economic planning in industry, agriculture and transport, and developed hydro-electric power.

Nevertheless, discontent was aggravated by the general economic slump of the 1930s, and dictators in Europe strengthened their measures. In 1935/6 Mussolini attacked Ethiopia, causing the Emperor to take refuge in England. Between 1936 and 1939 Mussolini and Hitler supported Franco's Nationalists in Spain. Finally all Europe was at war again.

WW2 and after

In WW2 Mussolini's Italy was allied with Hitler's Germany as the Axis powers. Italy, already in Ethiopia, invaded the Sudan, and entered British Somaliland. In the summer of 1940, Marshall Graziani the Libyan commander advanced towards Egypt, but was out-manoeuvred by British and Commonwealth troops. By February 1941 Cyrenaica had been taken, and also some 30,000 Italian POWs, and by May Italy had also been driven out of East Africa including Ethiopia.

That same Spring, Axis troops invaded Greece and Yugoslavia. They also landed in the west of Cyrenaica, and the Allies were eventually beaten back by Rommel as far as El Alamein. The great battle there took place in October 1942, after which another advance through Cyrenaica and Tripoli with Montgomery, with Allied landings to the west, forced an Axis surrender in May 1943.

Many Italian POWs found themselves in Britain, working on the land. The Italian settlers in Cyrenaica were evacuated during the war, while those in Tripoli tended to stay as this was the more productive area.

Sicily was invaded by the Allies in July 1943, where Italy's Sixth Army was lost. Landings on the mainland began in September, and Italy then agreed to an Armistice. German forces in Italy however continued the struggle. By June 1944 Rome was occupied by the Allies, and the German Army in Italy surrendered in 1945 soon after Mussolini's death. Many British prisoners who escaped were helped by friendly Italians. War in Europe ceased in June and in the Far East in September 1945.

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In the immediate post-war period Italy, the peninsula with Sicily and Sardinia, was established as the 'Repubblica Italiana' 2 June 1946 with a right-wing democratic government supported by the U.S. and the Church. At first, Italy's colonies were administered by the British, but then Italy was made a Trustee for South Somalia for the U.N. Eritrea (later incorporated into Ethiopia) became independent in 1960 but continued to receive economic aid from Italy. In Libya after post-war British admin, independence was granted in 1951.

The last half century has seen Italy, with a population rising towards 60 million, prospering due to the excellent design and production of machinery, cars, fashions, and food, together with increased tourism to the beautiful cities and countryside.

Sources: 'Mind Alive' Marshall Cavendish Encyclopedia
'El Alamein to the River Sangro' Field Marshall Montgomery



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Sketch map to show the separate States before 1860

