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Interventionism (Italy)

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Italy entered the First World War in May 1915, roughly ten months after it began. During those ten months, the battle of opinions for and against intervention raged on. Public meetings, demonstrations, and street clashes that occasionally left partisans of neutrality (socialists, Catholics and liberals close to Giovanni Giolitti) wounded put the debate in the public eye.

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1. The Various Interventionist Currents

The complex constellation in favor of intervention linked radical cultural currents with a range of political movements. Its [nationalist](#) element connected the idea of Italian expansionism into the Balkans and the Adriatic Sea with opposition to representative democracy and socialism. But there was also a significant democratic/revolutionary interventionist configuration on the left. Republicans, revolutionary trade-unionists, and anarcho-syndicalists saw war as a means to an end, a way to fight the Central European empires, free the oppressed, radically transform [Italian society](#), and end the monarchy. Some also wanted power to pass into the hands of the working class.

2. Benito Mussolini and “Revolutionary” Interventionism

Alongside the founder of futurism, [Filippo Tommaso Marinetti \(1876-1944\)](#), and the poet [Gabriele](#)

D'Annunzio (1863-1938), both key purveyors of nationalist myths, it was [Benito Mussolini \(1883-1945\)](#) – expelled from the Italian Socialist Party in October 1914 over his pro-war positions – who became the most important spokesman for the forces that coalesced in November 1914 under the name *Fasci di azione rivoluzionaria*, with confused slogans that both opposed and championed [revolution](#).

3. Interventionism and Anti-fascism

Often approached by historians through the prism of its later development in [fascism](#), early 20th century Italian interventionism, particularly its democratic/revolutionary component, continues to complicate the period's analysis, because many of its members would become militant anti-fascists after the war – [Gaetano Salvemini \(1873-1957\)](#), [Emilio Lussu \(1890-1975\)](#), [Piero Calamandrei \(1889-1956\)](#), [Fernando Schiavetti \(1892-1970\)](#), [Carlo Rosselli \(1899-1937\)](#), [Adolfo Omodeo \(1889-1946\)](#), and [Pietro Nenni \(1891-1980\)](#). *L'Unità*, the political and cultural journal founded in 1911 by the southern medievalist Gaetano Salvemini, became the rallying point for this particular kind of interventionism. The configuration of democratic and/or revolutionary interventionism thus represents a quandary for the historian. The question raised by these left radicals' personal engagement and support for Italy's participation in the war cannot be abstractly reduced to the interventionist filiations of “totalitarian” fascism or to the fascist content of interventionism.

4. Conclusion

After war broke out, there was an intense debate about whether Italy should intervene, which continued until Italy entered the war in May 1915. The complex constellation in favor of intervention linked radical cultural currents with a range of political movements. Although small, the interventionist movement was successful in affecting the public sphere.

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