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## ITALY'S INTERVENTION TO WWI. THE "HOME FRONT" AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL HERITAGE\*

This paper aims to share the most updated results of the Italian and foreign historiography about how and why the Italians split on the opportunity to go to war joining the Entente powers and on the Italian society in the war years. The better part of the supporters of the intervention argued that the war was the great opportunity for completing national unity. Aside or behind this rational aim purposes such as imposing to Italian people an ordeal so to bring it to maturity and self-confidence were present. The leftist supporters of the intervention looked beyond the immediate territorial interests and aimed at the destruction of the "prison of the peoples", to say the Habsburg Empire. One of them was Benito Mussolini, who used to be a prominent left-wing socialist and traumatically broke with his comrades joining the pro-war front. Catholics, socialists and many liberals, in sum the majority of the country, did not desire the intervention, but their opposition was dull and passive. Italian intervention was largely a coup d'état prompted by a violent minority. Nonetheless Italians accepted tamely the decision of the government and went to die in the trenches. Only in 1917, and especially in Turin, there were serious troubles, which started due to shortage of essential goods. Even the Russian revolutions and the great Caporetto defeat did not push the socialists to modify their loyal and passive attitude. The happiness for the final victory was from the very beginning poisoned by the sensation that France and Great Britain inclined to give scarce satisfaction to Italy, especially in the eastern Adriatic shore and in Turkey. So, Italy emerged from the war in a psychological state closer to the mood of a defeated country rather than to the mood of a victorious country.

**Key words:** Italy, World War I, neutrality, intervention, "home front".

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### Италияның Бірінші Дүниежүзілік Соғыстағы интервенциясы. «Ішкі майдан» және психологиялық мұра

Бұл мақаланың мақсаты – итальяндықтардың соғысты бастауға қатысты бөлінуінің, Антанта державаларына қосылуы себептері және соғыс жылдарындағы итальяндық қоғам туралы соңғы шыққан итальяндық пен шетелдік тарихнамамен таныстыру. Интервенцияның көптеген жақтастары соғыс ұлттық бірігуді аяқтайтын тамаша мүмкіндік деп есептеді. Бұл рационалдық мақсаттың астарында итальяндық халыққа оның сенімдігі күшею үшін ауыр сынақты жүктеуі мақсаттары жатыр. Интервенцияның солшыл жақтастары тікелей аумақтық мүдделердің шеңберінен тыс қарады және «халықтар түрмесінің», мысалға Габсбургтер империясының талқандалуына ұмтылды. Олардың бірі Бенито Муссолини болды. Ол белгілі солшыл социалист еді және соғыс қарсаңындағы өзінің замандастарымен қарым-қатынасты үзді. Католиктер, социалистер және басқа да либералдар, жалпы алғанда елдің көп бөлігі араласуды қаламады, бірақ олардың оппозициясы баяу және пассивті болды. Итальяндық интервенция негізінен ұлттық азшылықпен басталған мемлекеттік төңкеріс еді. Дегенмен итальяндықтар үкіметтің шешімін бағынып қабылдап, оқоптарда қаза болды. 1917 жылдың өзінде әсіресе Туринде бірінші қажеттіліктегі тауарлардың жетіспеуінен елеулі қиындықтар пайда болды. Орыс революционерлері мен Капореттоның жеңілісінің өзі социалистердің лоялдық және пассивтік қарым-қатынасын өзгертпеді. Жеңіске деген сенімділік бастапқыдан Франция мен Ұлыбританияның, әсіресе Адриаттық теңіздің шығыс жағалауы мен Түркияда Италияның қанағаттандыра алмайтындығы сияқты сезіммен де байланысты еді. Осылайша Италия соғыстан жеңуші мемлекеттен гөрі жеңілген мемлекет көңіл күйіндегі психологиялық жағдайда шықты.

**Түйін сөздер:** Италия, бірінші дүниежүзілік соғыс, бейтараптылық, интервенция, «ішкі майдан».

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**Интервенция Италии в Первой мировой войне.  
«Внутренний фронт» и психологическое наследие**

Целью данной статьи является освещение самых последних литератур в итальянской и зарубежной историографии о том, как и почему итальянцы разделились в отношении возможности начать войну, присоединившись к державам Антанты, и об итальянском обществе в годы войны. Большая часть сторонников интервенции утверждала, что война была прекрасной возможностью для завершения национального единства. Вне или за этой рациональной целью присутствовали такие цели, как навязывание итальянскому народу тяжелого испытания, чтобы привести его к зрелости и уверенности в себе. Левые сторонники интервенции смотрели за пределы непосредственных территориальных интересов и нацелены на разрушение «тюрьмы народов», как империи Габсбургов. Одним из них был Бенито Муссолини, который был видным левым социалистом и порвал отношения со своими товарищами, вступившими в довоенный фронт. Католики, социалисты и многие либералы, в целом большинство страны, не желали вмешательства, но их оппозиция была пассивной. Итальянская интервенция была в основном государственным переворотом, спровоцированным насильственным меньшинством. Тем не менее итальянцы смиренно приняли решение правительства и умирали в окопах. Только в 1917 году, особенно в Турине, возникли серьезные проблемы, которые начались из-за нехватки товаров первой необходимости. Даже русские революции и великое поражение Капоретто не подталкивали социалистов к изменению их лояльного и пассивного отношения. Счастье в окончательной победе было с самого начала отравлено ощущением, что Франция и Великобритания склонны давать мало удовлетворения Италии, особенно на восточном побережье Адриатического моря и в Турции. Таким образом, Италия вышла из войны в психологическом состоянии, более близком к настроению побежденной страны, чем к настроению страны-победителя.

**Ключевые слова:** Италия, Первая мировая война, нейтральность, интервенция, «внутренний фронт».

## Introduction

As a 56 years old Italian I belong to the last generation of Italian children who started learning about the First World War not as the First World War or the Great War but as the Fourth Italian Independence War, the first three being the wars waged by the Kingdom of Sardinia in 1848-49, in 1859 and in 1866. When a primary school pupil, I used to buy the adhesive figurines so to complete a scrapbook on the *Risorgimento* (“resurrection”, the cliché name for the process of Italian independence and unification), and the scrapbook terminated with the final victory of Italy in the First World War. The last figurine to fill in the last picture was the figurine of a German soldier, whose helmet looked like much more a Second than a First World War helmet of a German soldier. The purpose of such a representation was clear: to produce a psychological match between *Risorgimento* and the fight against German occupation in 1943-45, but also to legitimate Italian participation to the 1914-1918 war as part of a long-term process of liberation. Later, in the turmoil of the dramatic changes that occurred in Italian society and school system in the

70’s, this patriotic approach was quickly dismissed, so that when I tell to my students that I happened to study the First World War as the Fourth Italian Independence War they react in surprise and amusement. However, the Institute for the History of *Risorgimento* officially includes in its mission the study of the First World War, to such an extent that two years ago has organized a great international conference on the historiographies on the First World War of the involved countries.

So, after its end, the Great War was officially understood in Italy as – first of all – the completion of the *Risorgimento*, accomplished thanks to the annexation of the provinces of Trento and Trieste, which belonged to the Habsburg Empire. And for sure a little but important share of those who supported the intervention, the so-called democratic interventionists, pursued nothing other than the completion of national unity and, possibly, the disintegration of the Habsburg Empire, whom they labeled as the “prison of the peoples”; indeed, they argued that Italy must help the *Risorgimento* of the other peoples dominated by Vienna and Budapest. After the fall of the fascist régime, this patriotic and idealist interpretation allowed Republican régime

– communist and socialist opposition included  
 – to accept the participation of Italy to the First World War as a honorable step of Italian national history and to celebrate as victory day the day when Habsburg army surrendered (November 4th 1918. The armistice had been signed the day before).

In Republican age, paying due respect to the Italian intervention in the Great War was also – explicitly or not – a way to criticize fascist régime: indeed, the common feeling was that in 1915 we had rightly waged war against the natural enemies of Italy, to say the Germans, whereas in 1940 Mussolini had forced Italians on a wrong and unnatural road insisting on the alliance with Nazi Germany. All these opinions and feelings, you know, were symbolized in the last figurine of the last picture of the scrapbook. I may add that in one of the most popular songs of the *Risorgimento*, a verse says "German stick cannot tame Italy". German stick, not Habsburg stick. Between German world and Italy actually there is a century-long troubled relationship that goes beyond mere political disagreements. Italians admire Germans and do not love them, Germans love Italy while paying scarce consideration for Italians. This comedy is still on stage. Some years ago Italians were enthusiastic supporters of European Union and a widespread joke was that the single way for Italy to overcome her chronic problems of corruption and disorganization was to declare war to Germany and immediately surrender, so to be ruled by Germany. Now Italians are inclining to view Germany as a country which by means of European Union is bullying Italy and so we are experiencing a new anti-Germany tide.

And so, apparently, the Great War was the prosecution and completion of a process that alas had stopped after 1870 (the year when Kingdom of Italy invaded and annexed what remained of the Pope State and Rome became the new capital). This image is disturbed by the fact that since 1882 till 1915 Italy was politically and militarily allied of the Habsburg Empire and of the German Empire. Among the few Italians who know something about history, many have a bad opinion of war in itself and deplore the "useless carnage" that occurred in the years 1915-1918 ("useless carnage" being the famous expression pope Benedictus XV used in his letter dated August 1st, 1917, sent to the heads of the belligerent states, where he urged them to stop the war and come to a fair peace); but those who nurture patriotic views think, or feel, that the famous Triple Alliance was an... infamous, unnatural, wrong alliance, and that the declaration of war against Habsburg Empire was the victory of bravery

or at least the victory of reality against political intrigues. These Italians don't find strange that after 32 years of alliance Italy declared war against her allies; they find strange the alliance and remember it with uneasiness. At the same time, in the neutrality months many politicians, such as Giolitti, were deeply disturbed by the idea to commit a betrayal; later, the feeling to have committed a felony was far from absent in the Italian ruling class and has been absorbed by Italian people as part of the national self-consciousness of Italians as cute and unreliable people. In other words, you may believe me or not, I am saying that consciously or unconsciously Italians in the same time feel that in 1915 we did the right thing and think that we showed our less honorable side.

Obviously in the first decades after the end of the war this second feeling was never publicly confessed, but we have clear first-hand documentation that it tormented Mussolini in 1939-1940 and was one of the reasons of his behavior. Since late August 1939, to say since the Nazi-Soviet pact, he happened to reply "We are not bitches!" to those who suggested to break the absurd alliance with Nazi Germany, keep on neutrality or even repeat the move of 1915. What a pity he, to be loyal to his companion Hitler, in Spring 1940 committed a much worse felony: when the sudden German offensive crushed the French army he said that Italy must intervene on time not to be accused to have stabbed France on her back when defeated, but at the end he acted exactly like this (Ciano, 1975; De Felice, 1990).

If we assume that Triple Alliance was a wrong and unnatural alliance, based only on an unreasonable fear of France / grudge on France, which had "stolen" Tunisia from Italy in 1881, it is easy to step ahead arguing that for decades the Italian policy-makers did not really believe in it and only waited for the opportunity to do the "right thing". This is an apparently logical and convincing explanation of what happened between July 1914 (when the war broke out) and April 1915 (when the secret pact with the Entente powers was signed in London). But it is an even too easy way to explain the past with the future. Still in 1914, many prominent Italian policy-makers were sincere and convinced supporters of the Triple Alliance (Rusconi, 2009; Seton-Watson, 1967).

True, French ambassador Camille Barrère had worked very well to improve Italian-French relations; true, for Italy it was a dogma that the Triple Alliance must not have an anti-UK attitude; true, some foreign observers had predicted that Italy could join the Entente; true, in 1905 German

prime minister Bernhard von Bülow had showed no hope to have Italy as an ally in a possible general war, therefore considering its neutrality the best reasonable solution; and sometimes someone admitted that the alliance with Habsburg Empire was a good way not to have to wage war to the same Habsburg Empire; true, the alliance was not popular and people willing to fight against Austro-Hungarian Empire were much more than people ready to join it in a war (the large majority consisting of people who wanted no war at all). Nonetheless, we must be very cautious in arguing that until 1914 in the mind of some of the most important Italian policymakers the Triple Alliance was mere fake. Admiration for Germany played a role in all this (Bosworth, 1979; Castronovo, 1984, Lanaro, 1990; Webster, 1975; Mola, 1980).

Furthermore, it is a plain truth that the Italian General Staffs went on till first half of 1914 studying plans of war against France in alliance with Germany and that no secret plan of war against the “Central Powers” has been found in the archives after 1886 (in that year the alliance had not been renewed yet. It was renewed in 1887 with more favorable conditions for Italy and in this new shape was regularly renewed every 5 years) (Procacci, 1997).

Then, it is true that the biggest Italian territory beyond the borders – Trento province – was in the hands of Habsburg Empire, but territories like Savoy and Nice had stricter connection with the “genealogy” of the nation (Savoy was the motherland of the reigning dynasty, Nice was the birthplace of the Italian national hero Giuseppe Garibaldi); and these territories were in the hands of France (Rusconi, 2009). Moreover, in France’s hands were Corsica, which belongs much more to Italian than to French geographical and cultural space, and Tunisia, where thousands of Italians lived and that France had seized in 1881 with deep disappointment and grudge on Italian side. As noted above, it was largely due to this shock that Italy had signed the Triple Alliance in 1882). As for Trieste, its harbor was vital for Habsburg Empire. Relying upon this evidence, Italian rulers could easily reject as unrealistic and fanatical utterances the nationalist appeals to Trieste: the establishment of an Italian university in Trieste looked to all “wise and balanced persons” the maximum of what Italy could request to the old empire. In sum, a renowned Italian historian, Gian Enrico Rusconi, argues that, rather than a fateful, obliged outcome, Italian intervention on the side of the Entente was largely due to Vienna’s obstinacy not to give way Trento region to Italy (Rusconi, 2009).

It is worthy to be noticed that Italy arrived to the days when the great conflict broke out with a largely unpredicted team of decision makers. The Head of the Major Staff, general Alberto Pollio, a wholehearted supporter of the Triple Alliance, suddenly died on 1st July 1914. His successor was general Luigi Cadorna, who showed to be less warm on this subject. On 20 August 1914 pope Pius X died, a pope who loved very much Habsburg Empire as single catholic great power (theoretically it is not correct to include this information speaking about Italian decision makers, but the importance of the Catholic Church in Italy cannot be overlooked). On 16 October 1914 died Antonino Paternò-Castello, marquis of San Giuliano (normally known as Antonino di San Giuliano), a minister of foreign affairs who was seriously committed to the Triple Alliance. Most important of all, on 31 March 1914 Antonio Salandra had replaced Giovanni Giolitti as prime minister. Salandra was a right-wing liberal, Giolitti was a left-wing liberal. Giolitti was the master of the parliament and liked periodically resigning so to show the weakness of his opponents. He had directly indicated Salandra as new prime minister. He was hated by all the extremists, by the moralists and by the conservatives, who accused him not to be ferocious enough against working class. Nonetheless, he thought he could always control and drive any possible political development. He failed to perceive the size of the forces, feelings and ambitions the Great War could excite.

Salandra had “inherited” Antonino di San Giuliano from Giolitti’s cabinet. The current mentality was that foreign policy must be kept as much as possible far away from daily political quarrels and Salandra showed no will to make substantial changes in foreign policy. But when di San Giuliano died, he chose Sidney Sonnino as his successor. Again, Sonnino had never shown hostility towards the Triple Alliance and particular sympathy for the anti-Habsburg nationalist currents, on the contrary he was known as a convinced supporter of the “infamous” alliance. But he and Salandra, while days passed by, on one side had to face Vienna’s unwillingness to “pay” for Italian neutrality with Trento, on the other side grasped that war on the side of the Entente was not only a great opportunity to assess Italy as a great power in the Balkans and in the Eastern Mediterranean, but also a great opportunity to take away the country from Giolitti’s political cobweb. In other words, war was an opportunity for (mostly) anti-democratic forces to rebel to Giolitti’s hegemony. In June Italy had experienced the “red week”, a large spontaneous rebellion movement

broken out in several provinces, especially of Marche and Romagna. The General Trade Confederation was somewhat forced to proclaim a general strike, but called for its end in a few days. The movement had not been a serious threat for the ruling class, but in many circles excited the will to force "the mob" to stricter discipline (Gaeta, 1981).

In the weeks between the Sarajevo attempt and the beginning of the warfare, di San Giuliano had drawn the guidelines of Italian attitude: no change of balance must occur in the Adriatic and in the Balkans. This did not mean that Austro-Hungary must not expand and/or consolidate her power in South-Eastern Europe; it meant that Vienna had to compensate Italy. In August 1914, the Italian government proclaimed neutrality, arguing that the Triple Alliance's military obligations were purely defensive. Then the bargain started, and we know that it failed on the Habsburg side. On 26 April 1915 the Italian ambassador in London, marquis Imperiali, signed the secret military alliance with the Entente powers. On 3 May Italy formally quit the Triple Alliance. On 23 May Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary.

The decision to intervene was particularly audacious because the Italian decision makers knew what had happened beginning from August 1914 and was day-by-day happening in the different war fronts. European powers had started the war in the illusion of a short, even though giant, conflict. Germans aimed at a mega-Sedan, French trusted in the *élan*. Nobody had foreseen the terrible trench war. But, sharing Cadorna's opinions, the king Vittorio Emanuele III, Salandra and Sonnino, with typical wishful thinking, were pretty sure that with a great general offensive Italy would crush the resistance of Habsburg army and run to Lubjana, if not to Vienna, so to produce not only a rapid Italian victory but the victory of the Triple Entente and the end of the war (Isnenghi, Rochat, 2004; Isnenghi, 2014).

Another striking feature of the way Italian rulers decided and planned the war is that they ostentatiously refused to declare war to whatsoever power other than Habsburg Empire: only on 21 August 1915, and reluctantly, Italy declared war on Ottoman Empire and only on 28 August 1916 on Germany. In this way, Italy's war looked a sort of "private" war against Vienna. This narrow-minded attitude was doomed to be paid in the post-war negotiations, as we will see later.

An immediate and great supporter of the intervention was the newspaper "Corriere della

Sera" [Courier of the Evening], the more influential Italian newspaper, expression of the aims and views of the high and middle bourgeoisie of Northern Italy. On August 31st 1914 his director, Luigi Albertini, wrote to Salandra: "We don't demand the war at all costs; but at all costs we must prevent in the East and in the Adriatic Sea the establishment of an hegemony we would be in short time the first victim of". Italian ambassador in Berlin, Riccardo Bollati, bitterly commented: "Even if we were offered Trento province (and Valona as well), Corriere della Sera would not be content with it: it wants war; and it rules Italy" (Rusconi, 2009). A last serious attempt to solve peacefully the national problems with Austro-Hungary was after the fall of Belgrad (3 December 1914). Italian diplomacy invoked compensations, Vienna refrained from giving a concrete reply. In this way, the better part of the Italian rulers began thinking when to declare war rather than whether to intervene or not. The mission to Rome of the German statesman Berhard von Bülow ended with a failure. Sonnino's requests now went beyond Trento. Bülow came back to Berlin defeated but sure that Italy's choice had been all but fateful and grudging more on Vienna than on Rome: "If at the end of July, at the beginning of the war, Austria had given what today looks ready to give, Italy would have joined us. If between January and March had offered the same, Italy would have remained neutral" (Rusconi, 2009).

In the diplomatic circles and in the Italian ruling class day by day the feeling that Italy could not go on keeping her neutrality increased. A winner Habsburg Empire would surely take revenge on Italy... so it was necessary to fight against it. Meanwhile, mobilization of the pro-intervention factions became more and more vivacious and aggressive. And an unexpected politician joined their ranks: Benito Mussolini. He was the brilliant and successful director of the newspaper of the Socialist Party, the "Avanti!" [Ahead!] and the rising star of the extremist wing of the party. The Socialist Party had immediately proclaimed its support to neutrality and for some time Mussolini joined this position. But very soon he showed distress for this immobile attitude and argued that socialists had to shift from absolute neutrality to an "active and operative neutrality". It was not easy to understand what an "active and operative neutrality" could be: it could be interpreted as invite to mobilization against a possible assault of the Habsburg army; as a matter of fact this sibylline position was the bridge towards interventionism. He was expelled from

Socialist Party and, thanks to funds coming from French government, founded a new newspaper, “Il Popolo d’Italia” [Italy’s People]. At the beginning, the subtitle of this newspaper was “Socialist daily newspaper”. Sincerely or insincerely, Mussolini asserted himself as a socialist who was trying to call his comrades to a position similar to the position held by the great socialist parties of the great powers. The difference was that in accepting the war the great European socialist parties had renounced revolution, whereas Mussolini argued that the war was the road to revolution. He remained completely isolated, but as everybody knows after the war he would succeed in bringing together, with fascism, confused socialist calls and revenge against the anti-war Italians (De Felice, 1965; Castronovo, 1984).

In a famous article on the newspaper “La Tribuna” [The Tribune] Giolitti argued that “a lot” could be get with serious and balanced negotiations. He did not understand that his neutralism was for his opponents one of the main reasons for interventionism: for them, war must bury Giolitti’s Italy in the name of a great, audacious, rapacious Italy. Moreover, Sonnino insisted on arguing that the nation could overthrow a monarchy refusing to listen to the national call. Sonnino lied: the better part of the Italian people was pro peace; for him “the nation” were the nationalists. Giolitti stated that monarchy was not in danger by all means. What was in danger, indeed, was his power. The king joined the pro-war front and he did not dare challenging him. The majority of the members of the parliament reaffirmed its contrariety to the war but the pro-war movement organized great and violent manifestations and Giolitti remained paralyzed by his loyalty. At the end, the parliament surrendered and accepted the intervention. Only the socialists voted against, but letting clearly understand they were not intentioned to boycott the war. Salandra and Sonnino broke the historical gentlemen’s agreement among the various souls of the liberal ruling class: they joined the nationalists and exploited the “democratic interventionists” so to realize a permanent anti-democratic re-balancing of the same Italian ruling class. Sonnino will die in 1922; Salandra, no longer holding important charges after 1916, will live enough to express his full solidarity to fascist dictatorship. An important role played Gabriele D’Annunzio, at that time the most famous Italian writer. He came back to Italy from France, where he had been keeping himself off his innumerable creditors, and in exhilarating speeches invited openly to violence against the “traitors”

who were hindering the march of Italy towards her destiny. At the end, Italians enthusiastically welcomed or tamely accepted the decision of the government and marched towards death in the trenches (Seton-Watson, 1967; Spinosa, 1987, Jones, 2014).

In the war years D’Annunzio was the most efficacious testimonial of Italian war, performing impressive military raids. On the eve of the victory he wrote a famous poem starting with the verse: “Oh our victory, you will not be mutilated!”. In this hope a clear fear was present. With his unquestionable instinct, D’Annunzio felt that Italy’s allies were not willing to give to Italy all what Italian ruling class aimed at. Actually, Italy was not given Fiume (as a retaliation D’Annunzio occupied it with his comrades), was not given an absolute superiority in the Adriatic sea, was not given Smyrna. Italy paid for her allies’ egoism, for her own narrow-minded “private” war against Habsburg Empire, for her own incoherence in her attitude towards the “little peoples” of Eastern Europe and Balkans and also for the silent disdain of her allies due to her bargain in 1915 (just like Giolitti was afraid of). While the socialists, like Tracy Chapman, talked, talked ‘bout revolution, without never doing it, the nationalists could easily accuse the liberal ruling class to be shamefully weak against working class and against the other victorious powers as well. Despite being a victorious power, Italy experienced a psychological state very similar to the state of mind of the defeated countries. This atmosphere was one of the determinant factors for the coming to power of the National Fascist party (Grassi, 1996).

With his progress towards dictatorship Mussolini took a complete revenge on his old comrades. He had happened to measure their incapacity during the war years. Socialists did not change their attitude when Italian army, contrarily to Cadorna and Sonnino’s dreams, failed to attain a decisive short-term victory, so that very soon the war on the Italian front became a terrible long-term trench war (it is interesting that in the collective memory this failure is not present and that the fact that Italians joined the other peoples in the trench war is felt as normal) (Isnenghi, 2014). In late August 1917, in Turin, a spontaneous revolt sprinkled due to transitory shortage of flour. As usual, Socialist Party had prepared nothing to provide a whatsoever follow up but was also slow in simply trying to stop it, being as usual split in a revolutionary and a reformist wing. As a consequence, some fifty insurgents and ten soldiers uselessly died, some two hundred were

injured and hundreds of socialists and anarchists were tried and condemned to prison.

Turin's was a local and sudden revolt. The actual great opportunity for a revolutionary push occurred a few months later, in late October 1917, when Austro-Hungarian forces succeeded in crushing the Italian front and invaded large areas of North-East Italy. This defeat is named by the little town of Caporetto (now in Slovenia, in Slovenian Kobarid) (Silvestri, 1984). Peasants had in their hand the weapons, factory workers could stop production. A few weeks later the first news of the "October Revolution" penetrated censorship. A capable party could attain, if not socialist revolution, the end of monarchy and the proclamation of the republic, just like had happened in Russia in March. But Socialist Party abode to the principle of not boycotting the military effort and did not change its passive attitude. Cadorna managed to reorganize the troops behind Piave river, nonetheless he was forced to resign. His successor, Armando Diaz, showed more

understanding of the material and moral needs of the soldiers. After the failure of the last enemy offensive in Summer 1918, Italian army scored an easy victory with the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in October 1918, a victory named by the little town of Vittorio Veneto .

Italian Socialist Party behaved more decently than the other European Socialist parties, which had supported the participation of their own countries to the war, and was rewarded by the voters: from the 1919 pools it came out as the most voted party, whereas the new-born fascist movement scored ridiculous digits. But to be big does not mean to be strong. In 1920 Giolitti was called again to form a government and in December swept off D'Annunzio from Fiume: the political revenge of the anti-war side appeared complete... Only to precede a far complete and ferocious revenge of the pro-war side. In October 1922, meeting Vittorio Emanuele III in order to be charged as new premier, Mussolini said: "King, I bring to you Vittorio Veneto's Italy".

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What follows obviously is not a comprehensive bibliography on the Italian involvement in the Great War. It is a confidential set of works that stay behind this paper. Other than some classical and capital books, this list includes some very recent works focused on particular topics. I am sad I cannot include a comprehensive work on Italian Socialist Party facing to the war.

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*\* This paper is an updated version of a relation presented at the international conference “The international symposium on judicial and historical aspects of World War I”, held in Istanbul on 6-8 December 2017.*