

Spencer Di Scala

Paper: “Written out of History: Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, the First World War, and the Rise of Fascism”

University of Rome, “Roma Tre”

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Part 1: Introduction

- **Vittorio Emanuele Orlando is a forgotten statesman. This fact is not only an error regarding the historical personage but a mistake made by historians from the point of view of Italian history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but above all of world history.**
- **Studying the history of Orlando’s career, one can understand how the course of Italian history was altered from the course it was on and how the rise of fascism was favored, and, through fascism, world history.**
- **This is the reason I wrote my book, *Makers of the Modern World. Vittorio Orlando: Italy.***
- **The book operates on four different levels, which are all relevant: Italian politics; international diplomacy; the First World War; historiography.**
- **The historiographical problems are important and neglected.**
- **English-language historiography gives a false view of Italian diplomacy before, during, and after the First World War.**
- **I believe that historians do not consider many important points concerning Italy. They operate in what I would call a “default mode” when it comes to Italy, that is, they repeat the same trite phrases when explaining Italian diplomacy, modern Italian history, the history of Italian intervention, and military history of this period.**
- **That is, they repeat ad nauseum that Italy “betrayed” its allies of the Triple Alliance without understanding the nature of this alliance, the changes that occurred over the**

years the alliance was in force, and, I think, without having read the text of the treaty. Then they proceed from these errors to making false analogies between the first and second world wars.

- In addition, again without understanding well what really happened or looking at the archival sources, they maintain that the Italians did not fight in an adequate manner during the First World War.
- Another commonplace error is that, without fighting, the Italians then proceeded to demand too much territory at the Peace Conference.

Part 2: Diplomacy and National Affairs

- There are two fundamental points regarding the Triple Alliance that I would like to emphasize that historians usually do not mention
- First, the Triple Alliance was a Defensive alliance in which Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy pledged to help each other only if one or more of them were attacked by a third power.
- Granted that it is often difficult to understand when a war breaks out whose fault it was, but the text of the treaty setting up the Triple Alliance specifies that only in the case of an attack by a third power without provocation would the *causus foederis* have come into effect and Italy would have joined its allies in a defensive war.
- In August, 1913, for example, the Italians informed the Austrians that they would not have supported them in a war against Serbia, and the Italians (Giolitti and di San Giuliano) answered that they would not have done so because the Triple Alliance did not come into play if one of the allies attacked another country.
- In October 1913, the Austrians initiated a dangerous policy toward Italy that violated another of the treaty's terms: they sent Serbia an ultimatum ordering them to withdraw from Albanian territory without consulting with or informing the Italians. Giolitti informed Italy's allies that Italy would not consider the *causus foederis* as coming into effect if its allies attacked another country and, in addition, violated Article 7 of the treaty obliging Austria to keep Italy informed of what it did and to provide compensation in case it altered the status quo.
- However, this is exactly what Austria and Germany did in

- the 1914 crisis that produced World War I: i.e., they transformed the defensive alliance into an offensive one.**
- **Under those circumstances, they had no call on Italian loyalty.**
 - **However, there is another important point to consider besides the diplomatic one.**
 - **That is, between 1882 and 1914, when Italy denounced the alliance, Italy had become more democratic.**
 - **In 1882, the monarchy counted for much more and it searched for allies that could help it against the threat of greater democratization. In the 1890s, particularly after 1901, Italy had become a parliamentary democracy (even with all its defects) with clear parliamentary responsibility, with a parliament that had a voice in military affairs, and with growing Liberal and Socialist influence. And the monarchy had adapted to the new situation.**
 - **What is the importance of this fact? The Italian people would never have allowed its government to enter a war on the Austrian (or German) side because Austria was the traditional enemy, and both Germanic countries were seen as conservative and antidemocratic.**
 - **To have entered a war on the Germanic side would have been folly because Italy would have wound up as their satellite had they won a war for domination of the European continent. Salandra makes this point quite clearly in his memoirs.**
 - **At this point, we have to mention Giovanni Giolitti, who worked hard to establish a liberal democracy in Italy. Italian democracy had defects, but defects can be worked out.**
 - **At this point as well, we have to mention Orlando, who was a prominent member of Giolitti governments as Minister of Education and of Justice.**
 - **Not much is said now of Orlando, but he was the most important legal thinker in Italy at the time. As minister, he fought for increased civil rights, the independence of the judiciary and the university, and for reconciliation with the Church (direct link with Pius X and a forerunner of Lateran agreement with the church).**
 - **These are also principles for which he fought during the war, when they were threatened.**
 - **In short, I would propose that, had things proceeded without the aftermath of World War I, Orlando might well have succeeded Giolitti and further helped liberalize**

Italian society.

Part 3: World War I: facts to consider

- **This is where we have to discuss World War I, and there are a number of things we can say about it and about the historiography of the war.**
- **The importance of the Irredenta for the Italians is usually neglected or considered an excuse by historians, but it had a similar importance for them as Alsace-Lorraine had for France.**
- **The denouncing of the Triple Alliance was not a “betrayal” but a strict interpretation of its terms setting forth a that the *causus foedoris* would come into effect only in case that a “direct provocation” by another country led to a war.**
- **Both the Italian Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister said this privately and publicly, but the Germanic powers ignored them in July 1914.**
- **Article 7 of the treaty clearly stated that the Austrians must consult with the Italy before taking initiatives in the Balkans that could have provoked a war; Austria purposely did not do this, believing that Italy would not agree to an offensive war.**
- **Article 7 also stated that if the Austrians changed the status quo in the Balkans they must compensate Italy; therefore the negotiations the Italians demanded (and that the Allies condemned as shameful after the fact) were justified.**
- **Italy is portrayed as entering the war for selfish motives, but these are not ascribed to the other Allies. Besides the folly of not mentioning this, the “democratic interventionists” led by Bissolati are usually not mentioned.**
- **The military situation: It is usually not mentioned that the Italian front was the most difficult (see Keegan), both for the nature of the terrain and the strong defensive positions of the Austrians.**
- **Emphasis is always put on Caporetto; but it is a myth supported by other myths (the one that Italian army collapsed, and the one that the Allies won the battle.)**
- **Italians on the French front never mentioned.**
- **Vittorio Veneto: presence of British and French troops always mentioned, and that they won the battle.**

Orlando

- **Considering the situation of Italian governments during the war and Orlando:**
- **Salandra (until 1916) authoritarian (but a lot of governments were)**
- **Boselli, (1916-1917) more representative, but inefficient**
- **Orlando: (1917-1919) Minister of Interior; fight with Cadorna over civil rights; probably prevented a coup d'état;**
- **His politics: considered World War I a Peoples' war**
- **Importance of civilian control**
- **More rights for soldiers, bringing them on a par with British and French soldiers**
- **Fought demands for repression and defended civil rights; his record is better than that of the US, for example**
- **Reorganized the army after Caporetto**
- **Geared up industry for war**
- **Got rid of Cadorna (no matter what British historians may argue); Named Diaz as commander**

Part 4: The Peace Conference and its Aftermath

- **Allies opposed a new contender**
- **Criticism of military effort (Caporetto)**
- **The Legend of the delayed offensive (Spring 1918, when Foch needed help) (analogous situation of Austrians pressured by the Germans)—put forward by the French**
- **The Legend of victory only because of the dissolution of the Austrian Empire (there was a similar situation with Germany, which the allies did not emphasize)**
- **The legend that Italians fought “only when the war was over” (Margaret MacMillan)**
- **Legend that the Italians asked for “too much” (mention British and French; Germans, Austrians, Russians)**
- **Sonnino's rigidity**
- **Wilson: rigidity; racism; anti-Italian; pro-Slav; Fiume (blocking an agreement even in 1920).**

Part 5: the Rise of Fascism

- **Character is always mentioned for rise of fascism, going back to Rome; weakness of the liberal state, etc.**
- **The serious effects of the Peace Conference not mentioned**
- **“Mutilated Peace” considered a legend, but should it be dismissed?**
- **“Default position”: Peace Conference had nothing to do with rise of fascism; but is this the case?**
- **Why not consider it? Why is it considered in the case of Germany, where Hitler came to power 13 years after its end, and not in Italy’s case, where Mussolini came to power three years after?**
- **Consider the following elements:**
- **Before World War I, Italy was making important progress toward democracy “Democracy in the making”; all of a sudden that stops: why?**
- **World War I and the Peace Conference changed world history, so why not Italian history?**
- **I am not saying that the events of the Peace Conference was the only cause for the rise of fascism in Italy, but it should be considered, at least one of them, not dismissed.**
- **The Peace Conference eliminated the heir of the Liberal State from contention—Orlando. This was not even considered by the Allies, who instead weakened him by supporting Yugoslavia and spreading legends about the Italian performance in the war: i.e.,**
- **Italy betrayed its allies;**
- **Italy sold itself to the highest bidder;**
- **Italy did not fight until the war was over;**
- **Italy asked for too much at the Peace Conference**

Other points:

Leave for questions? Economic conditions are cited in the rise of Fascism, but the world after WWI ran into economic difficulties that were overcome. The same thing happened in Italy, i.e., the economic difficulties

were being overcome BEFORE Mussolini came to power; in fact, Mussolini's remedies for the economic difficulties after he came to power were the classical economic laissez faire policies, the same as in other countries.

International Fascism grew with the Great Depression beginning in 1929; Fascism came to Italy in 1922; how come?

Diplomacy: At Paris, Italy was considered an interloper and shut out of many of the gains it considered legitimate; it made some gains linked to receiving the Irredenta and to security issues after a long struggle.

Contrast this with France, which not only got Alsace and Lorraine but domination of the continent after the war and great colonial gains.

That is, France successfully excluded Italy from competition both on the continent and in colonial affairs. However, that was just until Mussolini came to power, when he challenged France's hegemony (e.g., the Balkans) and wanted colonial gains—e.g., agreements with Laval and a Free Hand in Ethiopia granted by the French leader. There was a direct connection between this and the First World War.

Given these elements, it does not take much imagination to link the rise of Fascism to the legitimate resentment of the Italians after WWI. In fact, the primary sources are full of this resentment, which, however, is generally ignored by historians who consider it bogus—but it was not and it should be considered an important cause of the rise of Fascism in Italy for which the British, the French, and the Americans bear a part of the responsibility.

Orlando said as much when he predicted a disaster of world proportions in Paris—a warning that the Allies ignored.

After all, the Paris Peace Conference is generally considered to bear an important part of the responsibility for the rise of Nazism in Germany and of Fascist-like regimes in Europe—in all areas, that is, except, strangely, Italy.

It is time that historians alter this attitude.]]]

6a Parte: Il vecchio Orlando (slides 25 and 26)

Orlando lived until age 92. This period of his life is generally ignored, but I think that it should not be ignored.

He opposed Mussolini after a “sbandamento” that ended with the Matteotti affair:

He favored the return of parliamentary government (after Ethiopia);

He threw his prestige in opposing Mussolini in Sicily;

He advised the King and favored the return of parliamentary government after WWII;

He continued his juridical studies;

He anticipated, understood, and favored the state’s new role as the guarantor of social justice;

He came close to being named Premier twice, and favored the left (he refused to become Premier unless he had the support of the leftist parties);

He probably would have become Italy’s first regularly elected president had he not alienated the Christian Democrats (who initially supported him) by criticizing their negotiation of the treaty ending WWII

We have to consider if, by the end of WWI, Orlando incarnated the Liberal State, and discuss whether both were done in by Allies at the Paris Peace Conference.

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