The History of the Twentieth Century
Episode 197
"1919 – Italy I"
Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Otto von Bismarck had once described Italy as a nation with a large appetite and rotten teeth, that is, it was a nation with grand ambitions that its military might was insufficient to pursue.

This quote was much repeated among the other delegations at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. The Italians had huge demands. And if they didn't get what they wanted, they were prepared to walk out of the conference.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century.*

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 197. 1919 – Italy, part one.

This is the 22nd episode of our 1919 World Tour, if anyone's still counting. (I did say it would be thirty-something episodes.) Today we begin considering the post-war situation in Italy.

How would you assess Italy's role in the Great War? In 1919, that was a complicated question.

In some respects, Italy had performed remarkably well. In 1915, when Italy entered the conflict, there must have been many observers who believed that the country was too politically and economically fragile to hold its own over years of debilitating conflict with nations larger and richer than it was.

You could say the Italian people and the Italian state had risen to the challenge. Italian entry into the war had opened a third front against Austria, and the Italians had fought continuously, bleeding the Austrians even after Russia had bowed out. Italy had suffered half a million soldiers killed and nearly a million more wounded, but had fought on, until its final offensive forced Austria to ask for an armistice, which in turn made it impossible for Germany to continue the war alone.

The Italian car maker, *Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Torino*, better known by its acronym FIAT, had become Europe's largest producer of trucks, or lorries if you like. It produced 25,000 of them in the year 1918 alone. Italy began the war with virtually no domestic aircraft industry, yet by the end of the war was producing 500 airplanes every month. In 1915, the Italian Army fielded exactly 613 machine guns. By the end of the war, that number was up to 20,000.

The Italian government's performance in managing the wartime economy had been exemplary. Government ministries had ensured war-critical factories could get enough employees. Exemptions from military service were granted as needed, and large numbers of women workers were recruited to help keep those factories humming.

Some Italians benefited greatly from the wartime economic expansion. Even to the point where it became unseemly. Soldiers living in Alpine trenches in fear of landslides resented those who were working at the FIAT plant in Turin. Rich Italian industrialists got richer, and spent some of their riches keeping up the drumbeat of wartime propaganda, since war was so good for business.

All this was repugnant to the rural Italian peasants of the south, who always seemed to come up short compared to their northern cousins, and to the Italian socialists, who had opposed the war on the grounds that it was just a scheme to make more money for capitalists at the cost of the workers' blood. Everything that had happened in three-and-a-half years of fighting only confirmed all they ever read in Marx about the evils of capitalism.

But Italy's political and economic elites were proud of what their nation had accomplished. So were the returning veterans. Not only had Italy gone to war shoulder to shoulder with the world's great democracies to crush authoritarianism, it had finished the work of the *Risorgimento.* Surely now the last bits of unredeemed Italy would finally be joined to the fatherland.

So which was it? Was the Great War Italy's finest hour, or a grasping capitalist exercise? This question would roil Italian politics for the next five years, and further divide an already divided nation.

The guy doing most of the roiling was Gabriele D'Annunzio. We met him before in the podcast, back in episode 165. D'Annunzio was born in 1863, the son of a wealthy landowner. He published his first volume of poetry at the age of sixteen. He branched out into novels and plays and by the early twentieth century he was one of Italy's most prominent literary figures. He became interested in politics and served a term in the Italian Chamber of Deputies from 1897-1900. He spent the last years of the Belle Époque in Paris, where he worked on an opera, rode in an airplane with Wilbur Wright, and collaborated with Claude Debussy on a musical play based on the martyrdom of St. Sebastian, a project that incited the Catholic Church to place all of D'Annunzio's works on the Index of Forbidden Books.

D'Annunzio became an increasingly strident Italian nationalist in his later years. When the Great War began, he returned to Italy and became a leading figure in the campaign for Italy to enter the

conflict against Austria to reclaim the unredeemed Italian lands. After Italy entered the war, D'Annunzio enlisted in the military at the age of 52 and became a fighter pilot, which further boosted his celebrity. He is perhaps best known for the daring air raid he led on Vienna on August 9, 1918. His squadron flew 700-miles round-trip to drop hundreds of thousands of propaganda leaflets imprinted with the Italian flag that declared "we do not make war on children and women," taunted the starving Viennese, and declared "Long live Italy! Long live the Entente!"

I described this mission back in episode 165. It had zero military significance, but it was huge in morale terms, both in Vienna and in Italy, where D'Annunzio became the biggest hero of the Great War.

Just a few days after the Armistice, D'Annunzio published a poem that attracted a great deal of attention among the Italian public. The poem directly challenged the right of Woodrow Wilson and the Paris Peace Conference—which the poem described as a "senile council of trickery"—to take away from Italy what Italian blood had won on the battlefield and warned against a "mutilated victory." The pro-war Italian right proclaimed that Italy had earned the lands promised to it in the 1915 Treaty of London, episode 101. The right also championed one additional claim: the city of Fiume.

Never heard of it? Well, neither had most people living in 1919. But incredibly enough, in a world where Russia was fighting a civil war and Greeks and Turks were battling in Anatolia, one of the biggest international controversies of the era was the future of a sleepy Adriatic seaport with a population of maybe 50,000 souls.

Istria is a peninsula at the head of the Adriatic Sea that juts south like an enormous fang. At the western root of this fang lies the Italian-speaking city of Trieste, which until now has been Austria's largest seaport. In 1919, everyone was in agreement that when the peace treaties were signed, Trieste would go to Italy. Near the southern tip of Istria lies Pula, or Pola, which you'll recall had been the base of the Austrian Navy. The London agreement had promised all of Istria to Italy after the war, although the population of Istria is mixed: Italian, Croatian, and Slovene.

The town of Fiume lay at the eastern root of Istria, just across the peninsula from Trieste. By the terms of the London agreement, it would fall just outside the new Italian border, in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, what will soon be called Yugoslavia.

Fiume, or Rijeka, as it is known in Croatian, lay in Croatia, which meant that within the structures of Austria-Hungary, it had been part of Hungary. It was Hungary's principal port, as Trieste had been Austria's. The reason why Gabriele D'Annunzio and other Italian nationalists took such a passionate interest in the town was that, out of its total population of 50,000, just under half of its citizens were ethnic Italians—46% to be precise—which made them the plurality ethnic group, ahead of Croats, who accounted for 32% of the population. The balance were Slovenes, Magyars, and German speakers.

The Italian-speaking people living in Rijeka, or Fiume, were the teachers, shopkeepers, and professionals. The Hungarian government had encouraged the development of an ethnic Italian middle class in Rijeka as a bulwark against Croat nationalism. But although Italians were the plurality in Fiume, the surrounding countryside was overwhelmingly Croat, much like the situation of Smyrna in Anatolia that we just examined in our episodes on Turkey and Greece. So we see here another example of the devilish details the Peace Conference faced when trying to work out post-war borders based on ethnicity. Townsfolk of one ethnic group surrounded by country folk from a different ethnic group. To split off little Fiume from its surroundings would isolate the town. But if you include the surrounding region, it all adds up to a Croat majority.

Still, the Italians had a point. Or half a point. Or 46% of a point. The question was: how hard was the Italian government going to push to get some 23,000 more Italian speakers inside the borders of Italy? And how stubborn were Italy's alliance partners—France, Britain, and the United States, willing to get in the face of Italian demands?

The short answers are: Very hard, and very stubborn.

The Italian prime minister, Vittorio Orlando, went into the Paris Peace Conference as one of the Big Four. Italy had overcome poverty, internal division, and its late birth as a nation to become a peer of the world's great democracies, and would now take its place as a leader of the new post-war world. It was a great responsibility, but also a great honor.

On the other hand, as Orlando left for Paris, the political situation he left behind in Rome was uneasy. The Italian left had never approved of the war, and now it drew inspiration from the success of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in Russia. The liberal middle confronted the same post-war economic dislocations of unemployment and high food prices that were being felt worldwide, and wondered if the left was right. The political right was convinced Italy had shown its greatness and had earned all its many territorial claims, but worried that weak and cowardly liberals like Orlando might give it all away to the greedy and predatory British.

Orlando needed to prove to the left that the war had been worth the sacrifice and prove to the right that Italy had more to gain from a partnership with the other democracies than from a policy of militarism and confrontation. Much was riding on Orlando's ability to talk the Allies into accepting Italy's claims.

[music: Vivaldi, *Cello Sonata in E minor*]

This uneasy moment in Italian political history, which presented Vittorio Orlando with such grave perils, presented Benito Mussolini with correspondingly exciting opportunities. Mussolini has come up before in the podcast; let me just remind you about his background. He was an ardent socialist who made a name for himself opposing the Italo-Ottoman War in 1911. He did time in prison for it, which only raised his stock among Italian socialists. That and his skillful

journalism got him the post of editor of *Avanti!,* the Italian socialist newspaper based in Milan. Under Mussolini's editorship, the circulation of *Avanti!* went from 20,000 to 100,000.

Then came the Great War in August 1914. By October, while Italy was still neutral, Mussolini had changed his views and become a supporter of Italian entry into the war on the Allied side. Recall that the war had brought German and French socialist parties around to supporting the war for nationalist reasons. The Italian socialist party, by contrast, remained adamantly anti-war. Mussolini decided the French socialists had the right idea and broke with the Italian socialists. He left *Avanti!* and founded a new newspaper, *Il Popolo d'Italia,* in which he made the case for war. This got him expelled from the socialist party.

Ironically, the seed money to get this new socialist-nationalist newspaper up and running came from pro-war Italian capitalists looking to make a few *lire* off the war and the French secret service, looking for a new ally. It may be that Mussolini overplayed his hand here. He may have thought that many of the tens of thousands of new readers he had drawn to *Avanti!* would follow him to his new newspaper. They did not. Mussolini's paper's circulation was only a small fraction of that of the flagship newspaper of Italian socialism. But with the French and the plutocrats on his side, he could afford to be patient.

Mussolini enlisted in the Italian Army during the war. He served honorably for nine months, rose to the rank of corporal, then was discharged after he was wounded. He returned to his new wife and his newspaper, now subsidized—much more lavishly—by the British secret service.

In March 1919, while Prime Minister Orlando was in Paris, Mussolini revived a political organization he had first put together in 1915. He called it *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento.* Now, the Italian word *fascio* literally means "bundle," as in, a bundle of sticks or a sheaf of grain or a bunch of flowers. But it can also mean a group of people. So you could reasonably translate *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* as "Italian Combat Groups." And yes, to answer the question you're probably asking right now, this is the origin of the word "fascist." But we're not there yet. So just hold your horses.

The stated political program of the *fasci* was not extremist. It was by design a sort of centrist compromise, offered as a common-sense middle-of-the-road alternative to the polarized extremes of Italian politics. The *fasci* were not to be aligned with any political party and explicitly rejected "creeds" and "dogmas," describing themselves as the "church of all heresies." They endorsed universal suffrage, land reform, an eight-hour workday, and the abolition of the monarchy, all ideas championed by the socialists, but they were also explicitly nationalist and anti-socialist. They celebrated Italy's role in the Great War and demanded the annexation of the Austro-Hungarian territories claimed by Italy.

The *fasci* were also willing to use violence in support of their political goals, as their name implies. They were "an organization not for propaganda, but for battle," as Mussolini put it. Mussolini himself had a long personal history of willingness to use violence that went back to his

childhood, in which he was reputedly a bully in school. He was also an incorrigible lecher, one who boasted of brawling with the offended husbands and boyfriends of the women he subjected to his amorous advances. This despite his having gotten married back in 1915.

He also had a record of political violence. After his military service, he was organizing veterans to attack anti-war protestors in Milan, and the willingness to use violence as a political tool would be the hallmark of his political career.

So the *fasci* political program said, "Let's combine some socialist ideas with some nationalist ones," while its mode of operation added, "…or else we'll knock a few of your teeth down your throat."

This new organization attracted just the sort of membership you would expect a program like this to attract: nationalists, veterans of the Great War, pro-war socialists who had become disillusioned with the socialist party's stubborn opposition to the war, and thugs looking for an excuse to rough people up. They numbered about two hundred in all.

On April 15, 1919, a group of right-wing extremists in Milan attacked and set fire to the editorial offices of *Avanti!* the socialist newspaper that Benito Mussolini used to run. Four people were killed and the paper shut down for several days. Mussolini and his new *fascio* had nothing to do with the attack, but he was quick to claim credit for it, or "moral responsibility," as he put it. It helped raise his profile, even though, I would like to emphasize again, he had nothing to do with it, other than sharing the political orientation and predilection for violence of the people who actually did. That's politics for you. Mussolini's *fascio* adopted the black shirts and the quasi-military rituals of some of the right-wing veterans groups in Milan, but at this moment in time, he is still only a minor player in the Italian political scene.

And at this same moment, over in Paris, Prime Minister Orlando is having a very bad day.

[music: Vivaldi, *Cello Sonata in E minor*]

Officially, Italy was an equal partner with the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Japan at the Paris Peace Conference. In fact, Orlando and his foreign minister Sidney Sonnino, were feeling the cold shoulder. Wilson, Lloyd George, and Clemenceau liked Orlando personally, Sonnino not so much, but were distinctly hostile to the Italians' territorial claims.

Back in 1915, the Entente were willing to make generous promises of postwar compensation to get Italy into the war, because in 1915, the Entente had reason to believe that Italian entry into the war would doom the Central Powers. The Austrian Army was already stretched thin, between the Serbian front and the Russian front. It was reasonable to hope that opening a third front against Austria might add more pressure than the Austrian military could bear.

So the Entente promised Italy a lot. Why wouldn't they? After all, it wasn't as if they were promising their own territory. They promised the remaining Italian-speaking territories in

Austria, principally the South Tyrol and Trieste, and the German-speaking northern Tyrol, because Italy wanted a secure defensive line. Besides Trieste, the Italians were also promised Istria and islands and ports along the Dalmatian coast on the historical argument that these places had once been Venetian holdings as well as the military argument that Italy needed good port facilities in the Adriatic for her naval defense. The Dalmatian coast of the Adriatic offers excellent port facilities, while the Italian coast opposite is spectacularly lacking in safe harbors. Therefore, Italy needed to control Dalmatia. The Allies also promised the port of Vlore in Albania. Heck, why not an Italian protectorate over Albania? The Entente also promised to affirm Italy's control over the Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean and dangled promises of an Italian role in carving up the Ottoman Empire.

But once Italy actually entered the war, the reality fell far short of Allied hopes. The Italians had a high opinion of their own contribution, but from the British and French perspective, Italian intervention began as a disappointment and remained a disappointment, except for that one moment, Caporetto, when it had become a fiasco.

The Italian Army had had a minimal impact on the war. The vaunted Italian Navy mostly stayed in port. Even so, the Italians demanded much in the way of support from their allies. The British basically financed the Italian war effort, to the tune of some £700 million, which is about £36 billion, or US$50 billion in today's money. The Italian military kept begging the Allies for arms and ammunition, which the Allies provided, even though their own militaries were undersupplied. Once the Italians got these arms, they seemed to do very little with them.

After the disaster of Caporetto, the Italians required even more aid. The new Italian military chief of staff, Armando Diaz, afterward worked on rebuilding his army…and rebuilding…and rebuilding…The Germans advanced toward Petrograd and forced a Russian armistice…and Diaz kept rebuilding. The Germans went on the offensive in France and threatened to push the British off the continent...and Diaz kept rebuilding. Only after it was clear that Germany and Austria were crumbling, did the Italian Army at last begin an offensive, exactly ten days before the Austrian armistice and just in time to grab Trieste and the other Adriatic ports Italy coveted so dearly. In Paris they joked that the surest way to get the Italians to go on the attack was to declare an armistice.

It all seemed grasping and mercenary to the other Allies. And it has to be said that the British, French, and American attitudes reflected no small amount of anti-Italian prejudice. You probably don't even need me to spell out for you the crude stereotype of Italians that was prevalent at the time and survives even in our day. Italians are loud, emotional, demonstrative, and not entirely honest. They are passionate, yet temperamental and undisciplined. They make fine artists or musicians, but are incapable of restraint, of tact, or of cool and logical analysis.

That was the stereotype. So when Orlando came to Paris insisting on all the territories promised in the Treaty of London plus Fiume, it was easy to dismiss this as an overly ambitious opening

bid. Even more so when he started talking about increasing Italy's holdings in Africa, asking his allies to give up French and British Somaliland to Italian control, to agree to an Italian sphere of influence over Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. And when he insisted that if he didn't get what he asked for, his government would fall, he would be assassinated, and there would be revolution in Italy, well, it was easy to dismiss these wild predictions as exaggeration borne of emotion. Typical Latin, really.

The British government took the view that Italy's contribution to the war effort had been a disappointment. The British were willing to honor the terms of the Treaty of London, grudgingly, taking the pragmatic view that nations that do not honor their promises to their allies soon find themselves short of allies. But the British government was not interested in granting the Italians one more shovelful of dirt than had already been promised in the treaty. And that included Fiume.

The French were even more resistant than the British to giving Orlando what he wanted. Understand that when Britain and France agreed to the Treaty of London, they did so under the assumption that Austria-Hungary would survive the war, and thus these territorial grants to Italy were to be made at Austrian expense. As a member of the losing coalition, Austria would deserve to suffer some territorial losses and granting Italy rule over a few South Slav lands was no more unjust than the *status quo ante,* when Germans and Hungarians were ruling over them.

But the collapse of Austria-Hungary and the rise of Yugoslavia as an independent state changed this calculus. Self-determination is now the order of the day, and taking Slav lands away from a Slav kingdom to enlarge an Italian kingdom amounted to robbing one ally to enrich another. It also smacked of the old 19th-century way of doing business that the Paris Peace Conference was supposed to reject.

Also remember that the French government believes a strong Yugoslavia is in its own best interest. The French want to forge a chain of alliances with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia to replace the alliance with Russia. Weakening Yugoslavia does not fit with the program.

We also have to acknowledge that France doesn't entirely trust Italy. French policy is to keep Germany weak so there can never be another Franco-German war, and a too-strong Italy undermines that policy. Don't ever forget that until the Great War began, Italy was officially an ally of Germany. The French certainly hadn't forgotten. Nor had they forgotten that Italy joined an alliance with Germany and Austria while in a snit over French colonial claims in North Africa. If it happened once, it could happen again. Another Italo-German alliance could potentially become a grave threat. If the Italians kept pressing these ideas about the *Risorgimento* and unredeemed Italy, how long before they turned their attention to Savoy and Nice and Corsica, all formerly Italian lands now held by France?

Yet the ally most hostile to the Italian claims was the United States. The US had not been a signatory to the Treaty of London. Those promises to Italy were French and British promises, not American promises, and Woodrow Wilson felt in no way bound to them. Quite the contrary. Wilson deplored secret agreements like the Treaty of London. The first of his Fourteen Points was a rejection of secret agreements and a declaration that diplomacy should always be open and public. This was clearly applicable to the Treaty of London. The ninth point called for an adjustment of Italian frontiers along lines of nationality. That meant the post-war borders of Italy would be drawn on the basis of ethnicity and self-determination, just like the borders of Poland or Romania.

And what's more, every one of the major powers had agreed to the Fourteen Points, including Italy. As far as Wilson was concerned, the Italians themselves had thus already agreed to give up whatever claims they had under the Treaty of London and accepted the principle of borders drawn on ethnic lines. Seriously, why are we even arguing about this?

Wilson had in fact already made one concession that went beyond ethnic borders. That was to grant the Italians the Tyrol all the way up to the water divide, the high point of the Alps, a place called Brenner Pass. This was done for military reasons; it would make it easier for the Italians to defend their Alpine territories if they could have the high ground, but it did mean some 250,000 German-speaking Austrians would now be living in Italy, and for the next two generations, the Italians would force them to use the Italian language and adopt Italian names.

Wilson was uncomfortable making any exceptions to the principle of self-determination based on ethnic lines. He'd made a big one for the Japanese, which we'll get to soon, and a smaller one here, in the Tyrol, and that was as far as he was willing to go.

The ports along the Dalmatian coast had been occupied by the Italians in the final days of the war, and now in 1919, the Allies were jointly occupying them until their futures were determined. Ports like Split, known to the Italians as Spalato, and Šibenik, or Sebenico. Zadar, or Zara. And of course, Rijeka, known to the Italians as Fiume.

The Italians insisted that both history and justice demanded all these ports be given to Italy. They spoke of oppression of Italian speakers by the Slavs, of Italian women harassed in the streets. The Allied soldiers on the scene told their superiors different stories. Stories of Slav newspapers shut down by the Italians, of Slav nationalists forced out of the coastal towns and into the interior of the country. Of Italian soldiers withholding Allied relief aid from those who refused to sign oaths of allegiance to Italy.

Herbert Hoover, the man in charge of distributing Allied food aid recommended to Woodrow Wilson that the US cut off assistance to Italy in retaliation. Wilson agreed, deepening the rift between Italy and the United States. French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau wrote that "I told Orlando that he thought I was the sainted King Stanislas of Poland, who, when he was bitten by a dog, not only pardoned the animal but gave him a chunk of cheese in addition. Well, my

name is Georges, not Stanislas. I am not giving cheese to the boys who scampered away from Caporetto. I shall live up to our treaty pledge, and in addition I shall convey a frank expression of my profound contempt. But I shall give no extras."

The divisions between Italy and the Allies seemed irreparable. The Americans suggested that Italy and Yugoslavia meet bilaterally to negotiate their common border. The Yugoslav government agreed to this proposal; the Italians refused. They also refused to allow Italian territorial claims to be delegated to an expert committee, as was the usual practice at the Paris conference. The other delegations found it hard to understand why the Italians were being so intractable, and above all else, were frankly baffled by the obsession over Fiume. Colonel House wrote in his diary, "Why they have set their hearts on a little town of 50,000 people, with little more than half of them Italians, is a mystery to me."

The dispute between the Italians and the Americans came to a head on April 14, the day before the attack on *Avanti!* in Milan. Wilson met with Orlando and laid out his position. The Fourteen Points were to be the basis for the peace agreement. That's how it was for everyone else, and that's how it was going to be for Italy. Foreign minister Sonnino, who had negotiated the Treaty of London, pointed out that the Austrians had offered Italy some of the Dalmatian islands in exchange for remaining neutral, yet the Allies refused to grant them the same in exchange for fighting and dying in the war. The following Sunday, Easter Sunday as it happened, during another stormy meeting of the Big Four, Orlando broke down and wept over the refusal of the Allies to grant Italy's claims. The French and the British were unmoved, though Woodrow Wilson—Orlando's chief adversary and not a man ordinarily given to displays of emotion—took Orlando's arm and gently consoled him. Or tried to. A few days later, the Italians would walk out of the conference and go home, precipitating the biggest crisis of the peace talks. David Lloyd George summed it up admirably with his remark, "Well, the fat is in the fire at last."

We'll have to stop there for today. Thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Markus, Barry, and Gareth for their donations, and thank you, Jeanne, for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Markus and Barry and Gareth and Jeanne help keep the words flowing and the bits going. If you'd like to help out, please visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com, and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

While you're there, you can leave a comment and let me know what you thought about today's show. I also post playlists of the music used on the podcast, along with composer credits and other information, so if you hear a piece of music you'd like to know more about, that's the place to look. Most of the music I use here is free and downloadable, and you'll find links to sites where you can download it, if you like.

A couple of weeks ago, this podcast reached a major landmark: one million downloads. I can hardly believe my own eyes. I still remember the days when a hundred downloads felt like a lot. Thanks to each and every one of you who downloaded one or more episodes. And I want to

thank those of you who wrote in to say that the podcast is helping you get through the COVID lockdown. In this time of crisis, I'm happy if there's something I can do to help make it pass a little more easily.

Some of you have also written in to say that listening to episodes 171 and 172, on the 1918 influenza pandemic feels eerie now. I feel the same way. I recorded those episodes with the thought in the back of my mind that another global pandemic was just a matter of time, which was all the more reason for us to remember the last one. In truth, we should all feel fortunate the world got a 102-year respite in between. I thought about saying something to that effect in the podcast, but I don't think it made the final cut. Of course, I'm kicking myself now, because if I had put it in, I'd look like a genius in hindsight. Little did I know when I posted those episodes that the next pandemic would emerge in a matter of weeks.

Well, it's not really a predictions podcast, is it? It's a history podcast.

And I hope you'll join me next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century,* as we continue the story of post-war Italy, right up to the advent of this "Prime Minister Benito Mussolini" thing. Italy concluded, next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century.*

Oh, and one more thing. It's important to emphasize that the demands Orlando was making at the peace conference didn't come from him personally. He was merely the messenger bearing Italian public opinion. Whether it was truly national public opinion, or merely that of a vocal right-wing minority is hard to say, since there were no public opinion polls then, but in a sense it hardly matters. The vocal right wing is now very much in the driver's seat of Italian politics.

Woodrow Wilson didn't understand this. He wrote up a statement addressed to the Italian public, laying out his position and making his case for why the Allied offer was fair to Italy and calling on Italians to join in a new post-war world in which the rights of all nations would be equally respected.

Wilson's statement did nothing to quiet the passions building in Italy. Propaganda posters went up across the country, depicting him in an Austrian Army helmet. Wilson had visited the city of Turin last January during his tour of Italy and at that time the city had renamed a street in his honor: Corso Wilson. Now in April, an angry mob went up and down that street, covering the street signs with new ones that read Corso Fiume.

[music: Closing Theme]

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