

Futurism and the Birth of Fascism

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This study analyses selected aspects of the Italian Futurist movement's political agenda, its involvement in interventionist campaigns for Italy to join the First World War, and its subsequent role in the forming of the Fascist movement. The *Intervento*, the nine-month period when the nation was deciding whether to join the war, became an important milestone in Italian history, bringing together diverse political forces in Italy previously hostile to each other, shaping the traits which would determine its future. The turbulent days of the *Intervento* also marked the beginning of co-operation between the founder of Futurism, F. T. Marinetti, and Benito Mussolini, which culminated in the founding of the Fasci di Combattimento.

[Futurism; Fascism; Marinetti; Mussolini; Intervento]

Introduction

The proclamation in the Founding Manifesto of Futurism: *"We will glorify war – the world's only hygiene – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for a woman"*¹ remains today probably the most cited idea in regard to Futurism. For the leader of the Futurist movement, F. T. Marinetti, war was the cure to all of Italy's maladies, would force Italy to look to the future rather than its illustrious history, and would lift up Marinetti's homeland and secure it a great future in which Italians would once again be a proud and respected nation and cultural elite. Lifting up the Italian nation and fulfilling the legacy of its ancient history was also the objective of Mussolini's Fascist movement, to which Marinetti turned his hopes and dreams in his country, with Futurism as the official national art and Futurists as its cultural elite.

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¹ Fondazione manifesto del Futurismo, 1909, Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto (hereinafter MART), Archivio del '900, Fondo Gino Severini, SEV. VII., Sev. VII. 1.

From 1910 at the latest, Marinetti took on an aggressively nationalistic attitude. He was also convinced that artists, as the cultural elite, must get involved in politics in the interest of the future of his country, Futurists in particular, whom he declared to be “*anarchists operating in the field of art*”.² As the irredentist anti-Austrian unrest generated by Futurist evenings demonstrated, however, art wasn’t the only field in which they operated. Many of them aimed to “capture” Italian passatist towns and were motivated by the need to modernize society. Marinetti believed that the fate of his nation depended on Futurist propaganda and the inevitability of war, which if Rome, Venice and other cities were to continue to live from Classical Tradition and Florence was to continue to be no more than a picture gallery, would lead to disaster.³ His desire to modernize Italian cities was not based merely on blind acceptance of modern things alone. Marinetti, despite the Triple Alliance, believed that war with Austria-Hungary was drawing near and that his country must get ready for it. Following the Futurist evening in Milan’s Teatro Lirico in February 1910, Marinetti continued to spread the ideas of Futurism across Europe, while at the same time promoting his strident anti-Austrianism. Still, in February, he visited Paris where he glorified the new Futurist Italy and presented his desire to evoke an intellectual *riavvicinamento* between the two countries, i.e. a cultural rapprochement between Italy and France, in order to prepare for a possible conflict with the Central Powers.⁴ In the same year, he called for the same rapprochement in London, claiming that a war against Austria-Hungary, and with it the treaty-bound Germany, would finally eliminate Pan-Germanism.⁵ His anti-Austrian demonstrations led to a number of heated moments for Italian diplomacy in Britain, which were refuted by stating they stood on good moral principles, although according to diplomats Marinetti was just one of many irredentists who did not have a decisive influence on political events.⁶ Nevertheless, Marinetti did come to see his expectations come to fruition on 28 July 1914, one month after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. By 4 August, alliance obligations plunged all the European powers into conflict and the continent

² E. IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti: The Artist and His Politics*, New Jersey 2015, p. 43.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁴ E. IALONGO, Futurism from Foundation to World War: the Art and Politics of an Avant-garde Movement, in: *Journal of Italian Modern Studies*, 21, 2, 2016, p. 314.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 46.

found itself at war. Only Italy declared neutrality, doing so on 31 July. Advocates of war on the side of the Triple Alliance were in a minority, and most Italians did not want to get involved in a war against Great Britain. Also playing a part in the decision was the fact that during the July crisis, Vienna had not consulted its approach with Italy, and furthermore the Italian government had previously signed an agreement with France that in the event of a conflict in which Germany was the aggressor, it would not support Germany and was not bound to join the war alongside its Triple Alliance partners. Furthermore, Italy was not ready militarily for a conflict of such a size, with many of its forces still dislocated in Libya and the country also weakened due to June's massive Red Week workers' protests and the cataclysmic July death of Chief of Staff, Alberto Pollio. His successor was General Luigi Cadorna, whom Giolitti said he would not choose simply for the reason of knowing him. Fearful of an attack by Austria, Cadorna proposed immediate mobilization. San Giuliano and Salandra feared, however, that this would provoke the very reaction which Cadorna feared, and so the Italian army was not mobilized.⁷

There was an interesting phenomenon prevalent within Italian society, however, which was a legacy of the nationalization of the military in the 19th century. The co-existence of two military cultures during the Risorgimento period had left an ambivalent image of the heroic warrior fighting for his homeland, often referred to in nationalistic rhetoric. Garibaldi and his volunteers had left a legacy that Italians found difficult to reconcile with a legitimate army secured by the state.⁸ Before Italy joined the First World War and subsequent to it, many voluntary regiments were set up in addition to the regular army. The most important point, however, was that the Nationalists now again awakened Garibaldi's legacy: "*the attractive image of young heroes, the myth of a courageous minority focused on the national revolution against the old and perverse ruling class, the high moral value of the prescribed weapons test: these elements were part of the ideology of intervention,*"⁹ which invigorated the turbulent days of the pre-war months. During the autumn of 1914, Garibaldi's grandson Peppino set up the Garibaldi Legion of volunteers, which he commanded, and which 4,000 volunteers joined, including his four brothers. In December, the Garibaldi Legion

⁷ Ch. SETON-WATSON, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism 1870–1925*, London 1967, p. 418.

⁸ C. PAPA, *L'Italia giovane. Dall'Unità al fascismo*, Roma 2013, pp. 131–132.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

was deployed with the French Foreign Legion in Argonne.¹⁰ Their heroism was celebrated through nationalist interventionist agitation and by the whole of Italian society. Marinetti wanted in as early as August to create a legion of volunteers who would fight for France while Italy remained neutral,¹¹ which was directed by Foreign Minister San Giuliano during the summer months. In October, Italy received more tragic news, this time San Giuliano's death. Salandra took over his agenda for a short period until he put his friend Sidney Sonnino in the position of Foreign Minister in November. The ten-month period of neutrality, termed the *Intervento* by Italian historians, is one of the pivotal moments in Italian history. The turbulent atmosphere over the issue of intervention plunged Italy to the verge of civil war, while also determining its future, not just in the repercussions of joining the conflict, but also in shaping the characters which were to govern Italy's fate.

As soon as the war broke out and Italy's neutrality was declared, a wave of strikes began in Italy, either for or against intervention. The socialists threatened revolution were the government to join the conflict, and Catholics were also opposed to Italian involvement. Nationalists were clear in wanting war on one side or the other, and not for ideals or sentiment, but rather for the size of the country. They later placed their support on the side of the Allied powers, and Corradini declared that Italy must fight the Allies' war, but to fight it for itself: *"This war must not be the last Italian war for unification, but the first war of Italy as a great power."*¹² Futurists threatened revolution if Italy did not join the war against the Central Powers on France's side. They wanted to lead the fight not just with weapons, but also as a clash of cultures and civilizations:¹³ *"We are grateful to the French Revolution for our first patriotic and military awakening, our current civil and intellectual freedom. We owe the French army for the unification of our country. We are grateful to France for our culture and our art of the last two centuries. This sympathy is even firmer in these days,"*¹⁴ wrote Papini in *Lacerba*, a journal which gradually transformed itself over 1914 from a cultural newspaper into a political weekly, becoming a tool of Futurist propaganda, with of Milan's Futurists only Marinetti continuing to write articles for it.

¹⁰ SETON-WATSON, p. 421.

¹¹ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 52.

¹² SETON-WATSON, p. 421.

¹³ C. TISDALL – A. BOZZOLLA, *Futurism*, London 1977, p. 174.

¹⁴ G. PAPINI, *Il dovere dell'Italia*, in: *Lacerba*, II/16, August 15, 1914, p. 243.

During this period, Milan was brimming with interventionist activity, with violent clashes between pro-war and anti-war members of the public whipped up by the socialists breaking out on 1 August. Marinetti co-operated with the pro-French demonstrations led by the republicans and pro-war socialists. In the event of intervention in the war on the side of the Central Powers, he threatened the government with revolution, and that it would be he who would start it in Milan, his people now clearly demonstrating their readiness for conflict with Austria-Hungary.¹⁵ During September, the French halted the German advance at the Marne, igniting further Futurist demonstrations in Milan putting pressure on Italy to join the war. To this end, the Futurists created the tactic of “political action in theatres”. On 15 September 1914, Puccini’s *La Fanciulla del West* opera had its premiere at Teatro del Verne. According to the records of the Milan prefecture, after the first act Marinetti, Boccioni, and Carrà rose from the audience, Marinetti unfurled an Italian flag from the upper gallery with the inscription: “*Long Live Italy and France*”, while Carrà at the same time illustratively destroyed a piece of cloth in the Austrian colours bearing the message “*Down with Austria*” from the opposite gallery.¹⁶ They were subsequently removed from the theatre, only for them to symbolically burn the Austrian flag at the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele the next day during another demonstration of interventionist unrest. Marinetti was arrested with several other Futurists, and they spent a number of days in prison.¹⁷

After his release, Marinetti continued in his interventionist activities, publishing the manifesto *In this Futurist Year*, which was aimed at students and introduced the ideas and activities of the movement, explaining why it supported intervention and glorified war and encouraged students to take on these core Futurist ideas for themselves. He reminded them that in the period of *Intervento*, the Futurist battle wasn’t just political manifestations, but this Futurist year was also the pinnacle of their cultural struggle: “*War discredits all its enemies: diplomats, professors, philosophers, archaeologists, critics, cultural obsession, Greek, Latin, history, senility, museums, libraries, foreign industry. War will develop gymnastics, sport, farming schools, trade and industrial practice. War will rejuvenate Italy, enrich it with men of action, force it no longer to live from the past, from its ruins and nonviolent climate, but rather from its own*

¹⁵ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 52.

¹⁶ R. HUMPHREYS, *Futurism*, London 1999, pp. 64–65.

¹⁷ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 52.

*nationalist forces.*¹⁸ He also drew attention to art, which was also meant to conform to the interests of the homeland and war, and urged Futurist artists to promote this in their work. He hoped that such art would bring new pliant war dynamic and artistic originality. He also sent letters to Severini, who was still residing in Paris, urging him to accept the new Futurist aesthetic doctrine: *“This war in a way encircles the entire world. It will remain at war, [...] meaning in an aggressive, dynamic, futurist state for at least 10 years. It is therefore essential that Futurism does not take part in the wonder of this fire just directly, [...] but that it also becomes the plastic expression of this Futurist hour. I am speaking about a wider expression which is not limited to the narrow circle of experts; about expression so strong and synthetic which would impact the imagination and sight of all or almost all intelligent readers. I do not see this as the prostitution of the plastic dynamic, but I believe that this greatest war, intensively experienced by Futurist painters, may arouse real trembling in their sensibility. [...] You will likely have fewer abstract paintings and drawings, a little more realistic and in some regards they may be post-Impressionist Avant-Garde. Perhaps, and I hope this should be so, this will give birth to a new military plastic dynamic. Boccioni and Carrà are with me in my opinion and they believe in the greatest possible artistic innovation which can be achieved. As such, I ask you to focus on war and its reverberations in Paris in your paintings, endeavour to live a painter’s war, study it in all its wonderful mechanical forms (military trains, fortifications, injuries, emergency surgery, hospitals, parades, etc.)”*¹⁹ Thus Marinetti, if not for the last time in his life, declared military Futurism.

In subsequent months, Severini endeavoured to bring his work as near as he could to what Marinetti had proposed. During 1915, he painted pictures with a military theme which were fundamentally more realistic than the interventionist works of his Italian friends. These include the pictures *War*, *Armoured Train*, and *Red Cross Train*. In contrast, Carrà began to distance himself from Marinetti’s ideas. Nevertheless, his *Interventionist Demonstration of August 1914* is often described as the most Futurist work ever. It is a collage which approximates Cubist practice. Nevertheless, it brings together the typical Futurist aesthetics of the pre-war years with an approach characteristic for Futurism of the era, i.e. a *“fragmentation of the traditional perceptual space, inserting snippets*

¹⁸ F. T. MARINETTI, *In quest’anno futurista*, 1915, in: *La guerra, sola igiene del mondo*, Milano 1915, p. 149.

¹⁹ Marinetti’s Letter to Severini, November 20, 1914, MART, Archivio del ’900, Fondo Gino Severini, SEV. I. 3., SEV. I. 3.4.13.

from newspapers and discovered advertising materials, inducing an impression of kinesthesia through visual dynamics created by the collage construction as a vortex and also a pattern of intersecting fields laid out in mutually unsettling diagonals, and finally also confronted with the different sound level of the language with its graphical symbols,"²⁰ all as a model disseminated as cultural propaganda. In *Demonstration*, Carrà brought together the need for freedom and spontaneous expression with his innate desire for order. This was what Marinetti was trying to square in his politics; to unleash the revolutionary energy of the individual and focus it on collective nationalistic purposes.²¹ A month later, Carrà created his *Futurist Synthesis of War* manifesto, which was a patriotic metaphor glorifying eight poets, nations fighting on the frontiers of war and Italy, and their positive characteristics as against Austria-Hungary's and Germany's pedantry and passatism. In it, Carrà highlights, for example, the practical spirit, sense of duty, honour, and respect as characteristics typical for the British and the Italian genius, as against the bigotry, passatism, and penchant for spying amongst the German nations.²² A year later, the similar manifesto, *Synthesis of World War* was produced, which copied the structure of the previous manifesto, with Carrà's graphical compositions also used, accompanied by Marinetti's texts. The Futurists also attempted to propose a new national flag in which red, the colour of spilt blood, would dominate over the green and white. They even declared the watermelon the national fruit, as in its ripe state red predominates over the green and white edges.²³

Probably the most original Futurist interventionist contribution was Balla's experiments in fashion. Besides his abstract paintings in the national colours he produced during this period, Balla also created his own style of dress and taking the idea that one should look the way one thinks reflecting the opinions one holds he designed interventionist clothing. He described his principles in the manifesto *Anti-neutral Dress*, accompanied by clothing designs for individual Futurists. They were all to be in Italian colours. Marinetti's art management met with reluctance not just from Carrà, with the Florence group beginning to turn away from the Milan group, and Lacerba ended co-operation with Marinetti's group. Papini and Soffici also criticized his cumbersome management and blinkered

²⁰ H. FOSTER – R. KRAUSOVÁ – Y.-A. BOIS et al., *Umění po roce 1900*, Praha 2013, p. 95.

²¹ IALONGO, *Futurism from Foundation*, p. 318.

²² TISDALL – BOZZOLLA, pp. 187–188.

²³ G. LISTA, *Futurism*, Michigan 2001, p. 101.

nationalist policies,²⁴ and criticized the Milan Futurists' laxity: "Since the start of the war, when we transformed *Lacerba* into a political propaganda weekly in sharp Futurist intent, meaning irredentist and pro-war, to our surprise we no longer find out [Milanese] friends at our side. The Futurist demonstrations in support of intervention which we called for and expected to be numerous and impulsive, were modest and unimportant, culminating in just a small Milan demonstration, and in Balla's inappropriate and empty manifesto of anti-neutral clothing."²⁵ In early 1915, Papini himself took over *Lacerba*'s management, and *marinettism* continued to find itself the target of criticism in the journal. In February 1915, Papini, Soffici and Palazzeschi broke away from Marinetti's Futurism and left the movement. Marinetti wrote to Severini that *Lacerba* had become totally passatist, and "Papini, Soffici, and Palazzeschi [...] have betrayed us."²⁶ *Lacerba* continued to agitate for intervention until May, when it closed down, with its tone becoming ever more aggressive. Its final issue openly called for the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic. "War with Germany or civil war. War with Germany or revolution. War with Germany or a Republic," and criticized the King's silence.²⁷ With the Florence artists' departure, the Futurist movement, which prior to the war had always acted as an organized group, began to fall apart.

Over the course of winter, it began to become clear that the war would not be over by Christmas, as many European statesmen had predicted. To move the conflict into a new phase and open new fronts, greater pressure was placed on the Italian government by the Great Powers, as well as by its own population. Also, at Christmas, the news came to Italy that brothers Bruno and Costante Garibaldi had fallen in battle. Their bodies were brought home, and an alleged 300,000 people attended their funeral in Rome.²⁸ According to some contemporaries, this represented the largest ever public gathering in Italian streets.

Marinetti continued to rouse the population to demonstrate for Italy to join the war, now also doing so outside Milan. He set out on a propaganda tour with the Nationalist Corradini in December. He toured Italian universities, where he proved a hit amongst students, mainly due

²⁴ IALONGO, *Futurism from Foundation*, p. 319.

²⁵ G. PAPINI – A. SOFFICI, "Lacerba" Il Futurismo e Lacerba, in: *Lacerba*, II/24, December 1, 1914, p. 325.

²⁶ Marinetti's Letter to Severini, March 26, 1915, MART, Archivio del '900, Fondo Gino Severini, SEV. I. 3., SEV.I.3.4.15.

²⁷ TISDALL – BOZZOLLA, p. 175.

²⁸ J. RIDLEY, *Mussolini*, Praha 2002, p. 75.

to the interruption of the lectures of pro-German lecturers, and they were recruited for nationalist objectives. He was also well-received by the politicized working class when he demonstrated support for pro-French intervention alongside the syndicalists and pro-war socialists.²⁹ Futurists also focused their attention on Rome, and they were arrested here during a demonstration in front of the parliament building on 19 February 1915.³⁰ Two months later, Marinetti was again arrested in Rome, this time on 12 April alongside Balla, Settimelli, and a number of other Futurists, and with Mussolini during an interventionist demonstration at Piazza di Trevi. This was the first large activity that Mussolini took part in. Later, Marinetti would describe this event as crucial for his future political direction.³¹ On 26 April, the Italian government signed the Treaty of London, which bound Italy to join the war on the side of the Allies, for which it would receive *terre irredente*, Istria, and other areas of the Dalmatian coast and a number of overseas possessions. Salandra then endeavoured to raise the influence of the interventionist groups, supporting some in secret, such as D'Annunzio, whom he informed of the wording of the treaty in order to demonstrate that all public opinion was for the war and the government thus felt under its pressure.³² Subsequently, on 4 May, Italy left the Triple Alliance agreement.³³

In spring, the interventionist campaign generally became broader. In 1919, Marinetti recalled that during this period, one could behold, “*on the tumultuous squares of Milan and Rome, an odd couple out together again, the destructive actions of liberals and patriotism, with their new faces: Mussolini, Corridoni, Corradini, Garibaldi and Marinetti, all allied in the demand for ‘War or Revolution’*”.³⁴ However, following his April arrest and stay in prison where, unlike Mussolini, he spent a number of days, Marinetti withdrew from his political engagement for a while and was not particularly involved in the events of “radiant” May. The largest pro-war demonstration was held on 5 May on the unveiling of the monument to Garibaldi’s Expedition of the Thousand in Quarto, near Genoa for the 55th anniversary of the expedition setting sail. Taking part in the event were veterans of the

²⁹ HUMPHREYS, p. 65.

³⁰ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 54.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

³² P. MILZA, *Mussolini*, Praha 2013, p. 194.

³³ SETON-WATSON, pp. 431–432.

³⁴ F. T. MARINETTI, *Old Ideas That Go Hand in Glove but Need to Be Separated*, 1919, in: F. T. MARINETTI, – G. BERGHAUS, *Critical Writings*, New York 2006, p. 332.

Thousand, Garibaldi's son Ricciotti and Peppino's grandson, who had returned from the French front.³⁵ D'Annunzio made a speech calling for war. Once Salandra was made familiar with its content, he publicly distanced himself from the ceremony and recommended the King do the same. D'Annunzio's calls for restoring Italy's greatness were well-received by the crowd of 20,000, and the original memorial event subsequently grew into turbulent unrest.³⁶

Tensions within society and in the parliament built up, with clashes between pacifists and interventionists continuing to occur in Italian cities, often accompanied by violence and rivers of blood, until on 23 May Foreign Minister Sonnino submitted an ultimatum to the Austro-Hungarian government, and mobilization was declared in Italy. Italy joined the conflict the next day, marked by the jubilant cheering of crowds, although played out in an atmosphere of civil war.³⁷ When Salandra and Sonnino led their country to war, they claimed the war was an opportunity to join history; "*Now or never, Italy must master its past and make Risorgimento real rather than experience permanent rivoluzione mancata.*"³⁸ The social atmosphere invoked by intellectuals during the Intervento period and prior to it had significantly contributed to the lead-up to the war, just as their failure in defiance of Fascism did a generation later.³⁹ The war changed everything, for Europe, for Italy, and for the Futurists. In this "Futurist" hour of joining the battle, Futurism's principal idea became real: war was no longer a projection of the future, and thus the movement partially lost its justification.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, in the end the war transformed Futurism more radically. It also affected Marinetti himself, showing him that Italians could be recruited as a patriotic unit of revolutionary individuals, and at its end strengthened his desire to create the Futurist Political Party.

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The First World War represented a new brutalization of public life, in which violence became routine, and the nationalist ambitions without

³⁵ RIDLEY, pp. 76–77.

³⁶ SETON-WATSON, p. 442.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 449.

³⁸ R. J. B. BOSWORTH, *Italy and the Wider World 1860–1960*, New York 1996, p. 29.

³⁹ TISDALL – BOZZOLLA, p. 177.

⁴⁰ W. L. ADAMSON, How Avant-Gardes End—and Begin: Italian Futurism in Historical Perspective, in: *New Literary History*, 41, 4, 2010, p. 861.

which Fascism could not triumph intensified. The war itself was nevertheless not the cause of the rise of Fascism; Fascism was more the result of the post-war politics, and most of the concepts which Fascism gave birth to had existed before 1914.⁴¹ These included faith in a new revolutionary culture led by the elite to replace the old elites of liberalism and conservatism or the left-wing, shared by Nationalists, Futurists and some syndicalists, and a common theoretical background to these currents. Much of what became Fascism after 1919 can be found in the Founding Manifesto of Futurism ten years earlier.⁴² The Futurist tactic of “conquering” passatist cities, accompanied by frequently violent clashes can also be seen as a precedent for the future Fascist conquering of socialist centers. Also important in the genesis of Fascism was the influence of syndicalist Sorelianism and its faith in the principle of the regenerative impact of violence. In any case, Mussolini’s view of Sorel’s teachings was not permanent, and he was only partially influenced by them. Nevertheless, Sorelianism placed down roots in several political and intellectual factions in Italy, meaning that directly and indirectly it was involved in the rise of Fascism.⁴³

Socialist Mussolini was not an orthodox Marxist, being highly influenced by Sorel’s theoretical criticism of revolutionary syndicalists and Pareto’s theory of elite. He spoke of himself as an “*authoritarian and aristocratic socialist*”,⁴⁴ and like Marinetti held an elitist, anti-parliamentary and initially also anti-Church position, believed in cleansing through violence and like syndicalists believed that only a special revolutionary vanguard could shape a new revolutionary society. Mussolini’s ideas were both cause and consequence of the form of Italian Fascist history, whose ideology was as a result not firm and intransigent, and over the whole of the Fascist epoch it was entirely dependent on Mussolini’s will and ideological inclinations.⁴⁵ The foundations were laid during the Inter-vento period, the events of which were crucial for Mussolini’s intellectual rebirth, for the shaping and nascence of Fascism.

Following the outbreak of the First World War and the declaration of Italian neutrality, Mussolini, as the editor-in-chief of *Avanti!*, continued

⁴¹ S. PAYNE, *A History of Fascism*, New York 1995, p. 79.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁴³ J. J. ROTH, The Roots of Italian Fascism: Sorel and Sorelismo, in: *The Journal of Modern History*, 39, 1, 1967, p. 30.

⁴⁴ PAYNE, p. 83.

⁴⁵ E. NOLTE, *Fašismus ve své epoše*, Praha 1998, p. 330.

to defend the official party line, threatening revolution to the government in the pages of his paper in the event of intervention, with *Avanti!* hosting headlines over the whole of August such as “*Down with War!*” and “*Our Neutrality shall be Absolute!*”, and appeals such as “*Italian proletariat: do not be swept up by the calamity of war!*”⁴⁶ Mussolini criticized advocates of intervention, warmongers and in particular opposed Italian involvement on the side of the Central Powers. From the July crisis, he advocated an anti-Austrian and anti-German position due to their ultimatum to Serbia and Belgium.⁴⁷ At that time, however, he doubted whether the official line of the Italian socialist party was right, and the following weeks for him were a period of internal struggle, further intensified by the fact that the socialists in Germany, Austria-Hungary and France supported the war and urged people to fight for their homeland. Mussolini later confirmed that it was the fact that the German socialists betrayed internationalism that led him to reject international socialism.⁴⁸ While he was struggling with his conscience, the number of his friends who joined the interventionist movement grew.

In October 1914, a number of syndicalist leaders, specifically, for example, Filippo Corridoni, Alceste de Ambris and lawyer Angelo Oliviero Olivetti, alongside other left-wing intellectual groups, founded the *Fascio rivoluzionario d'azione interventzionista*, the Revolutionary Fasci of Interventionist Action, in Milan.⁴⁹ Their manifesto, written by Olivetti and published on 5 October 1914 was addressed to the workers of Italy, “*at this tragic hour which has elapsed, while the great war in Europe celebrates its bloody splendour, while the very foundations of civilization seem to be swept away by a rediscovered barbarism,*” and it stated that, “*we, combatants from various party factions, feel the obligation to state frankly and clearly that, [...] we [left-wing] revolutionaries, the working class of many countries, avant-garde elements, basically all those who have an aversion to war and the battle against*

⁴⁶ *Avanti!*, XVIII/211, August 2, 1914, p. 2; *ibid.*, p. 5; XVIII/215, August 6, 1914, p. 3.

⁴⁷ NOLTE, p. 234.

⁴⁸ RIDLEY, p. 68.

⁴⁹ It was standard practice for various radical groups in Italy to form Fasci from the 1870s. These were organized trade unions, middle-class radicals and pro-reform farmworkers. The most well-known were the Fasci Siciliani, associations of farmworkers who in 1895–1896 brought most of Sicily to revolt against contemporary political and economic structures. Thus, the establishment of Revolutionary associations was not a new practice within the Italian left. PAYNE, p. 82.

*militarism in their programme, bear much responsibility for it*⁵⁰ and it ascribed guilt to those groups, the German and Austro-Hungarian working class and domestic socialists, for not standing up to resist, “*the ultimatum of the Austrian government to the small Serbian nation,*” that there was no “*movement to the anxious shout of doom of Luxembourg and Belgium dishonoured in their sacred right to freedom and independence,*”⁵¹ and that the proletariat there did not protest against their governments in support of their comrades in the countries attacked. Olivetti further called upon Italian workers to stand alongside the great powers fighting for the freedom and independence of nations: “*War is today a tragic reality which we cannot be indifferent to as spectators without denying our principles,*” and to join the conflict on the side of the Allies against the “*barbarity, authoritarianism, militarism, German feudalism, and Austrian villainy. We must put an end to the humiliation, from now on we must accept responsibility and prepare for action!*”⁵²

Mussolini’s intellectual rapprochement with syndicalism is evidenced in his previous articles in *Utopia* magazine, which he founded in November 1913, on whose pages he did not have to hold to the Socialist Party’s official line. Here, he submitted Marxist ideology to criticism, opposing its materialist-scientific interpretation and rejecting the idea of the decline of capitalism as not corresponding to historical reality. He expressed here his sympathy to anarcho-syndicalist thought on the relationship to violence and the need for a revolutionary elite able to control the masses.⁵³ During the first two months of the *Intervento*, however, he became convinced that the socialists were unable to form such an elite. Gradually, his opinions moved ever closer to the syndicalist camp, against whom the Party journals still profited themselves against, and expressed opinions which he no longer agreed with. His friends and readers of *Utopia* could see how he was ever more inclined towards interventionism. Corridoni aptly described his situation, when he bragged to his brother: “*My ideas are shared by the most intelligent of European socialists and the resistance. Mussolini himself, head of Avanti!, is of like mind but he does not dare to express it publicly out of fear that his Comrades would expel him.*”⁵⁴

Mussolini’s friend, advocate of intervention and editor-in-chief of the paper *Il resto del Carlino*, Massimo Rocca, decided in October to hasten

⁵⁰ A. del NOCE, *Il pensiero politico di Angelo Oliviero Olivetti*, Milano 1976, pp. 58–59.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.

⁵³ MILZA, pp. 173–174.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

Mussolini's decision to move to the interventionist camp, addressing an open letter to him on 7 October, in an article entitled "The editor of *Avanti!* is a man of straw", in which he said that Mussolini was not writing what he really thought and lacked the courage to express himself. The following day, Mussolini responded in *Avanti!*, calling Rocca a straw man, representing his last expression in support of international socialism.⁵⁵ A few days later, he published an article in *Avanti!*, From Absolute Neutrality to Active and Divided Neutrality, in which he attempted to clarify and defend his true position. He considered absolute neutrality to support the Triple Alliance partners of Germany and Austria-Hungary and noted that the socialists in France and Great Britain supported the war. He continued to perceive interventionism as socialist intervention to the benefit of the attacked nation, like the syndicalists. He further presented his opinion here that socialists should not always oppose war, as were their revolution to win, they would have to lead the battle against foreign governments to defend it: "And who can assure you that the government arising from revolution might not find their congratulatory baptism in war? And if (hypothetically) the Central Powers with their returned 'ancient' regimes triumph, will you continue to be absolute neutralists who remain against the war which might protect 'your', our revolution? [...] We have the unique privilege of living in the most tragic hour in the history of the world. Do we want to be – as people and as socialists – impassive observers of this grand drama? Or do we want to be – in a certain sense – its protagonists? Socialists of Italy, remember: sometimes it happens that the 'letter' kills the 'spirit'. Let us not try to protect the 'letter' of the Party if it means killing the 'spirit' of Socialism."⁵⁶ The following day, at a congress of the Italian Socialist Party in Bologna, he gave up the position of *Avanti!* editor-in-chief.

The following month, on 15 November, Mussolini published the first issue of *Il Popolo d'Italia*. He declared it supportive of left-wing interventionism and joining the war on the side of the Allied Powers. The Socialist Party declared him a traitor and criticized his selling out to "French gold", although in this respect they were clearly wrong. Initially, the paper *Il Popolo d'Italia* was funded by donations from industrialists, including the founder of Fiat, Agnelli, and support from French socialists and later the French government, which saw in Mussolini an influential figure serving their interests, did not come until spring 1915. The criticism that

⁵⁵ RIDLEY, p. 70.

⁵⁶ B. MUSSOLINI, Dalla neutralità assoluta alla neutralità attiva ed operante, in: *Avanti!*, XVIII/288, October 18, 1914, p. 3.

he had “defected” for money, which the socialists accused him of, was not true. Nevertheless, he felt alone in the Party in his opinions and on 24 November he was expelled from it.

In December, Mussolini joined the Fascio rivoluzionario, shortly thereafter taking control and becoming its most important speaker. His subsequent speeches showed an influence of the revolutionary and nationalist syndicalists, stressing mobilization of the masses, for the first time within a national initiative which would subsequently become a national revolution. On 6 November in *Il Popolo d’Italia*, he announced the movement’s reorganization as the Fasci d’azione rivoluzionaria, or the Fasci of Revolutionary Action, which he described as Fascist.⁵⁷ By the end of January, it had over 9,000 members.⁵⁸ At the same time, Marinetti and his Futurists, who had kept up their radical and violent pro-war doctrine, organized their own Fasci politici futuristi,⁵⁹ or Futurist Political Fasci, later joining Mussolini’s Fasci.⁶⁰ In an interview published on 23 February 1915, Marinetti expressed his admiration for Mussolini’s transition to interventionism and his subsequent departure from the Socialist Party, claiming that “his recent acts, positions, and rebellions are clear demonstrations of Futurist awareness”.⁶¹ The next day, Mussolini returned the sympathy. He continued to perceive his position as a revision of socialism, which now stood behind national goals. For him, the transition to interventionism meant co-operation with nationalism, which he had always opposed. In the article published on 10 April, “Fascists of Italy: tomorrow occupy the Squares at any cost”, he called for demonstrations the following day while also denying his affiliation to nationalism, although he had the same objectives.⁶² Two days later, he was arrested in Rome during a pro-war demonstration alongside Nationalists and Futurists. In contrast to the others, he was released the same evening. During the spring months, when the interventionist campaign was reaching its climax, their objectives markedly coincided, and the ideology of the extreme right began to penetrate Mussolini’s socialism and syndicalism. This coalescence only cemented war, and later prepared the path to Fascist ideology.⁶³

⁵⁷ PAYNE, p. 85.

⁵⁸ MILZA, p. 190.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ TISDALL – BOZZOLLA, p. 203.

⁶¹ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 55.

⁶² RIDLEY, p. 76.

⁶³ MILZA, p. 195.

Mussolini was involved in the front line of the events of “radiant” May. The radical atmosphere of the *Intervento* hit him, and on 11 May he declared from the window of the *Il Popolo d’Italia* editorial board, that, “if Italy does not declare war on its borders, then there shall be a civil war within the country, and this will mean revolution”.⁶⁴ It was exactly ten months since he had threatened exactly the opposite in the pages of *Avanti!* The violent demonstrations and bloody clashes of those May days were in fact essentially unnecessary, as the Italian government had signed a pledge to join the war within a month on 25 April, and so on 23 May Mussolini was able to announce in *Il Popolo d’Italia* that: “From today, we are all only Italians. All Italians are united as a block of steel. General Cadorna has drawn his sword and will advance upon Vienna. Long live Italy!”⁶⁵

From the very first days of the war, many of the interventionist groups volunteered for the war. In contrast to Marinetti’s Futurists, fifty-four-year-old D’Annunzio, and syndicalists de Ambris and Corridoni, who fell early, Mussolini did not immediately go to the front, although he did try to do so to silence critics but came up against the military administration rules and was forced to wait until his year group was called up. This happened at the end of the summer. On 31 August, Mussolini was called to arms, and after a fortnight’s training was assigned to the 11th Bersaglieri Regiment and sent to fight at Monte Nero.⁶⁶ Mussolini served for seventeen months in the army, during which time he achieved the rank of corporal and spent roughly eight months in active battle at the front. In February 1917, he was wounded during artillery practice, spending the subsequent weeks in military hospitals and then returning to Milan. This marked the end of his military service. During that time, his reputation meant he was not permitted to take officer exams, and nor could he take part in the “heroic events” which would have earned him awards. Nevertheless, after his return from the front he could be spotted in the streets of Milan with crutches due to his serious wounds and this partially silenced critics and partially added to his reputation.

Experience of war caused some interventionists and patriots to shift further to the right. Nationalists formed other movements to keep Italy at war and increase military morale and courage despite the increasing suffering of war. This trend, however, eliminated left-wing interventionist

⁶⁴ RIDLEY, p. 77.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁶⁶ MILZA, pp. 196–197.

groups.⁶⁷ Some of their members gave way under the trauma of war, while others tended towards right-wing nationalism. *Fasci d'azione rivoluzionaria*, in which Mussolini was criticized for being over-authoritarian, was eventually dissolved at the end of 1916. One can detect a shift to the right in Mussolini during the war too, his “*commitment to nationalism became complete and extreme and his goal was to bring together nationalism and some forms of socialism which would deal with all classes*”.⁶⁸ The war years, however, represented a unique non-political era in his life. After his injuries, he returned to the editorial board of *Il Popolo d'Italia* in autumn 1917 and continued to focus on journalism. In contrast to Marinetti's fiery statements glorifying war as a beautiful bloody cleansing, Mussolini never celebrated war with such soaring rhetoric. In his paper, he commemorated the heroism of Italians at the front, who were “*disciplined, brave, of good will*,”⁶⁹ and sometimes also gave a report on his own state of mind: “*Today, my heart is drained. [...] Modern civilization has 'turned us into machines'. War has led us to the unbearableness of this process of mechanizing European society.*”⁷⁰ Mostly, however, his articles fought against desertion in the Italian army and defeatism in society. This was a battle that was needed more in 1917 than at any time before.

In June 1917, Cadorna launched an offensive known as the Tenth Battle of the Isonzo in order to occupy Trieste, in which Marinetti was also involved. The Italians did not advance far, occupying just one village, and the operation soon turned against them. Marinetti was injured and subsequently hospitalized.⁷¹ In total, the Italians lost 160,000 men. But it was not to be the last of Cadorna's debacles, with the course of battles in summer demonstrating the Italian command's failure. Cadorna, however, blamed the continuing failures on the incompetency and defeatism of his own men, leading to an uptick in mutinies and desertions in the army. Autumn, however, saw a more grievous blow. On 24 October 1917, the Austrian army reinforced by German units penetrated a fifty-kilometer wide section of the front at Caporetto. Following three days of failed attempts at halting the offensive, Cadorna was forced to issue an order for a general retreat, although at the time the Italian army was already in significant disarray. In the end, with the help of British and French

⁶⁷ PAYNE, p. 86.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁶⁹ MILZA, p. 199.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 60.

troops, the Italian army succeeded in halting the Austrian advance on 9 November, although the Central Powers divisions had already advanced to within around forty kilometres of Venice.⁷² After the Battle of Caporetto, the Italians had lost almost half their army, with statistics stating 40,000 dead and injured, 280,000 men captured, and 350,000 Italians deserted. The Austrians also captured a lot of military equipment. The Italian government was forced to resign, with Vittorio Emmanuele Orlando becoming the new Prime Minister. Cadorna was also dismissed, and General Armando Diaz became the new Chief of Staff of the Italian armed forces.⁷³ Mussolini now felt the necessity to encourage Italian faith in resistance more than ever before.

The defeat at Caporetto represented an important milestone in the ideological development of the future dictator, who still considered himself a “reformed” socialist, even though he had broken away from his party and Marxist teachings and become attached to nationalism. As it was for most of the interventionists at the time, Caporetto was a shock and a sobering-up for him. Mussolini now perceived the inability of the Socialist Party to avert the defeat or use it to secure revolution. At the start of the following year, he decided to get rid of the “Socialist Daily” subheading from *Il Popolo d’Italia*, replacing it with the subheading “Daily of Warriors and Working People”. In August of that year, under its new masthead, its readers were able to read: “*You cannot be forever a socialist, forever a republican, forever an anarchist, forever a conservative. The spirit is change above all. Rigidity is for the dead.*”⁷⁴ From early 1918, his articles demanded a dictator along the line of the ancient Romans for a period of battles.⁷⁵ His thinking was ready for change and until the end of the war he used his paper to bring together readers and advocates for his future political performance.

During the war, Marinetti was also focused on journalism, founding the new magazine, *L’Italia Futurista*, in 1916. In contrast to Mussolini, however, he attempted to enter politics during the war. War radically transformed Futurism, with the Milan group of the pre-war years long gone by 1917. Marinetti was the only one who held onto the movement’s doctrine in his thinking during the war and after it. He was also the only

⁷² MILZA, p. 205.

⁷³ RIDLEY, p. 88.

⁷⁴ MILZA, p. 209.

⁷⁵ RIDLEY, p. 91.

Futurist artist for whom the reality of war had never swayed his conviction of its glory. He continued to glorify it in his works, but no longer as a vision and future need, although he did emphasize the ongoing conflict, the heroism of the men, and subsequently the veterans. In particular, he blindly celebrated and supported General Cadorna, even after the disastrous outcome of the Battle of Caporetto, when he continued to endeavour to defend him.⁷⁶ After his recovery and return to civilian life, Marinetti began the process of reshaping Futurism into a formal political movement. After Caporetto, the actions of the pro-war groups increased in total, managing to slowly raise Italians' military morale, and for Marinetti the United States of America joining the conflict in April portended the end of the war, after which he decided he would become a key player in Italian politics. As such, he founded the Futurist Political Party in 1918, publishing the Manifesto of the Futurist Political Party on 11 February in *L'Italia Futurista*. Its programme was founded on the 1913 political manifesto.⁷⁷ It was extremely nationalistic and was still based on pre-war radical Futurist positions and the idea that war would unite Italy more than any kind of political movement could.

The Futurist Political Party was meant to be separate from the Futurist art movement so that anyone could join it, including those with different cultural opinions or artistic tastes. The manifesto proclaimed a strong and free Italy which, *"is no longer a slave to its past, foreigners who are overly loved, and priests who are overly-tolerated. [...] A sovereign, united, and indivisible Italy. Revolutionary nationalism for freedom, health, physical and intellectual development, strength, progress, the magnitude and pride of the Italian people"*.⁷⁸ Marinetti continued to fight for the development of industry, infrastructure, the modernization of Italian cities, and against tourism. In his manifesto, he repeated his previous calls for the patriotic education of the proletariat and declared that if the working class stand the nation in front of a class struggle, then the Futurist Political Party would fight for its freedom. The manifesto also referred to the necessity of eliminating the political police and ending the practice of deploying the army to deal with domestic unrest. It promised social security to workers in the form of an eight-hour working day, parity of wages for men and women, pension

⁷⁶ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 59.

⁷⁷ TISDALL – BOZZOLLA, p. 203.

⁷⁸ Manifesto of the Futurist Political Party, February 11, 1918, in: MARINETTI – BERGHAUS, p. 305.

and insurance, encroaching upon the Socialist Party's agenda. There was a deep economic crisis throughout Italy in 1917, with the rural situation particularly dire. Following Caporetto, the number of rural recruits reached sixty percent. In order to deal with the problem of veterans from amongst farm workers, Marinetti introduced a project of nationalizing the land of local authorities and church organizations, cultivating more infertile land and redistributing land to veterans at fair prices. He promised veterans who were returning to the labour market within the public sector that their war service would count towards their pensions.⁷⁹

The war transformed the view of the status of women in the way Marinetti had hoped. Futurism's political programme, as it had done before the war, stood against marriage, aiming to make divorce easier and "free" women from the chains of marriage and motherhood. Marinetti proposed setting up a state institution for unwanted children, which would educate them to become model citizens, instead of being left to parents who do not bother looking after them.⁸⁰

Somewhat surprisingly, the Manifesto of the Futurist Political Party called on a smaller army and navy once Austria-Hungary was defeated, on condition of the provision of military and sports education at schools, and the proper training of a larger officer cadre. Marinetti believed that war had militarised the Italian nation to such an extent that it could be transformed into an army if needed. As such, he saw no reason in maintaining a larger professional army as this would remove the workforce from fields and factories.⁸¹

Marinetti, who had always endeavoured to define himself against parliamentarianism, for the first time went beyond mere criticism in the Futurist Party programme and offered an alternative to parliamentary democracy. He wanted to abolish the senate and replace it with a chamber comprising the public, young people under thirty years of age elected on the basis of universal suffrage which would bring new initiative, while the chamber of deputies was to comprise representatives of industry, agriculture, business, and engineers. The age limit was to be reduced to twenty-two years, with restrictions in the number of professors, "*who are always opportunists*" and lawyers, "*who are always ultra-conservatives*".⁸² The

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 305–307.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 306.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., p. 305.

manifesto balanced somewhere between radicalism and nationalism and was an attempt at bringing together individual and collective needs.⁸³ These principles became the foundation for Futurist democracy, a concept Marinetti developed fully over the subsequent year. In ideas, he was closer to the revolutionary left-wing than the uncompromising right-wing.⁸⁴ Futurists, according to Marinetti's words, did not contemplate democracy at a general level such as the applied socio-political system but rather spoke of an Italian democracy which would grow for the particularities of the nation: "*Our pride, like Italians, is based on our superiority due to our enormous number of talented individuals. We thus want to create a true, aware, and brave democracy which be an honest acknowledgement and celebration of 'number', as it will include the largest number of individual geniuses. In this world, Italy represents a kind of exceptionally talented minority comprised of individuals who are superior to average humans due to their creative, innovative, and inventive strength.*"⁸⁵ Thus, Italian democracy was to be based on the "*masses of talented individuals,*" who knew their rights and, "*naturally played their role in shaping the transformations of their own state*".⁸⁶

One of the foundations of the Futurist political programme remained Marinetti's uncompromising anti-clericalism, as for him the Church was in every regard a passatist institution. He would accept no less than the expulsion of the papacy and the entire Church hierarchy from Italy: "*Our anti-clericalism longs to rid Italy of its churches, priests, pastors, nuns, madonnas, candles and bells. [...] The only possible faith is in tomorrow's Italy.*"⁸⁷ In this, Fascism presented itself as a secular faith, in which Mussolini's politics would be "secularised" and the myth of *Il Duce* in contrast almost "deified", something Marinetti would contribute towards.

The Futurist Political Party was formally established in November 1918, although prior to this on 20 April Marinetti alongside Futurist poet Mario Carli and writer Emilio Settimelli founded the *Roma Futurista* daily in Rome as its official paper. Also, during the summer of 1918, Marinetti collected political allies with whom he could go into electoral battle

⁸³ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 65.

⁸⁴ MARINETTI – BERGHAUS, p. 304.

⁸⁵ F. T. MARINETTI, *Democrazia futurista*, 1919, in: F. T. MARINETTI, *Democrazia futurista: dinamismo politico*, Milano 1919, p. 85.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁸⁷ Manifesto of the Futurist Political Party, February 11, 1918, in: MARINETTI – BERGHAUS, p. 305. The text was censored after the manifesto was published in *L'Italia Futurista* and in *Roma Futurista*, and in later reprints this passage was omitted.

after the war. Through Carli, he began co-operating with the Arditi, a militant group of the “daring ones” comprising war veterans who had problems reintegrating into society and who were against the socialists and the working class. Carli believed that the Arditi and Futurists shared the same objectives and that both groups had much in common. Some Futurists voluntarily volunteered for Arditi regiments, and Marinetti was a regular guest at their barracks, where he spread his propaganda and recruited new members to his movement. The Arditi, who helped set up the Futurist Political Party and its local organizations in Italian cities, also accepted the Futurists’ help in forming their own association on 1 January 1919. With the assistance of young captain of the Arditi assault platoons, Ferruccio Vecchi, Marinetti set up the movement’s first unit in his own apartment in Milan.⁸⁸ By the end of the month, divisions from various Italian cities came together under the Arditi national association based in Milan, and they later published their own magazine, *L’Ardito*, run by Vecchi and Futurist Carli,⁸⁹ who played a significant role in shaping the Arditi association’s political programme, which was very similar to the ideas in the Futurist Party’s programme. Carli was also the author of the Manifesto of the Futurist Ardito, which represented its “*most complete, most radical and most Futurist*” political proclamation.⁹⁰ Some historians speak of Ardito-Futurism as a new ideological phenomenon after 1918.

Marinetti also attempted to establish contact with left-wing interventionists and he managed to recruit several syndicalists into his organization.⁹¹ Alongside co-operation with the Arditi, this led to a closer political rapprochement with Mussolini, whom he met in Genoa in June 1918 in order to discuss the path ahead after the end of the global war.⁹² Marinetti’s private diary gives the impression that it was Mussolini who first made contact with him in order to set up a collaboration with the Arditi and Futurists.⁹³ Mussolini, who was also looking to reorganize Italian politics, was impressed by the Manifesto of the Futurist Political Party, especially in its efforts to address the issue of military retirees. Mussolini and Marinetti shared many ideas. They agreed that Italy needed a firmer hand in managing the war, and that government weakness just

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

⁸⁹ MILZA, p. 233.

⁹⁰ MARINETTI – BERGHAUS, p. 303.

⁹¹ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 77.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁹³ MARINETTI – BERGHAUS, p. 303.

emboldened the Socialist Party, whom they both opposed. Both men denounced intellectuals and artists who did not support the war, or who held defeatist positions. They also found agreement regarding the Arditi whom they both believed should be promoted and rewarded for their bravery in battle. These common interests were founded on their shared nationalism, although from the beginning of their co-operation, Marinetti doubted Mussolini's revolutionary potential and his support for certain elements of Futurist policy, in particular the Futurists' radical anti-clericalism, with Mussolini usually responding with silence to Marinetti's anti-Church speeches. Marinetti also faulted him for an overly lax and conservative approach to the working class.⁹⁴ Following a December meeting of both men, Marinetti wrote in his diary of the impression that Mussolini gave him: *"He says: 'The republic is a sort of crowning ideal we all dream about. But I could well go beyond the republic to arrive at a monarchy.' I sense the reactionary in the making in this violent, agitated temperament, so full of Napoleonic authoritarianism and a nascent, aristocratic scorn for the masses. He comes from the people but no longer cares about them. He tends toward aristocratic thought and notions of the heroic will. He's certainly no great intellect. He didn't see the need for war. He was originally an antimilitaristic demagogue without a country. [...] He doesn't see things clearly. He is propelled by his predisposition toward heroic struggle and his Napoleonic ideal. He also aspires, I think, to riches. He can't take his big eyes off my expensive raincoat."*⁹⁵ Marinetti nevertheless saw the influence he had and decided to co-operate with him, and later to follow him.

While Marinetti was gathering support and expanding the ranks of his political party, the war was coming to an end. In summer 1918, the Austrians attempted their final offensive, which collapsed and was followed by an Italian counterattack. On 24 October, General Diaz executed an attack on the Piave River, five days later Italy had conquered Vittorio Veneto and over the subsequent week they conquered Trento and Trieste. Austria retreated and on 3 November requested a ceasefire, which was affirmed the following day.⁹⁶ At eleven o'clock in the morning on 11 November 1918, quite reigned on all fronts and the Great War was at an end. The subsequent peace conference in Paris, however, brought more

⁹⁴ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, pp. 78–79.

⁹⁵ Marinetti's Diary, December 4, 1918. F. T. MARINETTI, A Meeting with the Duce, in: MARINETTI – BERGHAUS, p. 319.

⁹⁶ RIDLEY, p. 93.

disappointment for Italy. Despite the promises of the Treaty of London, Italy acquired only the province of Trentino, South Tyrol, and Istria, with the territory of Dalmatia coming under the newly established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and, Slovenes.

During November and December, Marinetti and Mussolini jointly spoke at several victory ceremonies.⁹⁷ From December, Marinetti organized nationalist demonstrations demanding acquisition of the Dalmatian coast. On 11 January 1919, such a demonstration grew into unrest in Milan's La Scala, using the same Futurist "theatre tactics" from the *Intervento* period, and led by Marinetti, several Arditi and Mussolini.⁹⁸ A clear signal was sent that evening that Italy's nationalists would not be disregarded.

On 23 March 1919, the Fasci Italiani di Combattimento, or the Italian Fasci of Combat, was established at Circolo industriale e commerciale in Milan's Piazza San Sepolcro. This represented the birth of Fascism, which desired to be perceived as national socialism.⁹⁹ It brought together Mussolini's supporters, the Arditi, Futurists, several former republicans, socialists, anarchists, and syndicalists. Nevertheless, Mussolini later confirmed that one could not talk of anything like "Fascist syndicalism", not even an embryonic form.¹⁰⁰ In its electoral programme, however, it declared that any Fascist voters would be voting for national syndicalism. It also proclaimed it would transform the parliamentary system, create economic councils regulating the national economy, and spread and promote Italy in the world.¹⁰¹ The reason that Mussolini wanted to unite in this way a number of different political factions under the Fascist flag, and the reason that Marinetti accepted this formal alliance, was for the social and political development of the "Two Red Years" of post-war Italy,¹⁰² which required more than just spontaneous demonstrations and violent acts: *"I felt that it was not only the anti-socialist battle we had to fight. [...] There was a lot more to do. All the conceptions of the so-called historical parties seemed to be dressed out of measure, shape, style, usefulness. They had grown tawdry*

⁹⁷ MARINETTI – BERGHAUS, p. 304.

⁹⁸ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 80.

⁹⁹ NOLTE, p. 253.

¹⁰⁰ NOCE, p. 19.

¹⁰¹ RIDLEY, p. 98.

¹⁰² Italy's "Two Red Years" of 1919–1920, or the Biennio rosso, was a period of social conflict as a result of the economic crisis following the Great War, during which time the radical left grew in power, followed by a violent reaction from the fascists. It only came to a definitive end in the March on Rome two years' later.

*and insufficient – unable to keep pace with the rising tide of unexpected political exigencies, unable to adjust to the formation of new history and new conditions of modern life.*¹⁰³

In some of its characteristics, Fascism was influenced by Marinetti's Futurism, including the fact that over its whole era, Fascism endeavoured to build up a military nation and engender a more military perspective on the world in Italians.¹⁰⁴ In July, Mussolini wrote in *Il Popolo d'Italia* that, "Fascism is an unprecedented movement. It does not despise contact with groups which have been ignored or denounced... Average people always preferred not to take Futurism seriously and now, despite those people, Marinetti as the leader of Futurism is a member of the Fasci di Combattimento central committee".¹⁰⁵ The Fasci di Combattimento's took on a number of points in the Futurist electoral programme, and Marinetti and syndicalist De Ambris were authors of its political manifesto, published in *Il Popolo d'Italia* on 6 June 1919, The Manifesto of Fasci Italiani di Combattimento proclaimed universal suffrage with the passive age limit reduced to twenty-five years, and the active limit to eighteen years, including for women, proportional representation on a regional basis, the abolition of the senate and the creation of economic councils including representatives of the workers. For the first three years of the reform period, a National Assembly was to be called, which would create a new constitution. The planned social measures included introducing an eight-hour workday, setting a minimum wage, reducing the retirement age and a reorganization of insurance. The manifesto also promised a peace-promoting and competitive foreign policy, the nationalization of the arms industry and the creation of national militia to defend the state. In the financial sector, in 1919 the Fascists planned to impose a windfall tax on "capital of a progressive nature" in the form of the partial expropriation of all wealth, the confiscation of the assets of Church institutions, and the abolition of "all bishoprics", which had too many privileges and were a burden for the nation.¹⁰⁶

During April, the Futurists were involved in street battles between Fascists and socialists, and it was they who, along with the Arditi, set fire to the Milan editorial board of *Avanti!*. Marinetti later highly exaggerated

¹⁰³ B. MUSSOLINI, *My Autobiography*, New York 2017, p. 75.

¹⁰⁴ BOSWORTH, p. 68.

¹⁰⁵ TISDALL – BOZZOLLA, p. 204.

¹⁰⁶ *Manifesto dei Fasci italiani di combattimento*, June 6, 1919, https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Manifesto_dei_Fasci_italiani_di_combattimento,_pubblicato_su_%22Il_Popolo_d%27Italia%22_del_6_giugno_1919 [2019-04-11].

his involvement in these events, boasting that, “*From that day on, Milan was transformed entirely. Although Bolshevik arrogance was not dead, it was mortally wounded.*”¹⁰⁷ Marinetti continued to promote Fascist movement propaganda, as he had initially for the Futurists. His Roma Futurista also served Mussolini in leading his electoral campaign. Mussolini generally endeavoured to support prominent cultural representatives such as Marinetti and D’Annunzio, who influenced society’s mindset and could thus serve Fascist propaganda.

Since his youth, Gabriele D’Annunzio had wanted to become a famous poet and conquering hero. He had undoubtedly fulfilled the first of these dreams as a leading Italian literary figure of the Belle Epoque. On 12 September 1919 he occupied Rijeka alongside two-thousand soldiers, mainly comprising Arditi. They later ruled it as a separate city-state for a period of fifteen months, which in Italian historiography has been described using the term *fiumanesimo*.¹⁰⁸ Corradini and Mussolini publicly expressed their support for D’Annunzio’s act, and Marinetti went to Rijeka to support his fellow poet-at-arms. D’Annunzio welcomed this support for his act, but he was disappointed by the position of other Fascists who did not join them, and he warmly welcomed Marinetti. Marinetti attempted to convince D’Annunzio of the necessity of expanding his adventure, which he saw as having the potential for giving rise to revolution, which he wanted to spread to Italy. D’Annunzio rejected such a vision. Marinetti and Vecchi managed to convince his commander, but the mission to occupy Trieste turned into a fiasco, and Marinetti gradually lost his support. In the end, Marinetti came to the conclusion that D’Annunzio, who with his act had attempted to force the government to act and hoped for Italian military support, was just a “*maniac of beautiful gestures, imprisoned in wonderful phrases and an average guy,*” who did not see the revolutionary nature of his act and “*declared that he did nothing political*”.¹⁰⁹ Marinetti then left Rijeka. *Fiumanesimo* had two important consequences. First, it demonstrated the Italian government’s weakness and the explosive power of nationalism, but it also created something which later became the “Fascist style”. D’Annunzio here managed to create a new type of political liturgy incorporating elaborate uniforms, special ceremonies accompanied by

¹⁰⁷ TISDALL – BOZZOLLA, p. 204.

¹⁰⁸ At the Peace Conference in Paris, instead of getting Rijeka, or Fiume in Italian, and other parts of the Dalmatian coast, Italy received the Brenner Pass.

¹⁰⁹ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 63.

song and speeches from the balcony of the city hall in Rijeka to a mass audience in the form of a dialogue with the leader. D'Annunzio's successors adopted the black shirt of the Arditi as their uniform, implemented the Roman greeting of raising the right arm, delighted in mass gatherings, introduced the anthem *La Giovanezza* and created several special chants and symbols.¹¹⁰

Upon his return from Rijeka, Marinetti affirmed his political alliance with Mussolini and plunged himself back into the electoral campaign. For this purpose, he produced the brochure, *Futurist Democracy: a political dynamic which brought together previous Futurist political manifestos and essays*. He continued to take part in verbal and physical assaults on the socialists, continued to glorify war, accused the government of not being able to achieve Italian territorial objectives, and continued to hold a vision of intellectuals and artists being involved in the future management of the state, and anti-clericalism. He attempted to extend his influence within the *Fasci di Combattimento* and implement Futurist democracy principles within its electoral programme. During a Fascist campaign in Milan, during a speech in Piazza Belgioso, he emphasized the transformatory effect of the war, which had forever liberated Italy of its inherited enemy and allowed it to achieve a new national awareness. Two days later, he spoke right after Mussolini, who had not spoken out against the Church in his speech, while Marinetti attacked the Church and declared the necessity of expelling the papacy from Italy, and that, "*the Fascist impassioned anti-clericalism, like many of our other revolutionary desires, is neither utopian nor a false hope*".¹¹¹ Mussolini did not share his strong anti-Church position, having become a more careful pragmatist than Marinetti, in comparison to his revolutionary youth. He did not refute the speech, however, rather remaining silent. Mussolini was a stronger political figure than Marinetti, and in the long-term he alone would determine Fascism's political future. Marinetti, whose political programme was based more on left-wing notions than Fascism, resented Mussolini's "transition to reaction", which gradually led to most left-wing *Fasci* members either leaving or being expelled.¹¹²

The most significant outcome of the First World War was that it definitively united Italy. Now more Italians felt a sense of national belonging

¹¹⁰ PAYNE, p. 92.

¹¹¹ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 95.

¹¹² MARINETTI – BERGHAUS, *Critical Writings*, p. 304.

and found a new national identity.¹¹³ Besides another irredentist disappointment, the war brought about a poor economic situation. Thus, the Socialists won the 16 November 1919 elections. They proved a fiasco for the Fascists, who received just 4,657 votes out of 270,000 in Milan, a full half of which went to the Socialists.¹¹⁴ On 18 November, Mussolini, Marinetti, Vecchi and several Arditi were arrested. Over the twenty-one days which Marinetti spent in San Vittore Prison,¹¹⁵ he decided to leave Fasci di Combattimento. He did so formally, alongside several other Futurists, on 29 May 1920. The reason for this decision was that they had been unable to force antimonarchism and anti-clericalism on the Fascists. The Futurist Political Party offered a radical and nationalistic political vision which promised to defend Italy's territorial interests, resist socialism, and respond to the economic and political demands of war veterans, workers, women, and farmworkers. Its reforms would lead to an expansion of personal and political freedoms. The political reality, however, proved unfavourable to them, with the socialists and working-class taking up a position on the extreme end of the political spectrum, with little faith in nationalists (which Futurists were) who promoted a radical agency which would affect their own. In contrast, Fascists were unwilling to tolerate anything which overlapped with socialism. Although they adopted some parts of the Futurist programme, for the most radical of them Marinetti's alliance with the Fascists was doomed to failure from the beginning.¹¹⁶ Thus in 1920 the Futurist Political Party collapsed. Some of its supporters remained in the Fascist camp, while others joined the Socialists. Marinetti withdrew from political life completely for two years.

Marinetti remained more enduring in his support for D'Annunzio's initiative in Rijeka than Mussolini, still nurturing a hope that this nationalist campaign would become the embryo for Futurist revolution in Italy. This somewhat misplaced hope was extinguished in November 1920 when Giolitti, who had become Prime Minister for the last time in his life in June of that year in order to "save" Italy, signed an agreement with the government of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in Rapallo, in which Italy affirmed its possession of Trieste, Istria, and a number of smaller islands at the Dalmatian coast, but surrendered Rijeka. Thus,

¹¹³ BOSWORTH, p. 67.

¹¹⁴ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 96.

¹¹⁵ TISDALL – BOZZOLLA, p. 204.

¹¹⁶ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 106.

D'Annunzio's dream ended, and he departed Rijeka with his troops on Christmas Eve 1920.

Mussolini continued in his fight. At the end of 1920, *Fasci di Combattimento* had 88 local organizations and 20,615 members.¹¹⁷ Over the subsequent two years, they attacked the Socialists in power and almost plunged Italy into civil war. From autumn 1920, Fascism became a highly visible phenomenon, even though the word had been used within Italy since 1915. Now, it was generally associated with the ever-more violent movement, whose members were called Fascists in courts.¹¹⁸ The use of organized political violence, in a much more organized and aggressive manner than the resistance of Italy's left-wing, became an integral part of the rise of Fascism.

Once Giolitti decided to ask the King in April 1921 to dissolve parliament and call a new general election, outbreaks of violence increased markedly in Italy. Over the course of the six-week electoral campaign, Mussolini travelled across northern cities and towns, making speeches every day. In the end, the election brought triumph and 38 seats in parliament.¹¹⁹ In July, Giolitti resigned, and new Prime Minister, socialist Ivanoe Bonomi attempted to pacify the situation in the country. As such, Mussolini came to an agreement with the Socialists, and not the Communists,¹²⁰ to end the fighting, although he was unable to control his *squadristi* units. In Ravenna, Bologna, and Ferrara, where the Socialists had the greatest number of representatives and where young Italo Balbo had joined the local *Fasci* organization, the bloody battles continued. On 7 November, a nationwide congress was held at which Mussolini announced the transformation of the movement into the *Partito Nazionale Fascista*, or the National Fascist Party. A week later, they withdrew from the peace pact with the Socialists. By the final day of 1921, the National Fascist Party had 840 local organisations and 249,036 members.¹²¹ At this time, Fascism was still closely tied to the *Il Popolo d'Italia* daily, whose editor-in-chief held a dominant position.¹²² After the establishment of the Fascist Party, he became generally known as *Il Duce*, although again this term of address can also be traced back to 1915 when Mussolini addressed

¹¹⁷ RIDLEY, p. 122.

¹¹⁸ PAYNE, p. 96.

¹¹⁹ RIDLEY, pp. 111–112.

¹²⁰ The Communist Party was founded in Italy on 21 January 1921.

¹²¹ RIDLEY, p. 123.

¹²² NOLTE, p. 333.

his supporters in Fasci d'azione as Fascists, and the most militant of them addressed him as *Duce*, or Leader.

In early 1922, Italo Balbo began the transformation of his squadristi into Blackshirts on Mussolini's orders. They adopted the uniform and rules established by D'Annunzio during *fiumanesimo*, and a hierarchy along the lines of the Roman legions, with *Il Duce* at the head. Their violence increased to a peak in summer; the total number of victims of the political violence of 1919 to 1922 is estimated at almost 2,000 people.¹²³ By the end of August, the Fascists had occupied Ferrara, Bologna, Ravenna, and Milan. Demands for a march on Rome began to appear amongst their ranks. While Mussolini was meeting with the government behind the scenes, the Blackshirts were getting ready to march, announcing on 24 October: "*Either they give us the government, or we shall grab power by marching on Rome.*"¹²⁴ Four days later, they got their wish when the Prime Minister resigned. Victor Emmanuel III gave in to Mussolini, appointing him to form a government on 30 October out of fear of civil war and probably a little personal sympathy. Mussolini became Italy's Minister of the Interior, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister at the same time: "*I was the leader of the revolution and chief of the government at thirty-nine. Not only have I not finished my job, but I often feel that I have not even begun it. [...] My objective is simple: I want to make Italy great, respected, and feared; I want to render my nation worthy of her noble and ancient traditions. I want to accelerate her evolution toward the highest forms of national co-operation; I want to make greater prosperity forever possible for whole people. I want to create a political organization to express, to guarantee, and to safeguard our development. [...] I desire our nation to conquer again, with Fascist vigor, some decades or perhaps a century its lost history,*" wrote Mussolini in his autobiography a few years later.¹²⁵

Once Mussolini had taken office, Marinetti returned to the Fascists, remaining there this time until his death. The question remains as to what extent the powerlessness of the previous two years of political isolation and his fears for the future of the Italian nation,¹²⁶ linked to faith in his leader, were behind this step, or whether in contrast, it represented a purely pragmatic, or opportunistic decision. His 1918 sober assessment of Mussolini had gradually turned into a blind admiration for the Italian

¹²³ PAYNE, p. 106.

¹²⁴ RIDLEY, p.134.

¹²⁵ MUSSOLINI, pp. 298–299.

¹²⁶ IALONGO, *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti*, p. 106.

dictator. From the end of 1922, Marinetti attempted to be accepted as a suitable partner for building up Fascist Italy and strived to ensure this partnership would give Futurism the acknowledgement of the official state art of the Fascist regime. This was his primary objective until the end of his life. His path there led him to change several key positions of Futurist doctrine, and it was certainly also one of the reasons for his blind following and defence of each of Mussolini's political steps and errors. Like General Cadorna during the First World War, Marinetti admired Il Duce over the next twenty years, accompanying him right up to his tragic end.

