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History 7042  
Specimen Question Paper 2L (A-level)  
Question 03 Student 1  
Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0

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**Specimen answer plus commentary**

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

**Paper 2L (A-level): Specimen question paper**

**03** 'Italy was in crisis in 1921 because of the disastrous consequences of the First World War.'

Assess the validity of this view.

**[25 marks]**

**Student response**

The crisis in Italy in 1921 was in part the result of the First World War which Italy had entered late in the hope of winning land at Austria's expense, but which had left a bitter taste. The Italian armies performed badly, for example at Caporetto, only winning victory in the closing stages of the war -at Vittorio Veneto. There was a high casualty rate, the war was ruinous economically and at the end a lot of demobilised soldiers were left unemployed. When Orlando went to the peace conference at Versailles to claim Italy's reward for fighting with the allies, its claims were largely ignored. The Italians soon referred to this as a 'mutilated peace' and it increased the strong feelings of resentment in Italy. However, the First World War was not the only reason for the crisis in Italy in 1921. Italy had suffered political, economic and social problems before the First World War and other factors which emerged after the war but were not entirely the consequences of the war also influenced the discontent.

The crisis of 1921 grew out of the years 1919-1920, which were known as the Biennio Rosso. The trade unions had increased their membership by over 2 million members by 1919 and there were hundreds of strikes and violent communist take-overs of factories. 1921 marked the start of the Biennio Nero, which continued into 1922, when Italy was in a state of virtual anarchy and civil war. The communist activity increased and the country was divided between its supporters and opponents. During this time, Fascism also emerged as a "Third Way" between right-wing nationalism and left-wing Communism. Mussolini promised to destroy the communists and Italy's weak liberal government and restore law and order

The crisis of 1921 was partly a result of the disastrous consequences of the First World War. Italy joined the Triple Entente in 1915 hoping to gain the 'Terra Irredenta' which consisted of parts of the Austrian Empire where Italian-speaking people lived. There had been a lot of support for the completion of the Italian unification (achieved in 1870) among nationalists. The Fasci di Azione Rivoluzionaria, for example, had pressurised the government to get more involved in the war for this reason. However, having suffered badly through the war years, the Italians were disappointed when, although they gained quite a lot of territory, they did not get Dalmatia or Fiume in the peace treaties. The mutilated peace spread dissatisfaction with the government and boosted support for extremists.

However, the problems of 1921 were not all the result of the consequences of World War I. Italy had been in a weak political state even before the war. It had a very restricted franchise before 1900 and the vote was only given to all men in 1912. In addition, trasformismo, which involved making deals to hold together a strong central liberal group and isolate extremists, had brought corruption and undermined support for parliamentary politics. The Italian Socialist Party had

grown rapidly since the late 19th century, and by the time the First World War broke out, it was gaining over 20% of the vote. There were also many socialist-controlled unions which organised crippling general strikes. Developments like this worried the wealthy élites and the Catholic Church.

Economically and socially, pre-war Italy was also divided, particularly between the more prosperous industrial north and the poorer agricultural south. A result of this was the growth of a frustrated socialist opposition movement. By 1915, there was also further division between nationalists who wanted an expansionist foreign policy, and those who wanted Italy to remain neutral.

Italy had entered the war in a weak state in 1915. It had a very small army and had been forced to rely on conscription. Five million of its eight million troops were conscripted and many, particularly from the south, were not interested in the fight. The Italian economy was also weak, so war had to be financed by borrowing which brought a 500% increase in the national debt by 1916. There was also 400% inflation which resulted in a problems of food supply, because farmers chose to keep their agricultural produce for themselves rather than sell it for worthless money.

It is therefore, not surprising that the post-war Liberal governments faced many problems. However, it was not just because of the war. Its problems were added to when, in January 1919, the Pope, who had originally been hostile to the idea of a united Italy that he did not control, lifted a ban on the formation of a Catholic political party. This led to the foundation of the Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI). The Catholic Party added another voice of opposition to that from the left and right-wings.

In addition, the PSI (socialists) became more revolutionary after the 1917 communist Revolution in Russia which provided them with inspiration. They demanded the overthrow of the Liberal government and the establishment of a Communist regime. The PSI grew from 50,000 to 200,000 members between 1914 and 1919 which suggests that the war played a part but it was not just this. Italy was traditionally divided between rich and poor and the socialists exploited these divisions. In addition, its demands for action were supported by many in the growing ranks of the unemployed.

The economic problems which had been exacerbated by the First World War were the major cause of discontent among industrial workers and in the countryside. Unemployment had reached more than 2 million by 1919, and the strikes which were organised by the trades unions and peasant leagues built on existing discontents and oppression by factory owners and landlords across Italy. In many areas, particularly in the north, the socialists took control of local government, alarming the middle and upper classes who thought a communist revolution was about to begin. The consequent chaos was the result of Italy's poor political structure and the lack of respect for a government which only told employers and landowners to make some concessions and set up food committees to distribute supplies.

Another force of disorder, partly the result of war but also building on prewar nationalist discontent, were the various militant right -wing groups who wanted change. Demobilised officers and men were, for example, attracted to the Arditi which spread across Italy in 1919. In 1919, d'Annunzio led a force of blackshirted Arditi and captured Fiume, one of the areas claimed by Italian nationalists. These groups attacked Socialists and trade unionists which they regarded as the enemies of the Italian state. Mussolini was a member of an Arditi group and in

March 1919 he created a new force, the Fascio di Combattimento which combined left and right-wing demands. The Fasci spread in Italian towns but gained no seats in the elections of November 1919.

The unrest of the biennio rosso was therefore a mixture of pre and post war discontent and one of the reasons conditions grew worse was because of the ambitions of Mussolini. and his belief in violent action. Mussolini sent his action squads to end the factory and land occupations and won over industrialists and landowners, who were frustrated by the Liberal governments' lack of action. With their money Mussolini was able to build up support among the middle and lower-middle classes who feared socialist revolution. The Fascist squads also burnt down Socialist newspaper works and destroyed trade union offices. So the chaos became self-perpetuating. As one group tried to protect themselves, so more division and more violence occurred.

The crisis of 1921 passed only because Mussolini rose to the top. Having helped create the chaos with his violent squads, he gained respectability when some liberals offered him the opportunity to participate in an anti-socialist electoral alliance in May 1921. This gave the Fascists 35 seats and Mussolini became a deputy. After this, Mussolini toned down his action and worked towards greater respectability. He was so successful that in 1922 the King invited him to become Prime minister. At the same time, as Mussolini changed his ways, the worst of the postwar economic distress passed. So, the troubles of 1921 were the result of a variety of causes -pre-war, during the war, the consequences of war and the result other post 1918 changes.

### **Commentary – Level 3**

The answer contains a number of valid points, but its effectiveness is undermined by the organisation and structure of the response. The introduction does contain a clear argument, but is too lengthy and contains too much detail. The second paragraph is descriptive and lacks any attempt to explain the developments described. The third paragraph builds on points already made in the over lengthy introduction. The assessment then considers some longer-term issues and then moves back to the war. It is, then, difficult to discern a controlled, focused argument: the answer lacks control and is suggestive of poor planning. In summary, much of the material is generally appropriate, but the lack of control limits this to Level 3.