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**ALLEGIANCE IN EXCHANGE FOR REWARDS: ITALIAN AND ROMANIAN
FIRST WORLD WAR VETERANS' MOVEMENTS IN COMPARISON,
1918-1945**

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A DISSERTATION

In

History

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of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract

In Italy and Romania, between 1918 and 1945, nationalist First World War veterans gave rise to powerful social movements, underpinned by former fighters' associations, which adopted a variety of political stances, alternatively collaborating with democracy or with authoritarianism.

To ascertain the reasons these former militaries' organizations accepted or rejected pluralist and anti-liberal trends, this dissertation explores the ways parties and institutions secured the endorsement of patriotic ex-servicemen by satisfying their claims to material, symbolic and political privileges through specific social and cultural policies and the financial and organizational assistance they afforded to ex-enlistees' groups. This work demonstrates that, in both countries, the majority of the movements' memberships' loyalties were prominently affected by their wish to attain a special socio-economic status and a public role as educators of and diplomats for their nation, goals that led them to back parties and regimes that accorded them said recompenses.

To prove that a desire for a special place within politics and society considerably influenced most associated ex-soldiers' public attitudes, this dissertation undertakes a set of synchronic comparisons between the political conduct of the Italian and Romanian movements for the considered period. The first comparison, focusing on the period 1918-1928, highlights that the Italian and Romanian parliamentary democracies were respectively rejected and tolerated by most associated nationalist ex-combatants, due to the different degrees they were able to cater to demobilized soldiers' demands for benefits. It also indicates that Italian organized ex-soldiers in most cases buttressed the budding Fascist dictatorship to obtain the benefits they believed they had been denied under the liberal system of government.

The second and third comparisons, looking respectively at the years 1929-1938 and 1939-1945, reveal that nationalist veterans' sense of entitlement continued to impact many of these ex-combatants' political leanings significantly, showing that the latter cooperated with the various regimes in power in Italy and Romania, within this time span, mainly as a way of ensuring such polities would satisfy their claims to rights. To further corroborate its thesis, the dissertation investigates some of the transnational connections that involved Italian and Romanian former fighters in the interwar era. In doing so, it highlights that, by providing numerous veterans with the status and role they wished for, Mussolini's autocracy and the Romanian parliamentary system prevented foreign anti-status quo ideals and practices from gaining widespread popularity among the ex-combatants they ruled over.

This analysis contributes to historical debates on the radicalizing processes that European ex-servicemen underwent in the post-1918 era, suggesting that one of the main catalysts for said processes consisted in democratic political players' failure to cater to war survivors' needs and aspirations, and, conversely, in far-right organizations' success in acknowledging such demands. To examine these topics, the dissertation employs a wealth of hitherto under-investigated primary sources, including secret police reports, transcripts of meetings of veterans' representatives, written exchanges between the latter and state authorities, and ex-enlistees' periodicals.

Dedication

To my mother, Nicola Tamzin Owtram, and to my grandmother, Verena Sladen, who made this project possible.

To my great-grandfather Antonino Sciarrino, who served in the Great War and visited Romania.

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Introduction: Understanding Italian and Romanian Nationalist Veterans' Support for Democratic and Authoritarian Political Projects

0.1 The Historiography of War Veterans' Political Activism in Post-War Europe: Established Theoretical Paradigms and New Perspectives

In 1929, the Italian Fascist¹ regime organized a plebiscite to buttress its legitimacy. In this occasion, the nationalist² associations which represented Italian soldiers of the First World War, which had been collaborating with the dictatorship since the latter's inception, confirmed their loyalty to the Mussolini government, by asking their members to vote in favor of Italy's new masters.

Importantly, it appears many members of these veterans'³ organizations were prominently influenced, in renewing their allegiance to the regime at the ballot box, by the feelings of gratefulness they felt towards this system of government. Specifically, in all likelihood, most of their leaders and rank and file believed that, in the previous years, Mussolini had generously rewarded nationalist ex-combatants for their military deeds in the First World War, in terms of official benefits – offering them “*goods, services*” and “*esteem*” on the basis of formal privileges they enjoyed.⁴ Consequently, it might be argued

¹ Following an established academic convention, I use “*fascism*” with an initial lower case to define phenomena related to generic fascism, while resorting to “*Fascism*” with an initial upper case to refer to the Italian variant of these phenomena.

² I understand followers of ‘nationalism’ to endorse an “*ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential nation.*” See Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 22.

³ I understand a ‘veteran’ to be someone who served “*in the military for a minimum period of time regardless of whether they saw combat.*” See Grace Huxford et al., “Writing Veterans’ History: A Conversation on the Twentieth Century,” *War & Society*, 38, No. 2 (2019), 127.

⁴ Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of World War 2: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society: 1941-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 186.

that these flankers of the Fascist government were supporting the latter, to a great degree, due to its comprehensive “*veterans’ policies*.”⁵

Evidence that Fascist state provisions for ex-combatants played an important role with regard to nationalist veterans’ willingness to endorse the dictator’s plebiscite can be found in a circular that was issued by the central committee of the National Association of War Mutilated and Disabled (*Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra*; ANMIG), shortly before voting operations took place. In this circular, which the committee sent to all of the Association’s chapters, it was claimed that under the Blackshirts’ reign, nationalist war disabled and mutilated had been endowed with good living standards and were being honored by the Italian population at large. Conversely, this statement implied, under Italy’s previous rulers, the very same veterans had been insufficiently rewarded by public authorities and society, to the actual point of being humiliated. Therefore, the message claimed, to vote for Mussolini entailed continuing to experience the same degree of wellbeing that had been witnessed since 1922.

*On [the day of the plebiscite] we will be called to reconfirm our pride in our past and our belief in our future; but it will also be our duty to express our gratitude to those who defended our sacred rights and acknowledged our natural necessities. We must give our vote to an idea, and this idea is embodied in [Mussolini,] who bled at our side, who took up arms again to defend us and avenged our dignity and gave us our daily sustenance.*⁶

As can be seen above, in endorsing the Fascist dictatorship at the 1929 electoral plebiscite, Italian associated nationalist discharges were guided to a relevant degree by their desire to be rewarded by their political institutions for having served in the First World

⁵ By “*veterans’ policies*” I intend an “*array of entitlements*” offered by a state to the ex-servicemen living under it. See Stephen Ortiz, “Introduction,” in *Veterans’ Policies, Veterans’ Politics: New Perspectives on Veterans in the Modern United States*, ed. Stephen Ortiz (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 1.

⁶ *La Stampella: Periodico Mensile della Sezione Milanese dell’Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra* [The Crutch: Monthly Periodical of the Milan Chapter of the National Association of War Mutilated and Disabled], April 1929

War. Interestingly, in the same year, similar priorities were influencing the political orientations of affiliates to Romanian patriotic⁷ ex-servicemen's groups, who lived under a rather different set of institutions, i.e., a parliamentary democracy. Specifically, at that time the largest war participants' association in this country, the National Union of Former Fighters (*Uniunea Națională a Foștilor Luptători*, UNAL), praised the recently established government of the National Peasants' Party (*Partidul Național Țărănesc*; PNT). The Union claimed that this government, more than previous ones, was worthy of the former fighters' support as it had promised to acknowledge their rights⁸ to benefits. As a matter of fact, one of the Union's leaders promised his followers that the PNT could be trusted with delivering privileges⁹ to them, hence deserving their backing.

*Until recently we experienced hard times. [We lived under] governments that did not afford nor respect law-given rights to citizens. Similarly [we were ruled by] deputies who, instead of addressing the needs of those who elected them, minded only their own business. Today we have a government that has promised justice and legality. In the short time since it came to rule the fatherland it has accomplished many deeds, strengthening our belief that the promise to uphold the rule of law, justice, and legality it made during its time in opposition was no lip service.*¹⁰

Based on the aforementioned statements, it appears both Italian and Romanian organized nationalist war returnees were guided to a prominent degree, in their political orientations, by the pursuit of official privileges. Specifically, it seems these former soldiers were ready to back vastly different political regimes, provided the latter granted them the

⁷ In using the term “*patriotic*” as a byword for “*nationalist*,” in referring to First World War soldiers who prioritized such ideological beliefs above other ones they might have held, I do not intend to imply that other kinds of ex-combatants, who gave precedence to different kinds of principles, were not informed by their own versions of patriotic ideals.

⁸ I understand veterans’ “*rights*” to be an institutional acknowledgment that specific ex-servicemen have a “*prerogative to scarce goods, services, and esteem more important than those of others.*” See Edele, *Soviet Veterans*, 185.

⁹ I understand veterans’ “*privileges*” as an equivalent term to the notion of veterans’ rights, as defined in my previous footnote.

¹⁰ *Îndreptarea: Organ Politic al Partidului Poporului sub Președinția Generalului Averescu* [The Redress: Political Organ of the People’s Party Presided by General Averescu], newspaper cutting, likely 1929, folder 13, fund “*Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva și in Retragere*,” (UORR), Central Historical National Archives (*Arhive Naționale Istorice Centrale*; ANIC), Bucharest, Romania, 86.

privileges they sought. Nevertheless, it remains to be ascertained whether a desire to obtain goods, services, and esteem shaped the political loyalties of patriotic former fighters' organizations in Italy and Romania. Specifically, scholars are still to assess whether this wish prominently affected such groups' recruits in choosing whether to support democratic or authoritarian politics and if this factor exerted a strong pull through time.

Several researchers investigate historical processes that prompted European First World War veterans to support political organizations, in the aftermath of the first global conflict, employing a variety of stimulating disciplinary approaches. One of the main questions addressed by these historians consists in why and to what degree returnees in post-Great War Europe – a continent that was thoroughly marked by dictatorship and authoritarianism - ended up supporting democratic or anti-parliamentary trends. At the same time, this question remains to be thoroughly addressed. Notably, the factors leading a high number of Italian dischargees to support Mussolini's power structure continuously are yet to be uncovered. While a number of studies indicate some of the reasons many enlistees supported this dictatorship in the early-to mid-1920s, research on this time span remains incomplete. Furthermore, it is yet to be ascertained why and to what extent former soldiers continued to cooperate with the regime in the 1930s and during the Second World War.

Another case study that beckons in-depth analysis is Romania between 1918 and 1945. While the former fighters of other nations in Central and Southern-Eastern Europe have recently become the focus of sustained inquiry, Romanian war participants' political activities and proclivities between the 1920s and the rule of Marshal Ion Antonescu have

not yet been researched comprehensively, notwithstanding increasing interest in this topic.¹¹

My doctoral dissertation addresses both of these historiographical gaps, studying the ways organizations and institutions secured the support of associated ex-combatants in Italy and Romania between the end of the first global conflagration and the end of the second one. It ascertains why numerous Italian war returnees radicalized¹² politically into supporting the Blackshirts' reign until Mussolini's dismissal by King Victor Emmanuel III, and why some ex-soldiers backed the pro-Nazi puppet state that existed in Central-Northern Italy between 1943 and 1945. Additionally, my analysis surveys the motivations that prompted many Romanian former fighters to support their country's parliamentary¹³ powerholders, and later to lend a moderate degree of support to the various dictatorships which held sway over Romania between 1938 and 1944. My work also compares these Italian and Romanian case studies, to further highlight political dynamics that were prominently at play in both contexts.

¹¹ Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-century Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 101-143; Ioana Cazacu, "Victor Cădere: Diplomat (1919-1944)" [Victor Cădere: Diplomat (1919-1944)] (PhD Dissertation, „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, 2012), 24-43; Mihai Chioveanu, *Fețele fascismului: Politica, ideologie și scrisul istoric în secolul douăzecilea* [The Faces of Fascism: Politics, Ideology and Historiography in the Twentieth Century] (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2005), 253-256; Silviu Hariton, "War Commemorations in Inter-War Romania" (PhD Dissertation, Central European University, 2015), 290-312; Rebecca Haynes, "Saving Greater Romania: The Romanian Legionary Movement and the "New Man,"" in *Sacrifice and Rebirth: The Legacy of the Last Habsburg War*, eds. Mark Cornwall, John Paul Newman (New York: Berghahn, 2016), 178-181; Constantin Iordachi, Blasco Sciarrino, "War Veterans, Demobilization and Political Activism: Greater Romania in Comparison," in *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, special issue, eds. Kristian Mennen, Wim van Meurs, 6, No. 1 (June 2017), 94-108; Blasco Sciarrino, "Soldiers of Peace: The Transnational Activism of Romanian Great War Veterans, 1920-1939," *Institute of Croatian History (Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb)*, 50 (2018), 207-220.

¹² By "political radicalization," I intend "an increase in and/or reinforcing of extremism in the thinking, sentiments and/or behavior of individuals and/or groups of individuals." See David Mandel, "Radicalization: What Does It Mean?" in *Homegrown Terrorism: Understanding and Addressing the Root Causes of Radicalization Among Groups with an Immigrant Heritage in Europe*, eds. Thomas Pick, Anne Speckhard, Beatrice Jacuch (Amsterdam: Ios Press, 2009), 111.

¹³ By "parliamentary" regime, or organization, I refer to those political entities accepting the core features of 'parliamentary government,' a form of government "where the executive derives its legitimacy from the parliamentary representative body." See Maurizio Cotta, "Parliamentary Systems," in *International Encyclopedia of Political Science: volume 6*, eds. Bertrand Badie, Dirk Schlosse-Berg, Leonardo Morlino (London: Sage, 2011), 1766.

In engaging with their respective national political environments, Italian and Romanian demobilized soldiers followed a European-wide pattern. In the aftermath of World War One, while a high number of discharged individuals across the continent refrained from political endeavors,¹⁴ many of their peers nevertheless took up a variety of causes, working with myriads collective organizations and several institutions – of a radical or moderate nature. To give some examples, in Italy itself, in the early post-Great War era, men who had served in the army entered the ranks of Fascist, socialist, communist and Catholic organizations.¹⁵ Similarly, in France and Germany, those who had worn a military uniform ended up buttressing a variety of groups across the local political spectrums.¹⁶ Their Central-Eastern European counterparts, for their part, gave their consent to local ruling elites or counter-elites,¹⁷ while a number of former Russian soldiers and Red Army conscripts collaborated with the Soviet Communist Party.¹⁸

Generally, these individuals' political activism consisted of voting for and taking up official posts within private bodies and public institutions, educating their fellow

¹⁴ Julia Eichenberg, John Paul Newman, "Introduction: The Great War and Veterans' Internationalism," in *The Great War and Veterans' Internationalism*, eds. Julia Eichenberg, John Paul Newman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 11.

¹⁵ Ángel Alcalde, *War Veterans and Fascism in Interwar Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 45-81; Eros Francescangeli, "Una storia comune, un soggetto diviso: Gli ex combattenti," [A Common History, A Split Actor: The Ex-Combatants] in Mario Isnenghi ed., *Gli italiani in guerra. Conflitti, identità, memorie dal Risorgimento ai nostri giorni* [Italians in Wartime. Conflicts, Identities, Memories between the Italian Unification and Current Times]: volume 4: *Il ventennio fascista* [Twenty Years of Fascist Rule], eds. Giulia Albanese, Mario Isnenghi: tome 1: *Dall'impresa di Fiume alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale (1919-1940)* [From the Takeover of Fiume to the Second World War (1919-1940)] (Turin: Utet, 2008), 84-85.

¹⁶ James Diehl, "Germany: Veterans' Politics under Three Flags," in *The War Generation: Veterans of the First World War*, ed. Stephen Ward (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1975), 147-180; Robert Soucy "France: Veterans' Politics Between the Wars," *The War Generation*, 60-81; Benjamin Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations: Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1896, Kindle edition.

¹⁷ Maciej Górny, "Where Did the Postwar Politics of Memory Lead to?," in *Postwar Continuity and New Challenges in Central Europe, 1918-1923: The War That Never Ended*, eds. Tomasz Pudlocki, Kamil Ruszala (London: Routledge, 2021), 105-108.

¹⁸ Alexandre Sumpf, "Entre démobilisation et surmobilisation: L'impossible repos du soldat rouge en URSS, 1921-1929" [Between Demobilization and Over-Mobilization: The Failed Discharge of Red Soldiers in the URSS, 1921-1929], *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'Histoire* [Twentieth Century: Historical Review], No. 98 (April-June 2008), 183-187.

countrymen on civic and political values, undertaking unofficial diplomatic activities,¹⁹ lobbying for benefits, disseminating propaganda, and giving rise to paramilitary undertakings.

Interestingly, in mobilizing to achieve their goals, ex-combatants appear to have been moved by a number of different factors. The variedness of these catalysts is attested to by the strategies which political organizations often employed to secure war survivors' support: fashioning political programs which, notably, appealed both to these men's ideological values and practical needs. To give but one example, the British Union of Fascists promised ex-combatants to reverse a purported decline of the British nation as a great power *and* to provide jobs to those among them who had been left unemployed by the Great Depression.²⁰

Like their European peers, Italian and Romanian ex-enlistees engaged with their nations' politics for a number of different reasons, thereby adhering to a variety of organizations and politics. As mentioned above, the influences which determined the political loyalties of these individuals – including those who radicalized into cooperating with far-right forces - are still to be thoroughly assessed. This work focuses on ascertaining the main factors which affected the political preferences of significant 'portions' of the Italian and Romanian ex-soldiers' communities. Specifically, it surveys veterans imbued with nationalist beliefs, who militated in war survivors' associations and movements that shared their views.

These returnees were very politically active and influential in a number of ways, in the time span under consideration – most notably by bringing prestige to governments they

¹⁹ Kristian Mennen, Wim van Meurs, "Editorial Introduction: War Veterans and Fascism," *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, 6, No. 1 (June 2017), 6-9.

²⁰ Jakub Drábik, "'We're of Their Blood and Spirit of Their Spirit:' Ex-Servicemen and the British Union of Fascists," in *New Political Ideas in the Aftermath of the Great War*, eds. Alessandro Salvador, Anders Kjøstvedt (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 154-163.

decided to endorse or by contributing to bringing down the ones they rejected, and by helping shape collective moods and mindsets with their undertakings in the fields of education and propaganda - hence certainly warranting a detailed historical inquiry. Moreover, as across this period they were continuously allowed to undertake public activities, albeit with varying degrees of independence, they represent a relatively accessible subject of analysis – unlike their left-wing and (in the case of Italy) Catholic counterparts, who until the Second World War were generally persecuted and silenced.

Why did the Italian nationalist fighters' movement, for the most part, radicalize into accepting Fascism? Why, conversely, did most adherents of its Romanian counterpart back parliamentary democracy?²¹ Finally, why did both these movements cooperate with the dictatorships lording over Italy and Romania during the Second World War? Answering these questions entails ascertaining which political, social, economic, and cultural elements prompted ex-servicemen in these two countries to radicalize politically, specifically into supporting one or more of the several anti-democratic, far-right, hardcore nationalist organizations and polities active in these kingdoms in the time span under consideration. Importantly, while these groups and regimes differed in terms of ideology and ultimate goals - “*radical-right*” and “*fascist*” ones tending to ask respectively for contained and pronounced social change – they all shared the aim of putting an end to parliamentary rule.²²

Established theoretical approaches to understanding veterans' political allegiances in Europe provide researchers with several stimulating paradigms, one of which appears to

²¹ By “*democracy*,” I intend a political regime which allows for “*broad and equal participation in politics ... without limitations imposed on the basis of ascriptive categories ... or the origins of citizenship*.” See Elizabeth Kier, Ronald Krebs, “War and Democracy in Comparative Perspective,” in *In War's Wake: International Conflict and the Fate of Liberal Democracy*, eds. Elizabeth Kier, Ronald Krebs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4.

²² Michael Ledeen, “Italy: War as a Style of Life,” *The War Generation*, 126; Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 15-19, 95, 106-123, 136-138, 277-288, 392-396.

be especially useful in uncovering the general dynamics at play in this dissertation's case studies. To begin with, it should be mentioned that the main theories on nationalist veterans' support for right-wing authoritarianism – in other words, the main variety of extremism that was espoused by former European fighters, even though far-right politicians exaggerated the extent they were aided by veterans, for propaganda purposes²³ - seem to account only partially for the political conduct of Italian and Romanian returnees, or to leave specific long-term shifts in the loyalties of these ex-enlistees unexplained.

Several works emphasize ex-warriors' desire to safeguard their existing socio-economic status or overcome material deprivation as the main incentives for pivoting to the right. For example, it is remarked that active and reserve officers who entered the Italian Fascist movement aimed at protecting their class interests.²⁴ Similarly, ex-enlisted men militating in the French far-right of the 1930s wanted to preserve their middle-class status from a perceived socialist threat to this status.²⁵ It is stressed that the Nazi movement employed "*military desperadoes*" who feared or suffered unemployment.²⁶

While these accounts correctly highlight the importance of material interests – as, indeed, it is likely that many of the associated former troops supporting anti-democratic politics tended to behave as 'rational actors,' intent on maximizing their wellbeing – it is difficult to maintain that this factor was the determinant one in the Italian and Romanian case studies. As will be shown in this dissertation, some radical ex-soldiers were scarcely

²³ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 55, 89, 263-265; Richard Bessel, *Nazism and War* (London: Phoenix, 2005), 285-297, Kindle edition; Kristian Mennen, "'Milkshops and Bemedalled Old Men': War Veterans and the War Youth Generation in the Weimar Republic," *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, 6, No. 1 (June 2017), 15-16, 19, 40.

²⁴ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini*: volume 1: *Il rivoluzionario, 1883-1920* [The Revolutionary, 1883-1920] (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1965), 459-460; *Mussolini*: volume 2: *Il fascista* [The Fascist]: tome 1: *La conquista del potere, 1921-1925* [The Seizure of Power, 1921-1925] (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1966), 322; Gaetano Salvemini, *The Origins of Fascism in Italy* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1973), 119-136, 316-329.

²⁵ Soucy, "France," 72.

²⁶ Wolfgang Sauer, "National Socialism: Totalitarianism or Fascism?," *American Historical Review*, 73, No. 2 (December 1967), 411.

motivated by economic considerations, while even those who were guided by such concerns tended to act also on the basis of other kinds of stimuli. Moreover, at times, the latter individuals were guided not so much by a desire to *preserve* their living conditions as a wish to *improve* them.

Other scholars take into account cultural and political influences to investigate these matters. Certain interpretations posit that politically active fighters were affected by the nature of long-term ‘national political cultures,’ which tended to endow them with democratic or illiberal attitudes. For instance, in Germany, according to this view, the lack of resilient pluralist traditions entailed war returnees adhered to paramilitary groups in droves. Conversely, French ex-combatants largely refrained from supporting right-wing extremism due to the presence of deeply-entrenched pluralist customs.²⁷ However, as a recent inquiry indicates that even in the latter country, as a matter of fact, numerous returnees cooperated with right-wing militant entities,²⁸ we should not assume that long-term national customs necessarily shaped former militaries’ public activities.

As a matter of fact, other scholars employ a less deterministic perspective, focusing instead on wartime and post-war political and cultural developments. Some of them propose that European veterans radicalized mainly out of army or battlefield ‘brutalization’ (to put it with historian of fascism Mosse): it is suggested that soldiers of the First World War were negatively affected by their combat service, becoming either desensitized to violence and, hence, amenable to using coercion to solve political problems, or developing a lasting fascination with the military lifestyle they had experienced, therefore wishing to keep on living in this way after being discharged. Their wartime experiences hence

²⁷ Antoine Prost, “The Impact of War on French and German Political Cultures,” *The Historical Journal*, 37, No. 1 (March 1994), 211-215.

²⁸ Chris Millington, *From Victory to Vichy: Veterans in Inter-war France* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2012), 39, 74-76, 112-132, 185-189.

prompted these men to enter paramilitary bodies.²⁹ While, in Italy and Romania, some men with knowledge of war certainly embraced radicalism as a result of their military experiences, it is likely that the majority of their peers were not converted to authoritarianism by such a catalyst, as a multitude of investigations claim that most of the continent's military forces were not actually brutalized by wartime events.³⁰

Various accounts posit that veterans' radicalism might be ascribed to the effects of failed processes of 'cultural demobilization.' They propose that all societies that were politically and militarily mobilized for the First World War developed similar Manichean cultural frameworks, also known as 'war cultures,' to successfully wage war. Only those countries that eventually experienced a clear-cut victory underwent cultural demobilization, ridding themselves of such frameworks. On the other hand, polities that had experienced defeat, or a victory diminished by frustrated hopes of territorial aggrandizement and a lack of internal political cohesion, proved incapable of discarding their war cultures. Consequently, in the latter kind of context, many discharges kept on

²⁹ Dietrich Beyrau, "Brutalization Revisited: The Case of Russia," *Journal of Contemporary History*, special issue, eds. Mark Edele, Robert Gerwarth, 50, No. 1 (January 2015), 21-29; Ledeen, "Italy," 131-132; Adrian Lyttelton, "Fascism and Violence in Post-War Italy: Political Strategy and Social Conflict," in *Social Protest, Violence and Terror in Nineteenth-and Twentieth Century Europe*, eds. Wolfgang Mommsen, Gerard Hirschfeld (New York: Springer, 1982), 259; George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 159-185; Angelo Ventrone, "Fascism and the Legacy of the Great War," in *The Legacies of Two World Wars: European Societies in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Lothar Kettenacker, Torsten Riotte (New York: Berghahn, 2011), 96-97.

³⁰ Lorenzo Benadusi, "Borghesi in Uniform: Masculinity, Militarism, and the Brutalization of Politics from the First World War to the Rise of Fascism," in *In the Society of Fascists: Acclamation, Acquiescence, and Agency in Mussolini's Italy*, eds. Giulia Albanese, Roberta Pergher (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 38-45; John Paul Newman, "War Veterans, Fascism and Para-Fascist Departures in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1918-1941," *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, 6, No. 1 (June 2017), 44-45, 74; Antoine Prost, "Les limites de la brutalization: Tuer sur le front occidental, 1914-1918" [The Limits of Brutalization: Killing on the Western Front, 1914-1918] *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'Histoire*, 81, No.1 (January – March 2004), 6-20; Benjamin Ziemann, "Germany after the First World War - A Violent Society? Results and Implications of Recent Research on Weimar Germany," *Journal of Modern European History*, 1, No.1 (March 2003), 81-93; *War Experiences in Rural Germany, 1914-1923*, trans. Alex Skinner (New York: Berg, 2007), 228-252, 271-275.

fervidly opposing their wartime enemies while at times also directing their antagonism against additional social and political categories.³¹

The cultural mobilization paradigm is undoubtedly useful in understanding the political allegiances of a high number of Italian and Romanian patriotic veterans in the immediate aftermath of the war. As both countries were victor nations, it appears former troops in both Italy and Romania did not radicalize to the extent that those in defeated nations tended to. On the other hand, in Italy, the Liberal³² elite's failure to obtain conspicuous territorial gains for this kingdom, in addition to the Italian population's aversion to accepting the more jingoistic ideals underpinning this country's war effort, pushed a contained segment of the nationalist veterans' community to embrace Mussolini and the Blackshirts. Nevertheless, as will be pointed out in this dissertation, in the long run, the political loyalties harbored by associated patriotic ex-combatants in both kingdoms tended, for the most part, to be influenced by additional factors.

As can be seen above, the surveyed theoretical paradigms might be integrated by additional perspectives to delineate better the chief influences impacting the loyalties of Italian and Romanian associated patriotic ex-enlistees. This dissertation, while employing the cultural demobilization paradigm as a starting point, mainly makes use of a further perspective on ex-servicemen's activism to comprehensively understand the political

³¹ Annette Becker, "Faith, Ideologies and "Cultures of War,"" trans. John Horne, in *A Companion to World War I*, ed. John Horne (Malden: Wiley, 2013), 235-238, 243-245; Robert Gerwarth, John Horne, "Paramilitarism in Europe after the Great War: An Introduction," in *War in Peace: Paramilitarism in Europe after the Great War*, eds. Robert Gerwarth, John Horne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3-11, 16; John Horne, "Introduction: Mobilizing for 'Total War,' 1914-1918," in *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, ed. John Horne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3-17; "Beyond Cultures of Victory and Cultures of Defeat? Inter-War Veterans' Internationalism," *The Great War*, 213-216; Mark Jones, "From Caporetto to Garibaldiland: Interventionist War Culture as a Culture of Defeat," *European Review of History – Revue Européenne d'Histoire*, 15, No. 6 (2008), 663-670; John Paul Newman, *Yugoslavia in the Shadow of War: Veterans and the Limits of State Building, 1903-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3-17, 262-264; William Rosenberg, "Paramilitary Violence in Russia's Civil Wars, 1918-1920," *War in Peace*, 25-39; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery*, trans. Jefferson Chase (New York: Picador, 2003), 173, 3948-4058, Kindle edition.

³² In this dissertation, I employ "Liberal" with an initial uppercase when referring to the interwar parties of Italy and Romania espousing liberal ideologies, in addition to the governments led by such parties.

behavior of a high number of Italian and Romanian nationalist veterans. By doing so, this dissertation's analysis also highlights the sources of many war participants' illiberal tendencies, which tended to be unrelated to the radicalizing catalysts stressed by established academic approaches.

This dissertation adopts its chief outlook from several further studies surveying European military personnel's authoritarian propensities. These investigations propose that anti-liberal organizations and autocracies often secured men in uniform's backing by promising to provide them with material and symbolic privileges, which the latter ardently sought. For instance, Diehl, Mulligan³³ and Newman³⁴ claim that Adolf Hitler and King Alexander I of Yugoslavia's governments channeled the support of former fighters whom democracy had insufficiently catered to in their claims to benefits. Millington³⁵ and Drábik³⁶ stress that, in France and Great Britain, war returnees backed grassroots dictatorial groups with the respective aims of forcing governments to raise military pensions and to provide former militaries with jobs.

Šmidrkal³⁷ proposes that in Czechoslovakia, where veterans of the Austro-Hungarian army were prevented from enjoying a prestigious public status, former soldiers of the local German minority chose to collaborate with the Permanent International Committee (*Comité International Permanent*; CIP), a pro-fascist transnational forum, to pressure their state into bestowing upon them the official recognition they longed for. Edele

³³ James Diehl, *The Thanks of the Fatherland: German Veterans after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 18-43; William Mulligan, "German Veterans' Associations and the Culture of Peace: The Case of the Reichsbanner," *The Great War*, 153-157.

³⁴ John Paul Newman, "Allied Yugoslavia: Serbian Great War Veterans and their Internationalist Ties," *The Great War*, 101-102, 110; *Yugoslavia*, 12-13, 79, 99, 196-197.

³⁵ Millington, *From Victory to Vichy*, 37-39.

³⁶ Drábik, "We're of Their Blood," 157.

³⁷ Václav Šmidrkal, "The Defeated in a Victorious State: Veterans of the Austro-Hungarian Army in the Bohemian Lands and Their (Re)mobilization in the 1930s," *Zeitgeschichte* [Contemporary History], special issue, eds. Laurence Cole et al., 47, No. 1 (2020), 81-89, 93-104.

and Gerwarth³⁸ state that combat survivors were often prompted to embrace political violence as a way of protesting against inadequate official provisions for them. Finally, concerning one of this dissertation's own case studies, several historians³⁹ point out that Mussolini came to enjoy growing support from associations representing patriotic ex-enlistees as the latter saw their desire for recompenses accommodated by the former.

As implied by the scholarly perspective delineated above, ex-servicemen often radicalized due to feeling underserved by their states in terms of recompenses for their wartime accomplishments, such as social care, economic paybacks, and public honors. They consequently endorsed radical politics as a way of seeing their claims to rights acknowledged. Ultimately, this outlook proposes that, for a high number of European ex-combatants, the choice between supporting democracy or (right-wing) authoritarianism rested mainly on which political option proved most effective at delivering rewards to them.

Based on these assumptions, my work contends that both in Italy and Romania, in the long run, the majority of associated nationalist First World War soldiers were ready to back those political organizations and regimes that proved ready to help them obtain the state benefits which they collectively asked for: as defined above, a specific set of goods

³⁸ Mark Edele, Robert Gerwarth, "Introduction: The Limits of Demobilization: Global Perspectives on the Aftermath of the Great War," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 50, No. 1 (January 2015), 11-13.

³⁹ Matteo Millan, "The Contradictions of Veterans' Associations? The Fascist Appropriation of the Legacy of World War I and the Failure of Demobilization," *New Political Ideas*, 98; Ugo Pavan Dalla Torre, "Le origini dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi Di Guerra (1917-1923)" [The Origins of the National Association of War Mutilated and Disabled (1917-1923)], in *Passato, presente e futuro. Compendio sulla storia dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra, 1917-2012* [Past, Present and Future. Summary of the History of the National Association of War Mutilated and Disabled, 1917-2012], ed. Valdo Del Lucchese (Rome: Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra e Fondazione Roma, 2012), 111-117; Pierluigi Pironti, "L'evoluzione delle pensioni di guerra italiane dalle origini fino all'avvento del fascismo" [The Evolution of Italian War Pensions from Their Origins to the Onset of Fascism], in *Guerra e disabilità: Mutilati e invalidi italiani e primo conflitto mondiale* [War and Disability: Italian War Mutilated and Disabled and the First Global Conflict], ed. Nicola Labanca (Milan: Unicopli, 2016), 217-227, 230; Fabiano Quagliaroli, *Risarcire la nazione in armi: Il ministero per l'Assistenza militare e le pensioni di Guerra (1917-1923)* [To Reward the Nation in Arms: The Military Assistance Ministry and War Pensions (1917-1923)] (Milan: Unicopli, 2018), 356-357, 467; Giorgio Rochat, *Gli Arditi della Grande Guerra: Origini, battaglie e miti* [The Daring Ones of the Great War: Origins, Battles and Myths] (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1981), 165-171; Martina Salvante, "Italian Disabled Veterans between Experience and Representation," in *Men after War*, eds. Stephen McVeigh, Nicola Cooper (New York: Routledge, 2013), 119-120; Francesco Zavatti, *Mutilati ed invalidi di guerra: Una storia politica* [War Mutilated and Disabled: A Political History] (Milan: Unicopli, 2011), 102, 120, 133.

and services and a conspicuous measure of public esteem. Importantly, the pursuit of such concessions remained a crucial priority for these demobilized troops for decades, even at the time of the Second World War. According to Edele, Soviet former soldiers of the Second World War developed a sense of “*entitlement to special treatment*,” based on their “*wartime service*,” which compelled them for decades to lobby their governments into granting them an official “*prerogative to ... goods, services and esteem*.”⁴⁰

In my work’s view, between 1918 and 1945 – and certainly beyond, although the years after the Second World War lie outside of my inquiry’s boundaries – numerous Italian and Romanian nationalist combatants of the Great War nurtured a strong sense of entitlement, based on similar premises to those of their Soviet counterparts. Consequently, these war survivors, believing they were owed by their respective governments, organized into popular social movements⁴¹ – that rested on several organizations representing their interests - to pressure institutions into providing them with privileged access to the items they desired. In doing so, they aimed to use these benefits to fulfill a variety of political impulses. First of all, they wished to employ them to secure a unique, elevated socio-economic status. Additionally, they desired to put their privileges in the service of safeguarding their national communities, specifically by securing the state’s support in disseminating patriotic values among their fellow countrymen and undertaking public diplomacy activities abroad to help defend their nations’ post-war borders. In other words, the Italian and Romanian former fighters’ movements wanted their respective parliaments and governments to grant them, together with their prized special socio-economic status, an official public role as ‘guardians of the nation.’

⁴⁰ Edele, *Soviet Veterans*, 19, 36, 185.

⁴¹ I consider “*social movements*” to be loosely connected networks of social actors, the latter uniting among themselves in the attempt to exert political pressure, whose interests are recognizable only with reference to a specific system of values. See Donatella Della Porta, “Social Movements,” *International Encyclopedia*: volume 1, 2431-2434.

Because of these ambitions, it might be contended that most war participants militating in the aforementioned movements were prominently influenced by their sense of entitlement, in their political loyalties, supporting those collective entities – including ones of an illiberal variety - that promised to satisfy their rights to privileges. In other words, the main goals of the Italian and Romanian fighters’ movements – i.e., their ‘non-negotiable’ claims⁴² - consisted in exacting from the state material, symbolic and political rewards for their members. Like other social movements operating in contemporary times,⁴³ these organizations viewed a plurality of political actors as potential patrons that might influence institutions into giving in to their requests. Hence, in choosing their sponsors, they acted pragmatically, basing their allegiances on political players’ promises and achievements, with regard to promoting their claims to privileges. Crucially, in those instances when parliamentary forces failed to deliver them the compensations they aspired to, they sometimes turned to the authoritarian right to see their aspirations fulfilled.

To clarify and contextualize the dynamic defined above, it might be useful to explain the theoretical assumptions underpinning my analysis of the nationalist war survivors who militated in associations and movements articulating their demands. To begin with, it should be stressed that, as in other post-World War One societies, in Italy and Romania ex-militaries mobilized politically on the basis of a wealth of factors. Patriotic former soldiers appear to have been motivated by combinations of catalysts that constantly included their ideological values among these incentives. Notably, one such amalgamation appears to have affected most of the men enrolled in nationalist ex-enlistees’ groups: it was comprised of said beliefs and a desire to improve one’s socio-economic status.

⁴² Social movements usually possess specific goals which are non-negotiable, as they underpin the very self-definitions of these organizations. See Donatella della Porta, Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 229-233.

⁴³ Della Porta, Diani, *Social Movements*, 210-214.

In other words, activists who acted under the influence of this amalgam wanted to protect or improve their own standing *and also* to safeguard and to strengthen their fatherlands, as attested by the coexistence of such diverse aspirations within the collective programs their associations articulated. Mann claims that European fascists simultaneously acted in a ‘instrumental-rational’ manner – seeking personal advantages - and worked toward ‘value-rational’ goals – promoting a purported higher cause.⁴⁴ Most associated nationalist war participants observed in my two case studies appear to have similarly pursued a mixture of pragmatic and idealistic ends, albeit one which was much less extreme. For this reason, they asked not only for material paybacks and public honors for themselves but also for a special political role as guardians of the nation. More in detail, they usually sought, at a personal level, to obtain at least one kind of material or figurative compensation; to uphold the ideal of buttressing the fatherland, they strove as a minimum to take part in war commemorations extolling fallen and surviving soldiers’ wartime sacrifices.

Second, due to jointly promoting their ideological values and pursuing status-oriented aspirations, most of these activists essentially endorsed political forces which catered to both of their priorities. In other words, politicians simultaneously needed to profess nationalist beliefs and promise advantages to these ex-militaries to get the latter’s support. In Italy and Romania, between 1918 and 1945, a great variety of grassroots organizations, not to mention almost all ruling forces, courted former fighters to receive their endorsement and collaborated with them to bolster their own prestige and legitimacy. In this time span, patriotic veterans’ movements continuously collaborated with political players that consistently showed themselves to be in accordance, at least in part, with their values and which satisfied their sense of entitlement, fostering alliances with them. In those

⁴⁴ Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 22.

instances when their patrons ended up disappointing both of their pragmatic and value-driven expectations, they usually withdrew their support in a manifest or tacit manner.

Therefore, it might be claimed that they essentially pursued their goals in a rather practical and ultimately efficient way, although the partnerships they struck with Mussolini and Antonescu eventually backfired, once these statesmen began losing the wars they had led their countries into, thereby plunging ex-enlistees into the patterns of economic and social dislocation brought about by these conflicts.

To be sure, this reading of status-oriented former fighters' activities might seem like an excessive generalization. After all, judging from the ways ex-militaries operated in other countries, it seems European veterans at times behaved in ways that conflicted with their own interests. For instance, they proved ready to work with politicians even when the latter appealed to their ideological convictions much more than their material needs. In France, patriotic returnees supported the conservative Doumergue government (1934), notwithstanding the latter's cuts to public pensions, fearing that opposing the prime minister might lead to a leftist alternative coming to power.⁴⁵ Additionally, ex-combatants were at times ready to collaborate with government-affiliated associations even when the latter's leaders did not effectively champion their rights, or they allowed themselves to be coerced into working with authoritarian powerholders, even when the latter did not cater to any great degree to their necessities.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, it appears the Italian and Romanian nationalist former fighters' organizations on the whole allocated political support coherently with their main desiderata, in some instances even managing to extract significant concessions in exchange

⁴⁵ Soucy, "France," 91-97.

⁴⁶ Martin Crotty, Mark Edele, "Total War and Entitlement: Toward a Global History of Veteran Privilege," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 59, No. 1 (2013), 27-28; Martin Crotty, Neil Diamant, Mark Edele, *The Politics of Veteran Benefits in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 105-110, 115-117.

for their backing. To be sure, they could also act against the needs of their members, to some degree. For instance, in 1918-1922, Italian patriotic ex-soldiers antagonized potential patrons such as the Socialist and Catholic parties, to a degree, as ideological disagreements made them prejudiced against these groups⁴⁷ – although, it should be noticed, said parties refused themselves to build bridges toward them.

However, ultimately organized discharges collaborated only with those partners that both shared their worldview and gave them the rewards they felt entitled to. Importantly, this kind of conduct took place both under dictatorship and democracy: returnees flanking Mussolini and the illiberal Romanian helmsmen of 1938-1944 appear to have continuously backed these leaders not just as the latter wielded considerable coercive powers. Nor do they seem to have done so merely as a result of gradually being accustomed to working with these political patrons: in other words, path dependencies were not determinant in these situations. Instead, ex-enlistees' movements seem to have carried on collaborating with all these autocrats as the latter persistently offered them partial ideological kinship and agreed to many of their requests.

Third, apparently, most of the demobilized men militating in such movements embraced moderate forms of patriotism: they focused on preserving their kingdoms' post-Great War borders and were in principle open to working to see their demands satisfied within the framework of parliamentary politics. They also seem to have refrained from majorly intolerant attitudes towards political opponents and ethnic minorities. This state of affairs can be attributed largely to their countries' victory in the war, which prevented most discharged militaries from developing grievances related to territorial losses. Even in

⁴⁷ Sandro De Amicis, *Combattenti tra democrazia e fascismo: L'Associazione Nazionale Combattenti di Viterbo, 1919-1925* [War Veterans between Democracy and Fascism: The Viterbo Chapter of the National Association of Fighters, 1919-1925] (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2019), 32-36.

liberal⁴⁸ Italy, notwithstanding the local elite's failure to considerably expand national borders at the international peace settlements of 1919-1920, the largest war survivors' associations acted in a restrained manner. Ultimately, most of the Italian and Romanian patriotic ex-soldiers who prioritized receiving a special status and role from the state in all likelihood shied away from confrontational politics. This middling stance entailed two important consequences for the allegiances of these movements' affiliates.

On the one hand, most of these activists were in principle open, to varying degrees, to collaborating with political forces that were openly moderate or reformist, or which at least accepted to work towards their goals within the framework of parliamentary politics. Crucially, they appear to have followed potential patrons who reacted favorably to their nationalist values and calls for a special place in society. It should be noticed that the majority of the patriotic associations' members probably wished for politicians merely to accept their principles and to implement some policies which they considered of paramount importance – specifically, defending the fatherland's borders and disseminating patriotism among the citizenry - rather than asking them to subscribe to hardcore-nationalistic worldviews and policymaking.

Eventually, some parliamentary forces would succeed in harnessing these former fighters to their causes, while others would fail. Successful ones, such as the main parliamentary parties of Romania, were able to speak to both concerns championed by patriotic veterans' groups. Unsuccessful ones did not address, overall, both of these preoccupations, as in the case of the Italian Socialists, or acknowledged the veterans' ideals but not their desires for benefits, like the Italian Liberals and the political Catholics.

⁴⁸ I understand “liberal” democracies to “protect individual liberties ... limit the scope of unchecked executive authority [and] enshrine the rule of law.” See Kier, Krebs, “War and Democracy,” 5.

On the other hand, when democratic parties could not speak to associated ex-combatants' hopes, these men often radicalized into supporting authoritarian organizations and power centers, to see their claims taken up effectively. It should be noticed that in all likelihood, on the whole, the great part of the members of the nationalist former fighters' associations mainly came to support said groups and politics more to see their calls for benefits addressed, rather than because they had come to identify wholesale with the intransigent nationalism promoted by these partners. Specifically, they often looked at these anti-democratic political entities as patrons who would help them obtain the status and public role they wished for and which might be listened to as they shared *some* ideological affinities with them. In other words, the anti-liberal right's brand of nationalism facilitated the convergence between this political player and many discontented patriotic returnees rather than originating said alignment. Furthermore, while disgruntled war participants cooperated continuously with the far right, as will be shown below, it seems the ideological worldviews of most of these collaborators did not come to completely mesh with those of their patrons, entailing that, in most cases, this alliance remained ultimately superficial and incomplete.

At the same time, some fighters entered these alliances for other reasons. Not all patriotic demobilized soldiers were guided primarily by a combination of moderate ideology and a sense of entitlement to privileges (which, as seen above, were meant to include official assistance in protecting the fatherland through reasonable means such as pedagogy and diplomacy). Instead, some returnees were galvanized by fusions of incentives that blended chauvinism and other radicalizing factors surveyed above: wartime brutalization, a desire to defend entrenched advantages, extreme worldviews and practices that were either long-established or fairly recent. Crucially, these amalgamations were all of an anti-democratic kind.

This state of affairs entailed that, both in Italy and Romania, minorities of First World War fighters were neither benign in their patriotism nor influenced, in their leanings, by state veterans' policies: they showed little interest in being rewarded by their governments, hence could not be moderated through the granting of official benefits. Instead, they tended to join extremist bodies essentially due to being ideologically radical to begin with. They might be termed 'hyper-nationalists,' as they promoted authoritarian mindsets and behaviors motivated by virulent xenophobia, classism, and militarism.

The most vivid instance of this phenomenon took place in Italy, where, as will be shown below, Mussolini's Fasces and government were backed by a contingent of uncompromising ex-enlistees (in addition to some combat survivors who worked as 'guns for hire'). Importantly, several of these intransigent Fascists militated simultaneously in the local patriotic ex-enlistees' movement and associations. It should also be noticed that ideological considerations, albeit of a less intense kind, prompted the majority of the patriotic veterans' organizations to support the Fascist prime minister in the early stages of his rule. In this way, they misguidedly hoped to 'heal' the Italian country from the political and social fissures that had opened up between 1919 and 1922. In other words, they believed they would help reconcile Italians one to another, under the aegis of a strong government, instead of dreaming, as in the case of the hyper-nationalists, that their faction might violently trample over its adversaries.

Nevertheless, judging from the overall conduct of the patriotic ex-militaries' associations, it seems that most activists who ended up buttressing anti-democratic politics aimed essentially to obtain the special status and role they prized, as parliamentary parties and institutions had failed to help them fulfill these aspirations. After all, Italian and Romanian far rights were usually apt at simultaneously channeling diverse frustrations harbored by the fighters of the first global conflagration. As in the case of German

Nazism,⁴⁹ they effectively addressed the grievances of different collectives and individuals. In each case study, fascists and other far righters often managed to harness the discontent of different segments of the patriotic former fighters' national communities: minorities of men in uniform who voiced strong ideological complaints and were committed anti-liberal activists, on the one hand; larger constituencies formed by veterans who were politically moderate and status-oriented, on the look for new patrons after being let down by their existing ones, on the other. The latter discharges were essentially ready to cooperate with these chauvinist patrons in exchange for seeing their agendas satisfied. It is difficult to ascertain these pragmatic flankers' degrees of conviction in upholding their alliances to the illiberal right. Nevertheless, as said above, it is likely they usually held onto their less bigoted brands of patriotism, although they often collaborated continuously with these sponsors.

The primary instance of cooperation between nationalist veterans' movements and anti-democratic advocates took place in Italy: as will be delineated below, the Fascist party, in addition to enrolling fanatical former fighters, also coordinated itself with various ex-warriors who were unhappy with the Liberal elite's failure to grant them the special place they longed for. Interestingly, even some of the hyper-nationalist former shock troops that aided Mussolini did so, in part, due to perceiving a lack of gratitude on behalf of state and society. Importantly, as will also be shown below, the major patriotic ex-servicemen's groups ended up working with Mussolini after 1925, mainly to receive several kinds of concessions and enjoy the formal task of custodians of the fatherland. Similarly, in Romania, former fighters tended to collaborate with authoritarianism mainly for reasons of status and on the condition that the representatives of this trend allowed them to act as

⁴⁹ Roger Eatwell, "Towards a New Model on the Rise of Right-Wing Extremism," *German Politics*, 6, No. 3 (December 1997), 180.

protectors of the nation. Ultimately, in both case studies, a high number of demobilized soldiers came to agree with, or at least acquiesce to,⁵⁰ anti-liberal trends as the latter promised and later enacted favorable state veterans' policies.

My fourth contention is that the majority of the members of the ex-combatants' associations and movements were affected, to variable degrees, by a strong sense of entitlement, in addition to moderate nationalist convictions. Hence, most former fighters enrolled in these organizations were influenced, in their ultimate orientations, by the issue of obtaining the privileges and the responsibilities they desired, while nevertheless limiting their collaboration to organizations that shared their core ideological sensitivities. To be sure, this sense of entitlement did not give rise to an even level of cooperation on behalf of the soldiers of the First World War. After all, gaining official rewards was rarely the only aim of adherents of the former troops' associations. In Italy, for instance, before 1922, one of the main ex-combatants' associations briefly tried to develop a party of its own with the aim of turning its members into the country's new ruling elite.⁵¹ It is hence likely that, as fighters simultaneously pursued a range of objectives, some of them might have ultimately declined to coordinate with specific political organizations due to ideological divergences. While these groups might have been willing to advocate for their rights, their general agendas conflicted too strongly with the remaining causes embraced by said activists to allow them to work together.

At the same time, it might be argued that patriotic veterans' movements and associations were generally compelled, by their claims to rights, to adopt an accommodating stance toward politicians who agreed to most to their desiderata - which

⁵⁰ I understand political "*acquiescence*" to be a state of resigned acceptance of a given ruling system, which might entail a degree of cooperation with the latter. See Paul Corner, *The Fascist Party and Popular Opinion in Mussolini's Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 164, 191.

⁵¹ Giovanni Sabbatucci, *I combattenti nel primo dopoguerra* [Former Fighters in the Early Post-War Era] (Bari: Laterza, 1974), 301-327.

ranged from acquiescence to full consent.⁵² Such supportive attitudes entailed voting and campaigning for and contesting elections on behalf of specific politicians, in addition to disseminating propaganda and enacting specific policies on behalf of the latter, and even promoting these sponsors through paramilitary means.

Fifth, it should be stressed that some exceptions to this general dynamic took place. As discussed earlier, Italian and Romanian minorities of hyper-nationalist returnees did not usually mobilize for the purpose of obtaining special emoluments. Additionally, once Italy was turned into a dictatorship, some of this kingdom's associated former army recruits actively opposed Mussolini, notwithstanding his generous provisions for veterans and his espousal of nationalist principles, as their ideological inclinations openly clashed with the Fascist constellation of beliefs and style of rule. As will be shown below, they ended up contesting the rule of the Blackshirts during the interwar era and World War Two.

Finally, the majority of the members of the Italian and Romanian former fighters' movements, while constantly desiring certain goods and services and a conspicuous share of public esteem, were not always guided to the same extent by this priority in their political choices. As a matter of fact, their behavior was influenced by a cluster of factors that shifted to a degree in time. Essentially, their sense of entitlement appears to have shaped their orientations principally in times of widespread economic crisis, as many of them felt compelled to use their rights to material rewards as a way out of a state of economic hardship.

Instead, in times when their nations were involved in large-scale military confrontations or faced other kinds of existential threats, Italian and Romanian activists often felt compelled to support their governments independently from seeing their requests

⁵² I consider "consent" to be "an affirmation that requires a positive mental or physical act of endorsement." See Roberta Pergher, Giulia Albanese, "Introduction; Historians, Fascism and Italian Society: Mapping the Limits of Consent," *In the Society of Fascists*, 4.

fulfilled. Notably, during the Second World War, while Italy and Romania remained ruled by strongmen, many old soldiers for a while put aside their own interests, buttressing leaders like Mussolini and Marshal Ion Antonescu, all while enduring worsening living conditions. Similarly, in the first stages of Mussolini's rule, several associations of ex-enlisted men gave expressed their confidence in the new Italian prime minister as, among other matters, they hoped he would put an end to the latent civil war that had been raging since 1919-1920, a national catastrophe these organizations wished to put an end to.

However, in most cases, the stances of the followers of the ex-warriors' movements were strongly affected by these persons' sense of entitlement: this influence remained constant and relevant for most of them, throughout 1918-1945. Even when the bulk of the Italian movement elected to work with its dictatorial government for reasons of 'national salvation,' it appears they were unwilling to do so for long without seeing their claims to a special socio-economic status and public role as guardians of the nation satisfied by the Fascist autocracy. Even at this juncture, the movement was bent on exacting concessions from the leader of the Blackshirts in exchange for its approval. Later, as Italian and Romanian strongmen mobilized their people for fighting during the Second World War, similar priorities eventually shaped most Italian and Romanian associated veterans' loyalties. Specifically, the fighters' claims to rights gradually drove a wedge between many of them and their respective dictators, due to resentment at the ways ex-soldiers' privileges were increasingly undercut by the deterioration of state finances and national economies caused by the kingdoms' ruinous war efforts.

Ultimately, this dissertation claims that whether members of the Italian and Romanian nationalist ex-combatants' movements accepted democracy or endorsed authoritarianism depended, to a considerable extent, on the ability of their respective countries' elites to acknowledge their claims. As will be indicated below, my research

suggests that, in the immediate aftermath of the war, the Italian liberal system failed to significantly address the claims of numerous ex-combatants, leading many of the latter, radicalized by their frustration, to support the budding Fascist autocracy, as a way of receiving the concessions and prerogatives they felt they deserved. As Mussolini succeeded, to a relevant degree, in addressing these activists' requests, they kept on supporting him until his fall from power in 1943.

On the other hand, this study argues that the Romanian parliamentary elites managed – notwithstanding a multitude of general political shortcomings⁵³ - to satisfy the exigencies of numerous local former fighters. They hence secured the approval of the discharges' movement, until they were supplanted by King Charles II's⁵⁴ authoritarian regime in 1938 – although it should be noted that a minority of ex-combatants, dissatisfied by a lack of favorable provisions, supported militant groupings in the attempt to see their rights acknowledged by institutions.

During the Second World War, the Italian and Romanian illiberal powerholders managed to mobilize old soldiers into helping them wage war. They accomplished this feat by continuing to guarantee them their existing privileges and offering them additional ones. Nevertheless, in the final stages of their war efforts, as these systems of government ended up mired in major military and economic quandaries, they lost much of the support of the discharges' movements. Later, similar issues entailed the failure, on behalf of Mussolini's pro-Nazi puppet state, to acquire the active backing of the majority of the patriotic ex-combatants under this regime's rule. As the dissertation will demonstrate in detail, political players' ability to cater to ex-soldiers' sense of entitlement was central for acquiring and

⁵³ Stephen Fischer-Galati, *Twentieth-Century Rumania* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 25-45.

⁵⁴ Following an established scholarly convention, I refer to monarchs mentioned in this dissertation by anglicized names.

preserving the latter's consent, or at least acquiescence, in the course of the 30 years following the Great War.

In several ways, these events were congruent with developments taking place in the rest of the continent. To begin with, in many European countries, World War One troops came to derive a strong sense of entitlement from the military duties they had performed in the course of the conflict. Except for Soviet Russia – as this country's Leninist/Stalinist elite denied combat survivors the right to organize as a formal interests' group, on ideological grounds⁵⁵ - war participants gave birth to organizations and movements which strove to represent their adherents' interests. These organizations were often strong in numerical terms, a key reason being that affiliates of different political persuasions at times proved capable of collaborating, albeit on a limited set of issues.

To provide some examples, 2,886,900 French ex-combatants were enrolled in veterans' associations. The British Legion had 409,011 members by 1938. In Germany, a cohesive ex-enlistees' movement failed to coalesce, nevertheless servicemen's groups proved popular. The "Steel Helmet, League of Frontline Soldiers" (*Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten*) had approximately 350,000 associates by 1932; the Kiffhäuser League (*Kiffhäuserbund*) enjoyed 2,600,000 adherents in 1929; the "Black-Red-Gold Imperial Banner" (*Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold*) had circa 900,000 supporters by 1925-1926; the Imperial Association of War Disabled and Participants and Survivors of Deceased Fighters (*Reichsbund der Kriegsbeschädigten, Kriegsteilnehmer und Kriegerhinterbliebenen*) witnessed 830,000 enrollments by 1922 and the League of the Red Front Fighters (*Roter Frontkämpferbund*) had approximately 127,000 followers by 1927.

⁵⁵ Crotty, Edele, "Total War and Entitlement," 27; Alexandre Sumpf, "Un droit à la réhabilitation? Le statut légal des invalides russes de la Grande Guerre, 1912-1927" [A Right to Rehabilitation? The Legal Status of Russian Great War Disabled, 1912-1927], *Le Mouvement Social* [The Social Movement], 4, No. 257 (2016), 164.

In Poland, 15,6-23,6% veterans entered an association.⁵⁶ As will be pointed out below, Italian and Romanian war survivors' movements were also popular ones, with high membership rates.

In those countries in which such organizations were active, their adherents embraced a wide variety of political causes. In many cases, they politically mobilized to pursue similar goals as their Italian and Romanian counterparts: obtaining material and symbolic recompenses from their respective states, enacting patriotic pedagogy, and performing public diplomacy,⁵⁷ often asking public authorities to provide them with assistance with regard to the latter two kinds of activities. In other words, many of these former fighters wished to be granted a special socio-economic status and an official role as custodians of the fatherland.

Mirroring their Italian and Romanian equivalents also in another regard, veterans' movements across Europe enjoyed differing degrees of success regarding achieving their aims. For instance, while the French one enjoyed noticeable lobbying power – indeed, it persuaded governments, in the mid-to-late 1920s, to re-evaluate war pensions and grant old age pensions to returnees⁵⁸ – in Great Britain the principal discharges' group remained largely uninfluential.⁵⁹ Ultimately, it appears the degree to which states came to satisfy the former fighters' sense of entitlement depended on a variety of causes. Crucially, in various case studies, a determinant factor consisted in political institutions' willingness and ability

⁵⁶ Julia Eichenberg, "Veterans' Associations," *1914-1918-Online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, accessed July 12, 2021, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/veterans_associations.

⁵⁷ Ángel Alcalde, "War Veterans as Transnational Actors: Politics, Alliances and Networks in the Interwar Period," *European Review of History – Revue Européenne d'Histoire*, 25, No. 3-4 (July 2018), 493-506; Bruno Cabanes, *La victoire endeuillée: La sortie de guerre des soldats français, 1918-1920* [The Grieving Victory: How French Soldiers Came Back from War] (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004), 5150, 6064-6104, Kindle edition; Antoine Prost, *In the Wake of War: 'Les Anciens Combattants' and French Society, 1914-1939*, trans. Helen McPheil (Providence: Berg Publishers, 1992), 58-61.

⁵⁸ Prost, *In the Wake of War*, 36, 38.

⁵⁹ Niall Barr, "Service Not Self: The British Legion, 1921-1939" (PhD Dissertation, University of St Andrews, 1994), 151-191, 249; Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 26-60.

to address ex-soldiers' claims, which mostly depended on ruling elites' ideological considerations and political savviness.

Another fundamental variable consisted in the determination shown by the former fighters' representatives in pressing institutions for rewards, in addition to their aptness at exploiting the "*political opportunity structure*"⁶⁰ they operated within. As surveyed above, in several countries, said representatives colluded with right-wing entities to force the state's hand into granting veterans their coveted status.

European polities tended to provide benefits to ex-combatants.⁶¹ Furthermore, they turned sectors of national communities of combat survivors into "*status group[s]*," - i.e., groups with claims that were officially acknowledged by the state - and, eventually, into "*corporate group[s]*" - in other words, organizations "*tied into the institutional structure of the surrounding society [and possessing] well-defined legal privileges.*"⁶² As a part of the latter process, governments often co-opted⁶³ veterans' associations, taking into account the demands articulated by the latter's leaders, involving these representatives in the crafting and carrying out of policies and supporting their grassroots initiatives, as seen above in the case of the old-age pensions afforded to French ex-enlistees.

Some governments even collaborated to recompense the fighters of the Great War by creating or promoting transnational forums to exchange details on social care provisions. With regard to disseminating knowledge on policies and technologies for reintegrating war disabled, in July 1917 a Permanent Inter-Allied Committee was created by the governments of Belgium, Great Britain, France, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Russia and Greece, the

⁶⁰ Crotty, Diamant, Edele, *The Politics*, 164.

⁶¹ Herbert Obinger, Klaus Petersen, Perter Starke, "Introduction: Studying the Warfare-Welfare Nexus," in *Warfare and Welfare: Military Conflict and Welfare State Development in Western Countries*, eds. Herbert Obinger, Klaus Petersen, Perter Starke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 21-22.

⁶² Edele, *Soviet Veterans*, 205, 217.

⁶³ I understand processes of "*co-optation*" to consist in the formal recognition, by a ruling system, of requests voiced by political actors contesting this system. See Patrick Coy, "Co-Optation," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political and Social Movements*: volume 1, eds. David Snow, Donatella Della Porta, Bert Klandermans (Malden: Wiley, 2013), 127.

United States and Japan. Later, British, Italian, French, Polish, German, Austrian, and Yugoslav authorities encouraged the International Labour Organization to provide a similar service. Moreover, under the aegis of the Organization, bilateral conventions were stipulated between Germany and Poland, Czechoslovakia and Austria, and Czechoslovakia and Germany to ensure that displaced war impaired were guaranteed medical assistance.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Poland and Czechoslovakia were enjoined by international treaties to care for the Habsburg veterans living within their boundaries.⁶⁵

Italy and Romania were part of this pattern of states expressing their gratitude to the men who had defended them in wartime. Under both parliamentary democracy and illiberal rule, these countries attempted to satisfy the claims to privileges forwarded to them by wide sectors of their respective war returnees' communities, developing ambitious social and cultural projects for this purpose. In doing so, establishments encountered various obstacles and, at times, fell short on their promises to satisfy the sense of merit harbored by discharged troops. The Italian Liberal elite was egregious in its failure to cater to the demands of a large and influential sector of the local fighters' community - the patriotic one - thereby frustrating the latter and unwittingly contributing to its own fall from power and replacement by Fascism. As for the Romanian parliamentary rulers of the 1920s and the 1930s, they occasioned discriminations against Habsburg war disabled, and, in the wake of the Great Depression, temporarily curtailed the rights of ex-combatants in general, causing considerable harm to the latter. Moreover, both Mussolini and Romania's three illiberal power structures came to discriminate against Jewish ex-militaries.

⁶⁴ Gildas Bregain, "Un problème national, interallié ou international? La difficile gestion transnationale des mutilés de guerre (1917-1923)" [A National, Inter-Allied or International Issue? The Complicated Transnational Management of the War Disabled (1917-1923)], *Revue d'Histoire de la Protection Sociale* [Historical Review of Social Protection], No. 9 (2016), 115-129.

⁶⁵ Natali Stegmann, Katrin Boekh, "Veterans and War Victims in Eastern Europe during the 20th Century: A Comparison," *Comparativ: Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* [Comparisons: Journal of Global History and Comparative Social Research], special issue, eds. Natali Stegmann, Katrin Boekh, 20, No. 5 (2010), 16.

At the same time, a high number of veterans in Italy and Romania were ultimately accorded, similarly to many of their European peers, a privileged socio-economic status, which afforded them several goods and services and a considerable measure of public regard. With regard to this dissertation's focus, it should be stressed that this status was enjoyed by nationalist war participants in both countries – these individuals amounting to an important sector of the Italian veterans' community and the near totality of the Romanian fighters' movement. With regard to the general policies of these states, it should be noticed that similarly to most nations on the continent, the Italian and Romanian kingdoms legally defined veterans as individuals who had fought in the First World War on these monarchies' side – although, importantly, providing some privileges like war pensions also to local former soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian armies.

In Italy, liberal governments passed four main social provisions on veterans, Mussolini's regime 32 major and minor ones,⁶⁶ the dictator's subsequent pro-Nazi puppet state two; in Romania, the parliamentary system passed seven basic laws in the course of the 1920s and 13 in the 1930s; King Charles II's regime two and the military dictatorship of Marshal Ion Antonescu ten. Paralleling developments elsewhere, Italian and Romanian governments made the arrangements mentioned above also by holding recurring consultations with the former fighters' delegates. Ultimately, it might be claimed that Italian and Romanian authorities were often inclined to satisfy their militaries' claims, an orientation that suggests acknowledging such demands was a necessary precondition for pacifying returnees and ensuring their collaboration.

Surveying European veterans' policies and "*veterans' politics*"⁶⁷ ultimately confirms the notion that, across the continent, the status of former fighters depended, first

⁶⁶ Giuseppe Colonna, ed., *Raccolta delle disposizioni di legge a favore degli ex combattenti* [Compendium of Laws for Former Fighters] (Siena: Stab. Tipografico Combattenti, 1954), 3-42.

⁶⁷ By "*veterans' politics*" I intend the veterans' "*unique role in [national] politics*." See Ortiz, "Introduction," 1.

of all, on national elites' willingness and ability to satisfy discharged troops' demands for such standing and, second, the negotiating skills displayed by and opportunities available to discharges' representatives. My analysis also suggests that the political orientations of numerous ex-enlistees were prominently affected by their desire to be satisfied in their sense of deserving. This dynamic is attested by the ability of various far-right organizations to secure militaries' support by catering to their wishes for recognition. Building on these considerations, it can be claimed that in Europe, following the First World War, a high number of returnees came to choose whether to support parliamentary or illiberal players based on these entities' readiness and ability to cater to their claims to rights. In other words, for many war survivors, the choice between democracy and dictatorship pragmatically came down to which system of government they deemed to be more accommodating towards their wishes.

This dissertation explores whether such dynamic was at play in the case of Italian and Romanian nationalist veterans between 1918 and 1945. To comprehensively investigate these issues, my key research questions are the following: to begin with, to what extent was the sense of entitlement discussed above central to the political activism of war participants' movements, within the considered time span – in other words, did most of the affiliates to these organizations make its satisfaction a priority of theirs, and did they accord support to those political forces which acknowledged their claims to a unique socio-economic position and an official role as custodians of the fatherland? If so, what specific kinds of benefits did these claimants ask for? Moreover, which political forces did the associations and movements representing these former men in uniform support in the attempt to see their members' sense of entitlement satisfied? Moreover, what policies did the various political regimes in power in Italy and Romania implement to pacify the nationalist ex-combatants' groups and to harness their support? To what degree were these

policies successful, and did they represent a crucial reason for war survivors to collaborate with or to reject said powerholders?

By answering these questions, the dissertation contributes to analyzing the political preferences of Italian and Romanian nationalist veterans, between 1918 and World War Two. Specifically, it helps ascertain the reasons numerous Italian veterans rejected their country's liberal political system and came to cooperate with Mussolini, while a high number of their Romanian counterparts accepted a pluralist political system. Additionally, this study aids in understanding how, during the Second World War, the Italian and Romanian dictatorships managed to ensure a sizeable degree of cooperation on behalf of their national communities of war survivors.

Ultimately, my research makes various significant contributions to the historiographies of First World War veterans and post-1918 right-wing illiberalism in Italy and Romania. To begin with, it contributes to the development of a comprehensive political history of Italian and Romanian ex-soldiers. This kind of historical survey is currently almost entirely absent for the Romanian case study, while also still incomplete for the Italian one, especially concerning the public activities undertaken by the latter country's ex-combatants in the 1930s and during the Second World War. Second, my inquiry provides an extensive survey of Italian and Romanian state veterans' policies between 1918 and 1945, topics which are yet to be examined in many regards. While this kind of survey is rather incomplete in the case of Romania, a comprehensive analysis of such policies for the years between the mid-1920s and the mid-1940s is still to be undertaken for the Italian case study. In particular, with regard to both contexts, it is still necessary to determine the ways these provisions evolved in time, in addition to determining which national and transnational factors (such as the local repercussions of the Great Depression) prompted said shifts.

Third, my study provides an innovative reading of former military personnel's activism, especially by positing that a sense of entitlement from wartime service was a determinant factor in this militancy. This theoretical approach has not been yet applied to the case study of Romania, while it has been only partially employed for the Italian one. With regard to the latter, several studies suggest that associated patriotic fighters lent authoritativeness to Mussolini beginning in the early-to-mid-1920s, essentially as a way of receiving benefits from him. At the same time, it is yet to be thoroughly verified whether or not this wish continuously acted as the main incentive for organized patriotic fighters to cooperate with the Fascist regime. Moreover, it is still unclear to what extent the dictatorship championed the claims of ex-combatants in the long run.

With regard to providing innovative insights into the ways illiberalism secured and preserved backing in Italy and Romania, my research findings indicate that this phenomenon made significant inroads among veterans by capitalizing on the shortcomings of democratic politicians – namely, the latter's inability or unwillingness to advocate for the interests of former fighters. In highlighting this dynamic, my work helps confirm the contentions voiced by Paxton and Riley, who state that Italian Fascism secured its following mainly by sponsoring social groups that felt inadequately represented by other organizations.⁶⁸

As a matter of fact, my study indicates that, in interwar Romania, right-wing forces similarly capitalized on parliamentary elites' limitations in championing the needs and aspirations of civil society sectors. They brought various war returnees to their side by exploiting weaknesses in state provisions for the latter – although, unlike in Italy, these anti-democratic players were ultimately undermined by the fact that local parliamentary

⁶⁸ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 55-86; Dylan Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe: Italy, Spain and Romania, 1870-1945* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 1-22.

governments eventually rectified their mistakes. As for the Romanian authoritarian rulers of 1938-1944, it should be stressed that, although they could not exploit a pre-existing context of acute veterans' discontent, unlike Mussolini, they still secured a relevant degree of support from demobilized troops' associations by striving – with the partial exception of the “*National Legionary State*”⁶⁹ - to replicate previous rulers' policies.

Ultimately, this inquiry suggests that Italian and Romanian nationalist veterans' political proclivities depended, to a relevant degree, on post-war factors such as the repercussions of state policymaking. My findings also help make the case that many patriotic ex-combatants' approval of anti-democratic trends was largely based on short-term factors, namely whether parliamentary governments proved capable of satisfying these ex-soldiers' sense of entitlement through economic, symbolic, and political concessions. Finally, my research contributes to scholarly claims that, in interwar Europe, authoritarian developments, far from being inevitable, took place mainly as the result of specific contingencies, namely the miscalculations of parliamentary elites.⁷⁰ In attesting to the validity of these academic perspectives, my research transcends established theoretical paradigms on ex-combatants' extremism, proposing that national political cultures and brutalizing war experiences were not its principal ‘triggers.’

0.2 Comparing and Connecting Italy and Romania

Having outlined the key historical dynamics examined by this dissertation, it is necessary to detail the rationale for comparing, in a synchronic manner, the ways they were at work

⁶⁹ Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sincera a poporului român* [A Truthful History of the Romanian People] (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic, 2008), 375.

⁷⁰ Nancy Bermeo, *Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times: The Citizenry and the Breakdown of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 21-64; Giovanni Capoccia, *Defending Democracy: Reactions to Extremism in Interwar Europe* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 3-4.

in Italy and Romania. Furthermore, as my work will also explore these two case studies with regard to some of the synchronic connections – i.e., transnational contacts between Italian and Romanian organizations and the transmission of political and ideological values and practices from one country to the other - they held to each other, it should be explained how examining these links will further validate the points the dissertation will make through the use of comparisons.

The central assumption underpinning my comparison consists in the belief that in Italy and Romania, between 1918 and 1945, numerous (albeit not all) nationalist First World War soldiers were primarily influenced, in their political allegiances, by post-war factors, i.e., the claims to rights mentioned above. Specifically, most members of the patriotic former fighters' associations and movements supported mainly those political actors who promised to satisfy their claims to benefits. Hence, they chose, either constantly or at least at one point in time, to back democratic or authoritarian political entities depending on which of these actors catered more consistently to them. Based on this observation, comparing Italian veterans to their Romanian counterparts might prove stimulating in terms of promoting innovative scholarly perspectives on the breakdown of democracy in Europe during the interwar era. First of all, comparing national case studies from Southern Europe and Central-Eastern Europe might be a useful corrective to historical narratives that promote simplistic notions of regional political 'special paths.' Specifically, this joint analysis helps highlight that, on the contrary, similar clusters of factors shaped radicalizing processes occurring in different areas of this continent.

Second, juxtaposing analyses of my selected case studies brings attention to the fact that, between the Two World Wars, European discharged military personnel tended to embrace right-wing extremism for a variety of causes beyond feeling frustrated by military defeat in the Great War or by diplomatic tensions imperiling or downsizing post-war

national borders – the latter two catalysts having already received ample academic scrutiny. My study indicates that returnees tended to accept and promote anti-democratic ideals even in victorious nations, not just in defeated ones – albeit perhaps less virulently than in the latter. It also stresses that in countries witnessing ongoing territorial disputes in the aftermath of the conflict - such as Italy in the early 1920s, with its unfulfilled claims over territories facing the Eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, a situation that was commonly portrayed by the kingdom's chauvinists as a case of 'mutilated victory' (*vittoria mutilata*) – former fighters might have been outraged by other controversies than just this one. As a matter of fact, comparing the Italian case study - a glaring and dramatic example of demobilized military personnel coming to accept extremism as a result of a frustrated sense of entitlement - with the Romanian one - a situation in which discharged troops, for the most part, were satisfied in their claims to benefits, hence pacified - effectively points out that European ex-militaries were often prone to take up anti-parliamentary ideals as a result of being neglected in their demands for compensations.

Finally, my comparative research shows that the men who returned from the battlefield were capable of taking up uncompromising stances long after the end of the war of 1914-1918, at a time we might instead assume they had settled down and had become inactive. In other words, my comparisons show that issues such as territorial losses and contested borders, while essential catalysts for the seditiousness and intolerance displayed by the men who had served in the Great War, were not the only incentives for these phenomena. As a matter of fact, my joint analyses of the Italian and Romanian case studies indicate that droves of ex-enlistees were ready to throw in their lot with the right for reasons unrelated to the military outcomes of the Great War and the initial wave of international tensions posthumously occasioned by this military clash.

What aspects of these two national case studies does this dissertation compare? It should be noted that Italy and Romania presented, within the considered time span, both differences and similarities, in terms of general developments. In the interwar era, these countries' public lives differed to a considerable degree. Summing up, both kingdoms were liberal democracies until 1922, Italy being ruled by a succession of governments headed by the local Liberal party, Romania being governed mainly by the populist general Alexandru Averescu. However, in that year, these countries' political trajectories began differing sharply, as in Italy Mussolini's Fascist movement came to power and gradually established a dictatorial regime which would last until the middle of the Second World War. On the other hand, Romania remained a democracy until 1937 – although an increasingly fragile one,⁷¹ to be sure. In the 1920s, the Romanian kingdom was helmed in turn by Averescu, the local Liberals, and the National Peasant Party. In the subsequent decade, the PNT stopped ruling in 1933, replaced, until 1937, by the Liberals. After this year, an illiberal system of government was instated by King Charles II, which lasted until 1940.

During the Second World War, the political paths of these kingdoms came to resemble each other again, as Italy and Romania were both ruled by repressive regimes. For most of this conflict, Mussolini remained at the helm of the Italian nation and, in 1940, entered the second global conflagration on the side of the Axis. He remained in power until 1943, when he was deposed and arrested by King Victor Emmanuel III after a series of military reversals. Once freed from captivity by a Nazi commando, he headed the pro-German Italian Social Republic (*Repubblica Sociale Italiana*; RSI), in Central-Northern Italy, between 1943 and 1945, while the growing part of Italy outside this republic's control was occupied by the Allies.

⁷¹ Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 278-279, 284.

On the other hand, in Romania, King Charles' rule was replaced in 1940 by a hybrid fascist and military dictatorship. The following year, the military leader who jointly ruled the country with the fascists, General Ion Antonescu, neutralized his political partners and began wielding power by himself, soon after entering World War Two on the side of the Axis. Like the Italian dictator, he was deposed by his own monarch, Michael I, once Romania became majorly strained by its fighting effort, in 1944. Ultimately, both Italy and Romania spent most of the second global conflict under illiberal control.

As can be seen above, Italy and Romania were ultimately different in their power structures in the interwar era, while resembling each other, in this regard, at the time of the war of 1939-1945. Both the differences and similarities discussed earlier allow for fruitful comparisons, which help prove the three key assumptions underpinning my analysis, which are set out in detail below.

1. In Italy and Romania, between 1918 and 1945, the majority of the followers of the local nationalist returnees' groups and movements were influenced by their sense of entitlement from wartime military service. The latter prominently affected these adherents' political orientations, albeit to varying degrees. Despite the varied intensities of this influence, in the long run most affiliates to these organizations supported those political forces that advocated a certain set of provisions for them, i.e., policies which satisfied their claims to a special status and public role, thereby promoting their personal and ideological interests alike.
2. The extent to which political parties and regimes addressed the claims to benefits that were prompted by this sense of entitlement significantly impacted these movements' stances towards said political players, leading the movements

to buttress either democratic or authoritarian trends. In other words, the ways parliamentary and anti-liberal entities positioned themselves towards former fighters' requests affected their relationships with said potential backers.

3. Almost all Italian and Romanian governments attempted,⁷² with different degrees of commitment and success, to cater to associated war returnees' requests for provisions, to curry favor with them.

Furthermore, my comparison defines the crucial independent variable that prompted many Italian and Romanian nationalist former fighters to accept their respective countries' general political developments. Specifically, this joint evaluation emphasizes the reasons a high number of Italian veterans supported Mussolini's autocracy and, conversely, many Romanian ones went with parliamentary democracy between the two World Wars, while also helping understand why scores of former fighters in both countries collaborated with dictatorship during the Second World War. To explain divergent and convergent historical outcomes, I will essentially use the "*method[s] of crucial agreement*" and "*of crucial difference*:"⁷³ analyzing the Italian and Romanian case studies in the search of a manifest similarity, which might have led to convergent outcomes in both contexts, or conversely, a significant difference which might have entailed divergent results in these two settings.

⁷² It appears the early Communist cabinets of Romania were not interested in securing the cooperation of the local former fighters' movement, as attested by their detention of some of the latter's leaders. See Cazacu, "Victor Cădere," 18-19; J. Tricot, "Victor Gomoiu and the Cantacuzène Commission," *Bulletin of the Transylvania University of Braşov*, 6, No. 51 (2009), 116.

⁷³ Diego Olstein, *Thinking History Globally* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 69.

My dissertation opens with a ‘synchronic,’⁷⁴ ‘generalizing’⁷⁵ and ‘contrast-oriented’⁷⁶ comparison between Italy and Romania, pertaining to the interwar era. It is synchronic since it takes in account events taking place simultaneously. Furthermore, it is contrast-oriented as it surveys two analogous case studies to explain the reasons numerous Italian nationalist fighters came to reject liberal democracy - unlike Romanian ones, who mostly accepted it. More in detail, it explores the liberal political systems and national societies of my chosen units of analysis, for the early aftermath of the First World War (1918-1922) - individuating one crucial difference between these otherwise similar contexts.

As a matter of fact, it might be stressed that these two realms exhibited a number of similarities even before the Great War. To begin with, in both countries, in the period between their respective first stages of national unification (1859; 1861) and the end of World War One, various collective actors had hoped to rise up in the ranks of local and national social pyramids, or at the very least to preserve their current standing from intrasocietal competition and negative effects of public policymaking. Their ranks included peasants who desired to obtain private arable land, workers who wished for higher salaries and better working conditions, and members of the middle classes who wanted to acquire a higher social and economic status, or at least hold onto their existing one.⁷⁷

These aspirations even prompted such individuals to take up uncompromising stances. Before the First World War, the Romanian kingdom’s peasantry had agitated for

⁷⁴ ‘Synchronic’ historical comparisons – i.e., comparisons drawn between units of analysis sharing the same timeframe – emphasize the endogenous factors determining these units’ convergent or divergent features. See Olstein, *Thinking*, 62-67.

⁷⁵ ‘Generalizing’ comparisons delineate the factors leading to convergences between units of analysis, by emphasizing crucial similarities between these units. See Olstein, *Thinking*, 68-70.

⁷⁶ ‘Contrast-oriented’ comparisons delineate the factors leading to divergences between units of analysis, by emphasizing crucial differences between these units. See Olstein, *Thinking*, 68-70.

⁷⁷ Keith Hitchins, *Rumania: 1866-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 107, 118, 124, 135, 172-176; Martin Clark, *Modern Italy: 1871 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2014), 78-82, 362-364, 445-446, Kindle edition.

the concession of land, to the extent of giving rise to a massive revolt in 1907.⁷⁸ In Italy, sectors of the middle class had begun flirting with integral nationalism to protect their place in society from perceived threats from Socialism. In Sicily, the lower classes had given rise to widespread riots to break up large landed estates in 1893-1894, and workers and peasants had temporarily insurged in major cities in 1914.⁷⁹ It is certain that many of these status-minded individuals would take up arms in the first global conflagration and later exploit their military record as a resource to exact rewards from public institutions, with a view to elevating or buttressing their standing.

Another similarity between Italy and Romania in this period consisted in the flourishing of mass nationalist movements⁸⁰ – another development that would influence soldiers of the First World War in both countries, undoubtedly prompting many of these individuals to disseminate patriotic values among their fellow countrymen. Finally, pre-1918 Italy and Romania were also similar in institutional and political terms: both were ‘young’ nation-states, each one having been jointly ruled, until the end of the Great War, by a monarch and an oligarchic parliamentary elite. As will be shown below, in wartime, Italian and Romanian elites motivated their armed forces also by promising to grant troops various kinds of material and symbolic recompenses during and after this military clash. After the cessation of hostilities, both countries underwent a dramatic expansion of popular suffrage, mass parties coming to represent many of the newly enfranchised citizens.

Ultimately, the various similarities listed above help argue for implementing a contrast-oriented comparison between Italy and Romania for the post-World War One era. First of all, they help stress that divergences in Italian and Romanian nationalist veterans’

⁷⁸ Philip Eidelberg, *The Great Rumanian Peasant Revolt of 1907: Origins of a Modern Jacquerie* (Leiden: E.G. Brill, 1974), 190-228.

⁷⁹ Clark, *Modern Italy*, 332-333, 476, 558-559; Mario Isnenghi, *Il mito della Grande Guerra* [The Myth of the Great War] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014), 13-25.

⁸⁰ Roland Clark, “European Fascists and Local Activists: Romania’s Legion of the Archangel Michael (1922-1938)” (PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2012), 56-61; Clark, *Modern Italy*, 474-482.

conduct, between 1918 and 1922, derived mainly from post-war factors, among them the fact that parliamentary parties in the two nations experienced different degrees of accomplishment in addressing requests forwarded to them by former fighters – essentially a failure, in the case of liberal Italy, and relative success, in the case of Romania. Crucially, these differing degrees of success played a substantial part in the fact that Italian and Romanian war returnees developed divergent political conducts – endorsement of Fascism, in the former case, and acceptance or, at least, toleration of democracy, in the latter.

As for comparing events in 1923-1939, this joint analysis is of a generalizing variety, as it underlines similar developments occurring in Italy and Romania. Specifically, it indicates that in both countries – notwithstanding the different kinds of regimes in place - governments managed to satisfy the claims to benefits articulated by patriotic enlistees' movements and associations to a relevant degree. Crucially, the comparison shows that, by virtue of these accomplishments, the Italian dictatorship and the Romanian parliamentary system managed to preserve most of the support they had won among former militaries in the course of the 1920s. As for the Second World War, my dissertation enacts another synchronic and generalizing comparison. Specifically, it surveys the ways both nations' institutional systems – which were authoritarian for most of this conflict's time span - held onto the support of the nationalist ex-soldiers' organizations, highlighting that these systems mostly did so by implementing similar veterans' policies.

Importantly, while the analysis for the years 1918-1922 aids in understanding why former army recruits might have taken up extremism *against democracy* to ensure they were recompensed according to their wishes, the remaining part of the dissertation points out how returnees living under repressive rule might radicalize, for the same purposes, *into following the directives of their rulers* – in other words, into helping legitimize the latter and even into enforcing some of their policies - albeit often to a limited degree. Generally,

these contrast-oriented and generalizing comparisons stress that, for the majority of the members of the patriotic ex-combatants' groups, the choice between supporting democracy or authoritarianism depended, to a great degree, on being satisfied in their sense of entitlement.

It should be noticed that, by pointing out the relevance of veterans' claims to rights, my comparisons act both in a "*heuristic*" and "*paradigmatic*" manner. With regard to the former mode of inquiry, the more-widely researched case study (Italy) is used to open up and explain the less-widely studied one (Romania); with regard to the latter kind of investigation, the less-analyzed instance, by bringing to the fore innovative research perspectives, helps uncover unexamined features of the more well-known one.

Finally, my research also focuses on some significant synchronic connections binding these two case studies, in a manner which compliments my comparative approach on the model of an increasingly practiced blend of diverse methodologies. This additional focus is beckoned by the nature of my principal investigative strategy – i.e., comparing Italy and Romania as national units of analysis. While the latter strategy is useful in individuating primary influences originating within the boundaries of these units,⁸¹ it is still necessary to ascertain whether factors hailing from outside of the latter's limits – in other words, transnational stimuli - also prominently affected ex-servicemen's tendency to support those organizations and polities acknowledging their claims to benefits.

My study hence delineates two 'exogenous' factors that might have potentially complemented to a sizeable extent, in the interwar era, the 'endogenous' dynamics discussed earlier. To begin with, it looks at Italian antifascist exiles' attempts at swaying, through their propaganda, the political loyalties of those compatriots living in the motherland who were collaborating with the Blackshirts. Specifically, the dissertation

⁸¹ Olstein, *Thinking*, 72, 84-86, 92-97.

investigates whether, following Fascism's consolidation, opponents of the latter, operating from outside of Italy, managed to capture the support of at least some Italian-based former fighters by exploiting hypothetical shortcomings in Mussolini's system of rewards.

The second issue addressed in these sections is the possibility that transnational “*transfers*”⁸² of political ideals and practices took place from Fascist Italy – and, to a lesser degree, also from Nazi Germany - to democratic Romania. More in detail, my work examines whether Romanian ex-combatants – similarly to their counterparts in other European countries⁸³ - might have been encouraged to embrace anti-parliamentary trends by learning about and imitating the mobilization of former soldiers deployed by Italian Fascism and Hitlerian Nazism, essentially attempting to replicate these militant tactics to achieve their own goals.

Ultimately, my research on said transnational connections reinforces the key conclusions drawn by my comparisons, as it appears the aforementioned exogenous factors failed to significantly affect the main political dynamic investigated by my dissertation. This failure depended mostly on the fact that, as both the Italian Fascist regime and the Romanian parliamentary democracy successfully catered to the desire for privileges harbored by most adherents of former fighters' movements, the majority of associated veterans in these countries were not open to foreign anti-status quo suggestions. Notably, antifascists based outside of Italy failed to diverge former militaries living in the fatherland from cooperating with Fascism, their lack of success being prompted, to a degree, by the fact that Mussolini's autocracy at the time was effectively addressing needs and aspirations championed by the ex-enlistees' associations, ingratiating itself to them. As a matter of

⁸² Michael Werner, Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity,” *History and Theory*, 45, No. 1 (February 2006), 39.

⁸³ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 102-111, 162-182; Brian Jenkins, Chris Millington, *France and Fascism: February 1934 and the Dynamics of Political Crisis* (London: Routledge, 2015), 33-35, 169-170; Victor Lundberg, “Within the Fascist World of Work: Sven Olov Lindholm, Ernst Jünger and the Pursuit of Proletarian Fascism in Sweden, 1933-1945,” *New Political Ideas*, 199, 207, 209-214.

fact, the antifascists' propaganda contained few or no attempts to discredit the Blackshirts' veterans' policies, a strategy that indirectly attests to the latter's (temporary) effectiveness.

Similarly, in Romania, only a reduced sector of the local ex-combatants' community was radicalized by the Italian and German models of authoritarian veterans' politics. In other words, this variety of fascist political transfer was rather limited in its impact. Importantly, Romanian former fighters' unwillingness to follow these foreign examples came down to the fact that many of them were only superficially and temporarily interested in them. They mostly aimed to use fascist tactics to pressure their kingdom into granting them the recompenses they sought, at times when public institutions were not catering to their wishes. Consequently, as the Romanian parliamentary system eventually managed to acknowledge the war returnees' rights extensively, the transnational fascist notion of a violent seizure of power on behalf of ex-enlistees lost even its initial limited appeal. To sum up, with regard to my research findings, the transnational connections investigated by this dissertation, while not especially impactful in and of themselves, should be ultimately taken into account, as they indirectly support the validity of my work's main thesis, which I demonstrate through my comparative approach.

0.3 Main Social and Political Actors under Consideration

As mentioned earlier, my dissertation focuses mainly on two kinds of historical actors: on the one hand, patriotic Great War soldiers militating within associations and movements representing their interests; on the other, political organizations and institutions operating in Italy and Romania, between 1918 and 1945.

Studying the relationships and activities of these various bodies is helpful in uncovering the main influences over associated former Italian and Romanian fighters. To

be sure, this focus is limited, leaving out high percentages of ex-combatants living in these European countries. After all, on the one hand Italian and Romanian politically active ex-militaries subscribed to several ideologies, besides nationalism, while many others forsook political activism wholesale. It is actually challenging to investigate the influences shaping most Italian and Romanian World War One fighters, as they generally tended to embrace a wide variety of causes, never entirely banding together within the same collective bodies. On the other hand, not all the returnees of these kingdoms who took up political causes worked in veterans' associations.

Nevertheless, my analytical scope is representative of a multitude of veterans living in these countries. As a matter of fact, patriotic ex-militaries' groups were popular and prominent in both kingdoms. After all, many men who had been enlisted in these countries' armed forces espoused ideas that were congruent with such organizations' priorities, for instance wishing to pressure, through the latter, institutions and societies into purportedly strengthening their fatherland. It should be noted that, in Romania, nationalists represented the near totality of the local ex-combatants' movement's membership, although a small faction of communist sympathizers eventually emerged in the late 1930s. As for Italy, in addition to nationalists, at least three other kinds of ideologically inclined ex-warriors were rather publicly visible between 1918 and the consolidation of Mussolini's rule: Socialist, Communist and Catholic ones. At the same time, on the whole, patriotic veterans' associations enjoyed a higher following than their leftist and Catholic rivals.

As mentioned above, my focus is also productive inasmuch as it helps study veterans' political activities in a long-term perspective, bearing in mind that Italian and Romanian repressive governments allowed these individuals to continue carrying out their activities, albeit in a heavily regulated manner. On the other hand, these rulers gradually prevented non-nationalist returnees from voicing their ideas and pursuing their public

agendas. While these silenced men might have kept on covertly working towards their aims, their very secrecy in doing so makes it difficult to investigate the trajectories of their political activism in the long run. For instance, we know that, in the interwar era, some Italian leftist war participants kept on opposing the Blackshirts even after the latter suppressed the former's organizations, as these antifascists moved abroad and continued to wage this struggle from their adoptive countries. It is, however, more difficult to ascertain whether antifascist ex-combatants who lived in Italy, at the time, contested Fascist rule. By focusing on those groups of demobilized men who continuously engaged in public affairs within the time span under consideration, my methodological strategy represents a viable way of ascertaining which stimuli shaped the political proclivities of sizeable segments of the Italian and Romanian returnees' communities in the long run.

To investigate the latter issue, my study details the goals espoused by former fighters' movements, in addition to examining the alliances these bodies built with specific collective actors to achieve their objectives. It should be observed that, as in both Italy and Romania veterans' movements represented high numbers of returnees, my study contributes to ascertaining and assessing the political orientations of a range of former members of different kinds of troops, such as privates, officers, war volunteers, and shock troops. More in general, my focus on veterans' organizations represents an insightful research strategy whether we generally understand ex-combatants to be a self-mobilized "*imagined community*" or a social group categorized and drawn together by the prescriptions of official legislation.⁸⁴ Be it as it may, in Italy and Romania, these associations and movements were crucial for First World veterans' participation in public affairs, as they articulated the claims of scores of combat survivors. Hence, they were at all times publicly relevant.

⁸⁴ Edele, *Soviet Veterans*, 11-12.

With regard to the defining features of the returnees' associations surveyed in this inquiry, the latter focuses upon those which represented able-bodied or disabled and mutilated former soldiers; which promoted different kinds of nationalist ideologies; that operated as state-controlled, private, or mixed bodies. Generally, this investigation takes into account large-scale associations, which enjoyed conspicuous memberships, although it also looks at smaller ones, in those instances the latter might provide answers to its main research questions. For Italy, I consider chiefly the war impaired's association known as the ANMIG; the National Association of Fighters (*Associazione Nazionale Combattenti*; ANC); the National Association of War Volunteers (*Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra*; ANVG); and the major group which gathered the wartime elite shock troops known as 'Daring Ones' (*Arditi*), i.e., the National Federation of Italian Daring Ones (*Federazione Nazionale fra gli Arditi d'Italia*; FNAI).

For Romania, a case study denoted by a much more fragmented landscape of veterans' associations, I look primarily at the able-bodied ex-soldiers' group known as the UNAL; the Union of Reserve and Retired Officers (*Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva și în Retragere*; UORR); the Union of Romanian Former Volunteers (*Uniunea Foștilor Voluntari Români*; UFVR); the "War Disabled" Society (*Societatea "Invalizii din Război"*) and the Society of Romanian War Mutilated and Disabled (*Societatea Mutilaților-Invalizi din Război din România*; SMIR). In scrutinizing all these groups, my study focuses generally on the most prominent personalities operating within them, i.e., their leaders, with a particular emphasis on ANMIG President Carlo Delcroix, ANC President Amilcare Rossi and UNAL President Virgil Serdaru. My focus on the associations' upper echelons is dictated by the breadth of available sources detailing these personalities' actions. By studying such materials, it is possible to gauge the ways political players positioned themselves towards the veterans' associations.

An inevitable consequence of this emphasis on ex-soldiers' movements is that my dissertation looks mostly at former military personnel who found themselves on the winning side of the First World War while casting only a cursory glance to defeated ones. This limited focus is an inevitable effect of my research strategy, as victor war returnees were, for the most part, the only ones allowed to organize publicly by the Italian and Romanian kingdoms. Nevertheless, to the extent that this is possible, I also survey state provisions aimed at former recruits of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces living in both countries, in addition to these policies' impact on their intended beneficiaries.

In concrete terms, what kind of benefits were sought by the members of Italian and Romanian discharges' movements? First of all, these combat survivors wished for a variety of material recompenses: goods and services, such as plots of arable land, war and military pensions, and preferential hirings in the civil service and private companies – these job placements being asked for to a greater degree by Italian returnees, probably due to the comparatively more urbanized state of their kingdom.⁸⁵ In the case of the Italian island of Sardinia, local former military personnel also tended to ask for the modernization of this area's infrastructure, to improve its economy and services. Importantly, patriotic former fighters in both Italy and Romania generally wanted to be placed at the top of their respective states' "*hierarch[ies] of sacrifice*,"⁸⁶ hence being the main beneficiaries of state veterans' policies.

In terms of symbolic rewards, demobilized soldiers wanted to be included in official patriotic rituals and receive military decorations to be granted esteem on behalf of public authorities and the population. Furthermore, to fulfill their self-ascribed mission as guardians of the nation, they desired to be given official support – in other words, goods,

⁸⁵ By 1950, 9,5% of the Italian population lived in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, compared to 1,5% of the Romanian population for the same year. See United Nations, *Growth of the World's Urban and Rural Population, 1920-2000* (New York: United Nations Publication, 1969), 100.

⁸⁶ Mark Cornwall, "Introduction: A Conflicted and Divided Habsburg Memory," *Sacrifice and Rebirth*, 3.

services, and esteem - for their own patriotic-pedagogic initiatives: these included publishing pamphlets and periodicals, burying dead comrades in arms within the framework of official and grassroots ceremonies and training youth to their own values and military practices. Former fighters also wished to be included in state organizations for youth education, to help carry out the latter task.

Finally, these activists asked for financial and logistical assistance in performing public diplomacy activities outside of their countries, chiefly through transnational ex-combatants' forums. As for Romanian ex-warriors, they wished to be aided in working in these environments for an additional purpose, using such forums to pressure their own governments into providing them with more conspicuous material concessions.

To ascertain which politicians were supported by the fighters' associations and movements, my dissertation surveys the latter's stances towards the main organizations located across the Italian and Romanian political spectrums, during the entire time span under consideration. This kind of analysis is extended to authoritarian regimes, as my study ascertains which political actors, within these polities, became the preferential referents of ex-combatants' groups. Most notably, under Italian Fascism veterans' representatives lobbied chiefly Mussolini, while entertaining a more ambiguous relationship to the Fascist party. Under the Romanian National Legionary State, war returnees struck an alliance with General Antonescu, all while behaving in a more distant manner towards the officer's fascist partners in command. For all kinds of political systems under consideration, my inquiry investigates the lobbying strategies and tactics that the veterans' delegates implemented, in addition to the ways they struck partnerships with patrons and preserved such ties through time.

Crucially, my analysis broadly surveys the ways these alliances ended up modifying the beliefs of former fighters who subscribed to them, in addition to how they impacted the

political fortunes of the ex-militaries' patrons. It should be stressed, in the latter respect, that organized nationalist veterans, while operating mainly as legal and social actors, promoted certain political and ideological goals, hence eventually backed or opposed specific parties and governments, ultimately affecting national and European collective developments.

Finally, my research takes into account the modalities through which the Italian and Romanian states rewarded former army recruits, assessing specifically the extent their provisions satisfied the core requests forwarded to them by ex-combatants. In doing so, it assesses material recompenses from a quantitative point of view, whenever possible, and ascertains the inclusiveness of state patriotic ceremonies and war commemorations – determining whether war survivors felt they were allowed to adequately participate in these events, even though they were usually unable to determine their overall staging and content.

0.4 Sources

To analyze the Italian and Romanian case studies, my dissertation employs a wide array of primary sources, culled from public archives and libraries in Italy, Romania, Great Britain, and France. To ascertain the main goals which were championed by associated ex-enlistees, in addition to evaluating these movements' political affiliations, my study surveys the periodicals they printed, personal memoirs and pamphlets written by prominent organizers and activists, yearbooks of war participants' groups, and reports authored by law enforcement agencies and secret services. Most of the primary sources I have collected on my Romanian case study have not been employed, as of yet, in scholarly research. Similarly, the war survivors' periodicals printed under Mussolini represent innovative

research materials, as they have hitherto rarely been used in academic investigations on Fascism.

Police and secret service reports employed in this dissertation are particularly useful in developing qualified assessments of Italian and Romanian returnees' political moods, mindsets, and preferences, in the absence of more precise methods of investigating these matters, such as public opinion surveys. These accounts also help put together rounded evaluations of state veterans' policies, contributing to gauging former fighters' reactions to these provisions.

The various materials listed above are available at archives and libraries located in Italy and Romania. First of all, I found various among these documents in Rome, at the Central State Archive (*Archivio Centrale dello Stato*; ACS), the Motherhouse of the War Mutilated and Disabled (*Casa Madre dei Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra*; CMMIG), the Library of Modern and Contemporary History (*Biblioteca di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea*; BSMC) and the Alexandrine University Library (*Biblioteca Universitaria Alessandrina*; BUA).

Second, I consulted periodicals, memoirs, and pamphlets at the Central National Library of Florence (*Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze*). Third, I found various sources of interest in Bucharest, at the Central Historical National Archives (*Arhive Naționale Istorice Centrale*; ANIC), the National Council for the Investigation of the Security Archives (*Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității*; CNSAS) and its library, the Romanian National Military Archives (*Arhive Militare Naționale Române*; AMNR), the Library of the Romanian Academy (*Biblioteca Academiei Române*) and the University Central Library "Carol I" (*Biblioteca Centrală Universitară "Carol I"*; BCU). The University Central Library "Mihai Eminescu" of Iași (*Biblioteca Centrală Universitară „Mihai Eminescu” Iași*) proved similarly useful in this regard.

To analyze and assess, in terms of effectiveness, the policies which Italian and Romanian statesmen implemented to satisfy the claims of the veterans' movements, I studied several additional sources: periodicals published by ex-enlistees' associations, private letters, legal texts, transcripts of congresses held by the aforementioned groups, brochures detailing social and cultural policies and confidential reports compiled by former militaries, politicians and several kinds of public authorities. I gathered these materials from archives and libraries situated in Italy, Romania, Great Britain, and France. I conducted my research in Rome, at the ACS, the CMMIG – in particular having benefitted from the opportunity to investigate, at the latter, a recently-unveiled archival fund including transcripts of ANMIG national congresses, previously held at this association's chapter in the city of Arezzo - the BSMC and the Historical-Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri*). Additionally, I visited the Forlì Historical Institute of the Resistance and the Contemporary Age (*Istituto Storico della Resistenza e dell'Età Contemporanea di Forlì*). At said institute I consulted documents which were authored by this city's chapter of one of the main Italian war participants' associations, the National Association of Fighters.

Furthermore, I studied sources available in Bucharest, at the ANIC, the CNSAS, the AMNR, the BCU, the Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Arhiva Diplomatică ale Ministerului Afacerilor Externe*). Additionally, in London, I read the news bulletin of one of the interwar era's main transnational veterans' forums, the Inter-Allied Federation of Former Fighters (*Fédération Interalliée Des Anciens Combattants*; FIDAC), at the British Library. Likewise, I consulted the bulletin of another forum of this kind, the International Conference of Associations of War Mutilated and Former Fighters (*Conférence Internationale des Associations des Mutilés de Guerre et Anciens Combattants*; CIAMAC), at the Library of the Paris Institute of Political Studies

(*Bibliothèque de l'Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris*). Moreover, I looked at periodicals available at the Tuscan Historical Institute of the Resistance and the Contemporary Age (*Istituto Storico Toscano della Resistenza e dell'Età Contemporanea*) and the Historical Studies Foundation “Filippo Turati” (*Fondazione di Studi Storici “Filippo Turati”*), in Florence. Finally, I accessed several online collections of periodicals, specifically the Bucharest Digital Library (*Biblioteca Digitală a Bucureștilor*) and the online archives of the BUA and the Italian dailies *The Evening Messenger (Il Corriere della Sera)* and *The Messenger (Il Messaggero)*.

0.5 Structure

Comparing the Italian and Romanian case studies allows appreciating the degrees of success that each country's institutions encountered in addressing the wishes of the old local soldiers. For this purpose, my analysis performs a set of synchronic comparisons, between these two contexts, for the period between 1918 and 1945. Chapter One enacts contrast-oriented and generalizing comparisons for the years between 1918 and 1928. The first kind of comparison helps explain the reasons the Romanian ex-servicemen's movement accepted the local parliamentary system, while its Italian counterpart, for the most part, came to accept the Fascist autocracy. My joint analysis highlights how, in this decade, Romanian democracy implemented specific policies which ensured that it was accepted by many of the local veterans. At the same time, it underscores how the Italian liberal system's failure to implement a similar set of provisions was crucial for its eventual loss of legitimacy among numerous nationalist returnees, who in turn radicalized against it, to seize what they believed they deserved.

With regard to the generalizing comparison for the years between 1923 and 1928, this examination details how the Fascist dictatorship gained the support of these disaffected discharges, by handing out to them the benefits which its liberal predecessors had not been able to provide. It also highlights the similarities between the successful initiatives of the Romanian democracy and Mussolini's repressive polity. Additionally, a section of this chapter further highlights the Romanian state's accomplishment, with regard to co-opting veterans' groups, by investigating some of the political entanglements which took place between Italy and Romania in the course of this decade. Specifically, this subchapter points out that anti-democratic political principles which had originated with Italian Fascism, once introduced in Romania, failed to take hold among the majority of this country's ex-combatants, as the latter had been mostly pacified by the parliamentary system through its social and cultural policies.

In Chapter Two, the dissertation performs a second generalizing comparison for the years between 1929 and 1938. As for my previous analysis, this comparison points out how the Italian and Romanian political orders had to cater to the war participants' sense of entitlement to receive their support. More in detail, through this comparison, I underscore how the Italian Fascist regime preserved its hold over the local combatants' movement by continuing to provide its affiliates with several privileges, as it had done in the previous decade. In focusing on this dynamic, I highlight that, to receive the advantages they felt deserving of, the majority of the members of the Italian movement helped the dictatorship enact some of its goals, thereby essentially undergoing a process of limited radicalization. As for Romania, this comparison shows how the local parliamentary power-bearers provided ex-servicemen with a similar kind of status and role as the one Mussolini was offering their Italian counterparts. By doing so, they were for the most part successful in preserving their hold over war participants.

Finally, a subchapter studies the transnational connections arising around this time between Italy and the latter's antifascist exiles, attesting to the fact that Mussolini's regime, at this stage, was successful in holding onto the support of the Italian ex-soldiers' movement – as evinced by the antifascists' unwillingness to criticize the Fascist model of veterans' policies. Another subchapter inquires on transnational connections between Italy and Romania, emphasizing that most adherents of the Romanian ex-combatants' movement remained faithful to the parliamentary system of government. More in detail, this section shows that, just like in the previous decade, extremist Romanian war participants attempted to introduce in their own country radical political ideals inspired by the Blackshirts' dictatorship but failed to find a widespread and lasting audience within the local movement.

In Chapter Three, my work implements an additional generalizing comparison, for the Second World War, between Mussolini's regime and the Italian Social Republic, on one hand, and the authoritarian governments of King Charles II – whose system of government, which came into being a year before the start of the war of 1939-1945, is covered here from its onset, to improve analytical comprehensiveness - the Romanian fascists and General (later to become Marshal) Antonescu, on the other. This examination shows that these various autocracies had to grant various benefits to fighters, to hold onto their support, a strategy they managed to accomplish until Italy and Romania were overwhelmed by the financial and military strains imposed by their respective war efforts – these strains penalizing most of all the Italian Social Republic, which consequently gained, from the outset, merely a lukewarm following among former fighters. By focusing on these issues, I point out that the Italian and Romanian movements accepted to work towards some of the autocrats' own aims to secure special treatment for their members, thereby radicalizing to some extent, albeit in a superficial and limited manner.

Finally, in its conclusions, the dissertation sums up its research findings, highlighting the persistent influence of state policymaking over the political tendencies of associates of the Italian and Romanian ex-enlistees' movements in the time span under consideration. Furthermore, in this section my work proposes prospective research avenues to analyze its topics of inquiry further.

Chapter One: 1918-1928: From Military Demobilization to Political Pacification

1.1 Italy: Authoritarian Veterans' Politics

1.1.1 1918-1922: Neglecting the Nationalist Veterans' Sense of Entitlement

By 1915, the Kingdom of Italy had been involved in seven inter-state conflicts, including those leading to its unification: the First (1848-1849), Second (1859) and Third Italian War of Independence (1866); the capture of pontifical Rome (1870); a brief war against Ethiopia to preserve its recent colony in Eritrea, followed by a failed attempt at extending its influence over Ethiopia itself (1887-1896); a military expedition against China at the time of the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901); the initial colonization of Libya (1911-1912). Consequently, by the time the First World War came around, several returnees' associations were active in the kingdom, mainly the conservative Committee of the Veterans of the Wars for the Independence and Unity of Italy of 1848-1849 (*Comizio dei Veterani delle Guerre 1848-49 per l'Indipendenza e l'Unità d'Italia*) and the radical Society of the Veterans of the Patriotic Wars (*Società dei Reduci delle Patrie Battaglie*).

These associations undertook political activities, among other matters. First of all, they attempted to improve state social assistance for ex-combatants.¹ For instance, the paramilitaries who had fought at the side of the charismatic military commander Giuseppe Garibaldi, in the course of the Second War of Independence, successfully lobbied the

¹ Gianni Isola, "Un luogo d'incontro fra esercito e paese: Le associazioni dei veterani del Risorgimento (1861-1911)" [A Nexus between the Army and the Country: Veterans' Associations in the Italian Unification Process (1861-1911)], in Deputazione di Storia Patria per l'Umbria "Perugia," *Convegno Nazionale di Studi: Esercito e città dall'Unità agli anni trenta: Spoleto: 11-14 maggio 1988* [National Academic Congress: Army and Cities from the Italian Unification to the 1930s: Spoleto: May 11-14, 1988] (Spoleto: Panetto e Petrelli, 1989), 506, 511-512.

Italian parliament to obtain war pensions.² Additionally, ex-warriors sought to strengthen the nation they had fought for by teaching other Italians patriotic and martial virtues. For instance, several ex-soldiers' groups taught youths nationalist beliefs and military practices.³ In educating their fellow countrymen, these activists followed an increasingly popular trend of turning dead patriots into collective behavioral models,⁴ publicly exalting dead soldiers' purported love for their homeland and martial virtues, asking their compatriots to imitate these individuals.⁵

Interestingly, various activists got involved in more drastic initiatives. Notably, many of the followers of Garibaldi who had fought in the unification wars at one time or another supported leftist and revolutionary organizations in Italy and abroad.⁶ In 1915, some old soldiers took part in the public demonstrations staged by the political faction willing for Italy's entry into the First World War.⁷ Importantly, while Italy had a large veterans' social movement before World War One, this organization would be eclipsed, in

² Eva Cecchinato, *Camicie rosse: I garibaldini dall'Unità alla Grande Guerra* [Redshirts: The Followers of Garibaldi from the Italian Unification to the Great War] (Bari: Laterza, 2011), 206-207.

³ Mauro Fincardi, "I reduci risorgimentali veneti e friulani" [The Veterans of the Italian Unification Wars in the Veneto and Friuli Regions], *Italia Contemporanea*, 222 (2001), 66-91.

⁴ Alberto Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento: Parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell'Italia unita* [The Nation at the Time of the Italian Unification: Kinship, Sanctity and Honor in the Origins of United Italy] (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2011), 174-178.

⁵ Fulvio Conti, "Per una geografia dell'associazionismo laico in Toscana dall'Unità alla Grande Guerra: Le società di veterani e reduci" [Towards Inventorying Secular Associations in Tuscany from the Italian Unification to the Great War: The Societies of War Veterans and Returnees]; Fabio Merlo, "Reducismo garibaldino e culto patriottico in Oltrepò" [The Activitism of Demobilized Followers of Garibaldi and Patriotic Cults in Oltrepò], *Bollettino del Museo del Risorgimento* [Bulletin of the Museum of the Italian Unification], special issue, eds. Alberto Preti, Fiorenza Tarozzi, 39 (1994), 21-22; 63-64, 70; Maria Girardi, "I Garibaldini dal volontariato giovanile al mutualismo reducistico a Bologna e Vicenza" [The Followers of Garibaldi From Youthful Volunteering to Returnees' Associations in Bologna and Vicenza], *Storia e Futuro: Rivista di Storia e Storiografia On Line* [History and Future: Online History and Historiography Review], November 2014, accessed April 5, 2021, <http://storiaefuturo.eu/garibaldini-dal-volontariato-giovanile-al-mutualismo-reducistico-bologna-e-vicenza/>.

⁶ Enrico Acciai, "Volontariato in armi, sovversivismo e radicalismo politico nella storia d'Italia: Un approccio biografico" [Armed Volunteering and Political Subversivism and Radicalism in Italian History: A Biographical Approach], in *Biografie, percorsi e networks nell'età contemporanea* [Biographies, Journeys and Networks in the Contemporary Era], eds. Eloisa Betti, Carlo De Maria (Rome: Bradypus, 2018), 24-35.

⁷ Marco Mondini, "La guerra prima della guerra: L'anno della neutralità in Italia tra mobilitazione culturale e attesa della grande prova" [War before the War: Italy's Year of Neutrality between Cultural Mobilization and Awaiting the Great Test], in *La Grande Guerra: Società, propaganda, consenso* [The Great War: Society, Propaganda and Consent], eds. Dario Cimorelli, Anna Villari (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale S.p.a., 2015), 33.

numerical and political terms, by a subsequent movement of ex-soldiers, that would come into being in the wake of this conflict.

On May 24, 1915, the Kingdom of Italy entered the first global confrontation on the side of the Entente, a decision which was undertaken by a minority government, headed by the Liberal Antonio Salandra, which sought primarily to gain control over the territories of Trentino, the Julian March, Southern Tyrol and parts of Dalmatia and Istria, which at the time were under Habsburg rule, while also aiming to consolidate its recently-established hold over the Albanian city of Vlorë.⁸ Subsequent wartime cabinets would also pursue the Ottoman province of Adalia, full diplomatic recognition of Italian sovereignty over the recently-occupied Dodecanese islands, and an unspecified share of German African colonies.⁹ In entering the war, the Salandra government was supported, at the grassroots level, by a motley group of forces commonly known as ‘interventionists’ (*interventisti*). These radicals came mainly from the nationalist and leftist-Socialist ‘camps’ which, together with the Catholic one, were by 1915 at the core of the country’s politics. Eventually, while this interventionist minority succeeded in pushing Italy into the fray, a section of the nationalist camp and the majority of the leftist and Catholic ones remained opposed to the conflict, to varying degrees.¹⁰

The Italian state and society were thoroughly involved in the First World War. However, the kingdom’s participation in the war was unpopular within sizeable segments of society, as it required considerable sacrifices on behalf of the civilian population and the army, both of which became rife with tensions, as a result of the elites’ repressive conduct

⁸ Andrea Baravelli, “Diplomazia e scopi di guerra” [Diplomacy and War Aims], in *Dizionario storico della Prima Guerra Mondiale* [Historical Dictionary of the First World War], ed. Nicola Labanca (Bari: Laterza, 2016), 62, Apple Books edition.

⁹ Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919-1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 86.

¹⁰ Mario Isnenghi, Giorgio Rochat, *La Grande Guerra, 1914-1918* [The Great War, 1914-1918] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014), 103-111; Macgregor Knox, *Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17-30, 50.

of the war effort.¹¹ Importantly, between 1915 and 1918, the challenges of waging war noticeably aggravated the country's pre-existing social and political fissures. The extreme fringes of the political spectrum created or took up more vigorously intolerant political myths, calling for the national community's purification from perceived parasites.¹² During and after the war, the nationalist, Socialist and Catholic camps remained opposed to each other to a manifest degree.¹³

Notwithstanding these issues, Italy ultimately emerged victorious from the conflict, occupying parts of Dalmatia and the cities of Trento and Trieste,¹⁴ and gaining the Trentino and South Tyrol regions and part of the Istrian peninsula, through the treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye.¹⁵ While at war, the army remained on the whole united, despite the discontent voiced by multitudes of conscripts, a discontent which stemmed mainly from the army command's uncaring and rigid leadership. Ultimately, most soldiers resigned themselves to continuing to obey orders rather than giving in to the temptation of mutiny. Therefore, while in 1917 the army suffered a major reversal at Caporetto, this debacle was caused by relevant deficiencies in the high command's strategic planning, rather than a general shortcoming in the army's morale and discipline.¹⁶

The homefront similarly remained overall disciplined, the civilian population generally contributing to the war effort. To be sure, especially in 1916-1918, widespread

¹¹ Paul Corner, Giovanna Procacci, "The Italian Experience of 'Total Mobilization,' 1915-1920," in *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, ed. John Horne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 226-234.

¹² Giovanna Procacci, "Gli effetti della Grande Guerra sulla psicologia della popolazione civile" [The Great War's Effects on the Civilian Population's Psychology], *Storia e problemi contemporanei* [History and Contemporary Issues], 10 (1992), 85-88.

¹³ Macgregor Knox, *To the Threshold of Power, 1922/33: Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and National Socialist Dictatorships*: volume 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 390-391.

¹⁴ Richard Bosworth, *L'Italia di Mussolini: 1915-1945* [Mussolini's Italy: 1915-1945], trans. Alessio Catania (Milan: Mondadori, 2009), 104-105.

¹⁵ Spencer di Scala, *Vittorio Emanuele Orlando: Italy* (London: Haus Publishing, 2010), 178, Scribd edition; Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 87; Alan Sharp, "The Paris Peace Conference and its Consequences," *1914-1918-Online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, accessed April 11, 2021, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/the_paris_peace_conference_and_its_consequences

¹⁶ Isnenghi, Rochat, *La Grande Guerra*, 290-296, 380-389.

protests took place, directed against the state's persistent commitment to prolonging the war effort, the most noticeable demonstration taking place in Turin in August 1917. These protests were waged mainly by the working class, the peasantry, and city-and town-dwellers.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the main political forces which had opposed Italy's entry into the war, the Socialists and the Catholics, eventually helped the state wage a protracted fighting effort, albeit with varying degrees of reluctance.¹⁸

A considerable number of Italians were involved in the conflict, in one way or another. Numerous women supported the war effort by acting as nurses, tending to the war-wounded, and working in factories.¹⁹ Additionally, multitudes of male Italians took up arms in the international confrontation, serving either the Italian state or the Habsburgs. First of all, numerous ethnic Italians served in the Austro-Hungarian armed forces during the war, as they had already done before then – in 1910, one Habsburg soldier out of 100 belonged to this ethnic group.²⁰ Second, the Italian kingdom mobilized for war a vast number of citizens, in addition to Italians hailing from abroad. Between 1915 and 1918, 5,903,140 Italian citizens were called to serve in the army – these individuals belonging to recruiting cohorts ranging between the birth years 1874 to 1900²¹ - of which 1,800,000 would be discharged by March 1919, the standing army being left with 500,000 men, including 52,000 officers, by December 1919.²²

¹⁷ Roberto Bianchi, "Il fronte interno alla prova: Le opposizioni alla guerra a Prato e in Toscana" [The Homefront's Trials: The Anti-War Oppositions in Prato and in Tuscany], in *Un paese in guerra: La mobilitazione civile in Italia (1914-1918)* [A Nation at War: The Civilian Mobilization in Italy (1914-1918)], eds. Daniele Menozzi, Giovanna Procacci, Simonetta Soldani (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 2010), 119-125; Giovanna Procacci, *Dalla rassegnazione alla rivolta: Mentalità e comportamenti popolari nella Grande Guerra* [From Resignation to Revolt: Popular Mindsets and Attitudes in the Great War] (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1999), 52-145.

¹⁸ Isnenghi, Rochat, *La Grande Guerra*, 329-330.

¹⁹ Stefania Bartoloni, *Italiane alla guerra: L'assistenza ai feriti, 1915-1918* [Italian Women at War: Relieving the Wounded, 1915-1918] (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2003), 93-96.

²⁰ Christa Hämmerle, "«Eroi sacrificali»? Soldati austro-ungarici sul fronte sud" [«Sacrificial Heroes»? Austro-Hungarian Soldiers on the Southern Front], in *La guerra italo-austriaca (1915-1918)* [The Italian-Austrian War (1915-1918)], eds. Nicola Labanca, Oswald Überegger (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014), 146.

²¹ Pierluigi Scolè, "I morti" [The Dead], *Dizionario storico*, 375.

²² Giorgio Rochat, *L'esercito italiano da Vittorio Veneto a Mussolini (1919-1925)* [The Italian Army from Vittorio Veneto to Mussolini (1919-1925)] (Bari: Laterza, 2006), 12-34.

After an elite corps of shock troops known as the Daring Ones was formed in the summer of 1917, between 40,000 and 50,000 men came to serve in this corps.²³ Among the recruits of the army, approximately 200,000 served as officers.²⁴ Additionally, between 9,500 and 9,900 Italians residing within the kingdom volunteered to fight, joined by volunteers hailing from other territories: 687 men from the Trentino region; roughly 2,000 men from the Julian March and Dalmatia; 303,919 Italians from the rest of the world. Approximately 10,000 Italians fought in the French army.²⁵ Indicatively 4,285 Italians battled, together with other Allied forces, against the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War.²⁶ According to one estimate, the Italian war disabled and mutilated amounted to at least 675,000 individuals – i.e., the number of war impaired who would eventually be granted war pensions by the state.²⁷ Among the Italian combatants were approximately 5,500 Jews, 478 of whom were granted military awards.²⁸

It might be claimed that the kingdom, while rife with political and social tensions, had not been pushed to a breaking point by the end of the war. To be sure, the country was deeply divided on the meaning to ascribe to its war experience. The conflict widened up its pre-existing cleavages, leading to myriad episodes of political violence. In Turin, Daring

²³ Giorgio Rochat, *Gli Arditi della Grande Guerra: Origini, battaglie e miti* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1981), 29, 64.

²⁴ Giovanni Sabbatucci, *I combattenti nel primo dopoguerra* (Bari: Laterza, 1974), 3,7.

²⁵ Piero Del Negro, “L’esercito italiano, i volontari e i giovani nella Grande Guerra” [The Italian Army, Volunteers and Youth in the Great War]; Alessio Quercioli, ““Italiani fuori d’Italia:” I volontari trentini nell’esercito italiano, 1915-1918” [Italians Beyond Italy’s Borders: Volunteers from Trentino in the Italian Army, 1915-1918]; Fabio Todero, “I volontari del litorale austriaco” [Volunteers from the Austrian Shore]; Emilio Franzina, “Volontari dell’altra sponda: Emigranti ed emigrati in America alla guerra (1914-1918)” [Volunteers from the Other Shore: American Migrants and Immigrants at War (1914-1918)]; Hubert Heyriès, “I volontari italiani in Francia durante la Grande Guerra” [Italian Volunteers in France during the Great War], in *Volontari italiani nella Grande Guerra* [Italian Great War Volunteers], eds. Fabrizio Rasera, Camillo Zadra (Rovereto: Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, 2008), 14; 203; 196-199; 220 81.

²⁶ Paolo Formiconi, *Missione in Siberia. I soldati italiani in Russia, 1915-1920* [The Siberia Mission. Italian Soldiers in Russia, 1915-1920] (Rome: Ufficio Storico Stato Maggiore della Difesa, 2018), 72-73, 96, 100, 144-149, 154.

²⁷ Lisa Bregantin, “Mutilati” [War Mutilates], in Mario Isnenghi ed., *Gli italiani in guerra. Conflitti, identità, memorie dal Risorgimento ai nostri giorni*: volume 3: *La Grande Guerra: Dall’intervento alla «vittoria mutilata»* [The Great War: From Italy’s Entry into War to the «Mutilated Victory»], eds. Daniele Ceschin, Mario Isnenghi (Turin: Utet, 2008), 1077.

²⁸ Giovanni Cecini, *I soldati ebrei di Mussolini: I militari israeliti nel periodo fascista* [Mussolini’s Jewish Soldiers: Israelite Militaries in the Fascist Age] (Milan: Ugo Mursia Editore, 2008), 24.

Ones fired upon workers who were peacefully demonstrating against the country's involvement in the war, a week after the cessation of hostilities.²⁹ Nevertheless, as highlighted below, in the early aftermath of the Great War, the parliamentary class was afforded a concrete opportunity to recompose at least some of the fractures that had opened or widened during the confrontation. In particular, this class was presented with the chance to bring numerous nationalist veterans (known in Italian prevalently as “*combattenti*”) to its side, by satisfying the sense of entitlement that these men had acquired during the war, as a result of their military service. However, between 1919 and 1922, in addition to unsuccessfully addressing other major collective issues,³⁰ democratic politicians failed to address efficiently the requests made to them by the *combattenti*.

As proposed by several scholars mentioned in the dissertation's introduction, multitudes of patriotic fighters felt they deserved several kinds of rewards from the state in exchange for having protected it during the war. Which factors enabled the emergence of this sense of entitlement? Moreover, which kinds of rewards did these ex-servicemen feel deserving of? First of all, a high number of such veterans wanted institutions to provide them with economic remunerations. These wishes stemmed from the promises the elites had made them in 1915-1918, to motivate them to serve. Soldiers had been promised land³¹ and special war insurances (amounting to 1,000 *Lire* for commissioned and non-commissioned officers and 500 *Lire* for infantrymen).³² Workers, who represented a relevant portion of the ex-servicemen,³³ had been told that they would eventually be granted

²⁹ Fabio Fabbri, *Le origini della guerra civile: L'Italia dalla Grande Guerra al fascismo, 1918-1921* [The Origins of the Civil War: Italy between the Great War and Fascism, 1918-1921] (Turin: Utet Libreria, 2009), 11.

³⁰ Andrea Baravelli, “La società italiana del dopoguerra” [Post-War Italian Society], *Dizionario storico*, 751-755.

³¹ Roberto Bianchi, *Pane, pace, terra: Il 1919 in Italia* [Bread, Peace, Land: Italy in 1919] (Rome: Odradek, 2006), 20-21; Simona Colarizi, *Dopoguerra e fascismo in Puglia (1919-1926)* [Apulia in the Post-War Era and under Fascism (1919-1926)] (Bari: Laterza, 1977), 7-8.

³² Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 10-11.

³³ Antonio Gibelli, *La Grande Guerra degli italiani, 1915-1918* [Italians in the Great War, 1915-1918] (Milan: Rizzoli, 2015), 88; Procacci, *Dalla rassegnazione*, 122; Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 3-4.

better living standards and employment opportunities.³⁴ Sardinian combatants had come to expect the elevation of their island's living standards, as they were guaranteed the latter would be modernized, through the drainage of the local marshes and the building of new roads,³⁵ a promise which, as will be shown below, would come to influence to a relevant degree these former recruits' collective agendas.³⁶

Such promises were bound to appeal to most veterans, who were of a middle-class background or belonged to the lower strata of the social pyramid. For instance, 58% of the conscripted workers were peasants, with meager literacy rates. It is probable most of them returned to their original occupation in the wake of the conflict, as suggested by the low urbanization rates for post-war Italy, for 1920.³⁷ Most non-commissioned officers – i.e., the bulk of the wartime officialdom - hailed from the middle class and possessed high literacy rates (many of these NCOs, as a matter of fact, being teachers or university students).³⁸ In the aftermath of the conflict, the rank and file of one of the leading nationalist veterans' associations, the National Association of Fighters, would be composed of peasants, workers, and white-collared professionals.³⁹ The membership of the ANC federation of Forlì was reportedly made almost exclusively of self-described “*humble*

³⁴ Mario Isnenghi, *Giornali di trincea: 1915-1918* [Trench Journals: 1915-1918] (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1977), 200-214; Gianni Isola, *Guerra al regno della guerra! Storia della Lega proletaria mutilati invalidi reduci orfani e vedove di guerra (1918-1924)* [Let's Fight the Kingdom of War! History of the Proletarian League for the War Mutilated, Disabled, Returnees, Orphans and Widows (1918-1924)] (Florence: Le Lettere, 1990), 293.

³⁵ Girolamo Sotgiu, *Storia della Sardegna: Dalla Grande Guerra al fascismo* [History of Sardinia: From the Great War to Fascism] (Bari: Laterza, 1990), 37-43, 302.

³⁶ *Fiamma Nera: Voce dell'Arditismo: Settimanale della Federazione Nazionale fra gli Arditi d'Italia* [Black Flame: Mouthpiece of the Daring Ones: Weekly of the National Federation of the Italian Daring Ones], November 15, 1923

³⁷ In 1920, 5,0% of the Italian population lived in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, United Nations, *Growth of the World's Urban and Rural Population*, 100.

³⁸ Gibelli, *La Grande Guerra*, 90; Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 3, 7.

³⁹ Letter sent by the ANC president to the Italian prime minister, June 30, 1923, file 528080, box 1852, fund “*Segreteria Particolare del Duce*” (SPD), series “*Carteggio Ordinario 1922-1945*,” (CO 1922-1945), Central State Archive (*Archivio Centrale dello Stato*; ACS), Rome, Italy

workers.”⁴⁰ Among the shock troops known as the Daring Ones, many originated from the lower middle class, the peasantry, and the working class.⁴¹

In other words, it is likely numerous *combattenti* aimed to use their recompenses as a way of ascending within the national social pyramid, a wish which they had entertained long before 1915.⁴² Additionally, their eagerness to be rewarded by the state was probably strengthened by the fact that, during the war, many soldiers came to see public institutions as indispensable tools for improving their lives.⁴³ Other soldiers were pressed to request public social assistance by the nature of the injuries they had sustained while serving in the army. Even before the conflict was over, disabled, and mutilated soldiers began asking the state for war pensions and jobs.⁴⁴

During the war, nationalist combatants began to feel they were owed other benefits, aside from material privileges. Specifically, army officers and Daring Ones became accustomed to being publicly extolled for their military deeds,⁴⁵ hence wished to continue being honored after the cessation of hostilities. Their claims were given further urgency by the belief that the war had been a traumatic event, which had entailed considerable personal

⁴⁰ Message sent by the secretary of the ANC federation of Forlì to the presidents of this federation’s chapters, December 11, 1931, folder “1931,” box 13, fund “*Archivio dell’Associazione Nazionale Combattenti e Reduci – Federazione delle Province di Forlì-Cesena e Rimini*” (AANCR), series “*Circolari 1927-1957*” (C1922-1957), Historical Institute of the Resistance and the Contemporary Age of Forlì-Cesena (*Istituto Storico della Resistenza e dell’Età Contemporanea di Forlì-Cesena*; ISREC), Forlì, Italy

⁴¹ Eros Francescangeli, *Arditi del Popolo: Argo Secondari e la prima organizzazione antifascista (1917-1922)* [The People’s Daring Ones: Argo Secondari and the First Antifascist Organization (1917-1922)] (Rome: Odradek, 2000), 15; Marco Rossi, *Arditi, non gendarmi!: Dalle trincee alle barricate: Arditismo di guerra e Arditi del Popolo (1917-1923)* [We Are Daring Ones, Not Policemen! From the Trenches to the Barricades: Wartime Daring Ones and People’s Daring Ones (1917-1923)] (Pisa: Bfs Edizioni, 2011), 26-28.

⁴² Marco Mondini, Guri Schwarz, *Dalla guerra alla pace: Retoriche e pratiche della smobilitazione nell’Italia del Novecento* [From War to Peace: Demobilization Rhetoric and Practices in Twentieth-Century Italy] (Sommacampagna: Cierre Edizioni e Istituto Storico della Resistenza e dell’Età Contemporanea della Provincia di Vicenza “Ettore Gallo,” 2007), 34-35; Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 173.

⁴³ Antonio Gibelli, *L’officina della guerra: La Grande Guerra e le trasformazioni del mondo mentale* [The War’s Workshop: The Great War and the Transformations of the Mental World] (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2007), 95-98.

⁴⁴ Ugo Pavan Dalla Torre, “I primi anni dell’ANMIG e il suo primo manifesto (1918)” [The Early Years and the First Manifesto of the ANMIG (1918)], in *Guerra e disabilità: Mutilati e invalidi italiani e primo conflitto mondiale*, ed. Nicola Labanca (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 2016), 97-104.

⁴⁵ Marco Mondini, *La politica delle armi: Il ruolo dell’esercito nell’avvento del fascismo* [The Politics of the Army: The Army’s Role in the Fascist Takeover] (Rome: Laterza, 2006), 13-14, 32-43, Apple Books edition; Rochat, *Gli Arditi*, 35.

sacrifices on their behalf. The harrowing nature of their combat experiences can be gleaned from a volunteer's wartime private letter.

Here [the soldiers] are crushed by the fresh evidence of a protracted war. We are preparing to spend the winter here by digging the ground and giving men heavy clothing... Oh modern war! A war that is conquered a few meters at a time [by expending] time and millions of men ... It is no longer an episode in [our lives], but rather the defining endeavor of a whole generation."⁴⁶

Ultimately, by the end of the war, these servicemen wanted to receive material and symbolic rewards from the state. In the immediate aftermath of the conflict, they made various claims to public authorities, asking the latter to fulfill their aspirations. In addition to pensions for the disabled and land for all ex-combatants alike, they wanted war insurances to be paid in the same amount to all of them.⁴⁷ War victims also asked for their benefits to be extended to their counterparts residing in Italy's post-war territorial acquisitions.⁴⁸ Veterans also began demanding preferential hirings in the public and private sectors.⁴⁹ Sardinian war participants asked for the modernization of their island, advancing this request mainly through an autonomist group, the Sardinian Action Party (*Partito Sardo d'Azione*; PSA),⁵⁰ which was founded in 1920.⁵¹

In this period, *combattenti* also began mobilizing at the grassroots level to pressure institutions into granting them the goods and services they coveted. With regard to land

⁴⁶ Gibelli, *La Grande Guerra*, 100.

⁴⁷ "Il Rinnovamento:" *Bollettino ufficiale dell'Associazione Nazionale dei Combattenti* ["The Renewal:" Official Bulletin of the National Association of Fighters], April 6, 1920

⁴⁸ Ugo Pavan Dalla Torre, "Le origini dell'Associazione Nazionale Fra Mutilati e Invalidi Di Guerra (1917-1923)," in *Passato, presente e futuro. Compendio sulla storia dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra, 1917-2012*, ed. Valdo Del Lucchese (Rome: Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra e Fondazione Roma, 2012), 63, 112.

⁴⁹ *A Noi!: Organo dell'Associazione Nazionale Reduci Zona Operante* [To Us!: Organ of the National Association of Returnees from the War Zone], January 20, 1919

⁵⁰ *La Voce dei Combattenti: Giornale dei Mutilati, Invalidi e Combattenti* [The Mouthpiece of the Veterans: Daily of the War Mutilates, Disabled and Veterans], May 2, 1921

⁵¹ Manlio Brigaglia, *Emilio Lussu e "Giustizia e Libertà:" Dall'evasione di Lipari al ritorno in Italia (1929-1943)* [Emilio Lussu and "Justice and Freedom:" From the Escape from Lipari to the Return to Italy (1929-1943)] (Cagliari: Edizioni Della Torre, 2008), 14.

grants, as the state failed to issue an agrarian reform, the ANC's activists helped discharged soldiers acquire land for themselves by supporting the grassroots land seizures they enacted in 1919 and 1920 in Central and Southern Italy,⁵² confiscations which ultimately led to the creation of 125,000-130,000 new smallholdings.⁵³ To become employed, returnees, in addition to setting up agricultural cooperatives,⁵⁴ sought to achieve preferential access to jobs. They pursued this goal by asking the state to let them oversee the National Institution for Fighters (*Opera Nazionale Combattenti*; ONC) and the National Institution for the War Disabled (*Opera Nazionale per gli Invalidi di Guerra*; ONIG),⁵⁵ two institutions which the state had set up in 1917 to help reintegrate recruits into civilian life.⁵⁶ The ANMIG - the association representing war victims with nationalist leanings - demanded to be afforded a significant degree of control over the ONIG to protect its adherents' interests.⁵⁷

As mentioned earlier, during the Great War, many patriotic soldiers had come to believe they deserved a highly visible standing in post-war society, as they had fought to defend their country.⁵⁸ Precisely, they wished to live the rest of their lives surrounded by a grateful people. Moreover, they expected the state to actively foster the nation's thankfulness by granting them a prominent role within public parades and war commemorations. Some among them also wanted to be given a more active special role, the function of guardians of the nation. Specifically, having sacrificed themselves to protect and enlarge the nation's borders, they considered these boundaries unmodifiable to their

⁵² Bianchi, *Pace, pane, terra*, 38-39; Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 184-185.

⁵³ Gustavo Corni, "La politica agraria del fascismo: Un confronto fra Italia e Germania" [Fascist Agricultural Politics: A Comparison between Italy and Germany], *Studi Storici* [Historical Studies], No. 2 (April – June 1987), 394.

⁵⁴ Ángel Alcalde, *War Veterans and Fascism in Interwar Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 69; Francesco Zavatti, *Mutilati ed invalidi di guerra: Una storia politica* (Milan: Unicopli, 2011), 16.

⁵⁵ *Il Bollettino: Pubblicazione Mensile della Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra* [The Bulletin: Monthly of the National Association of War Mutilated and Disabled], July 15, 1919; "Il Rinnovamento," April 6, 1920

⁵⁶ Pavan Dalla Torre, "Le origini dell'Associazione," 20-21; Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 11.

⁵⁷ *Il Bollettino: Pubblicazione Mensile*, March 1, 1921

⁵⁸ Mondini, Schwarz, *Dalla guerra alla pace*, 29, 35.

nation's detriment. For instance, a representative of the war impaired, in publicly defending Italy's annexation of Southern Tyrol, stated: "*We war mutilated, who gladly sacrificed our blood and flesh to return Trento to the Fatherland and to give Italy the borders created [for it] by God, will know how to defend these conquests.*"⁵⁹

In other words, *combattenti* pursued 'nation-statist' goals, wanting to strengthen the state, mostly by preserving its post-war territorial configuration. They elected to achieve these aims mainly through nationalist pedagogy and public diplomacy. For instance, they wished to take part in state ceremonies not just to revel in public adoration but also to achieve pedagogic objectives. Specifically, they believed that by participating in these events – posing as living examples of devotion to the homeland and martial self-abnegation - they might imbue attending audiences with these qualities. As claimed by ex-servicemen, by publicly commemorating the war, they would "*give a prominent contribution to the rebirth of the Italian spirit, while glorifying [the] dead, in addition to extolling those who live.*"⁶⁰

Furthermore, they generally longed to educate the youth on patriotic values. In its political manifesto, the ANMIG stated it aimed at ensuring that Italian youths "*[understood] they descend[ed] from glorious generations that built the Fatherland and learn[ed] their duties towards the generations that [would] succeed them.*"⁶¹ In accomplishing their educational mission, veterans undoubtedly drew inspiration from the pedagogic traditions of their predecessors of the unification and imperialist wars of the late 1800s and early 1900s. They were also stimulated by an idea that was quite popular in the country in the aftermath of World War One, i.e., the notion of spreading military values

⁵⁹ *La Stampella: Periodico Mensile della Sezione Milanese dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra*, February 1926

⁶⁰ *Il Combattente Maremmano: Organo della Federazione Provinciale Grossetana dell'Associazione Nazionale Combattenti* [The Fighter of Maremma: Organ of the Grosseto Provincial Federation of the National Association of Fighters], August 9, 1923

⁶¹ Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 386.

and practices among the Italian people to defend the fatherland. This concept actually prompted the development of a network of private societies, supervised by the army and dedicated to enacting military education initiatives for the Italian youth – a so-called ‘premilitary’ training (*istruzione premilitare*). Unsurprisingly, *combattenti* aimed themselves at providing this kind of training, the ANC openly advocating it.⁶² Importantly, non-commissioned officers wanted public institutions to help them in this endeavor, supporting their grassroots initiatives in this field.⁶³ In 1923, the ANC would ask Mussolini that official premilitary training tasks be granted to retired World War One officers.⁶⁴

⁶² Rochat, *L'esercito italiano*, 117-143, 278.

⁶³ *Il Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale Combattenti* [The Bulletin of the National Association of Fighters], February-March 1923

⁶⁴ Memorandum sent by the ANC central committee to the prime minister, likely 1923, 528080, 1852, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

Image 1.1: A soldier presenting a youth with the Italian flag.



Source: *La Vittoria: Organo dell'Associazione Nazionale Combattenti di Palermo*, June 16, 1923 (Image courtesy of the *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze*; further reproduction is prohibited)

As for public diplomacy, this segment of the Italian fighters' community engaged in various endeavors of this kind. The ANC joined the forum for veterans from the Allied countries known as the Inter-Allied Federation of Former Fighters in 1920,⁶⁵ while the ANMIG built ties of solidarity with its foreign counterparts and with international organizations. Notably, in 1919 the Association took part in the third Inter-Allied conference on the after-care of disabled men, simultaneously federating with French and

⁶⁵ Virgiliu Serdaru, *Drepturile foștilor luptători români: Făgăduielile de pe front* [The Rights of the Romanian Former Fighters: The Front's Promises] (Bucharest: Editura Uniunea Națională a Foștilor Luptători, 1921), 18.

Belgian war disabled's associations to safeguard European peace. It also used the conference to claim Italy's sovereignty over the border city of Fiume,⁶⁶ which was disputed between Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. It is highly likely that *combattenti* wanted their state to give them the resources to fulfill their diplomatic tasks.

In articulating these various requests to public authorities, patriotic returnees diverged partially from the goals of other veterans, those supporting the Socialist and Catholic parties. Generally, Italian veterans harbored different understandings of their country's war aims and the kind of socio-political order that was to exist in Italy in the aftermath of this conflict. Therefore, similarly to their German counterparts, they lacked a shared "*interpretative framework of the war*" and unequivocal "*conclusions drawn from it for the country's political direction.*"⁶⁷ For instance, in 1919, the ANC claimed it stood against the recently founded Catholic party, the Italian People's Party (*Partito Popolare Italiano*; PPI), and the Socialists. It did so on starkly ideological grounds, rooted in a negative interpretation of these parties' conduct in the First World War.

*We unshakingly oppose the Italian People's Party for its confessionism and its desire to subordinate the entire Nation's political interests to those of the Clergy. We stand against the official Socialist Party first of all for its rejection of the Fatherland, which led it to oppose the war effort, a decision that we cannot overlook, as it prolonged fighting operations, made the combatants' wartime burden heavier, increased the number of casualties and wounded and exacerbated the agony of those territories which had been invaded and ravaged; we stand against it as it refuses to acknowledge that Italy's intervention in the war was necessary and provided valid help to the Belgian people, in their unfair martyrdom, and our brothers from Poland, Bohemia, Trento and Trieste, in their liberation; and that it helped vanquish German militarism, the main obstacle to civilizational and human progress.*⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *Il Bollettino: Pubblicazione Mensile*, December 15, 1919

⁶⁷ Nadine Rossol, "Commemoration, Cult of the Fallen (Germany)," *1914-1918-Online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, accessed July 22, 2021, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/commemoration_cult_of_the_fallen_germany/2014-10-08.

⁶⁸ "*Il Rinascimento*," November 10, 1919

Due to these divergences, Italian veterans also developed contrasting senses of entitlement, disagreeing with each other on what categories of war participants should be prioritized in terms of official concessions and which war dead should be officially commemorated. Crucially, as shown below, the Socialist and Catholic parties would eventually exacerbate these divisions and, importantly, make many nationalist returnees feel slighted in their sense of entitlement.

Soon after the end of the conflict, in 1919, patriotic ex-soldiers asked Italy's liberal political system to satisfy their claims to privileges. To effectively lobby governments and parliament, they formed a social movement. This strategy was undoubtedly facilitated by the ties of solidarity that had come about between officers and soldiers during the war,⁶⁹ bonds which the movement's organizers hoped might be rekindled for this new purpose. The core of the said movement was initially formed by three associations: the ANMIG, which was founded in 1917⁷⁰ and had 220,000 members by 1919;⁷¹ the ANC, which was founded in 1918 and had, indicatively, 500,000 followers in 1920;⁷² the Association of Italian Daring Ones (*Associazione fra gli Arditi d'Italia*; AFAI) – known after 1920 as the National Association of Italian Daring Ones (*Associazione Nazionale fra gli Arditi d'Italia*; ANAI) – which was created in 1919 and likely numbered 1,000 members.⁷³

To some extent, these three organizations cooperated with various small associations representing war volunteers, created after Italy's victory in the First World War,⁷⁴ the main group, based in Milan, numbering 800 members.⁷⁵ For their part, already

⁶⁹ Gibelli, *La Grande Guerra*, 90-91.

⁷⁰ Pavan Dalla Torre, "Le origini dell'Associazione," 21.

⁷¹ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 34.

⁷² Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 52, 83.

⁷³ Rochat, *Gli Arditi*, 113, 117, 137.

⁷⁴ Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Il decennale: Decimo anniversario della vittoria, anno sesto dell'era fascista* [The Decennial: The Tenth Anniversary of the Victory, the Sixth Year of the Fascist Era] (Florence: Stabilimenti Grafici A. Vallecchi, 1929), 350-351.

⁷⁵ Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Documenti della fede e dell'azione, 1919-1932: Pubblicati in occasione del decennale della rivoluzione fascista* [Testimonies of Faith and Action, 1919-1932: Published

in the course of the conflict war widows had helped form associations advocating for their interests, the Association of Mothers and Widows (*Associazione Madri e Vedove*) and the Association of Relatives of the Missing in Action (*Associazione dei Congiunti dei Dispersi di Guerra*).⁷⁶

It should be stressed that politically organized ex-enlistees did not gravitate only toward the nationalist camp. As a matter of fact, they took up a variety of causes. To begin with, many of them embraced left-wing ideologies, notably working with the Socialists and the Communists. In doing so, they veered between championing revolutionary ideals and simply trying to earn compensations from public authorities, similarly to their patriotic counterparts. Some of them even promoted anarchist principles. A notable example of the leftist insurrectionary tendencies harbored by a part of the Italian fighters' community is represented by the activist Cesare Seassaro. A lawyer and an enthusiastic supporter of the Soviet revolution, he promoted the development of paramilitary units to stage an armed uprising.

Another current that attracted a high number of returnees was political Catholicism. Finally, certain former fighters became attracted to leftist versions of nationalism, swerving between revolutionary aims and a more limited program of opposing the rise of Fascism through street battles.⁷⁷ Importantly, these multiple iterations of veterans' activism would be driven underground by the Blackshirts after 1925. As a matter of fact, Fascism gradually muzzled and neutralized a considerable portion of the Italian ex-combatants' community

on the Occasion of the Decennial of the Fascist Revolution] (Rome: Edizione de La Volontà d'Italia, 1933), 31.

⁷⁶ Ugo Pavan Dalla Torre, "Le donne nell'associazionismo reducistico italiano tra Grande Guerra e fascismo" [Women in Italian Returnees' Associations between the Great War and Fascism], *Genesis: Rivista della Società Italiana delle Storiche* [Genesis: Review of the Italian Association of Women Scholars], 15, No. 2 (2016), 176.

⁷⁷ Francescangeli, *Arditi del Popolo*, 109-162; "Una storia comune, un soggetto diviso: Gli ex combattenti," in Mario Isnenghi ed., *Gli italiani in guerra: volume 4: Il ventennio fascista*, eds. Giulia Albanese, Mario Isnenghi: tome 1: *Dall'impresa di Fiume alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale (1919-1940)* (Turin: Utet, 2008), 84-85; Isola, *Guerra*, 6, 134.

until it collapsed in 1943. Nevertheless, the patriotic associations of former fighters and the movement the latter came to constitute still ended up representing a sizeable segment of this community between 1918 and 1945.

This patriotic movement mobilized in a variety of manners to pressure public institutions into granting it its wishes. While the ex-servicemen's associations at the movement's core often diverged in their public views, they all shared the aim of securing rewards for their members, to some extent. For the ANC and the ANMIG, these benefits represented a relevant priority. Within the former group, a sizeable number of followers prioritized lobbying the state for benefits over pursuing broader political causes.⁷⁸ In its initial political manifesto, the latter association had mentioned the need to reward war disabled and mutilated with plots of private land and jobs.⁷⁹

On the other hand, the AFAI/ANAI and the war volunteers, whose members held much more radical views than the majority of the ANC and ANMIG adherents, focused to a degree – if not prevalently, in the case of the volunteers – on more ideological issues. For instance, the ANAI stated it wished for the violent renewal of the Italian political system,⁸⁰ while, in late 1919, numerous volunteers supported the radical nationalist poet Gabriele D'Annunzio in his staging of the takeover of the border city of Fiume.⁸¹ Later, volunteers attempted to splinter the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes by fostering Montenegrin nationalism.⁸² To some extent, therefore, the Daring Ones and the volunteers went beyond the general goals of the social movement. However, they also shared some objectives with the rest of the latter: the ANAI was interested in patriotic pedagogy - wanting to harness

⁷⁸ Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 351-355.

⁷⁹ Pavan Dalla Torre, "I primi anni dell'ANMIG," 109.

⁸⁰ Ferdinando Cordova, *Arditi e legionari dannunziani* [Daring Ones and D'Annunzio's Legionaries] (Padua: Marsilio Editori, 1960), 13-30; Emilio Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista (1918-1925)* [The Origins of Fascist Ideology (1918-1925)] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 156-167.

⁸¹ Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Documenti della fede*, 68-83.

⁸² *La Volontà d'Italia: Settimanale Imperialista: Organo del Volontarismo Italiano* [Italy's Will: Imperialist Weekly: Organ of the Italian Volunteers], May 19, 1927

youth for patriotic defense - and sought institutional help in obtaining jobs for its members.⁸³ Additionally, the volunteers shared an appreciation of pedagogic war commemorations with other associates of the movement, as they aimed to remind their compatriots of Italy's past, to "*promote the nation's progress and wellbeing in the future.*"⁸⁴

As seen above, with various exceptions, especially among Daring Ones and war volunteers, the political priorities of such associations consisted to a relevant extent in securing privileges. This state of affairs is evident when one considers that, immediately after the conflict, no general alignment occurred between them and the Blackshirts. As a matter of fact, while, after 1922, Benito Mussolini crafted a manipulative historical narrative according to which Great War veterans had abetted Fascism in droves since the latter's very inception,⁸⁵ the movement actually attempted to cooperate mainly with other political forces, in 1919 and early 1920.

Between 1919 and 1922, Italy's political system included, in addition to the Fascists, an establishment composed essentially of the old Liberal ruling elite's various factions and the Catholic Italian People's Party. As for the Italian Socialist Party (*Partito Socialista Italiano*; PSI), it was formally revolutionary but had become accustomed to working towards its goals through parliamentary means.⁸⁶ In the early 1920s, it birthed two offshoots, the uncompromising Communist Party of Italy (*Partito Comunista d'Italia*) and the more moderate Unitary Socialist Party (*Partito di Unità Socialista*). An Italian Republican Party (*Partito Repubblicano Italiano*) was also active.

⁸³ Cordova, *Arditi e legionari*, 211-212.

⁸⁴ Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Documenti della fede*, 36.

⁸⁵ Patrizia Dogliani, *Il fascismo degli italiani: Una storia sociale* [Italians' Fascism: A Social History] (Novara: De Agostini, 2014), 97.

⁸⁶ Dylan Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe: Italy, Spain and Romania, 1870-1945* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 44-47.

Crucially, initially associated *combattenti* attempted to cooperate mainly with various parliamentary organizations – albeit often in a stilted and half-hearted manner – rather than the revolutionary Fascists and Communists. To some extent, their movement viewed a plurality of political players as potential patrons that might champion their requests, although they often voiced an anti-Liberal, anti-Socialist, and anti-Catholic rhetoric.⁸⁷ For example, the initial president of the ANMIG, Dante Dall’Ara, was a Republican.⁸⁸ In 1919 the ANC accepted subsidies from the Nitti government and, while competing at the general elections of that year with its own candidates, cooperated in some localities with the Liberals and the Republicans. It should also be noted that the movement was not opposed, as a whole, to the socialist left and the Catholic PPI. As shown below, the ANC briefly attempted to cooperate with the Socialists’ own veterans’ group. Additionally, various ANC members were enrolled in the PSI and the PPI,⁸⁹ while some ANMIG members were affiliated with the PSI.⁹⁰

As mentioned above, the ANAI aimed, among other things, at securing a particular role within society for its members. Therefore, the Daring Ones accepted to take part in the public celebrations of Italy’s victory which took place in Rome in March 1919.⁹¹ Additionally, the Association, notwithstanding its rampant nationalism,⁹² made a partial overture to the Socialists, in the hope of preserving the high symbolic standing the Daring Ones had enjoyed in wartime. Specifically, after Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando began

⁸⁷ Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 75-76, 171, 204-207.

⁸⁸ Pavan Dalla Torre, “Le origini dell’Associazione,” 33.

⁸⁹ Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 83, 210-222

⁹⁰ Zavatti, *Mutilati e invalidi di guerra*, 33-34.

⁹¹ Luigi Balsamini, *Gli Arditi del Popolo: Dalla guerra alla difesa del popolo contro le violenze fasciste* [The People’s Daring Ones: From the War to the Defense of the People against Fascist Violence] (Casalvelino Scalo: Galzerano Editore, 2002), 34-35.

⁹² Angelo Ventrone, “Fascism and the Legacy of the Great War,” in *The Legacies of Two World Wars: European Societies in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Lothar Kettenacker, Torsten Riotte (New York: Berghahn, 2011), 102.

disbanding the Daring Ones' corps, the ANAI indirectly asked the Socialists, through its official mouthpiece, to cooperate with it to re-establish this military force.⁹³

On the other hand, until 1920, there was only limited overlap between the movement and Fascism, as well as the Italian far right in general. First of all, there appears to have been little interest, on behalf of the former's membership, toward the radical Italian Nationalist Association (*Associazione Nazionalista Italiana*; ANI). Their lukewarm stance towards the ANI doubtless stemmed from the fact that the latter did not show much commitment to defending veterans' claims.⁹⁴ On the other hand, many of them certainly looked with sympathy to Gabriele D'Annunzio, the poet and war hero who in September 1919 gathered a small private army of approximately 2,250 individuals (including many ex-combatants and Daring Ones)⁹⁵ and seized the town of Fiume, at the time contended by Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, in the attempt to have it annexed by his country. As seen above, war volunteers strongly identified with D'Annunzio's expansionist endeavor. Numerous Daring Ones also entered D'Annunzio's paramilitary guard at Fiume, and some of their leaders visited the occupied city.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, with the exception of the volunteers, it does not appear D'Annunzio exerted a strong sway over the movement. This situation might be attributed to the likeliness that many affiliates to the latter felt, as a matter of fact, only a moderate degree of outrage at Italy's lack of conspicuous territorial gains from the war. After all, the kingdom had already shored up its international standing through the fragmentation of a long-time rival like the Habsburg empire.⁹⁷ As a matter of fact, D'Annunzio was criticized

⁹³ *L'Ardito: Settimanale dell'Associazione Arditi d'Italia* [The Daring One: Weekly of the Association of Italian Daring Ones], June 22, 1919

⁹⁴ Erminio Fonzo, *Storia dell'Associazione Nazionalista Italiana (1910-1923)* [History of the Italian Nationalist Association (1910-1923)] (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2017), 169-171, 177.

⁹⁵ Michael Ledeen, *D'Annunzio a Fiume* [D'Annunzio at Fiume], trans. Livia De Felice (Bari: Laterza, 1975), 93.

⁹⁶ Ledeen, *D'Annunzio*, 94, 117-119; Rossi, *Arditi, non gendarmi!*, 69-70.

⁹⁷ Arno Mayer, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany and Italy in the Decade after World War I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 89.

by the ANC, which, despite ardently wishing to see Fiume annexed to Italy, objected to his other expansionist aims. As a matter of fact, the Association eventually endorsed, for the most part, the treaty of Rapallo (1920), an agreement between Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which turned Fiume into a free city.⁹⁸

Crucially, two months after the poet's occupation of Fiume, the national elections registered a massive turnout for the Socialist and Catholic parties, groupings that had not supported the annexation of Fiume in their electoral propaganda.⁹⁹ In light of the PSI and the PPI's exceptional electoral performances, it is likely that various patriotic fighters had voted for these parties, as was reportedly the case for a number of ANC members.¹⁰⁰ As for the extent of veterans' active involvement in the occupation itself, it should be noted that, while between 5,500 and 6,000 enlisted men and 600 officers gradually joined the poet at Fiume,¹⁰¹ just before D'Annunzio was ousted from this city by the Italian army, he had a mere 4,500 men at his disposal.¹⁰²

Finally, it should be borne in mind that, at the time of their founding, Mussolini's Fighting Fasces (*Fasci di Combattimento*) were not popular among demobilized troops. To be sure, the ANAI and the volunteers had strong ties to them, albeit for a short time in the case of the Daring Ones' association.¹⁰³ However, before the general elections of 1919, the

⁹⁸ Giovanni Sabbatucci, *La stampa del combattentismo (1918-1925)* [The Former Fighters' Press (1918-1925)] (Bologna: Cappelli, 1980), 59-81.

⁹⁹ Paolo Mattera, "La "lezione della guerra:" I codici di comunicazione retorica e visiva nella campagna elettorale del 1919" [The "War's Lesson:" Rhetorical and Visual Communication Codes in the 1919 Electoral Campaign], in *La propaganda nella Grande Guerra tra nazionalismi e internazionalismi* [Great War Propaganda between Nationalisms and Internationalisms], ed. Daniela Rossini (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 2007), 199-206; Ezio Santarelli, *Storia del fascismo* [History of Fascism]: volume 1: *La crisi liberale* [The Liberal Crisis] (Milan: Edizioni Res Gestae, 2018), 112.

¹⁰⁰ Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 221-222.

¹⁰¹ Knox, *To the Threshold*, 252.

¹⁰² Andrea Carteny, "L'impresa di Fiume" [The Takeover of Fiume], in Congresso di Studi Storici Internazionali, *Il 1919: Un'Italia vittoriosa e provata in un'Europa in trasformazione* [1919: A Victorious and Strained Italy in a Shifting Europe] (Rome: Ministero della Difesa, 2020), 343-344.

¹⁰³ Andrea Augello, *Arditi contro: I primi anni di piombo a Roma, 1919-1923* [Renegade Daring Ones: The First Time Rome Endured Political Violence, 1919-1923] (Milan: Ugo Mursia Editore, 2017), 38-50, 116-153; Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Documenti della fede*, 31-64; Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini: volume 1: Il rivoluzionario, 1883-1920* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1965), 474, 478-480.

ANC's leadership rejected Mussolini as a candidate on its electoral ticket.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, the Fascists suffered a crushing defeat in these elections.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, it can be claimed that the extensive connection which eventually came into being between many *combattenti* and Fascism, beginning in 1920, was not a given. Instead, this budding relationship drew its strength, for the most part, from the mistakes Mussolini's opponents had committed in 1919.

As a matter of fact, while Italian society and politics were considerably polarized following the war, the main parliamentary parties might have secured at least the tolerance of a number of patriotic fighters by satisfying the latter's sense of entitlement. Instead, as will be highlighted below, these parties neglected, to varying degrees, such claims. To be sure, organizers and activists of the main parliamentary parties would eventually cooperate with sectors of the veterans' movement, between 1921 and 1925, on a shared antifascist platform. For instance, the leftist militia known as the People's Daring Ones (*Arditi del Popolo*), active between 1921 and 1924, included returnees belonging to a range of political groupings which resisted the Blackshirts.¹⁰⁶ Another antifascist veterans' association, known as "Free Italy" (*Italia Libera*), active between 1923 and 1924, similarly drew its membership from different parties.¹⁰⁷ However, by this time, the parliamentary parties had already alienated other segments of the nationalist ex-servicemen's movement, thereby squandering the opportunity to develop strong ties to the latter as a whole.

To illustrate parliamentary organizations' miscalculations of 1919, first of all, the Socialist and Catholic parties kept the requests of the nationalist veterans in little regard

¹⁰⁴ Angelo Tasca, *Un normale stato di eccezione: Crisi italiana e fascismo (1914-1922)* [A Regular State of Exception: The Italian Crisis and Fascism (1914-1922)] (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2019), 379, Apple Books edition.

¹⁰⁵ Giulia Albanese, "Violence and Political Participation during the Rise of Fascism (1919-1926)," in *In the Society of Fascists: Acclamation, Acquiescence, and Agency in Mussolini's Italy*, eds. Giulia Albanese, Roberta Pergher (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 51.

¹⁰⁶ Francescangeli, *Arditi del Popolo*, 53-102, 141, 164.

¹⁰⁷ Isola, *Guerra*, 197-201; Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 367-372.

when not antagonizing these individuals altogether. This conduct proved to be a crucial error, as said returnees believed their military deeds, allegedly undertaken in the name of the fatherland and leading to the latter's wellbeing and aggrandizement, gave them the right to be prioritized by Italian institutions in terms of recompenses, receiving precedence over other kinds of war survivors. However, the PSI and the PPI proved unwilling to help these combatants obtain special treatment.

Additionally, they failed to treat the nationalist veterans' organizations as legitimate interlocutors. Notably, the Socialists antagonized the ANMIG by creating their own veterans' group, the Proletarian League for the War Mutilated, Disabled, Returnees, Orphans, and Widows (*Lega Proletaria Mutilati, Invalidi, Reduci, Orfani e Vedove di Guerra*; MIROV). The MIROV and the Socialist party acted as organizational rivals of the ANMIG, the League attempting to woo away the Association's members.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, as the MIROV championed the needs of war deserters and prisoners – for instance, it asked for the war insurance which had been offered to soldiers to be extended to these other war survivors¹⁰⁹ - various nationalist ex-enlistees certainly came to believe that the League aimed at undermining their own claims to a special status. For instance, in 1928, the president of the ANMIG after 1924,¹¹⁰ Carlo Delcroix, would accuse the MIROV, in rather melodramatic terms, of pursuing this kind of agenda.

A proletarian league was founded, grouping war shirkers, veterans and deserters, the relatives of the fallen soldiers and executed deserters; a babel tower which obfuscated

¹⁰⁸ Zavatti, *Mutilati e invalidi di guerra*, 69-78.

¹⁰⁹ Police report on a gathering of socialist war disabled and mutilated, December 16, 1918, file "Milano: Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra," box 119, fund *Ministero degli Interni (MI)*, series *Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza (DGPS)*, subseries "Divisione Affari Generali e Riservati. Archivio Generale" (DAGRAG), year 1920, category G1, ACS

¹¹⁰ Vittoria Albertina, "Delcroix, Carlo," *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* [Biographical Dictionary of Italians]: volume 36: *De Fornari – Della Fonte* (1988), accessed February 1, 2021, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-delcroix_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/.

*[just] values, which amalgamated heaven and hell, which mixed blood and mud, [which was] the most repellent monster birthed by the red craze.*¹¹¹

The MIROV eventually earned the support of scores of working-class returnees by promising to force the bourgeoisie to respect the promises it had made to them in wartime: offering them better living standards; yielding preferential access to factory occupations, and full salaries to the invalids and mutilated among them. However, the League never managed to make significant inroads in the war survivors' movement, at one time briefly numbering 300,000 adherents, but being left with approximately 60,000 followers by March 1920.¹¹²

On the other hand, the MIROV's strategy alienated numerous patriotic ex-servicemen. As a case in point, while the ANMIG was partly pervaded by antisocialist feelings from its foundation,¹¹³ these tendencies were undoubtedly exacerbated by the League's conduct. Its competition with the ANMIG made the latter more confrontational towards it, as recalled in 1921 by ANMIG Secretary Ruggero Romano: "[*The MIROV mouthpiece*] accused us of having sold out to the government and we viewed the *Proletarian League as an enemy. At that time, it was necessary to fight [it].*"¹¹⁴ The MIROV probably also intensified antisocialism within the ANC, with its confrontational attitude towards the latter. It rejected an alliance proposed by this association,¹¹⁵ while also trying to discredit it at the local level.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Carlo Delcroix, *Un uomo e un popolo* [A Man and a People] (Florence: Stabilimenti Grafici A. Vallecchi, 1928), 237.

¹¹² Francescangeli, "Una storia comune," 84; Isola, *Guerra*, 22, 42, 53, 112, 277, 292-293.

¹¹³ Zavatti, *Mutilati e invalidi di guerra*, 41-43.

¹¹⁴ Minutes of the proceedings of an afternoon meeting of the central committee of the ANMIG, March 2, 1921, volume 3, fund "*Archivio del Comitato Centrale dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra (ANMIG) in Roma, Casa Madre, 1917-2003*" (ACCANMIG), series "*Comitato Centrale, Commissione Direttiva ed Esecutiva*" (CCCDE), subseries "*Verballi 1920-1921*" (V1920-1921), Motherhouse of the War Mutilated and Disabled (*Casa Madre dei Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra*; CMMIG), Rome, Italy

¹¹⁵ Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 85, 346.

¹¹⁶ Report sent by the prefect of Cremona to the Minister of the Interior, September 20, 1919, *Cremona: Associazione fra Ex Combattenti*, 104, G1, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1920, MI, ACS

As for the Italian People's Party, this group probably had a better initial chance of working with the nationalist associations than the Socialists: it was moderately patriotic and inter-classist, in its ideology. It also defended ex-enlistees' rights to preferential hiring and asked for war pensions raises and the payment of war insurances. However, in 1919, after the ANC decided to create its own party, the PPI reacted by developing its own ex-servicemen's organization, the National Union of War Returnees (*Unione Nazionale Reduci di Guerra*; UNRG), a tactic which widened the rift between itself and the ANC.¹¹⁷ The UNRG, just like the MIROV, even tried and sometimes succeeded in taking members away from the patriotic associations.¹¹⁸ Due to the Socialist and Catholic parties' aversion to the *combattenti*'s groups, the Italian veterans' movement became by default a nationalist one, the PSI and PPI ex-servicemen's groups working toward their objectives outside of this collective body.

Additionally, the Socialist party and its League did not cater to this movement's requests to any noticeable degree. On the one hand, they rejected or underplayed its claims. While the PPI championed peasant soldiers' demands for smallholdings,¹¹⁹ the PSI advocated for the collectivization of land.¹²⁰ The latter stance probably alienated many land-hungry members of the nationalist ex-servicemen's movement, who wished to obtain parcels for themselves. The MIROV stressed the differences between proletarian and

¹¹⁷ Giorgio Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico in Italia* [The Italian Catholic Movement] (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1982), 385, 387-388; Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 87-90; Roberto Vivarelli, *Storia delle origini del fascismo: L'Italia dalla Grande Guerra alla marcia su Roma* [History of the Origins of Fascism: Italy between the Great War and the March on Rome]: volume 2 (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012), 187.

¹¹⁸ Circular sent by the General Confederation of Labor's central committee to the Socialist party's chapter in Lucca, June 1919, 119, "*Milano: Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra*," MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1919, G1, ACS; *Il Reduce: Organo Ufficiale dell'Unione Nazionale Reduci di Guerra* [The Returnee: Official Organ of the National Union of War Returnees], October 24, 1921

¹¹⁹ Candeloro, *Il movimento cattolico*, 380, 387.

¹²⁰ William Brustein, Marit Berntson, "Interwar Fascist Popularity in Europe and the Default of the Left," *European Sociological Review*, 15, No. 2 (1999), 163-164.

middle-class war disabled and mutilated, implicitly refusing to represent the latter.¹²¹ Additionally, it stated that officers might only join it by entering the Socialist party's labor organizations, due to their middle-class background.¹²²

On the other hand, the Socialists, as mentioned above, championed the rights of war prisoners and deserters. The PSI's orientation must have undoubtedly annoyed patriotic ex-servicemen, who based their claims to privileges on allegedly having performed their military service in an unhesitant and self-abnegating manner. As a case in point, when in 1920 the ANMIG rejected a potential alliance with the socialist General Confederation of Labor (*Confederazione Generale del Lavoro*), it did so, among other reasons, as it felt the left was not sufficiently committed to championing the rights of impaired nationalists, as later claimed by an ANMIG pamphlet published under Mussolini's government.

*The Association of the Mutilates [in the early post-war period] became embroiled in a fierce battle to defend its unity against all sabotage attempts and impose [official] acknowledgment of the sacred rights of the war impaired. In 1919 the classist fanaticism gave birth to that proletarian league which aimed to turn soldiers against soldiers and at the same time to place those who had fought on a par with those who had deserted; in June 1920 the third national congress of the mutilates had to reject a proposal to join the General Confederation of labor which, while pretending to offer [the mutilates] the proletariat's solidarity, surreptitiously aimed at obfuscating and dispersing the ideal values of the war.*¹²³

Socialists' and Catholics' neglect of such demands for goods and services undoubtedly prompted many claimants to believe their requests would not be acknowledged by public institutions, as they lacked powerful sponsors. While they enjoyed ties to parties sitting in the parliament, such as the Republicans and the Sardinian PSA, they

¹²¹ Message sent by the general directorate of public security to the governmental cabinet, December 11, 1919, "Milano: Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra," 119, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1919, G1, ACS

¹²² Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 82.

¹²³ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi d'Italia, *L'assistenza ai mutilati d'Italia: 29 aprile 1917 – 29 aprile 1942* [Social Care for Italian War Mutilated: April 29, 1917-April 29, 1942] (Milan: L. Alfieri, 1942), 4-5.

were not connected to the PSI and the PPI, the parties which had made the largest electoral gains in 1919 and 1921.¹²⁴ Nor did they enjoy direct parliamentary representation, their electoral ticket of 1919 having failed to score a significant success.¹²⁵

Moreover, the Socialists and the Catholics failed to give these activists the public esteem they wished for. In their public statements, said parties did not exalt the nationalist ex-soldiers' wartime valor. Additionally, the Socialists initially failed to signal they prioritized the patriotic values dearly held by these ex-enlistees – despite belatedly starting to do so in 1921¹²⁶ - and at times contested the latter in public. While the number of verbal and physical abuses committed by Socialists at the expense of patriotic fighters was greatly inflated by the right, for propaganda purposes,¹²⁷ real instances of this phenomenon, in all likelihood, antagonized the patriotic fighters against the left. For instance, in the town of Oneglia, a tussle broke out between these two factions while the *combattenti* were publicly inaugurating a banner.¹²⁸

It is likely that, on the whole, the PSI and the PPI, by their political choices, intensified the latent hostility that many combat survivors already felt against them, failing to forge a truce with them. According to the Communist leader Angelo Tasca, who before 1921 had been a Socialist politician, the PSI had indeed been presented, in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, with the prospect of gathering many veterans into its following, wasting however this opportunity by failing to cater to their claims.

¹²⁴ Knox, *To the Threshold*, 270; Ministero dell'Economia Nazionale: Direzione Generale della Statistica, *Statistica delle elezioni generali politiche per la 26esima legislatura (15 maggio 1921)* [Statistics of the General Political Elections for the 26th Parliamentary Term (May 15, 1921)] (Rome: «Grafia» S.a.i. Industrie Grafiche, 1924), 42.

¹²⁵ Didier Musiedlak, *Lo stato fascista e la sua classe politica, 1922-1943* [The Fascist State and Its Political Class, 1922-1943] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003), 111.

¹²⁶ Andrea Baravelli, *La vittoria smarrita: Legittimità e rappresentazioni della Grande Guerra nella crisi del sistema liberale (1919-1924)* [The Lost Victory: Legitimacy and Representations of the Great War in the Crisis of the Liberal System (1919-1924)] (Rome: Carocci, 2006), 42, 48, 51-53, 58-59.

¹²⁷ Bianchi, *Pace, pane, terra*, 72-73.

¹²⁸ Message sent by the prefect of Porto Maurizio to the interior ministry, June 20, 1920, *Porto Maurizio: Associazioni Nazionali fra Ex Combattenti*, 105, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1920, G1, ACS

*We could have vied for power by rejecting the war while still bringing numerous interventionists to our side. Instead of rejecting those who had sincerely wished for the war, all we had to do was call on them to help us “refashion Italy.” Reading today the public statements, the circulars that were issued by the combatants’ groups in 1919, it is clear that it would have taken merely a degree of tactical ingenuity, a measure of true revolutionary spirit, to bring them to our side.*¹²⁹

It should be noted that, even after 1919-1920, the Socialists continued committing significant tactical mistakes in engaging with the patriotic war survivors. As a matter of fact, the PSI (together with the other forces of the organized left) missed an opportunity to forge links to *combattenti* who opposed Fascism by failing to support to any great extent the People’s Daring Ones.¹³⁰ On the other hand, it might also be remarked that fissures between the Socialists, the Catholics, and the patriotic returnees were also occasioned by the latter’s representatives, who did not actively pursue alliances with these parties, instead heavily criticizing them.¹³¹

Importantly, the Liberal governments themselves achieved limited success with regard to satisfying the wishes of the veterans’ movement, failing to acknowledge the latter’s requests to any great extent.¹³² To be sure, the Liberal elite presented several ideological convergences with this movement and actually gave in to some of its requests. To begin with, Liberals were intrinsically nationalist, despite the fact that their patriotic credentials had been partially tarnished by their failure to obtain, at the post-Great War peace conferences, all the territories that they had been promised by the Entente in exchange for Italy’s military participation in the conflict.¹³³ They blended their devotion to the fatherland with notions of civic liberties, monarchism, and political pluralism,

¹²⁹ Tasca, *Un normale stato di eccezione*, 258-259.

¹³⁰ Francescangeli, *Arditi del Popolo*, 80-109.

¹³¹ Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 50-52, 156, 287, 345-346.

¹³² Dogliani, *Il fascismo degli italiani*, 22.

¹³³ Knox, *To the Threshold*, 251-253.

ultimately envisioning the First World War as a necessary sacrifice, which had led Italy to acquire at least part of its rightful borders, hence furthering the process of national unification.¹³⁴

They also tried to satisfy the nationalist ex-combatants' sense of merit. In 1920 and 1921, in accordance with demands made to them by the ANMIG – which asked that war victims of the Habsburg army be accorded the same pension rights as their counterparts in the Italian kingdom¹³⁵ - Liberal cabinets began providing such compensations to impaired of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces who had acquired Italian citizenship – even though such emoluments were lower than those afforded to invalids who had fought on the Italian side.¹³⁶ The Liberals also conceded discounts on train fares to the disabled and mutilated,¹³⁷ satisfying another demand made to them by the ANMIG.¹³⁸ In 1919, the Association also obtained, through peaceful lobbying, a temporary raise in war pensions.¹³⁹ Finally, a senator and distinguished medical expert,¹⁴⁰ Pio Foà, collaborated with the ANMIG at the inter-Allied conference on the after-care of disabled men.¹⁴¹

Nevertheless, it appears the Liberals, on the whole, underestimated the importance of winning the movement to their side, making only limited efforts to grant its members the preferential treatment they prized. First of all, while King Victor Emmanuel III donated

¹³⁴ Rosario Forlenza, Bjørn Thomassen, *Italian Modernities: Competing Narratives of Nationhood* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 24-34.

¹³⁵ Pavan Dalla Torre, “Le origini dell’Associazione,” 63, 109, 112.

¹³⁶ *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell’Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra* [The Victory: Bulletin of the National Association of War Mutilated and Disabled], July-August 1938

¹³⁷ *Raccolta ufficiale delle leggi e dei decreti del Regno d’Italia: Anno 1921* [Official Collection of the Italian Kingdom’s Laws and Decrees: Year 1921]: volume 2 (Rome: Tipografia delle Mantellate, 1921), 2574.

¹³⁸ Minutes of the proceedings of an afternoon meeting of the ANMIG central committee, July 11, 1920, volume 3, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1920-1921, CMMIG

¹³⁹ Fabiano Quagliaroli, *Risarcire la nazione in armi: Il ministero per l’Assistenza militare e le pensioni di Guerra (1917-1923)* (Milan: Unicopli, 2018), 297-298.

¹⁴⁰ Chiara Ambrosoli, “Foà, Pio,” *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*: volume 48: *Filoni-Forghieri* (1997), accessed April 12, 2021, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pio-foa_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pio-foa_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

¹⁴¹ *Il Bollettino: Organo Mensile dell’Associazione Nazionale Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra* [The Bulletin: Monthly of the National Association of War Mutilated and Disabled], September 1922

8,000 acres from his own estates to the ONC,¹⁴² governments failed to pass an agrarian reform. Instead, they merely legalized the land seizures enacted by peasant soldiers at the grassroots level, thereby unwittingly fostering social conflict and failing to make these expropriators more loyal to the liberal order.¹⁴³

Additionally, multitudes of war disabled became frustrated with the shortcomings of laws regulating war pensions. Until 1920 such pensions were considerably low, their paltriness being exacerbated by a concurrent steep rise in food prices.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, applying for them usually entailed enduring a lengthy and laborious bureaucratic process. The state failed to address these shortcomings effectively. While it afforded pension raises, it initially avoided making them permanent. Moreover, it did not manage to shorten the application process to receive these emoluments.¹⁴⁵

Public authorities also held a mixed record with regard to finding jobs for invalid and able-bodied veterans. A 1921 law raised the percentage of invalids hired by the state and the private sector, prescribing mandatory percentages of disabled and mutilated employees for such workforces: 10-20%, for the civil service and public companies; 5% for private companies.¹⁴⁶ However, it did not lead to a significant rise in the number of employed impaired. Notably, before the law was passed, 6,550 war mutilated had taken up jobs in the railway, postal, and telegraphic services. At the same time, fewer than 6,000 additional mutilated were hired in these sectors in the subsequent year and a half.¹⁴⁷ It

¹⁴² *L'Opera Nazionale Combattenti nel decimo annuale della vittoria* [The National Institution for Fighters in the Tenth Anniversary of the Victory] (Rome: Editrice Opera Nazionale Combattenti, 1928), 91.

¹⁴³ Bianchi, *Pace, pane, terra*, 25-27, 58-60.

¹⁴⁴ Quagliaroli, *Risarcire la nazione*, 141-142, 297-302.

¹⁴⁵ Pierluigi Pironti, "L'evoluzione delle pensioni di guerra italiane dalle origini fino all'avvento del fascismo," *Guerra e disabilità*, 217-227; Quagliaroli, *Risarcire la nazione*, 328-363, 490-492.

¹⁴⁶ Pierluigi Pironti, "Warfare to Welfare: World War I and the Development of Social Legislation in Italy," *Historical Social Research*, special issue, ed. Herbert Obinger, 45, No. 2 (2020), 205-206.

¹⁴⁷ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the ANMIG central committee, March 9, 1923, volume 5, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, subseries "*Verballi 1922-1925*" (V1922-1925), CMMIG; Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Sesto congresso nazionale: Bolzano, luglio 1926: Assistenza: Relatore Vittorio Presti* [Sixth National Congress: Bolzano, July 1926, Social Assistance:

should be noted that able-bodied nationalists also believed the state was not doing enough for them in terms of placements. Those who looked forward to becoming schoolteachers felt ostracized in their job pursuits by civilian competitors.¹⁴⁸ While the civil service kept employing many of the women it had hired during the war,¹⁴⁹ it fired some personnel who had served in the army.¹⁵⁰ Work cooperatives set up by the ANC were compelled to ask for private loans to finance themselves, as they were excluded from state subsidies.¹⁵¹

Patriotic fighters' annoyance at these issues was intensified by their perceived underrepresentation within official decision-making and administrative forums. First of all, their associations wished to control the National Institution for Fighters and the National Institution for the War Disabled to promote the interests of their own members. Nevertheless, they believed they were not given a sufficient degree of influence over these institutions. In 1920, the ANC lost its initial monopoly over the representation of Italian veterans within the ONC. Consequently, part of the Association became alienated from the Institution, fearing that the latter's activities would benefit mainly Socialist and Catholic ex-enlistees.¹⁵² As for the ANMIG, the latter wanted its representatives within the ONIG's administrative council to enjoy a stronger position.¹⁵³

The ANMIG also became discouraged from collaborating with Liberal cabinets to tackle issues related to war pensions for a variety of reasons. First of all, its leaders believed the Association was not granted sufficient delegates in a governmental committee for

Speaker Vittorio Presti] (Rome: 1926), 8, ACCANMIG, series "*Archivio della Ex Sezione ANMIG di Arezzo*" (AANMIGA), CMMIG

¹⁴⁸ Message sent by the prefect of Bologna to the general directorate of public security, July 22, 1922, 99, *Bologna e Provincia: Associazione Nazionale Combattenti*, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1922, G1, ACS

¹⁴⁹ Pavan Dalla Torre, "Le donne nell'associazionismo," 177.

¹⁵⁰ Report sent by the prefect of Rome to the interior ministry, June 5, 1922, *Roma: Ex Combattenti*, 99, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1922, G1, ACS

¹⁵¹ *Il Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale Combattenti*, May 5, 1922; *Problemi d'Italia: Rassegna Mensile dei Combattenti* [Italy's Issues: Monthly Review of the Former Fighters], December 1924

¹⁵² Giuseppe Barone, "Statalismo e riformismo: L'Opera Nazionale Combattenti (1917-1923)" [Statism and Reformism: The National Institution for Fighters (1917-1923)], *Studi Storici*, No. 1 (1984), 223.

¹⁵³ *Il Bollettino: Organo Mensile*, April 1, 1921

reforming these pensions. They resented having to work together with the UNRG and the MIROV's own delegates.¹⁵⁴ Second, under the government of Francesco Nitti (June 23, 1919 – June 15, 1920), the Association believed it was not treated with sufficient respect by this prime minister. Specifically, Nitti met officially with the ANMIG president Dante Dall'Ara but left other leaders of the Association out of such consultations, embittering them.¹⁵⁵ Nitti also paid insufficient attention to the memorandums sent to him by the Association.¹⁵⁶ His behavior undoubtedly estranged the ANMIG, as attested by the fact that Dall'Ara was forced to resign from his post as he held links to an undersecretary to the government.¹⁵⁷ Under Mussolini's regime, the former president would confine himself to private life, managing a construction business.¹⁵⁸

Institutions also fell short of the associations' expectations with regard to public honors. To begin with, Daring Ones considered their corps' disbandment in 1920 a harsh affront, as it deprived them of a social identity which they relished.¹⁵⁹ Second, governments failed to craft official war commemorations and ceremonies that met the approval of the patriotic ex-soldiers. In 1919, the latter were embittered by Prime Ministers Orlando and Nitti, as they chose, respectively, to avoid celebrating the anniversary of Italy's entry into the First World War and the annual recurrence of this country's victory.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, they were often dissatisfied with their place in these public events. Daring Ones were merely given an informal role in the military celebrations in Rome in March 1919.¹⁶¹ The ANMIG

¹⁵⁴ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the ANMIG central committee, June 8, 1920, volume 5, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1922-1925, CMMIG

¹⁵⁵ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the ANMIG central committee, March 30, 1920, volume 2, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, subseries "*Verballi 1919-1920*," CMMIG

¹⁵⁶ *Il Bollettino: Organo Mensile*, November 1, 1920

¹⁵⁷ Pavan Dalla Torre, "Le origini dell'Associazione," 83-87.

¹⁵⁸ Report sent by the high police commissioner of Naples to the political police division, May 21, 1928, file "*Dall'Ara, Dante*," box 408, MI, DGPS, subseries "*Divisione Polizia Politica*" (DPP), ACS

¹⁵⁹ Rossi, *Arditi, non gendarmi!*, 35-39.

¹⁶⁰ Mondini, *La politica delle armi*; 62; Mondini, Schwarz, *Dalla guerra alla pace*, 42.

¹⁶¹ Balsamini, *Gli Arditi del Popolo*, 34-35.

felt marginalized in the December 1920 celebrations of the military victory.¹⁶² In 1921, both able-bodied and impaired *combattenti* felt sidelined in the state ceremony celebrating the public entombment of the unknown soldier in Rome.¹⁶³

As a result of all these various setbacks, the veterans' movement felt deeply frustrated in its aspirations to privileges. Consequently, it was also alienated from significant portions of the Italian political system: the Liberals to some extent, the PSI and the PPI to a more substantial degree. Crucially, motivated by their lack of powerful and committed institutional patrons, many of its adherents began undertaking grassroots initiatives to impose their claims to benefits upon the state. First of all, various individuals affiliated with the ANC participated in the widespread land seizures that took place between 1919 and 1920. Second, beginning in 1919, nationalist war impaired gave rise to several protest cycles to receive higher war pensions, secure jobs¹⁶⁴ and gain control over the public facilities assisting them.¹⁶⁵ Able-bodied men with combat experience supported these protests, hoping to obtain preferential access to occupations themselves¹⁶⁶ and secure control over the ONC.¹⁶⁷ These cycles of protest would continue, for some time, even after the March on Rome.

It should be noted that the impaired were continuously goaded into demonstrating by what they perceived to be a persisting state of indifference towards their claims. The war victims' agitations began as governments did not take sufficiently into account the requests of the ANMIG, mainly with regard to increasing war pension levels.¹⁶⁸ As seen

¹⁶² *Il Bollettino: Organo Mensile*, December 1, 1920

¹⁶³ Mondini, Schwarz, *Dalla guerra alla pace*, 110-113.

¹⁶⁴ Minutes of the proceedings of an afternoon meeting of the ANMIG central committee, February 28, 1919, volume 1, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, subseries "*Verbali 1917-1920*," CMMIG

¹⁶⁵ Phonogram sent by the police chief of Rome to the interior ministry, December 11, 1920, *Roma: Associazione Mutilati*, 105, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1920, G1, ACS

¹⁶⁶ Message sent by the minister for public works to the interior ministry, April 4, 1921, *Bologna: Associazione Mutilati e Tubercolotici di Guerra*, 88, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1921, G1, ACS

¹⁶⁷ Report sent by the prefect of Bologna to the general directorate of public security, April 19, 1922, *Bologna e Provincia: Associazione Nazionale Combattenti*, 99, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1922, G1, ACS

¹⁶⁸ *Il Bollettino: Organo Mensile*, September 1, 1920

above, Prime Ministers Nitti and Giolitti had failed to make the pension raises they had mandated permanent. Consequently, the ANMIG's demonstrations continued, culminating with an attempt to invade the parliament in December 1920.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, the impaired kept on agitating due to feeling insufficiently assisted by the state with regard to job placements. For instance, in early 1921, the parliament's failure to pass a law providing them with preferential hiring prompted the impaired in Bologna to occupy a local civil service structure.¹⁷⁰

Finally, in the first half of 1922, discharged military personnel continued agitating as they were outraged at the fact that, as mentioned above, the civil service had recently fired some of their peers while allowing female employees to hold on to their jobs.¹⁷¹ In the course of these agitations, which injured some individuals and caused a death,¹⁷² war impaired and other veterans occupied several public facilities. They often forcefully expelled the women working in these places in the attempt to take over their posts. Interestingly, they allowed female staff members with nationalist credentials, such as the widows of fallen soldiers, to retain their positions.¹⁷³

The protesters achieved significant results. Ultimately, their agitations netted the war victims 10,000 hirings.¹⁷⁴ A new law on pensions was approved in December 1920, making previous pensions raises permanent: consequently, by 1921, infantrymen with major disabilities enjoyed pension installments amounting to 2,400 *Lire*, a noticeable

¹⁶⁹ Phonogram sent by the police chief of Rome to the interior ministry, December 11, 1920, *Roma: Associazione Mutilati*, 105, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1920, G1, ACS; Quagliaroli, *Risarcire la nazione*, 329-364.

¹⁷⁰ Message sent by the prefect of Bologna to the general directorate of public security, February 15, 1921, *Bologna: Associazione Mutilati e Tubercolotici di Guerra*, 88, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1921, G1, ACS

¹⁷¹ Message sent by the prefect of Rome to the interior minister, June 5, 1922, *Roma: Ex Combattenti*, 99, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1922, G1, ACS

¹⁷² Minutes of the proceedings of a morning meeting of the ANMIG central committee, July 9, 1921, volume 3, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1920-1921, CMMIG

¹⁷³ Message sent by the prefect of Ascoli Piceno to the interior ministry, November 15, 1922, *Ascoli Piceno: Associazione Nazionale Ex Combattenti*, 99, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1922, G1, ACS

¹⁷⁴ Minutes of the proceedings of a morning meeting of the ANMIG central committee, July 9, 1921, volume 3, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1920-1921, CMMIG

improvement, compared to their pre-1919 instalments, which had amounted to 1,260 *Lire*.¹⁷⁵ In mid-1921, a law improving placements for the war impaired was finally passed.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, ANC and ANMIG members tended not to be grateful to the Liberal governments, believing they owed these favorable laws only to themselves. They thought the latter had been passed only due to their own forceful style of ‘lobbying.’¹⁷⁷ In other words, as governments had failed to preempt the *combattenti*’s disaffection and discontent, they later experienced considerable difficulties in retrieving these ex-militaries’ loyalty. Moreover, even the new legislation still did not completely satisfy these claimants. As discussed earlier, the Liberal law favoring the war impaired in terms of placements failed to substantially tackle the issue at hand, prompting agitations for jobs to continue until after the March on Rome.

Many patriotic ex-servicemen also felt compelled to press their claims to symbolic rewards through direct action. As seen above, they felt unsatisfied with the role they were given in patriotic celebrations. In 1921, their delegation to the ceremony of the unknown soldier, feeling frustrated with the insufficient role accorded to it in this service, publicly asked to be accorded a more prominent one.¹⁷⁸

Summing up, Italy’s brief spell of liberal rule in the interwar era saw the estrangement of the nationalist veterans’ movement from the main parliamentary parties and the Liberal governments. To a considerable extent, this development depended on the tactical mistakes committed by the ruling Liberal elite and the mass Socialist and Catholic organizations. Specifically, these elites and parties failed to represent adequately discharges’ claims, a course of action that contributes to buttressing Baravelli’s

¹⁷⁵ *Il Bollettino: Organo Mensile*, February 1, 1921; Quagliaroli, *Risarcire la nazione*, 364.

¹⁷⁶ Minutes of the proceedings of a morning meeting of the ANMIG central committee, July 9, 1921, volume 3, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1920-1921, CMMIG

¹⁷⁷ *Il Bollettino: Organo Mensile*, January 1, 1921; minutes of the proceedings of a morning meeting of the ANMIG central committee, July 9, 1921, volume 3, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1920-1921, CMMIG

¹⁷⁸ Mondini, Schwarz, *Dalla guerra alla pace*, 111.

assertion¹⁷⁹ that Italian Liberals were incapable of moderating their nation's politics as they did not represent the demands of a variety of post-war political actors. As will be shown below, having lost their faith in the parliamentary system's ability to acknowledge their rights, various adherents of the nationalist movement ended up flanking Mussolini's Fasces.

After the March on Rome, the majority of the movement would support the Fascist regime, even though the majority of its members did not spontaneously identify with the Fascist party. As will also be indicated beneath, the social and cultural policies enacted by the Mussolini cabinet stopped these flankers from opposing its authoritarian project, as said provisions convinced many of them to acquiesce to this initiative. Consequently, a high number of Italian ex-servicemen would continuously support Mussolini throughout the 1920s, helping him survive the crisis of legitimacy he suffered in 1924, after the murder of the antifascist deputy Giacomo Matteotti, unwittingly helping him remain in place until 1943.¹⁸⁰

As mentioned above, the Blackshirts' co-optation of patriotic war survivors began in the liberal era. Between 1919 and 1922, the burgeoning Fighting Fasces made inroads within the ex-militaries' movement. On the one hand, the Fasces agreed on some essential ideological precepts with the latter. Denoted by a Manichean and revolutionary form of nationalism, bent on saving the fatherland from alleged decadence, fashioning new institutions, and making Italians more warlike and committed to their country's destiny,¹⁸¹ Mussolini's grouping shared patriotism, inter-classism and a wish to defend the countries' new borders with moderate and hyper-nationalist *combattenti* alike. It also saw eye to eye with the radical ex-enlistees' minority on the need to obtain new territories for Italy and

¹⁷⁹ Baravelli, "La società italiana," 751-755.

¹⁸⁰ Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 369-374.

¹⁸¹ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 230-300, Apple Books edition.

violently purge the latter of ‘internal enemies.’¹⁸² On the other hand, the Fasces promised moderate returnees, in addition to various status-oriented Daring Ones, that they would give them the smallholdings, pensions, jobs and public honors they craved, in addition to helping them educate the Italian homeland in accordance with their beliefs. In other words, Mussolini courted these claimants by proposing to make them admired, economically secure, and politically influential – although, as would become only gradually clear, merely those among them who would offer complete obedience to him would be allowed to engage in active politics.

Ultimately, before the March on Rome, the Blackshirts succeeded in capturing the consent of a portion of the combat survivors’ movement, also by promising to satisfy the sense of entitlement animating this organization. Importantly, as a political body with a strong paramilitary wing – i.e. a “*militia-party*”¹⁸³ - Fascism often helped ex-men in uniform come closer to the socio-economic status they prized by assisting them into pressuring public institutions and citizens, through the use of strong-arm tactics. It should be borne in mind that said tactics were unwittingly enabled by the Liberal cabinet headed by Giovanni Giolitti, once the latter chose to forge an electoral alliance between his political current and Mussolini in 1921.¹⁸⁴

To be sure, discharged soldiers joined the Fighting Fasces – while in many cases simultaneously militating in the veterans’ movement - for a variety of reasons, beyond attempting to obtain special treatment, as the Fascists tended to attract a variety of social

¹⁸² Aristotle Kallis, *Fascist Ideology: Territory and Expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922-1945* (London: Routledge, 2000), 28-52; Pier Giorgio Zunino, *L'ideologia del fascismo: Miti, credenze e valori nella stabilizzazione del regime* [The Ideology of Fascism: Myths, Beliefs and Values in the Regime's Consolidation] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1985), 88-107, 245-259.

¹⁸³ Emilio Gentile, *Storia del partito fascista: 1919-1922. Movimento e milizia* [History of the Fascist Party: 1919-1922. Movement and Militia] (Bari: Laterza, 1989), 313.

¹⁸⁴ Emilio Gentile, *E fu subito regime: Il fascismo e la marcia su Roma* [The Instant Regime: Fascism and the March on Rome] (Bari: Laterza, 2014), 24-25.

and political actors harboring diverse goals.¹⁸⁵ First of all, ex-servicemen were prompted to become or abet Blackshirts by several economic catalysts. Unemployed men joined Fascism as guns for hire. Middle-and-upper-class officers turned into Blackshirts to forestall the Italian proletariat from improving its social standing at the expense of their own economic interests. As a case in point, the ANMIG leader Giuseppe Caradonna, a landlord from the Apulia region, joined the Fasces to safeguard his estates. Blackshirt university students attacked workers, whom they perceived as rivals in the class struggle.

Second, Mussolini's movement was attractive to hyper-nationalist war participants, in a variety of ways. To begin with, the Fasces' stance on border issues was amenable to grassroots chauvinists operating in Trentino, the Julian March, and Istria. On the kingdom's Northern-Eastern border,¹⁸⁶ where, even before the war, Italian ethnic nationalism had been especially virulent and intolerant, a hyper-nationalist political culture and post-war border tensions with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes prompted many veterans, especially war volunteers, to join the Blackshirts.¹⁸⁷ Notably, the ANC member Francesco Giunta became the Fascist leader of Trieste, where he oversaw the Blackshirts' violent intimidation of the local Slav minority.¹⁸⁸ In Trentino, fired up by similar chauvinist

¹⁸⁵ Kevin Passmore, "Fascism as a Social Movement in a Transnational Context," in *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective: A Survey*, eds. Stefan Berger, Holger Nehring (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 581-582, 586-593.

¹⁸⁶ Mimmo Franzinelli, *Squadristi: Protagonisti e tecniche della violenza fascista. 1919-1922* [The Militias: Protagonists and Methods of Fascist Violence. 1919-1922] (Milan: Mondadori, 2003), 11, 32-33, 38-41, 65; Pavan Dalla Torre, "Le origini dell'Associazione," 92.

¹⁸⁷ Report authored by the PNF, on the political-economic situation of the province of Trieste, June 1932, file "Trieste – Sindacale," box 27, fund "Partito Nazionale Fascista" (PNF), series "Direttorio Nazionale" (DN), subseries "Segreteria Politica (1881-1941)" (SP 1881-1941), ACS; Glenda Sluga, "Identità nazionale italiana e fascismo: Alieni, allogeni e assimilazione sul confine nord-orientale italiano" [Italian National Identity and Fascism: Aliens, Individuals of Foreign Extraction and Assimilation on the Italian Northern-Eastern Border], in *Nazionalismi di frontiera: Identità contrapposte sull'Adriatico nord-orientale, 1850-1950* [Frontier Nationalisms: Opposing Identities on the Northern-Eastern Adriatic, 1850-1950], ed. Marina Cattaruzza (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore, 2003), 172-180; Annamaria Vinci, *Sentinelle della patria: Il fascismo al confine orientale, 1918-1941* [Guardsmen of the Fatherland: Fascism on the Eastern Border, 1918-1941] (Bari: Laterza, 2011), 7, 24-59, 111-113.

¹⁸⁸ Franzinelli, *Squadristi*, 32.

impulses, several volunteers joined Fascism.¹⁸⁹ Additionally, army officers entered Mussolini's movement, guided by their militarist values.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, the Blackshirts attracted veterans who opposed the established political parties at all costs.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, as mentioned in the opening of this dissertation, some ex-combatants, including Daring Ones, joined Mussolini's movement as they wished to keep on enjoying the military lifestyle they had grown accustomed to on the battlefield.

Similarly, it is likely that various ex-enlistees who had become used to violent behavior during the war later felt compelled to use violence to solve political problems, hence viewing Fascism as the best tool for implementing their unprincipled tactics. The Italian kingdom's lack of conspicuous territorial gains, due to the outcome of the European Peace Treaties, also prompted many returnees' adhesion to Fascism¹⁹² and occasioned acts of political violence against Socialists on their behalf.¹⁹³ Finally, the Fasces' fostering of a public cult of the nation allowed this movement to attract combatants who desired to partake in transcendental beliefs.¹⁹⁴

As can be seen above, the nationalist ex-combatants' reasons for joining Fascism were wide-ranging. In particular, hyper-nationalist motivations were prevalent. The Fighting Fasces and their political heir of November 1921, the National Fascist Party (*Partito Nazionale Fascista*; PNF), made inroads in the *combattenti*'s associations, channeling the intransigent ideological inclinations of a portion of these organizations' memberships. The Blackshirts played on various adherents' frustration at Italy's diplomatic

¹⁸⁹ Gianni Faustini, *Il fascismo nel Trentino* [Fascism in Trentino] (Trento: Edizioni U.c.t. Trento, 2002), 12-13, 21-23.

¹⁹⁰ Mann, *Fascists*, 19.

¹⁹¹ Paul Corner, *The Fascist Party and Popular Opinion in Mussolini's Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 114; Salvatore Lupo, *Il fascismo: La politica in un regime totalitario* [Fascism: Politics in a Totalitarian Regime] (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2000), 44-45, 174-175.

¹⁹² Griffin, *The Nature*, 255-265.

¹⁹³ Mark Jones, "From Caporetto to Garibaldiland: Interventionist War Culture as a Culture of Defeat," *European Review of History – Revue Européenne d'Histoire*, 15, No. 6 (2008), 668.

¹⁹⁴ Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. Keith Botsford (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 21, 38-39.

failure to secure conspicuous territorial gains in the aftermath of the First World War. This was surely the case for war volunteers and the Daring Ones, and for a number of recruits of the more moderate ANC and ANMIG. Many local ANC leaders were swayed by such feelings.¹⁹⁵ It is likely that the ANMIG was in part pervaded by a similar mindset, as its central committee, due to the war impaired's discontent at Italy's territorial disputes with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, after 1920 became decidedly chauvinist.¹⁹⁶

It should be stressed that the Blackshirts infiltrated the ANC, the ANMIG and the FNAI also by helping their members secure the benefits they sought. Hence, war survivors' outrage at the establishment's neglect of their sense of deserving represented another significant recruiting tool for the Fascists, echoing how the latter had drafted career militaries by helping them preserve the various social and economic privileges they had acquired in the course of the war.¹⁹⁷ As the Blackshirts grew in strength, they pledged to back other flankers' requests.¹⁹⁸ For instance, they promised to provide plots of private arable land to farmers¹⁹⁹ - hence, backing the main request of peasant soldiers to the state - and sponsored the ANMIG's claims to level war pensions.²⁰⁰ Moreover, unlike the Socialists, the Fascists presented themselves as an inter-classist political force, hence potentially open to ex-servicemen independently from the latter's social background.

The Blackshirts also promised to teach Italians to be devoted to the fatherland and turn officers into the military educators of the latter, all to better defend it in the future.²⁰¹ On the other hand, Mussolini's grouping attempted to alienate this movement from its

¹⁹⁵ Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 70, 161.

¹⁹⁶ Pavan Dalla Torre, "Le origini dell'Associazione," 92-93.

¹⁹⁷ Mondini, *La politica delle armi*; 52-62, 193, 254-279, 350-358, 457; Gaetano Salvemini, *Le origini del fascismo in Italia: "Lezioni di Harvard"* [The Origins of Fascism in Italy: "Harvard Lessons"] (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1966), 198-201, 325.

¹⁹⁸ Adrian Lyttelton, *La conquista del potere: Il fascismo dal 1919 al 1929* [The Seizure of Power: Fascism between 1919 and 1929], trans. Giovanni Ferrara, Iole Rambelli (Bari: Laterza, 1982), 75-76; Santarelli, *Storia del fascismo*: volume 1, 266.

¹⁹⁹ Brustein, Berntson, "Interwar Fascist Popularity," 164.

²⁰⁰ *La Stampella*, January 15, 1924

²⁰¹ Gentile, *Storia del partito fascista*, 199, 405-406.

political competitors, reinforcing veterans' belief that they were being neglected by the antifascists. For instance, at an ANC meeting in Bologna, the paramilitary chieftain Dino Grandi claimed that the Giolitti government would not adopt provisions favoring the Association's members due to Socialist parliamentary obstruction.²⁰²

These tactics helped the Blackshirts earn support from a segment of the movement. Notably, numerous Daring Ones came to endorse the Fighting Fasces and, later, the PNF. In doing so, they hoped to acquire the symbolic and material concessions they aspired to. Beginning in 1921, many Daring Ones joined the pro-Fascist National Federation of Italian Daring Ones. FNAI activists supported Fascism as they espoused radical nationalist values: for instance, in 1923 the Federation enthusiastically endorsed the Italian navy's occupation of the Greek island of Corfu. At the same time, they buttressed this political sponsor as they fervidly wished to receive an official public role as patriotic educators.²⁰³ It is also likely that the Daring Ones militating in the FNAI aimed to receive state financial support, as one of the Federation's goals was to provide "*practical assistance*"²⁰⁴ to its followers.

As for public honors, the Federation expected the Blackshirts to force Italians to show gratitude to its adherents, having been impressed with a pledge to this effect that Mussolini had recently made.²⁰⁵ At the second national congress of the Fighting Fasces Mussolini had lauded the Daring Ones' military efforts during and after the war and promised that they would soon enjoy conspicuous collective esteem.

²⁰² Report sent by the prefect of Bologna to the general directorate of public security, July 22, 1922, *Bologna e Provincia: Associazione Nazionale Combattenti*, 99, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1922, G1, ACS

²⁰³ *Fiamma Nera*, December 10, 1922; September 13, 1923

²⁰⁴ Federazione Nazionale Arditi d'Italia, *Statuto* [Statute] (Orvieto: Marsili, 1938), 4, file "*Federazione Nazionale Arditi d'Italia*," box 285, ACCANMIG, series "*Presidenza*," subseries "*Corrispondenza Associazioni-Comitati-Enti Vari*" (CACEV), CMMIG

²⁰⁵ *Fiamma Nera*, February 4, 1923

It is natural that presently Italians do not want to be reminded of the war. But, in the near future, the psychology of the people shall change and the whole Italian people, or the majority of the latter, shall acknowledge the moral and material worthiness of Italy's victory; the whole Italian people shall honor its veterans and oppose any Government that might jeopardize the nation's future. The whole people shall honor the Daring Ones. The Daring Ones entered the trenches singing, and we owe it to them if we eventually recovered the land between the Piave and the Isonzo rivers; we owe it to them if we still hold the city of Fiume; we owe it to them if we still hold a foot in Dalmatia.²⁰⁶

Importantly, the FNAI activists endorsed and took part in the illegal deeds perpetrated by the Fascist paramilitary squads, aiming to help the Blackshirts gain political prominence. They also helped their allies neutralize those organizations which they deemed hostile to their own interests. As a case in point, Lieutenant Giancarlo Nannini, who militated both in the FNAI and the Bolognese Blackshirts, cooperated with the latter so that the Daring Ones might one day be turned into educators of the Italian homeland. As a matter of fact, he complained that the establishment had by far and large denied him and his peers this role, while, according to him, only Fascism had accepted to help them pursue this aspiration.²⁰⁷

Moreover, the Federation praised the March on Rome, clearly believing the political forces which had frustrated their claims to benefits had been defeated through the Blackshirts' seizure of power. In the immediate aftermath of the March, the FNAI attacked the Liberal cabinets for having denied the ex-combatants their due and lauded Fascism, believing it would create "*a GOVERNMENT ... in which one [might have confided], in which one [might have placed] one's hopes in the event that one's belongings, one's rights,*

²⁰⁶ Edoardo, Duilio Susmel eds., *Opera omnia di Benito Mussolini* [Benito Mussolini's Complete Works]: volume 14: *Dalla marcia di Ronchi al secondo congresso dei Fasci (14 settembre 1919 – 25 maggio 1920)* [From the March of Ronchi to the Fasces' Second Congress (September 14, 1919 – May 25, 1920)] (Florence: La Fenice, 1954), 468.

²⁰⁷ Giancarlo Nannini, *Gli scritti: Raccolti e ordinati da Eugenio Capelli (Federazione Nazionale Arditi d'Italia)* [Writings: Collected and Ordered by Eugenio Capelli (National Federation of Italian Daring Ones)] (Bologna: Fiamma Nera, 1923), 29.

even one's life were to be threatened, trampled upon as in the bitter days after the end of our victorious war."²⁰⁸

On the other hand, not all Daring Ones prioritized the pursuit of a special socio-economic status and the role of guardians of the nation. Hence, they were not swayed by Fascism's promises in this sense. Notably, the ANAI clashed with the Blackshirts as the latter attempted to limit its autonomy²⁰⁹ and bring its agricultural cooperatives under their control.²¹⁰ Some of these elite troops joined the antifascist militia known as the People's Daring Ones. They belonged to or sympathized with the working class and the peasantry and believed governments should reward the latter with economic incentives, for their contributions to the kingdom's war effort. Therefore, these Daring Ones opposed Fascism as they believed the latter was helping the state renege on its past promises to the workers and peasants by forcefully stifling these Italians' claims to better living standards.²¹¹ After all, already in 1919, some Daring Ones had stated that they would fight against anyone who *"opposed the due rights acquired by the working class which, on a daily basis at the time of the war effort, was promised a better tomorrow."*²¹²

Nevertheless, it should be noted that by 1928 the FNAI had acquired approximately 10,000 members,²¹³ including many defectors from the ANAI:²¹⁴ the breadth of this membership suggests that obtaining a special status and political prerogatives were, as a matter of fact, paramount aims to most associated Daring Ones.

Similar to the FNAI activists, various members of the ANC and ANMIG seem to have viewed the Blackshirts' violent methods as successful means for satisfying their own

²⁰⁸ *Fiamma Nera*, October 29, 1922

²⁰⁹ Rochat, *Gli Arditi*, 139.

²¹⁰ *L'Ardito*, October 21, 1922

²¹¹ Balsamini, *Gli Arditi del Popolo*, 75-82; Francescangeli, *Arditi del Popolo*, 66; Rossi, *Arditi, non gendarmi!*, 137-141.

²¹² *L'Iniziativa: Giornale Politico Repubblicano* [The Initiative: Republican Political Daily], April 19, 1919

²¹³ Report sent by the vice-secretary of the FNAI to the secretary of the National Fascist Party, May 3, 1928, 153037, 408, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

²¹⁴ Rochat, *Gli Arditi*, 147-151.

sense of merit. Hence, they apparently supported the Fascists for eminently pragmatic reasons. To this end, chapters of said associations and Fascist structures began intermingling, predominantly in localities where the Shirts were on the way to becoming hegemonic, principally in Central-Northern Italy.

In the beginning, the Fascists appear to have helped former fighters mainly in terms of protecting the grassroots patriotic ceremonies and war commemorations organized by the latter. To come closer to enjoying the Italian people's esteem, many nationalist ex-servicemen started staging public events in their hometowns. Crucially, some of them proved ready to accept the violent assistance offered by Blackshirts, to protect their rituals from local left-wing contesters. In 1920 the ANC chapter in Arezzo, which was organizing a public ceremony, called upon Shirts from the nearby cities and towns of Florence, Siena, and Montevarchi to prevent local anarchists and Socialists from disrupting the latter.²¹⁵ Later, Mussolini's paramilitaries also helped returnees' associations earn jobs and undermine rival veterans' organizations. First of all, in Bologna, the local ANC leader, Bruno Biagi, stipulated agreements with the Fascist agricultural workers' unions to obtain preferential hirings for demobilized farmers.²¹⁶ The Bolognese Fascist and ANC chapters also cooperated to get 150 Shirts and 250 veterans hired by a sugar mill.²¹⁷ In the Apulian city of Taranto, local Fascists similarly championed veterans' right to work.²¹⁸

As previously mentioned, between 1921 and 1922, war disabled and mutilated undertook aggressive agitations to receive jobs in the civil service, in addition to seizing control over public assistance facilities. Crucially, in various cities and towns, Fascists put

²¹⁵ Report sent by the prefect of Arezzo to the interior ministry, December 20, 1920, *Arezzo: Associazione Nazionale Combattenti*, 104, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, G1, 1920, ACS

²¹⁶ *Problemi d'Italia*, October 1924

²¹⁷ *Il Combattente: Bollettino Quindicinale della Federazione Provinciale Bolognese* [The Fighter: Biweekly Bulletin of the ANC Provincial Federation of Bologna], June 17, 1922

²¹⁸ Report sent by the prefect of Lecce to the interior ministry, January 26, 1922, *Lecce: Associazione Ex Combattenti*, 99, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, G1, 1922, ACS

themselves at the demonstrators' disposal to help them reach their goals. Blackshirts protected protesting war impaired from the police and helped intimidate their targets, which consisted essentially of female public employees, an unsurprising choice considering many Italian war disabled and mutilated embraced hyper-masculine ideals and sexist prejudices.²¹⁹ To witness women acting as work colleagues and competitors for jobs must have been rather frustrating for them, as attested by a call issued by the ANMIG, for female civil servants to be fired.²²⁰

For their part, Fascist activists committed themselves to help impaired intimidate female employees for instrumental reasons – as they coveted the political support of these impaired - and in light of sharing sexist prejudices with the latter.²²¹ As a case in point, in Florence, paramilitary squads staffed by veterans – including Fascist ones²²² – policed the premises of state companies that were targeted by the local demonstrators, preventing women from accessing their workplaces.²²³ The ANC chapter in Bologna publicly asked Fascists to help demonstrators take away jobs from women employed in railway companies.²²⁴ More generally, Fascists effectively helped demonstrators come closer to achieving their goals. In Palermo²²⁵ and Mantua²²⁶ returnees and Fascists planned to

²¹⁹ Pavan Dalla Torre, “Le origini dell’Associazione,” 40-41; Martina Salvante, “Italian Disabled Veterans between Experience and Representation,” in *Men after War*, eds. Stephen McVeigh, Nicola Cooper (New York: Routledge, 2013), 121.

²²⁰ Pavan Dalla Torre, “Le donne nell’associazionismo,” 178.

²²¹ Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 34-48.

²²² It is likely that Fascist veterans were part of the paramilitary squads which were put together in Florence by the ANC, which assisted the local war disabled’s demonstrations. The Fascists’ militancy in these squads is attested by the fact that, at a later stage, the National Fascist Party asked its members to leave these groups. See the report sent by the prefect of Florence to the interior ministry, December 18, 1922, *Firenze: Associazione Ex Combattenti*, 99, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1922, G1, ACS

²²³ Message sent by the posts and telegraphs minister to the interior ministry, *Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra ed Ex-Combattenti: Affari Generali*, May 11, 1921, 88, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1921, G1, ACS

²²⁴ Report sent by the public works minister to the interior ministry, April 4, 1921, *Bologna: Associazione Mutilati e Tubercolotici di Guerra*, 88, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1921, G1, ACS

²²⁵ Report sent by the prefect of Palermo to the interior ministry, October 8, 1922, *Palermo: Ex Combattenti*, 99, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1922, G1, ACS

²²⁶ Report sent by the prefect of Mantua to the interior ministry, November 10, 1922, *Mantova: Ex Combattenti*, 99, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1922, G1, ACS

occupy local state premises jointly. In Leghorn, Fascists threatened to shut down the city's public services unless the city hall satisfied local veterans' calls for hirings.²²⁷ In Rome, the militias helped guard the facilities recently occupied by war impaired.²²⁸ Blackshirt violence also helped *combattenti* rid themselves of some of their organizational rivals. Notably, the Fascist²²⁹ and ANMIG leader²³⁰ Cesare Colbertaldo openly boasted that the Shirts' strong-arm tactics had contributed to the demise of the MIROV in Sicily and Bologna.²³¹

As a result of their campaign to support the veterans' attempts at enforcing their rights, the Blackshirts made inroads within the ANC and the ANMIG. Notably, in 1922 the Bolognese chapter of the ANC - while reportedly having been preoccupied, in 1919, with procuring jobs for its members²³² - released a statement which endorsed a dictatorial conception of the state, a declaration which undoubtedly aligned with the local Fascists' tenets. In other words, by then, the Bolognese patriotic former enlistees appear to have accepted authoritarian politics as the primary vehicle for enforcing their rights. As a matter of fact, in the same declaration, they claimed it was fundamental that "*veterans ... be granted ... a special status above all other citizens, in every walk of life [so that they might] positively influence the people by acting as an example of civic and military virtue.*" They also wished to reform Italian politics in an anti-liberal direction: "*The Italian people have come to believe that the political order, which is increasingly ceasing to contemplate politics and the State as mediators between the various social and political ideals of the*

²²⁷ Report sent by the prefect of Leghorn to the interior ministry, July 29, 1922, *Livorno: Associazione Ex Combattenti*, 88, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1921, G1, ACS

²²⁸ Report sent by the police commissioner of Rome to the general directorate of public security, April 15, 1921, *Roma: Mutilati*, 88, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1921, G1, ACS

²²⁹ Giuseppe Miccichè, *Dopoguerra e fascismo in Sicilia* [Sicily in the Post-War Era and under Fascism] (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1976), 218.

²³⁰ Pavan Dalla Torre, "Le origini dell'Associazione," 92.

²³¹ Minutes of the proceedings of an afternoon meeting of the ANMIG central committee, November 9, 1920, volume 3, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1920-1921, CMMIG

²³² Reports sent by the prefect of Bologna to the interior ministry, October 1, 1919; February 21, 1920, *Bologna: Associazione Combattenti*, 104, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1920, G1, ACS

parties, must be understood as a legitimate and necessary means to achieve the national goal of developing the nation's energy and strength."²³³

It is also likely that the Fascists' cooperation with demonstrating demobilized soldiers ended up binding sectors of the ANMIG to them. First of all, the mere act of struggling on the Blackshirts' side eventually made some protesters well disposed towards their accomplishments. It was reported that, in Rome, Fascists helping war impaired guard the facilities the latter had occupied were fraternizing with said occupants.²³⁴ Additionally, it can be inferred that the Fascists' assistance to ANMIG members fostered ties of solidarity between the latter and the Blackshirts, as it brought demonstrators closer to their goals. As seen above, through its agitations the ANMIG obtained thousands of jobs. It is likely that members of the Association who had collaborated with the Fascists for this purpose believed that their success was partially ascribable to this cooperation. Ultimately, as claimed by Albanese,²³⁵ it can be said that the Shirts' strong-arm tactics helped them secure a widespread following, a following which also included veterans.

Crucially, returnees proved ready to cooperate with Fascism to enforce their claims to benefits even in rather dramatic ways, by directly taking part in or otherwise abetting the March on Rome, according to a subsequent account provided by Ettore Viola, a prominent dischargee who flanked Mussolini until Blackshirts assassinated the antifascist parliamentarian Giacomo Matteotti.

²³³ Report sent by the prefect of Bologna to the interior ministry, September 5, 1922, *Bologna: Associazione Nazionale Combattenti*, 99, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1922, G1, ACS

²³⁴ Report sent by the police commissioner of Rome to the general directorate of public security, April 15, 1921, *Roma: Mutilati*, 88, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1921, G1, ACS

²³⁵ Albanese, "Violence and Political Participation," 49-54.

*Fascism was, for many Italians, a movement reacting to those who, abroad, chose not to acknowledge Italy's sacrifices on the battlefield and protesting those who, within [this nation], chose not to treat the fighters of the Carso, the Piave and the Grappa as they deserved and wished to be treated after years of unprecedented suffering. Consequently – for the truth must be told – the March on Rome benefitted from many fighters' efforts or their encouragements.*²³⁶

Interestingly, the ANC chapter in Terni participated in this march to improve the living conditions of their city's war mutilated. After taking part in the Shirts' seizure of power, this chapter asked Mussolini, the new prime minister, to provide employment opportunities to the members of the local ANMIG chapter.²³⁷ Soon after, the Terni steelworks hired 25 war mutilated, as requested by the local vice-prefect and the director of the city's Fascist structure.²³⁸ As shown above, this exchange of favors between the Fascists and the Terni ex-servicemen came about essentially as a result of the latter's attempt to satisfy their sense of entitlement.

As can be seen above, Mussolini's followers breached the former fighters' movement by playing on its adherents' wounded sense of deserving. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that, notwithstanding such fruitful tactics, at this time, Blackshirts were unable to gain hegemony over said movement. This state of affairs can be put down, first of all, to the moral and political revulsion which various of the latter's members felt toward Fascism, even though they shared patriotic values with it. For instance, in 1921, various representatives of the ANC and the ANMIG supported Prime Minister Ivanoe

²³⁶ *L'Italia d'Oggi: Organo Ufficiale dell'Associazione Nazionale Combattenti e Reduci* [Today's Italy: Official Organ of the National Association of Fighters and War Returnees], August 5, 1954

²³⁷ Message sent by the representative of the Fascist organization and the war veterans of Terni to the prime minister, November 15, 1922, *Perugia: Ex Combattenti*, 99, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1922, G1, ACS

²³⁸ Report sent by the sub-prefect of Terni to the interior ministry, November 26, 1922, *Perugia: Ex Combattenti*, 99, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1922, G1, ACS

Bonomi's ultimately unsuccessful attempt to broker a general truce between the Fascists and the Socialists to put an end to the violence flaring up in the country.²³⁹

Second, it should be noted that, in their fanatic pursuit of power, the Blackshirts ended up threatening the autonomy and the very aspirations of the nationalist ex-servicemen's associations, as much as they promoted them. Notably, Fascists often attempted to subdue ex-warriors' groups, as they ultimately aimed at gradually taking control of the movement underpinned by the latter.²⁴⁰ The Fascists' intransigent stance toward patriotic veterans stemmed from their totalitarian ideology, which prompted them to take over any power structure.²⁴¹ Additionally, the Fascists sought to gain economic and social preeminence in the localities where they operated.²⁴² Thereby, they ended up competing with the ANC, which itself controlled various local administrative positions, businesses and trade unions. Possibly due to these ideological and organizational fissures, the Fascist chieftain of Cremona, Roberto Farinacci, undermined the ANC chapter in this city to the point of causing its collapse, notwithstanding the outspoken patriotism of the chapter's members²⁴³ and the attempts made by a representative of the ANMIG, Carlo Delcroix, to mediate between the factions at odds.²⁴⁴

The Fascists' drive to accumulate power and subordinate combat survivors' associations must have alarmed many leaders and cadres of the latter organizations. According to a subsequent account, leading organizers of the ANC feared that if they

²³⁹ Pavan Dalla Torre, "Le origini dell'Associazione," 100; Matteo Millan, "The Contradictions of Veterans' Associations? The Fascist Appropriation of the Legacy of World War 1 and the Failure of Demobilization," in *New Political Ideas in the Aftermath of the Great War*, eds. Alessandro Salvador, Anders Kjøstvedt (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 91.

²⁴⁰ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 125-126, 142.

²⁴¹ Gentile, *Storia del partito fascista*, 578-582.

²⁴² Corner, *The Fascist Party*, 32-50.

²⁴³ Minutes of the proceedings of an afternoon meeting of the ANMIG central committee, April 23, 1922, volume 4, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, subseries "*Verbali 1921-1922*," CMMIG; Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 130.

²⁴⁴ Letter sent by Carlo Delcroix to Roberto Farinacci, October 9, 1921, file "*Delcroix, Carlo*," box 16, fund "*Archivi di Famiglie, di Persone e Studi Professionali*," series "*Farinacci, Roberto*," ACS

submitted to Fascism, they would lose their posts within the Association.²⁴⁵ Similar concerns must certainly have been at play within the ANMIG. Consequently, sectors of these ex-servicemen's groups tried to thwart or to contain Fascism. For instance, in 1921, the ANC leadership decided to help the People's Daring Ones oppose the Blackshirts.²⁴⁶ As for the ANMIG, in October 1922, it tried to stall Mussolini's upcoming March on Rome, by attempting to set up its own demonstration in the Italian capital, together with the nationalist poet Gabriele D'Annunzio, an event which might have enjoyed the participation of some prominent Liberal politicians, had it taken place.²⁴⁷

Fascists were also prompted to oppose certain demobilized servicemen by their own sense of entitlement, which prevented them from respecting the latter's political credentials. As noted by Millan, the Shirts felt part of a special community of Italians:²⁴⁸ they believed they were strengthening the nation through a paramilitary campaign aimed at destroying the country's internal enemies, a purpose for which they were allegedly ready to lay down their lives. Consequently, in their eyes, the magnitude of their service to the fatherland trumped the significance of *combattenti*'s wartime military accomplishments. As a matter of fact, the Fascists came to believe they were the only true Italian patriots. This sectarian ethos actually led them to attempt to create a "*monopoly of patriotism*"²⁴⁹ for themselves. Indeed, the exclusivist attitude guiding the Blackshirts' activities is neatly depicted by a political cartoon authored by the pro-Fascist FNAI, a cartoon which was clearly meant as a rebuke to nationalists who contested the Shirts' attempts at securing a

²⁴⁵ Angelo Amico, *Combattentismo e fascismo* [Veterans and Fascism] (Milan: Edizioni Corbaccio, 1932), 136-137.

²⁴⁶ Francescangeli, *Arditi del Popolo*, 55.

²⁴⁷ Ugo Pavan Dalla Torre, "L'ANMIG fra D'Annunzio e Mussolini (ottobre 1922): Note e prospettive di ricerca" [The ANMIG between D'Annunzio and Mussolini (October 1922): Remarks and Research Perspectives], *Italia Contemporanea* [Contemporary Italy], No. 278 (2015), 331-334.

²⁴⁸ Matteo Millan, *Squadrisimo e squadristi nella dittatura fascista* [The Activities and Members of the Blackshirts' Militias under the Fascist Dictatorship] (Rome: Viella, 2014), 16.

²⁴⁹ Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo: Storia e interpretazione* [Fascism: History and Interpretation] (Bari: Laterza, 2011), 11.

monopoly on patriotism. More in detail, the picture depicts these detractors as self-seeking, cowardly and grotesquely obese figures – thereby implicitly stating that, unlike Mussolini’s militias, they were not ready to risk their lives to uphold patriotic values. In the cartoon, these ‘opportunists’ unfitness as nationalists and the alleged necessity of safeguarding the homeland through paramilitary means are openly stated by a dead and resurrected Daring One.

Image 1.2: Caption: “[To those who accuse Fascism of attempting to secure a] monopoly on patriotism [t]he [dead and resurrected] Daring One [asks]: “What did you bleeding hearts do [to aid the nation], while we gave our lives for the Fatherland?””



Il monopolio del patriottismo

L'ARDITO: — Che cosa faceva questa brava gente quado si moriva per la Patria?

Source: *Fiamma Nera: Voce dell'Arditismo: Settimanale della Federazione Nazionale fra gli Arditi d'Italia*, March 11, 1923 (Image courtesy of the *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze*; further reproduction is prohibited)

Due to their self-aggrandizing outlooks, the Shirts assaulted veterans who did not accord them the compliance and esteem they felt entitled to. Crucially, the former usually had no qualms about physically harming the latter, even those who possessed unimpeachable patriotic credentials. For instance, war impaired enrolled in the ANMIG were beaten up by Fascists for failing to salute them publicly.²⁵⁰

Ultimately, before October 1922, the Fascist party had made some inroads within the veterans' movement – “*rooting*”²⁵¹ itself in this grouping to some extent, to use Paxton's turn of phrase - but was far from hegemonizing it. Notably, the overall number of confirmed Fascist war survivors is rather lower than the membership figures of the movement. A survey taken in November 1921 indicates that 87,182 ex-combatants belonged to the Fighting Fasces – i.e., 57% of this organization's general membership at that stage.²⁵² Out of a sample of 424 Fascist paramilitaries killed in action in the early 1920s, only 124 were war veterans.²⁵³ The Fascist militias included merely a few thousand mutilated.²⁵⁴

On the whole, it appears the veterans' associations which by this stage identified most strongly with Fascism were the middle-sized FNAI and the small associations of war volunteers. The FNAI's proclivities were likely due, among other reasons, to the fact that Daring Ones were among the organized former fighters who had benefitted the least from the post-war status quo, with regard to seeing their sense of entitlement acknowledged officially. Therefore, they were undoubtedly the likeliest to commit to the Fascist

²⁵⁰ Pavan Dalla Torre, “Le origini dell'Associazione,” 101, 111.

²⁵¹ Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 117.

²⁵² Marco Revelli, “Italy,” trans. Roger Griffin, in *The Social Basis of European Fascist Movements*, ed. Detlef Mühlberger (New York: Routledge, 2015), 18.

²⁵³ Sven Reichardt, *Camicie nere, camicie bruno: Milizie fasciste in Italia e in Germania* [Blackshirts, Brownshirts: Fascist Militias in Italy and Germany], trans. Umberto Gandini (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009), 219.

²⁵⁴ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the national council of the ANMIG, April 8, 1940, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, subseries “*Verballi 1938-1943*” (V1938-1943), CMMIG

alternative. On the other hand, before the March on Rome, even sectors of the ANC and the ANMIG cooperated with the Blackshirts. Notably, however, the latter two veterans' associations ultimately wanted to remain separate from these accomplishments, at times even opposing them, as they did not feel respected by them in their desire for political and organizational independence.

To conclude, it can be claimed that the Fascists' success in capturing the support of a part of the movement depended, among other matters, on their successful exploitation of the resentment felt by many moderate fighters (and even some hyper-nationalist ones) at the state's insufficient acknowledgment of their sense of entitlement. Specifically, the Fascists took advantage of these ex-enlistees' frustration at not feeling rewarded for their military sacrifice sufficiently, convincing many of them to endorse their authoritarian project, in exchange for helping such flankers obtain some of the privileges they sought. At the same time, as will be shown below, the Fascists would end up bringing a much higher number of *combattenti* to their side only once they managed to satisfy the latter's claims more extensively.

1.1.2 1923-1928: The Fascist Co-optation of Nationalist Ex-Servicemen

In October 1922, following the March on Rome, Benito Mussolini was tasked by King Victor Emmanuel III with forming a new ministerial cabinet, thereby allowing Fascism to come to power. Ultimately, the birth of the Mussolini government inaugurated a 20-year long spell of dictatorial rule in the kingdom under the aegis of Fascism. Notably, while this autocracy began life as a coalitional system of power, in which conservative and patriotic fellow travelers played a relevant role, eventually these flankers lost much of their

influence, or were wholly subordinated, to Mussolini and the Fascist party.²⁵⁵ Importantly, said supporters included the nationalist veterans' associations, encompassing the larger, more moderate ones, i.e., the ANC and the ANMIG. Eventually, as shown below, the Fascist regime successfully subordinated the *combattenti*'s movement to itself by manipulating the majority of this organization's members into obeying to and collaborating with Mussolini and the PNF, in exchange for seeing many of their rights recognized by the state.

To be sure, the movement's activists did not endorse the Blackshirts' government only out of a desire to obtain a special place in society. A minority of them – war volunteers, many FNAI adherents, minorities of ANC and ANMIG members – committed to it out of hyper-nationalism, just like they had done with the Fighting Fasces and with the PNF before October 1922. Additionally, the majority of government supporters to be found within the ANC and the ANMIG – large associations that on the whole enrolled moderate individuals, unlike the small-scale and militant FNAI and volunteers' groups – harbored a wish to see Mussolini tame all forms of extremism, even those perpetrated by his paramilitaries, so that the fatherland might recover from the political deadlock that had been in place since 1919-1920.²⁵⁶ Another likely reason many of these less intransigent organizers and activists flanked Italy's new rulers was to preserve traditional socio-economic hierarchies, which they believed had been threatened by the left.²⁵⁷

Nevertheless, in working with the Blackshirts' leader, these moderates kept on also being guided by their desire for rewards. This craving actually became a crucial incentive for cooperation after Mussolini proclaimed a formal dictatorship in 1925. As, in the mid-

²⁵⁵ Martin Clark, *Storia dell'Italia contemporanea, 1871-1999* [History of Contemporary Italy, 1871-1999], trans. Andrea Di Gregorio (Milan: Rcs Libri, 1999), 310-312; Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 110-128, 212-224.

²⁵⁶ Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 358-372.

²⁵⁷ Millan, "The Contradictions of Veterans' Associations?," 91, 102.

to-late 1920s, the prime minister and his party gradually stripped these flankers of their independence and autonomy (while at the same limiting the power of the militias), it is likely the moderate majority of the movement carried on supporting him to keep on receiving official advantages and the role as guardians of the nation, rather than due to still perceiving the leader of Fascism as a solution to a national emergency. Moreover, once Mussolini had neutralized the left and put an end to open class struggle, in the early stages of his regime,²⁵⁸ in all likelihood, middle-class veterans, while grateful to him for having safeguarded their socio-economic status, kept on buttressing him to gradually improve the latter.

It should be noted that the Blackshirts' seizure of power in 1922 represented a gamechanger in the relationship between Fascism and the war survivors' movement. Specifically, as Mussolini's government secured control over institutional resources, Fascism was able to satisfy its flankers' sense of deserving to an unprecedented degree, hence acquiring a rather more significant degree of support from them than had previously been the case. In the immediate aftermath of the March on Rome, many of the movement's members hoped their aspirations would be satisfied by the government presided by Mussolini. Notably, notwithstanding its recent attempt to stall the March, the ANMIG resolved to lobby the new cabinet to reform existing legislation on war pensions.²⁵⁹ Crucially, almost all the ANC local federations accepted cooperating with the Mussolini government to see their claims to recompenses pleased.²⁶⁰

For his part, Mussolini was keen to meet several of the demands articulated by the nationalist veterans. In doing so, he undoubtedly aimed at securing consent from them to buttress his own legitimacy. After all, Fascism considered the former fighters' support as a

²⁵⁸ Martin Clark, *Modern Italy: 1871 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2014), 706-708, 753-765.

²⁵⁹ Pavan Dalla Torre, "Le origini dell'Associazione," 111-117.

²⁶⁰ *L'Italia d'Oggi*, August 5, 1954

crucial propaganda tool in light of the symbolic importance it ascribed to Italy's war experience as a vehicle for political change. As perceptively observed by Labanca, no other political regime in interwar Europe claimed to be "*an offshoot of the Great War*"²⁶¹ as insistingly and repetitively as the Blackshirts' dictatorship.

Essentially, Mussolini's government and, to a lesser extent, the Fascist party planned to acquire the *combattenti*'s consent, or at least their acquiescence, by providing them with the material, symbolic, and political rewards they craved. Fascism was ready to afford them various economic paybacks, welfare provisions, public esteem and recognition, and a larger degree of official representation within the National Institution for Fighters and the National Institution for the War Disabled. It was also ready to grant the nationalist ex-combatants' associations the status of official representatives of the Italian veterans' interests, providing these associations with institutional support against their Socialist and Catholic competitors, and to make their adherents into national pedagogues and ambassadors.

Consequently, between 1923 and 1925, an alliance between Fascism and the bulk of the *combattenti*'s movement came into being, based on the following terms: the latter would accord support to Mussolini's cabinet, in exchange for a specific socio-economic status and a role as guardians of the nation for its members. In entering this agreement, the movement entertained the unspoken belief that it would be allowed to keep on engaging freely in national politics – with the exception of its hyper-nationalistic minority, which had already spontaneously adhered to Fascism. Unfortunately for this organization, the PNF would quickly subordinate it, with Mussolini's acceptance, forcing its adherents to cooperate with it and forego any notion of entertaining an independent political role. As

²⁶¹ Nicola Labanca, "Monumenti, documenti, studi" [Monuments, Documents, Studies], *Dizionario storico*, 802.

compensation, these flankers would nevertheless keep on enjoying their official privileges and prerogatives.

As mentioned above, in 1923-1925, the government accorded the ex-militaries flanking it much of what they had dreamed of since undergoing military demobilization. First of all, it reformed war pensions, improving to some extent existing legislation. While Fascists betrayed their original promise to level pensions, they did raise to some extent these emoluments, even for war widows and orphans.²⁶² Notably, they simplified procedures for applying for these pensions for ex-servicemen who had become impaired while serving at the frontline.²⁶³ Furthermore, this reform extended several of these measures to Habsburg army invalids and mutilated who had acquired Italian citizenship.²⁶⁴

Additionally, the government prioritized the hiring of war impaired in the state civil service, public companies, and middle schools.²⁶⁵ It should be noted that it accorded this priority also to war decorated,²⁶⁶ doubtless benefitting Daring Ones and war volunteers, who included numerous recipients of military awards in their ranks – respectively, 3,625²⁶⁷ and, by 1924, at least 3,200.²⁶⁸ Similarly, invalid officers and NCOs who worked for the army began being paid the same as their able-bodied counterparts.²⁶⁹ On the other hand, the cabinet, in downsizing temporary hirings in the civil service by dismissing over 65,000 employees,²⁷⁰ cut down the number of male and female civil servants who had been hired

²⁶² *FIDAC: Bulletin of the Allied Legions*, June 1929; *La Stampella*, January 15, 1924

²⁶³ Pironti, “L’evoluzione,” 230.

²⁶⁴ *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell’Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, July-August 1938

²⁶⁵ Giuseppe Colonna, ed., *Raccolta delle disposizioni di legge a favore degli ex combattenti* (Siena: Stab. Tipografico Combattenti, 1954), 14-15, 26.

²⁶⁶ *Raccolta ufficiale delle leggi e dei decreti del Regno d’Italia: Anno 1923* [Official Collection of the Italian Kingdom’s Laws and Decrees: Year 1923]: volume 2 (Rome: Tipografia delle Mantellate, 1923), 6409.

²⁶⁷ Antonio Caroti, “Arditi formidabili in guerra ma ingenui nella lotta politica” [The Daring Ones: Mighty Soldiers and Political Naives], *Il Corriere della Sera* [The Evening Messenger], October 23, 2017, https://www.corriere.it/cultura/17_luglio_20/reparti-assalto-arditi-prima-guerra-mondiale-8027ddc2-6d61-11e7-8b64-8c2227f4edc4.shtml.

²⁶⁸ In 1924, the Italian state examined 9,200 requests for military awards, presented by war volunteers, accepting 3,200 such claims. See the letter sent by the war ministry to the personal secretary of the prime minister, December 9, 1924, 509791, 1248, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

²⁶⁹ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi d’Italia, *L’assistenza ai mutilati*, 33-34.

²⁷⁰ Gianni Toniolo, *L’economia dell’Italia fascista* [Fascist Italy’s Economy] (Bari: Laterza, 1980), 50.

during the war, i.e., workers who, as seen above, were seen by combat survivors as usurpers of jobs they deserved. Importantly, Mussolini allowed ex-warriors to apply for resulting vacancies.²⁷¹ His government also funded the FNAI,²⁷² the Roman chapter of which spent a sizeable part of its budget (50,000 *Lire* in 1924-1925) on financial assistance for its members.²⁷³

Crucially, the government made the *combattenti's* organizations believe it considered them legitimate interlocutors. First of all, it made them into the official representatives of the Italian veterans' interests. In 1923, a National Association of War Volunteers came into being thanks to the fusion of two similar pre-existing organizations, based respectively in Milan and Florence.²⁷⁴ In the same year, the government made this new group into the official mouthpiece of the Italian war volunteers.²⁷⁵ Simultaneously, it made the ANMIG, the FNAI, and the ANC the formal agents of, respectively, the war impaired, the Daring Ones, and the remaining able-bodied ex-militaries. In the same period, the National Association of Fighters – in accordance with the requests it had made to the Fascist government - was transformed into a state body.²⁷⁶ As a result, the ANC obtained 1,000,000 *Lire* from the National Institution for Fighters,²⁷⁷ while also earning a yearly governmental subsidy.²⁷⁸ Additionally, the Association was allowed to choose 12 out of 15

²⁷¹ *La Vittoria: Organo dell'Associazione Nazionale Combattenti di Palermo* [The Victory: Organ of the National Association of Fighters' Chapter in Palermo], March 1; September 1, 1923

²⁷² Report sent by the vice-secretary of the FNAI to the secretary of the PNF, May 3, 1928, 153037, 408, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

²⁷³ Budget estimate for the Roman chapter of the FNAI, for the year 1924-1925, prepared by the secretary of the Federation, October 6, 1924, 153037, 408, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

²⁷⁴ Founding statement of the ANVG, December 14, 1923, 509791, 1248, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

²⁷⁵ Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Documenti della fede*, 263.

²⁷⁶ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi d'Italia, *L'assistenza ai mutilati*, 6; *Fiamma Nera*, January 21, 1923; Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 362.

²⁷⁷ Comitato Nazionale Associazione Combattenti, *La sagra delle bandiere: 25 giugno 1923: Da Palazzo Venezia il 4 novembre 1923* [The Celebration of the Flags: June 25, 1923: From Venetia Palace on November 4, 1923] (Rome: Tipografia Editrice Giorgio Berlutti, 1923), 30, 528080, 1852, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

²⁷⁸ Royal decree June 24, 1923, number 1371, 528080, 1852, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

members of the ONC administrative council and was given control over the Institution's offices for delivering social care to returnees.²⁷⁹

The following year, the National Association of Families of War Dead (*Associazione Nazionale Famiglie dei Caduti di Guerra*), which had been created in 1923 from the merger of the Association of Mothers and Widows and the Association of Relatives of the Missing in Action,²⁸⁰ was similarly turned into a state body.²⁸¹ On the other hand, the government forced out of existence ex-militaries' groups that were competing with the officially-approved ones or even just opposing Fascism. The ANAI was banned in 1924,²⁸² its secretary Gino Coletti later deciding to enter the Fascist bureaucracy.²⁸³ The MIROV and the UNRG, persecuted by Blackshirts and the police, disappeared by the middle of the decade.²⁸⁴

Crucially, the far-right government made an outspoken attempt to co-opt the movement, taking into account requests and suggestions the latter made to it. To give a few examples, in 1923, Mussolini created a special commission to help ANC members keep onto the parcels of land they had seized in the Latium region before the March on Rome.²⁸⁵ Additionally, the government took advice from the ANMIG in developing its war pensions reform. Mussolini went as far as dismissing the undersecretary for war pensions, Cesare De Vecchi, after the latter failed to take into account the Association's proposals for this reform.²⁸⁶ Public authorities also acknowledged various claims to employment voiced by fellow travelers of Fascism. For instance, at the behest of Carlo Delcroix, the president of

²⁷⁹ *L'Italia d'Oggi*, June 10, 1953

²⁸⁰ Pavan Dalla Torre, "Le donne nell'associazionismo," 175-176.

²⁸¹ Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Il decennale*, 336.

²⁸² Rossi, *Arditi, non gendarmi!*, 213-214.

²⁸³ Letter by Gino Coletti, May 28, 1937; report on Gino Coletti, June 2, 1937, "*Coletti, Gino*," 315, MI, DGPS, DPP, ACS

²⁸⁴ Isola, *Guerra*, 164-165, 189, 201-202; Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 90.

²⁸⁵ Message sent by the executive committee of the Latium-Sabina federation of the ANC to the prime minister, September 10, 1923, 1852, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

²⁸⁶ Quagliaroli, *Risarcire la nazione*, 398-444.

the ANMIG after 1924, the ministry of education began employing disabled middle-school teachers to a significant extent.²⁸⁷

In 1923, following the recent disbandment of the public surveillance force known as the Royal Guard (*Guardia Regia*), the ANC asked Mussolini to procure jobs to the officers who had been employed by this organization.²⁸⁸ Their plea was somewhat satisfied, as the government subsequently decided to enroll part of the former Royal Guard officers in the new police organization that was set up in 1925, the Public Security Agents' Corps (*Corpo degli Agenti di Pubblica Sicurezza*).²⁸⁹ Moreover, the state also considered some requests stemming from specific regional issues. Italian fighters residing in Trieste wished for local Slavs to be stopped from sending their children across the border with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, to be educated in the municipality of Karlovac. The government accordingly began attempting to discourage these customs from being perpetuated.²⁹⁰

Under Fascism, the patriotic ex-combatants even began enjoying a greater degree of control over the ONIG than in the liberal era. In 1923, Delcroix, at the time a member of the ANMIG's central committee, became an advisor to the Institution.²⁹¹ It should also be noticed that in 1922 the state started generously financing the Institution, raising public subsidies for the latter from 2,000,000 to 27,000,000 *Lire*. Thereafter, these subsidies amounted to a yearly 22,000,000 *Lire*.²⁹² Furthermore, nationalist returnees were granted

²⁸⁷ *Problemi d'Italia*, December 1924

²⁸⁸ Message sent by the ANC president to the prime minister, October 3, 1923, 528080, 1852, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

²⁸⁹ Piero Crociani, "La Regia Guardia per la Pubblica Sicurezza" [The Royal Guard for Public Security], *Il 1919*, 206.

²⁹⁰ Order of business issued by the Pola association of veterans, May 1, 1923; report sent by the prefect of Istria to the interior ministry, May 3, 1923, *Pola: Ex Combattenti*, 75, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1923, G1, ACS

²⁹¹ *Il Bollettino: Organo Mensile*, June 1923

²⁹² Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Sesto congresso nazionale: Bolzano: Luglio 1926: Opera nazionale pro invalidi: Relatore: Aurelio Nicolodi* [Sixth National Congress: Bolzano: July 1926: National Institution for War Disabled: Speaker: Aurelio Nicolodi] (Rome: 1926), 6, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG; *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, October-November 1936

the opportunity to increase their lobbying powers as their representatives were included in the Fascist electoral ticket for the general elections of 1924. Eventually, 58 of them would enter the parliament,²⁹³ including the ANMIG president Carlo Delcroix.²⁹⁴

Finally, the new cabinet provided several public honors to the movement's associates, to a greater degree than those they had been afforded under liberal rule. For instance, it gave their delegates a prominent role in state war commemorations. In 1923, remarking upon a patriotic ceremony in Rome to which they had recently been invited, ANC national council members stated that their followers finally felt adequately honored by public institutions.

*We already gathered in Rome, in the past years, with our flags. We were invited, together with many other delegations, we were perhaps the most numerous, we were undoubtedly the most neglected. Today we gather at a ceremony which is truly for us, for our Association, which is finally vast, mighty and respected.*²⁹⁵

Additionally, in the same year, FNAI delegates were invited to attend an official commemoration of the First World War, in which public authorities for the first time openly praised the Daring Ones for helping Italy win the conflict.²⁹⁶ The war volunteers, for their part, were reserved a special war decoration.²⁹⁷ Returnees who expected to be given a special status as national educators were also satisfied by Italy's new masters. In 1923, Mussolini stated that he was interested in putting veterans into the service of official patriotic pedagogy, asking them to help spread the "*religion of the Fatherland.*"²⁹⁸ In the same year, he invited war mutilated to oversee a weekly collective ritual involving

²⁹³ Musiedlak, *Lo stato fascista*, 129.

²⁹⁴ Albertina, "Delcroix, Carlo."

²⁹⁵ Comitato Nazionale Associazione Combattenti, *La sagra delle bandiere*, 7, 528080, 1852, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

²⁹⁶ *Fiamma Nera*, January 28, 1923

²⁹⁷ Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Il decennale*, 352.

²⁹⁸ *Il Combattente Maremmano*, July 26, 1923

schoolchildren, in which these youths performed the Fascist salute in front of the Italian flag.²⁹⁹

The leader of the Blackshirts also showed veterans flanking him that he wished to take into account their proposals for devising a civic cult of the homeland. Notably, he made May 24, the day on which Italy had entered the war in 1915, a national festivity, following the ANMIG's recommendation.³⁰⁰ It is certain that by conferring important public responsibilities upon the *combattenti*'s associations, in addition to more generally affording a variety of privileges to Italian veterans, the government earned the support of many nationalist fighters. Doing so also convinced these fellow travelers to consent to, or at least to tolerate, the PNF.

In the case of the FNAI and the ANVG, it appears these associations cooperated with the government and the PNF due to a variety of incentives. First of all, Fascism's chauvinism undoubtedly sat well with these ideologically militant organizations. Remarkably, the ANVG president, Eugenio Coselschi, stated to Mussolini that his association's ultimate goal consisted in promoting Italian expansionism in the world.³⁰¹ Many ANVG members wished for Italy to annex the Dalmatian region.³⁰² Nevertheless, several Daring Ones and war volunteers – especially the first - additionally expected to receive goods, services, and esteem from the state, thereby basing their political allegiances on this goal. As seen above, several Daring Ones had entered the FNAI to pursue these benefits. As for the ANVG, it aimed, among other goals, at educating Italians on

²⁹⁹ Zavatti, *Mutilati e invalidi di guerra*, 120.

³⁰⁰ *Il Bollettino: Organo Mensile*, May 1923

³⁰¹ Letter sent by the president of the ANVG to the prime minister, January 14, 1928, 509791, 1248, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

³⁰² Andrea Benzi, *Il volontarismo di guerra e l'Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra a Como: Dalle guerre in Africa Orientale alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale* [War Volunteering and the National Association of War Volunteers in Como: From the Wars in Eastern Africa to the Second World War] (Cusano Milanino: S.e.b., 2007), 44-45.

patriotism.³⁰³ It hence undoubtedly wanted to receive a special symbolic status and practical assistance from the state, to perform this task.

Therefore, by providing these various former troops with figurative and concrete recompenses, the government certainly cemented its ties to them. As a matter of fact, at the end of 1923, the leaders of the FNAI claimed that their federation's liaison with Fascism was based on feelings of thankfulness. Their appreciation stemmed from the belief that the Mussolini cabinet was properly compensating the Daring Ones for their wartime sacrifice.³⁰⁴ Therefore, it is likely that FNAI militants kept on consenting to the PNF at least in part out of feeling confirmed in their sense of deserving. Even the ANVG thanked Mussolini for recognizing the veterans' wartime sacrifice in terms of tributing them with adequate public recognition and economic paybacks, an accomplishment which the liberal governments had purportedly failed to achieve.³⁰⁵

As for the National Association of Fighters and the National Association of War Mutilated and Disabled, these organizations provided a much more restrained form of backing to Fascism. The limited nature of this support stemmed from a breadth of factors. As discussed earlier, under the liberal regime, the ANC and the ANMIG had remained, on the whole, distant from the Blackshirts. Most of their members had felt ideological revulsion or indifference toward the Fighting Fasces. Second, many of these associates had been connected to political parties other than the Fascists, such as the Liberals, the Republicans or the PSA. Finally, before and after the March on Rome, the ANC and the PNF constantly clashed due to organizational rivalries.

³⁰³ Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Statuto* [Statute] (Rome: Stabilimento Tipografico Centrale, 1930), 3-4.

³⁰⁴ *Fiamma Nera*, December 2, 1923

³⁰⁵ Public statement issued by the ANVG, September 29, 1924, 509791, 1248, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS; Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Documenti della fede*, 110.

The contentions opposing the National Association of Fighters and the National Fascist Party stemmed, to begin with, from the latter's incessant and remorseless drive to accrue economic and administrative influence at the local level.³⁰⁶ The party hence strove not only to take political and organizational power away from war survivors' chapters, as explained earlier, but also to neutralize the trade unions connected to these branches. As a matter of fact, the ANC stipulated in 1923 a pact with the Blackshirts, which required the Association to wind down its own unions so as not to rival the latter's Fascist competitors.³⁰⁷ All these forms of exclusivist intolerance rested on the Fascists' belief that they were entitled to a special status due to their paramilitary activities in the service of the fatherland, a claim which was only strengthened by their recent, supposedly-heroic seizure of power. Blackshirts demeaned those combat survivors who, while being sympathetic to their cause, had not taken part in the March on Rome, claiming they were insufficiently committed to the nation's salvation.³⁰⁸

As a result of the PNF's intransigence, on the whole, the ANC and the ANMIG tended to limit the extent to which they cooperated with this party. Notably, Vittorio Arangio Ruiz, who presided over the ANC between 1923 and early 1924,³⁰⁹ stated that the Fascist party should not take over his association's prerogatives (which he identified with providing ex-men in uniform with social assistance and disseminating the cult of the First World War soldiers in Italian society).³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ *Mussolini: volume 2: Il fascista: tome 1: La conquista del potere, 1921-1925* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1966), 403-407.

³⁰⁷ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 127.

³⁰⁸ Report on a confrontation between ANC members and Fascists, issued by the president of the ANC federation of Lucca, attached to the message sent by the prefect of Lucca to the general directorate of public security, September 17, 1924, *Lucca: Ex Combattenti*, 71, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1924, G1, ACS

³⁰⁹ Mario Missori, *Gerarchie e statuti del P.N.F.: Gran consiglio, direttorio nazionale, federazioni provinciali: Quadri e biografie* [Hierarchies and Statutes of the P.N.F.: Great Council, National Directorate, Provincial Federations: Cadres and Biographies] (Rome: Bonacci Editore, 1986), 162.

³¹⁰ *Il Combattente Maremmano*, September 20, 1923

At the same time, the ANC and the ANMIG appreciated and cooperated with, to a considerable extent, the Mussolini cabinet, mainly in light of the official responsibilities and privileges the latter was conferring upon them. For instance, the ANC provincial congress of Brindisi elected to support the government due to the latter's recent decision to turn the Association into a state body.³¹¹ The ANMIG released a press article which claimed that it stood by the government as the latter was protecting the war disabled's rights, but wanted to eschew any major involvement with the PNF.

*We are ... close to the National government that is trying to give due consideration to ... the rights of the fighters and is making the Fatherland great and worthy of respect ... But while we war mutilated might sincerely and committedly collaborate with the National government to rebuild the nation, we cannot extend this cooperation to the fascist party, as it is a political party, and as such can be taken over by partisan men, who think and act in a factional manner.*³¹²

To be sure, many members of these associations kept on rejecting Fascism as a whole. Notably, between 1923 and 1924, following the establishment of the antifascist association known as "Free Italy," numerous ANC members began joining the latter.³¹³ On the other hand, numerous other associates of the ANC and the ANMIG viewed the government with gratitude, believing it could be trusted with defending their independence and the rights of their followers. In all likelihood, these sympathizers believed they could substantially influence the Mussolini cabinet regarding the latter's veterans' policies and convince it to preserve the independence of their groups. In holding these beliefs, they resembled other fellow travelers of the government, who for varying periods viewed the Fascist political project as essentially flexible and open to being shaped by them, like an

³¹¹ Report by the prefect of Brindisi to the general directorate of public security, January 31, 1923, *Lecce: Ex Combattenti*, 75, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1923, G1, ACS

³¹² *La Stampella*, January 15, 1924

³¹³ Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 367-368.

“*open-ended experiment.*”³¹⁴ In light of these assumptions, numerous pro-Fascist fighters believed that Mussolini would keep on taking into account their requests to him, essentially treating the ANC and the ANMIG as ‘junior partners’ in the political coalition buttressing him. Notably, ANC followers asked him to protect their association from the interference of the PNF. For instance, in 1923, a chapter of the Association pleaded for Mussolini to stop the Blackshirts from manipulating its internal elections.³¹⁵

Nevertheless, Mussolini’s flankers within the ANC and the ANMIG overestimated the extent they could influence the government. As a matter of fact, in 1923, the ANC asked the prime minister to accord it a more prominent role in the development and implementation of state veterans’ policies. Mussolini, however, rejected this request.³¹⁶ Furthermore, he ultimately proved unwilling to uphold the independence of the organized war survivors against pressure from the PNF. As a result, the Blackshirts continued subordinating ANC chapters, often resorting to or threatening to deploy violence.³¹⁷

As can be seen above, Mussolini wanted the ANC and the ANMIG to firmly follow his directives, thereby acting as the ultimate designer of the ex-combatants’ official socio-economic status and political role. Additionally, notwithstanding his ambiguous public statements on Blackshirts’ violence, at least in the short term, Mussolini was not prepared to put an end to the latter, as his power depended to a relevant degree on the Fascist militias.³¹⁸ By choosing this course of action, he effectively let the PNF keep on encroaching on the independence of the ANC and the ANMIG. Why did numerous members of the National Association of Fighters and the National Association of War

³¹⁴ David Roberts, *Fascist Interactions: Proposals for a New Approach to Fascism and its Era, 1919-1945* (New York: Berghahn, 2016), 94.

³¹⁵ Letter sent by veterans of Piazza Armerina to the prime minister, October 22, 1923, *Catalnissetta: Ex Combattenti*, 75, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1923, G1, ACS

³¹⁶ *Problemi d’Italia*, August 1924

³¹⁷ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 128.

³¹⁸ Giulia Albanese, *La marcia su Roma* [The March on Rome] (Bari: Laterza, 2008), 173-177; Millan, *Squadrisimo*, 21, 87, 98.

Mutilated and Disabled nevertheless keep on supporting the prime minister? Essentially, it might be claimed that, in light of the various favors which Mussolini had begun granting members of the movement, most of the latter were ready to continue flanking him. More in detail, these ex-combatants were estranged from the antifascist opposition parties, mainly as a result of the latter's previous failure to help them acquire the benefits they felt entitled to. On the other hand, they were thankful to Mussolini for having accorded some of these rewards, hence supporting him despite his ultimate disregard of their groups' independence. It might be speculated that they believed his nebulous promises to discipline the Blackshirts eventually or resigned themselves to trading their organizational freedom for their newly acquired benefits.

Ultimately, it might be claimed that many *combattenti*'s desire to be thanked by their nation led them to radicalize towards supporting Fascism. As seen above, between 1919 and 1922, a number of them forged ties to the PNF, as it helped them receive some of the recompenses they sought. Between the March on Rome and the formal proclamation of Fascist dictatorship in 1925, numerous other ones began cooperating with Mussolini's government – hence accepting to live under a semi-authoritarian regime, while looking with unease or concern at the PNF's tendency to push this polity towards developing a “*monistic center of power.*”³¹⁹ They were led to accept the kingdom's new political situation, primarily because the prime minister was turning into reality, to a relevant extent, the treatment which these fellow travelers had long desired to enjoy. As a matter of fact, the overarching preoccupation with securing benefits led most members of the ANC and the ANMIG to eventually accept the subordination of their associations to the PNF, which took place by early 1925.³²⁰ In other words, these groups accepted to come under the

³¹⁹ Juan Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 78.

³²⁰ Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 369-374; Zavatti, *Mutilati e invalidi di guerra*, 88, 102.

informal control of the Fascist party, to preserve the privileges which their affiliates were receiving from the Mussolini government.

These organizations' subordination took place mainly during and soon after the national political crisis that unfolded in 1924 as a result of the murder of the antifascist parliamentary deputy Giacomo Matteotti. Initially, following Matteotti's slaying by Fascist thugs, the leaders of the ANC, the ANMIG, and the soon-to-be banned ANAI were prompted, by the general wave of public indignation caused by this assassination,³²¹ to begin resisting the PNF. They publicly asked Mussolini to restrain his party. Notably, the ANC held a congress in July 1924, in which it asked the Fascist government to cease being influenced by the PNF in the future.³²² Soon after, ANAI Secretary Coletti wrote to the ANC leaders to show his support and criticize the Blackshirts' party.³²³ In the same month, the ANMIG also held its congress, during which President Delcroix exhorted Mussolini to force his political organization to follow 'the rule of law.'³²⁴ In making his request to Mussolini, he was clearly asking for the PNF to be curbed of its authority, as in the following months, he privately criticized the latter for its intolerant and power-hungry attitude.³²⁵

Crucially, nevertheless, the ANC and the ANMIG did not ultimately press Mussolini to any considerable degree on these matters. Their failure to do so, in all likelihood, stemmed from a concern that they might irretrievably alienate him, jeopardizing the new, special socio-economic status they were in the process of acquiring. More in detail, these associations' adherents (while ready in some cases to make amends with the Liberals) still viewed the left and sectors of the PPI with suspicion and resentment, as they

³²¹ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini: volume 2: Il fascista: tome 1: La conquista del potere, 1921-1925* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1966), 630-632, 677-704.

³²² *Problemi d'Italia*, September 1924

³²³ *L'Italia d'Oggi*, August 5, 1954

³²⁴ Albertina, "Delcroix, Carlo."

³²⁵ *La Nazione* [The Nation], October 17, 1924

had been at odds with these parties before and after the Fascist seizure of power. Notably, at the ANC congress of 1924, the congressmen affirmed that it was necessary to prevent “those political parties which [had] forsaken and offended victory”³²⁶ from resuming their leading political role in the country – an apparent reference to the Socialists and the Italian People’s Party, which, as seen above, had neglected patriotic war survivors’ sense of entitlement. Moreover, at the congress, delegates of the recipients of golden war medals trenchantly refused to cooperate with antifascist politicians, for the same reason.

*We cannot forget the dishonor and the shame we previously endured, which we never want to be forced to suffer again. For these reasons, we cannot trust the recent, bolstered words of those who previously committed, inspired, or sheepishly abetted the offenses that were levied against the Army and Us [since] we are good at telling true friends and admirers apart from the swarm of fickle sponsors and insincere patrons of our dignity.*³²⁷

The National Association of War Mutilated and Disabled generally resembled the ANC’s stance. Giovanni Baccarini, the ANMIG’s secretary after 1924,³²⁸ claimed that it was necessary to keep on supporting the Mussolini cabinet, in his view, to prevent ex-servicemen from being humiliated as had been the case before the March on Rome.³²⁹ The fact that, in September 1924, President Delcroix was fiercely criticized by the antifascist politician Piero Gobetti³³⁰ possibly reinforced the president’s alienation from the government’s opponents. On the other hand, numerous members of the Association doubtless still felt strong feelings of gratitude towards the prime minister, which might have made them reluctant to challenge him manifestly. A member of the Association’s central

³²⁶ Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 370, 372.

³²⁷ Public statement issued by the representatives of the Italian bearers of golden war medals, attached to the report sent by the prefect of Umbria to the interior ministry, July 27, 1924, *Perugia: Ex Combattenti*, 71, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1924, G1, ACS

³²⁸ Salvante, “Italian Disabled Veterans,” 121.

³²⁹ *Problemi d’Italia*, September 1924

³³⁰ Albertina, “Delcroix, Carlo.”

committee, Giovanni Madia,³³¹ conceded that it was thanks to the leader of Fascism if organized returnees were finally being respected.³³²

Eventually, the ANMIG ceased to challenge the government at all. In November 1924, Carlo Delcroix publicly renewed his support for the cabinet to help his association carry on lobbying successfully for the rights of the war disabled and mutilated.³³³ As can be seen above, the leaders of the ANC and the ANMIG essentially failed to sway Mussolini towards severing his ties to the PNF's more intransigent factions. Undoubtedly, this failure stemmed mainly from their decision to avoid cooperating with the antifascists, who at this time were still openly active in Italy. This outcome had fateful consequences for Italian democracy, as it contributed to Mussolini's eventual political survival in the face of the crisis kickstarted by Matteotti's murder.

The ANC also failed to resist the PNF's attempts at subordinating it to itself. This outcome, too, was determined, to a relevant extent, by many members' desire to keep on seeing their sense of entitlement satisfied. It should be noticed that Fascism used coercion and blackmail to subjugate the Association. Following its congress of 1924, the National Association of Fighters came increasingly under attack by the Fascist party, which used violence to take over numerous chapters of this association. Among other tactics, the PNF also threatened to stop representing the interests of ex-combatants: in Pisa, the party ordered those members of the Fascist trade unions who were also enrolled in the ANC to leave the latter, or they would be expelled from the former. As a result, by early 1925, numerous adherents to the Association had switched their allegiances entirely to the PNF.³³⁴

³³¹ Pavan Dalla Torre, "Le origini dell'Associazione," 92.

³³² Minutes of the proceedings of a morning meeting of the ANMIG central committee, October 9, 1924, volume 5, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1922-1925, CMMIG

³³³ *Il Tempo: Quotidiano Indipendente* [The Times: Independent Daily], August 1, 1946

³³⁴ Report sent by the prefect of Pisa to the general directorate of public security, February 11, 1925, *Pisa: Ex Combattenti Autonomi*, 108, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1925, G1, ACS; Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 142-153.

Nevertheless, the Association did not present a united front against the party's onslaught. Remarkably, many members of the ANC accepted the militias' initiatives against their organization, thereby failing to stand in the way of its subordination to the PNF. It appears they did so mainly as they sought to preserve the benefits they were receiving from the government or the Fascist party. Seeing that Mussolini was not taking a stand against the Blackshirts' offensive, some of them chose not to press him on this issue, fearing they would lose his concessions to them. For instance, after the ANC leadership criticized Mussolini at its 1924 congress, the La Spezia chapter of the Association spoke out against these denunciations, claiming the prime minister was solely responsible for the recent improvement of the *combattenti's* status.³³⁵ Similarly, the Leghorn chapter opposed the Association's central leaders, claiming that Mussolini was providing the veterans with "*due consideration for the work they [had] done to make Italy great.*"³³⁶

It seems many Sardinian ANC members essentially chose not to press the prime minister on the issue of Blackshirts' violence, as he was helping them achieve the infrastructural overhaul of their island, a goal which, as seen above, they had entertained since the end of the Great War. In 1923, a considerable part of the Sardinian Action Party's leadership – a party which, as shown above, was strongly interlinked with the ANC – had entered the PNF to ensure this modernization took place. Their strategy was later clearly enunciated by one of their leaders: "*We entered fascism as a maneuvering mass to exploit the new regime and lead it to support in Sardinia our initiatives which aimed at ... obtaining from the State all the necessary means to enact those public works which would have generally improved the island.*" In late 1924, the head of government satisfied these expectations, granting 1,150,000 *Lire* for public works to be undertaken in Sardinia.

³³⁵ See the order of business which was issued by the ANC provincial federation of La Spezia on February 2, 1925, *Spezia: Associazione Combattenti*, 108, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1925, G1, ACS

³³⁶ Report sent by the prefect of Leghorn to the interior minister, February 1, 1925, *Livorno: Associazione Nazionale Combattenti*, 101, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1925, G1, ACS

Consequently, sectors of the PSA tolerated the dictatorial provisions enacted by Mussolini in 1925.³³⁷ Therefore, it appears the prime minister satisfied said flankers' desire to see their island modernized, persuading them to passively accept the "*fascistization*"³³⁸ of the National Association of Fighters.

In early 1925, aiming to end the protracted infighting between the ANC and the PNF, Mussolini used his powers as prime minister to replace the leaders of the former, substituting them with a triumvirate of Fascist cadres and sympathizers: Amilcare Rossi, Luigi Russo and Nicola Sansanelli. It should be noted that these new leaders promised to keep providing various kinds of benefits to the ANC members.³³⁹ It also appears some of those Fascists who were taking over ANC chapters made similar assurances, as in the town of San Pietro in Bagno.³⁴⁰ In all likelihood, these various guarantees ensured that most adherents accepted the Blackshirts' rule over the Association, thereby electing to remain in it. For instance, the ANC federation of Salerno chose to cooperate with the triumvirate to protect the rights of its members.³⁴¹ It should also be noticed that, in that year, the Association's overall membership amounted to approximately 362,000 adherents, similar numbers to those which it had enjoyed in the early 1920s.³⁴²

Importantly, Mussolini managed to convince the ANMIG to keep on cooperating with him, notwithstanding his interference in the ANC's internal affairs. When the prime minister replaced the ANC's leadership, he reassured ANMIG President Delcroix that he

³³⁷ Sotgiu, *Storia della Sardegna*, 231, 272-286.

³³⁸ With "*fascistization*" I term a "*process of importing fascism (as ideology and/or political élite) into the rationale of an authoritarian transformation of the political system.*" See Aristotle Kallis, "'Fascism,' 'Para-fascism' and 'Fascistization: On the Similarities of Three Conceptual Categories,'" *European History Quarterly*, 33, No. 2 (April 2003), 233-234.

³³⁹ *Problemi d'Italia*, May 1925

³⁴⁰ *Il Corriere Padano* [The Po Valley's Messenger], October 23, 1926, notebook 1, box 251, AANCR, series "*Rassegna Stampa 18 Luglio 1926 - 08 Ottobre 1942*" (RS), ISREC

³⁴¹ Report sent by the prefect of Salerno to the general directorate of public security, March 3, 1925, *Affari Generali Congresso*, 107, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1925, G1, ACS

³⁴² *Italia Augusta: Problemi d'Italia: Rassegna dei Combattenti* [Venerable Italy: Italy's Issues: Review of the Former Fighters], August 1928

intended to keep on collaborating with the fighters' associations and granting privileges and prerogatives to the latter's members, involving them, for instance, in the patriotic education of Italians.³⁴³ As a result of these assurances, the ANMIG leadership essentially resigned itself to tolerating the fate of the ANC and kept on working with Mussolini to satisfy its members' sense of entitlement. It should also be noted that, around that time, the prime minister deplored the violent attacks which had been recently perpetrated by some Blackshirts against members of the ANMIG chapter in Parma.³⁴⁴ It might be speculated that Mussolini's display of solidarity toward the Association convinced the latter that the head of government would at least protect it from grassroots Fascist violence, while not from subordination to the PNF.

Summing up, Fascism successfully exploited the desire harbored by the majority of the returnees' movement to be thanked by the fatherland, to bring this organization under its control. In other words, Fascist veterans' policies were crucial for the successful subordination of numerous ex-soldiers to the Mussolini cabinet and the PNF. As shown above, the ANC and the ANMIG ultimately complied with the government and, to a lesser extent, with the PNF, in exchange for receiving material, symbolic and political rewards. Similarly, the FNAI was also significantly affected, in its support for Fascism, by the gratitude its members felt towards the latter. Notably, at the time of the dispute between the ANC and the PNF, pro-Fascist Daring Ones fought against members of the Lecce chapter of the National Association of Fighters.³⁴⁵ They probably did so mainly out of thankfulness to the party. As a matter of fact, it appears that, before this time, the FNAI

³⁴³ Summary of a meeting between the prime minister and the president and the secretary of the ANMIG, likely 1925, 528080, 1852, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

³⁴⁴ Message sent by the prime minister to the president of the ANMIG, likely 1925; message sent by the president of the ANMIG to the prime minister, May 4, 1925, "Delcroix, Carlo," 62, SPD, series "Carteggio Riservato," ACS

³⁴⁵ Report sent by the prefect of Lecce to the interior ministry, March 27, 1925, *Lecce: Arditi d'Italia*, 107, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1925, G1, ACS

and the National Association of Fighters had been on good terms, as the former's main periodical had not voiced complaints against the latter.

Between 1925 and 1926, the Italian political system came under a formally authoritarian regime, buttressed by single-party rule. All political parties except the Fascist one were banned from public life during the latter year.³⁴⁶ This development also affected those groups with which the *combattenti* entertained positive relationships, such as the PSA and the Republicans, hence doubt displeasing most associated ex-enlistees. Nevertheless, the movement essentially came to accept the dictatorship, as a matter of fact cooperating with it. More in detail, they obeyed and worked with the government and the PNF, gradually becoming enmeshed with the latter in many ways.

How did the regime preserve its hold over the numerous associated fighters who had come to agree to it, in the coming years? Did it merely deploy its considerable, growing coercive apparatus³⁴⁷ to ensure compliance? As a matter of fact, a comprehensive analysis of the dictatorship's strategy for building consent among veterans suggests that Fascism deployed a 'carrot and stick' approach to this issue – policing fighters while, crucially, also continuously satisfying their calls for preferential treatment. Ultimately, under Mussolini's autocracy, the *combattenti*'s groups – which, it should be stressed, by now were the only ones still operating in Italy - managed to keep on pursuing some of their priorities, focusing on lobbying the state for economic and symbolic benefits, enacting patriotic pedagogy and undertaking public diplomacy. With regard to the latter endeavor, they actually became more involved than previously, cooperating extensively with the Inter-Allied Federation of Former Fighters. In 1925, the ANC hosted the Inter-Allied Federation of Former Fighters'

³⁴⁶ Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 116.

³⁴⁷ Mauro Canali, "Crime and Repression," in *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, ed. Richard Bosworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 223-234.

congress in Rome.³⁴⁸ Finally, in 1928 the ANMIG entered the FIDAC.³⁴⁹ Beginning in 1925, the ANMIG also attended meetings of a vaguely leftist transnational veterans' forum, the CIAMAC.³⁵⁰

As the nationalist organizations were now bereft of competition and were majorly supported by the state, most of them thrived in organizational terms, except for the FNAI, which in these years decreased slightly in membership figures, coming down from 10,000 members in 1928 to 7,739 in 1932.³⁵¹ For instance, by 1928, the ANC registered 479,000 enrollments.³⁵² By 1929, the ANMIG, which had also begun incorporating former members of the MIROV,³⁵³ boasted 300,000 affiliates.³⁵⁴ The ANVG began admitting volunteers from the territories which had been annexed by Italy at the end of the First World War. In 1926, it took in volunteers from the Julian March, Dalmatia, and the city of Fiume³⁵⁵ (the latter by then had become part of the Italian kingdom).³⁵⁶ In 1927, the Association incorporated a group of war volunteers from the Trentino region, the Trentino Legion (*Legione Trentina*).³⁵⁷ By 1929, the Association would number approximately 20,000 members.³⁵⁸

It can be stated that, under the budding Fascist regime, these associations found a favorable environment to press for the preferential treatment they desired in exchange for cooperating with this dictatorship with regard to several initiatives promoted by the latter.

³⁴⁸ Martina Salvante, "The Italian Associazione Nazionale Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra and Its International Liaisons in the Post Great War," in *The Great War and Veterans' Internationalism*, eds. Julia Eichenberg, John Paul Newman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 170.

³⁴⁹ FIDAC, December 1928

³⁵⁰ Salvante, "The Italian Associazione Nazionale Mutilati," 171-172.

³⁵¹ Report sent by the FNAI president to the prime minister, March 10, 1932, 153037, 408, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

³⁵² *Italia Augusta*, August 1928

³⁵³ Report sent to the ANMIG president, February 8, 1926, "Roma: Associazione Nazionale Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra," 163, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1936, G1, ACS

³⁵⁴ FIDAC, June 1929

³⁵⁵ *La Volontà d'Italia*, September 30, 1926

³⁵⁶ Steiner, *The Lights that Failed*, 336.

³⁵⁷ Message sent by the president and the secretary of the ANVG to the president of the ANMIG, September 1, 1927, "Legione Volontari di Guerra," 296, ACCANMIG, "Presidenza," CACEV, CMMIG

³⁵⁸ Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Il decennale*, 352.

It should also be stressed that the regime provided several hyper-nationalistic returnees with additional incentives to support it, in the guise of its jingoist and imperialist policies. After all, as discussed earlier, a sizeable minority of the movement held chauvinist beliefs, especially in the case of the volunteers and the Daring Ones. For instance, in 1924, the ANVG had openly encouraged Mussolini to establish a formal dictatorship to safeguard his ultranationalist politics.³⁵⁹ It had also flaunted its colonialist tendencies since the mid-1920s.³⁶⁰ Concerning the local level, some ANVG chapters openly embraced ethnic prejudices and resentments. The Association's chapter in Bolzano, a city close to Italy's border with Austria, asked local authorities to ban public religious teaching in German within South Tyrol.³⁶¹

However, as seen above, between 1922 and 1925, Fascism managed to establish control over almost all of the movement – except for the ANAI, which it simply drove out of existence - by developing a rather comprehensive set of veterans' policies, which were more attuned to patriotic ex-combatants' needs and aspirations than those the liberal regime had devised. In the case of the most prominent nationalist associations, the ANC and the ANMIG, cooperation with Fascism was likely prompted mainly by a wish to see members' needs and aspirations acknowledged by the state. After all, if most of these moderate war survivors had initially supported the Fascist cabinet also as a way out of a perceived national crisis, this emergency had subsided by the late 1920s, following the government's proscription of the left and subordination of the Fascist paramilitaries. As a matter of fact, Dogliani and Zavatti suggest veterans' organizations, in the long run, supported the Fascist

³⁵⁹ Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Documenti della fede*, 123-124.

³⁶⁰ *La Volontà d'Italia*, June 15, 1927

³⁶¹ Report sent by the consul general of Innsbruck to the Italian foreign affairs ministry, January 18, 1929, "Bolzano: Sezione Associazione Volontari di Guerra," 50, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1935, G1, ACS

regime mainly as it provided their affiliates with several advantages.³⁶² As will be illustrated below, this explanation appears to be correct.

Beginning in 1925, the terms of the alliance between Fascism and the veterans' movement were formally modified, as the former came to dominate the latter completely: in exchange for carrying on enjoying its rewards, the movement accepted to work with the Blackshirts while renouncing to an independent role in national politics. For its part, between 1926 and 1943, the dictatorship kept on enacting the favorable veterans' policies it had started crafting in 1923 to preserve the assent of these flankers. In time, it even extended the range of benefits available to them.

In all likelihood, in these twenty years the ex-enlistees' movement consented to the regime principally as a result of these provisions, which catered both to their personal interests and some of their core ideological beliefs. To begin with, in the mid-to-late 1920s, the autocracy consolidated, in general terms, the advantageous economic status of men with knowledge of the war. To be sure, the government was ultimately restrained in land grants and financial support for peasant soldiers. Nevertheless, it did provide various perks to the latter. The autocracy's readiness to satisfy at least some of the peasant veterans' requests undoubtedly ensured that these old soldiers, on the whole, were treated more favorably than other categories of country-dwellers. As a matter of fact, between 1922 and 1928, Fascism set back the living conditions of the Italian peasantry to a considerable degree. It dismantled the liberal laws which had allowed farmers to seize landed estates – going as far as evicting occupiers from some of these holdings. It also increased the taxes paid by farmers and made life harder for the latter through the reevaluation of the national currency undertaken in

³⁶² Dogliani, *Il fascismo degli italiani*, 99; Zavatti, *Mutilati e invalidi di guerra*, 102.

1926. Consequently, many smallholders had been forced to sell their properties by the end of the decade.³⁶³

On the other hand, the regime reformed the ONC, which began focusing on providing land to veterans - for instance, through land reclamation schemes³⁶⁴ - and generously funded the Institution. Notably, in 1938 the ONC would be assigned a special subsidy of 12,000,000 *Lire*.³⁶⁵ In providing land to returnees, the Institution offered plots for collective tilling and private use.³⁶⁶ By 1927, it had begun leasing private parcels to over 20,000 sharecroppers, aiming to turn them into smallholders.³⁶⁷ Furthermore, the government handed out 864,865 *Lire* to peasant soldiers to buy agricultural machinery and farming equipment.³⁶⁸ By 1927, impaired peasant discharges had received 38,641,257 *Lire* in agricultural loans, partially financed by the state, with individual loans of this kind capped at 30,000 *Lire*.³⁶⁹ 500 of them became smallholders thanks to these subsidies. This initiative was beneficial for jobless mutilated in Southern Italy, where public authorities met significant challenges in providing jobs to these impaired.³⁷⁰ Furthermore, in 1925 the *combattenti*'s agricultural cooperatives were incorporated into a Fascist³⁷¹ body, the National Cooperation Body (*Ente Nazionale per la Cooperazione*). The cooperatives'

³⁶³ Giuseppe Lorenzoni, *Inchiesta sulla piccola proprietà coltivatrice formatasi nel dopoguerra* [Inquiry on the Post-War Smallholders]: volume 15: *Relazione finale: L'ascesa del contadino italiano nel dopo-guerra* [Final Report: The Italian Peasant's Ascent in the Post-War Era] (Rome: Soc. An. Tipogr. Operaia Romana, 1939), 255, 268; Roger Absalom, "The Peasant Experience under Italian Fascism," *Oxford Handbook*, 133-139; Valerio Castronovo, "Fascismo e classi sociali" [Fascism and Social Classes], in *Fascismo e capitalismo* [Fascism and Capitalism], ed. Nicola Tranfaglia (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976), 102-103.

³⁶⁴ Dogliani, *Il fascismo degli italiani*, 105.

³⁶⁵ Royal decree, June 16, 1938, number 1062, "*Opera Nazionale Combattenti: Regio Decreto Legge 16 Giugno 1938*" [National Institution for Former Fighters: Royal Decree-Law of June 16, 1938], box 2121, dossiers 1/1-8-1 to 1/1-8-3, fund "*Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri*" (PCM), series "*Gabinetto*," category "*Affari Generali*" (AG), years 1937-1939, ACS

³⁶⁶ Mauro Stampacchia, *Ruralizzare l'Italia!: Agricoltura e bonifiche tra Mussolini e Serpieri* [Italy Must Be Ruralized!: Agriculture and Land Drainage between Mussolini and Serpieri] (Milan: Franco Angeli Editore, 2000), 212.

³⁶⁷ Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Il decennale*, 376.

³⁶⁸ *Italia Augusta*, July 1927

³⁶⁹ Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Il decennale*, 373.

³⁷⁰ *Il Bollettino: Pubblicazione Mensile*, April 1927

³⁷¹ John Pollard, *The Papacy in the Age of Totalitarianism: 1914-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 138.

managers hoped their organizations would benefit from this merger.³⁷² The state also offered 200,000,000 *Lire* to create popular homes for disabled veterans residing in urban areas and 2,283,000 *Lire* for those living in rural spaces.³⁷³

Concerning war pensions, in 1926, some categories of disabled received raises in their emoluments.³⁷⁴ Notably, by cumulating this increase and the one they had been enjoying since 1924, former infantrymen with severe disabilities enjoyed yearly pension installments amounting to 18,480 *Lire*, a noticeable improvement compared to payments they had received in the liberal era (1,410 *Lire*).³⁷⁵ Moreover, the disabled were allowed to cumulate war and workplace pensions. Furthermore, financial ameliorations were offered to those invalids who were not given preferential access to the job market.³⁷⁶ Finally, Mussolini left war pensions levels unchanged in the mid-to-late 1920s, at the time he undertook a campaign for the reevaluation of the national currency,³⁷⁷ an initiative which noticeably downsized general salaries.³⁷⁸

The government also took important steps towards satisfying the ex-combatants' needs in terms of social care provisions. It kept on subsidizing the members of the FNAI through the mid-to-late 1920s. In particular, following financial mismanagement by the Federation's leadership, which led to reduced subsidies for the membership,³⁷⁹ the

³⁷² *Problemi d'Italia*, November 1925

³⁷³ Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Il decennale*, 373.

³⁷⁴ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Sesto congresso nazionale: Bolzano, luglio 1926: Le pensioni di guerra: Relatore Cesare Colbertaldo* [Sixth National Congress: Bolzano: July 1926: War Pensions: Speaker Cesare Colbertaldo], (Rome, 1926), 4, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

³⁷⁵ *FIDAC*, June 1929

³⁷⁶ Zavatti, *Mutilati e invalidi di guerra*, 133.

³⁷⁷ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Settimo congresso nazionale: Roma: 4 novembre 1929: Relazione della segreteria pensioni: Relatore: Cesare Colbertaldo Colbertaldo* [Seventh National Congress: Rome: November 4, 1929: Report of the Pensions Secretariat: Speaker: Cesare Colbertaldo] (Rome: Stabilimenti Grafici A. Vallecchi, 1929), 4-5, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

³⁷⁸ Clark, *Storia*, 354-355.

³⁷⁹ Report on the FNAI sent by the PNF leader Carlo Scorza to the prime minister, likely 1928, 153037, 408, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

government replaced it with the PNF chieftain Carlo Scorza, who began supporting the FNAI's recruits more generously than his predecessors.³⁸⁰

With regard to placing veterans in state and private jobs, the regime was relatively successful, at least concerning help to the war disabled. To be sure, it did not completely solve the problem of unemployment among old soldiers. For instance, in 1928, in Bologna, a few hundred veterans and war victims demonstrated to be placed.³⁸¹ However, the dictatorship did help a multitude of former fighters in this regard. Between 1925 and 1926, new laws gave the ex-servicemen privileged access to jobs. Notably, new calls for middle-school teachers were issued, open to disabled and able-bodied veterans.³⁸² After 1926, combatants were also facilitated in accessing newly available jobs in the civil service.³⁸³

Additionally, a 1928 law granting impaired priority in the assignment of monopoly goods shops³⁸⁴ ensured that, by 1937, 6,500 business units of this kind would be accorded to these war victims.³⁸⁵ Importantly, power-bearers moved to stabilize the employment statuses of a multitude of war survivors. Veterans who worked as state employees for a whole year between 1924 and 1925 were offered permanent contracts.³⁸⁶ Numerous invalids working in railway, postal, and telegraphic services saw their job stability improved through new laws.³⁸⁷ Moreover, in 1927 ANMIG members were allowed to enroll in the Fascist unions, an opportunity which provided them with a degree of

³⁸⁰ FNAI financial statement, December 31, 1931, 153037, 408, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

³⁸¹ *La Libertà: Organo della Concentrazione Antifascista* [Freedom: Organ of the Antifascist Concentration], March 25, 1928

³⁸² Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Sesto congresso: Assistenza*, 21, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

³⁸³ *Il Bollettino: Pubblicazione Mensile*, January 1927

³⁸⁴ Giuseppe Bruni, *Tutti i benefici per benemerenze di guerra fasciste e militari* [All the Provisions for Fascist and Military War Merits] (Siena: Ancora, 1939), 164-166.

³⁸⁵ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Decimo congresso nazionale: Roma: 29 aprile 1937: Relazione della segreteria assistenza: Relatore Vittorio Presti* [Tenth National Congress: Rome: April 29, 1937: Report of the Social Care Secretariat: Speaker Vittorio Presti] (Rome: Poligrafia R. Filipponi, 1937), 5, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

³⁸⁶ *Italia Augusta*, July 1927

³⁸⁷ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Sesto congresso: Assistenza*, 22-25, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

employment protection.³⁸⁸ The state also subsidized construction cooperatives set up by the war impaired.³⁸⁹ These provisions led to the hiring of many ex-combatants. By 1929, 31,000 impaired were employed in the state administration, 15,000 in public and semi-public companies, 110,000 in private companies.³⁹⁰

Furthermore, in 1926 the regime began helping veterans obtain small loans from private banks, to finance their businesses, through the ANC's mediation.³⁹¹ It had secured small loans for 10,000,000 *Lire* within that year, with low-interest rates.³⁹² Ex-enlistees found employment even within the Fascist party. In 1928 it was reported that volunteers in the Trentino region, who had previously deserted in droves local party chapters as the latter had accepted former Habsburg veterans, now were being “*given due consideration,*” which presumably means they were offered positions within these structures. Consequently, they returned to according support to the PNF.³⁹³

Importantly, between 1925 and 1928, the dictatorship co-opted the servicemen's associations to a considerable extent. Its considerably attentive disposition towards these associations, in all likelihood, helped mend some of the rifts Fascism had opened up between itself and the ANC and the ANMIG. To begin with, in the mid-to-late 1920s, the government put an end to the more openly violent activities of the Blackshirts due to the latter's escalating patterns of aggression against flankers of the government.³⁹⁴ Between 1925 and 1926, the prime minister issued draconian public security laws, which undermined the Fascist paramilitary organizations' tendency to dominate politics at the

³⁸⁸ *La Stampella*, January-February 1927

³⁸⁹ *Il Bollettino: Pubblicazione Mensile*, July-August 1926

³⁹⁰ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Settimo congresso nazionale: Roma: 4 novembre 1929: Relazione morale: Parla il segretario generale: Gianni Baccarini* [Seventh National Congress: Rome: November 4, 1929: Moral Report: Speaker: General Secretary Gianni Baccarini] (Rome: Società tipografica anonima Luzzatti, 1929), 8, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

³⁹¹ *Italia Augusta*, July 1927

³⁹² *FIDAC*, August 1, 1926

³⁹³ PNF report on the political situation in Trentino-South Tyrol, September 5, 1928, “*Trento – Situazione,*” 25, PNF, DN, SP 1881-1941, ACS

³⁹⁴ Lyttelton, *La conquista del potere*, 433-472.

local level. Various squad leaders were actually sent into internal exile.³⁹⁵ Additionally, in 1927 the dictator declared police prefects to be the sole enforcers of law and order at the local level, thereby further downsizing the grassroots authority of the militia. He also asked these prefects to help veterans consolidate their economic and symbolic standing in the areas they controlled: “*The prefects of the fascist Regime must acknowledge [the veterans’ associations] as much as possible, promoting their initiatives and ensuring they are surrounded by a supportive [citizenry].*”

Mussolini’s decisions undoubtedly pleased the ANC and the ANMIG, as they allowed these associations to preserve at least a limited degree of organizational autonomy from the Fascist party, in addition to holding onto a measure of influence at the local level. Importantly, they ensured that the PNF could no longer attempt to subordinate these associations’ local structures through violence. It is telling in this respect that the ANMIG printed, in its main periodical, the public statement which confirmed the police prefects’ powers and obligations.³⁹⁶ The ANMIG president, Delcroix, openly saluted Mussolini’s course of action as an evident turn in the direction of limiting the PNF’s power.³⁹⁷

To be sure, the organizational autonomy which these associations managed to cling to was very narrow. Notably, Mussolini did not reverse the fascistization of those ANC chapters which the Blackshirts had previously taken over. Additionally, almost all of the personalities who were to preside over the associations during the Fascist era became members of the party by the mid-to-late 1920s,³⁹⁸ a development that further diminished this autonomy: ANVG President Eugenio Coselschi; Amilcare Rossi, Nicola Sansanelli, and Luigi Russo, the members of the triumvirate initially ruling over the ANC; ANMIG

³⁹⁵ Millan, *Squadrisimo*, 144, 148.

³⁹⁶ *Il Bollettino*, January 1927

³⁹⁷ *La Stampella*, January-February 1927

³⁹⁸ Report on Giovanni Baccarini’s life, likely 1934; report on Eugenio Coselschi’s political activities, likely 1945, “*Baccarini, Giovanni*,” “*Coselschi, Eugenio*,” 56; 337, MI, DGPS, DPP, ACS; Missori, *Gerarchie*, 257, 269, 271, 272, 275, 291.

Secretary Giovanni Baccarini; Major Alessandro Parisi, and General Ottavio Zoppi, the FNAI presidents of the 1930s. Even the ANC's secretary of the late 1920s, Angelo Zilli,³⁹⁹ despite having militated previously in the antifascist "Free Italy" group, closely cooperated with the ANC Fascist triumvir Sansanelli.⁴⁰⁰ Unsurprisingly, by the end of the decade, the movement was wholly integrated – albeit informally - in the PNF and, hence, was strictly monitored by the latter.⁴⁰¹

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the Mussolini cabinet took into account a number of demands forwarded by veterans' associations, which certainly helped smooth over their loss of political and organizational independence. First of all, they became conspicuously represented in the National Institution for Fighters and the National Institution for the War Disabled. Concerning the ANC, while this association lost in 1926 its right to choose 12 out of 15 members of the ONC's administrative council,⁴⁰² its triumvir Amilcare Rossi nevertheless became a member of the National Institution's consultative board.⁴⁰³ For its part, by 1926, the ANMIG held sway over the ONIG executive council,⁴⁰⁴ one of the Association's members acting as vice president of the Institution.

As, in 1925, the National Institution for the War Disabled was granted the task of providing employment to war victims, the ANMIG certainly found itself in the position to provide hirings to many of its members. Police prefects also helped the National Association of the War Mutilated and Disabled with regard to placement initiatives at the

³⁹⁹ Paolo Ceci, *I gerarchi dell'Associazione Nazionale Combattenti* [The Leaders of the National Association of Fighters] (Rome: Pinciana, 1928), 111.

⁴⁰⁰ Report on the PNF leader Nicola Sansanelli, January 17, 1931, "*Sansanelli, Nicola*," 1204, MI, DGPS, DPP, ACS

⁴⁰¹ Rochat, *Gli Arditi*, 163-166; Sabbatucci, *I combattenti*, 374; Zavatti, *Mutilati e invalidi di guerra*, 102-103.

⁴⁰² *L'Italia d'Oggi*, June 10, 1953

⁴⁰³ *L'Opera Nazionale Combattenti nel decimo annuale*, front page.

⁴⁰⁴ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Sesto congresso: Assistenza*, 6, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

local level, helping it force private businesses to provide occasional work to white-collared impaired workers.⁴⁰⁵

Furthermore, the regime endorsed various initiatives promoted by these groups. It partially financed the building of the ANMIG's central headquarters in Rome, the Motherhouse of the War Mutilated and Disabled (*Casa Madre dei Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra*).⁴⁰⁶ It also provided the war disabled with small loans and subsidies for building homes, in accordance with their association's wishes.⁴⁰⁷ Similarly, it is likely it extended pension benefits to the impaired of the Habsburg army to satisfy the ANMIG's desires, as, as remarked above, the latter had lobbied since the end of the war for these measures. In this period, the Blackshirts also provided more direct forms of institutional patronage. Mussolini offered subventions to the ANMIG through the ONIG⁴⁰⁸ and turned the organization gathering recipients of golden war medals, founded in 1924, into a state body.⁴⁰⁹ For its part, the PNF helped the ANC deliver social assistance to its members.⁴¹⁰

It should be highlighted that the organized *combattenti*'s ascent came down also to their pro-Fascist or Fascist leading delegates. While working with Fascism mainly as they experienced some ideological convergences with the latter, these individuals nevertheless additionally focused on lobbying it for provisions for the ex-combatants. Specifically, they collaborated with Mussolini also as a way of ensuring he would continue rewarding the fighters they advocated for. These managers' strategies would yield positive results for the returnees they represented, in the rest of the interwar era and the opening stages of the

⁴⁰⁵ *Il Bollettino: Pubblicazione Mensile*, August 1925; July-August 1926; April 1927

⁴⁰⁶ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the ANMIG central committee, October 3, 1938, volume 7, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, subseries "*Verbali 1938-1943*," CMMIG

⁴⁰⁷ *La Stampella*, July-August 1926

⁴⁰⁸ Minutes of the proceedings of a morning meeting of the ANMIG central committee, May 29, 1929, volume 7, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, subseries "*Verbali 1926-1937*" (V1926-1937), CMMIG

⁴⁰⁹ Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra, *Il decennale*, 338.

⁴¹⁰ Associazione Nazionale Combattenti: Federazione Provinciale Ravenna, *Adunata e congresso provinciale: Cervia, 19 maggio 1929* [Gathering and Provincial Congress: Cervia, May 19, 1929] (Ravenna: Società Tipo-Editrice Ravennate e Mutilati, 1929), 14, E101, 8, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

Second World War, while later unwittingly leading returnees to suffer the destruction and harsh material deprivations brought about by the latter conflict. Those veterans' delegates who seemingly obtained the most from this approach were ANMIG President Carlo Delcroix and the main ANC leader, Amilcare Rossi. They ensured their groups cooperated extensively with Mussolini's autocracy and, by doing so, secured various provisions for their followers. As a matter of fact, Delcroix, an officer who had lost his hands and sight to an explosive injury during the First World War, was later described by the right-wing journalist Giano Accame as a "*clever lobbyist*"⁴¹¹ for the war impaired.

Image 1.3: Carlo Delcroix, delivering a public speech.



Source: *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra*, December 1940 (Image courtesy of the *Biblioteca di Storia Moderna e Contemporanea*; further reproduction is prohibited)

⁴¹¹ Carlo Delcroix, *D'Annunzio e Mussolini* [D'Annunzio and Mussolini] (Florence: Le Lettere, 2010), 82-83.

Rossi, a teacher and a bearer of the military golden medal,⁴¹² achieved a similar degree of success. Curiously, his accomplishments appear to have rested partly on his fawning attitude towards Mussolini, which probably endeared him to the latter. This stance was actually rather pronounced: for instance, writing to the head of government in the aftermath of the official war commemorations that took place in Rome on November 4, 1938, Rossi claimed he and the other leaders of the ANC had deliberately kept a low profile in the course of such event. They aimed to allow Mussolini, another participant in this occasion, to be the only focus of the attendees' attention.

[My] Leader ... We all saw you yesterday and intimately rejoiced at Your unique and mindful warrior comradeship, but You did not see the national managers of the [National] Association [of Fighters], who, steering clear of Your intense gaze as much as possible, believed that by doing so they might underline the nature of the gathering: a display of the unitary and univocal disposition of the Italian fighters.⁴¹³

⁴¹² Ceci, *I gerarchi*, 46-50.

⁴¹³ Letter sent by the ANC president to the prime minister, November 5, 1938, 528080, 1852, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

Image 1.4: Amilcare Rossi, in the central row of the group portrait shown below.



Source: Paolo Ceci, *I gerarchi dell'Associazione Nazionale Combattenti* (Rome: Pinciana, 1928) (Image courtesy of the *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze*; further reproduction is prohibited)

In terms of public honors, the regime carried on satisfying the nationalist war survivors to a substantial degree. In particular, the latter kept enjoying a prominent position in state patriotic ceremonies. Crucially, these ex-combatants' associations were invited to take part in said rituals.⁴¹⁴ In time, some of them even acquired a leading role in them. By 1927, the ANMIG had been afforded the right to parade in an advanced position within said celebrations.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁴ See, for instance, the message sent by the president of the ANC federation of Forlì to the federation's chapter presidents, November 2, 1930, "1930," 13, AANCR, C1922-1957, ISREC

⁴¹⁵ Minutes of the proceedings of an afternoon meeting of the ANMIG central committee, April 4, 1927, volume 7, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1926-1937, CMMIG

As mentioned above, in this period, activists of the movement were confirmed as guardians of the nation. To begin with, they were allowed to carry out patriotic pedagogy, being granted an important role in official educational initiatives. Specifically, they were given a role in the military training of the Italian people. The government founded in 1926 the National Union of Italian Retired Officers (*Unione Nazionale Ufficiali in Congedo d'Italia*; UNUCI), which focused, among other things, on “develop[ing] the professional disposition of officers.”⁴¹⁶ Similarly, in the beginning, the intermediate echelons of the official Fascist militia, the Voluntary Militia for National Security (*Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale*; MVSN) - which focused on providing premilitary training for the Italian youth⁴¹⁷ - ended up being composed chiefly of retired NCOs.⁴¹⁸ In 1928, when the MVSN’s ranks were opened up again, about 22,120 impaireds joined the Militia.⁴¹⁹ Furthermore, public authorities took part in the grassroots pedagogic ceremonies staged by the veterans flanking them. In Rome, ANVG associates commemorated fallen soldiers in a ceremony attended by party and government representatives.⁴²⁰

It should be noted that, by partaking in official rituals and educational efforts, veterans made a significant contribution to the regime’s effort to instill Italians with a fanatical sense of loyalty to the Fascist elite.⁴²¹ This effort was a multipronged one. It included the development of a “political religion,” i.e., a system of public rites and educational policies aimed at creating collective devotion to Fascist elites and ideals. Furthermore, beginning in the mid-1930s, the dictatorship involved its citizens in several

⁴¹⁶ *Bollettino Provinciale dell’U.N.U.C.I.* [U.N.U.C.I. Provincial Bulletin], November 4, 1927

⁴¹⁷ Rochat, *L’esercito italiano*, 273-278.

⁴¹⁸ Dogliani, *Il fascismo degli italiani*, 78.

⁴¹⁹ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the national council of the ANMIG, April 8, 1940, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

⁴²⁰ *La Volontà d’Italia*, February 11, 1928

⁴²¹ Aristotle Kallis, “‘A Question of Loyalty:’ Mussolinismo and the Collapse of the Italian Fascist Regime in 1943,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 6, No. 1 (2001), 69-73, 78-79.

wars to strengthen their nation-statism and win further prestige and influence for Mussolini and his party.⁴²²

Ultimately, the autocracy sought to entrench itself by creating ‘New Men,’ adult males who would act as fearless and selfless soldiers, indefatigable workers, and fanatically loyal members of the national community.⁴²³ It should be noticed that this multifaceted strategy ended up radicalizing many Italians, as it disseminated dictatorial, racist and imperialist mindsets among them. Ultimately, by taking part in the political religion of the Blackshirts and preparing their fellow countrymen for the Fascist wars of the 1930s and 1940s, veterans helped the population partially undergo radicalization, even though they were ultimately unsuccessful in turning the general populace into a phalanx of committed and loyal Fascists.⁴²⁴

Nevertheless, it is debatable whether *combattenti* themselves imbibed the extreme ideals they were helping propagate among their co-citizens. Ultimately, notwithstanding various exceptions – most notably the leadership and much of the membership of the ANVG - I contend that, as a matter of fact, most of them did not. Instead, it is likely that most associated patriotic fighters took part in the regime’s rituals and educational initiatives to further their own, more moderate agendas: continuously enjoying the gratitude of the people and protecting the nation’s post-Great War borders by educating their compatriots

⁴²² Gentile, *The Sacralization*, 31, 132-152; *Politics as Religion*, trans. George Staunton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 45-48; “The Sacralization of Politics”, in *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives*, ed. Constantin Iordachi (New York: Routledge, 2010), 277, 280, 284-285; Knox, *Common Destiny*, 53-110, 227.

⁴²³ Gentile, *The Sacralization*, 78-79; Luca La Rovere, “La formazione della gioventù in regime fascista. La scuola e le organizzazioni giovanili” [Youth Education in the Fascist Regime. School and Youth Organizations], in *L’uomo nuovo del fascismo: La costruzione di un progetto totalitario* [Fascism’s New Man: How a Totalitarian Project Was Devised], eds. Patrick Bernhard, Lutz Klinkhammer (Rome: Viella, 2017), 116; Robert Mallett, “Fascism as the Expression of a Spiritual Revolution in Italy”, in *The Sacred in Twentieth-Century Politics: Essays in Honour of Professor Stanley G. Payne*, eds. Roger Griffin, Robert Mallett, John Tortorice (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 92-106.

⁴²⁴ Jorge Dagnino, “The Myth of the New Man in Italian Fascist Ideology,” *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, 5, No. 2 (October 2016), 142-148; Tommaso Baris, “Consent, Mobilization, and Participation: The Rise of the Middle Class and Its Support for the Fascist Regime;” Valeria Galimi, “The ‘New Racist Man:’ Italian Society and the Fascist Anti-Jewish Laws,” *In the Society of Fascists*, 78-82; 162-163; Gentile, *The Sacralization*, 79-101, 150-152.

on nationalist and martial values. After all, while it is likely that Mussolini wished to create a new set of moral values and revolutionize the political system in Italy, it appears various social groups living under his dictatorship found ways of pursuing their own, distinct goals while feigning acceptance of the Fascist political agenda and public cult, as in the emblematic case of Italian Catholics. Notably, Catholic flankers of the autocracy supported several policies promoted by the latter, all while attempting to steer the state toward their own ends.⁴²⁵ In following this course of action, they were certainly helped by the fact that the Fascist political religion was in of itself “*syncretic*”⁴²⁶ – i.e., its rituals were not wholly dissimilar from Catholic ones (nor from those of another major fellow traveler, the monarchy),⁴²⁷ as the autocracy proved itself somewhat willing to amalgamate all of these different traditions.⁴²⁸

In a similar manner to these Catholics, the majority of the organized servicemen, in propagating the Fascist political religion, appear to have pursued their own, moderate aims, aided by the fact that said religion’s themes and messages overlapped to a degree with their own ideas for a civic cult. First of all, in working as public educators, veterans appear to have focused on simply spreading patriotic values. One of the triumvirs leading the ANC, Amilcare Rossi, believed that discharges needed to educate new generations to love their homeland and to transform citizens into selfless patriots.⁴²⁹ The ANMIG secretary, Baccarini, viewed the ANMIG as a vehicle for disseminating nationalist values.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁵ Walter Adamson, “Fascism and Political Religion in Italy: A Reassessment,” *Contemporary European History*, 23, No. 1 (2014), 64-65; John Pollard, “Fascism and Catholicism,” *Oxford Handbook*, 177; “Fascism and Religion,” in *Rethinking the Nature of Fascism: Comparative Perspectives*, eds. António Costa Pinto, Aristotle Kallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 141-143, 160.

⁴²⁶ Gentile, “The Sacralization,” *Comparative Fascist Studies*, 264.

⁴²⁷ Maurizio Ridolfi, *Le feste nazionali* [National Ceremonies] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003), 83-86.

⁴²⁸ Adamson, “Fascism and Political Religion,” 69-70; Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 51-56, 87, 139-140.

⁴²⁹ *L’Italia Combattente: Organo Ufficiale dell’Associazione Nazionale Combattenti* [Enlisted Italy: Official Organ of the National Association of Fighters], November 15, 1938.

⁴³⁰ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Sesto congresso nazionale: Bolzano: Luglio 1926: Relazione morale: Relatore il segretario generale Gianni Baccarini* [Sixth National

In all likelihood, the majority of the organized *combattenti* accepted to spread the Fascist message to propagate their own ideological beliefs, thereby working toward the establishment's ultimate purposes while furthering their own. To be sure, some veterans refused to pursue this covert strategy of promoting their ideas under the mantle of the Fascist political religion. For instance, an invalid in the town of Isolabona stated his willingness to take part in the official recurrence commemorating the First World War on November 4 (the day after Austria-Hungary had signed its armistice with Italy)⁴³¹ while openly refusing to show up at the anniversary of the March on Rome.⁴³²

At the same time, most associated war survivors appear to have accepted to superficially adhere to and promote the Fascist state's political myths and collective rites. This development essentially occurred as public authorities ensured their political religion was not entirely at odds with the ex-enlistees' more moderate proposals for a civic cult. As a matter of fact, they incorporated some of the idols venerated by the nationalist fighters, specifically fallen World War One soldiers and the institution of the Italian army. As for the New Men the Blackshirts hoped to engineer, these individuals' intended features overlapped to some extent with the virtues the nationalist ex-soldiers hoped to instill in the Italian people: selflessness, martial valor, patriotism. Consequently, the fostering of New Men undoubtedly became a somewhat attractive prospect for many ex-servicemen.

Mussolini's government also supported ex-enlistees' attempts at undertaking acts of public diplomacy in the nation's service. Notably, it began promoting the ANC's work at the Inter-Allied Federation of Former Fighters. The government granted railway

Congress: Bolzano: July 1926: Moral Report: Speaker: General Secretary Gianni Baccharini] (Rome, 1926), 9, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

⁴³¹ Alessandro Miniero, *Da Versailles al milite ignoto: Rituali e retoriche della vittoria in Europa (1919-1921)* [From Versailles to the Unknown Soldier: Victory Rituals and Rhetoric in Europe (1919-1921)] (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2008), 65.

⁴³² Report sent by the special commissioner of the ANMIG chapter of Ventimiglia to the Association's central committee, January 25, 1937, "*Ventimiglia, 1933-1969*," 324, ACCANMIG, "*Presidenza*," subseries "*Corrispondenza con le Sezioni*," CMMIG

discounts to Italian delegates travelling to FIDAC congresses,⁴³³ while Mussolini himself made an appearance at this federation's 1925 congress, which took place in Rome.⁴³⁴

To sum up, in the latter part of the 1920s, the government continued affording the ex-soldiers' associations, in many ways, the preferential treatment they had ardently sought since the closing stages of the Great War, thereby preserving a qualified form of consent from them. To be sure, veterans who shunned the organized fighters' ranks constantly rejected the status quo, even if just in a passive manner. For instance, in 1929 it was reported that, in Calolziocorte, some former associates of the Catholic National Union of War Returnees had continuously refused to enroll in the local ANC chapter.⁴³⁵

Nevertheless, by the late 1920s, the *combattenti*'s movement, which represented a sizeable segment of the Italian ex-servicemen's community, was willing to accept dictatorial rule and cooperate with the latter. Specifically, its members seem to have radicalized, for the most part, to the extent of supporting Mussolini's government and tolerating the PNF, assisting both of them. It appears these activists elected to cooperate with Fascist institutions, for the most part, as a result of the benefits they were enjoying, rewards which often elicited feelings of gratitude and loyalty from them. First of all, these perks persuaded veterans to remain enrolled in Blackshirt-supervised ex-combatants' organizations or to join them for the first time. For instance, the Forlì federation of the ANC saw its membership figures rise from 3,000 to 8,000, between 1926 and 1928, due to the federation's increasing accomplishments in terms of delivering social assistance to its recruits.⁴³⁶

⁴³³ Message sent to the prime minister, August 23, 1929, "*Belgrado: Congresso della Federazione Interalleata degli Ex Combattenti F.I.D.A.C. – 1 al 6 Settembre 1929: Facilitazioni Ferroviarie*," 1333, 14/3, PCM, "*Gabinetto*," AG, 1928-1930, ACS

⁴³⁴ *Problemi d'Italia*, October 1925

⁴³⁵ Report sent by the prefect of Bergamo to the personal secretary of the prime minister, January 23, 1929, E123, 8, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

⁴³⁶ *Il Lavoro di Italia/Il Corriere Padano* [Italian Labor / The Po Valley's Messenger], July 19, 1928, notebook 2, 251, AANCR, RS, ISREC

The privileges which were bestowed upon the ex-servicemen convinced the movement to buttress the regime, mainly in the fields of propaganda, education, electoral endorsement, and diplomacy. For example, after taking over the FNAI's management in 1928, Carlo Scorza gave many former Daring Ones prominent roles in the Federation's organization, that led many of them to work more closely with public institutions.⁴³⁷ As discussed in the introduction, many adherents of the ANMIG supported Mussolini at the electoral plebiscite of 1929, principally as a way of thanking him for his concessions to them. Similarly, disabled of the Habsburg army, according to the ANMIG, voted for him out of gratefulness for his acknowledgment of their pension rights.⁴³⁸

Additionally, it might be argued that the prestigious status enjoyed by nationalist war survivors played an indirect role in the latter's eventual compliance with Mussolini's pursuit of territorial revisionism abroad, which aimed at gradually dismantling the European Peace Treaties.⁴³⁹ In the case of the National Association of Fighters, the dictatorship was essentially able to impose Fascist or pro-Fascist leaders at the helm of this organization in exchange for the appanages it granted the latter's affiliates. This state of affairs entailed that ANC activists accepted to obey hyper-nationalist superiors, who approved of and abetted Mussolini's revisionist foreign policy. Notably, Amilcare Rossi had endorsed Italy's 1911 colonial campaign against Libya⁴⁴⁰ and had undertaken acts of military valor in the First World War, fueled by his patriotic fervor. Nicola Sansanelli had actually fought in the Libyan campaign and had joined the Fighting Fasces in their nascent

⁴³⁷ Report sent by the FNAI president to the prime minister, April 2, 1930, "*Associazioni Varie di Smobilitati: Istituto del Nastro Azzurro, Gruppo Medaglie d'Oro, Superdecorati, Volontari di Guerra,*" 1748, 1/1/8-2 onwards, PCM, "*Gabinetto,*" AG, 1934-1936, ACS

⁴³⁸ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Settimo congresso nazionale: Relazione morale*, 6, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

⁴³⁹ Knox, *Common Destiny*, 129-147.

⁴⁴⁰ Amilcare Rossi, *Figlio del mio tempo: Prefascismo, fascismo, postfascismo* [I Was A Product of My Time: Pre-fascism, Fascism, Post-fascism] (Rome: Romana Libri Alfabeto: Stampa, 1969), 16-19.

stage.⁴⁴¹ As for the ANMIG, the Mussolini cabinet's sponsorship of the Association's requests indirectly strengthened the latent chauvinistic tendencies of the impaired's leaders.

As a matter of fact, various among these upper echelons held expansionist views, such as Carlo Delcroix, elected in the central committee of the ANMIG in 1920,⁴⁴² who had clamored since the end of the war for Italy's annexation of Dalmatia.⁴⁴³ As they found their calls for benefits for war victims accommodated by the post-1922 government, it became increasingly unnecessary for them to accept the European diplomatic status quo, as they were no longer compelled to band with international bodies to pressure Italian institutions.

According to Davies,⁴⁴⁴ repressive regimes in interwar Europe helped undermine the strong pacifist transnational networks of the era by subordinating domestic non-governmental organizations and manipulating them toward their own ends, thereby deforming these collective bodies into agents of militarism and expansionism. This centralizing and manipulative approach took place in Fascist Italy, as attested by the fate of the ANC and the ANMIG. It should be stressed that between 1919 and 1924 – i.e., before the consolidation of Mussolini's dictatorship – these associations had cooperated to some extent with foreign organizations to bring about their goals, hence displaying some degree of acceptance of the European post-war order. During the FIDAC congress of 1924, the ANC delegation promoted the Federation's official recognition of Romania's new Eastern borders. Interestingly, at this congress, the ANC representatives also publicly drew a distinction between their association and Fascism.⁴⁴⁵ As for the ANMIG, it worked until

⁴⁴¹ Ceci, *I gerarchi*, 46, 74, 77.

⁴⁴² Pavan Dalla Torre, "Le origini dell'Associazione," 92-93.

⁴⁴³ Delcroix, *D'Annunzio*, 25, 87.

⁴⁴⁴ Thomas Davies, *NGOs: A New History of Transnational Civil Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 103-118.

⁴⁴⁵ Alexe Anastasiu, *Congresul de la Londra al foștilor luptători FIDAC: 15-22 septembrie 1924* [The London Congress of the FIDAC Former Fighters, September 15-22, 1924] (Bucharest: Biblioteca UOR, 1925), 7, 21.

1923 with the League of the Nations and foreign veterans' groups to preserve international peace.⁴⁴⁶ Nevertheless, as Fascism began providing substantial institutional patronage to the Italian ex-combatants, it managed to switch the ANC and ANMIG's general loyalties to assisting it, thereby turning these groups into vehicles for its expansionist objectives.

For instance, in 1923, Mussolini's government disbanded the Italian delegation to the Inter-Allied conference on the after-care of disabled men, which, as seen above, contained ANMIG representatives. Crucially, the Association accepted this measure, its secretary, Ruggero Romano, voicing the view that war victims' welfare issues could be addressed directly by the latter's national institutions. He evidently implied that, under the accommodating Mussolini cabinet, Italian war impaired might find purely domestic solutions to their material woes, therefore eschewing international cooperation on this matter.⁴⁴⁷ As for the ANC, being led after 1925 by a triumvirate of hyper-nationalists, it began cooperating with Mussolini to undermine the Peace Treaties, chiefly by eroding the stabilizing influence exerted, at the diplomatic level, by veterans' associations of other Allied countries.

Notably, in 1928 Sansanelli contemplated undercutting the public charges brought by the combatants of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes against Bulgarian paramilitaries operating within its borders, positing to offer the militias' government evidence which challenged these accusations.⁴⁴⁸ Ultimately, it might be claimed that, while many *combattenti* were interested in preserving Italy's post-1918 territorial configuration and maintaining good relations with their counterparts of the other victor nations, the

⁴⁴⁶ Salvante, "The Italian Associazione Nazionale Mutilati," 169.

⁴⁴⁷ *Il Bollettino: Pubblicazione Mensile*, February 1923

⁴⁴⁸ Report sent by the co-president of the ANC to the undersecretary of foreign affairs, January 26, 1928, file "Federazione Interalleata Ex-Combattenti F.I.D.A.C.," folder 66, fund "Ufficio Società delle Nazioni" (USN), Diplomatic-Historical Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Archivio Storico-Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri*; ASDMAE), Rome, Italy

leaders of the ANC and the ANMIG wished to expand Italian borders, even proving themselves ready to antagonize foreign comrades in arms to this end.

In conclusion, as indicated above, Fascism's substantial patronage of the *combattenti* was one of the key reasons many of the latter helped buttress this dictatorship. They did so chiefly by cooperating with it in the fields of propaganda, electoral confirmation by plebiscite and public diplomacy. They probably made their most notable contribution to Fascist rule by promoting the regime's political religion. First of all, they buttressed the personal cult of Mussolini, which public authorities began fostering after 1926.⁴⁴⁹ They lauded him profusely as an accomplished helmsman of the fatherland and emphasized the necessity of unconditionally obeying him. An instance of this kind of propaganda was offered by Carlo Delcroix, in a pamphlet of his.

*Benito Mussolini knows he can rely on authentic people, the people who fight genuinely and donate selflessly ... The people, denoted by mettle, spontaneity, and vigor, appear to have been born Fascist, and they take up to the new order with deep honesty, undergoing necessary sacrifices and backing their acceptance of discipline with facts.*⁴⁵⁰

Fellow travelers of the autocracy also helped the latter as a whole buttress its legitimacy, notably by stressing – and actually exaggerating - its ties to the First World War. As mentioned above, Fascists accrued legitimacy and prestige by claiming they had been followed by scores of veterans since the end of this conflict. They sought to create aural and visual nexuses between themselves and Great War combatants to reinforce this narrative.⁴⁵¹ Sympathetic veterans helped them corroborate this claim. For instance, they participated with Blackshirts in public war commemorations and paraded with and in front of Fascist authorities during these and other public happenings. Furthermore, they jointly

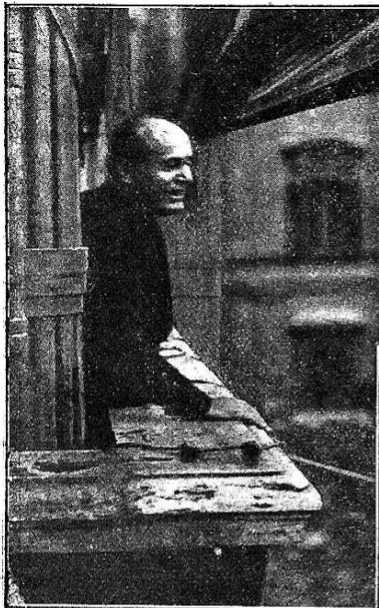
⁴⁴⁹ Gentile, *The Sacralization*, 135-136.

⁴⁵⁰ Delcroix, *Un uomo*, 393-394.

⁴⁵¹ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 80-81.

celebrated the respective anniversaries of the end of World War One and the March on Rome. They also bolstered the prestige of other Fascist personalities aside from Mussolini, like PNF Secretary Augusto Turati⁴⁵² (1926-1930), praising his wartime accomplishments.

Image 1.5: Caption: “Above: The Leader speaks from the Venezia Palace – Below: The mass of war returnees listens to the Leader.”

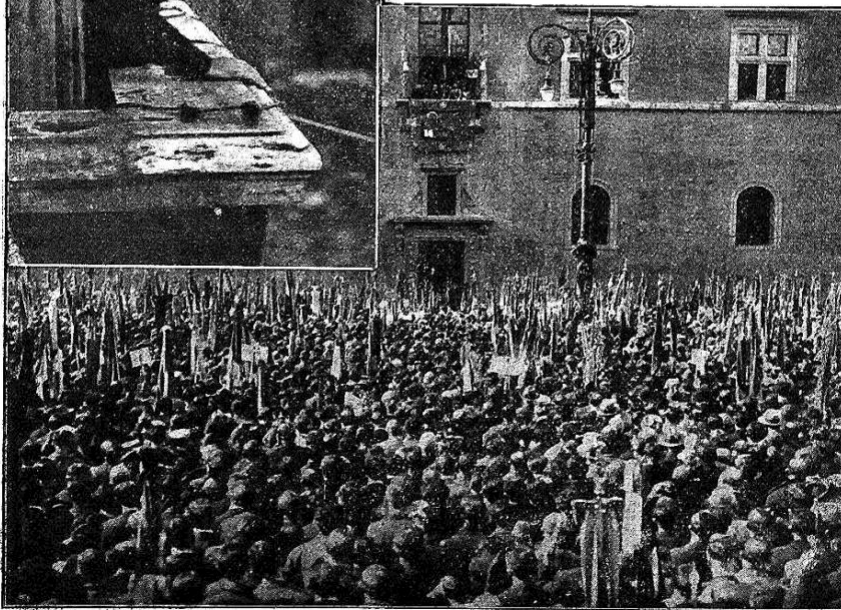


Il Duce tace per qualche momento. Allora la folla improvvisa a lui una appassionata dimostrazione. Si grida: «Viva il Duce!», «Viva le Ali d'Italia!».

Ripeto: il mio discorso si conclude con una domanda; ma prima di rispondere, pensate che il Grande Re, il Padre della Patria, vi guarda, e il Fante Ignoto vi ascolta: «Se sarà necessario, farete domani quello che avete fatto, che facemmo ieri?» (La folla, levando in alto mille e mille bandiere, e tendendo le braccia nel saluto fascista, risponde con un grido formidabile: «Sì!»)

Allora, portate la eco di questo giuramento in ogni angolo della Patria. Viva l'Italia!

La folla risponde al Duce, rinnovando il grido: «Viva l'Italia!» Si grida da ogni parte, agitando le insegne della guerra e della rivoluzione: «Vi-



In alto: Il Duce parla dal Palazzetto Venezia. — In basso: La massa dei reduci di guerra ascolta il Duce.

Source: *La Stampella: Periodico Mensile della Sezione Milanese dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra*, December 1928 (Image courtesy of the *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze*; further reproduction is prohibited)

Ultimately, the authoritarian system catered to a multitude of Italian veterans, especially those militating in the *combattenti* groups, consequently receiving widespread, albeit partial and passive, consent. In providing this kind of backing to Fascism, veterans

⁴⁵² *La Stampella*, March-April 1926; November 1927; May 1928

flanking the latter mirrored an attitude embraced by the great part of Italian society, which tended to find specific aspects of Mussolini's regime agreeable - while rejecting the latter's remaining features - and to endorse the dictatorship in a resigned manner.⁴⁵³ Nevertheless, it should be noted that, even in providing its limited form of support, the organized fighters' movement had doubtless radicalized politically, coming to accept and coordinate with illiberal powerholders.

1.2 Romania: Pluralist Veterans' Politics

1.2.1 1918-1928: Acknowledging the Nationalist Veterans' Sense of Entitlement

Before the First World War, the Kingdom of Romania had already been involved in two conflicts: the Romanian War of Independence (1877-78) and the Second Balkan War (1913). Both confrontations led to the establishment of war veterans' associations, such as the "Crossing of the Danube" Society (*Societatea Trecerea Dunării*, 1903) and the Society of the Veterans of 1877 (*Societatea Veteranilor din 1877*) in the former case, and the "Defenders of the Fatherland" society (*Apărătorii Patriei*, 1913) in the latter. These associations ended up playing a prominent public role, especially as those grouping veterans of the War of Independence succeeded in lobbying the state to receive private plots of land for their members.⁴⁵⁴ Nevertheless, it should be noticed that the old soldiers' movement which was centered upon these organizations would be dwarfed in the aftermath

⁴⁵³ Simona Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime, 1929-1943* [Italians' Beliefs under the Regime, 1929-1943] (Bari: Laterza, 2009), 29-38; Corner, *The Fascist Party*, 171, 191.

⁴⁵⁴ Constantin Iordachi, Blasco Sciarrino, "War Veterans, Demobilization and Political Activism: Greater Romania in Comparison," in *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, special issue, eds. Kristian Mennen, Wim van Meurs, 6, No. 1 (June 2017), 86-87; Virgiliu Serdaru, Drepturile foștilor luptători români: Făgăduielile de pe front [The Rights of the Romanian Former Fighters: The Front's Promises] (Bucharest: Editura Uniunea Națională a Foștilor Luptători, 1921), 45.

of the Great War by a much larger equivalent, which gathered former combatants of the latter conflict.

During the first two years of this war, Romania remained neutral. In these years, while the majority of the country – which consisted mainly of peasants, many of them illiterate – remained detached from the European conflict, and the nation’s small socialist party asked for the kingdom to remain strictly neutral, public opinion split into two currents, concerning the matter of their country’s participation in this war. One of these currents, which at the political level was upheld by conservatives, wished for the kingdom to enter the fray on the Triple Alliance’s side to achieve national unification with Bessarabia, at the time a province of the Tsarist empire. The second one, which enjoyed a significant degree of popular support, wished for Romania to fight on the Entente’s side, to gain the Transylvanian region,⁴⁵⁵ which by 1914 was inhabited by 2,827,419 ethnic Romanians (53,7% of the total population).⁴⁵⁶ Eventually, the latter current won the debate, and, in the summer of 1916, the kingdom joined the war as a partner of the Allies, being led during the war mostly by governments formed by the National Liberal Party (*Partidul Național Liberal*; PNL).

The conflict involved heavy military casualties for Romania, consisting of approximately 339,117 fallen soldiers.⁴⁵⁷ It also entailed its initial defeat, chiefly as a result of the army’s lack of adequate training, armaments, and supervision.⁴⁵⁸ After a string of reversals, at the end of 1916, the kingdom’s army and political leadership, including King

⁴⁵⁵ Lucian Boia, „*Germanofili: Elita intelectuală românească în anii Primului Război Mondial* [The “Pro-Germans:” The Romanian Intellectual Elite during the First World War] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2010), 36-64, 341-346; Radu Tudorancea, *Frontul de acasă: Propagandă, atitudini și curente de opinie în România Primului Război Mondial* [The Homefront: Propaganda, Attitudes and Public Opinion Currents in First World War Romania] (Bucharest: Editura Eikon, 2015), 86.

⁴⁵⁶ Harald Heppner, Rudolf Gräf, “Romania,” *1914-1918-Online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, accessed May 17, 2020, <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/bibliography/NXDA4BR8>.

⁴⁵⁷ Constantin Kirițescu, *Istoria Războiului pentru Întregirea României, 1916-1919* [History of the War for Romanian Unification, 1916-1919]: volume 1 (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1989), 15.

⁴⁵⁸ Glen Torrey, *România în Primul Război Mondial* [Romania in the First World War], trans. Dan Criste (Bucharest: Meteor Publishing, 2014), 29-44, 349-350.

Ferdinand I, were forced to retreat to the Moldavian principality, while Bucharest came under a harsh German occupying administration. However, the conflict's denouement ultimately turned in Romania's favor. A French military mission to this country assisted in reorganizing the latter's army, improving its offensive potential,⁴⁵⁹ while a similar Italian expedition helped organize former Romanian prisoners of war into a combat unit known as the Romanian Legion of Italy (*Legiunea Română din Italia*).⁴⁶⁰

While the kingdom concluded a peace agreement with the Central Powers in early 1918 – which cost it, among other things, the principality of Dobruja, to be returned to Bulgaria - the eventual collapse of the Powers in the same year allowed it to resume fighting. As the German army withdrew from the occupied part of the nation, the local armed forces remobilized and began penetrating Dobruja and Transylvania, while restoring public order in Bukovina. By the end of the year, collective assemblies in Transylvania, Bukovina, and Bessarabia voted for union with Romania. Additionally, in 1919, this realm's militaries entered the Banat and Hungary, occupying Budapest and putting an end to Béla Kun's budding Hungarian Republic of Soviets.

Between 1919 and 1920, the peace treaties of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, Trianon, and Paris legitimized the kingdom's acquisition of Transylvania, Crișana, Maramureș, Bukovina, Bessarabia, in addition to affording it partial control over the Banat. Additionally, the Neuilly treaty returned the principality of Dobruja to Romania. Through these annexations, the nation doubled its territory and population (the latter rising from 7,500,000 to 15,500,000 inhabitants).⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁹ Keith Hitchins, *Rumania: 1866-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 268.

⁴⁶⁰ Jean-Noël Grandhomme, "La Roumanie en Guerre et la Mission Militaire Italienne (1916-1918)" [Romania at War and the Italian Military Mission (1916-1918)], *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains* [World Wars and Contemporary Conflicts], No. 224 (October 2006), 29-30.

⁴⁶¹ Heppner, Gräf, "Romania."

The kingdom's population was extensively mobilized for the war effort. To begin with, various women played a relevant role in this effort, for instance, aiding war disabled and orphans through the relief associations they belonged to. Additionally, Ecaterina Teodoriu, a peasant from the village of Vădeni, managed to directly enroll in the army, ending up killed by enemy fire in 1917.⁴⁶² As for the kingdom's men, in 1916, approximately the whole male population between the ages of 18 and 45 - 1,083,000 individuals, including 20,000 officers⁴⁶³ and 4,000 young volunteers⁴⁶⁴ - became enrolled in the army. Among these servicemen were 23,000 Jews, whose contribution to the military effort would help them earn the status of citizens in the aftermath of the war.⁴⁶⁵

Furthermore, a substantial number of ethnic Romanians hailing from outside the kingdom ended up serving in or fighting alongside the latter's militaries. While 484,924 Romanians served in the Austro-Hungarian army,⁴⁶⁶ 12,000 Transylvanians, Bukovinians, and Banateans took refuge in Romania and joined its army. A further 10,367 Romanians from these regions, who had served in the Habsburg militaries and later surrendered to the Russians, eventually enrolled in the Romanian armed forces. Furthermore, at least 6,000 Romanian prisoners of war took part in the Russian Civil War between 1918 and 1920, fighting against the Bolsheviks, together with Allied forces, to return to their homeland and join the latter's military operations. Other former Habsburg soldiers, having become captives of the Italian state, formed the Romanian Legion of Italy. As a part of this Legion, they fought for the Italian and Romanian armies – in the number of at least 843 men, in the former case. Similarly, a few hundred Romanian prisoners of war served in the French

⁴⁶² Alin Ciupală, *Bătălia lor: Femeile din România în Primul Război Mondial* [Their Own Struggle: Romanian Women in the First World War] (Iași: Polirom, 2017), 92-128, 329-331.

⁴⁶³ Kirițescu, *Istoria Războiului*: volume 1, 207-208.

⁴⁶⁴ *Porunca Vremii: Tribuna Zilnică de Lupta Națională și Creștină* [The Order of the Times: Daily Platform for the National and Christian Struggle], December 4, 1936

⁴⁶⁵ Gabriel Asandului, *Istoria evreilor din România (1866-1938)* [History of the Romanian Jews (1866-1938)] (Iași: Institutul European, 2004), 61, 63.

⁴⁶⁶ Liviu Maior, *De la Marele Război la România întregită* [From the Great War to United Romania] (Bucharest: Rao Distribuție, 2018), 201.

army, while American citizens of Romanian ethnicity enrolled in the United States' forces to assist their motherland's war effort.⁴⁶⁷ According to one estimate,⁴⁶⁸ the conflict disabled and mutilated 115,222 Romanians.

It should also be mentioned that various other Romanian or Romanian-speaking servicemen, while not enlisting in or supporting the realm's armed forces, nevertheless played a role in the process of national unification that took place around 1918. In late 1917, Basarabian soldiers enrolled in the Russian army formed a military council that voted for their region's political and territorial autonomy,⁴⁶⁹ thereby paving the way for its subsequent annexation by the kingdom. A year later, the Central Romanian National Council (*Consiliul Național Român Central*), the collective body which came to control Transylvania before its union with the Romanian monarchy, was assisted by thousands of former Romanian recruits of the Hungarian militaries in preserving public order in this region. Specifically, these ex-conscripts manned the paramilitary bodies created by the Council, known as the National Guards (*Gărzile Naționale*).⁴⁷⁰

Ultimately, after 1920 a large contingent of Romania's community of war veterans was made up by victor, nationalist returnees (known in Romanian prevalently as *luptători*). Crucially, these fighters had come to expect various concessions from the Romanian state

⁴⁶⁷ Dumitru Ivănescu, "Stare de spirit și acțiunea antibolșevică. Corpul al-doilea de voluntari ardeleni, bănățeni și bucovineni din Rusia" [Anti-Bolshevik States of Mind and Activities. The Second Corps of Transylvanian, Banatean and Bukovinian Volunteers of Russia], in *Stări de spirit și mentalități în timpul Marelui Război. Corpurile de voluntari români din Rusia* [States of Mind and Mentalities during the Great War. The Corps of Romanian Volunteers from Russia], eds. Ion Agrigoroaiei et al. (Iași: Editura Junimea, 2005), 80-94; General G. Mărdărescu, *Campania pentru dezrobirea Ardealului și ocuparea Budapestei (1918-1920)* [The Campaign for Freeing Transylvania and Occupying Budapest (1918-1920)] (Bucharest: Saeculum I.O., 2018), 78; Marin Stănescu, Alexandru Roz, *Prizonieri și voluntari români din Primul Război Mondial și Marea Unire din 1918* [Romanian First World War Prisoners and Volunteers and the Great Union of 1918] (Arad: „Vasile Goldiș” Press, 2003), 31, 57-68, 106, 129-131; Uniunea Foștilor Voluntari Români, *Voluntari români și reforma agrară: Memoriul Uniunii Foștilor Voluntari către Consiliul de Miniștri și Parlament* [Romanian Volunteers and the Agrarian Reform: The Memorandum of the Union of Former Volunteers to the Council of Ministers and the Parliament] (Cluj, Tipografia „Carmen,” 1925), 14.

⁴⁶⁸ Report on Romanian war disabled, orphans and widows, likely 1927, 4, UORR, ANIC, 284.

⁴⁶⁹ Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sincera a poporului român* (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic, 2008), 281.

⁴⁷⁰ Călin Hentea, *Marea nerostita istorie a luptelor românilor din antichitate pana in zilele noastre* [The Great Untold Story of Romanians' Struggles from Antiquity to Current Times] (Bucharest: Cartier, 2018), 268-269.

on the basis of their wartime military service. Specifically, they wished for their polity to grant them material, symbolic and political rewards for their accomplishments. After all, these ex-combatants felt they had fought loyally and bravely during the Great War, protecting their nation in times of peril. For instance, one of the leaders of the Romanian World War One veterans' movement, the lawyer and writer⁴⁷¹ Virgil Serdaru, remembered the battles of Mărășești and Oituz in apocalyptic terms.

A hellish bombing took place along the whole battlefield, shells falling like raindrops, disintegrating the soil into a thousand fragments as if a colossal force had turned it over. Trees were cut down, logs were shot up in the air, whistling chants which had never been heard before. Rocks flew up as if forcefully hurled by thousands of unseen hands. You would have expected to see Death, brandishing her sickle, walking across the fields scorched by falling fire.

It should be pointed out that many ex-servicemen wished to publicly present themselves as heroes who had performed their combat duties, notwithstanding the hardships they had endured on the frontline. In his recollections of the conflict, Serdaru claimed that, despite facing mortal risks on the battlefield, Romanian combatants had nevertheless fought gallantly.

*At Mărășești, the brave men of the 32nd Regiment waged an attack despite being dressed only in their shirts, bare-chested before death. It was a dream-like sight. Beautiful young men with bright and crowned foreheads like those of the saints in churches, brave soldiers pushing through flames [rushing] against the fire that killed many of them.*⁴⁷²

⁴⁷¹ M. Ionescu-Lupeanu, "Luptători uitați" [Forgotten Fighters], *Luceafărul de Dimineața: Revista de Cultura* [Morning Star: Cultural Review], June 2018, http://www.luceafarul-de-dimineata.eu/pdf/revista_LUCEAFARUL_DE_DIMINEATA_nr_6_2018.pdf.

⁴⁷² Serdaru, *Drepturile foștilor luptători*, 8-9.

Image 1.6: Upper caption: “A postcard from the fighting at Mărășești;” side caption: “The soldiers, protected merely by their shirts, attack the enemy, terrifying him and bringing notoriety to the bravery of the Romanians.”



Source: *Casca: Gazeta a Foștilor Luptători de pe Front, a Văduvelor, Orfanilor și Invalizilor de Războiu (Ofițeri și Soldați)*, May 1-31, 1923 (Image courtesy of the *Biblioteca Centrală Universitară „Mihai Eminescu” Iași*; further reproduction is prohibited)

It is also likely that the soldiers were fueled, in their sense of deserving, by the other adversities they had faced besides combat actions. During their time at the front, they suffered food rationing and a lack of adequate living facilities.⁴⁷³ Additionally, some of them were subjected by their superiors to brutal coercive measures.⁴⁷⁴ Ultimately, it can be

⁴⁷³ Monica Negru, ed., *Viața pe front, în scrieri personale* [Life at the Front, in Personal Writings] (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2019), 109-110, 126.

⁴⁷⁴ Călin Hentea, “Propaganda românească în 1917” [Romanian Propaganda in 1917], *Historia* [History], accessed November 20, 2018, <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/propaganda-romaneasca-in-1917>.

claimed that fighters felt entitled to several recompenses on the basis of the bravery and selflessness they felt they had displayed in the course of the conflict. In the early post-war years, Serdaru would neatly sum up their expectations of recompenses with the following statement: “I cannot fathom who might be so crazy to oppose the wishes of those men who wrote the history of the fatherland with their blood.”⁴⁷⁵

Image 1.7: Upper caption: “A postcard for those who did not fight at the front to behold!;” lower caption: “Explanation: Here is one of the phases of Greater Romania’s creation!”



Source: *Casca*, March 18-30, 1923 (Image courtesy of the *Biblioteca Centrală Universitară „Mihai Eminescu” Iași*; further reproduction is prohibited)

⁴⁷⁵ Serdaru, *Drepturile foștilor luptători*, 11.

It should be noticed that, in nurturing these claims to privileges, *luptători* were first of all influenced by their social backgrounds. Undoubtedly, the fact that most of the soldiers hailed from the low and middle echelons of the kingdom's society ensured that these combatants invested the act of receiving material concessions with a strong meaning: 90% of the army was made of peasants,⁴⁷⁶ most of whom, as mentioned above, were illiterate, and who returned to their pre-war occupation after the cessation of hostilities, as suggested by the low urbanization rates for Romania for 1920.⁴⁷⁷ A significant number of officers similarly came from low-class backgrounds,⁴⁷⁸ despite displaying higher literacy rates, as many reserve officers were actually teachers.⁴⁷⁹ Importantly, in 1920 it was reported that out of 26,075 surveyed impaired infantrymen, corporals and sergeants, 88% hailed from the peasantry, 53% of them lacking a private plot of land.⁴⁸⁰

Furthermore, these fighters' expectations had been strengthened by the Romanian state, as the latter, between 1916 and 1920, promised economic paybacks to soldiers to motivate them to serve. One notable instance of this trend concerns the claims to smallholdings which were voiced by ex-enlistees after being demobilized. Before the conflict, the Romanian kingdom's peasantry had agitated for land grants, to the extent of revolting in 1907. Before and during the Great War, a similar intense drive toward securing private land likely guided Transylvanian, Bukovinian and Basarabian peasants of Romanian ethnicity, due to the fact that most of them held meager holdings or none at all. In March 1917, at a time when the Romanian kingdom had suffered heavy military defeats,

⁴⁷⁶ Ion Agrigoroaiei, *România interbelică: Unificare și evoluție economică* [Interwar Romania: Economic Unification and Evolution] (Iași: Demiurg, 2018), 90.

⁴⁷⁷ In 1920, 0,4% of the Romanian population lived in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. See United Nations, *Growth of the World's Urban and Rural Population*, 100.

⁴⁷⁸ Petre Otu, *Mareșalul Alexandru Averescu: Militarul, omul politic, legenda* [Marshal Alexandru Averescu: The Military Man, The Political Man, the Legend] (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2005), 286.

⁴⁷⁹ Kirișescu, *Istoria Războiului*: volume 1, 208.

⁴⁸⁰ Societatea „Invalizii din Război,” *Studiu statistic medical și social al invalizilor din război ai României cu aplicație la asistența și reeducația lor funcțională și profesională de dr. I. Ghiulamila* [Statistical, Medical and Social Study of the Romanian War Disabled for Their Functional and Professional Re-Education, Prepared by Doctor I. Ghiulamila] (Bucharest: Atelierele Grafice Socec & Comp., 1920), 6, 29-31.

and the Russian Revolution threatened to spill over into its territory,⁴⁸¹ King Ferdinand I promised peasant soldiers that he would grant them smallholdings once military hostilities were over.

*As your king, I tell you, sons of the peasants, who defended with your arm the land where you were born, where you grew up, that, in addition to the great reward of victory, which will assure to each one of you the gratitude of your whole nation, you have also won the right to own a larger share of the land on which you fought. You will be granted land. I, your king, will be the first to set the example.*⁴⁸²

Moreover, in early 1918, Ferdinand devolved land from the royal estates to the soldiers and the families of fallen soldiers.⁴⁸³ The king's promises and measures reportedly restored the army's morale.⁴⁸⁴ Furthermore, army propaganda stressed Ferdinand's promises to the troops, helping preserve the latter's readiness to fight.⁴⁸⁵ Additionally, the public press openly supported the land reform.⁴⁸⁶ Crucially, all of this propaganda strengthened servicemen's belief that they would be allowed to exact concessions from the state in the aftermath of the conflict. For instance, in 1918, it was rumored that the soon-to-be discharged combatants of Botoșani thought of revolting if, once they returned home, they would not be awarded the holdings they had been promised.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸¹ Hitchins, *Rumania*, 218, 231, 241-242, 266.

⁴⁸² Agrigoroaiei, *România interbelica*, 90-91.

⁴⁸³ *Buletinul Uniunii Ofițerilor de Rezerva și in Retrăgere înființat in Anul 1925* [Bulletin of the Union of Reserve and Retired Officers, Founded in 1925], July-August-September 1927, folder FB 0000577, volume 6, fund "Biblioteca Securității," (BS), National Council for the Investigation of the Security's Archives (*Consiliul Național pentru Studiarea Arhivelor Securității*; CNSAS), Bucharest, Romania

⁴⁸⁴ *Casca: Organ al Foștilor Luptători pe Front, al Văduvelor, Orfanilor și Invalizilor de Războiu: Organ Oficial la "Uniunii Naționale a Foștilor Luptători"* [Helmet: Organ of the Former Front Fighters, War Widows, Orphans, and Disabled: Official Organ of the National Union of Former Fighters], July-August 1930

⁴⁸⁵ Călin Hentea, "Propaganda românească."

⁴⁸⁶ Ion Agrigoroaiei, *Opinie publică și stare de spirit in vremea Războiului de Întregire și a Marii Uniri, Iași, 1916-1918* [Public Opinion and States of Mind in the Course of the War of Unification and the Great Union, Iași, 1916-1918] (Iași: Editura Fundației Axis, 2004), 103-104.

⁴⁸⁷ Report sent by the police of Botoșani to the minister of war, May 14, 1918, folder 4/1918, fund "Direcția Generală a Poliției," 1893; 1903-1936 (DGP 1893; 1903-1936), ANIC, 6.

Public institutions heightened the nationalist soldiers' expectations for rewards in additional ways. In 1916-1919, they encouraged war participants to believe they deserved a high symbolic standing within Romanian society. For instance, war volunteers were extolled for their accomplishments, in the course of public events, by the king, army generals, and Prime Minister Ionel Brătianu.⁴⁸⁸ More generally, the public press lauded the servicemen as the virtuous defenders of the nation. The famous journalist and poet Octavian Goga acclaimed peasant soldiers⁴⁸⁹ and, in his press articles, saluted the army with the following praise: "*In your wounds lies the victory of tomorrow.*"⁴⁹⁰ Unsurprisingly, many soldiers came to believe they were meant to keep receiving this kind of special consideration after the cessation of hostilities. For instance, as shown below, they wished to be formally invited to take part in the state's commemorations of the Great War.

As seen above, patriotic ex-combatants expected their claims to economic paybacks and public esteem to be satisfied by the state. Furthermore, various among them also sought to exact concessions for more ideological purposes: preserving and strengthening their fatherland. In this regard, it should be remarked that *luptători* aimed at preserving their nation-state in its post-war territorial configuration. These ambitions drew vigor from the patriotic traditions of the army of the 'Old Kingdom' region (*Vechiul Regat*) - i.e., the territories which Romania consisted of before the First World War⁴⁹¹ - and from the Wilsonian values of national self-determination which animated many war volunteers,

⁴⁸⁸ Elie Bufnea, *Revoluția de eliberare națională a Transilvaniei: Unirea: 1914-1918* [The Revolution for the National Liberation of Transylvania: The Union: 1914-1918] (Baia Mare: Marist, 2010), 142-149.

⁴⁸⁹ Doina Rad, "Primul Război Mondial in publicistica lui Octavian Goga" [The First World War in the Publishings of Octavian Goga] in *Presa Primului Război Mondial* [First World War Press], eds. Cătălin Negoită, Zănfir Ilie (Bucharest: Tritonic; Editura Axis Libri, 2015), 374.

⁴⁹⁰ Agrigoroaiei, *Opinie publică*, 82.

⁴⁹¹ Silviu Hariton, "Religion, Nationalism and Militarism in Nineteenth Century Romania," *Études Balkaniques* [Balkan Studies], No. 4 (2008), 18-36; Constantin Iordachi, "God's Chosen Warriors: Romantic Palingenesis, Militarism and Fascism in Modern Romania," in *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives*, ed. Constantin Iordachi (New York: Routledge, 2010), 333-338.

beliefs according to which a people might prosper only by possessing its own nation-state.⁴⁹²

Crucially, nation-statist fighters sought to implement their ideological priorities by defending their country's borders. For instance, as late as 1932, the reserve officers of Satu Mare County still talked about these boundaries in a decidedly emotional language.

*The borders of this fatherland [that were] written with the tears, sufferings [sic] and blood that we shed for centuries and [are] marked by the cemetery crosses of our heroes, that are placed along the frontier, will not be changed by any power in this world [as such a change might take place] only over our dead bodies.*⁴⁹³

It should be mentioned that ex-servicemen's main strategy for protecting the homeland consisted of educating the Romanian people on patriotic values and undertaking public diplomacy abroad.⁴⁹⁴ Therefore, to promote this strategy, many old soldiers sought to be granted a special public role by powerholders, i.e., the role of guardians of the nation. To this end, they asked, first of all, to be included in state war commemorations. By participating in the latter, they did not simply aim to revel in the people's gratitude but also to educate attending audiences on patriotic ideals by posing as living embodiments of civic virtue for them to imitate. After all, they believed they were the most suited for this educational task. As a prominent war participant, the diplomat Victor Cădere, stated: "*We former fighters are the only true upholders of the holy national tradition.*"⁴⁹⁵ Furthermore, *luptători* wished to be offered financial and organizational support for their endeavors in the fields of pedagogy and diplomacy.

⁴⁹² Maior, *De la Marele Război*, 218-219.

⁴⁹³ Public motion issued by the reserve officers of Satu Mare County, December 1, 1932, 20/1932, volume 2, UORR, ANIC, 94.

⁴⁹⁴ *FIDAC: Bulletin of the Allied Legions*, April 1928

⁴⁹⁵ *Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva, Secția Ilfov, Buletinul* [Union of Reserve Officers, Ilfov Chapter, Bulletin], 7; 8, 1926

For instance, shortly after helping found, in 1920, the forum for veterans from Allied countries known as the FIDAC,⁴⁹⁶ Virgil Serdaru petitioned his government to subsidize the ambassadorial activities he was undertaking at this federation.⁴⁹⁷ Similarly, in 1923 war volunteers, under the guidance of Voicu Nițescu, helped establish an international federation together with their counterparts in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and Czechoslovakia, to support the diplomatic ‘Little Entente’ which these three countries had recently established.⁴⁹⁸

It appears institutions needed to concede *luptători* these various economic, symbolic, and political recompenses to preserve their loyalty. Who were the main political players whom veterans engaged with to see their claims recognized? Toward the end of the First World War, the Romanian parliamentary system underwent several shifts. Some mass parties came into being or came to the fore of national politics for the first time, contending power with the National Liberal Party. The Transylvanian Romanian National Party (*Partidul Național Român*) began operating within the kingdom’s parliament. In 1918, various activists from the rural intelligentsia founded the Peasants’ Party (*Partidul Țărănesc*), while war hero General Alexandru Averescu put together the People’s League (*Liga Poporului*), which in 1920 became the People’s Party (*Partidul Poporului*). Importantly, in the course of the interwar period, these various parties would accept each other’s existence – albeit begrudgingly – thereby giving rise to a tenuously pluralist political system.

⁴⁹⁶ Virgiliu Serdaru, *Peste hotare... Contribuțiuni la cunoașterea României adevărate în străinătate, 1918-1925* [Abroad... Contributions to Foreigners’ Learning of True Romania, 1918-1925] (Bucharest: Institutul Cultural Al României, 1925), 57.

⁴⁹⁷ Letter sent by Virgil Serdaru to the minister of foreign affairs, November 3, 1921, box 14, fund “*Congrese și Conferințe Internaționale*” (CCI), Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Arhiva Diplomatică ale Ministerului Afacerilor Externe*; ADMAE), Bucharest, Romania

⁴⁹⁸ Bufnea, *Revoluția*, 269-270.

Crucially, the country's parliamentary order managed to moderate most organized former soldiers' political conduct until its replacement by authoritarian rule in 1938. It essentially accomplished this by catering to the latter's wishes, even co-opting old soldiers' associations. It supported these groups' initiatives and involved them in developing and implementing social legislation for ex-servicemen. It should be noticed that governments had divergent leanings in this time span. Notably, between the end of Romania's Hungarian campaign and 1928, the kingdom witnessed three main phases: rule by the People's Party (which was in office between 1920 and 1921, in addition to returning to power in 1926-1927); the National Liberal Party (which governed almost uninterruptedly between 1922 and 1928) and the organization which arose from the merger of the Peasants' Party and the Romanian National Party in 1926, the National Peasants' Party (which would act as the main incumbent between 1928 and 1933).

Notwithstanding the varied political orientations of ruling cabinets, all of them acknowledged victor veterans' sense of entitlement, a readiness that mostly stemmed from the fact that most political parties espoused nationalist principles.⁴⁹⁹ In accommodating former fighters' claims, governments proved willing to champion the demands for upward social mobility promoted by *luptători*. Remarkably, in doing so, they were careful to promise to help all kinds of dischargees of the Romanian army, instead of prioritizing those belonging to specific social groups and economic classes. Notably, even two parliamentary parties that espoused radical tendencies, i.e., the Peasants' Party and the People's Party, championed inter-classist ideals.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁹ Stephen Fischer-Galati, "Romanian Nationalism" in *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Peter Sugar (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969), 388, 391-395.

⁵⁰⁰ Mircea Mușat, Ion Ardeleanu, *Viața politică în România, 1918-1921* [Romania's Political Life, 1918-1921] (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1976), 189-208, 247; Marin Nedelea, *Aspecte ale vieții politice din România în anii 1922-1926: Politica guvernului liberal, regrupări în rândul partidelor burgheze* [Aspects of Romania's Political Life from the Years 1922-1926: The Politics of the Liberal Government, the Reassembling of the Bourgeois Parties] (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Literară, 1987), 181-182.

Importantly, governments were already addressing the central claims of the war participants even before most of the latter underwent military demobilization in 1920.⁵⁰¹ It should also be highlighted that, at this time, all the major political parties were paying homage to the war participants' requests. They offered *luptători* smallholdings, war pensions, and public honors. To give a few examples, the leader of the People's Party, General Averescu, and the PNL had already begun promising land to the soldiers in the course of the war, the latter party going as far as to have the agrarian reform inscribed in the national constitution.⁵⁰² In Averescu's case, these promises initially granted him tremendous popularity among the peasant soldiers of the Old Kingdom.⁵⁰³

Furthermore, in 1918-1919, all political parties declared themselves in favor of the land reform.⁵⁰⁴ In 1920, the Romanian National Party insisted that this reform prioritize the war disabled.⁵⁰⁵ Around the same time, the Peasants' Party lauded the soldiers' courage under fire at a parliamentary session.⁵⁰⁶ Importantly, these various groups began securing the support of prominent fighters. For example, a recipient of the military order of Michael the Brave, Mihail Văgăonescu, who would become a leading delegate of the veterans' movement in the 1930s, contested the May 1918 general elections as a candidate for Averescu's League.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰¹ Iordachi, Sciarrino, "War Veterans," 90-91.

⁵⁰² Partidul Poporului, *Partidul Poporului: Ce a făcut – ce va face: Averescu a dat pământ* [The People's Party: What It Accomplished – What It Will Accomplish: Averescu Granted Land], 14-15; Partidul Național-Liberal, *Ce-a făcut Partidul Național-Liberal dela întemeierea lui pana astăzi, 1848-1927* [What the National Liberal Party Accomplished from Its Foundation to Current Times, 1848-1927] (Bucharest: Imprimeriile „Independentă,” 1927), 22-23.

⁵⁰³ Sorin Radu, "Mitul eroului salvator: Cazul generalului Alexandru Averescu" [The Myth of the Saving Hero: The Case of General Alexandru Averescu], *Apulum*, 35 (1998), 550-557.

⁵⁰⁴ Agrigoroaiei, *România interbelică*, 103.

⁵⁰⁵ Minutes of the communist secret services' interrogation of the former Romanian National Party parliamentary deputy Voicu Nițescu, April 30, 1955, folder P 0050745, fund "Fond Documentar București," (FDB), CNSAS, 82.

⁵⁰⁶ Transcript of the speech delivered by the Peasant Party's leader Ion Mihalache at the chamber of deputies' session of June 13, 1921, D 010814, FDB, CNSAS, 142.

⁵⁰⁷ Propaganda leaflet sent by the People Party's candidate Mihail Văgăonescu to the voters of Bacau County, May 8, 1918, 10/1918, volume 1, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 12-13.

As mentioned earlier, all of the parliamentary parties broadly aligned with the patriotic values espoused by the near totality of associated veterans. This state of affairs doubtless played a crucial role in the fighters' willingness to support them. At the same time, it should be stressed that these organizations championed different brands of nationalism, depending on their core ideological precepts and the aspirations of the constituencies they advocated for. To begin with, the National Liberal Party was the referent of the Old Kingdom's elites and, in safeguarding the latter's interests, argued for a centralized administrative system.

The National Peasants' Party instead championed the ambitions of lower social strata and the ruling groups of the regions annexed by the kingdom by the end of the war. It hence called for administrative decentralization and wanted representatives of its supporters to access power. As a populist, catch-all organization led by a member of the Old Kingdom establishment like General Averescu, the People's Party was also in favor of economic and political reforms, albeit of a less transformative variety than those demanded by the PNT. ⁵⁰⁸ As shown below, these differing orientations would come to somewhat affect the aforementioned political players' willingness to keep the promises they had made the *luptători*.

As previously explained, the state began catering to the needs of the fighters even before it ceased military operations. To begin with, returning soldiers were granted conspicuous public acclaim. They were invited to parade in Bucharest in December 1918, marching next to the statue of war hero Michael the Brave and being saluted by the king. ⁵⁰⁹ Soon after, disabled officers were gratified with the opportunity to re-enter the army as

⁵⁰⁸ Constantin Iordachi, "A Continuum of Dictatorships: Hybrid Totalitarian Experiments in Romania, 1937-1944," in *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, eds. António Costa Pinto, Aristotle Kallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 236-238; Iordachi, Sciarrino, "War Veterans," 94-98.

⁵⁰⁹ Otu, *Mareşalul Alexandru Averescu*, 271.

clerks or instructors.⁵¹⁰ Importantly, in 1919 the state made major gestures toward crediting the combatants with the role of custodians of the fatherland. In that year, the state instituted⁵¹¹ and began subsidizing⁵¹² the “Graves for the Fallen War Heroes” Society (*Societatea “Mormintele Eroilor Căzuți în Războiu”*) – later to be known as the Heroes Cult (*Cultul Eroilor*) – to turn fallen servicemen in examples for these fighters’ families, in addition to future generations.⁵¹³ Veterans enjoyed a prominent role in this state-promoted nation-building effort, as the Society’s local committees were to include reserve officers.⁵¹⁴ The Society would perform various commemorative and pedagogic activities, for instance, entombing 190,584 deceased soldiers by 1942.⁵¹⁵ It was publicly praised by the reserve officers for inhumating said war dead⁵¹⁶ and was animated in major ways by commissioned officers.⁵¹⁷

Before military demobilization, the state started making economic concessions to servicemen. For instance, Heinen suggests that many civil service positions became

⁵¹⁰ Constantin Hamangiu, ed., *Codul general al României* [The Romanian General Code]: volume 9: *Legi uzuale, 1919-1922* [Ordinary Laws, 1919-1922] (Bucharest: Edit. Libr. “Universala,” Alcalay & Co.), 237.

⁵¹¹ Message sent by the minister of war to the leading authorities of the “Monuments for the Fallen War Heroes” Society, October 3, 1919, folder 2, fund “*Societatea „Cultul Eroilor,”*” (SCE), microfilm edition, reel 201, Romanian National Military Archives, (*Arhive Militare Naționale Române*; AMNR), Bucharest, Romania, 61.

⁵¹² For an example of the ways in which the state conspicuously funded the Society in the following years, see *Societatea „Cultul Eroilor” – Comitetul Central, Darea de seama anuală a activității pe anul 1930 către a zeceă adunare generală ordinară din 26 aprilie 1931* [Annual Report on the Activities for the Year 1930, Delivered to the Tenth General Ordinary Gathering, of April 26, 1931] (Bucharest: Atelierele Grafice „Răsăritul,” 1931), 18, SCE, 203, AMNR, 249.

⁵¹³ General report on the activities of the “Monuments for the Fallen War Heroes” Society in the years 1921-1922, likely 1922, 7, SCE, 202, AMNR, 356.

⁵¹⁴ General report on the activities of the “Graves for the Fallen War Heroes” Society in the years 1921-1922, likely 1922, 7; *Societatea „Cultul Eroilor,” Lege asupra regimului mormintelor de război din România – statutul Societății „Cultul Eroilor”* [Law on the Prerequisites for Romanian War Monuments – Statute of the “Cult of the Heroes” Society] (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice „Răsăritul” Soc. Anon., 1928), 8, SCE, 202, AMNR, 327; 582.

⁵¹⁵ Așezământul Național „Regina Maria” pentru Cultul Eroilor, *Dare de seama asupra activității Așezământului pe timpul dela 1 Aprilie 1941 la 31 Martie 1942* [Report on the Settlement’s Activity for the Period between April 1, 1941, and March 31, 1942] (Bucharest: Tipografia „Lupta” N. Stroila), 32, SCE, 204, AMNR, 251.

⁵¹⁶ *Monitorul Uniunii Ofițerilor de Rezerva, secția Ialomița* [The Union of Reserve Officers’ Observer, Ialomița Chapter], April-May 1925

⁵¹⁷ Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-century Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 100-102.

available to educated *luptători* in the kingdom's new territories.⁵¹⁸ Most importantly, between 1918 and 1921, governments turned King Ferdinand's promise of an agrarian reform into reality. Specifically, a radical reform was implemented, the victor ex-combatants being among the primary beneficiaries of the latter. The decrees regulating the distribution of the land expropriated in Transylvania, Crișana, Maramureș, the Banat, and the Old Kingdom prioritized various categories of victor ex-soldiers. In the first four of these provinces, the reform gave precedence to war invalids, ex-servicemen, war volunteers, and those citizens who had fought in the armies of Romania's allies.

In the Old Kingdom, the principal beneficiaries of the decrees included war invalids and former soldiers.⁵¹⁹ Undoubtedly, many discharges benefitted from the reform,⁵²⁰ which ultimately afforded land to 1,393,353 peasants.⁵²¹ Measures concerning Bessarabia did not contain special measures for veterans, however, it might be contended that these arrangements were not necessary in the first place. After all, this region had witnessed far-reaching, grassroots land expropriations before its annexation to Romania,⁵²² seizures that had doubtless benefitted the local ex-servicemen.

It is claimed that these laws stabilized Romanian politics in the early post-war era.⁵²³ This statement is certainly correct with regard to the reform's moderating effect on the political conduct of numerous ex-enlistees. The agrarian laws were praised by the war

⁵¹⁸ Armin Heinen, *Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail: Mișcare socială și organizație politică* [The Legion of the Archangel Michael: Social Movement and Political Organization], trans. Cornelia and Delia Esianu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999), 100-101.

⁵¹⁹ Hamangiu, ed., *Codul general*: volume 9, 673, 674, 749.

⁵²⁰ Silviu Hariton, "War Commemorations in Inter-War Romania" (PhD Dissertation, Central European University, 2015), 255; Iordachi, Sciarrino, "War Veterans," 90-98.

⁵²¹ Dumitru Șandru, *Reforma agrară din 1921 în România* [The Romanian Agrarian Reform of 1921] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1975), 251.

⁵²² Henry Roberts, *Romania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 33-35.

⁵²³ Heinen, *Legiunea*, 447.

participants themselves⁵²⁴ and appear to have improved the living conditions of many of the latter. According to one informal assessment, in the long run, these provisions benefitted chiefly former infantrymen⁵²⁵ – especially destitute veterans, as they hailed from the peasantry. It is therefore likely that the reform restrained the public conduct of most politically active *luptători*. For instance, in 1925, the economist Virgil Madgearu affirmed that 90% of Romanian citizens were against communism, as they were proprietors of land.⁵²⁶ Ultimately, by satisfying the sense of entitlement of various ex-combatants, the reform undoubtedly made its beneficiaries accept the post-war parliamentary regime. In the same period, the state behaved in a similarly pleasing way towards the war disabled, funding associations the latter were setting up to provide relief and assistance for themselves. Notably, between 1919 and 1920, the “War Disabled” Society received 3,500,000 *Lei*.⁵²⁷

The extensive generosity displayed by the state between the war years and 1921 can be chalked up to the Old Kingdom’s elites’ fears that the concomitant Soviet revolution might inspire local peasant soldiers to imitate this uprising.⁵²⁸ At the same time, until the Great Depression, governments kept treating the *luptători* relatively well, agreeing to many of the latter’s requests, as all the political forces that helmed the country shared some of the former fighters’ ideological beliefs. The People’s Party’s first government, headed by General Averescu (March 13, 1920 - December 16, 1921), ensured that multitudes of ex-

⁵²⁴ *Cerna: Organ zilnic al Societății „Cerna” a Veteranilor Grade Inferioare* [Cerna: Daily Organ of the “Cerna” Society of Veteran Infantrymen, Corporals, and Sergeants], November 16, 1918; General Alexe Anastasiu, *Dinastia regală și poporul român* [The Royal Dynasty and the Romanian People] (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice „Convorbiri Literare,” 1924), 26.

⁵²⁵ As stated by the reserve officers of the town of Pitești, in their proposal that the state offer a discount on train fares to them, likely 1935, 26/1934, UORR, ANIC, 28.

⁵²⁶ *Casca*, December 1925

⁵²⁷ Dr. I. Ghiulamila, *Opera de asistență și educație a invalizilor din războiu în România, 1917-1924* [Assisting and Training the Romanian War Disabled, 1917-1924] (Bucharest: Tipografia „Jockey Club,” Ion C. Văcărescu, 1924), 161.

⁵²⁸ Iordachi, Sciarrino, “War Veterans,” 90-91.

servicemen felt catered to in their sense of merit as soon as they were discharged. Notably, this cabinet completed the main stages of the land reform.⁵²⁹

Furthermore, to assist soldiers who had been impaired, the general – in accordance with the state’s increased willingness, in the aftermath of World War One, to operate in the field of social assistance⁵³⁰ - created in 1920 the National Office for the War Disabled, Orphans, and Widows (*Oficiul Național al Invalizilor, Orfanilor și Văduvelor de Război*; IOVR), which he tasked with providing assistance and training to invalids.⁵³¹ Between 1921 and 1922, the Office received 3,000,000 *Lei* to relieve war impaired who received insufficient war pensions or no payments.⁵³² Additionally, disabled who were not afforded land were given preferential access to clerk jobs at the National Office.⁵³³ It should also be noted that Averescu improved, on the whole, state financial support to the war victims’ associations. While in 1920-1921 subventions to the “War Disabled” Society had decreased to 1,700,000 *Lei*, the following year they climbed up to 7,450,000 *Lei*.⁵³⁴

The Averescu cabinet also provided ex-enlistees with several other perks. Notably, some of these benefits were extended, at least on paper, to Romanian citizens who had fought for the losing powers at war. Importantly, in 1920 the government guaranteed military pensions to all Romanian citizens who had taken part in the war as officers and had eventually joined the kingdom’s armed forces. Similarly, war pensions rights for

⁵²⁹ Victoria Brown, “The Movement for Reform in Rumania after World War 1: The Parliamentary Bloc Government of 1919-1920,” *Slavic Review*, 38, No. 3 (September 1979), 466.

⁵³⁰ Silviu Hariton, “Asumarea politicilor sociale de către stat în România. Cazul invalizilor, orfanilor și văduvelor de război (IOVR) după primul război român” [Summary of the Romanian State’s Social Policies: The Case of the War Disabled, Orphans and Widows (IOVR) in the Post-War Era], *Archiva Moldaviae* [Archives of Moldavia], supplement 1, eds. Constantin Iordachi, Alin Ciupală (2014), 116.

⁵³¹ Ministerul de Război – Oficiul Național I.O.V., *Recunoștința națiunii către acei cari au făurit „România mare”* [The Nation’s Gratitude to Those Who Founded “Greater Romania”] (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1920), 30-35.

⁵³² Ministerul de Război – Oficiul Național I.O.V., *Proiect de buget al cheltuielilor oficiului național I.O.V. pe exercițiul 1 aprilie 1921 – 31 martie 1922* [Budget Project for the I.O.V. National Office’s Expenses, for the Period between April 1, 1921 – March 31, 1922] (Bucharest: Tipografia Militară „Ministerul de Răsboiu,” 1921), folder 1917, volume 2, fund “Parlament,” ANIC, 414.

⁵³³ Ministerul de Război, *Recunoștința națiunii*, 44.

⁵³⁴ Ghiulamila, *Opera de asistență*, 161.

infantrymen, corporals, and sergeants were extended to Romanians who had fought, in such ranks, for the Habsburgs or Russians, ending up disabled due their service. Moreover, Averescu granted discounts on train fares to the disabled (75%),⁵³⁵ pensioned officers and reserve officers who were state functionaries (50%).⁵³⁶ The general also inaugurated a long-standing trend of co-opting veterans' associations. Specifically, he turned the "War Disabled" Society and another war victims' group, the General Association of the Disabled of Greater Romania's War (*Asociația Generală a Invalizilor din Războiul României Mari*), into official partners of the National Office for the War Disabled, Orphans and Widows.⁵³⁷ The president of the "War Disabled" Society's administrative council was even made a member of the IOVR National Office's central board.⁵³⁸

In terms of symbolic rewards, the general mandated that fallen soldiers be celebrated on Ascension Day, be extolled on a newly devised public ceremony called Heroes Day,⁵³⁹ and that each locality publicly honor its deceased fighters.⁵⁴⁰ In 1921, the government began inviting disabled of the First World War to take part in the official celebrations of Heroes Day, tasking them with extolling the heroic virtues of the fallen soldiers.⁵⁴¹

Finally, the general also helped *luptători* perform the diplomatic activities they were keen to undertake for the sake of shoring up their fatherland. He financially assisted Romania's largest ex-militaries' association, the UNAL, helping it cooperate with the Inter-Allied Federation of Former Fighters. Averescu's support in this regard inaugurated the Romanian state's strategy of consolidating its hold over its new territories by undertaking

⁵³⁵ Ministerul de Război, *Recunoștința națiunii*, 45, 118-132, 139-143; 150-154; Hariton, "War Commemorations," 259, 260.

⁵³⁶ *Buletinul Uniunii Ofițerilor de Rezerva și in Retragere înființat in anul 1925*, November – December 1926

⁵³⁷ Ghiulamila, *Opera de asistență*, 4.

⁵³⁸ Ministerul de Război, *Recunoștința națiunii*, 37.

⁵³⁹ Bucur, *Heroes and Victims*, 60.

⁵⁴⁰ Ministerul de Război, *Recunoștința națiunii*, 8.

⁵⁴¹ Valeria Bălescu, *Eroul necunoscut: istorie trecută și recentă* [The Unknown Hero: His Ancient and Recent History] (Bucharest: Editura Militara, 2005), 46-49.

a vigorous campaign of cultural diplomacy abroad. As the international partners to whom the Romanian state asked for diplomatic support were the victor nations of the First World War,⁵⁴² it made sense for the kingdom's governments to employ discharges as public diplomats. As a matter of fact, Averescu's minister of war, General Ioan Rășcanu, believed that subsidizing the UNAL's activities within the FIDAC would help disseminate pro-Romanian propaganda in Allied countries, buttressing Romania's international alliances.⁵⁴³

As can be seen above, in the immediate aftermath of the conflict, the kingdom implemented several measures to reward its militaries. These timely and extensive provisions undoubtedly ensured that many of the victor ex-servicemen came to accept the realm's parliamentary system of government. As a matter of fact, many of their beneficiaries probably forsook any political militancy, wishing merely to savor their paybacks. As Serdaru would recall at a later stage: "*When we returned to our fireplaces, from the front, we were tired of the front, of [eating] green peas mixed with ladybugs, of jaundice, of so many things! We had only one wish: to take off our heavy boots so that we may walk in our slippers or barefoot.*"⁵⁴⁴ As for defeated fighters, the latter eschewed political activism due to being actively discouraged from articulating their claims towards the state. As a matter of fact, in Transylvania, Hungarian ex-militaries were prevented from establishing their own associations.⁵⁴⁵

In light of its leader's background as a military man and its reformist stance, the People's Party afforded significant concessions to ex-enlistees. However, notwithstanding the scope of these recompenses, the country soon after witnessed the rise of a veterans'

⁵⁴² Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War 2* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 39-40; Zsolt Nagy, *Great Expectations and Interwar Realities: Hungarian Cultural Diplomacy, 1918-1945* (New York: Central European University Press, 2017), 138-140.

⁵⁴³ Report sent by the minister of war to the prime minister, November 6, 1921, 14, CCI, ADMAE

⁵⁴⁴ As Virgil Serdaru recounted, in 1937, in the introduction to the political program of the UNAL-sponsored Party of National Unity. See Partidul Unității Naționale, *Programul* [Program] (Bucharest: P.U.N., 1937), D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 106.

⁵⁴⁵ Franz Horváth, "The Divided War Remembrance of Transylvanian Magyars," *Sacrifice and Rebirth*, 80.

social movement, a development that was undoubtedly facilitated by the social ties that had formed between officers and soldiers during the war,⁵⁴⁶ and that the movement's organizers hoped might be renewed in the post-war era. This movement was centered on a variety of ex-servicemen's associations. Some of the latter had come into being before or during the First World War, as in the case of the Defenders of the Fatherland, the Circle of Reserve Non-Commissioned Officers (*Cercul Subofițerilor de Rezerva*; 1915),⁵⁴⁷ and the "War Disabled" Society (1917).⁵⁴⁸ For its part, the General Association of the Disabled of Greater Romania's War was created in the course of the military campaign against Hungary (1919).⁵⁴⁹

Most of those that were active in the 1920s, at the same time, were established just before or after soldiers were discharged. This was the case for the UNAL (1920), which was founded and led by Virgil Serdaru;⁵⁵⁰ the Union of Romanian Former Volunteers, the membership of which consisted mainly of Transylvanian, Bukovinian, Banatean, Basarabian and Macedonian war volunteers⁵⁵¹ (1922);⁵⁵² the Union of Reserve and Retired Officers (1923);⁵⁵³ the General Association of Reserve and Retired Active Officers (*Asociațiunea Generală Ofițerilor în Rezerva și Retragere Proveniți din Activitate*; 1925);⁵⁵⁴ the federation known as the Romanian Legion (*Legiunea Română*; 1926);⁵⁵⁵ the

⁵⁴⁶ Kirițescu, *Istoria Războiului*: volume 1, 208.

⁵⁴⁷ *FIDAC*, March 1927

⁵⁴⁸ Societatea „Invalizii din Război,” *Studiu statistic medical*, 4.

⁵⁴⁹ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the verification and control committee of the IOVFL Office, June 29, 1937, folder 34/1937, fund “*Oficiul Național pentru Invalizi, Orfani și Văduve de Război*” (ONIOVR), ANIC, 34.

⁵⁵⁰ UNAL promotional leaflet, likely 1934, D 010174, volume 10, FDB, CNSAS, 20.

⁵⁵¹ *Curentul* [The Current], January 27, 1938

⁵⁵² Statute of the UFVR, August 29, 1922, D 012742, FDB, CNSAS, 34.

⁵⁵³ Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva, *Statutele prezentate al 3-lea congres dela 6 febr. Șt. N. (24 ian. Șt. V.)* [Statutes Presented at the Third Congress of February 6 – New Style (January 24 – Old Style)] (Bucharest: Tipografiile Române Unite, 1924), FB 0001009, BS, CNSAS, 3-4.

⁵⁵⁴ Untitled newspaper clipping, December 13, 1928, 3/1924, UORR, ANIC, 27.

⁵⁵⁵ *Buletinul Uniunii Ofițerilor de Rezerva și in Retragere înființat in Anul 1925*, November – December 1926

“Military Virtue” Association (*Asociația „Virtutea Militară;”* 1929),⁵⁵⁶ which grouped those ex-servicemen who had been awarded the military decoration mentioned in its denomination. Several of these organizations became rather popular among former fighters. By 1927 the UNAL had 50,000 members, the General Association of the Disabled 40,000, the UFVR 30,000, the “War Disabled” Society 10,000, the UORR 6,000, and the Circle of Reserve Non-Commissioned Officers 5,000. In general terms, by the same year, Romania had 152,000 associated old soldiers, including those who were impaired. As for war widows, they formed the Society of War Widows (*Societatea Văduvelor de Războiu*), which by this year had 5,000 members.⁵⁵⁷

The movement based on veterans’ groups aimed to pressure the state into providing further economic concessions to war participants, in addition to preserving the latter’s symbolic privileges and role as national educators and ambassadors. The birth of this movement took place due to various reasons. First of all, not all *luptători* believed they had yet been adequately compensated in material terms. Many of them felt they had received nothing or deserved more. To begin with, many former militaries felt dissatisfied with their war pensions’ levels. As a case in point, infantrymen, corporals, and sergeants wished to increase these pensions, as by 1923 they received meager allowances: up to a maximum of 100 *Lei* per payment, at a time when disabled with the lightest impairments asked for at least a further 20 *Lei* to live above a subsistence level.⁵⁵⁸ Additionally, reserve officers who were discharged after 1921 complained that they were entitled to lower payments than those who had been demobilized before that year.⁵⁵⁹ Several ex-servicemen were also dissatisfied with how the land reform was being implemented. Various urban-based fighters

⁵⁵⁶ Memorandum sent by the “Military Virtue” Association to the IOVFL National Office, likely 1940, 5/1930, ONIOVR, ANIC, 20.

⁵⁵⁷ *Casca*, February 1927; *FIDAC*, March 1927

⁵⁵⁸ Nicolae Dumitrescu, *Invalizii din război: Studiu-memoriu* [War Disabled: Study-Memorandum] (Bucharest: Asociația Generală a Invalizilor din Războiul României Mari, 1923), 41, 62-63.

⁵⁵⁹ UORR memorandum, likely 1932, 20/1932, volume 2, UORR, ANIC, 194.

did not receive the parcels they were entitled to.⁵⁶⁰ Moreover, war volunteers, who hailed mainly from the kingdom's post-1918 territorial acquisitions, were discriminated with regard to land redistribution. The fact that both Averescu and his Liberal successors had their main electoral constituencies in the Old Kingdom doubtless impacted these volunteers negatively, as powerholders felt less beholden to them than to their main supporters. By 1925, only a few among those living in 44 different municipalities had received a private parcel.⁵⁶¹

Another important catalyst for the creation of the nation-wide ex-servicemen's movement consisted of the establishment of the first large-scale able-bodied veterans' association, the UNAL. This development was mainly occasioned by its president, Virgil Serdaru. In creating the Union, Serdaru was inspired by the time he had spent living in Paris, in the immediate aftermath of the Great War. In this period, he had learned about the organizational prowess of war returnees' associations in Allied countries and felt compelled to create a similarly influential group in his homeland.⁵⁶² It might be claimed that, in founding the UNAL, this lawyer kickstarted the birth of the Romanian war participants' movement, as the Union was strong enough to sponsor the core claims of this country's former fighters in the early 1920s, likely setting an example for later associations of this kind. As will be mentioned below, Serdaru was also shrewd enough, in political terms, to strike an alliance with the National Peasants' Party, enacting a strategy that provided the movement with a powerful ally.

⁵⁶⁰ Security report on an UNAL public gathering, January 29, 1928, D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 61.

⁵⁶¹ Uniunea Foștilor Voluntari Români, *Voluntari români*, 11-13.

⁵⁶² Serdaru, *Peste hotare*, 28-30, 58-59.

Image 1.8: Virgil Serdaru.



Source: Promotional leaflet of the National Union of Former Fighters (*Uniunea Națională a Foștilor Luptători*) (Image courtesy of the *Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității*; further reproduction is prohibited)

As shown above, the returnees' movement intended first and foremost to pressure public authorities into improving the nascent welfare system for veterans, in addition to providing further economic paybacks to its members. At the same time, it was also interested in ensuring the state would carry on bestowing upon the latter symbolic privileges and the role of national educators and ambassadors. Finally, it wanted to carry out the prerogatives connected to ex-combatants' self-ascribed public role.

With regard to their pedagogic pursuits, it should be specified that ex-servicemen wished to foster the cult of the nation among Romanian people to ensure that the borders

they had helped their nation secure between 1916 and 1919 would be defended in the future. For instance, Victor Cădere claimed that reserve officers had a duty to strengthen the homeland by undertaking educational activities.⁵⁶³ Disseminating this cult entailed spreading qualities that the ex-servicemen claimed to embody to the fullest extent: devotion to the fatherland and selflessness in the latter's service. The UNAL believed that "*Greater Romania, surrounded by so many enemies, need[ed] defenders who [were] tireless and capable, just like their predecessors, of acts of heroism to preserve the legacy they [had] inherited from those who had fallen in the battles of the Carpathians, Mărăști and Mărășești.*"⁵⁶⁴ Fighters sought to heroize themselves and their fallen comrades, providing living and dead examples for their compatriots to imitate, to pass their virtues onto other citizens.⁵⁶⁵

The ex-servicemen's associations sought to disseminate nationalist virtues chiefly through public rituals, as attested by the numerous collective war commemorations they promoted and took part in. Notably, the leader of the UNAL, Virgil Serdaru, played a relevant role in the state's decision to have an unknown soldier publicly entombed in Bucharest in 1923. He raised widespread interest in this kind of ceremony, writing brochures and organizing informative events on the topic, in addition to lobbying state authorities. The Union even contributed in financial terms to creating the monument that would eventually be built on top of the soldier's resting place.⁵⁶⁶

The ex-combatants' movement sought to turn its members' commemorations into educational opportunities. In the course of these events, its adherents were meant to stress their virtues and those of their dead comrades to surrounding audiences in the hope that onlookers would themselves embrace these qualities. As a case in point, the first president

⁵⁶³ *Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva, Buletinul, Secția Ilfov*, 7, 8, 1926

⁵⁶⁴ *Casca*, April-May 1931

⁵⁶⁵ Hariton, "War Commemorations," 58.

⁵⁶⁶ *Casca*, June 1-30, 1923; December 1927

of the UORR, General Alexe Anastasiu, directly ‘addressed’ the unknown soldier, in the course of a public ceremony, with the following words: “*Beneath this funerary stone, you represent the treasure of military virtue of our unified nation.*”⁵⁶⁷ It should also be remarked that the UORR’s bulletin described a military parade that the Union had performed in front of civilians as an “*elevating*”⁵⁶⁸ spectacle. In light of this, it might be reasonably stated that ex-servicemen also considered taking part in state war commemorations paramount to their pedagogic efforts, as they believed that acting as performers in these public rituals was crucial to their educational efforts.

Surveying the scant primary sources detailing these organized fighters’ social backgrounds confirms their movement’s goals consisted principally in exacting the various kinds of rewards mentioned above. To begin with, this survey suggests that former soldiers who joined the *luptători*’s movement tended to hail from the low and middle echelons of Romanian society. Notably, nearly half of the membership of the “Military Virtue” Association – 952 out of 2,452 associates – consisted of deprived peasants.⁵⁶⁹ Hence, it might be concluded that securing material paybacks and public esteem was essential to a high number of members of the movement, as they doubtless aimed to improve their socio-economic status.

Furthermore, this analysis indicates that many adherents to the movement had a strong interest in securing an influential public role from the state. After all, various among them were imbued with nationalist ideals, hence likely wished to disseminate these principles among their fellow countrymen through educational and diplomatic activities supported by public institutions. Notably, as will be shown below, the Union of Reserve and Retired Officers included a number of public educators and militaries. As proposed by

⁵⁶⁷ *Monitorul Uniunii Ofițerilor de Rezerva, Secția Ialomița*, April, May 1925

⁵⁶⁸ *Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva, Buletinul* [Union of Reserve Officers, Bulletin], September 1936

⁵⁶⁹ Memorandum sent by the “Military Virtue” Association to the IOVFL National Office, likely 1940, 5/1930, ONIOVR, ANIC, 20.

Hariton,⁵⁷⁰ individuals employed in these professions were involved in major ways in the kingdom's nation-building efforts between the two World Wars. As various such professionals were present in the UORR, it might be surmised that the *luptători* movement was denoted by a strong nationalizing drive, hence its affiliates aimed at securing an official role as custodians of the fatherland, to better fulfil their self-ascribed mission.

Table 1.1: Professional backgrounds of the memberships of national and local UORR directive committees

National Central Committee, 1928⁵⁷¹

Public Educators	4
Active or Retired Officers	15
Other Professions	17
Total Number of Members	36

Directive Committee of the Muscel County Chapter, 1925⁵⁷²

Public Educators	8
Active or Retired Officers	7
Other Professions	15
Total Number of Members	30

Professional Backgrounds of the Memberships of Local UORR Chapters

Chapter in Caliacra County, 1925⁵⁷³

Public Educators	12
Active or Retired Officers	2
Other Professions	60
Total Number of Members	74

Chapter in Botoșani County, Likely 1923⁵⁷⁴

Public Educators	14
Active or Retired Officers	7
Other Professions	26
Total Number of Members	47

⁵⁷⁰ Hariton, "War Commemorations," 58.

⁵⁷¹ List of members of the UORR national central committee, May 19, 1928, 14/1926, UORR, ANIC, 15.

⁵⁷² Report on the activities of the UORR chapter in Muscel County, March 1, 1925, 7/1925, UORR, ANIC, 72.

⁵⁷³ List of members of the UORR chapter in Caliacra County, February 4, 1925, 10, UORR, ANIC, 309-313.

⁵⁷⁴ List of members of the UORR chapter in Botoșani, likely 1923, 5/1924-1940, UORR, ANIC, 74.

Chapter in the Municipality of Dej, 1925⁵⁷⁵

Public Educators	1
Active or Retired Officers	2
Other Professions	11
Total Number of Members	14

Chapter in the Municipality of Putna, 1925⁵⁷⁶

Public Educators	14
Active or Retired Officers	37
Other Professions	55
Total Number of Members	106

Chapter in Prahova County, 1924⁵⁷⁷

Public Educators	4
Active or Retired Officers	7
Other Professions	14
Total Number of Members	25

Chapter in Prahova County, 1925⁵⁷⁸

Public Educators	16
Active or Retired Officers	6
Other Professions	93
Total Number of Members	115

Chapter in Bacau County, 1932⁵⁷⁹

Public Educators	3
Active or Retired Officers	1
Other Professions	37
Total Number of Members	41

Chapter in the Municipality of Năsăud, 1933⁵⁸⁰

Public Educators	1
Active or Retired Officers	0
Other Professions	14
Total Number of Members	15

⁵⁷⁵ List of members of the UORR chapter in the municipality of Dej, 1925, 6/1925, UORR, ANIC, 30 – 31.

⁵⁷⁶ List of members of the UORR chapter in the municipality of Putna, January 19, 1925, 6/1925, UORR, ANIC, 83-84.

⁵⁷⁷ List of members of the UORR chapter in Prahova County, March 14, 1924, 2/1922-1924, UORR, ANIC, 76.

⁵⁷⁸ List of members of the UORR chapter in Prahova County, February 14, 1925, 5/1924-1940, UORR, ANIC, 117-118.

⁵⁷⁹ List of members of the UORR chapter in Bacau, March 13, 1932, 20/1932, volume 2, UORR, ANIC, 123.

⁵⁸⁰ List of members of the UORR chapter in the municipality of Năsăud, 1933, 22/1933, UORR, ANIC, 376.

With regard to this role, several members of the movement desired to receive public financial and organizational assistance for their ambassadorial undertakings, as they desired to strengthen the kingdom by assisting it in its diplomatic activities.⁵⁸¹ They sought to accomplish this by buttressing Romania's international alliances. For instance, the UORR enacted cultural propaganda abroad to "*develop and preserve, among the former fighters' associations [of Romania] and friendly foreign countries, ties of permanent, mighty solidarity and comradely brotherhood.*"⁵⁸²

Associated ex-warriors cooperated extensively with the Inter-Allied Federation of Former Fighters to promote their goals. UNAL President Serdaru, who helped found the FIDAC, immediately enrolled his association in this forum.⁵⁸³ In the course of the 1920s, all the other main organizations representing able-bodied Romanian combatants joined the Federation.⁵⁸⁴ These associations gradually created a pro-Romanian climate of opinion within it. First of all, they strengthened ties of solidarity between their country and veterans of Allied nations: France, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.⁵⁸⁵ Second, they prompted the FIDAC to support Romania's foreign policy interests. In light of their efforts, in 1924, the Federation formally recognized Soviet Russia's existence. At the same time, it rejected the USSR's claims to sovereignty over territories placed outside of this union's then-current borders, thereby legitimizing Romania's control over Bessarabia in the face of the communist state's concomitant demands to take over this area.⁵⁸⁶ Additionally, Romanian activists ensured that the FIDAC condemned the incursions that Bulgarian paramilitary units undertook within their

⁵⁸¹ *Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva: Buletinul, Secția Ilfov*, 7, 8, 1926

⁵⁸² Statement issued by the UORR chapter in Bucharest, likely 1931, 12/1931, UORR, ANIC, 569.

⁵⁸³ Serdaru, *Peste hotare*, 58-59.

⁵⁸⁴ *FIDAC*, March 1927

⁵⁸⁵ For instance, Romanian veterans strengthened their ties to their counterparts from Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia at the 1925 congress of the FIDAC. See the minutes of an UORR internal meeting, October 2, 1925, 10, UORR, ANIC, 404.

⁵⁸⁶ Minutes of the proceedings of the FIDAC congress of 1924, likely 1924, 14, CCI, ADMAE

country's borders in the late 1920s,⁵⁸⁷ and compelled it to support the Romanian kingdom against a revisionist diplomatic campaign waged by Hungary.⁵⁸⁸

Interestingly, *luptători* worked in the Federation also with a view to pursuing their other objectives, in addition to diplomatic ones. First of all, they convinced the FIDAC to pass motions that promoted their rights to economic benefits, a strategy that helped them pressure their governments into acknowledging such rights. For instance, in the course of its yearly congress of 1928, which took place in Bucharest, the Federation publicly subscribed to the Romanian fighters' campaign to receive state subventions to build low-price dwellings. As a result of this prestigious endorsement,⁵⁸⁹ in 1930, the kingdom began granting the *luptători* said subsidies.⁵⁹⁰

Second, Romanian fighters cooperated with the FIDAC to make the pedagogic messages they disseminated among their people more impactful. In a similar manner to their Yugoslav counterparts,⁵⁹¹ they tried to convince their fellow countrymen that the kingdom's military involvement in the First World War had been an event of 'world-historical' significance, thereby painting the wartime deeds of the Romanian soldiers in a more eventful light. By doing so, they hoped to increase their compatriots' readiness to accept the principles they promoted. To this effect, they enacted war commemorations with their counterparts from other Allied countries, such as the international representatives who visited Bucharest during the 1928 FIDAC congress.⁵⁹² Additionally, they sent youths on study trips to other Entente nations. As a case in point, Princess Alexandrina Cantacuzino,

⁵⁸⁷ Report on the FIDAC congress of 1926, likely 1926, 14, CCI, ADMAE

⁵⁸⁸ Letter sent by the president of the FIDAC to the Romanian minister of foreign affairs, October 11, 1928, 14, CCI, ADMAE

⁵⁸⁹ Elie Bufnea, *F.I.D.A.C.: Cuvânt comemorativ* [F.I.D.A.C.: Commemorative Speech] (Bucharest: Tipografiile Române Unite, 1933), 11.

⁵⁹⁰ Guide on the Romanian state's legislation on social assistance, 1933, folder 79/1934, fund "Ministerul Muncii," series *Internațional*," ANIC, 79.

⁵⁹¹ John Paul Newman, *Yugoslavia in the Shadow of War: Veterans and the Limits of State Building, 1903-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 64.

⁵⁹² *Revista Foștilor Combatanți Români* [Review of the Romanian Former Fighters], September 1928

who presided over the Romanian FIDAC women's auxiliary force,⁵⁹³ persuaded the Federation to sponsor visits made by war orphans from Allied polities to the tomb of the unknown French soldier in Paris.⁵⁹⁴ Ultimately, the fact that *luptători* pursued multiple aims as a part of their transnational mobilization can have only increased their wish to be supported by their governments, in working as ambassadors abroad.

Having outlined the objectives of the fighters' movement, it remains to be ascertained the latter's degree of inner cohesion and general political proclivities. To begin with, it should be remarked that ex-servicemen's groups, which constituted the core of this movement, managed to cooperate with each other to a moderate degree. After all, the limited disagreements between the aforementioned associations arose mainly from organizational rivalries rather than full-blown ideological divergences. Crucially, all of these associations shared similar principles and agreed on the priority of securing rewards from the state. To be sure, competitiveness between rival representatives at times escalated, as attested by the pronounced competition opposing the president of the Romanian Legion, General Traian Moșoiu, to UNAL President Serdaru.⁵⁹⁵ However, interactions between the various associations were generally cooperative. This relative amicability is clear when considering the following episode. In 1923 Serdaru was accused by none other than a future dictator of Romania, the military officer Ion Antonescu (who, at the time, worked as a military attaché in Paris), of misappropriating public subventions earmarked for funding the UNAL's work within the FIDAC, making a private use of them.⁵⁹⁶ Serdaru was to be

⁵⁹³ Monica Negru, *Alexandrina Cantacuzino și mișcarea feminista din anii interbelici* [Alexandrina Cantacuzino and the Feminist Movement of the Interwar Years]: volume 1 (Targoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2014), 41-48.

⁵⁹⁴ FIDAC, November 1928; report on the FIDAC congress of 1929, likely 1929, 17/1928-1930, UORR, ANIC, 381.

⁵⁹⁵ For instance, Serdaru refused to cooperate with Moșoiu to help war veterans residing in Bucharest receive arable land from the state. See *Casca*, December 1927

⁵⁹⁶ V. Dobrinescu, Gh. Nicolescu, "Atașat Militar (1922-1926)" [Military Attaché (1922-1926)], in *Mareșalul Antonescu la judecata istoriei: Contribuții, marturi, documente* [Marshal Antonescu Judged by History: Contributions, Testimonies, Documents], ed. Gh. Buzatu (Bucharest: Editura Mica Valahie, 2002), 82-83.

judged on this matter by a board assembled by the ministry of war, which would have included the initial president of the UORR, General Alexe Anastasiu. However, Anastasiu refused to act as a judge in Serdaru's case.⁵⁹⁷ Eventually, Serdaru was acquitted of the accusations brought against him by Antonescu.⁵⁹⁸

What was, ultimately, the principal political orientation of the *luptători's* movement? Crucially, most of the organizations which underpinned this movement remained politically moderate as long as Romania's interwar parliamentary system lasted. In other words, between the early 1920s and the late 1930s, the movement struck alliances with the country's governments while also holding conspicuous links to opposition moderate or reformist parties. Crucially, the major parliamentary parties prevented the movement from radicalizing by satisfying its participants' sense of entitlement to a relevant degree. They managed to do so continuously, with some relevant exceptions in the early-to-mid-1930s. This trend began between 1922 and 1928, while the country was helmed by the National Liberal Party, headed first by Ionel Brătianu and, following his death in 1927, his brother Vintilă. In this period, the PNL managed to satisfy various requests that were articulated by the representatives of the war participants. In turn, the veterans' associations cooperated with, or at least tolerated, the Liberals. At the same time, it must be remarked that the ruling party also employed coercion to prevent disgruntled ex-servicemen from contesting its power. Notably, it forcibly neutralized extremists who attempted to harness discharges' dissent to topple it.

Which militant groups attempted to infiltrate the old soldiers' movement? First of all, the far left made some attempts in this direction. Apparently, by 1919 Socialist

⁵⁹⁷ Letter sent by General Alexe Anastasiu to Virgil Serdaru, May 13, 1925, 11, UORR, ANIC, 18.

⁵⁹⁸ *Casca*, March 18, 1925

propaganda had made some inroads in the army,⁵⁹⁹ however, in the following years, the left failed to attract significant interest from former fighters, due to committing various tactical blunders. In the immediate aftermath of military demobilization, the Romanian Socialist Party (*Partidul Socialist din România*) did not cater extensively to the *luptători*'s sense of merit. While asking for decent pensions for war disabled, it proposed to satisfy the farmers' hunger for land merely by collectivizing large estates,⁶⁰⁰ a proposal bound to alienate the peasant soldiers, who aspired to smallholdings.⁶⁰¹ This party's successors, the Romanian Social Democratic Party (*Partidul Social Democrat Român*) and the Romanian Communist Party (*Partidul Comunist din România*), committed their own mistakes. The Social Democrats focused on taking control of trade unions,⁶⁰² thereby diverting resources they might have used to create a following among the *luptători*. Communists also failed to gain the backing of war participants, as they pronounced themselves to be against the existence of the Romanian state in its current territorial configuration.⁶⁰³

On the other hand, the far right managed to secure the support of numerous First World War combatants. Importantly, between 1922 and 1924 the fascist Romanian National Fasces (*Fascia Națională Română*; FNR) caught the favor of various such individuals. On the one hand, the FNR made inroads within the fighters' movement by courting ex-servicemen who espoused chauvinist beliefs and held xenophobic and authoritarian views. Just like their counterparts in my Italian case study, these hyper-nationalist returnees could not be moderated by favorable veterans' policies, as they were

⁵⁹⁹ Nicolae Iorga, *Memorii* [Memories]: volume 2: (*Însemnări zilnice maiu 1917-mart 1920*) *Războiul național. Lupta pentru o nouă viață politică* [(Daily Notes May 1917 – March 1920) *The National War. The Struggle for a New Political Life*] (Bucharest: Editura „Națională” S. Ciomei, 1931), 195.

⁶⁰⁰ Ioan Scurtu, *Viața politică din România, 1918-1944* [Romanian Political Life, 1918-1944] (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1982), 71-72.

⁶⁰¹ In 1919, peasants vigorously contested the initial dispositions of the land reform, which gave expropriated land to temporary agricultural collectives. See Șandru, *Reforma agrară*, 50-53.

⁶⁰² Roberts, *România*, 247.

⁶⁰³ Constantiniu, *O istorie*, 320-321.

not especially interested in attaining state benefits. For instance, various reserve officers entered the Fasces as they felt attracted to the latter's anti-Semitic leanings.⁶⁰⁴

Additionally, the veterans who led the FNR believed the Liberals were too complaisant toward the Social Democrats and the Communists. Finally, some of the *luptători* living in the kingdom's frontier areas might have been compelled to join the FNR as they considered neighboring nations a threat to Romania's territorial integrity. After all, as discussed earlier, in the Italian kingdom's border with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, a similar phenomenon had recently taken place, whereby former war volunteers had tended to view their nation as a besieged fortress. They had thereby entered the Blackshirts' ranks and meted out violence against local ethnic minorities, which they viewed as 'fifth columns.' With regard to the Romanian case study, in a frontier region such as the Banat, numerous former members of the Romanian Legion of Italy joined the FNR. In doing so, they were probably persuaded by the fascists' promise to protect the territories which Romania had won through its military affirmation. After all, the Fasces boasted they aimed at "*protecting to its full extent the status which Romania [had] earned for itself through its sacrifices in the Great War.*"⁶⁰⁵

On the other hand, not all the ex-warriors who joined the fascists did so due to hyper-nationalist fervor. In this respect, it should be noted that the veterans' movement, as a whole, was not xenophobic. During the war, numerous Jews had fought bravely at the front – 825 among them earning decorations for their service⁶⁰⁶ - thereby likely earning the respect of many of their fellow servicemen. After the conflict, while the ex-combatants'

⁶⁰⁴ Police report on an FNR gathering in Bucharest, September 5, 1923, 49/1924, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 114.

⁶⁰⁵ Ioan Scurtu, ed., *Totalitarismul de dreapta în România: Origini, manifestări, evoluție, 1919-1927* [Romanian Right-Wing Totalitarianism: Origins, Manifestations, Evolution, 1919-1927] (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 1995), 316, 323, 332, 353.

⁶⁰⁶ Dumitru Hîncu, Lya Benjamin, eds., *Evreii din România în Războiul de Reîntregire a Țării, 1916-1919* [Romanian Jews in the War of National Unification, 1916-1919] (Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 1996), 20.

groups included anti-Semitic individuals – as in the cases of General Gheorghe Cantacuzino and Colonel Ștefan Zăvoianu, who were enrolled in the UORR⁶⁰⁷ and militated in the fascist Legion of the Archangel Michael (*Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail*) – they were usually led by moderate former soldiers. These leaders were generally on good terms with the Romanian Jewish community, especially those Jews who had served at the front.

A prominent local delegate of the ex-combatants, Professor Dan Bădărău, would attack the Legion of the Archangel Michael by stating that the homeland should be strengthened by educating Romanians to patriotic values instead of persecuting ethnic minorities.⁶⁰⁸ Additionally, Virgil Serdaru took part in the unveiling of a monument in Bucharest that commemorated Jewish fallen soldiers. Even among these associations' rank and file, a sense of respect for Jews was present. Notably, when the anti-Semitic cabinet headed by Octavian Goga would strip the Jewish *luptători* of their civic rights, in early 1938,⁶⁰⁹ a war impaired's association asked for these rights to be reinstated.⁶¹⁰ For its part, the Jewish community viewed ex-servicemen's leaders as its allies.⁶¹¹

It is also unlikely that most associated *luptători* embraced authoritarianism due to fears of external offensives. The Romanian veterans' associations' thorough involvement in international combatants' forums suggests that the majority of organized returnees believed that their public diplomacy, rather than the establishment of an illiberal system of government, would protect the kingdom from international threats. In light of this, it can

⁶⁰⁷ *Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva, Buletinul*, November – December 1937; message sent by the secretary of the UORR chapter in Ilfov to the UORR central committee, April 13, 1927, 17/1928-1930, UORR, ANIC, 5.

⁶⁰⁸ Minutes of a meeting of the UORR chapter in Iași, July 16, 1933, 21, UORR, ANIC, 227.

⁶⁰⁹ Wilhelm Filderman, *Memoirs and Diaries: volume 1: 1900-1940* (Jerusalem: Graphit Press Ltd, 2004), 245, 258.

⁶¹⁰ Message sent by the "Glories of the Nation" Society to the minister of labour, health and social assistance, November 1, 1938, 3/1936, ONIOVR, ANIC, 75.

⁶¹¹ Message sent by a leader of the Romanian Jews, Wilhelm Filderman, to the United Roumanian Jews association, September 9, 1930, folder 62, fund "*Ministerul Propagandei Naționale, Volum 3*" (MPN3), ANIC, 13.

be inferred that several combatants who joined the FNR did so not out of radical nationalism but for more pragmatic reasons. As observed by Chioveanu,⁶¹² some of the *luptători* who embraced extremism felt insufficiently rewarded by the state for their military service. Therefore, they looked for alternative political patrons who might help them pressure public authorities into granting them the concessions they sought.

As a matter of fact, the FNR castigated the Liberals for supposedly ignoring the needs of men with combat experience, professing to have the latter's interests at heart: “[W]e, the former leaders of the fighters of the great war, of those who today constitute the exploited masses, will find a way to hold scheming politicians accountable.”⁶¹³ General Gheorghe Băgulescu, a collaborator of the Fasces (and of the anti-Semitic movement of the early 1920s at large⁶¹⁴), issued a call to officers, accusing the post-war governments of not “bearing the expected fruits.”⁶¹⁵ The fascists also championed measures that would certainly benefit disgruntled *luptători*, proposing to redistribute arable land more thoroughly. To deliver on their promises, they sought to turn the country into a dictatorship.⁶¹⁶

It appears that various Romanian ex-servicemen alienated from the PNL were won over by the Fasces' propaganda. Therefore, they began supporting the latter's authoritarian message. For instance, the members of the Ploiești chapter of the Defenders of the Fatherland entered the FNR as their veterans' group had failed to secure land grants from

⁶¹² Mihai Chioveanu, *Fetele fascismului: Politica, ideologie și scrisul istoric în secolul douăzecilea* [The Faces of Fascism: Politics, Ideology and Historiography in the Twentieth Century] (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2005), 254.

⁶¹³ FNR statute-program, likely 1928, 49/1924, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 189.

⁶¹⁴ Tatiana Niculescu, *Mistica rugăciunii și a revolverului: Viața lui Corneliu Zelea Codreanu* [The Mystique of the Prayer and of the Handgun: The Life of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2017), 93-95.

⁶¹⁵ Dana Beldiman, Corneliu Beldiman, “Dreapta românească. Elemente de organizare militară, 1” [The Romanian Right. Elements of Military Organizations, 1], *Arhivele Totalitarismului* [The Archives of Totalitarianism], 26-27, No. 1-2 (2000), 32.

⁶¹⁶ Heinen, *Legiunea*, 108-109.

the state.⁶¹⁷ Some of the soldiers returning to the student bodies of the country, facing an uncertain future, joined the Fasces.⁶¹⁸ The UORR, which principally aimed at exacting rewards for veterans,⁶¹⁹ was apparently infiltrated by FNR propaganda.⁶²⁰ It should also be noted that members of the UFVR looked with sympathy to fascist ideals, as they were unhappy with their “*living conditions*,”⁶²¹ an issue which was undoubtedly exacerbated by the fact that they were penalized in terms of land redistribution. Finally, it is possible that the army’s living standards, which in the early 1920s were rather dire, prompted some career militaries to associate themselves with the Fasces.⁶²²

While the fascists won over a number of ex-soldiers, eventually, Brătianu prevented the former from fully exploiting the latter’s resentment. In 1924 the government shut down various FNR chapters. This clampdown was crucial for the FNR’s eventual decrease in membership figures, as the fascists themselves recognized.⁶²³ As a result of this intimidatory approach, the Fasces were marginalized. In Ploiești, where they had previously been popular,⁶²⁴ by 1926, they were holding only small, secret meetings,⁶²⁵ undoubtedly having been cowed into keeping a low public profile.

In 1924, the Liberals similarly used the threat of coercion, in addition to resorting to intrigue, to prevent the People’s Party from exploiting ex-servicemen’s frustrated sense

⁶¹⁷ Police report on the Defenders of the Fatherland chapter in Ploiești, August 31, 1923, 41/1922, volume 2, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 132.

⁶¹⁸ Andrew Janos, *East Central Europe in the Modern World: The Politics of the Borderlands from Pre-to Post Communism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 169-170.

⁶¹⁹ Scurtu, *Totalitarismul*, 373-375.

⁶²⁰ Security report on a Fasces’ gathering, October 19, 1923, 36/1923, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 16.

⁶²¹ Scurtu, *Totalitarismul*, 353.

⁶²² Dana Beldiman, *Armata și mișcarea legionară, 1927-1947* [The Army and the Legionary Movement, 1927-1947] (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2002), 30-31.

⁶²³ Police study on the activities of the FNR organization, undated; security report on Romanian anti-Semitic movements, undated; security report on the FNR chapter in Bucharest, November 1, 1924, 36/1923; 49/1924; 3/1924, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 21; 137; 221.

⁶²⁴ Police study on the activities of the FNR organization, likely from 1924, 36/1923, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 18; security report on the activities of the FNR chapter in Ploiești, likely from 1924, 49/1924, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 134.

⁶²⁵ Security report on the veterans of Ploiești, September 24, 1926, 49/1924, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 194.

of deserving. By that year, General Averescu's grouping had shriveled up into a small party, as a number of peasants who had previously supported the general felt disappointed with the land reform he had enacted. In his attempt to take power back for himself, the general temporarily radicalized, enacting a large demonstration in Bucharest. The supporters he gathered for his rally belonged to the ranks of the peasant soldiers who had buttressed his party since the end of the First World War. It might be speculated that many of these adherents had still not received the smallholdings they felt entitled to and, hence, were ready to support the general's move against Prime Minister Brătianu. As a matter of fact, in the days preceding the demonstration, the People's Party official periodical claimed that, under the Liberals' rule, land grants had been accorded to individuals who did not deserve them,⁶²⁶ in what was clearly an attempt to mobilize landless farmers against the Brătianu government.

At any rate, the PNL prevented at least some of the protestors from reaching Bucharest and warned Averescu that his followers would be fired upon if they entered the capital. While the general's rally eventually took place in the guise of a peaceful march, it is likely that the Liberals' firm stance restrained the demonstrators. It should also be highlighted that, at the time of the march, Brătianu further moderated Averescu by promising to help him return to power in the near future.⁶²⁷ However, once King Ferdinand granted the general a further ruling spell between 1926 and 1927, the head of the PNL influenced the king – thanks to their preferential relationship⁶²⁸ - into preventing Averescu from consolidating his rule. Eventually, the king dismissed the general at the behest of

⁶²⁶ *Îndreptarea: Organ Politic al Partidului Poporului sub Președinția Generalului Averescu*, May 29, 1924

⁶²⁷ Gheorghe Florescu, "Alexandru Averescu, omul politic (4)" [Alexandru Averescu, the Politician (4)], *Convorbiri Literare* [Literary Conversations], August 2009, accessed May 12, 2020, https://web.archive.org/web/20100709050644if_/http://convorbiri-literare.dntis.ro:80/FLORESCUaug9.html; *L'Œuvre* [The Work], June 5, 1924, D 011148, volume 2, FDB, CNSAS, 68; Ioan Scurtu, "Mit și realitate: Alexandru Averescu" [Myth and Reality: Alexandru Averescu], accessed June 25, 2020, <http://www.ioanscurtu.ro/mit-si-realitate-alexandru-averescu/>.

⁶²⁸ Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi (1866-1947)* [The History of Romania under the Four Kings (1866-1947)]: volume 2: *Ferdinand I* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedica, 2004), 10.

Brătianu.⁶²⁹

As shown above, the PNL strong-armed ex-servicemen from forging extensive ties to the far right. Nevertheless, it can be contended that it kept the veterans' movement under control mainly by accommodating some of its requests. Specifically, the Liberals made economic and symbolic concessions to *luptători*, in addition to granting them the coveted role of guardians of the nation. First of all, the former provided the latter with significant material rewards. To be sure, they accomplished this result with the support of the nation's civil society. A private relief society called "Family of the Fighters" Assistance House (*Casa de Sprijin „Familia Luptătorilor;*" 1915),⁶³⁰ which, in the course of the war,⁶³¹ had already subsidized soldiers' families, began making generous financial contributions to discharged troops and their relatives. After offering, in 1920, 9,469,853 *Lei* to the National Office for the War Disabled, Orphans and Widows,⁶³² between 1921 and 1922, the House donated 7,000,000 *Lei* to the ex-servicemen's families.⁶³³

At the same time, the PNL strove to deliver benefits to discharges by applying pre-existing laws and issuing new ones. New provisions made additional agricultural holdings available to these citizens. For instance, in 1923, disabled sergeants were given preferential access to plots of land in the frontier area of Dobruja.⁶³⁴ During General Averescu's brief tenure of power in 1926-1927, which Ionel Brătianu influenced considerably,⁶³⁵ a law awarding recipients of the Order of Michael the Brave their own smallholdings and free

⁶²⁹ Scurtu, *Viața politică*, 53.

⁶³⁰ Ciupală, *Bătălia lor*, 100.

⁶³¹ Casa de Sprijin „Familia Luptătorilor,” *Dare de seama pe ani 1927-1931* [Report on the Years 1927-1931] (Bucharest: Tipografia „Voința,” C. Donescu, 1932), folder 2935, fund “*Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri*,” 1925-1958 (PCM 1925-1958), ANIC, 25.

⁶³² Report sent by the president and the general secretary of the “Family of the Fighters” Assistance House to the prime minister, likely 1942, folder 27/1942, fund “*Ministerul de Război 1900-1952* (MR 1900-1952), series “*Cabinetul Ministrului*” (CM), ANIC, 26.

⁶³³ Casa de Sprijin „Familia Luptătorilor,” *Dare de seama pe ani 1937-1938* [Report on the Years 1937-1938] (Bucharest: Tipografia Ion C. Văcărescu, 1938), 7/1937, ONIOVR, ANIC, 14.

⁶³⁴ Dumitrescu, *Invalizii*, 128-129.

⁶³⁵ Scurtu, *Istoria românilor*: volume 2, 166-167.

train rides was passed.⁶³⁶ The following year, parcels were also made available to ex-combatants who had belonged to the temporary Basarabian parliament that, in 1918, had voted for this region to be united to Romania.⁶³⁷ In the latter part of the decade, returnees were afforded plots in Bucharest and its outskirts.⁶³⁸ Ultimately, during its six years in power, the PNL granted smallholdings to “*tens of thousands*”⁶³⁹ of veterans, both in the cities and in the countryside. Therefore, it might be claimed that the Liberals addressed, to some extent, veterans’ requests to this end. For instance, by 1926 some of the reserve officers living in the countryside had received land, in addition to 484 of those residing in cities and towns. Additionally, almost all of those based in Bucharest had been allotted a house, a few of them also scoring a parcel.⁶⁴⁰ It should also be noticed that the army’s budget was increased after 1924, thereby certainly improving the wellbeing of those career militaries who had been prompted by their harsh living conditions to associate themselves with fascism.⁶⁴¹

Furthermore, the Brătianu cabinet improved the situation of the war disabled. First of all, it constantly increased general and special assistance funds⁶⁴² for them, which as a whole grew from 53,691,780 to 170,370,000 *Lei*.⁶⁴³ Consequently, by 1925, public institutions could afford to look after 70,312 disabled.⁶⁴⁴ The PNL also passed new laws, which granted additional privileges to the disabled. To be sure, the pensions of impaired infantrymen, corporals, and sergeants remained as meager as they had been in the early

⁶³⁶ Hamangiu, ed., *Codul: volumes 15-16: Legi uzuale, 1926-1929* [Ordinary Laws, 1926-1929] (Bucharest: Edit. Libr. “Universala,” Alcalay & Co.), 747.

⁶³⁷ Untitled newspaper cutting, 13, UORR, ANIC, 90.

⁶³⁸ *Casca*, March 1928

⁶³⁹ Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, *Activitatea Corpurilor Legiuitoare și a Guvernului de la ianuarie 1922 pana la 27 martie 1926* [The Activities of the Legislative Bodies and the Government from January 1922 to March 27, 1926] (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1926), 7.

⁶⁴⁰ UORR report, likely 1926, 4, UORR, ANIC, 69, 79-81.

⁶⁴¹ Beldiman, *Armata și mișcarea legionara*, 31.

⁶⁴² Ghiulamila, *Opera de asistența*, 141.

⁶⁴³ Iordachi, Sciarrino, “War Veterans,” 99.

⁶⁴⁴ Fédération Interalliée des Anciens Combattants, *Bulletin*, August 1925, 9/1925, UORR, ANIC, 64.

days of this decade. Nevertheless, by the middle of the 1920s they had been granted a monopoly over the retail sale of tobacco, salt, and fire matches.⁶⁴⁵ They had also secured the ownership of 2,426 businesses by then. These measures, coupled with invalids' preferential access to land grants – as a matter of fact, by the mid-1920s, 47% of them had received a smallholding⁶⁴⁶ - undoubtedly ensured that a considerable number of them were able to eke out a living.

Finally, the Liberals adopted, to some extent, General Averescu's strategy of co-opting the *luptători*'s movement. During the general's last spell of rule, in 1926-1927, the UNAL managed to lobby the parliament to pass the law granting plots of land and free train rides to the bearers of the Order of Michael the Brave.⁶⁴⁷ The PNL also provided public honors to the fighters and confirmed their role as guardians of the nation. With regard to the latter function, it should be mentioned that, in the early 1920s, the Romanian state increased the scope of its nation-building project considerably to consolidate its hold over its new territories. In a similar manner to interwar Yugoslavia,⁶⁴⁸ this kingdom acted as a “*nationalizing state*.”⁶⁴⁹ Educational initiatives aimed at imbuing the population with patriotic values represented one of the cornerstones of its propaganda undertakings.⁶⁵⁰ As a part of its educational agenda, the state fostered the cult of the deceased fighters of the First World War, whom citizens were meant to view as models of devotion to the fatherland.

⁶⁴⁵ *Il Bollettino: Organo Ufficiale dell'Associazione Nazionale Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra* [The Bulletin: Official Organ of the National Association of War Mutilates and Disabled], March 1927

⁶⁴⁶ Ghiulamila, *Opera de asistența*, 16, 24.

⁶⁴⁷ UNAL memorandum to the parliament, likely 1934, D 0011294, FDB, CNSAS, 173.

⁶⁴⁸ Newman, *Yugoslavia*, 23-24, 83-112.

⁶⁴⁹ By “*nationalizing state*,” I intend a state “*understood to be ... of and for a particular ethno-cultural “core nation” whose language, culture, demographic position, economic welfare, and political hegemony must be protected and promoted by the state.*” See Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 103.

⁶⁵⁰ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation-Building and Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 8-48.

Unsurprisingly, as a part of its nation-building project, the state involved the *luptători* in its pedagogic activities and even supported a few of these partners' own grassroots endeavors in this field. Notably, in 1923, the government entombed an unknown soldier in Bucharest in a public ceremony. Ex-servicemen were thoroughly involved in the various events connected to this ceremony. First of all, a war invalid was invited to speak at the exhumation of one of the several fallen soldiers from among whom the body of the unknown soldier was drawn.⁶⁵¹ Moreover, the *luptători*'s associations were invited to take part in the official procession accompanying this soldier to his final resting place and in the subsequent burying ceremony, which was also attended by scores of Bucharest dwellers, including local schoolboys.⁶⁵² During the rest of the decade, UORR activists were summoned to other official war commemorations as performers of collective rituals.⁶⁵³ Additionally, the ministry of war subsidized one of the Union's periodicals,⁶⁵⁴ hence helping it spread its patriotic message.

The PNL also assisted the veterans' efforts as ambassadors of the homeland, promoting their activities within the FIDAC. The fact that the Liberals renewed Averescu's similar policy in this regard is unsurprising, considering that all interwar Romanian governments were intent on preserving the Peace Treaties, notwithstanding their different programs.⁶⁵⁵ Like Averescu, the Liberals undoubtedly believed that the combatants' transnational activism would help the kingdom preserve the international alliances which protected its new frontiers. This belief certainly stemmed from the fact that Romania's alliances involved mostly those countries which had fought on its side during the First

⁶⁵¹ Bălescu, *Eroul necunoscut*, 89, 150-157.

⁶⁵² *Casca*, June 1923; *Funeraliile eroului necunoscut, 16-19 maiu 1923* [Funeral of the Unknown Hero, May 16-19, 1923], FB 00001070, BS, CNSAS

⁶⁵³ *Programul comemorării eroilor in capitala* [Program of the Capital's Commemorations of Heroes] (Bucharest, 1925), FB 0000583, BS, CNSAS, 1-3.

⁶⁵⁴ Letter sent by the secretary of the UORR chapter in Ilfov to the president of the UORR, August 12, 1926, 15, volume 2, UORR, ANIC, 253.

⁶⁵⁵ Hitchins, *Rumania*, 428.

World War, or the elites of which included its wartime allies.⁶⁵⁶ Consequently, the Romanian state hoped to harness ties of solidarity between its veterans and their counterparts from Allied nations to serve its diplomatic goals. The PNL financed the *luptători*'s trips to FIDAC congresses outside of Romania,⁶⁵⁷ and lavishly funded the Federation's congress of 1928, which took place in Bucharest.⁶⁵⁸ At this event, foreign delegations were saluted by Acting Prime Minister Ion Duca.⁶⁵⁹

Ultimately, the PNL administration managed to address, to some extent, the core goals of the war participants' movement, which helps explain why – aside from limited entanglements with the far right – this organization mostly remained moderate. Nevertheless, it should be clarified that, while steering clear of right-wing extremism, many members of the ex-servicemen's associations supported opposition parties which promised to satisfy their sense of entitlement better than the Liberals. After all, the latter had not tackled several of the discharges' grievances. By 1928, the last year of the Liberals' hegemony, problems which had beset various categories of *luptători* since the first part of the decade were still to be alleviated. Impaired infantrymen, corporals, and sergeants endured paltry pensions. Disabled reserve officers discharged after 1921 were still receiving lower emoluments than their comrades who had been demobilized before that year. City-dwelling old soldiers, in addition to war volunteers in general, asked for better treatment with regard to land redistribution.

Another problem besetting specific categories of Romanian ex-combatants consisted in the bias which the kingdom's bureaucracy and judiciary held against

⁶⁵⁶ Steiner, *The Lights that Failed*, 90-98, 267, 269, 297.

⁶⁵⁷ Letter sent by the UORR central committee to the minister of foreign affairs, August 5, 1926, CCI, ADMAE

⁶⁵⁸ Financial report on the FIDAC congress of 1928, October 15, 1928, fund "Cabinetul de Manuscrise" (CM), series "Arhiva A-2495 (a-e)," (AA-2945), Library of the Romanian Academy (*Biblioteca Academiei Române*; BAR), Bucharest, Romania

⁶⁵⁹ FIDAC, October 1928

individuals who had fought against it, during the war. As pointed out by several scholars,⁶⁶⁰ in the wake of the Great War, the successor states of Central-Eastern Europe tended to discriminate against citizens who had found themselves on the losing side of the conflict. In some ways, this intolerant trend took also place in interwar Romania. Notably, while the 1920 law regulating war pensions had formally included all Romanian citizens from Transylvania, Crișana, Maramureș, Bukovina, the Banat, and Bessarabia, these dispositions failed to be translated into reality, at least in some cases. In Transylvania, according to a local observer, by 1930 many of those who had fought under the Habsburg banner were receiving reduced compensations or none whatsoever.⁶⁶¹ Moreover, it appears Basarabian reserve officers were prevented from receiving military pensions due to a decision of the Romanian court of cassation.⁶⁶²

As seen above, discriminatory practices also beset the group of victorious veterans and continued doing so through the 1920s. Mirroring the successor states of Central-Eastern Europe's prejudiced hierarchies of sacrifice, which favored specific categories of combatants over others,⁶⁶³ in Romania war volunteers – who, as seen above, hailed most consistently from the kingdom's new provinces – kept on receiving worse treatment than soldiers of the Old Kingdom. Not only, as specified above, were volunteers put at a disadvantage with regard to the distribution of smallholdings, but those among them who

⁶⁶⁰ Julia Eichenberg, "War Experience and National State in Poland. Veterans and Welfare in the 20th Century," *Comparativ: Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung*, 20, No. 5 (2010), 52, 55-56; John Paul Newman, "Introduction: The Burdens of Triumph – Victorious Societies in Twentieth Century European History," *Journal of Contemporary History*, special section, ed. John Paul Newman, 54, No. 4 (October 2019), 712-713; Radka Šustrová, "The Struggle for Respect: The State, World War One Veterans, and Social Welfare Policy in Interwar Czechoslovakia," *Zeitgeschichte*, 47, No. 1 (2020), 97-98; 113-118, 133.

⁶⁶¹ Ion Martin, *Timpuri de glorie, timpuri de mizerie* [Glorious Times, Miserable Times] (Arad: Tipografia Diecezană, 1930), folder 153-1931, fund "Casa Regala – Oficiale, Volum 3," (CRO3), ANIC, 107.

⁶⁶² *Buletinul Uniunii Ofițerilor de Rezerva și in Retragere înființat in anul 1925*, July – August - September 1927, FB 0000577, 6, BS, CNSAS

⁶⁶³ John Paul Newman, "Introduction: The Burdens of Triumph – Victorious Societies in Twentieth Century European History," *Journal of Contemporary History*, special section, ed. John Paul Newman, 54, No. 4 (October 2019), 712-713.

had been disabled or mutilated were not entitled to war pensions. Ultimately, the National Liberal Party's core orientation as a representative of Romanian elites and Old Kingdom constituencies in general made it unreceptive to the needs of various categories of ex-enlistees.

The Peasant Party and the National Romanian Party, the two main organizations that opposed the Liberals and eventually merged in 1926, proved apt at channeling various fighters' dissatisfaction with the PNL regime. As representatives, respectively, of communities living outside the Old Kingdom and of lower social strata, they were in the position to promise that all the *luptători* would be acknowledged in their claims to rights. For instance, the Romanian Party's leader Iuliu Maniu approved the UNAL's demands for ex-militaries to be granted parcels in a timelier manner.⁶⁶⁴

By taking up veterans' calls to see their economic status improved, by 1928, the PNT came to exert a firm grip over the ex-servicemen's movement. Eventually, the UNAL came to officially endorse the National Peasants while remaining on good terms with other parties.⁶⁶⁵ Serdaru, who had probably joined the Peasants' Party in the early 1920s, in 1928 openly invited his union's members to vote for the PNT.⁶⁶⁶ In the first part of the decade, the Union of Former Romanian Volunteers was firmly aligned with the National Romanian Party, its president, Victor Deleu, militating in the said party.⁶⁶⁷ The UFVR likely carried over its loyalty to this party's political successor. As a matter of fact, in 1930-1931, the UFVR vice president, Voicu Nițescu,⁶⁶⁸ would serve as a minister in three of the National Peasants' concomitant cabinets out of four.⁶⁶⁹ The Union of Reserve and Retired Officers

⁶⁶⁴ *Casca*, December 1925

⁶⁶⁵ *Casca*, April 1926, 14/1926, UORR, ANIC, 206.

⁶⁶⁶ *Avântul: Organ Politic Intransigent Al Tinerimei* [Momentum: Intransigent Political Organ of the Youth], March 5, 1928, D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 72.

⁶⁶⁷ Untitled newspaper cutting, likely 1929, D 012742, FDB, ANIC, 48.

⁶⁶⁸ Security report on a UFVR congress, likely 1927, D 0120742, FDB, CNSAS, 42.

⁶⁶⁹ Ion Mamina, Ioan Scurtu, *Guverne și guvernanți, 1916-1938* [Governments and Rulers, 1916-1938] (Bucharest: Silex, 1996), 69-85.

was also linked to this party. The UORR's first president, General Alexe Anastasiu, had cooperated with the PNT's predecessor, the Peasant Party,⁶⁷⁰ and presumably supported the National Peasants. His successor after 1926,⁶⁷¹ General Nicolae Rujinschi, was a confirmed follower of the latter.⁶⁷² It should also be noted that a few of the Romanian combatants who were prominent within the FIDAC, like Victor Cădere⁶⁷³ and the Romanian consul in Paris Pierre Ciolan,⁶⁷⁴ endorsed the PNT. On the other hand, the Liberals lent their help to the small⁶⁷⁵ Romanian Legion.⁶⁷⁶ Finally, in 1928, the great majority of the parliamentary senators who bore military awards supported either the National Peasants (70) or the Liberals (13).⁶⁷⁷

Ultimately, the extensive entanglements which had come into being, by the late 1920s, between the war participants' movement and these pro-status quo and reformist parties suggest that the former organization generally supported the parliamentary system of government. As shown above, this situation principally came down to the fact that the aforementioned political players had made various significant concessions to the ex-servicemen or had promised to fulfill the latter's sense of entitlement to a greater degree.

⁶⁷⁰ Project for the Peasants' Party's congress of 1921, likely 1921, D 010814, FDB, CNSAS, 260.

⁶⁷¹ Letter sent by General Nicolae Rujinschi, in his role as president of the UORR, to the minister of foreign affairs, July 8, 1926, CCI, ADMAE

⁶⁷² Report on First World War veterans' associations, October 7, 1947, folder 32/1935, fund "Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri – Serviciul Special de Informații" (PCMSSI), ANIC, 186.

⁶⁷³ Ioana Cazacu, "Victor Cădere: Diplomat (1919-1944)" (PhD Dissertation, „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, 2012), 14.

⁶⁷⁴ Paul Quinlan, *The Playboy King: Carol II of Romania* (Westport, London: Greenwood Press, 1995), 97.

⁶⁷⁵ *Casca*, October 1928

⁶⁷⁶ Police report on the activities of the UNAL, December 9, 1928, 74/1926, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 26.

⁶⁷⁷ *Senatul, Apel nominal cu starea civila, profesiunea, domiciliul și gruparea politica; Sesiunea ordinara, 1928-1929 (deschisa la 22 decembrie 1928)* [Roll Call of Senators with Their Civil Status, Profession, Domicile and Political Affiliation; Ordinary Session, 1928-1929 (Inaugurated on December 22, 1928)] (Bucharest: Imprimeriile Statului, 1929), D 010809, FDB, CNSAS, 35-46.

1.2.2 The Attitudes of Veterans' Associations Towards Italian Fascism

As discussed earlier, one of the factors which prompted Romanian victor First World War combatants to embrace the local far right consisted in these men in uniform's belief that they had not received material benefits commensurate with their expectations. It should be pointed out that, in radicalizing, discontented *luptători* drew encouragement from developments taking place abroad. More in detail, foreign political movements and regimes acted as 'positive' models for Romanian authoritarian-minded combatants, prompting the latter to attempt to emulate them. Thereby, by way of their example, these external inspirations sustained Romanian fighters' radicalizing impetus significantly.

Importantly, in the 1920s, the budding Fascist regime of Benito Mussolini represented a strong influence over the activism of Romanian radical ex-combatants. Crucially, as in the case of other European imitators of Italian Fascism,⁶⁷⁸ the latter phenomenon affected political actors who espoused a variety of different goals. Specifically, it influenced *luptători* who embraced extremism due to hyper-nationalist ideals, in addition to veterans who did so for more pragmatic and contingent reasons – i.e., who felt governments were not catering sufficiently to their sense of deserving.

This subchapter investigates how the Italian Fascist regime contributed to the radicalization of the latter kind of discontented ex-servicemen, by persuading them to adopt uncompromising methods to obtain the benefits they ardently sought. By exploring this issue, this section highlights that a sense of frustrated entitlement was among the principal causes that pushed various Romanian fighters to join their far right. At the same time, it

⁶⁷⁸ Aristotle Kallis, "'Fascism,' 'Para-fascism' and 'Fascistization': On the Similarities of Three Conceptual Categories," *European History Quarterly*, 33, No. 2 (April 2003), 230.

underlines that the veterans' movement, taken as a whole, ultimately remained moderate in its political conduct.

Essentially, militant Romanian war participants viewed Mussolini's Italy as a country where ex-combatants had taken over the local fascist movement. Subsequently, these ex-enlistees had conquered power through a revolutionary takeover: the Fascist March on Rome of October 1922. In interpreting the March as a model for anti-liberal political mobilizations - including armed seizures of power - the Romanians resembled radical old soldiers from other European countries.⁶⁷⁹ Crucially, the *luptători* who felt unsatisfied in their sense of merit supposed that many Italian war participants had suffered a comparable slight before their March.

These Romanian observers believed that their Italian counterparts had succeeded in reversing their own plight by forcefully taking control of their own country, as they had set up a regime that finally recognized their rights and worked actively to satisfy its obligations toward them. For instance, a mere two months after the March, former fighters in the Romanian city of Constanța, who were outraged at not having yet been assigned smallholdings, publicly mooted that they should attempt to seize power to put an end to this unfair predicament. A witness of a meeting of theirs recounted that one of their leaders' charged rhetoric in this regard was inspired by the revolutionary events which had recently occurred in Italy: "*The President of the Society of the demobilized men ... states that in Italy the demobilized of the War, in other words the Fascists, are in charge and further claims that, even if we do not go to power, we must nevertheless be ready to act at any given moment.*"⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁹ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 95-111.

⁶⁸⁰ Police report on a gathering of war veterans in Constanța, December 16, 1922, 41/1922, volume 1, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 42.

As previously shown in this dissertation, the actual relationship which had come into being between associated Italian nationalist veterans and the Fascist movement and regime was much less harmonious than what Romanian observers imagined. To be sure, between 1919 and 1922, a number of members of the veterans' associations had flanked the Blackshirts to pressure the Italian state and society into granting them the recompenses they desired. Furthermore, after the March on Rome, these organizations had acquiesced to Mussolini in return for various privileges. However, the associations, as a whole, had relinquished their organizational autonomy to Mussolini only following an intense campaign of intimidation which had been waged by the PNF. On the other hand, aggrieved veterans in Romania came to think that their Italian equivalents had achieved their objectives by using intransigent methods – i.e., joining the Fascist movement and seizing power through the latter. Consequently, they attempted to imitate the Italian veterans' purported strategy, joining their local far-right movements in the hope of replicating the success of this foreign 'model.' As shown above, Fascist Italy acted as a crucial influence over the activism of those Romanian ex-servicemen who felt frustrated with regard to their claims to a better economic status, prompting various among them to embrace right-wing authoritarianism and pursue a revolutionary seizure of power.

How did this alleged Italian model come to be known in Romania in the 1920s? Essentially, informal transnational networks disseminated, within the latter country, simplistic accounts of the general relationship between veterans and Fascism in the Mediterranean peninsula and the role the former had played in the latter's coming to power. It is possible that such accounts were spread by former members of the elite army corps known as the Daring Ones. After all, in the immediate aftermath of the March on Rome, the National Association of the Italian Daring Ones flanked the Mussolini cabinet. Moreover, around this time, the ANAI held important links to the Romanian anti-

democratic right. These ties almost certainly stemmed from the ANAI secretary's acquaintance with Romania, as he had lived there in 1913.⁶⁸¹ Additionally, in the early 1920s, the Association was in touch with the Romanian cultural milieu, as attested by the fact that, in 1921, some of its members met a delegation of Romanian university students visiting Milan. These contacts between Daring Ones and the Romanian population led elements in the latter to cooperate with right-wing activists. Notably, the ANAI printed a newspaper article by the journalist and political activist Elena Bacaloglu,⁶⁸² a prominent figure in the early Romanian fascist milieu and a collaborator of the Romanian National Fasces.⁶⁸³ Therefore, the Daring Ones likely convinced Romanian militant nationalists that the March on Rome had been an uprising enacted chiefly by war veterans.

Additionally, various Romanian former combatants disseminated the political myth of the Italian fighter's armed insurrection within their own country. These Romanians had either witnessed Fascism first-hand – as in the case of those members of the Romanian Legion of Italy who had lived in their adoptive nation for some time after being discharged, before returning to their native country⁶⁸⁴ – or studied it from afar – as the several returnees who manned the FNR's central committee, who likely were in touch with Bacaloglu and her Italian sympathizers.

Between 1922 and 1925, the political myth of the Italian veterans' seizure of power played an important part in the radicalization of a number of Romanian war participants, encouraging them to turn to illiberal politics. Specifically, this myth was used by the anti-liberal right to secure these disgruntled individuals' support, by promising the latter that, if

⁶⁸¹ “Coletti, Gino,” *Biblioteca Franco Serantini* [Franco Serantini Library], accessed May 14, 2020, <http://www.bfscollezionidigitali.org/entita/13864-coletti-gino/>.

⁶⁸² *L'Ardito*, April 30; May 14; May 28, 1921

⁶⁸³ Bacaloglu helped found a small fascist movement, which eventually merged with the FNR in 1922. See Roland Clark, “European Fascists and Local Activists: Romania's Legion of the Archangel Michael (1922-1938)” (PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2012), 90.

⁶⁸⁴ Police report on the activities of the FNR in Bukovina, December 1924, 36/1923, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 20.

they helped it overthrow the parliamentary order, it would adequately address their grievances. Eventually, various fighters, prompted by hyper-nationalist ideals or feeling frustrated in their claims to benefits, joined said calls to imitate the March on Rome.

The Romanian National Fasces, which manifestly copied the Italian Fighting Fasces in their paramilitary organization and style,⁶⁸⁵ used the March as a propaganda tool to enlist supporters among *luptători*. Specifically, the FNR suggested that Italian fighters had played an essential part in the paramilitary mobilization leading to the creation of Mussolini's dictatorship. By taking part in this mobilization, it was claimed, the Fascist war participants had both created a stronger Italy and asserted their rights in the face of ungrateful institutions: “[In 1919] leached off by politicians and brought to its knees by alien and anti-national communism, Italy was visibly perishing. In those difficult moments, those who had fought in the war believed it was time to have their say.”⁶⁸⁶

Notably, the FNR made it clear to their followers that they would eventually promote a seizure of power on the example of Italy. As a matter of fact, one of the Fasces' organizers, one Colonel Rădulescu, publicly stated that his group was planning to take control of Bucharest, deploying reserve officers as the spearheads of this mooted coup.⁶⁸⁷ The FNR's message caught the favor of various ex-warriors, who became convinced that, by imitating their Latin 'cousins,' they would end the varied grievances they harbored against the Romanian parliamentary regime. In the case of hyper-nationalist *luptători*, they likely saw Mussolini's takeover as an attractive model for strengthening the nation against the internal and external enemies they believed were threatening Romania.⁶⁸⁸ They hence doubtless joined the FNR to stage their own version of this insurrection. As mentioned above, the Banat-based former members of the Romanian Legion of Italy who militated in

⁶⁸⁵ Scurtu, *Totalitarismul*, 332-336, 348.

⁶⁸⁶ FNR propaganda poster, likely 1923, 49/1924, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 93.

⁶⁸⁷ Security report on a FNR gathering, October 19, 1923, 36/1923, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 16-17.

⁶⁸⁸ Scurtu, *Totalitarismul*, 354.

the Fasces might have adhered to the latter due to their region's proximity to Hungary, one of Romania's principal wartime foes. For their part, the FNR implicitly promised these returnees it would take power to safeguard Romania – and, hence, their region – against foreign threats on the alleged model of Italy.

*And in the course of one night, a handful of [veterans] and resourceful patriots had established the Fasces [which] took complete control of the country in the course of two years. What came after is well known. Today the Fascists are the masters of Italy ... A nationalist Italy. Finally, an Italy which is mighty and radiant as it has never been before.*⁶⁸⁹

By promising to imitate the Fighting Fasces' conquest of the Italian capital, the Romanian fascists also attracted veterans who felt frustrated in their sense of entitlement. As previously highlighted, members of the Ploiești chapter of the Defenders of the Fatherland association joined the FNR after failing to receive a land grant from the state. Apparently, they came to the Fasces after learning about the March on Rome,⁶⁹⁰ which attests to their interest in adopting paramilitary techniques to impose their wishes.

It seems the People's Party's 1924 demonstration in Bucharest was also inspired, to a degree, by the belief that the March on Rome had been chiefly the work of war veterans. Before the former rally took place, the Party's leader, General Averescu, claimed that his protest would resemble the March, although the officer publicly denied he harbored seditious intentions: *"I do not dream of fascism ... We have no communists who need to be expelled [sic], merely the incapable and the corrupt."*⁶⁹¹ Nevertheless, at the time he undertook his demonstration, the general envisioned himself as the vanguard of a righteous political mobilization against a self-serving elite, on the partial example of the Italian

⁶⁸⁹ FNR propaganda poster, likely 1923, 49/1924, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 93.

⁶⁹⁰ Security report on the activities of the FNR chapter in Ploiești, likely from 1924, 49/1924, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 134.

⁶⁹¹ *L'Œuvre*, June 5, 1924, D 011148, volume 2, CNSAS, 68.

Fascists. Therefore, it might be claimed that the Fascist political myth played a role - albeit a contained one - in the temporary radicalization of Averescu. It is possible that the peasant ex-combatants who followed the general shared his belief in this myth.

Having highlighted that the circulation of Italian ideological principles within Romania ended up affecting the political conduct of various local fighters, it remains to be explained why these principles did not affect the Romanian veterans' movement to a crucial degree. In other words, why did they fail to radicalize the movement as a whole, beyond the fringe elements delineated above? First of all, in the early-to mid-1920s the PNL cabinet managed to repress the mobilization of the anti-democratic right through coercion and political machinations. The suppression of the right probably discouraged ex-soldiers from preserving durable ties to the latter. Crucially, it also appears that the main parliamentary parties managed to satisfy the core goals of the movement to a relevant degree. Consequently, the majority of associated veterans undoubtedly remained uninterested in 'importing' radical ideas from abroad.

The lack of strong bonds of solidarity between the Italian veterans' movement and its Romanian counterpart appears to confirm the latter's moderation. As a matter of fact, in the course of the 1920s, these two organizations entertained a cordial but superficial relationship. To be sure, they cooperated within the FIDAC forum. In 1924, the Italian delegation to the Federation helped the latter pass a motion that formally recognized the existence of Soviet Russia within its current borders, thereby helping the Romanian fighters legitimize their country's control over Bessarabia in the face of concurrent Soviet claims to this land.⁶⁹² On the whole, however, the two movements did not develop significant connections. This lack of robust ties was in all likelihood determined, first of all, by the

⁶⁹² Alexe Anastasiu, *Congresul de la Londra al foștilor luptători FIDAC: 15-22 septembrie 1924* [The London Congress of the FIDAC Former Fighters, September 15-22, 1924] (Bucharest: Biblioteca UOR, 1925), 21.

two countries' diverging foreign policies, which remained consistently at odds in the course of the interwar era. As a matter of fact, while the two countries enjoyed thriving cultural relations, they lacked common diplomatic goals.⁶⁹³

Foreign policy matters aside, the two nations' internal political developments prevented Romanian and Italian veterans' associations from becoming thoroughly intertwined. Specifically, these events prompted said movements to avoid adapting each other's political strategies to any great length. Before the rise of Mussolini, Italian ex-servicemen had shown interest in the general political innovations taking place in Romania, such as the local land reform⁶⁹⁴ and the organizational structure of the Peasants' Party.⁶⁹⁵ However, after 1922 they appear to have ceased believing they might learn anything of use from Romania, including the local combatants' movement's strategies. As a matter of fact, Nicola Sansanelli, one of the leaders of the Italian veterans, subtly disparaged the Romanian combatants' groups for being, in his eyes, too disunited and hence ineffectual.⁶⁹⁶

For their part, the leaders of the Romanian combatants had little reason to imitate the strategies of their Italian counterparts. Consequently, they were also unimpressed with the Fascist myth of the veterans' armed takeover of the state. Specifically, it appears that these leaders were not desperate to the point of embracing the paramilitary techniques which had been used by the Italians, as they believed parliamentary parties were granting, or would eventually concede them, the concessions they sought. To be sure, they lauded their Italian equivalents for elbowing their way into prominence, thereby sensibly improving their socio-economic status.⁶⁹⁷ Crucially, however, they implicitly refused to apply a similar strategy to Romania. As mentioned above, in 1928, Virgil Serdaru invited

⁶⁹³ Stefano Santoro, *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale. Diplomazia culturale e propaganda, 1918-1943* [Italy and Eastern Europe. Cultural Diplomacy and Propaganda, 1918-1943] (Milan: Franco Angeli Editore, 2005), 229.

⁶⁹⁴ *L'Ardito*, May 14, 1921

⁶⁹⁵ Sabbatucci, *La stampa*, 122.

⁶⁹⁶ *La Tribuna* [The Tribune], September 10, 1925, 1, UORR, ANIC, 247.

⁶⁹⁷ *Casca*, April 19-30, 1923

the members of the UNAL to vote for the PNȚ at the general elections. In doing so, he certainly hoped the Liberal system of power would be replaced by more generous politicians. It should be noted that, at the beginning of the said year, a UNAL speaker had been motivating the Union's followers with charged language, claiming that "*[it was necessary] for a government to be instated in Romania, as [had been the case] in Italy, which [would] change the whole current system of government.*"⁶⁹⁸ Crucially, however, his comparison with Italy was a rather unsubstantial one, as the orator had no intention of imitating Fascist ex-servicemen, refraining from asking the audience to take up arms against the state. The relative mildness of his exhortations suggests the Union failed to embrace the idea of doing away with parliamentary institutions.

Second, the leaders of the associated Romanian fighters were also not especially interested in the organizational developments that Italian veterans' associations underwent in the decade, the most notable one consisting in their increasing centralization. As previously mentioned, in the course of the 1920s, the major parliamentary parties had established ties to the *luptători*'s movement. As a result, the latter's leading representatives undoubtedly believed they might pursue their agendas through these political groups. But, on the other hand, they did not feel motivated to join a single lobbying front, a strategy which might have alienated them from some of their political referents. Notably, in 1925 the president of the UORR, General Alexe Anastasiu, attempted to reunite all the main Romanian veterans' associations into a single federation, the Romanian Legion. To increase the appeal of his proposed merger, the general pointed out to the other leaders that a similar kind of organizational unification had previously occurred in Italy, in the guise of the National Association of Fighters. According to the officer, this fusion had helped Italian fighters increase their political influence and public relevance. Nevertheless, Anastasiu

⁶⁹⁸ Report on an UNAL gathering, January 29, 1928, D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 61.

ultimately failed to convince other combatants' leaders to relinquish their organizational independence to the Romanian Legion.⁶⁹⁹ Eventually, the Legion would coalesce into a small umbrella organization, in place of the large and influential federation envisioned by the general. Notably, even the UORR would eventually leave it in 1930.⁷⁰⁰

Ultimately, the fact that the organizers of the Romanian movement were only superficially interested in their Italian equivalents' strategies and principles suggests that, in the 1920s, this movement had been successfully co-opted by its country's democratic parties.

1.3 Comparing Italian and Romanian Veterans' Policies: The Failure of the Italian Liberal System and the Success of the Romanian One

In this section, I perform synchronic, generalizing, and contrast-oriented comparisons between the national case studies of Italy and Romania for the years 1918-1928.

Through these comparisons, I analyze the political activities and allegiances of the Italian and Romanian First World War veterans who militated in the ex-servicemen's social movements that came into being, in both countries, following the end of the Great War. By examining these two case studies, my comparative analysis highlights that, in both contexts, state policymaking prominently conditioned the loyalties of multitudes of nationalist former militaries. Specifically, the extent to which state social and cultural policies fulfilled these ex-combatants' claims to a special consideration guided the aforementioned movements into accepting or rejecting parliamentary rule. In other words, the different degrees to which Italian and Romanian parliamentary political systems

⁶⁹⁹ Minutes of a gathering of leaders of veterans' associations, October 3, 1925, 8, UORR, ANIC, 10-12.

⁷⁰⁰ UORR order of business, July 20, 1930, 13, UORR, ANIC, 373.

acknowledged the demands of these organizations led most of the latter's members to embrace divergent political developments: to respectively accept the onset of illiberalism in Italy and the continuation of democracy in Romania.

It should be noted that, in the two kingdoms, numerous patriotic ex-combatants came to ask their institutions to grant them privileges, in exchange for having fought for it during the conflict: material goods and public honors, in addition to financial and organizational support in protecting national borders through patriotic pedagogy and public diplomacy. In other words, in Italy and Romania ex-enlistees formed "*entitlement communit[ies]*," i.e., communities making "*a claim to the right to a special treatment.*"⁷⁰¹ Italian and Romanian nationalist former fighters also shared analogous socio-cultural backgrounds, backdrops that reinforced their desire to be given a prestigious standing by their governments and peoples. Another similarity between these two case studies is that in both Italy and Romania, war participants' movements pressured political parties and public authorities into granting them the goods, services and esteem they sought.

A further resemblance is represented by the fact that the movements chose to engage with the major democratic parties to be sponsored in their claims – although the Italian one did so much more reluctantly and even openly criticized such potential patrons. In other words, Italian and Romanian ex-combatants sought to lobby authorities and private bodies into turning them into status groups - i.e., factions the claims of which were officially acknowledged by institutions - and, eventually, into corporate groups - i.e., organizations tied into the institutional structure of the surrounding society and possessing well-defined legal advantages.

⁷⁰¹ Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of World War 2: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society: 1941-1991* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 185.

On the other hand, the parliamentary systems of Italy and Romania reacted differently to the demands nationalist former militaries forwarded to them. Under the Italian liberal order, the local fighters' movement was neglected, to varying degrees, by the parliament and governments, in addition to being ostracized in some measure by ordinary citizens. To put it differently, this movement experienced low “vertical” and “horizontal” statuses – i.e., it did not find powerful and committed sponsors and was not considerably respected by the people - between the end of the First World War and the Fascist seizure of power.⁷⁰² This development affected not only veterans' claims to a special socio-economic status but also undermined, to some degree, their hopes of being turned into custodians of the fatherland.

On the other hand, in Romania, the local fighters' movement's calls for concessions were acknowledged, albeit not in their entirety, by the establishment, while most of the *luptători*'s fellow countrymen provided them with recognition at the grassroots level. In other words, the Romanians might be described as enjoying a medium vertical status and a high horizontal one. Such a favorable trajectory came down, among other reasons, to the fact that parliamentary forces and the movement shared similar ideological beliefs. Crucially, while the Italian and Romanian ex-combatants' entitlement communities started to be turned into status and corporate groups, this process was much more fraught with objective uncertainty and perceived humiliations and threats in the former country.

Specifically, Italian patriotic former soldiers felt repeatedly frustrated in their claims to rewards and rejected with regard to their views. First of all, other citizens often failed to pay them the respect they believed they deserved due to the pre-war and wartime ideological polarization of politics and society. However, they seem to have been alienated

⁷⁰² Martin Crotty, Neil Diamant, Mark Edele, *The Politics of Veteran Benefits in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 8.

from the parliamentary regime for the most part due to the troubled interactions they experienced, in the post-war era, with the Liberal, Socialist and Catholic parties. To begin with, Catholics and Socialists failed to cooperate with their associations. Additionally, the Socialist party took up the claims of individuals whom they held in little regard, such as war prisoners and deserters, in addition to lambasting their principles. Moreover, on various occasions Liberal governments failed to take into account their desiderata while also, in their eyes, providing career opportunities to ‘unworthy’ civilians such as female civil servants.

On the other hand, in Romania the process of turning the combatants’ entitlement community into a status and corporate group was also denoted by setbacks but was overall less traumatic for its proponents. First of all, it appears the majority of this kingdom’s populace treated these claimants with the degree of respect they asked for, as their fellow citizens usually shared in their nationalism. Crucially, the main democratic parties, whether in power or opposition, cooperated with the combatants’ movement, a course of action imitated by the governments of the time. Furthermore, all these political actors aligned with it in terms of ideological tenets. Ultimately, under both the Italian and Romanian liberal regimes, the ways political parties positioned themselves toward the local ex-combatants’ associations’ claims and the accomplishments of governmental veterans’ policies’ determined, to a great extent, whether war participants accepted or rejected such regimes.

On the one hand, as previously explained, Romanian institutions helped the local entitlement community become a status and corporate group; therefore, the latter broadly accepted the local parliamentary system for the whole first decade after the conflict. In Italy, on the other hand, before 1922, this kind of community, and the social movement championing the former’s claims, felt hindered in many ways by the major parliamentary players. Consequently, before the March on Rome, segments of this community and

movement radicalized toward supporting Fascists, in exchange for the Blackshirts' championing of their claims. As a matter of fact, while Italian patriotic veterans backed Fascism for a variety of reasons – such as class struggle or resentment at Italy's measly territorial gains – it appears many of them did so out of wishing to exact the privileges they felt entitled to, through extreme means. To put it differently, more Italian veterans than Romanian ones resorted to enforcing their rights through an alliance with the far right, as in the former case fascism managed to capitalize on ex-servicemen's frustrated sense of entitlement substantially. As observed by Bresciani,⁷⁰³ while in Romania the Peasants' Party championed the local peasant combatants' aspirations to private plots of land, in Italy it was Fascism, to a considerable extent, which ended up taking up analogous claims.

Crucially, once Mussolini took power, he began bestowing several privileges on the nationalist ex-servicemen, in addition to turning these men's associations into the exclusive official representatives of the war participants, effectively making the patriotic fighters' faction into a corporate group, as this movement had long asked for. Its adherents were also given an illustrious role as custodians of the fatherland, especially by being allowed to partake in various patriotic pedagogic initiatives and being assigned a highly visible position in official ceremonies and war commemorations. Mussolini's munificence, coupled with ex-combatants' belief that they had been ill-served by the liberal regime, and with the fact that Fascism converged with at least some of their principles, entailed that most recruits of the ex-soldiers' movement ultimately came to support the budding Blackshirts' dictatorship, even at the expense of their own associations' independence. Prompted by alienation from democracy and gratitude for Fascism's largess, many former

⁷⁰³ Marco Bresciani, "Conservative and Radical Dynamics of Italian Fascism: An (East) European Perspective (1918-1938)," in *Conservatives and Right Radicals in Interwar Europe*, ed. Marco Bresciani (New York: Routledge, 2021), 80.

militaries radicalized into accommodating the latter's rule – even though they tended to provide passive acceptance and cooperate selectively with it, instead of fully embracing it.

To be sure, a minority within the *combattenti* movement supported Mussolini out of hyper-nationalism. Furthermore, most of its associates, who subscribed to more moderate values, had a number of reasons for abetting the post-1922 government, including their desire to see political infighting within the fatherland come to an end and preserve traditional socio-economic hierarchies. Nevertheless, a wish for concessions still acted as an important incentive for the moderate flankers even at this time. After all, they had begun extensively collaborating with Mussolini only after he had gone to power and was hence able to command significant resources. Additionally, in the mid-to-late 1920s their sense of entitlement doubtless became a fundamental reason for aiding Mussolini.

After all, at this time, the latter had already satisfied some of their other priorities - taming the left and somewhat disciplining his own paramilitaries - and disappointed them in other respects – as he did not help them defend their autonomy, ensuring they were subordinated to his party. Therefore, obtaining state benefits undoubtedly played a considerable role in the moderate flankers' persisting readiness to collaborate with Fascism. In particular, while at this stage these collaborators were prevented from engaging in active politics - unless they operated within the PNF - they were still permitted to fulfill some of their core political goals, as they were allowed to contribute to the fatherland's destiny as educators and diplomats. It should also be noticed that even the hardcore nationalists grouped in the National Federation of Italian Daring Ones came around to Fascism, in part, due to feeling satisfied in their requests for recompenses.

Ultimately, it might be claimed that the liberal orders' treatment of the ex-combatants' movements led the latter to accept their orders' respective denouements: demise, in the case of the Italian one, and survival, in the case of the Romanian one. As

previously mentioned, the outcomes of state policymaking determined whether numerous ex-soldiers came to accept the parliamentary regime of their respective nation. Where these results disappointed fighters' expectations, veterans often underwent political radicalization and, hence, supported the far right, as in the case of the majority of the Italian movement, in addition to smaller segments of the Romanian one.

Chapter Two: 1929-1938: The Great Depression and Its Challenges to State

Veterans' Policies

2.1 Italy: A Resilient Model of Veterans' Policies

2.1.1 1929-1938: Protecting the Veterans' Special Status

Between 1929 and 1938, Fascist rule in Italy endured notwithstanding the economic challenges brought about by the local repercussions of the Great Depression. As a matter of fact, Mussolini's regime gradually radicalized, expanding the role of the Fascist party in Italian politics and society; promoting racist and anti-Semitic mindsets within the citizenry; attempting to undermine the European Peace Treaties through an increasingly firm alliance with Nazi Germany; undertaking military campaigns against the Kingdom of Ethiopia and Republican Spain.¹ Crucially, in this era, the regime ensured that *combattenti* generally kept on enjoying a privileged socio-economic status, even improving this status to some extent.

With regard to general developments concerning these fighters' official lobbying groups, the ANC, the ANMIG, the FNAI, and the ANVG experienced various continuities and some discontinuities with the previous decade. On the one hand, these collective bodies kept operating at each other's side, even cooperating to some extent. For instance, in the city of Forlì, the leaders of each group's local chapter held joint meetings to discuss shared issues.² Additionally, each of these collective entities collaborated with the others to preserve their members' prominent role in state war commemorations and patriotic

¹ Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 212-244.

² Message sent by the presidents of the Forlì chapters of the Italian veterans' associations to the commander of the 82nd battalion of the MVSN, November 19, 1936, folder "*Associazioni di Guerra Forlivesi*," box 21, AANCR, series "*Corrispondenza con Enti Diversi, 1945-2000*" (CED 1945-2000), ISREC

ceremonies, thereby helping First World War veterans enjoy a prestigious position within society. As a case in point, on one occasion, the president of the ANMIG, Carlo Delcroix, extolled, at a public gathering in Padua, the Daring Ones' military valor, in such glowing terms that he was later thanked by the president of the FNAI, Major Alessandro Parisi (who presided over the Federation between 1932 and 1938, eventually dying from the injuries he sustained in a driving accident).³

*Dear Delcroix ... I want to announce to you on behalf of all the Italian Daring Ones that we were very satisfied with the words you pronounced in front of His Majesty the Emperor King and the bearers of the armed forces' flags who had gathered in Padua. Through your words, you highlighted the Daring One's most significant merit, to have been the first tool of the Revolution, a tool which helped Mussolini forge new Italians.*⁴

On the other hand, these lobbying entities changed in organizational terms in these years, albeit to a limited degree. First of all, the ANC, the ANMIG, and the ANVG admitted veterans from military campaigns other than the First World War, increasing their membership figures. In 1933 the ANC – which after 1932 was led primarily by Amilcare Rossi, in lieu of the preceding years' triumvirate - began incorporating veterans from the Libyan campaign of 1911 and members of the militias that had enforced D'Annunzio's will in Fiume between 1919 and 1920.⁵ In the second part of the decade, it began admitting combatants of the Ethiopian and Spanish campaigns.⁶ The ANMIG similarly accepted

³ *L'Italia Combattente: Organo Ufficiale dell'Associazione Nazionale Combattenti* [Enlisted Italy: Official Organ of the National Association of Fighters], August 31, 1938; Paolo Colombini, *Alessandro Parisi: Comandante dei Reparti Arditi d'Italia* [Alessandro Parisi: Commander of the Governing Body of the Italian Daring Ones' Armed Units] (Milan: Sejmard, 1939), 114.

⁴ Letter sent by the FNAI president to the ANMIG president, July 4, 1938, "*Federazione Nazionale Arditi d'Italia*," 285, ACCANMIG, "*Presidenza*," CACEV, CMMIG

⁵ *Il Combattente Mantovano: Bollettino Mensile della Federazione Provinciale dei Combattenti* [The Mantua Fighter: Monthly Bulletin of the Provincial Federation of Fighters], December 31, 1932

⁶ *L'Italia Combattente*, December 31, 1937

veterans of the African and Spanish conflicts, integrating by 1938 2,469 soldiers of the former campaign and 702 militaries of the latter.⁷

As for the ANVG, in 1929, it started including those Blackshirts who had been injured in the Fascist paramilitary mobilization of 1919-1922,⁸ while later accepting itself fighters of the Ethiopian and Spanish campaigns.⁹ Consequently, its membership figures rose dramatically: by the early 1940s, it would enjoy 94,845 adherents.¹⁰ On the other hand, the FNAI's membership remained numerically close to the one it had enjoyed in the 1920s, having 7,739 adherents in 1932.¹¹ Another change in this era was Major Parisi's decision, around 1938, to give the FNAI a new name, rechristening it as the Governing Body of the Italian Daring Ones' Armed Units (*Comando Reparti Arditi d'Italia*; CRAI).¹² Finally, by 1938 the *combattenti's* groups had come under even tighter control by the Fascist party than before, all of these associations formally becoming PNF structures.¹³

During this era, the returnees' movement kept on pursuing the same strategy as in the mid-to-late 1920s, backing the Fascist regime mainly so that the latter would, in turn, satisfy the former's members' sense of entitlement. Crucially, between 1929 and 1938, the movement focused on preserving its affiliates' special socio-economic status and protecting the nation's post-war borders: it pursued these priorities by lobbying the dictatorship for material perks, taking part in official patriotic ceremonies, undertaking

⁷ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the ANMIG central committee, October 3, 1938, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

⁸ Andrea Benzi, *Il volontarismo di guerra e l'Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra a Como: Dalle guerre in Africa Orientale alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Cusano Milanino: S.e.b., 2007), 49-50.

⁹ Report sent by the prefect of Venice to the interior minister, January 12, 1939, "*Venezia: Associazione Volontari di Guerra*," 211, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1939, G1, ACS

¹⁰ News report, December 11, 1942, 509791, 1248, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

¹¹ Report sent by the FNAI president to the prime minister, March 10, 1932, 153037, 408, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

¹² Pierpaolo Silvestri, "Chi siamo" [Who We Are], *A.N.A.I., Associazione Nazionale Arditi d'Italia* [A.N.A.I., National Association of Italian Daring Ones], accessed March 1, 2021, <https://arditiditalia.com>

¹³ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the national council of the ANMIG, April 8, 1940, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG; *L'Italia Combattente*, July 15, 1939; Marco Piraino, Stefano Fiorito eds., *Dizionario di politica a cura del Partito Nazionale Fascista – Antologia, volume unico d'Italia* [Political Dictionary Prepared by the National Fascist Party – Anthology, Single Italian Volume] (Lulu.com, 2014), 433.

other kinds of pedagogic efforts and performing diplomatic activities. Therefore, it appears most associated war survivors supported the regime chiefly to achieve their own aims rather than due to significantly identifying with the dictatorship's ultimate objectives. For its part, the regime kept on rewarding these flankers to a significant extent, thereby preserving their loyalty – albeit one of a relatively passive kind. Indeed, the majority of the movement's adherents seemingly elected to keep on endorsing the autocracy based on the gratitude they felt for it, as a result of the latter's concessions to them.

As a matter of fact, it appears the movement kept on supporting the regime chiefly for pragmatic reasons, from the late 1920s to the onset of World War Two: achieving as much of its own agenda as it could, in terms of securing the goods, services and esteem its affiliates sought. Many activists' relative detachment from the ultimate goals of the regime might be gleaned from several reports authored by law enforcement agencies and PNF structures, which highlight that Great War veterans' consent for Fascism was often superficial and selective. In Vicenza and Sassari, the local police bodies actually related that local veterans were manifestly apathetic towards Fascism, even though they coordinated with it.¹⁴

As a further case in point, the relationship between the fighters' representatives and the PNF was complex, although the former did not question their subordination to the latter. The ex-enlistees' associations and the Fascist party clashed at times in organizational terms.¹⁵ Additionally, in some instances, members of the former chose not to support this party, as the latter did not sufficiently acknowledge their needs. In the city of Rovereto, the

¹⁴ Report on the ANC chapter in Vicenza sent to the ANC triumvir Amilcare Rossi, December 20, 1930, "*Situazione Politica ed Economica delle Provincie: Vicenza*;" report on the political proclivities of the veterans of Sassari, likely 1930, "*Situazione Politica ed Economica delle Provincie: Sassari*," 28; 20, PNF, DN, SP 1881-1941, ACS

¹⁵ *L'Italia Grigio-Verde: Organo Ufficiale dell'Associazione Nazionale Combattenti* [Italy in Uniform: Official Organ of the National Association of Fighters], December 31, 1934

PNF took no step to address the necessities of old local soldiers, who were often destitute, prompting them to shun cooperation with it.¹⁶

Interestingly, it appears numerous veterans felt queasy about Fascism's gradual radicalization. Moreover, it appears many of them supported the dictatorship's more extreme initiatives only to the extent that the latter helped them come closer to their own goals. First of all, while it is likely that a multitude of World War One returnees served in the Ethiopian military campaign as a result of the jingoistic fervor that briefly swept over Italy at the time of this conflict,¹⁷ it is also likely that said recruits fought to gain smallholdings for themselves eventually. The widespread presence of the latter mindset is attested by the fact that public authorities planned to provide preferential access to Ethiopian arable land to citizens who had fought for this country's colonization.¹⁸

Furthermore, the ANC leadership endorsed the military campaign to acquire land for the Association's members.¹⁹ After the conquest of this country had taken place, the Association also asked to be tasked with supervising the latter's agricultural management.²⁰ The ANMIG likely enrolled its members in the Ethiopian campaign for reasons which resembled the ANC's motivations: specifically, it aimed at securing employment opportunities for its adherents. As a matter of fact, at the ANMIG congress of 1937, a speaker confirmed that, since this association had assisted the regime's colonial enterprise, Fascism was willing to help war disabled find jobs in its new dominion.²¹

¹⁶ Report on the political situation of Rovereto, April 27, 1932, *Treviso: Situazione Economica e Problemi Provinciali*, 25, PNF, DN, SP 1881-1941, ACS

¹⁷ Simona Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime, 1929-1943* (Bari: Laterza, 2009), 183-202; Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare: Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* [Beyond the Sea: History of the Italian Colonial Expansion] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), 263.

¹⁸ Giuseppe Bruni, *Tutti i benefici per benemerenze di guerra fasciste e militari* (Siena: Ancora, 1939), 357.

¹⁹ *L'Italia Combattente*, November 15, 1936

²⁰ Official note on request made by the ANC to the prime minister, October 3, 1936, 528080, 1852, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

²¹ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Decimo congresso nazionale: Roma: 19 aprile 1937: Relazione sull'Opera Nazionale per la Protezione ed Assistenza agli Invalidi di Guerra: Relatore: Aurelio Nicolodi* [Tenth National Congress: Rome: April 19, 1937: Report on

As for Italian ex-combatants who fought against the Spanish Republicans, a number of them likely did so merely to be remunerated, as volunteers for this military campaign were paid by Mussolini's government.²² As a matter of fact, surveying lists of Italians who volunteered to serve in this conflict, available at the Italian Central State Archive,²³ I determined that several of the First World War veterans who asked to take up arms were experiencing financial issues. More in detail, out of 171 volunteers who had demonstrably fought also in the Great War, 43 (25,14% of the total tally) were enduring such hardships.

In a similar manner to a multitude of other Italians,²⁴ several veterans did not wholly identify with the Fascist regime's increasing commitment to its alliances with Nazi Germany and other revisionist European nations. Indeed, some Italian ex-combatants identified with the "*pan-European*"²⁵ culture of victory established by ex-soldiers of Entente nations, a system of beliefs that promoted lasting ties of solidarity between former fighters of these countries. In 1937, the president of the Venice chapter of the ANC, General Egidio Macaluso,²⁶ was asked by Italian authorities to give up a planned visit to a gathering of Czechoslovak ex-combatants, in the course of which the officer would have met local veterans he had commanded during the First World War.²⁷ In the late 1930s, it was also reported that a number of veterans and war mutilated privately dissented from the recently established Italo-German alliance.²⁸

the National Institution for the Protection and Assistance to the War Disabled: Speaker: Aurelio Nicolodi] (Rome: Poligrafia R. Filipponi), 22, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

²² Patrizia Dogliani, *Il fascismo degli italiani: Una storia sociale* (Novara: De Agostini, 2014), 324.

²³ Computation based on lists and reports prepared by police prefects, concerning Italian volunteers for the Spanish Civil War, files 4, 5, 6, 6A, 6B, 6C, 7, 8, 9, box 18; files 10, 10A, 10B, 10C, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, box 19, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1938, J3, ACS

²⁴ Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani*, 256-265.

²⁵ Julia Eichenberg, John Paul Newman, "Introduction: The Great War and Veterans' Internationalism," in *The Great War and Veterans' Internationalism*, eds. Julia Eichenberg, John Paul Newman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 12.

²⁶ *L'Italia Combattente*, December 15-31, 1935

²⁷ Report on an Italian delegation's participation at a FIDAC gathering in Prague, July 3, 1937, "*Combattenti Mutilati e Reduci di Guerra*," 66, USN, ASDMAE

²⁸ Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani*, 257.

Finally, it is likely that many old soldiers quietly objected to the anti-Semitic measures which Mussolini began enforcing in 1938. Tragically, these provisions came to harm Jewish veterans of the First World War: generally, notwithstanding their patriotic credentials, these ex-soldiers were negatively affected by the regime's discriminatory course, many career officers among them eventually losing their employment.²⁹ It should be noticed that some non-Jewish ex-combatants privately voiced complaints concerning this intolerant turn. As the dictatorship became increasingly vocal in its xenophobic orientation, ANC President Amilcare Rossi grudgingly admitted, in an article he published in his association's main periodical, that such tendencies upset "*momentarily and very infrequently those who, with regard to these biological and partly moral issues, [were] still clouded by the quaint and flaccid humanitarianism which once guided all of this country's political actions.*"³⁰ His statement appears to imply that some members of the Association at the time were actually expressing concerns about Fascist intolerance.

A few years later, in Trieste, a veteran would write an anonymous rebuke to two local Fascists, known for their pronounced anti-Semitism. On the other hand, the writer would celebrate the patriotism of the local Jews.

*During the great war, I had the opportunity to meet and appreciate numerous "Jews of Trieste," [sic] who had willingly come to Italy to fight the Holy War, in the name of which some families of "Jews" [sic] of Trieste sacrificed all their sons, who in some cases were only 16 or 17 years old. I am aware that other "Jews" [sic] served voluntarily in the Ethiopian and Spanish wars, while I believe you ... never actually backed your unremitting, superficial patriotic fervor with facts, by following the collective example and doing your bit, during the recent African and Spanish wars, despite having been of age to serve in the army.*³¹

²⁹ Giovanni Cecini, *I soldati ebrei di Mussolini: I militari israeliti nel periodo fascista* (Milan: Ugo Mursia Editore, 2008), 93-104.

³⁰ *L'Italia Combattente*, July 31, 1938

³¹ Letter sent by an anonymous veteran of Trieste to two Fascists of his city, January 5, 1940, "*Trieste: Situazione Politica*," 27, PNF, DN, SP 1881-1941, ACS

As can be seen above, the movement's consent for the regime was of a qualified variety. Nevertheless, this form of support proved resilient. To a considerable degree, such persistent endorsement came down to the fact that, between 1929 and 1938, Blackshirts strove to preserve the material and symbolic advantages and political prerogatives associated fighters had been previously enjoying. In particular, by ensuring these ex-combatants kept their previous economic privileges, the Fascist elite ensured many veterans were relatively shielded from the local repercussions of the Great Depression.

Notably, the regime's partial satisfaction of the nationalist veterans' material demands between the late 1920s and late 1930s took place while Italy endured increasing economic hardship. Indeed, the Italian government's success in preserving *combattenti's* loyalty by providing them with material incentives mirrored the dictatorship's general approach to maintaining public backing through the economic turmoil which plagued the country. In the early 1930s, as the general population came to suffer growing financial downturns and unemployment, the state alleviated to some extent its plight by increasing public social assistance and hiring scores of citizens to contribute to an ambitious program of public works. This strategy helped the autocracy vent the potentially destabilizing effects of the Great Depression.³² As a result of the government's approach, organized *combattenti*, for the most part, remained supportive of it.

First of all, the regime kept on giving land to returnees, albeit to a measured extent. Importantly, in the 1930s, the Italian state developed an extensive program of land reclamation and transformation in Central-Southern Italy, Sicily, and Sardinia. Notably, it drained the Pontine Marshes, building new towns and resettling numerous agricultural workers in such areas, leasing recovered land to settlers to eventually turn them into smallholders. The Fascists' readiness to somewhat satisfy peasant soldiers' claims to land

³² Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani*, 46-104.

was essential to preserving the latter's support. In the wake of the Great Depression, the economic conditions of the Italian peasantry had further deteriorated from those of the late 1920s. For instance, after the onset of the global crisis, agricultural workers' wages had decreased between 20% and 40%.³³ Therefore, the Fascists' land grants to peasant soldiers between 1929 and 1938 undoubtedly helped counter these adverse developments to a degree.

To be sure, state land grants exhibited noticeable shortcomings. To begin with, they were limited, as Mussolini's government did not enact an agrarian reform. Additionally, beneficiaries of leased plots in the Pontine Marshes were often unhappy with the life and work conditions imposed by the leasing organization, the National Institution for Fighters. They also resented the financial burdens they endured due to their leasing arrangements. Between 1934 and 1938, they often protested against the National Institution, asking the Fascist trade unions to assist them in their demonstrations.³⁴

Nevertheless, the regime certainly improved the economic standing of many ex-combatants through said grants. A significant number of fighters obtained them. In 1929, over 9,000 veterans were helped collectively lease agricultural holdings by the ANC.³⁵ By 1937, 5,000 invalid peasants had received official loans to buy land.³⁶ The *combattenti* were also offered collective holdings in Fascist colonies. Not only, as seen above, did the regime afford land to those who had fought in the Ethiopian campaign, but the ONC was called to oversee agricultural processing operations in Fascist Ethiopia, undoubtedly ensuring that the areas under its supervision were tilled by fighters of 1915-1918. Additionally, arable soil was doubtless accorded to ex-soldiers in Libya. According to the

³³ Alexander De Grand, *Breve storia del fascismo* [Short History of Fascism], trans. Mino Monicelli (Bari: Laterza, 1994), 107.

³⁴ Dogliani, *Il fascismo degli italiani*, 140-144.

³⁵ FIDAC: *Bulletin of the Allied Legions*, November 1929

³⁶ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Decimo congresso nazionale: Relazione della segreteria assistenza*, 5, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

ANC federation of Tripoli, the majority of the 40,000 colonists who came to this colony in the mid-to-late 1930s were veterans of the First World War and of the Ethiopian campaign.³⁷

With regard to distributing private parcels, in the interwar period, the ONC created 19,400 smallholdings (albeit for the most part sized under 2 ha).³⁸ Most of these granting operations (amounting to 107,000 ha out of the 118,000 that were ultimately made available before the Second World War) occurred between 1932 and 1938.³⁹ As the ONC favored ex-warriors in distributing the agricultural holdings under its control,⁴⁰ it is doubtless that most such plots ended up being the property of war returnees. Finally, public institutions bettered smallholders' living standards by easing their fiscal burden,⁴¹ while they also improved the leasing contracts of the colonists who had settled in the Pontine Marshes, assuaging these settlers' exasperation to a degree.⁴²

Concerning war pension levels, the dictatorship proved relatively generous. To be sure, during the Great Depression, it cut its budget for these payments. Notably, by 1933, the total sum of said emoluments had been reduced by 260,000,000 *Lire*.⁴³ However, the government redressed this budget through the rest of the decade. In 1935 and 1936, pension levels for invalids with severe disabilities contracted due to frontline injuries were

³⁷ *L'Italia Combattente*, June 30, 1936; March 15, 1939; December 31, 1940

³⁸ Gustavo Corni, "La politica agraria del fascismo: Un confronto fra Italia e Germania," *Studi Storici*, No. 2 (April – June 1987), 413.

³⁹ Elisabetta Novello, *La bonifica in Italia: Legislazione, credito e lotta alla malaria dall'Unità al fascismo* [Land Drainage in Italy: Laws, Credit and the Fight against Malaria from the Italian Unification to Fascism] (Milan: Franco Angeli Editore, 2003), 276.

⁴⁰ Carl Schmidt, *The Plough and the Sword: Labor, Land and Property in Fascist Italy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 99.

⁴¹ Valerio Castronovo, "Fascismo e classi sociali," in *Fascismo e capitalismo*, ed. Nicola Tranfaglia (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976), 106.

⁴² Dogliani, *Il fascismo degli italiani*, 143-144.

⁴³ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Ottavo congresso nazionale: Roma: Gennaio 1933: Relazione generale: Relatore: Gianni Baccarini* [Eighth National Congress: Rome: January 1933: General Report: Speaker: Gianni Baccarini] (Rome: Tipografia "Saturnia," 1933), 11, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

increased.⁴⁴ Additionally, in 1937 unemployed invalids and mutilated who needed to work to enjoy basic living standards were granted a small pension raise. Those who suffered the most severe disabilities started benefitting from it from the age of 55; the remaining ones were entitled to it after becoming 60 years of age. By 1942, 6,393 impaired would benefit from this provision.⁴⁵ In general terms, in this period, social assistance for the *combattenti* was reasonably substantial. For instance, the FNAI/CRAI kept on subsidizing many Daring Ones, gifting 23,015 *Lire* in personal subventions in 1931.⁴⁶ In 1934, 30,000 ANC affiliates enjoyed subventions for 1,000,000 *Lire*.⁴⁷ Importantly, while, in 1936, veterans saw their war insurances abolished, families of those ex-combatants who thereafter passed away were allowed to keep on cashing them in.⁴⁸

In terms of ensuring returnees were employed, the regime presented a mixed record, albeit positive for the most part. Essentially, the state committed itself to procure hiring opportunities for veterans to contrast rampant joblessness caused by the Great Depression. The dictatorship was only partially successful in this endeavor, as the civil service and private companies often circumvented the laws that Fascism and its liberal predecessor had passed to impose the preferential employment of ex-combatants.⁴⁹ At the same time, the state provided *combattenti* with jobs by prioritizing the latter in allocating existing employment opportunities and supporting the creation of new occupations. As seen above, it also raised the pensions of thousands of jobless war impaired.

⁴⁴ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the ANMIG central committee, January 7, 8, 1937, volume 7, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1926-1937, CMMIG

⁴⁵ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi d'Italia, *L'assistenza ai mutilati d'Italia: 29 aprile 1917 – 29 aprile 1942* (Milan: L. Alfieri, 1942), 39-40; *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra*, October; December 1937

⁴⁶ Financial report on the FNAI, for 1931, December 31, 153037, 408, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

⁴⁷ *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, August 3, 1934

⁴⁸ Message sent by the president of the Forlì federation of the ANC to the local federation chapters, January 14, 1936, "1936," 13, AANCR, C1922-1957, ISREC

⁴⁹ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Decimo congresso nazionale: Relazione sull'Opera Nazionale*, 21-22, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG; *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, February 1938

As the global economic crisis unfolded, Fascism took important steps to raise the number of working ex-combatants. In 1929 a decree favored ex-militaries in the job market,⁵⁰ while the Fascist General Confederation of Italian Industry (*Confederazione Generale Fascista dell'Industria Italiana*) struck a deal with the ANC to get old soldiers hired by firms associated with it.⁵¹ In 1934, decorated veterans and war impaired were given preferential hiring in the civil service and public companies,⁵² while the ANC and the Fascist agricultural corporation collaborated to ensure able-bodied veterans were given preference concerning sharecropping work.⁵³ These measures led to noticeable results. Notably, numerous war victims secured state and private jobs in these years, accessing 52,167 placements between 1929 and 1931. While many of these jobs were only temporary, they undoubtedly helped improve ex-combatants' living standards, at least in the short term.

Table 2.1: Jobs provided by the ANMIG to its members in 1929-1931⁵⁴

1929	17,882
1930	17,299
1931	16,926

⁵⁰ *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, August 5, 1933

⁵¹ *Il Popolo di Romagna* [The People of Romagna], August 7, 1929, notebook 3, 251, AANCR, RS, ISREC

⁵² Giuseppe Colonna, ed., *Raccolta delle disposizioni di legge a favore degli ex combattenti* (Siena: Stab. Tipografico Combattenti, 1954), 28-29.

⁵³ Message sent by the secretary of the Forlì federation of the ANC to the local federation chapters, November 19, 1934, "1934," 13, AANCR, C1922-1957, ISREC

⁵⁴ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Ottavo congresso nazionale: Roma: Gennaio 1933: Relazione della segreteria per l'azione sociale sull'Opera Nazionale per la Protezione ed Assistenza degli Invalidi di Guerra e sull'Ente Edilizio per i Mutilati: Relatore: Aurelio Nicolodi* [Eighth National Congress: Rome: January 1933: Report of the Social Care Secretariat on the National Institution for the Protection and the Assistance to the War Disabled and the Housing Authority for the War Mutilated: Speaker: Aurelio Nicolodi] (Florence: Stabilimenti Grafici A. Vallecchi, 1932), 17, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

Additionally, approximately 12,000 war disabled found employment between 1933 and 1937.⁵⁵ In 1929, 32,506 able-bodied ex-combatants were placed by the ANC,⁵⁶ while, between 1933 and 1934, the Association ensured that approximately 50,000 veterans were hired.⁵⁷ Therefore, while the state did not wholly enforce veterans' employment legislation, it still achieved noticeable results in this field. Moreover, public authorities tended to collaborate with the *combattenti's* associations to ensure the latter's adherents found employment. For instance, the National Institution for the War Disabled assisted the ANMIG in its struggle to force the civil service to hire the mandatory quota of war impaired it was beholden to.⁵⁸ Consequently, it might be assumed that many *combattenti* came to acquiesce to the shortcomings of the regime's employment policies, probably believing they would gradually redress these limitations by collaborating with the sectors of the state they understood to be their allies.

An instance of this mindset might be gleaned in a remark made by ANMIG President Carlo Delcroix, in 1943, at a meeting of the Association's national council. Commenting on the noticeable inadequacies of the Fascist laws promoting the employment of the war impaired, he would simply stress that it was necessary for the ANMIG to strenuously keep on lobbying institutions to uphold more consistently such provisions.

*When was the law on mandatory placement ever seriously enforced? Since the beginning, we had to face opposition and a lack of understanding, so we ended up witnessing that most invalids did not come to benefit from what they deserved, the law on mandatory placement. So, this is the name of the game: [to] see if we are actually clever and strong enough to have these laws enforced.*⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Decimo congresso nazionale: Relazione sull'Opera Nazionale*, 23, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

⁵⁶ FIDAC, November 1929

⁵⁷ *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, November 5, 1934

⁵⁸ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Decimo congresso nazionale: Relazione sull'Opera Nazionale*, 21-22, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

⁵⁹ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the ANMIG national council, February 17, 1942, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

Not only did the state help place veterans within Italy, but it offered work to them in Fascist Ethiopia. Importantly, while soldiers who conquered this land were often unwilling to settle down in it,⁶⁰ numerous other veterans wished to benefit from the employment opportunities it offered. As a matter of fact, many war mutilated asked to be sent to this colony as workers and peasants to escape unemployment.⁶¹

Public authorities also accorded a measure of financial assistance to businesses that helped employ war survivors. Specifically, the state supported ex-combatant smallholders and artisans through the small loans that it had begun conceding to ANC federations in 1926. In 1934, it handed out 7,000,000 *Lire* in loans of this kind.⁶² Additionally, it helped the ANC develop private businesses, which in 1938 employed 1,849 veterans.⁶³ At a more general level, by the 1930s, it appears myriads of former fighters had obtained positions in the regime's political structures. According to Dogliani's investigation, the majority of posts available in the PNF, the MVSN, the Italian government, the Fascist trade unions, and the court adjudicating political crimes were held by men born in the last decade of the 19th century. In all likelihood, these individuals had served, for the most part, in the Great War.⁶⁴

Between 1929 and 1938, veterans' associations continued being extensively co-opted by Fascism, a state of affairs that helped them press for their members' rights. The associations preserved their official status as representatives of the Italian veterans, the ANMIG even being turned into a state body in 1929.⁶⁵ These representative functions were

⁶⁰ Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani*, 222-225.

⁶¹ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Decimo congresso nazionale: Relazione sull'Opera Nazionale*, 21-26, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

⁶² *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, August 3, 1934

⁶³ *L'Italia Combattente*, December 31, 1940

⁶⁴ Dogliani, *Il fascismo degli italiani*, 71-73.

⁶⁵ "Associazione nazionale fra mutilati ed invalidi di guerra" [National Association of War Mutilated and Disabled], *Sistema Informativo Unificato per le Soprintendenze Archivistiche* [Unified Info System for Archival Superintendencies], accessed March 8, 2021, <https://suisa.archivi.beniculturali.it/cgi-bin/pagina.pl?TipoPag=profist&Chiave=303>.

confirmed at the expense of organizational competitors. Notably, on the one hand the government allowed mutilated volunteers of Ethiopia and Spain to hold honorary membership⁶⁶ in a group representing the interests of impaired Blackshirts, the Fascist Association for Families of the Fallen, Mutilated and Injured for the Revolution (*Associazione Fascista Famiglie Caduti, Mutilati e Feriti per la Rivoluzione*).⁶⁷ On the other, Mussolini ensured that said volunteers would be represented officially by the ANMIG.⁶⁸ As seen above, in the 1930s, the *combattenti* movement was also allowed to represent veterans of other conflicts.

Moreover, it should be noted that these organizations found receptive partners in several institutions. For instance, the ANMIG got its requests satisfied through the intercession of World War One serviceman and Fascist chieftain Francesco Giunta,⁶⁹ who between 1927 and 1932 worked as an undersecretary to the presidency of the council.⁷⁰ The movement's associates also found direct representation in the PNF, as in November 1938, the ANC and the ANMIG leaders became members of the party's national council.⁷¹

Veterans' representatives also preserved and increased their hold on the Fascist parliament. In this decade, Carlo Delcroix kept on working as a deputy.⁷² At the same time, ANC President Amilcare Rossi, ANVG President Eugenio Coselschi, and ANMIG Secretary Giovanni Baccarini entered the chamber of deputies in 1929 and would hold their

⁶⁶ *Partito Nazionale Fascista: Foglio di Disposizioni* [National Fascist Party: Order Sheet], May 25; August 5; December 4, 1938

⁶⁷ Marco Piraino, Stefano Fiorito (eds.), "*Venti anni*" [Twenty Years]: volume 3: *Guerra e impero* [War and Empire] (Lulu.com, 2013), 147.

⁶⁸ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the ANMIG central committee, January 16, 1939, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

⁶⁹ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Settimo congresso nazionale: Relazione morale*, 9, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

⁷⁰ Mauro Canali, "Giunta, Francesco," *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*: volume 57: *Giulini-Gonzaga* (2001), accessed March 8, 2021, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-giunta_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-giunta_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

⁷¹ *L'Italia Combattente*, November 15, 1938

⁷² Vittoria Albertina, "Delcroix, Carlo," *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*: volume 36: *De Fornari – Della Fonte* (1988), accessed February 1, 2021, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-delcroix_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/.

posts until the collapse of the regime in 1943.⁷³ FNAI President Alessandro Parisi accessed the chamber in 1934 and retained his post until he died in 1938.⁷⁴ Parisi's successor as the CRAI president, General Ottavio Zoppi, had become a senator in 1933, a position he would enjoy for the following ten years.⁷⁵ More generally, 47 ANVG members became part of the chamber of deputies following the 1929 plebiscite.⁷⁶ A remarkable number of ANC and ANMIG representatives became parliamentary deputies: respectively, 40 and 14 after the plebiscite of 1929;⁷⁷ 45 and 30 following the one of 1934.⁷⁸

Delegates of the movement also received positions within the regime's economic organizations. They were well represented in the professional corporations and the workers' unions. This state of things was especially evident in the case of the ANMIG. By 1932, the Association had 648 representatives in the central bodies of the Fascist unions and corporations⁷⁹ and, by 1937, 1,300 representatives in the unions.⁸⁰ Representatives of the ANMIG and the ANC held seats at the state provincial committees for relief work,⁸¹ while ANC representatives took part in the meetings held by the state bodies controlling local employment offices, ensuring that this association was empowered to press for the placing of its members.⁸² The ex-enlistees' associations were also given a seat at official

⁷³ "Amilcare Rossi;" "Eugenio Coselschi;" "Giovanni Battista Baccarini," *Camera dei Deputati: Portale storico* [Chamber of Deputies: Historical Portal], accessed March 8, 2021, <https://storia.camera.it/deputato/amilcare-rossi-18950101/interventi#nav>; <https://storia.camera.it/deputato/eugenio-coselschi-18880913/>; <https://storia.camera.it/deputato/giovanni-battista-baccarini-18970927>.

⁷⁴ "Alessandro Parisi," *Camera dei Deputati*, accessed March 8, 2021, <https://storia.camera.it/deputato/alessandro-parisi-18820224/>.

⁷⁵ "Zoppi Ottavio," *Senato della Repubblica* [Senate of the Republic], accessed March 8, 2021, <https://notes9.senato.it/web/-enregno.nsf/d0babbe225d9abbac125711400382615/bc93eafd2c5d4a264125646f00619b81?OpenDocument>

⁷⁶ *La Volontà d'Italia: Settimanale Imperialista: Organo del Volontarismo Italiano*, March 17, 1929

⁷⁷ *La Libertà: Organo della Concentrazione Antifascista*, March 10, 1929

⁷⁸ Didier Musiedlak, *Lo stato fascista e la sua classe politica, 1922-1943* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003), 274.

⁷⁹ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Ottavo congresso nazionale: Relazione generale*, 12, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

⁸⁰ *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, May 1937

⁸¹ FIDAC, February 1932

⁸² Circular sent by the ANC president to the Association's provincial federations, August 1, 1933, "Partecipazione ad Enti Diversi," 23, AANCR, CED 1945-2000, ISREC

forums for veterans. ANMIG Secretary Baccarini held various administrative posts in the Fascist unions through the late 1920s and the 1930s.⁸³ Beginning in 1929, four ANMIG members were given seats at the directing board of the ONIG.⁸⁴

Thanks to their hold on the regime, the associations protected the socio-economic status of numerous veterans. The ANMIG's lobbying induced the government to raise the war pension levels for the jobless impaired.⁸⁵ The ONIG, which the ANMIG influenced, frequently advocated for impaired employees to the presidency of the council of ministers.⁸⁶ In 1939, the ANMIG also ensured that it would be in charge of representing the mutilated who had been enrolled in the Fascist Association for Families of the Fallen, Mutilated and Injured for the Revolution by soliciting the PNF secretary to accord it this prerogative.⁸⁷ For its part, the ANC managed to ease up requirements for enrolling in associations representing architects and engineers, for its associates.⁸⁸ Ultimately, the *combattenti*'s groups were probably perceived by their affiliates as effective in defending the latter's rights. This degree of trust is attested by the ANC's eventual rise in membership through the 1930s. While its numbers decreased slightly between 1930 and 1931, shrinking from 569,591 to 543,966 enrollments, they rose to 731,183 enlistments in 1934.⁸⁹

Importantly, associated former fighters carried on being abundantly satisfied in terms of symbolic rewards and institutional support for their pedagogic initiatives, even more so than had been the case in the mid-to-late 1920s. First of all, the regime involved *combattenti* in its panoply of public rituals, thereby acknowledging their longing to be

⁸³ Report on Giovanni Baccarini, likely 1934, "*Baccarini, Giovanni*," 56, MI, DGPS, DPP, ACS

⁸⁴ *Raccolta ufficiale delle leggi e dei decreti del Regno d'Italia: Anno 1929*: volume 6 [Official Collection of the Italian Kingdom's Laws and Degrees: Year 1929] (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, Libreria, 1930), 7109-7110.

⁸⁵ *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, September 1938

⁸⁶ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Decimo congresso nazionale: Relazione sull'Opera Nazionale*, 22-23, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

⁸⁷ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the ANMIG central committee, January 16, 1939, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

⁸⁸ *L'Italia Combattente*, January 1936

⁸⁹ *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, November 5, 1934

exalted and their desire to educate Italians on patriotism and martial values. With regard to fulfilling these individuals' wish to be acclaimed, it should be noted that state ceremonies constantly involved them as performers. Impressively, 100,000 of them took part in the 1938 victory celebrations that were staged in Rome.⁹⁰ Importantly, old soldiers enjoyed a prominent role in this and other ceremonies, being implicitly honored as protectors of the homeland by public authorities and audiences. Nationalist ex-servicemen were happy at their public visibility, hence were grateful to the regime, as attested by by ANC President Amilcare Rossi.

The numerous confirmations of a continuous, unswerving and far-sighted policy, and in the last year, the decisions to let the Mutilated parade at the inauguration of the [main avenue in Rome], to openly acknowledge the sacrifices and glories of our war, to let the veterans act as "Guards of Honor" at the Monuments to the Fallen, to let the war decorated inaugurate the [Coliseum avenue in Rome], in addition to various public statements, laws and plans, all of this moves us as Veterans, as fascists and as Italians, as it represents the most heartfelt and vocal instance of national gratitude we could have possibly asked for.

⁹⁰ *L'Italia Combattente*, November 15, 1938

Image 2.1: Caption: “In Piazza Venezia: The Leader proudly orders the Italian Fighters to foster and bequeath the spirit of Victory.”



Source: *L'Italia Combattente: Organo Ufficiale dell'Associazione Nazionale Combattenti*, November 15, 1938 (Image courtesy of the *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze*; further reproduction is prohibited)

Remarkably, veterans were also tributed important honors within public events which were not strictly connected to the First World War at a thematic level. For instance, a delegation of ex-militaries visiting a prestigious Fascist public exhibition, the Exhibit of the Fascist Revolution (*Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*), was officially welcomed by the PNF secretary.⁹¹ Moreover, ex-combatants were given a visible role in celebrations of the anniversary of the March on Rome.⁹²

It should also be noted that *combattenti* were also continuously granted opportunities to act as educators of the fatherland, by being invited to take part in public rituals and through other public platforms. Concerning these ceremonies' rationale, Falasca Zamponi suggests they were ultimately meant to engender, within the audiences attending them, a desire to adhere to the lifestyle which Italy's powerholders envisioned for their subjects: a way of life denoted by chauvinism, militarism, and unconditional obedience to

⁹¹ *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, April 5; November 5, 1933

⁹² *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, November 1933

the Blackshirts' elite. Veterans, therefore, posed as models for the aforementioned way of living when taking part in Fascist choreographies. In other words, these 'actors' were asked by the regime to pose and parade as living examples of Fascist New Men for other Italians to observe and to imitate.⁹³ It is unclear to what extent such flankers were sincerely committed to helping engineer the proposed spiritual revolution, in partaking in Fascist solemnities. Most patriotic ex-soldiers were likely not especially keen on the rituals' ultimate objectives. However, they joined in them to foster, within attending crowds, those moderate virtues they wanted the Italian people to interiorize: love for and devotion to the national community. After all, ex-enlistees undoubtedly wanted to inculcate the latter values into Italians. The war disabled spoke about educating youths to sacrifice themselves for the fatherland,⁹⁴ while the able-bodied ex-combatants wanted to be considered living examples for these younglings.

Veterans also wanted to turn their fallen comrades into examples for the latter: in 1934, they began offering muskets to Fascist boys, which had names of dead soldiers engraved on them. By donating these weapons, returnees clearly aimed at providing models of patriotism and self-abnegation to Italian youths. They also began symbolically handing over machine guns to teenagers at public events.

⁹³ Simonetta Falasca Zamponi, *Lo spettacolo del fascismo* [Fascist Spectacle], trans. Stefania De Franco (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino Editore, 2003), 53, 158-161.

⁹⁴ *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, December 1933

Image 2.2: Caption: “War mutilated and veterans gift the Fascist youths of Ravenna with muskets.”



Source: *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra*, December 1933 (Image courtesy of the *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze*; further reproduction is prohibited)

Veterans exploited Fascist rituals and other public platforms to attempt to impart the aforementioned qualities to Italians. In taking part in the regime's ceremonies, they exalted the virtues they and their dead comrades purportedly possessed in front of viewers. To give some examples, at a collective gathering in the town of Molfetta, the ANC president Rossi eulogized the spirit of self-sacrifice of one of his deceased comrades in arms in front of the local youth organization chapter and other Fascist bodies. In the course of a ceremony at the Coliseum of Rome, in which ex-servicemen figuratively handed over machine guns to Fascist youths (*Balilla*), a local Fascist organizer called out the name of a dead war disabled and Fascist martyr, Armando Casalini, clearly presenting the latter as a

model of patriotic selflessness to the boys. Former soldiers even tried to imbue younglings with their values by participating in parades. An army general spoke glowingly about the combat survivors' involvement in official parades, especially these men's apparent effect on young Italian males.

*The people, the youths, look, admire, praise [the parading veterans], even though they ignore how each one of those ex-combatants earned his moment of glory or managed to survive the chaos of war! ... Let's honor the dead fighters! And let's also honor the living fighters, so that patriotic ceremonies might amount not only to praising and mourning the dead but also celebrating, in a jolly atmosphere, the spiritual acts which affirm life and foster moral force to defend and strengthen the Nation.*⁹⁵

Ex-enlistees believed that, in performing in national observances, they were imparting their heroic virtues to attending civilians. ANMIG secretary Giovanni Baccarini, for instance, claimed that “*every national festivity [was] an opportunity to bring [the Association's] words of encouragement and advice to the masses.*”⁹⁶

Crucially, the regime helped veterans come closer to achieving their goals, thereby undoubtedly gaining many of these fellow travelers' approval. First of all, it supported some of such flankers' own pedagogic initiatives. The events in which veterans gifted muskets to youths were overseen by governmental authorities, such as Renato Ricci, the undersecretary to the ministry of education. Second, the PNF gave an illustrious role to fighters in its various educational and pedagogic initiatives. It invited them to help publicly celebrate prestigious recurrences, such as Italy's victory in the First World War and the March on Rome, in middle schools and outdoor mass gatherings. ANMIG members were also designated as official orators at the provincial anniversaries of the victory of 1918.

⁹⁵ *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, March 20; September 20; November 20, 1933; January 5, 1934; February; March 31, 1935

⁹⁶ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Ottavo congresso nazionale: Relazione Generale*, 16, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

Beginning in 1934, Mussolini summoned ex-enlistees to guard monuments to their fallen comrades in arms, together with Fascist youths, on said anniversaries. Associated ex-combatants believed that sharing this prerogative with Italian teenagers would help foster the cult of war heroes among the latter. In the same year Achille Starace, the secretary of the PNF, started asking old soldiers to take part in the celebrations connected to the foundation of the party's youth chapter in Rome, sending furthermore a delegation of the latter organization to visit this city's ANC chapter on this recurrence.⁹⁷

Third, veterans were called to teach adolescents on military practices and ideological principles, thereby allowing the former to prepare the latter to defend the fatherland. First of all, in these years, multitudes of veterans entered the Voluntary Militia for National Security, which the old soldiers viewed as a vehicle for spreading nationalist and martial values within Italian society.⁹⁸ Notably, in 1929,⁹⁹ 10,000 mutilated were admitted to the MVSN, enrolled in a special unit called the Legion of the War Mutilated (*Legione Mutilati*). This Legion oversaw premilitary training for the Italian youth.¹⁰⁰ By 1937, 21,080 mutilated, including 867 officers, were part of the Militia.¹⁰¹ Additionally, Daring Ones were also allowed to work as military instructors for boys.¹⁰² In 1938, UNUCI members were also called upon by the regime to fulfill these tasks.¹⁰³ Finally, in the same year, the veterans' associations were more directly amalgamated to the youth organizations

⁹⁷ *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, May 5; September 20; October 20; November 5, 1933; October 20; December 5, 1934

⁹⁸ *L'Italia Combattente*, January 31, 1938

⁹⁹ Francesco Zavatti, *Mutilati ed invalidi di guerra: Una storia politica* (Milan: Unicopli, 2011), 137.

¹⁰⁰ *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, December 1934

¹⁰¹ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Decimo congresso Nazionale: Roma: 29 aprile 1937: Relazione morale: Relatore il segretario dell'Associazione: Gianni Baccharini* [Tenth National Congress: Rome: April 29, 1937: Report on Moral Activism: Speaker: The ANMIG Secretary Gianni Baccharini] (Rome: Istituto Romano di Arti Grafiche di Tumminelli e Co.), 8, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

¹⁰² *L'Ardito d'Italia: Giornale degli Arditi di Tutte le Fiamme* [The Italian Daring One: Daily of All the Daring Ones' Corps], April 1933

¹⁰³ *Partito Nazionale Fascista: Foglio*, April 8, 1938

by the state. For instance, some chapters of the UNUCI and the ANMIG were made partners of the PNF Italian Youth of the Lictor (*Gioventù Italiana del Littorio*).¹⁰⁴

Image 2.3: Lower caption: “Consul Mario Mazzetti, commander of the Roman Legion of the War Mutilated, oversees the training of “our” Premilitary units.”



In alto: Il nuovo distintivo della Legione Romana Mutilati, con il motto dettato da Carlo Delcroix
In basso: Il Console Mario Mazzetti, comandante della Legione Romana Mutilati, assiste alle esercitazioni della “nostra” Premilitare

Source: *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, December 1934 (Image courtesy of the *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze*; further reproduction is prohibited)

Moreover, the Blackshirts gave ex-soldiers and their wartime experiences a visible place in the rituals extolling the dictatorship's accomplishments. During the first anniversary of the Fascist empire's foundation, the men of the trenches were afforded the

¹⁰⁴ See, for instance, *Partito Nazionale Fascista: Foglio*, February 25; September 6, 1938

opportunity to recall their military accomplishments publicly.¹⁰⁵ War mutilated¹⁰⁶ and able-bodied veterans were allowed to act as public guards of the Exhibit of the Fascist Revolution. The ex-militaries' activism led to some of their cherished ideals becoming somewhat popular. According to the president of the Roman federation of the ANC, under Fascism, "*the past martial combats, the bloody trenches, [the] dead [were] no longer a memory stifled in the depths of the humiliated Victory, but a lively state of excitement, a symbol of glory, celebrated out in the open under Italy's sky with waving flags and joyous chants.*"¹⁰⁷

It should be noticed that, at times, *combattenti* obtained the special honors and prerogatives they sought by directly petitioning public authorities. To be sure, their pleas were not always listened to. The PNF, in one instance, contested their calls to be allowed to organize a local event.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, they were also granted some of their wishes. PNF Secretary Achille Starace agreed to ex-combatants' demands to act as sentinels of the official exhibition of the Exhibit of the Fascist Revolution.¹⁰⁹

Between the late 1920s and late 1930s, the nationalist veterans' movement also continued enjoying the Italian state's assistance to its ambassadorial activities, hence being further accommodated in its followers' eagerness to protect their homeland through public diplomacy. The movement was afforded financial and organizational aid to this end. In exchange, it assisted the regime's general foreign policy course, which gradually moved Italy away from its established alliances with Entente countries, strengthening its ties to

¹⁰⁵ *L'Italia Combattente*, May 15, 1937

¹⁰⁶ Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. Keith Botsford (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 119.

¹⁰⁷ *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, April 5; November 5, 1933

¹⁰⁸ Report on the relationship between the PNF and the veterans of Milan, November 20, 1932, "*P.N.F.: Situazione Economica e Politica delle Provincie: Milano*," 6, PNF, DN, SP 1881-1941, ACS

¹⁰⁹ *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, November 5, 1933

revisionist countries like Germany, Hungary, and Austria.¹¹⁰ The Italian activists were strictly controlled and guided by their government in carrying out their undertakings.¹¹¹

Why did the fighters' movement accept to second the autocracy's diplomatic rerouting? In the case of the Fascist or pro-Fascist leaders of the servicemen's groups, endorsement for the regime's foreign policy undoubtedly stemmed from their identification with Mussolini's expansionist objectives, as they espoused themselves hyper-nationalist beliefs. For instance, in 1934, ANMIG President Delcroix condemned, together with Hungarian Prime Minister Gyula Gömbös, the 'unfair' terms of the Peace Treaties.¹¹² In 1938, when the Fascist party asked the Italian representatives to a transnational committee gathering Italian and French ex-servicemen to leave this forum,¹¹³ Delcroix welcomed said request. He believed it had become pointless to preserve ties of solidarity to a traditional ally of Italy like France, as he felt the latter country had long tampered with his own kingdom's interests.¹¹⁴

As for the ANVG and the CRAI, these associations' general memberships, mostly made up of hardcore nationalists, probably supported Fascism's destabilizing foreign policy spontaneously and wholeheartedly. On the other hand, the ANC and the ANMIG's adherents were, on the whole, far less affected by chauvinist principles, hence likely acquiesced to, rather than wholly embracing, their prime minister's diplomatic course of action. It might be claimed that these moderate ex-combatants, for the most part, wished merely to defend Italy's existing borders. They collaborated with their government to this end, even though, to accomplish their aims, they had to accept working towards the

¹¹⁰ James Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period, 1918-1940* (London: Praeger, 1997), 87-98, 145-195.

¹¹¹ Circular sent by the prime minister to the ministries and the PNF directorate, September 23, 1927; letter sent by the ANMIG president to the foreign affairs ministry, May 31, 1937, "*Combattenti-Mutilati e Reduci di Guerra*," 66, USN, ASDMAE; *L'Italia Combattente*, July 15, 1939

¹¹² *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, July 1934

¹¹³ *Partito Nazionale Fascista: Foglio*, December 12, 1938; *L'Italia Combattente*, February 20, 1936

¹¹⁴ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the ANMIG directive committee, December 15, 1938, volume 3, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, subseries "*Commissione Direttiva*" (CD), CMMIG

Blackshirts' expansionist ends. Their readiness to agree to this compromise was in all likelihood increased by the fact that their associations had been thoroughly co-opted by the dictatorship.

As seen above, since the early 1920s, Fascism had been weakening the ANC and the ANMIG's ties to states that accepted the European diplomatic status quo while securing these organizations' cooperation. It had accrued said associations' loyalty by helping them obtain preferential treatment for their members, thereby making it increasingly unnecessary for these groups to work with their counterparts from foreign countries, to earn consideration by the Italian kingdom. Before the Great Depression, this strategy had doubtless lessened ANC and ANMIG activists' commitment to the existing continental order. In the 1930s, the Fascist plan for insulating *combattenti* from countries that accepted the Peace Treaties yielded further results. As a case in point, in 1932, the ANMIG refused to accept the assistance offered to it by the FIDAC, with regard to lobbying the Mussolini cabinet to alleviate joblessness among Italian war victims, believing it might influence official veterans' policies by itself, as it had been granted delegates to Fascist provincial committees offering relief to the unemployed.¹¹⁵

Whatever their motivations for enacting ambassadorial undertakings, members of the movement took this work in two directions. To begin with, the ANC and the ANMIG continued working in the FIDAC while trying to undermine it covertly. In particular, Delcroix convinced the Federation to help create the Permanent International Committee, which ostensibly aimed at reconciling ex-servicemen from defeated and victor countries. As a matter of fact, Delcroix wanted to exploit the CIP to create a pro-Fascist and pro-Nazi rival to the Federation, hence neutralizing a powerful international barrier to revisionism. Eventually, the National Association of Fighters and the National Association of War

¹¹⁵ FIDAC, February 1932

Mutilated and Disabled would leave the FIDAC in 1939, believing they could not effectively control it.¹¹⁶ By this time, the ANMIG had already stopped cooperating with the left-wing transnational veterans' forum known as the CIAMAC.¹¹⁷ It should be stressed that combat survivors received official assistance for their activities within the FIDAC and the CIP. In late 1936, the Italian veterans promoted a gathering of veterans from 14 countries, during which they founded the Permanent International Committee.¹¹⁸ Mussolini provided his charismatic presence to this event, as the Fascist statesman received foreign veterans' delegations for a private hearing.¹¹⁹

The second prong of the Italian fighters' international activism promoted new international alliances between their kingdom and revisionist countries. More in detail, *combattenti* developed ties to countries ruled by politicians opposing the European Peace Treaties, like Nazi Germany and Horthyist Hungary. In 1933, Amilcare Rossi attended a Hungarian returnees' congress,¹²⁰ while, in the rest of the decade, Italian associations fostered links to Nazi old soldiers.¹²¹ Additionally, the ANMIG's leadership nurtured ties to Gyula Gömbös' government, on the basis of shared animosity toward the perceived iniquities of the Treaties.¹²²

As for the ANVG, in the early-to-mid-1930s this organization built connections to fascist and radical-right groups across Europe, principally through its sister organization known as the Action Committees for the Universality of Rome (*Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalità di Roma*; CAUR), which was active between 1933 and 1939. In developing these liaisons, the Association appears to have vigorously pursued the dismantlement of

¹¹⁶ *L'Italia Combattente*, April 15, 1939; Ángel Alcalde, *War Veterans and Fascism in Interwar Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 251-257.

¹¹⁷ Antoine Prost, "René Cassin and the Victory of French Citizen-Soldiers," *The Great War*, 28-29.

¹¹⁸ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 253.

¹¹⁹ *FIDAC*, December 1936

¹²⁰ *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, October 5, 1933

¹²¹ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 254-257.

¹²² *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, July 20, 1934

the Treaties. While the CAUR's general purpose was to export Fascist ideological principles and organizational practices abroad, in addition to shoring up Italy at the diplomatic level, it appears Italian war volunteers militating in the Committees were also interested in using the latter to pursue territorial revisionism. After all, the CAUR were strongly connected to the ANVG's pressure groups clamoring for Italian control over the border region of Dalmatia.¹²³ Importantly, the latter groups aimed at using the CAUR to solve this territorial dispute in Italy's favor.¹²⁴ The Committees' public statements included implicit attacks on the European post-war territorial order as they lambasted the League of Nations.¹²⁵

Mussolini's regime helped financially and organizationally the veterans' international initiatives. For instance, it arranged for the Hungarian prime minister Gömbös to visit the ANMIG headquarters in Rome during his 1936 visit to the Italian capital.¹²⁶ In this way, the dictatorship undoubtedly aided the Association in consolidating its ties to the Hungarian dignitary. As for the ANVG, this group was generously financed for its ambassadorial work through the CAUR.¹²⁷ The volunteers' organization also enjoyed the cooperation of important Fascist personalities regarding bolstering its links to foreign organizations. As a case in point, a prominent Fascist like Francesco Giunta took part in a gathering between Italian and Polish war volunteers that the Association had organized.¹²⁸

¹²³ Marco Cuzzi, *L'Internazionale delle camicie nere: I CAUR, Comitati d'azione per l'universalità di Roma, 1933-1939* [The Blackshirts' International: The CAUR, Action Committees for the Universality of Rome, 1933-1939] (Milan: Ugo Mursia Editore, 2005), 24-27, 36, 86-159.

¹²⁴ Report on the activities of the Castelfranco Veneto interdepartmental committee of the CAUR, for 1933, likely 1933, "Comitati d'Azione per l'Universalità di Roma: Comitati Provinciali: Affari Relativi," 2122, 1 to 1-8-3, PCM, "Gabinetto," AG, 1937-1939, ACS

¹²⁵ CAUR memorandum, September 1935, file "Settembre 1935," folder 810, fund "Gabinetto del Ministro e Segreteria Generale, 1921-1943," ASDMAE

¹²⁶ *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, March 1936

¹²⁷ Cuzzi, *L'Internazionale delle camicie nere*, 110, 126, 357.

¹²⁸ Message sent by the ANVG president to the office head of the presidency of the council of ministers, May 30, 1934, "Roma: Adunata di Volontari di Guerra: 24 Maggio 1934," 1873, 3/2-4, PCM, 1934-1936, ACS

Ultimately, the regime's willingness to continue satisfying *combattenti*'s claims to goods, services, and esteem played a vital role in the veterans' movement's willingness to second the Blackshirts' political course of action, as said readiness prompted associated fighters to experience intense feelings of gratitude towards the autocracy. Ex-servicemen were not only thankful for having been elevated to a privileged status in the early 1920s, but also for having seen their preferential treatment preserved amidst the economic turmoil brought about by the Great Depression. According to Delcroix, ex-enlistees carried on following Fascism as the latter was continuously satisfying their sense of deserving.

*Long gone are the times when governments considered us to be bothersome bystanders or shunned us as troublesome creditors; when the masses derisively thought of us as fools or angrily accused us of being sellouts. Those days are long gone, but we have not forgotten them, and this is one of the reasons we follow the [Fascist] revolution, after having consecrated ourselves to the war, as [this revolution] evermore clearly and faithfully acknowledges the necessities entailed by the Victory and keeps the latter's promises.*¹²⁹

Similarly, the ANC president Rossi publicly praised Mussolini for helping the fighters disseminate the cult of the fallen soldiers in the kingdom. An organizer of French ex-combatants, André Gervais, claimed that Italian old soldiers supported Mussolini due to their appreciation of him, as he provided them with the privileges they sought.¹³⁰

In what ways did veterans buttress the Fascist polity? In addition to supporting its diplomatic agenda, the ex-enlistees' associations made numerous other contributions to the dictatorship's course of action. To be clear, as shown above, they did not support it unreservedly. Moreover, Dalla Torre's contention that the ANMIG selectively supported the Blackshirts' regime - as many of the Association's members endorsed the Mussolini

¹²⁹ *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, December 1933

¹³⁰ *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, June 3; October 20, 1934

cabinet more than the PNF¹³¹ - appears to be correct. This dynamic appears to have also been at play in the case of the ANC. At the same time, it should be remarked that the *combattenti*'s organizations made important contributions to Fascism's foreign and domestic designs.

To begin with, patriotic ex-soldiers played a role in the Fascist expansionist wars of the middle-to-late 1930s. They performed public rituals aimed at galvanizing troops fighting in the Ethiopian campaign, for instance publicly handing over military banners to soldiers before the latter departed for Africa;¹³² collected money for the families of the Italian recruits of the Spanish conflict¹³³ and even fought directly in both conflicts. According to the ANC, 66,606 of its followers eventually served in Ethiopia, while 19,436 took up arms in the Spanish campaign.¹³⁴ More generally, military units comprising First World War servicemen, impaired,¹³⁵ volunteers¹³⁶ and Daring Ones¹³⁷ were established to take part in the colonial war in Africa.

Furthermore, former soldiers manipulated the public memory of the Great War, in addition to collective recollections of other events in the kingdom's recent political life, to prime other Italians to fight in the military campaigns of the 1930s. First, they undoubtedly helped ascribe a new meaning to the first global conflagration. In their propaganda, they implicitly presented this conflict as a mere prelude to inevitable further military struggles which Italians would have to wage in the future, to ensure their fatherland kept on thriving. One of the main periodicals printed by ex-enlistees presented Italy's victory in the First

¹³¹ Ugo Pavan Dalla Torre, *L'ANMIG nel 1943-1945: Settant'anni da allora* [The ANMIG between 1943 and 1945: Seventy Years Later] (Rome: Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra e Fondazione Roma, 2014), 22.

¹³² *L'Italia Combattente*, April 15, 1936

¹³³ Message sent by the personal secretary of the prime minister to the member of the ANC directorate Luigi Russo, November 5, 1937, 528080, 1852, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

¹³⁴ *L'Italia Combattente*, December 31, 1940

¹³⁵ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 245.

¹³⁶ Benzi, *Il volontarismo*, 73.

¹³⁷ *L'Ardito d'Italia*, November 1935

World War as the mere *prelude* to its pursuit of national glory through war, a target that would be reached only by creating a fully-fledged empire.¹³⁸

World War One veterans also made a notable contribution to the general political consolidation of the Blackshirts' reign. The ANMIG campaigned for the 1934 plebiscite that confirmed Mussolini's rule.¹³⁹ By 1935, veterans had collected and donated 14,496,571.95 *Lire* to the regime.¹⁴⁰ Like many of their fellow countrymen,¹⁴¹ they also passively seconded the anti-Semitic turn of the Fascist polity, discriminating against their Jewish peers. In 1939, the UNUCI would expel its Jewish adherents.¹⁴²

Perhaps the *combattenti*'s most conspicuous contribution to the entrenchment of the Fascist system of power consisted in the propaganda they deployed to legitimize the latter. First of all, through these deeds, they helped legitimize, in the eyes of Italians, the Fascist elite's rule and some of the latter's policies. As explained above, during their time in power, Fascist powerholders created a political religion to buttress their rule. Veterans contributed to this public cult by extolling Mussolini and the PNF. The Fascist statesman was lauded by the veterans' associations for his myriad purported achievements. He was especially lionized as a national savior who had supposedly rescued the country from internal enemies.¹⁴³ He was also credited with politically regenerating Italy, making it mightier and fairer than before.¹⁴⁴ Praise was also accorded to the PNF. For instance, this single party was praised as the only political organization capable of defending the Italian state.¹⁴⁵ Ex-warriors' propaganda also invested the Fascist elite with benevolent intentions and

¹³⁸ *L'Italia Combattente*, November 4, 1938

¹³⁹ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Decimo congresso Nazionale: Relazione morale*, 12, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

¹⁴⁰ *L'Italia Combattente*, May 15, 1936

¹⁴¹ Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani*, 245-256; Enzo Collotti, *Il fascismo e gli ebrei: Le leggi razziali in Italia* [Fascism and Jews: Italy's Racial Laws] (Bari: Laterza, 2003), 83-84.

¹⁴² Message sent by the UNUCI secretary to the ANMIG, December 1, 1939, "*Unione Nazionale Ufficiali in Congedo*," 285, ACCANMIG, "*Presidenza*," CACEV, CMMIG

¹⁴³ See, for instance, *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, February 5, 1932

¹⁴⁴ *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, February 1933

¹⁴⁵ *Il Combattente Mantovano*, November 5, 1932

charismatic overtones, claiming it cared for returnees' well-being and was generally respected by former fighters. As mentioned above, the regime keenly distorted public memory of the First World War and the latter's immediate aftermath to strengthen the Fascists' legitimacy as rulers. The fighters' associations supported this strategy, taking part in the manipulation, thereby openly claiming that Fascism had been very popular among veterans from its inception.

The movement also strengthened public perceptions of the Fascists as bearers of martial qualities by reminding Italians of these men's purported heroism and self-abnegation. They openly praised Fascist 'martyrs'¹⁴⁶ and lent credence to the Fascists' positive connection to the First World War, taking part in the anniversaries of the Blackshirts' grouping's foundation¹⁴⁷ and joining in collective rituals extolling the Voluntary Militia for National Security. For instance, in 1929, the ANVG figuratively affirmed its connection to the MVSN through a public ceremony: in the course of this event, as a part of the ritual's staging, ANVG Secretary Augusto Pescosolido kissed a Militia commander on the cheeks.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, April 5, 1933; November 5, 1934

¹⁴⁷ *La Stampella: Periodico Mensile della Sezione Milanese dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra*, April 1930

¹⁴⁸ *La Volontà d'Italia*, May 19, 1927; May 26, 1929

Image 2.4: Caption: “The Commander of the War Volunteers of Rome, Commissioner Augusto Pescosolido, offers his crimson handkerchief to Lieutenant General Ragioni, Commander of the Voluntary Militia for the Tenth Zone, kissing him on behalf of all of his comrades in arms.”



Il Comandante i Volontari dell'Urbe, Comm. Augusto Pescosolido, offre il fazzoletto cremisi al Luogotenente Generale Ragioni, Comandante la X Zona della Milizia Volontaria, e lo bacia per tutti i suoi compagni d'arme

Source: *La Volontà d'Italia: Settimanale Imperialista: Organo del Volontarismo Italiano*, May 26, 1929 (Image courtesy of the *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze*; further reproduction is prohibited)

As previously explained, organized ex-combatants attempted to mold Italians in their image, endowing them with features that would help them protect the Italian nation in the future. In disseminating their values, most activists probably wished to merely prepare their fellow countrymen to defend their country's borders rather than priming these compatriots to get involved in expansionist wars. As seen above, in the immediate aftermath of World War One, *combattenti* had proven themselves to be rather lukewarm, for the most part, toward the far right's jingoistic principles. At the same time, after

Mussolini came to power, the Fascist leader probably allowed these moderate fighters to believe that, in collaborating with him on training Italians in military matters, they were merely preparing the country for defensive war. He misled them by making ambiguous public statements on the ultimate aims of his foreign policy course. For instance, at a ceremony in which he oversaw men with combat experience handing over machine guns to youths, Mussolini vaguely stated that *“the [preferable war was] the one which [originated] the peaceful victories of rich harvests and [took] pride in productive labor. But [Italy’s] soul [did] not shy from the harsh necessity of considering the possibility of that other kind of war.”*¹⁴⁹

Nevertheless, while the affiliates to the veterans’ movement might not have wished on the whole to train Italians for future offensive wars, they objectively performed precisely this task. As a matter of fact, their public exaltations of patriotism and martial valor, while not necessarily delivered with a view to expansionist warfare, were easily put in service of the dictatorship’s warmongering. Similarly, as ex-militaries constantly encouraged Italians to obey their masters uncritically, they ultimately allowed Mussolini and his acolytes to exploit such exhortations easily, to convince citizens to stand behind Fascism as the latter vigorously pursued colonialist, revisionist, and militarist ventures.

Furthermore, the Blackshirts’ flankers helped the regime develop the cult of the Fascist New Man by aiding Mussolini in presenting fallen First World War soldiers as examples of self-sacrificing patriots for other Italians to emulate.¹⁵⁰ Specifically, former men in uniform portrayed their dead comrades as bearers of some of the qualities allegedly possessed by this soon-to-be-created new kind of Italian, such as readiness to fight and die

¹⁴⁹ *L’Italia Grigio-Verde*, March 15-20, 1934

¹⁵⁰ Bruno Tobia, “Dal milite ignoto al nazionalismo monumentale fascista (1921-1940)” [From the Unknown Soldier to Monument-Based Fascist Nationalism (1921-1940)], in *Storia d’Italia Einaudi. Annali* [The Einaudi History of Italy. Annals]: volume 18: *Guerra e pace* [War and Peace], ed. Walter Barberis (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2002), 599.

for the fatherland and the state. Therefore, they doubtless helped militarize Italian society, preparing it to accept and become involved in the Fascist wars of the 1930s and, eventually, the Second World War.

The movement also legitimized Mussolini's empire, presenting it as a natural extension of the Italian nation. They accomplished this feat by rhetorically linking the military conquest of Ethiopia to Italy's war effort of 1915-1918.¹⁵¹ Moreover, nationalist former fighters contributed to the vilification of those countries which opposed in any way Italy's expansionism, presenting Great Britain and France as long-time enemies of the kingdom, effectively disavowing the alliance which had united these three nations during the Great War.¹⁵² On the other hand, Italy's recent alliance with Nazi Germany was publicly praised by associated war survivors. Volunteers stressed historical similarities between the Italian Fascist and Nazi elites, highlighting parallels in the past lives of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler: both of them, according to the ANVG, were to be considered as legitimate rulers as they had personally risked life and limb in battle, in their youths, to protect their homelands.¹⁵³

Ultimately, it is highly likely that *combattenti*, while in many cases being only partially radicalized by their collaboration with Fascism, nevertheless acted themselves as prominent radicalizing influences over other Italians, convincing the latter to support the dictatorship and to uphold some of its more extreme features, like its militarist policies. In particular, it should be noted that the regime managed to create militarist enthusiasm among many youths, who consequently served voluntarily in the Fascist wars of the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁵⁴ It appears veterans, whether they had done so intentionally or not, helped the state

¹⁵¹ *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, February 1937

¹⁵² *L'Italia Combattente*, March 31; October 31; November 15, 1938

¹⁵³ *La Volontà d'Italia*, April 29, 1938

¹⁵⁴ Loreto Di Nucci, "Il fascismo e il problema storico della costruzione dell'«uomo nuovo»" [Fascism and the Historical Issue Concerning the Fostering of the 'New Man']; Luca La Rovere, "La formazione della

create this warlike mindset among youths, especially adolescent males. For instance, during the Second World War, a young soldier who had ended up serving in the Italian military campaign against the Soviet Union wrote a letter to the main ANC periodical, claiming his decision to take up arms had been based on the martial values he had been imbued with by the First World War veterans: “*Who granted us this indomitable temperament? You did, ye old ones. You veterans who imbued Your sons with fine courage and bravado which they now jealously guard within their youthful hearts.*”¹⁵⁵ According to Salvante, the ANMIG helped the regime spread the ideal of an “*ultra-militarized masculinity*”¹⁵⁶ within society.

Therefore, in some ways, independently from their overall degree of investment in the ultimate Fascist political project, many adherents to the movement significantly contributed to the regime’s project of creating a New Fascist Man, loyal to Mussolini’s elite and ready to fight in the conflicts promoted by the Fascist statesman.

2.1.2 The Italian Veterans’ Associations and International Antifascism

While Italian Fascism channeled the support of a high number of First World War fighters in time, it also eventually galvanized other such veterans – including some nationalist ones – into actively opposing it. In the interwar era, as Mussolini’s regime neutralized opposition at home, it rested on ex-combatants residing abroad to openly contrast the Blackshirts. For instance, at the time of the Spanish Civil War, some Italian followers of Giuseppe Garibaldi’s tradition of radical activism, who had fought in the First World War and later came to live in France, took up arms against the Spanish nationalists and the latter’s Fascist

gioventù in regime fascista. La scuola e le organizzazioni giovanili,” in *L’uomo nuovo del fascismo: La costruzione di un progetto totalitario*, eds. Patrick Bernhard, Lutz Klinkhammer (Rome: Viella, 2017), 43-45; 119-121.

¹⁵⁵ *L’Italia Combattente*, February 20, 1943

¹⁵⁶ Martina Salvante, “Italian Disabled Veterans between Experience and Representation,” in *Men after War*, eds. Stephen McVeigh, Nicola Cooper (New York: Routledge, 2013), 120.

and Nazi allies.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, the Socialist Guido Picelli, a prominent MIROV organizer and leader of the People's Daring Ones, who had left Italy after Mussolini's seizure of power, eventually fought in Spain against Franco and his Blackshirt acolytes, losing his life in the process.¹⁵⁸ Emilio Lussu and Raffaele Rossetti, former Italian servicemen and patriotic antifascist refugees in France, also took part in this conflict.¹⁵⁹

Importantly, between the late 1920s and late 1930s, several Italian antifascist First World War veterans, who had moved to France following Mussolini's rise to power, tried to win the support of other expatriated ex-servicemen from their own country. Additionally, they tried to prompt veterans still living in Italy to collaborate with them to the point of defying the Fascist system of power they lived under. Notably, in pursuing these goals, antifascists promised to satisfy the sense of entitlement harbored by the ex-combatants they were courting, both in the case of those living in France and the ones residing in Italy.

Bearing the latter development in mind, by surveying the propaganda messages directed by French-based antifascists to ex-servicemen living in Italy, it might be ascertained whether opponents of Mussolini generally promised these Italian returnees that they would fulfil their sense of entitlement better than Fascism was trying to do. In other words, surveying antifascists' strategies for building support among ex-soldiers residing in the motherland might help assess whether relevant shortcomings were to be found in the veterans' policies implemented by Mussolini's autocracy. Ultimately, this research strategy might help gauge the extent to which Fascist provisions for returnees successfully addressed the claims and needs of the latter.

¹⁵⁷ Enrico Acciai, *Garibaldi's Radical Legacy: Traditions of War Volunteering in Southern Europe (1861-1945)*, trans. Victoria Weavil (New York: Routledge, 2021), 146.

¹⁵⁸ Dianella Gagliani, "Da Parma a Madrid. L'antifascismo di Guido Picelli" [From Parma to Madrid. Guido Picelli's Antifascism], in *Guido Picelli*, ed. Fiorenzo Sicuri (Parma: Centro di Documentazione Remo Polizzi, 1987), 11-64.

¹⁵⁹ Manlio Brigaglia, *Emilio Lussu e "Giustizia e Libertà": Dall'evasione di Lipari al ritorno in Italia (1929-1943)* (Cagliari: Edizioni Della Torre, 2008), 14-20, 174-180; Marco Gemignani, "Rossetti, Giovanni Raffaele," *Dizionario biografico degli italiani: volume 88: Robusti-Roverella* (2017), accessed April 26, 2021, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-raffaele-rossetti_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-raffaele-rossetti_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

Individuals who fashioned and disseminated propaganda aimed at French-and Italian-based former fighters were connected to several Italian antifascist political parties operating in France, mirroring the attempts at collective cooperation that such parties undertook in their French sanctuary – attempts which ultimately led to mixed results.¹⁶⁰ Among said militants were Lussu and Rossetti, who had been prominent organizers of the *combattenti* movement before relocating to France – having helped lead, respectively, the Sardinian Action Party and the “Free Italy” association.¹⁶¹ They hence were, in all likelihood, ideally suited for the task of attempting to secure the support of their fellow ex-servicemen.

To attract the backing of Italian former militaries, antifascists created their own ex-servicemen’s groups and promised to fulfill veterans’ claims to economic benefits. First of all, in 1929, Lussu and Rossetti, supported by noted Social Democratic politician Carlo Rosselli, helped found in Paris a leftist veterans’ league gathering expatriated ex-servicemen,¹⁶² the Italian Federation of Former Fighters (*Federazione Italiana Degli Ex-Combattenti*; FIDEC). This Federation was presided over by Rossetti and included, in its directive council, Alceste De Ambris,¹⁶³ a war volunteer, political collaborator of Gabriele D’Annunzio, and antifascist émigré.¹⁶⁴ The FIDEC (not to be confused with the inter-Allied ex-servicemen’s forum known as the FIDAC) was undoubtedly interested in opposing the Fascist regime’s increasing regimentation of Italian veterans, which was taking place both

¹⁶⁰ Santi Fedele, *Storia della concentrazione antifascista, 1927/1934* [History of the Antifascist Concentration, 1927/1934] (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976), 22-27, 73-189.

¹⁶¹ Gemignani, “Rossetti, Giovanni Raffaele.”

¹⁶² Report authored by the Italian secret police concerning the activities of the FIDEC, December 8, 1929; reports authored by the Italian secret police concerning the activities of the FIDEC, February 16, 1929; June 21, 1930, “*Parigi: Associazione Combattenti Dissidenti*,” 232, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1927, G1, ACS

¹⁶³ Romain Ranero, *Raffaele Rossetti dall'affondamento della «Viribus Unitis» all'impegno antifascista* [Raffaele Rossetti from the Sinking of the «Viribus Unitis» to His Involvement with Antifascism] (Settimo Milanese: Marzorati Editore, 1989), 107.

¹⁶⁴ Gian Biagio Furiozzi, *Alceste De Ambris e il sindacalismo rivoluzionario* [Alceste De Ambris and Revolutionary Syndicalism] (Milan: Franco Angeli Editore, 2002), 76, 82-87.

in Italy and abroad, particularly in France in the latter case.¹⁶⁵ This ambition is attested by the FIDEC's attempt to join the Inter-Allied Federation of Former Fighters, with a view to countering the fascistized ANC and ANMIG's work within that forum,¹⁶⁶ although the antifascist federation failed in its attempt. Indeed, it appears the FIDEC found little sympathy within the FIDAC.¹⁶⁷

In the 1920s and 1930s, between 30,000 and 50,000 Italian ex-servicemen lived in France (of whom approximately 6,000 were enrolled in local ANC chapters).¹⁶⁸ As a part of its strategy for winning over said war participants, the FIDEC focused on addressing their material needs, attempting to exact, from the Italian state, the war insurances the latter had promised them at the time they had served.¹⁶⁹ A similar tactic was employed by the French-Italian Association of Former Fighters (*Association Franco-Italienne des Anciens Combattants*; AFIAC), a successor of the FIDEC,¹⁷⁰ founded and animated by Rossetti.¹⁷¹ In courting Italian ex-combatants staying in France, this association promised to help them obtain working permits and the war insurances they were entitled to – challenging, in the latter case, the Italian state's decision in 1936 to strip ex-soldiers of the right to cash in their insurances. As the AFIAC managed to obtain working permits for migrant ex-combatants,

¹⁶⁵ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 202.

¹⁶⁶ Report authored by the Italian secret police concerning the activities of the FIDEC, February 16, 1929, "*Parigi: Associazione Combattenti Dissidenti*," 232, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1927, G1, ACS

¹⁶⁷ Letter sent by the FIDAC president to Raffaele Rossetti, December 5, 1929, "*Parigi: Associazione Combattenti Dissidenti*," 232, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1927, G1, ACS

¹⁶⁸ Report authored by the Italian secret police concerning the activities of the FIDEC, April 4, 1929; report authored by the Italian secret police concerning the activities of the AFIAC, May 11, 1935, "*Parigi: Associazione Combattenti Dissidenti*," 232, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1927, G1, ACS

¹⁶⁹ Report authored by the Italian secret police concerning the activities of the FIDEC, February 16, 1929, "*Parigi: Associazione Combattenti Dissidenti*," 232, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1927, G1, ACS

¹⁷⁰ Leonardo Rapone, "I fuoriusciti antifascisti, la Seconda Guerra Mondiale e la Francia" [The Antifascist Emigrés, The Second World War and France], in *Les Italiens en France de 1914 à 1940* [Italians in France from 1914 to 1940], ed. Pierre Milza (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1986), 345.

¹⁷¹ Report authored by the Italian secret police concerning Italian antifascist organizations operating in Switzerland and France, January 25, 1935, "*Parigi: Associazione Combattenti Dissidenti*," *L'Indipendente/L'indépendant: Bollettino Mensile dell'Associazione Franco-Italienne des Anciens Combattants*» [The Independent: Monthly of the French-Italian Association of Former Fighters], January 1936, "*Federazione Ex Combattenti Antifascisti*," 232, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1929; 1938, G1, ACS

many of the latter joined the Union.¹⁷² By 1936, 2,270 ex-combatants had joined the Association, many of them simultaneously militating in the French ANC chapters.¹⁷³ As can be seen above, the Association's tactic for consent building proved successful, to the extent that it was imitated by Italian antifascists living in Belgium, who likewise attempted to recruit local Italian veterans by promising to obtain working permits for them and to force the Fascist regime to pay them their war insurances.¹⁷⁴ For this purpose, the Belgian militants even founded a similarly-named Belgian-Italian Association of Former Fighters (*Association Belgo-Italienne des Anciens Combattants*).¹⁷⁵

As shown above, exiled antifascists understood the political expediency of playing on Italian veterans' sense of entitlement – for instance, by catering to their material claims - to win their support. Crucially, while attempting to build a following among ex-combatants residing in Italy, these antifascists used similar tactics, but to a much more limited degree, comparatively speaking. Instead, for the most part, they tried to pry ex-soldiers away from the Fascist regime by claiming this system of power was morally abject and ideologically reproachable.

As a matter of fact, until the Second World War, Italian antifascists living abroad made only limited gains in securing support among the Italians living under Mussolini's regime.¹⁷⁶ Accordingly, émigré veterans managed to foster only superficial ties to the former fighters living in the motherland. In 1931 Lussu contacted a veteran confined by the

¹⁷² Circular sent by the national committee of the AFIAC to the Association's regional committees and chapters, likely 1935, "*Federazione Ex Combattenti Antifascisti*," report authored by the Italian secret police concerning the activities of the FIDEC, July 23, 1935, "*Parigi: Associazione Combattenti Dissidenti*," 232, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1927; 1938, G1, ACS

¹⁷³ *L'Indipendente/L'Indépendant*, January 1936, "*Federazione Ex Combattenti Antifascisti*," 232, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1929; 1938, G1, ACS

¹⁷⁴ Reports authored by the Italian secret police concerning the activities of Belgian-based Italian antifascists, February 4; March 11; March 18, 1936, 1106, 310, MI, ACS, DAGRAG, G1, ACS

¹⁷⁵ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 249.

¹⁷⁶ Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani*, 134-139, 202-211.

Blackshirts to the island of Lipari,¹⁷⁷ while in 1936, an AFIAC activist met Italian former fighters pilgrimaging to the Verdun battlefields.¹⁷⁸ The expatriated antifascists also managed to ensure some of their propaganda was delivered to Italy. As a case in point, the cartel of parties with which Lussu and Rossetti were cooperating smuggled political leaflets, pamphlets, and periodicals into the country.¹⁷⁹ For his part, Lussu introduced copies of one of his pamphlets into his native island of Sardinia.¹⁸⁰

Crucially, in attempting to win over their targets, the antifascists seemingly catered little to the Italian ex-servicemen's sense of deserving. To be sure, they made some promises to Italian veterans concerning improving their material status. In the pamphlet he snuck into Sardinia, Lussu guaranteed this island's ex-combatants that he would grant them land from a large estate on this island if he got to power.¹⁸¹ The AFIAC asked the Fascist state to grant veterans living under the latter the war insurances that it had made no longer reclaimable.¹⁸² Moreover, émigré Italian Communists criticized the Fascist regime's imperialist policy, claiming Ethiopia was not a suitable land for emigration,¹⁸³ thereby implicitly dismissing the feasibility of the regime's policy of resettling land-hungry veterans in this colony.

Nevertheless, it appears the antifascist exiles' propaganda generally insisted on more ideological issues in targeting veterans residing in Italy. For instance, the Communist Party of Italy, through a clandestine pamphlet destined to this kingdom, asked the local ex-

¹⁷⁷ Report authored by the Italian secret police concerning Emilio Lussu, January 9, 1931, *Gruppi Sardi d'Azione* 266, MI, ACS, DAGRAG, 1931, G1, ACS

¹⁷⁸ Report authored by an informant of the Fascist secret police, concerning the activities of the AFIAC, August 2, 1936, "*Federazione Ex Combattenti Antifascisti*," 232, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1938, G1, ACS

¹⁷⁹ Fedele, *Storia della concentrazione*, 55-56.

¹⁸⁰ Brigaglia, *Emilio Lussu*, 65.

¹⁸¹ Emilio Lussu, *La rivoluzione fascista* [The Fascist Revolution], 8, "*Gruppi Sardi d'Azione: Organizzazione all'Estero dell'Ex-Onorevole Lussu*," 266, MI, ACS, DAGRAG, 1929, G1, ACS

¹⁸² Report authored by an informant of the Fascist secret police, concerning the activities of the AFIAC, August 2, 1936, "*Federazione Ex Combattenti Antifascisti*," 232, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1938, G1, ACS

¹⁸³ *La Difesa/La Défense* [The Defense], August 31, 1935, "*Parigi: Associazione Combattenti Dissidenti*," 232, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1927, G1, ACS

combatants to oppose Mussolini's Ethiopian campaign essentially for ethical reasons, specifically to honor pacifist ideals.

*Ex-combatants! Put your experience in the service of the fight against the new war. Today imperialism calls your own sons to war, the horrors of which you have come to know all too well. Act as revolutionary educators for your sons, fight at your sons' side in the struggle to the death against the warmongering regime.*¹⁸⁴

As for the propaganda periodical disseminated in Italy by the antifascist cartel with which Lussu and Rossetti cooperated, "*Freedom*" (*La Libertà*), this publication focused essentially on the moral and physical affronts perpetrated by Fascism against Italian ex-combatants. For instance, it reminded its readers that the Blackshirts had murdered veterans in the run to consolidate their power. For instance, *Freedom* published the account of the Blackshirts' slaying of the war impaired Gaetano Pilati, which it had acquired from the victim's widow. By publishing this recollection, they clearly aimed to confute the Fascists' self-proclaimed benevolence and respect towards ex-combatants.

These intentions are attested by the fact that they blew up, in the newspaper's text, the following passage of the account's transcript, a polemical quote given by the dying Pilati to a policeman who interviewed him shortly before he passed away: "*To the patrolling brigadier asking him what had happened to him, my husband answered: "Austrians mutilated me, Italians killed me."*" *Freedom* also stressed¹⁸⁵ that the Fascist regime had incarcerated two prominent army officers who in 1925 had been involved in an attempt on Mussolini's life, the Social Democrat Tito Zanibóni and General Luigi Capello.¹⁸⁶ Finally, it presented the official representatives of the *combattenti* under Fascist

¹⁸⁴ *Salviamo il nostro paese dalla catastrofe!* [Let's Save Our Country from Destruction!], 29, "*Parigi: Associazione Combattenti Dissidenti*," 232, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1927, ACS

¹⁸⁵ *La Libertà*, May 15; July 24, 1927

¹⁸⁶ Giorgio Rochat, "Capello, Luigi Attilio," *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*: volume 18: *Canella-Cappello* (1975), accessed May 8, 2021, <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luigi-attilio->

rule as mercenaries working for the dictatorship in exchange for personal affluence and prestige.¹⁸⁷

The decision to decline playing on Italian ex-combatants' sense of entitlement suggests there were no major shortcomings with regard to the Fascist regime's veterans' policies which antifascists believed they might exploit. Notably, even the inadequacies antifascists did focus on – specifically, the war insurances which Mussolini elected to stop paying to war participants – did not significantly harm the financial wellbeing of the old soldiers' families – as, as discussed earlier, the Italian state chose to continue allowing the widows of insurance holders to reclaim these indemnities. Ultimately, antifascists' lack of coverage on neglected claims to benefits suggests that the Fascist regime's provisions, on the whole, successfully acknowledged the requests articulated by the *combattenti's* movement to this autocracy.

2.2 Romania: Challenges to Pluralist Veterans' Politics

2.2.1 Addressing Economic Discontent under the Liberal Regime

In late 1928, the National Peasants went to power thanks to the help of numerous Romanians who hoped they would make the country's politics more responsive to the needs of citizens.¹⁸⁸ Among those who harbored these hopes were numerous ex-servicemen, who wanted to receive better material benefits from the state or begin enjoying them for the first time.

capello_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/; “Zanibóni, Tito,” *Enciclopedia On Line*, accessed May 8, 2021, <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tito-zaniboni/>.

¹⁸⁷ *La Libertà*, March 10, 1927

¹⁸⁸ Florian Kühner-Wielach, “The Transylvanian Promise: Political Mobilisation, Unfulfilled Hope and the Rise of Authoritarianism in Interwar Romania,” *European Review of History – Revue européenne d’histoire*, 23, No. 4 (2016), 587-588.

Ultimately, the PNȚ's plans to make Romania a more democratic nation were undone by the local repercussions of the 1929 global agricultural crisis and the subsequent Great Depression, which caused significant hardship both to the state and society.¹⁸⁹ Consequently, the party was forced to adopt unpopular financial policies, while its attempts to raise the living standards of the population resulted in failure. The Peasants' inability to deliver on their electoral promises cost them part of their political support, ensuring that their popularity decreased to a degree in the course of the 1930s.¹⁹⁰ The PNȚ's well-meaning plans for the ex-servicemen were hampered by the economic crisis, echoing these general developments. Ultimately, the PNȚ managed to improve some ex-servicemen's benefits while being forced to curtail assistance measures aimed at other *luptători* severely. This state of affairs would last for a while under the PNȚ's successor at the helm of the nation, the PNL (which governed between 1933 and 1937). As a consequence, sectors of the veterans' movement became temporarily disaffected with ruling parties.

Therefore, as in the previous decade, various elements in the movement pivoted to the far right, in the attempt to force the status quo to acknowledge their expectations. As in the 1920s, governmental cabinets competed with the anti-democratic right for control over associated fighters, using a blend of repressive measures and improvements in official provisions. As a result of the state's fluctuating but ultimately accommodating stance toward the war participants' rights, the movement remained integrated in the country's parliamentary order until the latter's demise, albeit tenuously so.

It might be claimed that the PNȚ began its term in power with a sincere desire to satisfy ex-servicemen's calls for a better material status. The likeliness of this orientation

¹⁸⁹ Ion Agrigoroaiei, *România interbelică: Unificare și evoluție economică* (Iași: Demiurg, 2018), 233-259; Paul Quinlan, *The Playboy King: Carol II of Romania* (Westport, London: Greenwood Press, 1995), 95.

¹⁹⁰ Ioan Scurtu, *Din viața politică a României (1926-1947): Studiu critic privind istoria Partidului Național-Țărănesc* [On Romanian Political Life (1926-1947): Critical Analysis of the History of the National-Peasant Party] (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1983), 204.

is based on the observation that the National-Peasant governments passed laws aimed at amending the shortcomings of Averescu and Brătianu's veterans' policies. As a matter of fact, the National Peasants made temporary improvements to pension payments for disabled officers, NCOs, and infantrymen.¹⁹¹ In 1929 they also confirmed that Basarabian officers of the Russian militaries, who had joined the Romanian armed forces following the Great War, enjoyed the same pension rights as their counterparts of the Old Kingdom.¹⁹² As part of its efforts toward promoting land redistribution,¹⁹³ in 1930, the PNT issued a law that prioritized war disabled and volunteers of the kingdom's new provinces and bearers of the "Military Virtue" medal, with regard to the affording of smallholdings.

The PNT also showed goodwill towards fighters by following the previous governments' trend of co-opting military associations. Therefore, these associations were involved in the crafting of state social policies and received institutional support for their initiatives. For instance, the Union of Former Romanian Volunteers was tasked with verifying the wartime credentials of the volunteers who applied for land grants.¹⁹⁴ At the local level, the Bucharest mayor Demetru Dobrescu, who was associated with the National Peasants, asked the president of the UNAL, Virgil Serdaru, to help the city hall tackle public issues concerning local veterans.¹⁹⁵ In all likelihood, thanks to becoming a city-hall consultant, by 1934, Serdaru had helped over 7,000 veterans residing in Bucharest, in addition to thousands of ex-servicemen living in other cities, obtain land.¹⁹⁶ Dobrescu also sued a private company that had taken over soil originally meant for distribution among

¹⁹¹ IOVR Office memorandum sent to King Charles II, July 29, 1930, 25/1930, CRO3, ANIC, 7-8.

¹⁹² Constantin Hamangiu, ed., *Codul*: volumes 15-16: *Legi uzuale, 1926-1929* [Ordinary Laws, 1926-1929] (Bucharest: Edit. Libr. "Universala," Alcalay & Co.), 1244.

¹⁹³ Henry Roberts, *Romania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 156-157.

¹⁹⁴ Hamangiu, ed., *Codul*: volume 18: *Legi uzuale, 1930* [Ordinary Laws, 1930] (Bucharest: Edit. Libr. "Universala," Alcalay & Co.) 623.

¹⁹⁵ Secret police report on an UNAL gathering, August 24, 1930, D 0011294, FDB, CNSAS, 125.

¹⁹⁶ Memorandum sent by the UNAL to the parliament, likely 1934, D 0011294, FDB, CNSAS, 173; *FIDAC*, August 1934

the ex-servicemen prior to his administration.¹⁹⁷ In doing so, the mayor was acting in accordance with the UNAL's demands.¹⁹⁸

In terms of public honors, the PNTȚ involved the *luptători*'s movement in official patriotic rituals. In 1929, representatives of the UNAL, the UFVR, and the UORR¹⁹⁹ were invited to the grandiose celebrations of the decennial of Romania's national unification. Veterans played a visible role at these celebrations, parading in front of the young King Michael I.

*The High Regency and its various assistants sat in special tribunes ... the Heir Apparent stepped in to follow the parade, surrounded by a massive crowd of peasants ... The parade took place in the following order: the veterans of the 1877 War of Independence ... the former army officers of Bessarabia, the fanfares of the Banat, the delegates of the former fighters of the war of unification, the war volunteers from Transylvania, the Banat and Bukovina.*²⁰⁰

It should be noted that the National Peasants were careful not to slight militaries who openly associated with their Liberal competitors. Even General Traian Moșoiu, the president of the Romanian Legion, who was strongly connected to the PNL,²⁰¹ was summoned to this celebration.²⁰²

As shown above, initially, the PNTȚ tried to overcome the shortcomings of existing legislation on former fighters. Moreover, in the early 1930s, the party passed laws to address other grievances which had been harbored by veterans for a long time.

¹⁹⁷ Secret police report on UNAL gatherings, February 9, 1930, D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 108.

¹⁹⁸ *Casca*, April 10-30, 1923

¹⁹⁹ Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, *Programul serbărilor unirii, mai 1929* [Program for the Celebrations of the Unification, May 1929]; message sent by the city hall of Bucharest to the prime minister, May 14, 1929; message sent by the war ministry to the prime minister, May 2, 1929, 281/1929, PCM 1925-1958, 129; 43; 110-111.

²⁰⁰ *Regatul României, Monitorul Oficial* [Official Monitor], May 27, 1929

²⁰¹ Moșoiu had served as a minister in a Liberal cabinet of the 1920s. See Ion Mamina, Ioan Scurtu, *Guverne și guvernanți, 1916-1938* (Bucharest: Silex, 1996), 43.

²⁰² Message from the city hall of Bucharest to the Presidency of the council of ministers, May 14, 1929; list of active and reserve generals invited to the Alba Iulia declaration ceremony, likely 1929, 281/1929, PCM 1925-1958, ANIC, 43; 77.

Unfortunately, with the onset of the Great Depression, the Peasants decided to balance the state's budget by revoking many of the ex-combatants' established privileges. These measures were occasioned by the state's attempt to decrease expenditures to stabilize its budget.²⁰³ Essentially, beginning in the early part of the decade, governments cut down or paid war and military pensions irregularly, in addition to decreasing or altogether revoking other kinds of advantages. As a result, even though the PNT improved the conditions of some veterans, it alienated numerous other ones, causing them to flirt with the anti-liberal right to impose gratitude onto their fatherland. As shown below, the Peasants' mistakes, together with those committed by their Liberal successors, almost caused a divorce between the ex-servicemen's movement and the parliamentary parties.

Between 1930 and 1938, Romania's public life was marked by grave turbulences. In addition to an economic crisis, the nation experienced the rule of King Charles II, who, having renounced his rights to the Romanian throne, returned to his country in 1930 and took the crown from Michael I, demoting the latter to the role of the crown prince. Crucially, Charles used his newfound prerogatives to foment governmental instability to increase his personal power.²⁰⁴ Tragically, the country also witnessed the electoral rise of illiberal right-wing parties and movements, Corneliu Codreanu's Legion of the Archangel Michael – which was often referred to, by external observers, as the Iron Guard (*Garda de Fier*)²⁰⁵ - eventually becoming a fully-fledged mass movement.

The veterans' movement was, to some extent, influenced by the developments mentioned above. Importantly, in the early-to mid-1930s, sections of this movement

²⁰³ Francisco Veiga, *Istoria gărzii de fier: Mistica ultranaționalismului, 1919-1941* [A History of the Iron Guard: The Mystique of Ultrationalism, 1919-1941], trans. Marian Ștefănescu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993), 156-157.

²⁰⁴ Constantin Iordachi, "A Continuum of Dictatorships: Hybrid Totalitarian Experiments in Romania, 1937-1944," in *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, eds. António Costa Pinto, Aristotle Kallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 242.

²⁰⁵ Chelsey Parrott-Sheffer, "Iron Guard: Romanian Organization," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed April 27, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Iron-Guard>.

radicalized, for a variety of reasons. First of all, several ex-servicemen who espoused hyper-nationalist ideals began openly confronting the parliamentary order, attracted to the intolerant and authoritarian ideologies espoused by a range of parties and movements.

In some instances, these fighters' radicalization became pronounced as the result of a long-term escalating process. For instance, General Gheorghe Cantacuzino and Colonel Ștefan Zăvoianu, having long espoused extremist beliefs – Zăvoianu having gone as far as trying to establish a radical-right movement of war disabled around 1927 - joined the budding Legion of the Archangel Michael.²⁰⁶ Moreover, the Legion gradually caught the favor of a number of other chauvinist high²⁰⁷ and mid-ranking²⁰⁸ officers. It also appears Corneliu Codreanu's grouping harnessed the support of some of the war volunteers who had militated in the Romanian National Fasces in the 1920s.²⁰⁹ The Iron Guard's Manichean vision of the future national community, positing a fatherland purged of allegedly corrupting influences such as Jews and communists, undoubtedly held sway over all these intolerant individuals. The Legion's pronounced paramilitary features²¹⁰ also played a part in General Cantacuzino's conversion to it, as he had certainly been brutalized by his war experience and wished to keep on living a military-like existence. In one of his public statements, he boasted: "*Just like me and [my] border patrols were once the pride of the fatherland, I and the legionaries shall now bring glory to our nation.*"²¹¹

²⁰⁶ *Il Bollettino: Organo Mensile dell'Associazione Nazionale Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra*, March 1927; Roland Clark, "European Fascists and Local Activists: Romania's Legion of the Archangel Michael (1922-1938)" (PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2012), 251; Oliver Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu: Ascensiunea și căderea „căpitanului,”* trans. Wilhelm Tauwinkl [Corneliu Zelea Codreanu: Rise and Fall of the "Captain"] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2017), 154-160.

²⁰⁷ Rebecca Haynes, "Saving Greater Romania: The Romanian Legionary Movement and the "New Man,"" in *Sacrifice and Rebirth: The Legacy of the Last Habsburg War*, eds. Mark Cornwall, John Paul Newman (New York: Berghahn, 2016), 179.

²⁰⁸ Schmitt, *Corneliu*, 151.

²⁰⁹ Report by an emissary of the CAUR on a diplomatic visit to Romania, likely 1934, fund "Colecția Microfilme Italia" (CMI), microfilm edition, reel 61, ANIC, 137- 138; *La Volontà d'Italia*, April 1, 1934

²¹⁰ Constantin Iordachi, "God's Chosen Warriors: Romantic Palingenesis, Militarism and Fascism in Modern Romania," in *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives*, ed. Constantin Iordachi (New York: Routledge, 2010), 342-344.

²¹¹ Circular of the "All for the Fatherland" party, June 1935, I 0257486, volume 2, FDB, CNSAS, 99.

While not directly calling for the end of democracy, a small new association of volunteers, the Association of the Army Volunteers of the War of National Unification (*Asociația Voluntarilor din Armata din Războiul pentru Întregirea Neamului*; ANVR), which was founded in 1932²¹² and had 1,374 members by 1936,²¹³ became increasingly anti-Semitic, openly associating with far-right principles and personalities. In 1936, the ANVR came to be presided by journalist Ilie Rădulescu,²¹⁴ a notable fellow traveler of the anti-democratic right,²¹⁵ and banned its Jewish members from receiving military decorations.²¹⁶

Other hyper-nationalists adopted extreme behaviors as the result of more contingent factors. It should be noticed that they were outraged by the PNȚ cabinets' political course. Around 1930, the National Peasants reduced the plots of land reserved to Macedonian colonists in Southern Dobruja,²¹⁷ a measure that exposed that region to domination by local, 'anti-national' Bulgarian residents, in the eyes of the anti-parliamentary right. Additionally, under the National Peasants, the official administration in Bessarabia proved incapable of alleviating the economic hardship of the local population and contrasting the propaganda activities carried out by covert communist organizations working in this region.²¹⁸

The Peasants' course of action antagonized²¹⁹ the cultural association known as the Cult of the Fatherland (*Cultul Patriei*), which was led by Marin Ștefănescu, a war disabled and an influential organizer of cultural and patriotic societies.²²⁰ This course also marked

²¹² Founding statement of the ANVR, February 21, 1932, 5/1939, ONIOVR, ANIC, 9.

²¹³ Report on the ANVR, August 31, 1937, 24/1937, ONIOVR, ANIC, 23.

²¹⁴ Secret police report on the ANVR, December 3, 1936, D 012742, FDB, CNSAS, 151-152.

²¹⁵ Clark, "European Fascists," 291.

²¹⁶ Secret police report on an ANVR extraordinary congress, December 6, 1936, D 012742, FDB, CNSAS, 155-156.

²¹⁷ Secret police report on the Cult of the Fatherland, June 29, 1930, D 0012754, volume 1, FDB, CNSAS, 47.

²¹⁸ Alberto Basciani, *Dificila unire: Basarabia și România Mare, 1918-1940* [A Difficult Union: Bessarabia and Greater Romania, 1918-1940], trans. George Ivan, Maria Voicu (Bucharest: Cartier, 2018), 276-281.

²¹⁹ Security reports on the Cult of the Fatherland, April 14, 1930; April 15, 1930; June 29, 1930, D 0012754, volume 1, FDB, CNSAS, 17; 20; 43.

²²⁰ *Cultul Patriei* [The Cult of the Fatherland], November 27, 1933, D 011144, volume 2, FDB, CNSAS, 1.

the beginning of the radicalizing trajectory of the head of the UORR chapter in Bucharest, General Ion Anastasiu (not to be confused with the UORR's first president, General Alexe Anastasiu). Incensed at the PNT's measures, in the summer of 1930, the general participated in gatherings of the Cult of the Fatherland.²²¹ It should also be noted that this officer took part, together with Zăvoianu, in a demonstration that pressured the parliament to crown Prince Charles as Romania's new king.²²² By helping Charles ascend to the throne, Anastasiu was in all likelihood seeking to promote a political check to the PNT's power. The general's espousal of authoritarianism and intolerance would escalate in the second part of the decade when he became the president of the Military National Front (*Frontul Ostășesc Național*; FON), an anti-Semitic veterans' group, founded in 1936,²²³ which was headed by Colonel Ștefan Tătărescu,²²⁴ the leader of the Romanian National Socialist Party (*Partidul Național-Socialist din România*).²²⁵

In 1933 a public scandal erupted, which came to involve members of past PNT cabinets, including Iuliu Maniu. For some time, they were accused of having taken bribes from a Czechoslovak military contractor.²²⁶ In 1934, these accusations convinced Apostol Zamfir,²²⁷ one of the leaders of the war impaired, to establish a radical war disabled's group called the Front of the Fire Generation (*Frontul Generației de Foc*).²²⁸ To some extent, the PNT's governmental experience also antagonized Voicu Nițescu, the vice president of the

²²¹ Secret police report on the Cult of the Fatherland, June 29, 1930, D 0012754, volume 1, FDB, CNAS, 46.

²²² Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva, *Exponență a sentimentelor țării în clipa reîntoarcerii A.S. Regale Principele Carol* [Exposition of the Fatherland's Feelings at the Time of His Royal Majesty Prince Carol's Return] (Bucharest, 1931), FB 0000577, volume 5, BS, CNSAS, 6-16.

²²³ *Curentul*, January 26, 1938; Frontul Ostășesc Naționalist, *Memorandum-ul F.O.N. către națiune* [The F.O.N.'s Memorandum to the Nation] (1937), 32/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 179/1.

²²⁴ See the secret police report on the Front of the Fire Generation, likely 1938, in Folder D 011291, FDB, CNSAS, 210.

²²⁵ Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 279.

²²⁶ Mihai Chioveanu, "Afacerea Skoda" [The Skoda Affair], *Sfera Politicii* [The Sphere of Politics], 84 (2000), 16-18.

²²⁷ Secret police report on a Front of the Fire Generation gathering in Zalau, October 25, 1935, D 011291, FDB, CNSAS, 36.

²²⁸ Secret police report on the Front of the Fire Generation, April 16, 1945, D 0012994, FDB, CNSAS, 8.

UFVR. In the mid-1930s, the failure of the Peasantist regime to improve the nation's economy seems to have convinced him to distance himself from his old party and to join the recently founded Romanian Front (*Frontul Românesc*),²²⁹ an intolerant organization which was headed by another former National Peasant, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod. At the same time, as will be shown below, Nițescu's cooperation with the far right would prove to be temporary and superficial.

Additionally, the authoritarian-minded King Charles II secured the support of various reserve and retired officers, who in all likelihood were seduced by his promises to strengthen Romania in military terms.²³⁰ Notably, in 1932, following a request made by the king, the General Association of Reserve and Retired Active Officers, which was led by a long-time supporter of the king, General Ernest Baliff,²³¹ merged with a few other private bodies and changed its name to the "King Charles II" Society of Reserve and Retired Active Officers (*Societatea Ofițerilor de Rezerva și în Retrageră Proveniți din Activitate „Regele Carol II”*).²³²

On the other hand, Charles' general strategy ended up alienating the leader of the People's Party, Alexandru Averescu. Averescu, by now an army marshal, expected to be made prime minister by the king but was denied power by the latter on various occasions.²³³ Consequently, the ambitious officer became ready to tolerate alliances with the illiberal right to gain the political influence he sought. As a result, in the mid-1930s, the marshal

²²⁹ Secret police report on the Romanian Front, May 16, 1936, D 011148, volume 4, FDB, CNSAS, 11-12.

²³⁰ Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-century Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 110.

²³¹ Untitled newspaper clipping, December 13, 1928, 3/1924, UORR, ANIC, 27; Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi (1866-1947): volume 3: Carol al doilea [Charles the Second]* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 16.

²³² Statute of the "King Charles II" Society of Reserve and Retired Active Officers, likely 1932, 20/1932, volume 1, UORR, ANIC, 122.

²³³ Gheorghe Florescu, "Alexandru Averescu, omul politic (7)," *Convorbiri Literare*, November 2009, accessed May 17, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150101170659/http://convorbiri-literare.dntis.ro/FLORESCUnov9.html>; "Alexandru Averescu, omul politic (8)" [Alexandru Averescu, the Politician (8)], *Convorbiri Literare*, December 2009, accessed May 17, 2020, https://web.archive.org/web/20140319233602if_/http://convorbiri-literare.dntis.ro/FLORESCUdec9.html.

allowed some militant right-wing groups to join the electoral cartel he had recently assembled, the Constitutional Front (*Frontul Constituțional*), as asked for by his main coalition partner, Gheorghe Brătianu.²³⁴ His People's Party also developed ties to the Cult of the Fatherland.²³⁵ Even the future dictator of Romania, General Ion Antonescu, was antagonized by Charles' actions. Specifically, the king's overreliance on a corrupt inner circle of advisors pushed Antonescu to flirt with the Iron Guard.²³⁶

As seen above, in the first part of the decade, a number of war participants joined the far right out of harboring hyper-nationalist views. Nevertheless, it might be argued that, in this period, relevant segments of the ex-servicemen's movement tended to radicalize mainly due to issues related to their material wellbeing. It is evident that these issues represented the essential catalysts for the war participants' involvement with anti-democratic forces when observing the movement's general political trajectory between 1930 and 1937. On the whole, this organization continued the main trends it had espoused in the 1920s. First of all, it remained rather popular, as the associations which made up its core totaled 150,000 members in 1934.²³⁷ The UNAL remained resilient, continuing to number 50,000 members as it had done in the 1920s.²³⁸ In the last year before the advent of King Charles's illiberal regime, its gatherings were still attended by numerous members.²³⁹

Second, the leaders of the main ex-servicemen's groups cooperated to some degree among themselves to pursue common aims. For instance, beginning in 1930, the members of the "War Disabled" Society – which was undergoing a liquidation process - moved to a

²³⁴ Florescu, "Alexandru Averescu (8)."

²³⁵ Secret police report on the Cult of the Fatherland, June 14, 1935, D 011817, FDB, CNSAS, 282.

²³⁶ Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania, 1940-1944* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 38-40.

²³⁷ *FIDAC*, April 1934

²³⁸ Secret police report on the activities of the UNAL, July 5, 1937, 207/1935, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 65.

²³⁹ Secret police report on the UNAL, November 9, 1937, D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 230.

sister organization, the newly founded Society of Romanian War Mutilated and Disabled.²⁴⁰ Three years later, this new group fused with the General Association of the Disabled of Greater Romania's War.²⁴¹ In 1933, following an appeal made to them by King Charles II, various associations, including the UORR, the ANVR and the Circle of Reserve Non-Commissioned Officers, gathered under the Federation of Associations of Former Fighters and War Victims (*Federația Asociațiilor Foștilor Luptători și Victime de Războiu*; FAFLVR),²⁴² led by General Nicolae Rujinschi, who at that time acted as president of the UORR.²⁴³ After 1938, this umbrella organization would be known as the "King Ferdinand" Federation (*Federația "Regele Ferdinand"*).²⁴⁴ Moreover, by 1934 the UNAL's president, Virgil Serdaru, had been made an honorary member of the UFVR,²⁴⁵ which suggests that these two associations were cooperating.

Third, the movement kept on looking at the main parliamentary parties as its primary patrons. To give some examples, in 1934, the Romanian Legion was still firmly aligned to the Liberals, being led by another Liberal high officer in the wake of the death of General Traian Moșoiu.²⁴⁶ Moreover, a police report suggests that the FAFLVR might have supported the Liberals at the 1934 local elections.²⁴⁷ As for the PNT, it managed to preserve its connections to the ex-servicemen, despite having curbed the latter's benefits. It should be noted that, in 1932, 131 senators who had been awarded military decorations

²⁴⁰ Societatea Mutilaților-Invalizi din Război, *Statutul și regulamentul statutar al Societății Mutilaților-Invalizi din Război din România (S.M.I.R.)* [Statute and Statutory Regulation of the Society of Romanian War Mutilated and Disabled (S.M.I.R.)], 3, MR 1900-1952, CM, ANIC, 132.

²⁴¹ CIAMAC: *Bulletin de la Conférence Internationale des Associations des Mutilés de Guerre et Anciens Combattants* [CIAMAC: Bulletin of the International Conference of Associations of War Mutilated and Former Fighters], August-September 1933

²⁴² Police report on the veterans' federation, June 30, 1933; police report on the veterans' federation, March 9, 1934, 81/1932, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 3;16.

²⁴³ Report on First World War veterans' associations, October 7, 1947, folder 32/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 186.

²⁴⁴ *Luptători Voluntari: Organ de Lupta și Propaganda Națională* [Volunteer Fighters: Organ of National Struggle and Propaganda], December 1938, 65/1935, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 7.

²⁴⁵ UNAL memorandum to the parliament, likely 1934, D 0011294, CNSAS, 173.

²⁴⁶ Police report on the Romanian Legion, November 4, 1934, 17/1924, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 65.

²⁴⁷ Police report on the veterans' federation, March 31, 1934, 81/1932, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 19.

were members of this party.²⁴⁸ Additionally, the UNAL remained aligned to the National Peasants. Its president Virgil Serdaru left the party in 1935²⁴⁹ but thereafter remained closely connected with one of the Peasants' leaders, Ion Mihalache.²⁵⁰ While, at some point in the late 1930s, Serdaru joined the Legion of the Archangel Michael's ancillary organization known as the "Friends of the Legion" (*Prietenii Legiunii*),²⁵¹ which gathered the movement's anonymous donors,²⁵² his involvement with this group appears to have been rather marginal. It is likely that he became a member to appease the Legionaries, who had previously tried to intimidate him.²⁵³ Finally, the president of the SMIR, lawyer and politician Mihail Văgăonescu, was a parliamentary deputy under the Peasants' banner between 1929 and 1931.²⁵⁴ Crucially, most of the movement's core associations kept on entertaining alliances with incumbent parties.

At the same time, the movement experienced discontinuities with the previous decade. First of all, as mentioned above, the "War Disabled" Society was liquidated, apparently having ceased to exist toward the mid-1930s. Its termination was caused by a lack of adequate financial patronage on behalf of the state.²⁵⁵ Moreover, some other associations saw their followings decrease in the course of the decade as they failed to secure perks for their followers. By the late 1930s, the Romanian Legion would be virtually

²⁴⁸ Regatul României, *Senatul: Apel nominal cu starea civilă, profesiunea, domiciliul și gruparea politică (sesiunea ordinară 1932-1933)* [The Senate: Roll Call of Senators with Their Civil Status, Profession, Domicile and Political Affiliation (Ordinary Session, 1932-1933)] (Bucharest: Imprimeria Centrală, 1932), D 0010809, FDB, CNSAS, 24-34.

²⁴⁹ *Dimineața* [Morning], June 4, 1935, 207/1935, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 59.

²⁵⁰ Secret police report on the UNAL, January 22, 1940, D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 278.

²⁵¹ Memorandum sent by the UNAL president to the IOVFL General Office, likely 1940, 12/1940, ONIOVR, ANIC, 22.

²⁵² Schmitt, *Corneliu*, 201.

²⁵³ Secret police report on the Legion of the Archangel Michael, October 21, 1934, D 0011663, FDB, CNSAS, 15.

²⁵⁴ Biblioteca Județeană, "Mihail Văgăonescu," accessed July 20, 2021, <https://www.bjbacau.ro/2021/06/10/mihail-vagaonescu/>.

²⁵⁵ The Society claimed that "fatal" reductions in the state subventions it was receiving took place in 1929. See Societatea „Invalizii din Războiu,” *17 ani de activitate în folosul invalizilor noștri de războiu, 1917-1933* [17 Years of Activity in the Service of Our War Disabled, 1917-1933] (Bucharest: Tipografia „Ion C. Văcărescu,” 1933), 7.

extinct,²⁵⁶ many of its members having deserted it after it unsuccessfully pressured the state into recognizing their rights.²⁵⁷ For similar reasons,²⁵⁸ by 1940, the Circle of Reserve Non-Commissioned Officers had lost most of its members to newer representatives.²⁵⁹ Possibly due to the same factors, the Defenders of the Fatherland appear to have waned into irrelevance.

As established groups experienced failures in defending the rights of the combatants, some of the latter felt compelled to join newly founded entities, such as the SMIR. In this regard, around 1933, the “Bravery and Loyalty” Association (*Asociația “Bărbăție și Credință”*) was founded to represent the recipients of the military decoration which gave its name to this organization.²⁶⁰ In 1936 the “Glories of the Nation” Society (*Societatea „Gloriile Neamului”*), presided by Theodor Nitoi,²⁶¹ and the Association of Romanian Pensioned Non-Commissioned Officers (*Asociația Subofițerilor Pensionari din România*) were established, to represent, respectively, the claims of disabled infantrymen, corporals, and sergeants; and pensioned non-commissioned officers.²⁶² The “Great Voivode Michael” Society for Infantrymen, Corporals and Sergeants of the Campaigns of 1913-1916-1918 (*Societatea “Marele Voivod Mihai” a Veteranilor Grade Inferioare din Campaniile 1913-1916-1918*) was created in 1937 to lobby for the infantrymen, corporals, and sergeants who had served in the army between 1913 and 1920.²⁶³

²⁵⁶ Report on veterans’ associations, likely 1941, 11/1941, ONIOVR, ANIC, 35.

²⁵⁷ Report on the Romanian Legion, August 22, 1939, 144/1937, PCMSSI, ANIC, 48.

²⁵⁸ Report on the Circle of Reserve Non-Commissioned Officers, March 28, 1937, 6/1937, ONIOVR, ANIC, 14.

²⁵⁹ Report on the Circle of Reserve Non-Commissioned Officers, March 10, 1940, 10/1940, ONIOVR, ANIC, 39.

²⁶⁰ Police report on a gathering of bearers of the “Bravery and Loyalty” medal, August 10, 1933, 43/1933, DGP 1983; 1903-1936, ANIC, 26.

²⁶¹ Letter sent by General Ion Antonescu to the president of the “Glories of the Nation” Society, August 19, 1941, 63/1942, ONIOVR, ANIC, 38.

²⁶² Letter sent by the “Glories of the Nation” Society to the House for the War Disabled, Orphans and Widows, September 22, 1942, 63/1942, ONIOVR, ANIC, 2; *Asociația Generală a Subofițerilor Pensionari din România, Statut* [Statute] (Bucharest: Tipografia „Mușcanu,” 1936), 34/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 4, 20.

²⁶³ Founding statement of the “Great Voivode Michael” Society for Former Infantrymen, Corporals and Sergeants of the Campaigns of 1913-1916-1918, November 11, 1937, 8/1940, ONIOVR, ANIC, 3.

Crucially, unhappy *luptători* did not limit themselves to joining newly founded associations defending their interests. As in the 1920s, they flirted with the far right to have their claims recognized by the state. However, they did so on a larger scale than in the previous decade, as in the early-to mid-1930s governments slashed many of their benefits. Therefore, significant sectors of the fighters' movement temporarily switched to supporting anti-democratic projects promoted by several grassroots organizations. The latter were far-right veterans' groups, patriotic associations, and general political movements and parties.

The Communist Party of Romania, on the other hand, failed to capitalize on ex-servicemen's discontent. True, in the mid-to-late 1930s, this party came around to accepting Romania's post-1918 borders as a part of its policy of promoting a broad 'popular front' against fascism,²⁶⁴ thereby temporarily coming to share some ideological principles with the majority of the *luptători*. Nevertheless, the Communists made a tactical blunder by forming their own war participants' organization, the Former Fighters and War Victims' Front for Peace (*Frontul pentru Pace al Foștilor Combatanți și Victime de Război*), only at the close of the democratic era, in December 1937. Therefore, while the Front took into account the desires of the nationalist ex-servicemen – for instance, its leader Anghel Navarlie²⁶⁵ publicly emphasized the need to protect Romania's post-war borders from international aggression²⁶⁶ - it had merely a few months to court them before King Charles established his illiberal system of government. Unsurprisingly, in the course of its brief

²⁶⁴ Vladimir Tismăneanu, "Understanding National Stalinism: Romanian Communism in a Historical-Comparative Perspective," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 32, No. 2 (June 1999), 9; *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 79.

²⁶⁵ Report on First World War veterans' associations, October 7, 1947, folder 32/1935; police report on the Former Fighters and War Victims' Front for Peace, likely 1938, 145/1937, PCMSSI, ANIC, 185; 86.

²⁶⁶ *Luptătorii, Organ de Revendicări al Veteranilor din Războiul Reîntregirei, Îndrumător al Viitorilor Apărători al Țării* [Fighters: Organ for the Demands of the Veterans of the War of Unification and Guidance for the Future Defenders of the Fatherland] (Bucharest: Tipografia „Viața Literară,” 1937), fund “*Asociația Invalizilor, Văduvelor și Orfanilor de Război*,” microfilm edition, reel 467, ANIC, 821-822.

existence, the Front was reported to have gathered only a small number of members.²⁶⁷

Notwithstanding the entanglements between the authoritarian right and sectors of the old soldiers' community, between 1935 and 1937, the parliamentary order managed to improve the living conditions of many combatants struck hard by previous welfare cuts, thereby moderating many of them. Additionally, across the decade, the state consistently granted organized *luptători* their other main priorities, i.e., public honors and the role of guardians of the nation. Consequently, by the time Charles II came to proclaim his illiberal rule in 1938, the fighters' movement had remained integrated in the parliamentary order.

Several kinds of fighters suffered cuts in social care, hence turning to the far right. In doing so, they joined a plethora of different political players, which, in addition to championing exclusivist and anti-democratic visions of national renewal, promised to address the material grievances suffered by *luptători*. To begin with, the war disabled's general situation worsened noticeably in the early 1930s. Their suffering stemmed in part from long-standing inequalities in the kingdom's system of social policies dating back from the previous decade. Notably, by 1932 the PNT had not yet comprehensively improved the material conditions of disabled infantrymen, corporals, and sergeants, who still received meager pensions.²⁶⁸

Generally, the rising cost of living caused by the Great Depression²⁶⁹ undoubtedly strengthened these impaired's financial difficulties. As a result, numerous war victims felt their vital needs were not being acknowledged. As reported by the secret police, these war victims "*[were] unhappy with the financial compensations given to them, considering them too small compared to living necessities and the sacrifices which they [had made].*"²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Police report on the Former Fighters and War Victims' Front for Peace, likely 1938, 145/1937, PCMSSI, ANIC, 86.

²⁶⁸ Secret police report on the general congress of the war disabled, August 31, 1932, D 008840, volume 13, FDB, CNSAS, 221.

²⁶⁹ Agrigoroaiei, *România interbelică*, 251.

²⁷⁰ Secret police report on the war disabled, December 16, 1933, D 008840, volume 13, FDB, CNSAS, 328.

Discontent must have been rampant, especially among the disabled residing in the kingdom's new provinces, who, as seen above, at times received reduced pensions or no emoluments whatsoever. For instance, in 1930 between 70 and 80 impaired from the new principalities came to Bucharest to protest the fact that payments to them were beneath subsistence levels.²⁷¹

Most importantly, *luptători* began losing their established benefits. Beginning in 1929, Romanian governments moved to downsize the state's general financial commitments toward the citizenry.²⁷² As a part of these measures, they also reduced public spending for the war disabled. As a matter of fact, the state began reducing and paying its subventions to the war victims' associations irregularly,²⁷³ which, as mentioned above, caused the "War Disabled" Society to close down. Moreover, at times public authorities deferred paying pensions to invalids.²⁷⁴ Ultimately, major reductions of financial support for the disabled would take place at least until 1932. For instance, in that year, invalids were still soliciting the state to deliver payments in a timely manner.²⁷⁵

Other privileges which the disabled had enjoyed in the course of the 1920s were completely revoked or subjected to the risk of being withdrawn. It was proposed that the impaired should be revoked their discounts on train fares,²⁷⁶ while in the city of Iași, they were taken away public facilities accorded to them.²⁷⁷ In 1930, a large demonstration which

²⁷¹ Police report on the war disabled's demonstrations in Bucharest, March 19, 1930, 37/1930, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 5.

²⁷² Agrigoroaiei, *România interbelică*, 244-254.

²⁷³ Ion Ghiulamila, *Opera de asistență și reeducație a invalizilor din războiul al României realizată de Societatea „Invalizii din Război:” 1917-1935* [Assistance and Training Services Provided to Romanian War Disabled by the "War Disabled" Society: 1917-1935] (1936), 76-77; Societatea „Invalizii din Război,” *17 ani de activitate*, 7, 20-22.

²⁷⁴ List of grievances which were experienced by the war disabled, likely 1932, D 008840, volume 13, FDB, CNSAS, 174-175.

²⁷⁵ Secret police report on the General Association of the Disabled of Greater Romania's War, July 19, 1932, D 008840, volume 13, FDB, CNSAS, 189.

²⁷⁶ Constantin Iordachi, Blasco Sciarrino, "War Veterans, Demobilization and Political Activism: Greater Romania in Comparison," in *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, special issue, eds. Kristian Mennen, Wim van Meurs, 6, No. 1 (June 2017), 102.

²⁷⁷ Secret police report on the war disabled of Iași, August 28, 1930, D 0008840, volume 13, FDB, CNSAS, 79-80.

was staged in Bucharest by the disabled to receive pension raises and protest against the proposed revocation of their railway passes convinced the National Peasants to leave at least the latter kind of concession untouched.²⁷⁸ Nevertheless, public authorities' heavy-handed treatment of the demonstrators actually increased the rift between the disabled and the National Peasants, as the protesters were violently dispersed by the army and firefighters. One of the contesters actually died due to the injuries he had suffered at the hands of public authorities.²⁷⁹

The PNȚ's treatment of invalids led some of the latter to establish ties to the anti-liberal right. In doing so, they were in all likelihood looking for political patrons rather than sharing core values with the extremists. After all, just a month before the disabled's demonstrations in Bucharest, the SMIR had refused to take part in a public campaign against the government, waged by the nationalist cultural associations on the grounds that the National Peasants were not effectively addressing alleged communist subversion in Bessarabia.²⁸⁰ At the same time, shortly after the National Peasants had repressed the disabled who had demonstrated in Bucharest, some of the latter's delegates attended meetings of the Cult of the Fatherland, which openly denounced the Peasants for curtailing the rights of the war victims and mistreating them.²⁸¹

Additionally, it is likely that some impaired joined the Legion of the Archangel Michael to force the state to recognize their rights. As discussed earlier, Corneliu Codreanu's movement, which was interested in securing the support of the former fighters,²⁸² ended up attracting several hyper-nationalist officers and volunteers in light of

²⁷⁸ *Il Messaggero* [The Messenger], April 12, 1930, file "Rumenia, 1929-1930," box 344, ACCANMIG, "Presidenza," subseries "Corrispondenza Sezioni e Associazioni Estero," CMMIG; Iordachi, Sciarrino, "War Veterans," 102-104.

²⁷⁹ CIAMAC, April-May-June 1930

²⁸⁰ Police report on a gathering of war disabled, March 27, 1930, 37/1930, DGP 1893; 1903-936, ANIC, 6.

²⁸¹ Secret police report on Cult of the Fatherland gathering in Ploiești, April 14, 1930; secret police report on a Cult of the Fatherland gathering, June 29, 1930, D 0012754, volume 1, FDB, CNSAS, 18; 40.

²⁸² Secret police report on UNAL activities, December 3, 1937, D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 245.

its extremist worldview. Additionally, the Legion offered a program for improving veterans' lives, promising to grant them decent war pensions and smallholdings. With regard to war invalids, the Guard's lambasting of the governments for reducing state pensions²⁸³ must have sat well with some of these impaired.

To be sure, several war victims despised one of the most prominent Legionaries, Colonel Zăvoianu. In the late 1920s, the colonel had played a role in the *luptători's* movement, organizing war invalids.²⁸⁴ However, the latter eventually accused him of pretending to act in their name to carry out an administrative fraud.²⁸⁵ Nevertheless, some impaired appreciated the Legion as a whole, a feeling that was doubtless strengthened by the Legionaries' gifting of private homes to this category of veterans.²⁸⁶ When eventually the Guard would be temporarily crushed by King Charles in 1938, some invalids would bemoan its momentary disappearance, believing it had been sympathetic to their plight.²⁸⁷

The state's neglect of the disabled's rights assisted the rise of another right-wing organization, Apostol Zamfir's Front of the Fire Generation. Importantly, in his public speeches, Zamfir played on the invalids' feelings that they were being denied what they deserved.

²⁸³ Transcript of a Legionary propaganda speech, likely 1934, 117/1933, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 165.

²⁸⁴ Report sent by Colonel Ștefan Zăvoianu to the presidency of the council of ministers, April 3, 1929, 281/1929, PCM 1925-1958, ANIC, 238.

²⁸⁵ Secret police report on the general congress of the war disabled, August 31, 1932, D 008840, volume 13, FDB, CNSAS, 224.

²⁸⁶ Raul Cârstocea, "Peasants into Fascists: A Case of Political Mobilisation in Interwar Romania." Paper presented at the 42nd annual conference of the Irish Association for Russian, Central and East European Studies: "State and Non-state Actors in Eastern and Central Europe," Dublin City University, Ireland, May 9-11, 2019.

²⁸⁷ Police report on the General Office for War Disabled, Orphans, Widows and Former Fighters, April 21, 1939, 91/1939, DGP 1937-1948, ANIC, 92.

*The various governments that ruled the country certainly accomplished something; they built war monuments. But to what avail should the mutilated, widows, and orphans endure misery, and should we be left to the mercy of fate, without seeing our due rights acknowledged. They will build monuments also for us, possibly after we die. But we do not need monuments to be built after our deaths. We ask and demand that we receive what we deserve while we are still alive.*²⁸⁸

Zamfir attracted backing from the deprived disabled.²⁸⁹ His followers probably included some of the men whose disabilities had been re-evaluated by state medical commissions in 1933-1935. On the latter issue, it appears that some of the infantrymen, corporals and sergeants who were reviewed at this time – ending up classified with a 20% or 40% percentage of disability – were thereafter barred from enjoying a pension raise they had been granted in 1932.²⁹⁰ As a matter of fact, Zamfir castigated the Liberals, who had been back in power since 1933, for this measure, as for their decision to schedule additional sets of re-evaluations to take place every five years.²⁹¹ Furthermore, the Front drew support from the Transylvanian county of Arad,²⁹² thereby probably channeling the resentment of some of the invalids of the Habsburg army who received paltry or no payments. After all, despite his strong nationalism, Zamfir offered to accept even disabled ethnic Hungarians into his fold.²⁹³ Ultimately, his group was discretely popular in the middle of the decade. For instance, various meetings held by the Front in 1935 were followed by 300-600 people.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁸ Secret police report on a Front of the Fire Generation gathering in Zalău, October 25, 1935, D 011291, FDB, CNSAS, 36.

²⁸⁹ General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie's memorandum on security issues, likely 1935, 751, CRM, ANIC, 128.

²⁹⁰ *Drapelul Nostru: Organ al Apărării Nevoilor Mutilaților din Războiul și Foștilor Combatanți* [Our Flag: Organ for the Defense of the Necessities of the War Disabled and Former Fighters], May 1, 1935, 145/1937, PCMSSI, ANIC, 75.

²⁹¹ *Frontul de Foc: Tribuna Organizației „Frontul a Generației de Foc”* [Fire Front: Tribune of the Organization “Front of the Fire Generation”], June 15, 1935, 13, UORR, ANIC, 151.

²⁹² Map of the Romanian territory indicating support for extremist organizations by county, likely 1938, D 004011, FDB, CNSAS, 350.

²⁹³ Police report on the Front of the Fire Generation, February 11, 1935, 194/1935, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 3-4.

²⁹⁴ General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie's memorandum on security issues, likely 1935, folder 751, fund “*Casa Regala Miscelane*” (CRM), ANIC, 127-128.

As in the case of the disabled, pensioned officers colluded with the right to protect or increase their established privileges. Those among them who received low military pensions were on the look for political patrons who would raise their payments to cope with the rising cost of living, while those who were better off were hurt by the government's decision, in 1932, to cut down their emoluments.²⁹⁵ Many UORR members cooperated with the Cult of the Fatherland, "*hoping to satisfy in this way their personal demands.*"²⁹⁶ Notably, an association of pensioned reserve officers entered a pensioners' front established by the Cult.²⁹⁷

Probably for the same reasons, a part of the Union of Reserve and Retired Officers' membership joined Marshal Averescu's Constitutional Front,²⁹⁸ as the marshal had recently promised to increase pension levels for specific categories of officers.²⁹⁹ Remarkably, between 1933 and 1935, the Cult enjoyed the temporary cooperation of the recently elected president of the UORR, surgeon Victor Gomoiu, who probably shared with the heads of the Cult the goal of ousting the National Liberals from power, as suggested by a secret police report.

*As [beginning in 1933] a large group of pensioned or retired high officers has joined the Association, headed by ... Colonel V. Gomoiu [among others,] the meetings of the association have become increasingly turbulent, aiming to ... provoke agitations which will lead to the downfall of the government.*³⁰⁰

²⁹⁵ Hamangiu, ed., *Codul: volume 20: Legi uzuale, 1932* [Ordinary Laws, 1932] (Bucharest: Edit. Libr. „Universala,” Alcalay & Co.), 635-637.

²⁹⁶ Secret police report on the activities of the Cult of the Fatherland, February 20, 1935, D 011817, FDB, CNSAS, 278.

²⁹⁷ Secret police report on the Cult of the Fatherland, March 2, 1934, D 012754, volume 1, FDB, CNSAS, 264.

²⁹⁸ Secret police report on the Cult of the Fatherland and the Constitutional Front, June 14, 1935, D 011817, FDB, CNSAS, 284.

²⁹⁹ Partidul Poporului, *Programul partidului* [Party Program] (1933), D 011144, volume 2, FDB, CNSAS, 129.

³⁰⁰ Secret police report on the Cult of the Fatherland, likely 1935, D 011817, FDB, CNSAS, 217.

However, in working with the Cult, Gomoiu was doubtless not seeking to instate a dictatorship. He was certainly not motivated by the same fanatical nationalism as the Cult's leaders, as attested by the assistance he would later lend to Romanian Jews under King Charles' discriminatory royal regime.³⁰¹ Instead, in all likelihood, he merely aimed at ousting a government that had previously rejected his request to provide a discount on railway fares to the UORR's members.³⁰² In other words, Gomoiu essentially aimed at removing a cabinet that generally appeared uncaring towards officers' claims to benefits. Furthermore, in 1937 the Military National Front, headed by Ștefan Tătărescu (brother of Prime Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu), attempted to attract the support of retired officers by promising to improve their pensions.³⁰³

Finally, shortcomings in land grants prompted some old soldiers, who had become exasperated with not being allotted holdings, to look to grassroots illiberal forces or King Charles as potential sponsors. The Legion of the Archangel Michael, which promised to provide parcels to all peasants,³⁰⁴ pledged it would satisfy the needs of *luptători* residing in cities and towns. The Iron Guard created a following within the UNAL by making the latter promises. At a meeting of the Union focusing on the issue of land for city-dwelling fighters, a captain claimed that only the Legion would provide the fighters of 1916-1919 with the rewards they sought.³⁰⁵ By 1937, according to a police report, a part of the UNAL's membership was pursuing "*a right-wing political course,*"³⁰⁶ which suggests it had been won to the Legion. Additionally, it appears that various war volunteers began seeing the king as their primary political referent. While volunteers had seen their right to arable land

³⁰¹ *Buna Vestire* [Good News], September 21, 1940, P 013349, volume 2, FDB, CNSAS, 7.

³⁰² Victor Gomoiu, *Viața mea (memorii)* [My Life (Memoirs)]: volume 3 (Craiova: Editura Sitech, 2006), 275-276.

³⁰³ Frontul Ostășesc Naționalist, *Memorandum-ul F.O.N.*, 32/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 179/4.

³⁰⁴ Roberts, *România*, 236.

³⁰⁵ Secret police report on a UNAL gathering, November 22, 1937, D 0011294, FDB, CNSAS, 234.

³⁰⁶ Secret police report on UNAL activities, November 30, 1937, D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 242.

reconfirmed by a law that was passed in 1930, it appears this provision was not extensively implemented. In 1934 the UFVR protested that not all members had yet benefitted from this law.³⁰⁷ Consequently, several volunteers asked King Charles to grant them the plots they felt entitled to, pleading him to turn the land redistribution procedures in their favor.³⁰⁸ They stated they were placing their hopes in the king due to their disappointment with the main parties.³⁰⁹

Radical organizations which attracted ex-servicemen attempted to involve the latter in their subversive activities, sometimes successfully. The leaders of the Cult of the Fatherland and Apostol Zamfir stated the necessity to rid the country of the major parties' influence. They claimed they would improve Romanian politics while also making the state more receptive to the returnees' needs by doing this. For instance, the Cult depicted the *luptători* as living under the tyranny of an ungrateful and self-serving elite, which ignored their necessities.

*And now, almost 20 years since [the war], those among us who were not lucky enough to fall on the battlefield ... must behold the heart-breaking sight of this humiliated and disparaged nation, which was swamped with foreigners, shirkers, and deserters, who even managed to seize leading positions in the Fatherland, positions from which they taint our national pride and mock us in our poverty by flaunting the millions which they stole.*³¹⁰

As for Zamfir, in the course of a public meeting, he depicted the Front's program in the following terms: “[F]irst of all, [to be] a front in support of the king, to help him rid himself of the politicians, then [to help] the nation return to constitutional rule, so that it might do away with those who exploit it and so that the claims of the fire generation might

³⁰⁷ Untitled newspaper cutting, November 25, 1934, 26/1934, UORR, ANIC, 170.

³⁰⁸ Secret police report on a UFVR gathering, May 14, 1934, D 012742, FDB, CNSAS, 133.

³⁰⁹ Secret police report on the activities of the war volunteers of Dej, February 20, 1935, D 012742, FDB, CNSAS, 128.

³¹⁰ Cult of the Fatherland propaganda text, November 18, 1935, D 011817, FDB, CNSAS, 13.

be satisfied, for the purpose of purifying public life."³¹¹

Additionally, the Cult undertook intimidating public demonstrations³¹² while planning to offer paramilitary training to reserve officers, to be deployed if the latter demonstrated.³¹³ Similarly, the Front of the Fire Generation adopted coercive tactics, attempting to prevent the National Union of Former Fighters from holding its congress,³¹⁴ this union being an extension of the corrupt political system in the eyes of Zamfir's followers.³¹⁵

As previously mentioned, the parliamentary order eventually managed to preserve its ties to the ex-servicemen's movement while at the same time preventing the latter from developing extensive ties to the right. How did it accomplish this? Essentially, through the decade, the main parliamentary parties took various steps to reinstate the old soldiers' established benefits and addressed some of the problems that had beset the war participants since the 1920s.

To be sure, the state also used coercion to keep *luptători* in line. For instance, governments weakened the Cult of the Fatherland by temporarily banning it, interrupting some of its meetings, and arresting some of its more prominent members.³¹⁶ In 1934, the government, allegedly fearing that Victor Gomoiu was aiming to instate a militarist dictatorship, had him detained for three weeks.³¹⁷ Moreover, some of the candidates of the Front of the Fire Generation for the 1937 general elections were arrested. The Front, undoubtedly also due to these measures, garnered only 6,000 votes.³¹⁸ In addition to

³¹¹ *Universul* [The Universe], May 3, 1935, D 011291, FDB, CNSAS, 19.

³¹² Secret police report on the Cult of the Fatherland, likely 1934, D 012754, volume 2, FDB, CNSAS, 70.

³¹³ Secret police report on the activities of the Cult of the Fatherland, February 20, 1934, D 011144, volume 2, FDB, CNSAS, 340.

³¹⁴ Secret police report on the activities of the Front of the Fire Generation, October 24, 1935, D 011291, FDB, CNSAS, 34.

³¹⁵ Secret police report on the Front of the Fire Generation, March 13, 1936, D 011291, FDB, CNSAS, 64.

³¹⁶ Decree of the justice ministry, April 5, 1932, D 012754, volume 1, FDB, CNSAS, 115-116; secret police report on the activities of the Cult of the Fatherland, November 20, 1935, D 011817, FDB, CNSAS, 34-35.

³¹⁷ Gomoiu, *Viața mea*: volume 3, 269-339.

³¹⁸ Secret police report on the Front of the Fire Generation, January 5, 1938, D 011291, FDB, CNSAS, 211.

marginalizing these groups, the state began containing the mass radical movements. To some extent, Codreanu's movement was prosecuted by public authorities, as it was temporarily outlawed in 1931 and 1933.³¹⁹

Finally, public authorities resorted to extensively monitoring the fighters of 1916-1919. The National Office for the War Disabled, Orphans, and Widows took over the assets of the various disabled's associations in 1934.³²⁰ Additionally, in 1937, it was tasked with supervising all the ex-combatants' groups, formally changing its name to the General Office for the War Disabled, Orphans, Widows, and Former Fighters (*Eforia Generală al Invalizilor, Orfanilor, Văduvelor de Război și Foștilor Luptătorilor - IOVFL General Office*).³²¹

Ultimately, however, it was mainly by tackling returnees' material grievances in the mid-to-late 1930s that the parliamentary order held onto the fighters' associations. The old soldiers' material conditions were improved even before the middle of the decade. In 1931, the state confirmed the right for reserve officers from Bessarabia, who were currently enrolled in the Romanian army, to receive military pensions equal to those of their counterparts of the Old Kingdom.³²² In 1933, war volunteers from the kingdom's new principalities, who had been disabled in the course of the conflict, were finally granted war pensions. After the same year, disabled officers from the Habsburg army who were Romanian citizens were also entitled to these emoluments.³²³ Additionally, the kingdom gradually reconfirmed established privileges by restoring war pensions and social

³¹⁹ Scurtu, *Viața politică*, 122, 149.

³²⁰ Silviu Hariton, "Asumarea politicilor sociale de către stat în România. Cazul invalizilor, orfanilor și văduvelor de război (IOVR) după primul război mondial," *Archiva Moldaviae*, supplement 1, eds. Constantin Iordachi, Alin Ciupală (2014), 137.

³²¹ Hamangiu, ed., *Codul*: volume 25, part 1: *Legi uzuale, 1937* [Ordinary Laws, 1937] (Bucharest: Imprimeria Centrala, 1938), 245-246.

³²² Hamangiu, ed., *Codul*: volume 19: *Legi uzuale, 1931* [Ordinary Laws, 1931] (Bucharest: Edit. Libr. "Universala," Alcalay & Co.), 463.

³²³ Hamangiu, ed., *Codul*: volume 21: *Legi uzuale, 1933* [Ordinary Laws, 1933] (Bucharest: Imprimeria Centrala, 1934), 577-579, 639.

assistance.

Toward the middle of the decade, public finances recovered. Hence the state reverted to honoring its financial obligations toward its citizens.³²⁴ First of all, governments moved toward restoring emoluments and reconfirming assistance to the disabled, although the former process remained incomplete.³²⁵ It is also likely that, as the state's financial conditions improved, it raised its subventions to the invalids' associations. Furthermore, in 1934 public institutions improved infrastructure for catering to the necessities of the war impaired, setting up county chapters of the National office for the war Disabled, Orphans, and Widows.³²⁶ 70 such chapters existed by 1937.³²⁷

As a part of their efforts to address the grievances of the invalids, governments finally addressed an issue that had beset the latter, in major ways, since the previous decade. As previously mentioned, in 1932, the parliament passed a law that increased pension levels for impaired infantrymen, corporals, and sergeants. For instance, urban-based former infantrymen with a formal 100% disability and a family of four children were granted 4,875 *Lei* per installment,³²⁸ while, up to that point, the highest general pension payment had amounted to 2,317 *Lei*.³²⁹ This provision also broadened the range of invalids who were entitled to pensions, who thereafter included those who had been classified with 20-40% disability quotients. To be sure, in 1935, as mentioned above, the Liberals took away these raises from various disabled whom they had subjected to new medical evaluations, in addition to procrastinating the provision's implementation. Nevertheless, it seems that

³²⁴ Matthieu Boisdrion, *La Roumanie des années trente: De l'avènement de Carol II au démembrement du royaume, 1930-1940* [1930s Romania: From the Crowning of Charles the Second to the Partitioning of the Kingdom, 1930-1940] (Parçay-sur-Vienne: Anovi, 2007), 101.

³²⁵ In 1933, the state returned to paying pensions on time. At the same time, delays in payments were still being reported in 1937. See *Drapelul Nostru*, July 10, 1937, 12/1933, PCMSSI, ANIC, 5; letter sent by the police chief of Huși to a regional police inspector, December 9, 1933, D 0008840, volume 13, CNSAS, 320.

³²⁶ Silviu Hariton, "Asumarea," 137.

³²⁷ Text of law project, February 19, 1937, 2750, *Parlament*, ANIC, 287.

³²⁸ *Drapelul Nostru*, May 1, 1935, 145/1937, PCMSSI, ANIC, 75.

³²⁹ *CIAMAC*, April – May - June 1931

governments eventually enforced this law to a noticeable extent. In 1936, according to a police informant, Prime Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu had “*begun paying the pensions of a number of disabled sergeants, corporals, and infantrymen according to the law.*”³³⁰

In the latter part of the decade, the state kept on tackling long-standing and more recent problems which beset war victims to a relevant degree. Beginning in 1936, public and private companies and businesses were compelled to employ mandatory quotas of war disabled.³³¹ By 1937, 550 disabled had found employment through this binding quota. In 1936-1937, the state also created a credit fund to support the war invalids.³³² Furthermore, in 1937 the parliament increased pension rates for officers who had received their disability evaluation between 1921 and 1923.³³³ This measure probably benefitted many officers who were discharged after 1921, thereafter receiving, as seen above, lower pensions than the cohorts which had been demobilized before this year.

The state also acted to improve the living standards of pensioned officers, raising military pensions in 1936.³³⁴ It also appears that governments enhanced land redistribution procedures to some degree. In 1933 the ministry of agriculture offered land to war volunteers and ex-servicemen decorated with the “Military Virtue” award.³³⁵ Thanks to the work of the UFVR vice president Nițescu, who held the post of minister of agriculture in 1932-1933,³³⁶ by 1940, 350 volunteers would benefit from these measures.³³⁷ By 1936, 124 recipients of the Military Virtue medal living in Bucharest had also received plots.³³⁸ In 1936, a law assigned former fighters preferential access to plots of land in the kingdom’s

³³⁰ Secret police report on the Front of the Fire Generation, March 13, 1936, D 011291, FDB, CNSAS, 64.

³³¹ Hamangiu, ed., *Codul*: volume 24, part 1: *Legi uzuale, 1936* [Ordinary Laws, 1936] (Bucharest: Imprimeria Centrala, 1937), 584.

³³² Text of law project, February 19, 1937, 2750, *Parlament*, ANIC, 287.

³³³ Untitled newspaper cutting, March 28, 1937, D 0008840, volume 13, FDB, CNSAS, 579.

³³⁴ Hamangiu, ed., *Codul*, volume 24, part 1, 713.

³³⁵ Secret police report on a gathering of the war volunteers, March 29, 1933, D 0012742, FDB, CNSAS, 85.

³³⁶ Mamina, Scurtu, *Guverne*, 91-97.

³³⁷ Report on First World War veterans’ associations, February 3, 1940, P 0050745, FDB, CNSAS, 18.

³³⁸ Report on the activities of the administrative council of the “Military Virtue” Association, March 21, 1937, 5/1930, ONIOVR, ANIC, 16.

frontier regions.³³⁹ Other kinds of benefits were granted to ex-servicemen in these years. In the early 1930s, pensioned officers were afforded 75% discounts on train fares.³⁴⁰ In 1936, the recipients of the military orders “Crown of Romania” (*Coroana României*), “Star of Romania” (*Steaua României*), and “Military Virtue” were awarded some yearly free train passes.³⁴¹ This concession satisfied the principal demand voiced by the “Military Virtue” Association, thereby prompting most of the latter’s members to stop actively militating within it.³⁴² On the other hand, combatants awarded with the Bravery and Loyalty medal were only partially satisfied in their claims to benefits. In 1934 they had received free journeys, yet this privilege was revoked two years later. Nevertheless, most of the bearers of this decoration were able to keep on enjoying reductions on their train fares, provided they worked as state functionaries or had been impaired in the Great War.³⁴³

Another positive development was that the parliamentary order kept on co-opting the servicemen’s associations. Specifically, it asked these organizations to contribute to the development of social policies for ex-servicemen, even promoting some of these groups’ initiatives to ameliorate the living conditions of their affiliates. First of all, the “King Charles II” Society of Reserve and Retired Active Officers was behind the state’s decision to grant pensioned officers a 75% discount on train fares.³⁴⁴ Additionally, the 1932 law on war pensions was initially proposed to the parliament by Apostol Zamfir – who at this time was yet to become an extremist - and the president of the SMIR, Mihail Văgăonescu. Zamfir and Văgăonescu also successfully lobbied deputies to accord pensions to Transylvanian, Bukovinian, and Banatean war volunteers who had been impaired. Public

³³⁹ Hamangiu, ed., *Codul*: volume 24, part 1, 533.

³⁴⁰ Untitled newspaper cutting, likely 1933, 22/1933, UORR, ANIC, 363.

³⁴¹ Letter sent by the president of the UORR to the minister of communications and public works, December 12, 1936, 27/2934-1948, UORR, ANIC, 65-66; Hamangiu, ed., *Codul*: volume 24, part 1, 753-754.

³⁴² Report on the “Military Virtue” Association, November 29, 1939, 10/1939, ONIOVR, ANIC, 2.

³⁴³ Memorandum sent by the “Bravery and Loyalty” Association to the IOVFL General Office’s verification and control commission, likely 1940, 19/1937, ONIOVR, ANIC, 19.

³⁴⁴ Untitled newspaper cutting, likely 1933, 22/1933, UORR, ANIC, 363.

institutions also helped ex-servicemen's associations, in some instances, with regard to the latter's appeals to help them with specific issues besetting their adherents. Notably, in 1932 the SMIR engaged 622 times with these authorities to improve the wellbeing of its members, receiving support for most of its requests.³⁴⁵

Finally, it should also be noted that, through the 1930s, powerholders kept on granting significant symbolic honors to returnees, in addition to confirming the latter's official role as custodians of the fatherland. First of all, the war participants were allowed to keep contributing to the state's nation-building project, as the kingdom involved them in official war commemorations. For instance, they were regularly invited to take part in the official celebrations which took place on Heroes Day.³⁴⁶ In 1938, a delegation of the Heroes Cult was invited to the inauguration of the largest war memorial built in Romania between the two global conflicts, the Mărășești Mausoleum.³⁴⁷ Ex-combatants were also tasked with other educational tasks beyond disseminating patriotic values. Beginning in 1935, reserve officers were allowed to work as instructors for the pre-military training of the Romanian youth.³⁴⁸

In the course of the decade, the kingdom also kept supporting the war participants' public diplomacy activities. In the 1930s, ex-servicemen's associations continued cooperating with the FIDAC, 11 of them being enrolled in the Federation by 1939.³⁴⁹ In working with this organization, associated *luptători* focused on protecting their nation's borders, a task which they performed by preserving ties of solidarity to countries allied to Romania. Notably, the diplomat Victor Cădere worked as the Federation's president

³⁴⁵ Report on the activities of SMIR, likely 1934; report on the activities of SMIR, likely 1935, 6/1935, ONIOVR, ANIC, 65; 70.

³⁴⁶ Societatea „Cultul Eroilor,” Comitetul Central București, *Invitațiune și programul comemorării eroilor în ziua înălțării domnului* [Invitation to and Program of the Commemoration of Heroes on the Lord's Ascension Day] (Bucharest: Tipografia „România Noua,” 1934), 282/1935, 1925-1958, ANIC, 157.

³⁴⁷ Bucur, *Heroes and Victims*, 99.

³⁴⁸ Hamangiu, ed., *Codul: volume 23: Legi uzuale, 1935* [Ordinary Laws, 1935] (Bucharest: Imprimeria Centrala, 1936), 54.

³⁴⁹ FIDAC, November 1939

between 1933 and 1934.³⁵⁰ As mentioned above, in 1936, Italian Fascist veterans promoted the creation of a parallel transnational combatants' forum, the Permanent International Committee, which purportedly aimed at reconciling victors and vanquished of the First World War. Actually, the Fascists and their German collaborators sought to covertly use the CIP to legitimize the expansionist pursuits of Mussolini and Hitler.³⁵¹

Notwithstanding the Committee's real intentions, some of the Romanian FIDAC activists established a representative committee to it³⁵² in the misguided hope that they might help dissuade defeated nations from revising the Peace Treaties. It should be noted that Romanian institutions financially supported the work undertaken by these activists at the Federation and the Committee. Representatives or the *luptători* were granted subventions for their trips to FIDAC and CIP congresses and for hosting former foreign militaries who visited Romania.³⁵³ The Romanian wing of the federation of the war volunteers from the Little Entente also received official support, enjoying the participation of various public authorities at the congress it organized in 1933.³⁵⁴

It should also be pointed out that, at least since 1929, the official representatives of the war impaired had entered a fourth transnational forum, the International Conference of the Associations of War Disabled and Former Fighters.³⁵⁵ Notably, the president of the SMIR, Mihail Văgăonescu, worked as one of the Conference's vice presidents.³⁵⁶ In joining the CIAMAC, these activists aimed at finding lobbying partners to pressure Romanian

³⁵⁰ Ioana Cazacu, "Victor Cădere: Diplomat (1919-1944)" (PhD Dissertation, „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, 2012), 29-40.

³⁵¹ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 253-257, 267.

³⁵² FIDAC, June 1939

³⁵³ List of subsidies accorded by Romanian state ministries to the national delegation to the FIDAC congress of 1930, likely 1930, CM, AA-2945, BAR; report on the activities undertaken by the FIDAC's Romanian wing in 1932-1933, likely from 1933, 23, UORR, ANIC, 58; letter sent by the president of the UNAL, February 5, 1937, 62, MPN3, ANIC, 218.

³⁵⁴ *Gazeta Ilustrată* [The Illustrated Gazette], August 1933

³⁵⁵ CIAMAC, August-September 1929

³⁵⁶ Report on SMIR participation at the 1934 CIAMAC congress at Geneva, October 3, 1934, 152/1934, CRO3, ANIC, 76.

governments into improving benefits for their followers.³⁵⁷ Additionally, like their counterparts who militated in the FIDAC, they wished to preserve Romania's borders through their public diplomacy. Specifically, they attempted to stop the Confederation – which, like the CIP, gathered discharges from victor and defeated countries alike³⁵⁸ – from adopting public positions which might have legitimized a revision of the Peace Treaties. Romanian governments, accordingly, supported *luptători*'s efforts at the CIAMAC. For instance, when, in 1935, these activists organized a congress of the Confederation in Bucharest, local public authorities took part in this event, lending their prestige to it.³⁵⁹

Ultimately, until its demise in 1938, the parliamentary regime managed to preserve, for the most part, the associated veterans' special place within Romanian society. Consequently, the majority of the ex-servicemen's movement's members did not feel compelled to support the far right in the long run. The ex-combatants' general toleration of the main parliamentary parties is especially evident when considering the former's lack of extensive ties to right-wing extremist organizations in the mid-to-late 1930s. First of all, in 1935, the Union of Reserve and Retired Officers ceased to actively cooperate with the Cult of the Fatherland, as implied by a secret police report. This account indicates that, at the end of this year, a collaborator of the Cult attempted to persuade the UORR and its president to return to working with Ștefănescu's group: "*Professor Gerota will contact ... Doctor Gomoiu, to convince him to involve once again the U.O.R. [sic], in the movement for national moral regeneration.*"³⁶⁰ However, it appears the UORR's separation from the Cult was definitive, this split probably being occasioned by the Liberals' decision to eventually

³⁵⁷ Secret police report on a meeting of the central committee of the General Association of Disabled from Greater Romania's War, July 19, 1932, D 008840, volume 13, FDB, CNSAS, 189; secret police report on a war disabled's congress, August 31, 1932, D 008840, volume 13, FDB, CNSAS, 222.

³⁵⁸ Jay Winter, Antoine Prost, *René Cassin and Human Rights: From the Great War to the Universal Declaration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 59.

³⁵⁹ Report on the Romanian delegation's activities at the CIAMAC congress of 1931; *Krigs-Invaliden* [War Disabled], June 1, 1935, 27, CCI, ADMAE

³⁶⁰ Secret police report on the activities of the Constitutional Front, November 26, 1935, D 011144, volume 4, FDB, CNSAS, 298.

raise military pensions, as wished for by the Union's adherents. As for Averescu's Constitutional Front, it suffered a severe electoral defeat in 1937,³⁶¹ which suggests that, just as in the case of the Cult, pensioned officers generally no longer believed it was necessary to enforce their claims through radical movements and parties.

By that year, other militant *luptători*'s groups had lost their support among the ex-servicemen or had never secured one, to begin with. At the time, the Front of the Fire Generation was left with only 301 members.³⁶² The UORR, by the mouth of Gomoiu, resisted the Military National Front's attempts to receive an official endorsement from it.³⁶³ As a result, by early 1938, the FON had managed to rally only the limited number of 850 officers to its cause.³⁶⁴ It appears that even more prominent right-wing groups failed to infiltrate the ex-servicemen's associations extensively. Before the elections of 1937, several of the latter organizations rejected offers to merge with the radical bodies courting them, such as the Front of the Fire Generation, the Romanian Front, and the Military National Front.³⁶⁵ Around the same time, the UORR openly distanced itself from the latter two fronts.³⁶⁶

Even the Legion of the Archangel Michael appears to have attracted only a small number of old soldiers. Crucially, the bulk of the Legion's following was made up chiefly of other kinds of social constituencies.³⁶⁷ The Guard attracted few former combatants even at the leadership level. In 1936, among Codreanu's 120 closest followers, there were only

³⁶¹ François Duprat, "Naissance, développement et échec d'un fascisme roumain" [Birth, Development and Failure of a Romanian Fascism], in *Études sur le Fascisme* [Fascism Studies], eds. Maurice Bardeche et al. (Paris : Les Sept Couleurs, 1974), 123.

³⁶² Gendarmerie report on radical organizations in Romania, likely from 1938, D 004011, FDB, CNSAS, 113.

³⁶³ *Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva: Buletin* [Bulletin], September-October 1937

³⁶⁴ Police informative summary, January 30, 1938, folder 15/1938, fund "Casa Regala - Diverse," ANIC, 2.

³⁶⁵ Secret police report on the Front of a Fire Generation gathering in Bucharest, March 15, 1937, D 011291, FDB, CNSAS, 117.

³⁶⁶ *Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva: Buletin*, January-February 1938

³⁶⁷ Clark, "European Fascists," 78; Heinen, *Legiunea*, 374-375; Traian Sandu, *Un fascisme roumain: Histoire de la garde de fier* [A Romanian Fascism: History of the Iron Guard] (Paris: Perrin, 2014), 305-306; Oliver Schmitt, "Approaching the Social History of Fascism: The Legionaries of Vâlcea County in the Interwar Period," *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, 3 (October 2014), 138-139.

two reserve officers, including Colonel Zăvoianu.³⁶⁸ As a matter of fact, a Legionary organizer remarked that: “*many of those who accomplished something in the war of unification, instead of becoming the natural leaders of the national cause, have today betrayed this cause.*”³⁶⁹ Moreover, the Legion failed to penetrate the ex-servicemen’s associations to any great degree. To be sure, as mentioned above, it made some converts within the UNAL. Nevertheless, by 1937 members of the main fighters’ collectives were not unhappy at their predicament to the point of flocking to the Legion. As a matter of fact, the UNAL, the UFVR, and the war victims’ groups formed their own political party to compete at the 1937 general elections, the Party of National Unity (*Partidul Unității Naționale*),³⁷⁰ which espoused a moderate program.³⁷¹ Importantly, Dumitru Radu, a Legion sympathizer who had been the secretary of the Union of Former War Volunteers in the early part of the decade, by 1937 was only acting as the head of the Union’s chapter in Bucharest,³⁷² which suggests that by that time the Legion was losing the measure of support it had gathered within the UFVR.

Finally, it appears King Charles II was also unsuccessful into steering many *luptători* in an anti-parliamentary direction. Thanks to the king, a cabinet with noticeable authoritarian features ruled between 1931 and 1932,³⁷³ but the fighters’ associations do not appear to have endorsed this government to any substantial degree. Additionally, Charles seemingly lacked a strong following among organized war participants. Notably, despite being asked to do so by him, the UORR ultimately elected not to merge with the “King

³⁶⁸ Secret police report on the Legion of the Archangel Michael, August 6, 1936, I 0257486, volume 2, FDB, CNSAS, 150.

³⁶⁹ Sandu, *Un fascisme*, 205.

³⁷⁰ Secret police report on the activities of former fighters, November 30, 1937, D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 235.

³⁷¹ Partidul Unității Naționale, *Programul* [Program], D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 206-210.

³⁷² Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the IOVFL General Office’s verification and control commission, June 4, 1937, 34/1937, ONIOVR, ANIC, 17.

³⁷³ Kühner-Wielach, “The Transylvanian Promise,” 589-590.

Charles II” Society of Reserve and Retired Active Officers.³⁷⁴

Ultimately, before the monarch established his regime, veterans remained connected chiefly to the democratic parties and kept on entertaining alliances with governmental cabinets. To be sure, the ex-servicemen were still beset by some grievances related to material issues by the time Charles seized power for himself. Essentially, war disabled and volunteers saw their claims only partially addressed by public institutions. Furthermore, segments of the *luptători*’s community had been seduced by grassroots illiberal entities or by the crown. Importantly, this radicalizing pattern carried on until the final months of democratic rule, as, in late 1937, the radical-right National Christian Party (*Partidul Național Creștin*; PNC) secured the endorsement of some army officers who were being retired against their wishes.³⁷⁵

However, in general terms, the parliamentary parties did enough for the *luptători*’s movement to prevent the latter from generally turning rightwards. Remarkably, as anti-democratic politicians ceased to further their reach within this movement, organized ex-servicemen did not play a significant role in the fall of Romanian democracy. To be clear, many of the movement’s activists were no longer as actively supportive of parliamentary politics as they had been in the 1920s. By 1937, various among them still believed the state had to improve its veterans’ policies considerably, harboring some degree of resentment towards democratic power-bearers for their past neglect of their sense of merit.

Nevertheless, it might be claimed that, shortly before the advent of the royalist system of government, the majority of the adherents to the *luptători* movement still tolerated the moderate and reformist parties. First of all, as mentioned above, while segments of the movement had turned to seditious politics in the early-to-mid-1930s, it

³⁷⁴ As suggested by an order of business circulated by the Mehedinți chapter of the UORR, March 10, 1932, 20/1932, volume 2, UORR, ANIC, 110.

³⁷⁵ Dana Beldiman, Corneliu Beldiman, “Dreapta românească. Elemente de organizare militară, 1,” *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, 26-27, No. 1-2 (2000), 37.

appears a significant part of this movement had continued to endorse its usual referents. Second, it is likely that as a result of collective authorities' relative improvement in handling veterans' affairs, several of the *luptători* who had switched to the subversive right once again shifted in their leanings, leaving the militant groups they had joined. They possibly moved into a state of political passivity, acquiescing to the status quo (in a begrudging way, to be sure), or eventually returned to supporting their traditional sponsors. For instance, UORR President Gomoiu, notwithstanding his temporary cooperation with the Cult of the Fatherland, appears to have sided with the Liberals in the long run, as would be suggested, at the time of the Romanian communist dictatorship, by the secret services.³⁷⁶

2.2.2 The Attitudes of Veterans' Associations Towards Foreign Authoritarian Trends

As in the 1920s, the Italian combatants' movement's political strategy and the veterans' policies promoted by Mussolini's regime played an important part in the political radicalization of Romanian ex-servicemen who embraced the far right. Specifically, said strategy and provisions inspired various war participants to collude with radical nationalism to seize power, to force the Romanian state to satisfy their requests. The present subchapter points out two impactful political dynamics by analyzing this transnational entanglement. First, it shows that Romanian war participants tended to take up extremist stances due to believing that their sense of entitlement was being ignored by the establishment. Second, it underscores that, on the whole, the Romanian ex-servicemen's movement felt satisfied with the concessions it was made by the ruling parties.

³⁷⁶ Report on Victor Gomoiu authored by the communist state security organization, May 19, 1951, P 013349, volume 2, FDB, CNSAS, 27.

In the early-to-mid-1930s, Italian Fascism acted as a relevant source of inspiration for illiberal movements and parties in Romania, including Codreanu's Legion of the Archangel Michael. Not only did these movements study Mussolini's regime, but they even developed significant - albeit fluctuating - connections to emissaries of the latter. Notably, the president of the Italian National Association of War Volunteers, Eugenio Coselschi, visited Bucharest in 1933 and set up in 1936 a Romanian branch of the fascist international organization he presided over, the Action Committees for the Universality of Rome.³⁷⁷ In these years, for their part, Romanian war volunteers helped spread in Italy details about their country's own variant of fascism. A former member of the Romanian Legion of Italy and university professor in Rome, Claudiu Isopescu, helped popularize, among Italian audiences, knowledge of the Iron Guard's features.³⁷⁸

As in the 1920s, two kinds of Romanian radical former soldiers were galvanized by the example provided to them by Fascist Italy. In general terms, they were either ex-combatants motivated by hyper-nationalist beliefs or former fighters who felt slighted by the status quo with regard to their sense of deserving. Both kinds of radicals believed that in Italy, before the rise of Fascism, ex-servicemen had faced public indifference toward their political claims. This state of affairs, Romanians thought, had changed only once fighters of 1915-1918 had banded with the Fighting Fasces to seize control of the Italian state, a goal which had been accomplished through the March on Rome. Thereafter, thanks to the major role they had played in the Fascist seizure of power, such flankers had enjoyed a central role in Mussolini's regime, which had led to their needs and aspirations being

³⁷⁷ Cuzzi, *L'Internazionale delle camicie nere*, 100-102; 252-256; Francesco Guida, "La droite radicale roumaine et l'Italie dans les années 1930" [The Romanian Radical Right and Italy in the 1930s], in *La périphérie du fascisme: Spécification d'un modèle fasciste au sein de sociétés agraires: Le cas de l'Europe centrale entre les deux guerres* [The Periphery of Fascism: Defining a Fascist Model within Agrarian Societies : The Case of Central Europe between the Two World Wars], eds. Catherine Horel et al. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), 88-89; Traian Sandu, "Droite française, fascisme italien: Influences croisées sur la Garde de Fer" [French Right, Italian Fascism: Intertwining Influences over the Iron Guard], *Analele Universității București* [Annals of the University of Bucharest] (2004), 67-71.

³⁷⁸ *La Volontà d'Italia*, September 15, 1940; September 1, 1943

acknowledged by the latter.

Numerous Romanian ex-soldiers, whether of a hyper-nationalist or status-oriented bent, were inspired by the transnational political myth of the Italian old soldiers' armed insurrection. In believing in this myth, they took the Italian former fighters' alleged general strategy as a model and strove to adapt the latter to their own political context. To begin with, hyper-nationalists hoped to put it in the service of purging their country of purported internal enemies. In 1931, Colonel Ștefan Tătărescu, who would lead the Military National Front later in the decade, began implicitly stating that Romania needed to be guided by ex-enlistees, as was already the case in Mussolini's Italy. According to Tătărescu, Italian and Romanian men with combat experience possessed, as a consequence of having endured trials by fire in wartime, unique virtues which made them ideal patriots and statesmen.

*Writing these lines, I am reminded of the crucial role that the shared experience of bloodshed on the battlefield played in the unifying process of all [national] peoples ... [As said by Mussolini:] "The modern Italian state, which we admire today, which has evolved in the direction of a unitary and solidary notion, would not have been possible if the whole Italian people had not sacrificed itself for the Italian idea." We should pay considerable attention to these reflections, which come from the builder of the new Italy ... since the war, Romania has lived not only politically, but also spiritually, a new era, which was forged through fire and blood. Through the horrors, all the blunders and the fruitful heroic sacrifices, we were given the opportunity to see the admirable moral and spiritual qualities which adorn our generous and idealistic spirit.*³⁷⁹

Eventually, the officer imbued the FON with such assumptions. Specifically, the Front aimed at gathering discontented ex-servicemen under its aegis, whom it planned to pit against the parliamentary order. According to the Front's rhetoric, returnees were meant to take the place of purportedly corrupt traditional politicians.³⁸⁰ Bearing this in mind, it is clear that the Front was trying to emulate the Italian war participants' seizure of power,

³⁷⁹ Ștefan Tătărescu, *Crez nou (ideia național-socialistă)* [New Creed (The National-Socialist Idea)] (Bucharest: Tipografia Capitaliei, 1932), 3-32, D 013646, volume 2, CNSAS, 38.

³⁸⁰ Frontul Ostășesc Naționalist, *Memorandum-ul*, 32/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 179/6, 179/11.

albeit by using electoral means in place of armed insurrection.

As previously mentioned, it is likely that recruits of the Romanian Legion of Italy who, in the early 1920s, militated in the Romanian National Fasces, were trying to emulate the armed state takeover which Italian Fascist war participants had supposedly performed. It appears members of this Legion continued to be influenced by this myth in the 1930s, becoming attracted to groups they believed might stage a successful insurrection against the status quo. This was the case of Dumitru Radu, a former fighter of the Legion,³⁸¹ who by the early part of this decade had become the secretary of the UFVR. Radu sympathized with the Iron Guard and viewed the latter as a paramilitary force, capable of eventually seizing power.³⁸² Finally, Ilie Rădulescu, the president of the ANVR, while not interested in the relationship between Italian combatants and Fascism, was fascinated by Mussolini's regime's elaborate nationalist rituals, which he sought to import to Romania.³⁸³

Interestingly, both Radu and Rădulescu ended up cooperating with Eugenio Coselschi's Action Committees for the Universality of Rome, the latter directly joining them.³⁸⁴ While their collaboration with the CAUR took place at the time Mussolini's regime was developing ties to revisionist countries like Hungary,³⁸⁵ the said diplomatic strategy does not appear to have concerned these Romanian fellow travelers. After all, the latter were alienated from their kingdom's main international allies, even though the latter safeguarded Romania's territorial integrity by upholding the European Peace Treaties. Rădulescu looked with interest at Nazi Germany,³⁸⁶ while Radu appears to have nurtured a

³⁸¹ Constantin Gomboș, "Voluntarii români din Italia și acțiunile lor în sprijinul marii unirii" [The Romanian Volunteers of Italy and Their Actions in the Service of the Great Union], *Dacoromânia (Alba Iulia)*, No. 39 (2008), accessed May 21, 2020, https://www.dacoromania-alba.ro/nr39/voluntari_romani.htm.

³⁸² Report by an emissary of the CAUR on a diplomatic visit to Romania, likely 1934, CMI, 61, ANIC, 137-138.

³⁸³ Clark, "European Fascists," 380.

³⁸⁴ Report authored by an emissary of the CAUR, on a diplomatic visit to Romania, likely 1934, CMI, 61, ANIC, 137-138; list of members of the CAUR chapter in Bucharest, June 13, 1936, CMI, 61, ANIC, 114.

³⁸⁵ Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy*, 94.

³⁸⁶ Christopher Seton Watson, *Eastern Europe between the Wars, 1918-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945), 214.

grudge against the kingdom of Yugoslavia, confiding his animosity to Coselschi: “*South Slavs have no right to live among [Romanians].*”³⁸⁷

Ex-servicemen who wanted to force the Romanian state to recognize their claims to benefits were also motivated by the Italian example. Additionally, they drew encouragement from the latest instances of cooperation between First World War combatants and right-wing organizations that were taking place across Europe. For instance, in February 1934, the Cult of the Fatherland looked with interest³⁸⁸ at the paramilitary mobilization that had just contributed to the fall of France’s center-left government, in which war participants had played an important role.³⁸⁹ Additionally, the Front of the Fire Generation was galvanized by the dictatorial trends upheld by Fascist and Nazi former men in uniform. The leader of the Front, Apostol Zamfir, studied these tendencies through his activities at the CIAMAC. In September 1934, after attending a congress of the Confederation in Geneva, he visited Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany and analyzed their veterans’ policies.³⁹⁰ Zamfir came away from his trip believing that these were dictatorships *of* and *for* ex-enlistees. At a public gathering back home, he observed that “*in many countries the former fighters [led] the nation as Hitler, a former sergeant [sic], for Germany and Mussolini, a former sergeant [sic], for Italy.*”³⁹¹

Remarkably, Zamfir viewed the Nazi party as having been put in power by the German disabled servicemen. He also believed that this political vehicle had returned the favor by protecting its flankers’ interests.³⁹² As a result of his assumptions, Zamfir

³⁸⁷ Letter sent by the secretary of the UFVR to the president of the Italian ANVR, likely 1933, “*Scambio di Visite tra Volontari Romeni ed Italiani (Primavera 1934)*,” 1873, 3/2-4, PCM, “*Gabinetto*,” AG, 1934-1936, ACS

³⁸⁸ Report on the activities of the Cult of the Fatherland, February 25, 1934, D 011144, volume 2, FDB, CNSAS, 271.

³⁸⁹ Chris Millington, *From Victory to Vichy: Veterans in Inter-war France* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2012), 55-65.

³⁹⁰ Secret police report on Apostol Zamfir, September 21, 1934, D 011291, CNSAS, FDB, CNSAS, 2.

³⁹¹ Secret police report on the Front of the Fire Generation, April 5, 1935, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 13.

³⁹² Secret police report on the Front of the Fire Generation, March 27, 1936, D011291, FDB, CNSAS, 18.

organized his movement as a paramilitary force that was meant to take power on the Italian model. He adopted organizational practices from Italian and German fascism, notably asking to be called “*supreme leader*”³⁹³ by his followers. Furthermore, it appears he was influenced by the political myth of the March on Rome. In 1935, at a time when the National Peasants threatened to take power by forcefully seizing Bucharest,³⁹⁴ he mooted a counter-takeover of the state to his followers: “*If it is a matter of conquering power through sheer numbers, then we will show [the National Peasants] that we also possess the necessary strength.*”³⁹⁵

As shown above, the Romanian ex-servicemen’s movement’s sectors that radicalized in the 1930s were affected to a relevant degree by foreign political ideals and practices, Blackshirt-dominated Italy being the primary influence. Importantly, even those *luptători* who turned militant out of frustration with their lack of privileges were affected by these stimuli. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the combatants’ movement, for the most part, rejected these ideas and practices, as it was overall adequately sponsored by parliamentary parties. Its disinterest in radicalism might be evinced from the fact that Romanian and Italian ex-militaries’ groups had a superficial, and at times tense, relationship to each other.³⁹⁶

This lack of solid ties stemmed in part, aside from the moderation of the Romanian movement, from the Italian organization’s acquiescence to Mussolini’s foreign policy,³⁹⁷ which through the decade escalated in its attempts to undermine the Peace Treaties.³⁹⁸

³⁹³ Secret police report on the Front of the Fire Generation, March 13, 1936, D011291, FDB, CNSAS, 64.

³⁹⁴ Gábor Egry, “Armed Peasants, Violent Intellectuals and Political Guards. Trajectories of Violence in a Failing Nation State, 1918-1940,” *Střed. Časopis pro Mezioborová Studia Střední Evropy 19. a 20. Století* [Centre. Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies of Central Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries], 1 (2017), 50-52.

³⁹⁵ Police report on the Front of a Fire Generation gathering, October 19, 1935, 194/1935, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 25.

³⁹⁶ Report by Victor Cădere on his visit to Rome in 1933, December 23, 1933, CM, AA-2945, BAR

³⁹⁷ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 201-203, 243-247.

³⁹⁸ Macgregor Knox, *Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 129-147.

While, in the mid-to-late 1930s, *luptători* visited their Italian comrades on a number of occasions, such encounters did not lead the former to embrace the latter's political orientations and strategies. Instead, the Romanian guests were likely trying merely to ingratiate themselves to the *combattenti* in the hope that the latter, in return, might dissuade Mussolini from attacking the Peace Treaties. For instance, the president of the UNAL, Serdaru, while visiting Rome in 1937, paid homage to the statue of the Italian unknown soldier kneeling in front of it, and spoke enthusiastically about Romania and Italy's long-standing ties of solidarity.³⁹⁹ Even after the Munich Agreement, the former members of the Romanian Legion of Italy, who preserved strong emotional ties to their adoptive land,⁴⁰⁰ would still attempt to prompt Fascist war volunteers to persuade Mussolini to help Romania retain its Transylvanian province.⁴⁰¹

Unfortunately for the *luptători*, *combattenti* ultimately did not consider their pleas, echoing Mussolini's parallel indifference to the diplomatic overtures made to him by Bucharest's professional politicians.⁴⁰² While, in 1935, the ANC president Amilcare Rossi reassured the Romanian veterans that Italy's Abyssinian campaign was not a preamble to subverting the Treaties,⁴⁰³ *combattenti* refused to uphold these pacts in the coming years. Notably, they deserted the FIDAC congress of 1938, which took place in Bucharest and was envisaged by its promoters as an anti-revisionist platform.⁴⁰⁴ Most strikingly, in the summer of 1940, they accepted the breakup of Romania's post-Great War territorial

³⁹⁹ Report sent by the Romanian military attaché in Rome to the minister of foreign affairs, August 19, 1937, fund "71/1920-1944," series "Italia," volume 64, ADMAE, 170-172.

⁴⁰⁰ Stefano Santoro, "I volontari romeni sul fronte italiano nella Prima Guerra Mondiale e la Legione romena d'Italia" [The Romanian Volunteers on the Italian First World War Front and the Romanian Legion of Italy], *Quaderni della Casa Romana di Venezia* [Review of the Romanian House in Venice], 12 (2017), 162.

⁴⁰¹ Secret police report on a gathering of Transylvanian war volunteers, October 30, 1938, D 012742, FDB, CNSAS, 223.

⁴⁰² Giuliano Caroli, "Un'intesa mancata. I rapporti tra Roma e Bucarest dal conflitto italo-etiopeico al conflitto europeo, 1937-1939" [A Missed Entente. Relationships between Rome and Bucharest between the Italian-Ethiopian Conflict and the European Conflict, 1937-1939], *Quaderni di Clio* [Clio Review], 6 (1989), 239-261.

⁴⁰³ *L'Italia Grigio-Verde*, September 15-30, 1935

⁴⁰⁴ *FIDAC*, November 1938

configuration to the benefit of Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union.⁴⁰⁵ The Italian ex-servicemen's decision to deny their Romanian equivalents the assistance they sought undoubtedly led to major deterioration of the relationship between these nations' fighters' movements. As a matter of fact, it appears they stopped being formally in touch in 1940, after Germany and Italy arbitrated the territorial dispute between Romania and Hungary, to the benefit of the latter.

To be sure, during the Second World War, Italian veterans kept on fostering political ties between their country and Romania. For instance, Eugenio Coselschi disseminated pro-Italian propaganda among the Romanian war volunteers fighting in the Axis campaign against the Soviet Union,⁴⁰⁶ furthermore inviting Romanian Prime Minister Mihai Antonescu to take part in a fascist transnational corporatist network⁴⁰⁷ he oversaw between 1942 and 1943.⁴⁰⁸ Additionally, former combatant⁴⁰⁹ and journalist Umberto Guglielmotti made a public visit to Romania, during which he met the country's prime minister.⁴¹⁰ However, the two Italian ex-servicemen tellingly carried out their diplomatic endeavors without relying on their Romanian former comrades in arms.

Diplomatic issues aside, lukewarm interactions between the two combatants' movements came down to the fact that they had little reason to imitate each other's political approaches. For their part, the Italian ex-servicemen's associations did not view their Romanian counterparts as a worthy inspiration. Notably, in 1930 the Italian National Association of War Mutilated and Disabled subtly disparaged Romanian impaired's groups, for being, in its eyes, too disunited to constitute an effective lobbying front.⁴¹¹ On

⁴⁰⁵ *L'Italia Combattente*, September 15, 1940; March 15, 1941

⁴⁰⁶ Memorandum sent by the "Julius Caesar" Italian Volunteers' Legion to Mussolini, likely 1942, 509791, 1248, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

⁴⁰⁷ Letter sent by Eugenio Coselschi to Mihai Antonescu, June 11, 1943; letter sent by Coselschi to Antonescu, April 29, 1943, 74, *Italia*, 71/1920-1944, 279; 290.

⁴⁰⁸ Cuzzi, *L'Internazionale delle camicie nere*, 366-367.

⁴⁰⁹ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 94.

⁴¹⁰ *Universul*, June 12, 1942, 71, *Italia*, 71/1920-1944, 35.

⁴¹¹ *La Stampella*, May 1930

the other hand, the principal leaders of the Romanian movement – with the partial exception of Victor Gomoiu - refused to take arms up against the state, together with the far right, following the example of their Italian equivalents.

To be sure, these organizers admired how the Blackshirts' regime had satisfied the local war participants' sense of entitlement. To give an example, a Romanian CIAMAC delegation visited Rome in 1934, later praising the authoritativeness that Italian war disabled enjoyed in politics and society, a prominence afforded to them by Mussolini.⁴¹² Additionally, the secretary of the General Association of Young Reserve Officers with Short Conscription Terms (*Asociația Generală a Ofițerilor de Rezerva T.T.R.*)⁴¹³ also visited the Italian capital two years later, to take part in the yearly FIDAC congress. In the course of his stay, he marveled at the regime's recent creation of new towns in Central Italy, which were meant to host ex-combatants and their families.⁴¹⁴ Crucially, nevertheless, none of these admirers of the Fascist state's veterans' policies appear to have called for the militarization of the Romanian *luptători*'s movement, nor for it to collude with their own countries' anti-democratic movements. Therefore, their ultimate rejection of the Italian Fascist myth of the war participants' armed insurgence helps make the case that they remained tolerant of the parliamentary order until the latter's demise.

⁴¹² Report on the visit undertaken by a SMIR delegation to Rome in 1934, October 3, 1934, CRO3, ANIC, 37-38.

⁴¹³ *Universul*, June 8, 1935, 13, UORR, ANIC, 37.

⁴¹⁴ Letter sent by the secretary of the General Association of Young Reserve Officers with Short Conscription Terms to the minister of foreign affairs, November 26, 1936, 62, MPN3, ANIC, 216.

2.3 Comparing Italian and Romanian Veterans' Policies: Different Political Regimes, Similar Strategies for Obtaining Veterans' Support

In this section, I perform synchronic, generalizing, and contrast-oriented comparisons between the case studies of Italy and Romania, for 1929-1938. In jointly analyzing these case studies, my comparisons highlight that, in both countries, the sense of entitlement shared by numerous patriotic ex-combatants kept on prominently affecting these men's loyalties long after the end of the war they had fought in.

Specifically, in both Italy and Romania, notwithstanding the very different regimes – a dictatorship in the former case; a parliamentary system in the latter – the local ex-servicemen lived under, former fighters' movements' stances toward public institutions and major political groups were on the whole based on the local establishment's willingness to continue treating said movements as corporate groups. In other words, in these years, most members of said organizations kept on being guided, in their political choices, by a strong sense of entitlement. More in detail, they wished to preserve and to expand the special socio-economic status they had been granted in the previous decade, in addition to desiring to hold onto their pre-established role as guardians of the nation. Consequently, in this period, as in the earlier ten years, Italian and Romanian governments had to satisfy these fighters' demands to a significant degree, to keep on enjoying their backing.

Between the late 1920s and the closing stages of the following decade, the resilient link between patriotic ex-soldiers' claims to special treatment and their political conduct remained in place, as attested by the discontent voiced by former militaries at times when authorities failed to cater to their claims to material goods and services. In this decade, the Italian and Romanian governments and economies were financially challenged by the local repercussions of the Great Depression, downturns that reduced provisions for returnees.

Undoubtedly due to the paramount importance that ex-servicemen gave to preserving their economic privileges, Italian and Romanian governments were compelled to enact provisions to reverse this negative trend, restoring fighters' benefits and holding onto the latter's allegiance. Eventually, by the end of the 1930s, both kingdoms had managed to confirm social care for ex-enlistees, retaining the acceptance of these veterans' movements.

Importantly, it appears the Italian dictatorship, between 1929 and 1938, managed to keep in place most of the material benefits it had previously granted to the *combattenti*, continuously offering these rewards even though it held a mixed record on other fronts. For instance, its results concerning granting private land and providing dischargees with preferential hirings were more modest. Generally, it might be suggested that the Fascist elite, depending on World War One participants as a crucial symbolic resource for its legitimacy, was committed to upholding their status as a corporate group. Importantly, by exploiting its colonies of Libya and Ethiopia, the regime seems to have overcome some of its shortcomings in veterans' policies, offering jobs and holdings in these dominions to some ex-combatants. On the matter of the Ethiopian colony, it should be noticed that veterans' associations actively contributed to the creation of this empire, viewing it as an opportunity to improve their members' living conditions. Ultimately Mussolini's autocracy shielded a high number of fighters from the financial downturn caused by the Great Depression, thereby preventing these war participants from becoming disaffected with Fascism and contesting it, even though many ex-combatants who had been leased land in the Pontine Marshes, due to the vexing conditions of their leasing contracts, ended up protesting against their employers until their situation was slightly improved.

On the other hand, in Romania, the compact that had been in place between veterans and the state since the end of the war was subjected to more dramatic and pervasive challenges than was the case for Italy. Specifically, in the former kingdom, due to crippling

financial challenges, in addition to the political elite's temporary unwillingness to protect the ex-combatants' economic wellbeing, in some ways, veterans for a while stopped being considered as a corporate group, as they lost several among their existing privileges and saw their requests for improvements in the official system of benefits unattended to. Crucially, many adherents of the fighters' movement reacted to their loss of standing by disputing the status quo and cooperating with the far right, hoping the latter would help them restore or increase their privileges – this alliance paralleling, in some ways, the convergence between ex-militaries and the Fasces which had previously taken place in Italy. However, in the second part of the 1930s, in some ways the parliament and governments managed to restore and further raise the former militaries' status, thereby preventing right-wing militant forces from hegemonizing the movement. Furthermore, the Italian and Romanian establishments kept on granting former fighters the official role of guardians of the nation and sharing several ideological principles with them.

Ultimately, comparing Italy and Romania for this decade helps highlight the relevance of the following political dynamics. First of all, in both contexts, most adherents of ex-soldiers' movements kept on pursuing, as in previous times, the attainment of a special status and public role. In striving to achieve such goals, these individuals often accorded a pragmatic and conditional form of support to the political players they collaborated with to further their aims, a mindset which even conditioned Italian ex-servicemen serving the Blackshirts. In the latter case, it should nevertheless be stressed that this assistance, no matter how conditional, entailed a process of limited radicalization, as the pro-Fascist *combattenti* proved themselves ready to help Mussolini consolidate his dictatorial rule and prepare Italy for the offensives it eventually waged against Ethiopia and Spain.

Second, it should be noted that, by upholding the elevated status of the veterans, the regimes of Italy and Romania managed to hold onto the approval of a high number of the latter – essentially convincing these ex-soldiers to accept to live under dictatorship and democracy, respectively. Crucially, these different polities essentially pacified former militaries' movements by offering the latter's affiliates similar incentives, which further attests to the likeliness that a high number of veterans were influenced, in their loyalties, by their sense of deserving. Finally, my comparisons suggest that ex-combatants tended, as had already been the case in the 1920s, to challenge the status quo, or at least protest against specific public institutions, when they felt threatened in their rights. In Romania, disgruntled veterans forged temporary links to local far-right bodies, while their Italian counterparts contested the National Institution for Fighters, asking for help in this endeavor to the Fascist trade unions.

Chapter Three: The Second World War: Politically Mobilizing Old Soldiers for a New Conflict

3.1 Italy: Mobilizing Veterans for the Fascist Regime and the Italian Social Republic

Between the late 1930s and the mid-1940s, Italy underwent a prolonged and intensive cycle of military mobilization, becoming involved in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), undertaking the takeover of Albania (1939), and finally partaking in the Second World War (1940-1945). In the course of the latter clash, it occupied Corsica, Tunisia, and portions of French metropolitan territory, Egypt, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Greece.¹ Until 1943 the kingdom fought on the side of Nazi Germany. In this period, the Fascist autocracy also became increasingly militant at home, as it ramped up its anti-Semitic measures, interning foreign Jews living in Italy, along with some Italian ones, in addition to generally restricting the means of sustenance available to Jews placed under its rule.² Italy's military involvement in the Second World War eventually proved detrimental to the stability of Fascism and brought this kingdom to its knees. To give an example, between 1940 and 1943, 200,000 Italian soldiers lost their lives, and a further 600,000 of them were taken as prisoners.³

Eventually, in July 1943, the failure of the Fascist military mobilization, together with the invasion of the island of Sicily by Allied military forces, prompted the downfall of Mussolini, as the head of government was deposed by a monarchist coup d'état. Soon

¹ Davide Rodogno, "Fascism and War," in *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, ed. Richard Bosworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 252-256.

² Valeria Galimi, "The "New Racist Man:" Italian Society and the Fascist Anti-Jewish Laws," in *In the Society of Fascists: Acclamation, Acquiescence, and Agency in Mussolini's Italy*, eds. Giulia Albanese, Roberta Pergher (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 162-163.

³ Giorgio Rochat, "Gli uomini alle armi, 1940-1943. Dati generali sullo sforzo bellico italiano" [The Men under Arms, 1940-1943. General Details on the Italian War Effort], *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Micheletti* [Annals of the Luigi Micheletti Foundation], 5 (1990-1991), 35.

after, a coalition of Allied troops and Italian antifascists faced the Italian Social Republic, a puppet statelet established by the Nazis in Northern-Central Italy and led by Mussolini. The Social Republic was eventually defeated, ushering momentous institutional and political changes in Italy's public life, which ultimately led to the re-establishment of parliamentary democracy and the birth of a republican regime.

Between 1939 and the fall of Mussolini's first dictatorship, the general dynamics of the Italian veterans' movement resembled those of the post-1922 era – as this organization kept on lobbying the Fascist powerholders for benefits, as previously mentioned – while also witnessing some changes. In late 1938 the National Association of War Volunteers adopted a more combative denomination, rechristening itself as the “Julius Caesar” Italian Volunteers' Legion (*Legione Volontari d'Italia “Giulio Cesare”*).⁴ As discussed earlier, in the 1930s, all ex-combatants' associations, except for the Governing Body of the Italian Daring Ones' Armed Units, had elected to bring veterans of the Ethiopian and Spanish campaigns into their fold. Beginning in 1941, the ANC began accepting servicemen of the new global conflict.⁵ Similarly, by the following year, the ANMIG and the Volunteers' Legion had started admitting, respectively, the impaired and the volunteers of this war.⁶ It appears the rapport between the combatants of the first global confrontation and those of the Fascist conflagrations was generally a cooperative one.

What were the main features of the relationship between the movement and the Fascist regime between 1939 and 1943? Essentially, the majority of the former's recruits kept on cooperating with the latter, notably assisting its military undertakings in a variety of manners. Nevertheless, crucially, as in previous times, the associated fighters' support

⁴ *La Volontà d'Italia: Settimanale Imperialista: Organo del Volontarismo Italiano*, December 28, 1938

⁵ Circular issued by the director of the Forlì federation of the ANC, November 30, 1941, “1941,” 13, AANCR, C1922-1957, ISREC

⁶ Public statement on a meeting between the prime minister and the president of the the “Julius Caesar” Italian Volunteers' Legion, December 11, 1942, 509791, 1248, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS; Francesco Zavatti, *Mutilati ed invalidi di guerra: Una storia politica* (Milan: Unicopli, 2011), 152.

was selective and partial. For the most part, these activists failed to identify their interests with the Fascist state's ultimate ideological and political objectives.

Notably, as Italy's military alliance with Nazi Germany became increasingly binding, while the possibility of these two countries jointly fighting a new, major war in Europe grew gradually more likely, many of the movement's affiliates turned against these developments, albeit refraining from openly voicing dissent. In becoming more uneasy with Fascism's ultimate diplomatic and military course of action, these ex-servicemen resembled the majority of Italians.⁷ It was reported that veterans in Rome were upset at the rumor that the martial recurrence of May 24 might be discontinued to cement ties of solidarity between Italy and its Nazi partner.⁸ Before Mussolini decided to commit Italy to the unfolding second global confrontation in June 1940, war survivors quietly opposed the notion that their country might take part in this conflict while also rejecting the military partnership with Germany. Following Germany's attack on Poland, various former fighters privately rejected said alliance.⁹ In May 1940, working-class veterans in Turin objected to the Nazis' current invasion of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg.¹⁰ Citizens in Northern-Western Italy resisted the idea of a war against France, mindful of their country's cooperation with this nation in the First World War.¹¹ Numerous war survivors residing in these regions were likely of the same advice.

While a number of ex-combatants were uneasy at some Fascist policies, their movement nevertheless kept on cooperating with the dictatorship. It undertook propaganda activities, helped cement Italy's diplomatic ties to the Axis, and provided relief to army

⁷ Simona Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani sotto il regime, 1929-1943* (Bari: Laterza, 2009), 297-329.

⁸ PNF report on the political orientations of the First World War veterans, likely May 17, 1939, "*Roma: Situazione Politica*," 19, PNF, DN, SP 1881-1941, ACS

⁹ Letter sent by a First World War veteran to the PNF secretary, November 7, 1939, "*Situazione Torino*," 25, PNF, DN, SP 1881-1941, ACS

¹⁰ PNF report on the political situation in Turin, May 10, 1940, "*Situazione Torino*," 25, PNF, DN, SP 1881-1941, ACS

¹¹ Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani*, 270-271.

personnel involved in the regime's offensives. Many activists also took up arms again, getting involved in these military campaigns. It might be argued that this cooperation rested for the most part on the regime's readiness to grant veterans the socio-economic status and public role they desired. As a matter of fact, at least until the final stages of its military effort, the regime kept on considerably satisfying First World War veterans' sense of entitlement.

To begin with, public institutions continued granting land to veterans, albeit at a limited rate. Between 1940 and 1941, approximately 22,000 ANC members received collective holdings. In 1941, the regime distributed 2,848 parcels in the Pontine Marshes to veterans.¹² By 1943, the National Institution for Fighters had begun setting up agricultural ventures in Ethiopia and in the Italian protectorate of Albania,¹³ thereby further acknowledging ex-servicemen's calls for land. As for war pensions, the government held a mixed record, albeit probably overall positive. While, in 1940, Habsburg war impaired with minor disabilities were finally granted war pensions,¹⁴ it appears existing pension levels did not account for rising living costs. In 1941, ANMIG members complained that their emoluments were insufficient.¹⁵ Public authorities partially addressed this issue, raising compensation levels for invalids registered within the eight major disability categories officially acknowledged by the state.¹⁶

In the course of its war effort, Mussolini's regime was also moderately successful in placing fighters. On the one hand, results varied considerably based on local factors.

¹² *L'Italia Combattente: Organo Ufficiale dell'Associazione Nazionale Combattenti*, November 25, 1944; Mauro Stampacchia, *Ruralizzare l'Italia!: Agricoltura e bonifiche tra Mussolini e Serpieri* [Italy Must Be Ruralized!: Agriculture and Land Drainage between Mussolini and Serpieri] (Milan: Franco Angeli Editore, 2000), 382.

¹³ *L'Italia Combattente*, December 31, 1940; January 15; May 31, 1943

¹⁴ *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra*, March 1940

¹⁵ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the directive council of the ANMIG chapter in Verona, October 18, 1941, "Verona, 1932-1947," box 327, ACCANMIG, "Presidenza," subseries "Corrispondenza con le Sezioni," CMMIG

¹⁶ *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, January 1942

Placements were lacking in Southern Italy, also due to a dearth of industrial infrastructure that might provide jobs to the invalids.¹⁷ On the other hand, it is possible that, until Fascism's final months, many other impaired were newly hired by public companies. A decree approved one month before Mussolini's fall from power beckoned a major increase in the number of war invalids and mutilated to be mandatorily employed as subordinate staff in such companies. This mandatory quota jumped from 20% to 40% of the aforementioned positions.¹⁸ As for able-bodied veterans of the First World War and later military campaigns, they were also helped in getting hired by the state, albeit less successfully than in the case of war victims. 3,864 war survivors were placed in 1940 and 3,823 in 1941.¹⁹

Importantly, in 1939, following a request the ANC president Amilcare Rossi conveyed to Mussolini through the intercession of PNF Secretary Ettore Muti,²⁰ ex-soldiers were allowed to enroll in the National Fascist Party. Previously veterans had been admitted only in small numbers. Notably, by early 1933, merely 8,000 invalids and mutilated had been allowed to enter the party.²¹ After 1939, veterans were accorded prestigious symbolic enrollment seniorities in addition to being admitted in droves to this organization. Their party cards and seniorities afforded them preferential access to ordinary jobs and political positions.²² Interestingly, ANMIG members were given seniorities formally beginning on

¹⁷ Minutes of the proceedings of meetings of the national council of the ANMIG, February 16; February 17, 1943, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

¹⁸ Draft of royal decree, June 19, 1943, "*Regio Decreto Legge concernente Modifiche alla Legge 21 Agosto 1921 Numero 1312 sull'Assunzione Obbligatoria al Lavoro degli Invalidi di Guerra*," 2598, 1/1/8-1 to 1/1/8-5, PCM, "*Gabinetto*," AG, 1940-1943, ACS

¹⁹ *L'Italia Combattente*, January 15, 1943

²⁰ Minutes of the proceedings of meetings of the national council of the ANMIG, April 8, 1940, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG; *L'Italia Combattente*, March 31, 1940

²¹ Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati ed Invalidi di Guerra: Comitato Centrale, *Ottavo congresso nazionale: Roma: Gennaio 1933: Relazione generale: Relatore: Gianni Baccarini* (Rome: Tipografia "Saturnia," 1933), 14, ACCANMIG, AANMIGA, CMMIG

²² Paul Corner, *The Fascist Party and Popular Opinion in Mussolini's Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 135-136; Loreto Di Nucci, *Lo stato-partito del fascismo: Genesi, evoluzione e crisi, 1919-1943* [The Fascist Party-State: Birth, Development and Crisis, 1919-1943] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009), 565-567; Dante Germino, *The Italian Fascist Party in Power: A Study in Totalitarian Rule* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959), 47.

the day, in 1924, their president Carlo Delcroix had renewed his support to the Mussolini cabinet amidst the political crisis originated by the antifascist Giacomo Matteotti's murder.²³ As for ANC associates, they were accorded seniorities beginning on the date, in 1925, when their association had been taken over by a triumvirate of Fascist and pro-Fascist leaders.²⁴ To enjoy opportunities stemming from party membership, multitudes of ex-enlistees joined the PNF: by May 1940, 1,062,204 demobilized soldiers had applied for enrollment.²⁵ Likely, many of them did so to improve their social position and career status – as a case in point, war survivors in Milan reportedly understood entering the PNF as a path to improving their social standing²⁶ - and achieved their goal. Ultimately, it is probable that many of them preserved their employment or found work by entering this Fascist organization.

In the war years, the *combattenti*'s associations preserved their official consultative role within several institutions, while gradually expanding their lobbying power. More in detail, the Fascist autocracy carried on supporting these groups - in 1942, the ministry of finances raised the state subsidy to the ANMIG's annual budget from 500,000 to 3,000,000 *Lire*²⁷ - and even increased their representative powers. On the one hand, said organizations kept holding advisory duties at the state level. The National Association of War Mutilated and Disabled continuously enjoyed representatives in the Fascist corporations, including those representing workers.²⁸ With its 19 deputies, it also preserved a substantial delegation in the Italian parliament, after the latter was turned, in 1939, into

²³ ANMIG internal order of business, December 12, 1939, 509632, 1191, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

²⁴ Minutes of the proceedings of meetings of the national council of the ANMIG, April 8, 1940, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

²⁵ *L'Italia Combattente*, May 31, 1940

²⁶ PNF report on the admission of First World War veterans to the party, December 10, 1939, unnumbered file, 7, PNF, DN, SP 1881-1941, ACS

²⁷ Minutes of the proceedings of meetings of the national council of the ANMIG, February 19, 1942, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

²⁸ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the ANMIG directive committee, December 15, 1938, volume 3, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, CD, CMMIG; *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, August 1941

the so-called Chamber of Fasces and Corporations (*Camera dei Fasci e delle Corporazioni*).²⁹ The leading organizers of the other patriotic soldiers' bodies also remained active in the chamber and were joined, in 1939, by the "Julius Caesar" Italian Volunteers' Legion's secretary Augusto Pescosolido.³⁰ On the other hand, the movement actually gained further ascendancy at the official level. To begin with, its leaders entered the government. In February 1943, ANC President Amilcare Rossi was nominated undersecretary to the presidency of the council of ministers, while, a few months later, ANMIG Secretary Giovanni Baccarini was made undersecretary to the ministry of corporations.³¹

Other power centers were also penetrated by former fighters, to an extent. In early 1942 the PNF opened special local offices for delivering assistance to ex-combatants (*Uffici Combattenti*).³² While these bureaus were potentially at odds with the *combattenti's* associations, threatening to take over their prerogatives in the field of social care, the latter coordinated with them, the ANMIG doing so on the condition that they would be shut down after the conflict was over³³ and that they refrain from impinging on its placement duties concerning war impaired.³⁴ As a result of their cooperative attitude, war survivors were given a measure of control over these offices. ANC organizers were called to direct some of the said structures,³⁵ while the ANMIG had delegates to them.³⁶ Veterans also broadened their reach in other official structures. The National Association of War Mutilated and

²⁹ *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, April 1940

³⁰ "Augusto Pescosolido," *Camera dei Deputati*, accessed March 26, 2021, <https://storia.camera.it/deputato/augusto-pescosolido-18980110#nav>.

³¹ Mario Missori, *Gerarchie e statuti del P.N.F.: Gran consiglio, direttorio nazionale, federazioni provinciali: Quadri e biografie* (Rome: Bonacci Editore, 1986), 269, 303.

³² *L'Italia Combattente*, March 31; December 31, 1940; December 31, 1942; July 15, 1943

³³ Minutes of the proceedings of meetings of the national council of the ANMIG, April 26, 1942, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

³⁴ Minutes of the proceedings of meetings of the national council of the ANMIG, February 19, 1942, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

³⁵ *L'Italia Combattente*, January 15, 1943

³⁶ Minutes of the proceedings of meetings of the national council of the ANMIG, April 26, 1942, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

Disabled made further inroads within the National Institution for the War Disabled: the Association's secretary, Baccarini, became the Institution's president in 1939³⁷ while, beginning in 1942, three war disabled sat on the ONIG central management board.³⁸ Furthermore, the ANC signed pacts with the Fascist agricultural unions, which promoted the Association's farming cooperatives.³⁹

As a result of becoming more entrenched at the institutional level, the movement was able to solicit changes to veterans' policies for its followers' benefit. First of all, wartime pension raises came as the result of requests made by ANMIG President Delcroix to Mussolini.⁴⁰ The impaired's delegates who convinced the state to further equate Habsburg invalids' pensions with those of Italian army veterans. Ex-enlistees' delegates also persuaded public authorities to help them place and subvention their followers. The ANMIG kept on procuring employment for war victims through the ONIG and using the new PNF bureaus for social care for this purpose.⁴¹ It also cooperated with the presidency of the council of ministers to this end.⁴² Notably, it was through the Association's intercession with Mussolini that the mandatory quota of war invalids and mutilated to be employed in public companies was raised.⁴³ As for the ANC, this organization convinced Mussolini to offer 50,000 *Lire* to deprived ex-militaries.⁴⁴ Due to their lobbying powers, organizers were also able to help former fighters counter some of the negative repercussions of Allied aerial incursions. Thanks to Rossi, who, as mentioned above, had

³⁷ *Il Messaggero*, April 30, 1943

³⁸ *Raccolta ufficiale delle leggi e dei decreti del Regno d'Italia: Anno 1942: volume 7* [Official Collection of the Italian Kingdom's Laws and Degrees: Year 1942] (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato), 4997.

³⁹ *L'Italia Combattente*, June 15, 1940

⁴⁰ Minutes of the proceedings of meetings of the national council of the ANMIG, February 19, 1942, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

⁴¹ *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, April 1940; December 1942

⁴² Minutes of the proceedings of meetings of the national council of the ANMIG, March 20, 1941, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

⁴³ *L'Italia Combattente*, April 15, 1943

⁴⁴ Messages sent by the ANC president to the secretariat of the presidency of the council of ministers, May 29; June 25, 1940, "Roma – Associazione Nazionale Combattenti – Contributo Straordinario," 2601, 1/1-8-3, PCM, "Gabinetto," AG, 1940-1943, ACS

become an undersecretary to the presidency of the council of ministers, discharged soldiers collectively received 150,000 *Lire* against damages wrought by aerial bombings carried out against the peninsula.⁴⁵

Between 1939 and 1943, associated fighters held onto their prominent symbolic status within society. Importantly, they were extensively involved in the regime's numerous rituals. Old soldiers also received help in enacting their pedagogic and diplomatic activities. First of all, their groups were assisted by the regime in disseminating patriotic values and the cult of fallen servicemen among Italians. Official authorities took part in the commemorations of deceased fighters of 1915-1918.⁴⁶ Ex-militaries were included in Fascist ceremonies together with adolescents,⁴⁷ undoubtedly ensuring the former could pose as living models of patriotic devotion and self-abnegation for the latter, hence passing their values on to these younglings. As a matter of fact, around this time, former men in uniform believed that their ideals had begun to live in the Italian youth.⁴⁸ Finally, the main ANC periodical received official subventions,⁴⁹ thereby ensuring its publisher might disseminate its ideological messages.

The regime also helped returnees with the ambassadorial undertakings they implemented in this period, endeavors that were accomplished to ensure Italy would play a leading role in the envisioned Axis-dominated international order to come after World War Two. In light of this objective, movement activists strove to foster ties of solidarity between Italy and its military partners. As discussed earlier, the president of the volunteers' group, Eugenio Coselschi, attempted to strengthen the wartime entente between Italy and

⁴⁵ Message sent by the ANC to its president, March 12, 1943, "*Sussidi concessi dall'Ufficio Assistenza Reduci di Guerra*," 2598, 1/1/8-1 to 1/1/8-3, PCM, "*Gabinetto*," AG, 1940-1943, ACS

⁴⁶ *L'Italia Combattente*, March 15, 1940

⁴⁷ *Il Corriere della Sera*, October 29, 1941

⁴⁸ *L'Italia Combattente*, January 15, 1943

⁴⁹ Message sent to the ANC president, January 21, 1941, folder 545, box 93, fund "*Ministero della Cultura Popolare*" (MINCULPOP), series "*Gabinetto*," subseries "*Archivio Generale*" (AG), ACS

Romania. Additionally, ANC President Amilcare Rossi visited Nazi-occupied Poland, meeting local German authorities.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Italian ex-combatants invited delegations of their German counterparts to gatherings, praising alleged qualities of these guests' nation. Importantly, Fascist authorities took part in events involving Italian and German ex-enlistees, including an official visit by Nazi war mutilated to their Italian comrades.⁵¹

It is likely that the regime's willingness to accommodate the *combattenti's* sense of entitlement, coupled with these individuals' resentment at the way democracy had treated them, were key reasons the fighters' movement carried on endorsing dictatorship in these years, albeit mostly selectively and superficially. As a matter of fact, adherents to the movement kept on being grateful to Fascist power-bearers, as had been the case between the mid-1920s and the late 1930s. For instance, the ANMIG president Delcroix accepted shortcomings in official veterans' policies as he believed that Blackshirts generally held the impaired in regard and were continuously striving to satisfy the latter's requests. In light of this caring attitude, the president believed limitations and inadequacies in the state system of benefits were to be understood as temporary and accepted. In 1942, he made this clear at a meeting of the national council of the ANMIG.

In the past, we had to face so-called governments that were inept, hostile, inattentive, which shunned our requests, so that we moved to obtain by force what would not be lovingly offered to us, by agitating and sometimes deploying violence; however, now we face the following situation: all the Governmental organs tirelessly attempt to address the needs of the mutilated, at least in terms of promises, and I do not think – to be clear – that these guys are trying to con us or buy time, as they stand to gain nothing from such behavior. Clearly, some things do not work, but it is not up to us to find out how this state of affairs came to be. Besides, it would be unfair to claim we did not obtain most of what we asked for.⁵²

⁵⁰ Amilcare Rossi, *Missione di fede* [Mission of Faith] (Milan: Editoriale «Arte e Storia», 1942), 55-79.

⁵¹ *L'Italia Combattente*, December 15, 1941; January 31, 1942; January 31, 1943

⁵² Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the ANMIG national council, February 17, 1942, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

On the other hand, it appears those returnees who felt noticeably uncared for cooperated the least with the dictatorship. Notably, under General Ottavio Zoppi, the Governing Body of Italian Daring Ones' Armed Units provided a much more reduced degree of assistance to its members than under Alessandro Parisi's supervision and the CRAI periodical was underfunded.⁵³ Unsurprisingly, most Daring Ones appear to have stopped collaborating to any noticeable extent with the Body while also working with the regime in a more subdued manner than before.

How did the World War One participants' movement aid the Blackshirts between 1939 and 1943? Essentially, as in previous times, it lent a degree of support to several Fascist initiatives, especially those related to the war effort waged by Mussolini. To begin with, fighters' associations kept on buttressing the regime's legitimacy, moreover helping the latter pursue some of its principal goals. To give a few examples, by 1942, veterans had donated 18,019,790.80 *Lire* to the Italian state.⁵⁴ Following the regime's decision to oust Jews from all organizations linked to the PNF,⁵⁵ the ANC expelled its Jewish members.⁵⁶

The movement was also active in backing Italy's war effort. As in the case of previous Fascist conflicts, numerous World War One combatants fought for the regime. According to the ANC, by 1940, 143,373 World War One War veterans had served in the new global conflagration. Additionally, activists helped preserve morale among the troops and on the homefront. ANC members visited wounded soldiers in hospitals and handed out gift packages.⁵⁷ The "Julius Caesar" Italian Volunteers' Legion sent similar packages and

⁵³ Report sent by the prefect of Rome to the secretariat of the presidency of the council of ministers, on the Governing Body of the Italian Daring Ones' Units, August 8, 1941, "*Denuncia contro il Comando Reparti Arditi d'Italia*," 2601, 1/1-8-3, PCM, "*Gabinetto*," AG, 1940-1943, ACS

⁵⁴ *L'Italia Combattente*, December 31, 1942

⁵⁵ Giovanni Cecini, *I soldati ebrei di Mussolini: I militari israeliti nel periodo fascista* (Milan: Ugo Mursia Editore, 2008), 119.

⁵⁶ Circular issued by the director of the Forlì federation of the ANC, January 14, 1941, "*1941*," 13, AANCR, C1922-1957, ISREC

⁵⁷ *L'Italia Combattente*, December 31, 1940; January 15; February 28, 1941

letters to soldiers to motivate them.⁵⁸ The ANMIG collected financial resources for the army, sent packages to soldiers, and handed out relief items to conscripts' families.⁵⁹ In late 1942, when Allied bombings over Italy intensified,⁶⁰ the mutilated contributed to relief work in cities targeted by these attacks.⁶¹

Perhaps the movement's most relevant contribution to the fighting effort was in the domain of propaganda. Specifically, veterans disseminated various messages aimed at helping the state and society achieve victory. They articulated their exhortations through various means. ANMIG members volunteered to act as public speakers.⁶² Members of the "Julius Caesar" Italian Volunteers' Legion disseminated injunctions to win within their families and among friends and acquaintances.⁶³

⁵⁸ Report on the propaganda activities of the "Julius Caesar" Italian Volunteers' Legion, likely 1943, 509791, 1248, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

⁵⁹ Minutes of the proceedings of meetings of the national council of the ANMIG, April 26, 1942, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG; *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, March; April 1941

⁶⁰ Claudia Baldoli, Marco Fincardi, "Italian Society under Anglo-American Bombs: Propaganda, Experience and Legend, 1940-1945," *The Historical Journal*, 52, No. 4 (2009), 1018.

⁶¹ Minutes of the proceedings of meetings of the national council of the ANMIG, December 16, 1942, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

⁶² Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the ANMIG national council, February 19, 1942, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

⁶³ Circular issued by the "Julius Caesar" Italian Volunteers' Legion, January 3, 1943, 509791, 1248, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

Image 3.1: Carlo Delcroix delivering a propaganda speech in public.



Source: *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra*, April 1941 (Image courtesy of the *Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze*; further reproduction is prohibited)

Essentially, all this propaganda aimed at strengthening Italians' martial spirit, drumming up approval for the military alliance with the Axis and whipping up acclamation for the regime – thereby helping the latter pursue its strategy of employing the ongoing war as a tool for further entrenching itself in Italian politics and society.⁶⁴ As in previous times, this kind of indoctrination entailed employing and, to a considerable degree, manipulating public memory of the First World War, in addition to recollections of other pivotal events from Italy's public life. *Combattenti* stressed that Fascist leaders had been protecting the Italian fatherland since the Great War - fighting firsthand in that struggle and later

⁶⁴ Emilio Gentile, *La grande Italia: Il mito della nazione nel ventesimo secolo* [A Greater Italy: The Myth of the Nation in the Twentieth Century] (Bari: Laterza, 2011), 210-238; Macgregor Knox, *Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 145-147, 227-239.

mobilizing politically to defend and expand the homeland's borders – to buttress the Blackshirts' legitimacy.

The movement's activists also lent authoritativeness to the regime's promise to take care of Second World War soldiers, highlighting that Blackshirts had always spoken for veterans' rights.⁶⁵ Finally, they misleadingly suggested that Fascism had found general support among ex-combatants from its very inception. As for lending authoritativeness to Italy's alliance with the Axis, they claimed that Italy and Germany had come to share a breadth of martial traditions. According to Amilcare Rossi, both nations had been pervaded by a similar soldierly ethos since ancient times. It was even boasted that these two peoples had been morally regenerated through their involvement in the First World War. On the other hand, as in the mid-to-late 1930s, the Fascist flankers kept on vilifying Britain and France, as the latter opposed Italian expansionism. Notably, these countries were to be blamed for the outburst of the Great War and, more generally, for harming Italy's national interests since the time the latter had been unified.⁶⁶

Additionally, activists attempted to fortify Italians' resolve to fight by praising the martial qualities of living and dead militaries for their fellow countrymen to imitate. Notably, in publicly commemorating recently deceased combatants of the Great War, combat survivors extolled these men for their past military conduct, highlighting their bravery, patriotism, and self-abnegation. In doing so, they were clearly attempting to turn their comrades into models for their co-citizens. Utter and ceaseless loyalty to the nation in times of existential peril was one of the main qualities stressed by commemorators. Fascist leader Italo Balbo, who had died in 1940, was celebrated for the bravery and resilience he had allegedly shown in 1915-1918. *Combattenti* also mourned and celebrated younger

⁶⁵ *L'Italia Combattente*, October 31; December 31, 1942; *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, May 1942

⁶⁶ *L'Italia Combattente*, April 30; May 15, 1940; September 15; December 15, 1941; *La Volontà d'Italia*, May 24, 1940

fallen soldiers who had displayed these virtues. Amilcare Rossi lauded Niccolò Giani, a prominent young Fascist, who had helped found an official cultural institution, the School of Fascist Mysticism (*Scuola di Mistica Fascista*), and had served as a war volunteer. The ANC president presented him as an example of military virtue.⁶⁷ The “Julius Caesar” Italian Volunteers’ Legion president, Eugenio Coselschi, lauded the military exploits which were being accomplished by the Italian army’s special mountain infantry units (*Alpini*) on the Eastern Front, in the radio propaganda speeches the state tasked him to deliver.⁶⁸ As a further mobilizing tool, returnees conflated, at a rhetorical level, the regime’s war effort with the one that had been waged in 1915-1918. They implicitly claimed it was necessary to fight the current wars to protect the territorial gains the kingdom had made by the end of World War One.⁶⁹

As before 1939, organized *combattenti*, while in many cases not radical in and of themselves, helped lead many other Italians onto an extremist political path. Veterans’ propaganda undoubtedly helped galvanize several Italians into serving against the Allies and obeying Mussolini. The ANC president, Amilcare Rossi, stated that his association’s activities were binding servicemen of the First World War and the Fascist campaigns to the regime.⁷⁰ The extremist radio speeches made by the “Julius Caesar” Italian Volunteers’ Legion’s president, Eugenio Coselschi, replete with anti-communist, anti-Semitic and imperialist messages, were listened to by numerous members of ANVG,⁷¹ thereby undoubtedly exerting a measure of influence on them.

⁶⁷ *L’Italia Combattente*, June 30; December 15, 1941; March 15, 1942

⁶⁸ Text of the radio speech delivered by the president of the “Julius Caesar” Italian Volunteers’ Legion, February 2, 1943, 522, 82, MINCULPOP, “*Gabinetto*,” AG, ACS

⁶⁹ *L’Italia combattente*, March 15, 1941

⁷⁰ Report sent by the ANC national directorate to the prime minister, December 29, 1942, 528080, 1852, SPD, CO 1922-1945, ACS

⁷¹ Texts of radio speeches delivered by the president of the “Julius Caesar” Italian Volunteers’ Legion, February 2; May 4, 1943; report on the radio speeches delivered by the president of the “Julius Caesar” Italian Volunteers’ Legion, February 5, 1943, 522, 82, MINCULPOP, “*Gabinetto*,” AG, ACS

Ultimately, between 1939 and King Victor Emmanuel III's removal of Mussolini from power, the movement's consent for Fascism was continuous, while superficial. To be sure, the toll which the war effort increasingly took on the Italian state and society eventually created a degree of informal noncompliance within the ranks of this movement, mostly in the late stages of the conflict. To a degree, the mutually beneficial compact that had been in place between the patriotic servicemen's groups and the Blackshirts since 1922 was ultimately shattered. In 1942, many Italians began experiencing the full brunt of the material shortages caused by the war effort, in addition to suffering from unemployment. Consequently, war-related problems increasingly turned Italians against this conflict and the Fascist elite.⁷² The *combattenti's* organizations' stance toward Fascism followed this widespread pattern, taking a negative turn. Specifically, economic hardships finally impacted also members of these associations. It seems the state began downsizing existing benefits for veterans while the economy became even less capable of offering the latter adequate employment opportunities. As a case in point, in 1943, it was reported that, in the Apulia region, various impaired received meager war pensions (a monthly 140-150 *Lire*) and experienced difficulties securing jobs, especially decently remunerated ones.⁷³

In all likelihood, these problems created discontent among vast segments of the movement towards the regime, albeit not to the extent of pushing its affiliates to contest the latter openly. Clearly, the shortcomings of Fascist veterans' policies could not be accepted by many fighters, unlike in the past, as their harmful impact was now becoming widespread. The ANC federations of Brescia, Rome, and Varese bemoaned the presence,

⁷² Richard Bosworth, *L'Italia di Mussolini: 1915-1945* [Mussolini's Italy: 1915-1945], trans. Alessio Catania (Milan: Mondadori, 2009), 483-498; Colarizi, *L'opinione degli italiani*, 378; Philip Morgan, *The Fall of Mussolini: Italy, the Italians and the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 61-63, 72-84.

⁷³ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the national council of the ANMIG, February 16, 1943, volume 8, ACCANMIG, CCCDE, V1938-1943, CMMIG

in their ranks, of apathetic members.⁷⁴ Indignation at the penury and economic and social dislocation wrought by Fascism, which was likely felt by multitudes of veterans, would finally come out in the open after Mussolini's fall from power. Probably motivated by this outrage, immediately after the monarchist coup, 362 war mutilated in Rome asked the local police commissioner to have Carlo Delcroix step down from helming the ANMIG.⁷⁵

At the same time, it should be remarked that the movement generally kept on obeying Mussolini until his dismissal. As in the case of the majority of the Italian population, while military defeats, constant threats from bombings, and growing scarcity led the movement's adherents to restlessness and alienation, until July 1943, these members did not outright oppose the dictatorship.⁷⁶ It should, however, be noted that their consent generally remained rather superficial. Consequently, while in this period most of them never really stood up to Mussolini, once he was dismissed by the king, they generally did not object to his removal. As a matter of fact, even hyper-nationalists like Delcroix⁷⁷ and ANC President Rossi⁷⁸ sided with King Victor Emmanuel III immediately after the latter took away all power from the leader of the Blackshirts.

Bearing this in mind, it appears the regime for the most part successfully commanded the loyalty of the fighters' associations until its downfall, notwithstanding the relative disaffection of the Daring Ones and a growing degree of restlessness within the ANC and the ANMIG. However, as explained above, in many cases this loyalty was superficial and conditional, as it essentially depended on the Fascist polity's ability to satisfy the *combattenti's* sense of entitlement. Once the regime collapsed, it appears many veterans came to support the monarchic government, in exchange for seeing their claims to

⁷⁴ *L'Italia Combattente*, April 15, 1943

⁷⁵ Letter sent by war mutilated in Rome to the local police commissioner, August 10, 1943, "Roma: Associazione Nazionale Mutilati Invalidi di Guerra," 163, MI, DGPS, DAGRAG, 1936, G1, ACS

⁷⁶ Morgan, *The Fall of Mussolini*, 36-37.

⁷⁷ *La Vittoria: Bollettino dell'Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati*, August 1943

⁷⁸ *Il Resto del Carlino* [The Change for a Carlino], July 29, 1943

benefits acknowledged by the new status quo. For instance, soon after Mussolini's dismissal and arrest, the ANC chapter in Forlì publicly declared its intention to continue providing assistance to its members and educating Italians to patriotic values,⁷⁹ thereby implicitly accepting the regime change and asking to work with the king to continue satisfying its members' sense of entitlement.

As shown above, the war survivors' movement, for the most part, had been considerably informed by a desire to obtain preferential treatment in supporting Mussolini. This opportunistic behavior was denounced by the ANC president under the Italian Social Republic, Bruno Gemelli. He accused his own association of merely pursuing the material interests of its members, until 1943, instead of supporting Fascism in a committed and idealistic manner.⁸⁰ Ultimately, during the Second World War, many *combattenti* displayed a considerably moderate temperament, notwithstanding their cooperation with Fascism. Interestingly, after the monarchic coup d'état, many of the most radical and ideologically-driven veterans also acquiesced to the king, probably reassured by the fact that, at least in terms of popular perception, the royal government appeared to be somewhat of a continuation of its predecessor, due to its formally pro-Axis foreign policy and its authoritarian features.⁸¹ This accommodating stance was espoused by the war volunteers, who appear to have generally accepted the destitution of Mussolini, the "Julius Caesar" Italian Volunteers' Legion's president Coselschi going on to cooperate with Prime Minister General Pietro Badoglio.⁸²

⁷⁹ Message sent by the director of the Forlì federation of the ANC to the local federation chapters, August 23, 1943, "1943," 13, AANCR, C1922-1957, ISREC

⁸⁰ *L'Italia Combattente*, February 25; May 10, 1944

⁸¹ Bosworth, *L'Italia*, 499; Simona Colarizi, *La Seconda Guerra Mondiale e la repubblica* [The Second World War and the Republic] (Milan: Tascabili degli Editori Associati, 1996), 204-207.

⁸² Andrea Benzi, *Il volontarismo di guerra e l'Associazione Nazionale Volontari di Guerra a Como: Dalle guerre in Africa Orientale alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Cusano Milanino: S.e.b., 2007), 110; Marco Cuzzi, *L'Internazionale delle camicie nere: I CAUR, Comitati d'azione per l'universalità di Roma, 1933-1939* (Milan: Ugo Mursia Editore, 2005), 370-373.

Remarkably, associated war survivors in many cases continued to display an ultimately practical and contingent support for Fascism also under the radical successor to Mussolini's regime, the Italian Social Republic. As will be shown below, while under the Social Republic the First World War veterans' associations were once again led by hyper-nationalist ex-servicemen, these associations' memberships, as had been the case in 1922-1943, appear to have cooperated with extremist powerholders mainly to see their claims to benefits acknowledged. As the Republic was unsuccessful in satisfying these claims, the local ex-enlistees supported it less than they had done with the Fascist regime. As a matter of fact, they often lent the Republic a relatively passive kind of consent, like most of the Italian population living under this polity.⁸³

In 1943, the fall of Mussolini led to the German army's invasion of Italy, which in turn prompted the king to escape to Southern Italy, where he came under Allied tutelage. Around the same time, the Nazis helped establish the RSI, and Mussolini, freed from detainment, was nominally put in charge of this entity. As a result, the ANC and the ANMIG split in two for the rest of the war, continuing to exist both under the pro-Nazi Social Republic, which controlled the Central-Northern part of Italy, and a pro-Allied monarchical state, informally known as the 'Kingdom of the South' (*Regno del Sud*). On the other hand, the CRAI appears to have disappeared under both polities.⁸⁴ As for the "Julius Caesar" Italian Volunteers' Legion, at this time it reverted to being called the National Association of War Volunteers and appears to have been active only under the Social Republic.⁸⁵

Unsurprisingly, between 1943 and 1945, all these associations came under the control of the respective regimes they operated under. More in detail, under the Kingdom

⁸³ Colarizi, *La Seconda Guerra Mondiale*, 265-266.

⁸⁴ Pierpaolo Silvestri, "Chi siamo," *A.N.A.I., Associazione Nazionale Arditi d'Italia*, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://arditiditalia.com>

⁸⁵ Benzi, *Il volontarismo*, 113.

of the South, these organizations came into the orbit of pro-Allied forces. As a matter of fact, immediately after the royal coup of July 1943, the new Italian prime minister, General Badoglio, had planned to have these groups' Fascist and pro-Fascist leaderships immediately dismissed.⁸⁶ While Eugenio Coselschi kept heading the war volunteers until September 1943,⁸⁷ the ANC came to be led once again by the moderate nationalists who had been in charge of it before 1925. In particular, the antifascist Liberal Luigi Gasparotto, one of the founders of the Association, was made its new commissioner.⁸⁸

Eventually, in the closing stages of the Second World War, pro-Allied political forces took over the returnees' groups in the part of Italy under Anglo-American tutelage. The southern wing of the ANMIG, which began fully operating again after the Allies liberated Rome, had its new leaders nominated by Badoglio's successor, the Liberal prime minister Ivanoe Bonomi. As for the ANC, it began forging ties to the antifascist parties at the time of the German militaries' invasion of Italy. As a matter of fact, the ANC chapter in Rome fought alongside antifascists in the attempt to prevent Nazi armed forces from taking over the capital, also cooperating with the former leader of the Sardinian *combattenti* and antifascist exile Emilio Lussu, who had recently returned to Italy. In 1944, Ettore Viola, who had led the Association as the latter briefly contested Fascism in the wake of the Matteotti murder, became the president of this organization's Southern wing. In this period, he formed an entente with the new, recently established party of political Catholicism, the Christian Democracy (*Democrazia Cristiana*).

On the other hand, under the Social Republic, veterans were led once again by their hyper-nationalist comrades, who held a deep commitment to the second Fascist regime and

⁸⁶ Message sent by the head of the presidency of the council of ministers' secretariat to the cabinet of the war minister, July 30, 1943, "*Associazioni di Arma e Combattentistiche: Loro Dipendenza dalla Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri*," 2601, 1/1-8-3, PCM, "*Gabinetto*," AG, 1940-1943, ACS

⁸⁷ Cuzzi, *L'Internazionale delle camicie nere*, 368.

⁸⁸ *L'Italia d'Oggi: Organo Ufficiale dell'Associazione Nazionale Combattenti e Reduci*, September 3, 1953; July 1, 1954

the latter's alliance with Nazi Germany. For instance, the ANMIG was still led by a pro-Mussolini and pro-Nazi leadership.⁸⁹ As mentioned above, the ANC came to be led by Bruno Gemelli, an intransigent recipient of the golden war medal who in the early 1920s had militated in the Italian Nationalist Association's paramilitary wing, the "Standing Ready for the Fatherland and the King" (*Sempre Pronti per la Patria e per il Re*) militia.⁹⁰

These groups' higher echelons and pockets of the rank and file were considerably militant, due, among other reasons, to the bitterness they felt at the recent overthrow of the Fascist regime and the Allied invasion of Italy. The RSI's official ideological tenets – a heady mix of Manichean nationalism and enmity with the segments of the Italian elites that had reneged on Mussolini in July 1943, including the monarchy⁹¹ – doubtless struck a chord with these outraged ex-soldiers. They saw the fall of the dictatorship in 1943 as a disgrace, accusing the king of having betrayed the leader of Fascism, while also clinging onto their admiration for Mussolini and Hitler.⁹² Finding themselves to agree with the radical anti-Semitic orientation of the Republic,⁹³ they also blamed Jews for allegedly sabotaging Fascist Italy in its war effort.⁹⁴ Their radicalism was also stoked by paranoid fears of national decline. Eugenio Coselschi, who had ended up detained by the RSI police due to having sided with Badoglio after July 1943,⁹⁵ was replaced as president of the National

⁸⁹ *L'Italia d'Oggi*, September 3, 1953; Agostino Bistarelli, *La storia del ritorno: I reduci italiani del secondo dopoguerra* [The History of Their Return: Italian Returnees in the Second Post-War Era] (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2007), 147; Ugo Pavan Dalla Torre, *L'ANMIG nel 1943-1945: Settant'anni da allora* (Rome: Associazione Nazionale fra Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra e Fondazione Roma, 2014), 19, 48, 52-54; Giuseppe Sircana, "Lussu, Emilio," *Dizionario biografico degli italiani italiani*: volume 66: *Lorenzetto-Macchetti* (2006), accessed May 7, 2021, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/emilio-lussu_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/emilio-lussu_(Dizionario-Biografico)/); Ettore Viola, *Combattenti e Mussolini dopo il congresso di Assisi* [Veterans and Mussolini after the Assisi Congress] (Florence: L'Impronta, 1975), 9, 16-28, 112-113.

⁹⁰ Patrizia Mengarelli, "Gemelli, Bruno," *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*: volume 53: *Gelati-Ghisalberti* (2000), accessed March 1, 2021, [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bruno-gemelli_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bruno-gemelli_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

⁹¹ Martin Clark, *Modern Italy: 1871 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2014), 930-931.

⁹² *L'Italia Combattente*, February 9; May 10; July 24; November 25, 1944

⁹³ Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi, *Storia della Repubblica Sociale Italiana* [History of the Italian Social Republic] (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2012), 124-129.

⁹⁴ *L'Italia Combattente*, March 23, 1944

⁹⁵ Cuzzi, *L'Internazionale delle camicie nere*, 370-373.

Association of War Volunteers by Sergio Stroppiana,⁹⁶ a hyper-nationalist who feared Italy would end up apportioned in several pieces, to be offered to the various partners of the Allied coalition.⁹⁷

At the same time, it appears most returnees residing in the Republic were not drawn to the latter's ultranationalism. On the contrary, some of them supported the grassroots partisan movement that began clandestinely operating against the Fascists. A few even formed a secret paramilitary unit called the Autonomous Body of the Federation of Combatants (*Formazione Autonoma Federazione Combattenti*), which protected several antifascist guerrillas and Jews from Nazi persecution and later took part in the Allied liberation of Rome. As for the antifascist Luigi Gasparotto, who had been the ANC's commissioner between July and September 1943, the Liberal relocated to Switzerland to avoid capture by the Germans, while preserving ties to antifascist guerrillas.⁹⁸ As for those who chose to cooperate with local authorities, many of them made their support for the republican statelet conditional on seeing their claims to benefits acknowledged by it. This transactional mindset is attested by the fact that the Republic attempted to acquire the allegiance of the ex-soldiers by offering them various privileges.

Fascist powerholders accorded ex-enlistees, at least on paper, various economic paybacks, in accordance with its strategy of obtaining popular support by announcing sweeping social reforms.⁹⁹ For instance, they promised to drain the local marshes and grant this recovered land to war survivors. They also pledged to afford ex-servicemen preferential hiring for specific kinds of occupations, even raising the mandatory percentage

⁹⁶ Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi, ed., *Le udienze di Mussolini durante la Repubblica Sociale Italiana, 1943-1945: Da un progetto dell'Istituto Storico Germanico di Roma* [Mussolini's Hearings under the Italian Social Republic, 1943-1945: Based on a Project of the German Historical Institute in Rome] (Rome: Deutsches Historisches Institut in Rom, 2019), 171.

⁹⁷ *La Volontà d'Italia*, August 23, 1944

⁹⁸ *L'Italia d'Oggi*, September 3; 10, 1953; July 1, 1954

⁹⁹ Osti Guerrazzi, *Storia della Repubblica*, 138-143.

of war disabled and mutilated to be hired in private firms (which now climbed up to 10% of the latter's total workforce), the civil service (20%) and public companies (40%).¹⁰⁰ The war impaired were also guaranteed a future 20% increase in their pensions.¹⁰¹

The Republic also honored the veterans' associations as legitimate interlocutors, for instance, making the ANC the official manager of social assistance for veterans and granting this association delegates in state corporations of employers and workers. The pro-Nazi statelet additionally made *combattenti* into custodians of the fatherland, including them in its war commemorations, sending its delegates at meetings between Italian war survivors and their German counterparts,¹⁰² undoubtedly helping associated fighters in their attempts at shoring up the portion of Italy under the RSI's control, through patriotic pedagogy and public diplomacy.

Under the Social Republic, ex-militaries were, for the most part, asked to perform the same tasks as they had undertaken under the regime. To be sure, the National Union of War Volunteers took on a more militant function, reinforcing the paramilitary tendencies within the Republic – radical proclivities which shaped this statelet more so than they had in the case of the Fascist regime of 1922-1943¹⁰³ - by creating its own armed battalion, to be incorporated into the army.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, under the RSI, veterans kept on working mainly as propagandists. With regard to this role, it should be noted that patriotic ex-servicemen once again used the memory of the First World War to support the Fascist elite and the latter's war effort. They did so by likening the Republic's current military struggle to the Italian kingdom's dire predicament after its near defeat at Caporetto, in 1917. This

¹⁰⁰ *L'Italia Combattente*, June 25; October 10; December 25, 1944

¹⁰¹ Zavatti, *Mutilati e invalidi di guerra*, 156.

¹⁰² *L'Italia Combattente*, May 25, June 25, October 25, November 10, 1944

¹⁰³ Dianella Gagliani, *Brigate nere: Mussolini e la militarizzazione del Partito Fascista Repubblicano* [The Black Brigades: Mussolini and the Militarization of the Republican Fascist Party] (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999), 108-181; Luigi Ganapini, *La repubblica delle camicie nere* [The Blackshirts' Republic] (Milan: Garzanti Libri, 2002), 33-85, 112-128, 193-201.

¹⁰⁴ *La Volontà d'Italia*, May 20, 1944

parallel aimed at suggesting that the Republic would have soon recovered from its disarray and defeated its enemies, just like Italy had eventually managed to do in 1918. Veterans also undertook new tasks: for instance, the ANC sent gift packages to the numerous Italian prisoners of war who were detained in the Third Reich.¹⁰⁵

Nevertheless, it appears ex-men in uniform's associations on the whole merely acquiesced to the Republic, giving a passive form of consent to it. In espousing this stance, they mirrored the majority of the population living in this statelet, which chose to openly side neither with the Republic nor the armed resistance against the latter.¹⁰⁶ For instance, by late 1944, the ANC's membership figures amounted to approximately 150,000 members, a number which President Gemelli considered to some degree disappointing. Furthermore, the ANC federation of Brescia suffered from a reduced number of enrollments.¹⁰⁷ This limited degree of support might be attributed to various causes. To begin with, the Social Republic was generally pervaded with a sense of incumbent defeat,¹⁰⁸ which discouraged strongly identifying with Mussolini's cause.

Additionally, the shortcomings of the Republic's veterans' policies, brought about by infrastructural devastation and material shortages, undoubtedly played a notable role in many veterans' alienation from the RSI. Notably, various large-size firms were destroyed due to Allied attacks, a situation that reportedly made it difficult for the Republic to create jobs for veterans. As a matter of fact, in the Genoa area, many ex-combatants were jobless. Reportedly, some veterans were skeptical with regard to the chances that they would eventually be prioritized in access to the job market.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ *L'Italia Combattente*, February 10; March 23; October 10, 1944

¹⁰⁶ Morgan, *The Fall of Mussolini*, 169.

¹⁰⁷ *L'Italia Combattente*, September 10; November 25, 1944

¹⁰⁸ Morgan, *The Fall of Mussolini*, 175.

¹⁰⁹ *L'Italia Combattente*, September 25; November 25, 1944

Therefore, it appears that under the Social Republic, as had been the case under the Fascist regime, the veterans' sense of entitlement kept on playing an essential role concerning the political affiliations embraced by the fighters' movement. Consequently, the Republic's failure to extensively cater to the latter's claims to benefits contributed to alienating many activists from it.

3.2 Romania: The Old Soldiers and the Second World War

3.2.1 Mobilizing Veterans for King Charles' Authoritarian Regime

In the following three subchapters, I will highlight that Romania's right-wing authoritarian regimes – namely King Charles II's royalist system (1938-1940), the National Legionary State (1940-1941), and Marshal Antonescu's military dictatorship (1941-1944) - preserved the acceptance of the local war participants' movement by making significant material and symbolic concessions to the latter, in addition to allowing it to contribute to the preservation of the fatherland and espousing nationalist precepts. On the one hand, these various polities, notwithstanding their considerable differences, all stressed hyper-nationalism as their guiding principle, wishing for the marginalization and – in the case of the National Legionary State and of Antonescu's system of government – liquidation of various ethnic 'undesirables,' such as the Jews living under Romanian rule. As a part of their warped commitment to the fatherland's defense, these rulers championed some aims that were attractive to the moderate veterans' movement, namely an emphasis on the need to protect the country's post-World War One borders.

Nevertheless, the ideological convergences that occurred between the *luptători* and the illiberal statesmen of 1938-1944 were not sufficient, in themselves, to secure the

former's support for the latter. Instead, it appears these regimes all ingratiated themselves to the ex-enlistees' associations mainly by providing them with a continuous set of rewards. This common pattern brings attention to the fact that these power-bearers' polities experienced notable continuities in terms of policymaking, notwithstanding their differences.¹¹⁰ Crucially, as the majority of organized ex-enlistees elected to cooperate with them, these fellow travelers underwent a process of limited radicalization, essentially accepting to buttress illiberal systems of government and help enact some of these power structures' intolerant policies.

King Charles' rule came to be mainly as the result of the electoral rise of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, in addition to his unchecked political ambitions. The 1937 elections registered a remarkable surge in popularity for the Legion. At the same time, the PNL and the PNTȚ preserved significant backing. Charles might still have assembled a cabinet from the latter parties¹¹¹ but chose to put the extremist National Christian Party in charge. After a mere 45 days, the PNC was dismissed by Charles, who feared it would attempt to strike a deal with Corneliu Codreanu to unseat him. The king then established an authoritarian regime, claiming that his own illiberalism was necessary to quash the anti-democratic Legion.

Notwithstanding Charles' claims that he aimed at protecting Romanians' civil rights, his rule became increasingly intolerant, curtailing public freedoms and taking up pronounced anti-Semitic traits as time went on. With regard to institutional developments, while banning all other political organizations, he gave birth to two consecutive single parties: first the Front of National Rebirth (*Frontul Renașterii Naționale*; FRN) and later the Party of the Nation (*Partidul Națiunii*). Additionally, the king created an authoritarian

¹¹⁰ Constantin Iordachi, "A Continuum of Dictatorships: Hybrid Totalitarian Experiments in Romania, 1937-1944," in *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, eds. António Costa Pinto, Aristotle Kallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 243-264.

¹¹¹ Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 288.

constitution, a corporatist parliament, and a paramilitary organization, the National Guard (*Garda Națională*).¹¹² Between the regime's birth in early 1938 and its downfall in the middle of 1940, it might be claimed that the ex-servicemen's movement supported it mainly to carry on enjoying, or to widen, the range of privileges and prerogatives it had received under the parliamentary order, instead of supporting Charles' ultimate goals.

To be sure, a minority of organized fighters supported the king also due to his ultranationalist policies. First of all, Charles' system of power publicly extolled authoritarianism as the best strategy for defending the Romanian nation from threats to its territorial integrity. A public statement issued by the Front of National Rebirth claimed that "*its members [would] be ready to take what [was needed] to strengthen the army and border defense.*"¹¹³ The Association of the Army Volunteers of the War of National Unification agreed with this strategy, believing that repressive measures would help the nation remain united in the face of foreign nations which aimed at subverting the Peace Treaties.¹¹⁴ Second, the regime was implicitly anti-Semitic, having failed to revoke discriminatory measures which had been passed by the PNC during its brief tenure of power,¹¹⁵ in addition to eventually passing further bigoted measures of its own.¹¹⁶ The royal regime's orientation also found favor with the ANVR, which, as seen above, had been openly anti-Semitic at least since 1936. As a matter of fact, the Association ended up expelling all of its Jewish members in 1938.¹¹⁷ Due to their ideological affinities with the crown's rule, many members of the ANVR directly joined the Front of National Rebirth.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Iordachi, "A Continuum," 249-250, 252.

¹¹³ Public statement issued by the Front of National Rebirth, likely 1939, folder 2136, fund "*Ministerul Propagandei Naționale, Volum 2*" (MPN2), ANIC, 47.

¹¹⁴ Secret police report on the activities of the ANVR, March 17, 1939, D 012742, FDB, CNSAS, 233.

¹¹⁵ Iordachi, "A Continuum," 253.

¹¹⁶ Florin Grecu, "Legislația rasială și retorica antisemita a partidului națiunii" [The Party of the Nation's Racial Legislation and Anti-Semitic Rhetoric], *Sfera Politicii* [The Sphere of Politics], 178, No. 2 (2014), 128-131.

¹¹⁷ Secret police report on the activities of the ANVR, March 28, 1938, D 012742, FDB, CNSAS, 194.

¹¹⁸ Secret police report on the activities of the ANVR, April 4, 1939, D 012742, FDB, CNSAS, 234.

Nevertheless, the autocracy's chauvinism, *per se*, does not appear to have enticed the majority of the fighter's movement into flanking it. This state of affairs is attested by the fact that most of the latter's activists refrained from providing public institutions with active consent. To be sure, ex-servicemen's associations were happy to cooperate with the army to defend the nation from an increasingly volatile international context. For instance, in 1939, the UNAL donated 5,000 *Lei* to the armed forces to strengthen them.¹¹⁹

At the same time, the movement's leaders were only moderately involved with the regime's administration. The UNAL's president, Virgil Serdaru, chose not to join the FRN.¹²⁰ Voicu Nițescu, who in 1939 took over the presidency of the UFVR, following the death of Victor Deleu,¹²¹ was minister of labor in the first, short-lived ministerial cabinet headed by Patriarch Miron Cristea,¹²² but thereafter acted solely as vice president of the parliament's chamber of deputies.¹²³ Victor Gomoiu, the president of the UORR, became minister of health in 1940 but did so merely to provide the national health infrastructure with his professional expertise.¹²⁴ Additionally, he opposed Charles' increasing anti-Semitic stance, helping out Jews during his tenure as minister.¹²⁵ General Ernest Baliff and Victor Cădere appear to have been involved the most thoroughly with governmental and administrative structures, working, respectively, as an adviser to the crown and as the overseer of the administrative unit of Dunărea.¹²⁶

At the rank-and-file level, war survivors' groups associations generally do not seem

¹¹⁹ Letter sent by the IOVFL General Office's verification and control committee to the UNAL, June 9, 1939, 3/1939, ONIOVR, ANIC, 10.

¹²⁰ Memorandum sent by the UNAL president to the IOVFL General Office, likely 1940, 12/1940, ONIOVR, ANIC, 22.

¹²¹ Report on First World War veterans' associations, February 3, 1940, P 0050745, FDB, CNSAS, 19.

¹²² Ion Mamina, Ioan Scurtu, *Guverne și guvernanți, 1916-1938* (Bucharest: Silex, 1996), 218.

¹²³ Florin Grecu, *Construcția unui partid unic: frontul renașterii naționale* [Building a One-Party State: The Front of National Rebirth] (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedica, 2012), 161.

¹²⁴ Statement issued by Victor Gomoiu, August 24, 1946, P 013349, volume 1, FDB, CNSAS, 6.

¹²⁵ *Buna Vestire*, September 21, 1940, P 013349, volume 2, FDB, CNSAS, 7.

¹²⁶ Grecu, *Construcția*, 180; Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi (1866-1947)*: volume 3: *Carol al doilea* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedica, 2004), 240.

to have provided extensive grassroots backing to regime organizations. Notably, the “King Charles II” Society of Reserve and Retired Active Officers was less committed to the king’s political course of action than its name suggested. By January 1939, one month after the establishment of the FRN, only 660 of the 2,251 Bucharest-based members of the Society had entered this front.¹²⁷ Finally, few among the war disabled appear to have adhered to the Front.

It should also be noted that various associations clearly supported the regime in the hope of obtaining benefits for their followers. By espousing this pragmatic approach, they did not differ from the political behavior of most supporters of the royal system. As a matter of fact, it appears most of the members of the FRN adhered to the latter as a result of political opportunism.¹²⁸ For instance, the SMIR chapter in Mehedinți was impressed with Charles’ promise to grant the war disabled an official delegate in the parliament.¹²⁹ The “Glories of the Nation” Society backed Charles expecting him to apply social policies for the disabled more extensively than previous governments had.¹³⁰ Moreover, a small group which had been created to improve the living conditions of infantrymen, corporals, and sergeants, the League of the Former Infantrymen, Corporals, and Sergeants (*Liga Foștilor Luptători din Gradele Inferioare*), cooperated with the regime as it believed the king would provide ex-combatants with preferential access to state jobs.¹³¹ Additionally, the Association of the Romanian Pensioned Non-Commissioned Officers, which before 1938

¹²⁷ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the central committee of the Society of Reserve and Retired Active Officers “King Charles II,” January 16, 1939, 20, SCE, 203, AMNR, 428.

¹²⁸ Radu Bruja, *Carol al II-lea și partidul unic: frontul renașterii naționale* [Charles the Second and the Single Party: The Front of National Rebirth] (Iași: Editura Junimea, 2006), 65-71.

¹²⁹ Police report on a gathering of the SMIR chapter in Mehedinți, February 23, 1938, 48/1934, DGP 1893; 1903-1936, ANIC, 98.

¹³⁰ Secret police report on the activities of the “Glories of the Nation” Society, likely 1938, D 011485, volume 10, FDB, CNSAS, 7.

¹³¹ Propaganda leaflet of the League of Former Fighters from the Lower Ranks, likely 1938, D 010174, volume 10, FDB, CNSAS, 47.

had experienced difficulties finding committed patrons in parliament,¹³² in all likelihood endorsed the regime to see its claims to rewards finally satisfied. Probably in order to ingratiate themselves to Romania's masters, many of these NCOs asked to join both the FRN and the National Guard.¹³³ As for the UFVR, some of its members were pressured to join the Front to hold onto their jobs.¹³⁴

Overall, it appears the associations gave the regime conditional support, which they based mainly on being allowed to preserve, or indeed increase, the *luptători*'s privileged place in society. For its part, the authoritarian system satisfied the main needs of the movement, just like the governments of the parliamentary era had done. As a matter of fact, the regime continued the veterans' policies of the democratic period in many ways. As the king acknowledged associated ex-servicemen's needs, they generally followed him. To be sure, Charles' regime also used coercion to keep fighters in line by repressing the right-wing organizations that had attempted to capture the support of the ex-servicemen. In 1938, the Iron Guard was dealt a severe blow, as Codreanu was imprisoned and assassinated, and 400 other legionary leaders were executed.¹³⁵ In 1938, the crown banned all political organizations except for the FRN, thereby disbanding extremist organizations like the Front of the Fire Generation¹³⁶ and the Cult of the Fatherland.¹³⁷

It should be noticed that the regime proved itself to be somewhat severe also with moderate returnees, when it suspected them of acting against it. The UNAL ended up being

¹³² In 1936, the Association had tried to promote its claims through parliamentary deputy Vasile Dumitrescu, but eventually this deputy apparently neglected their requests, see police report on the Association of Romanian Pensioned Officers, December 30, 1936, 34/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 76.

¹³³ Police report on the congress of the Association of Romanian Pensioned Sergeants, likely 1939, folder 366/1939, fund "Ministerul Propagandei Naționale, Volum I" (MPN1), ANIC, 335.

¹³⁴ Secret police report on the UFVR chapter in Timișoara, February 15, 1939, D 012742, FDB, CNSAS, 229.

¹³⁵ Mann, *Fascists*, 289.

¹³⁶ Secret police report on the activities of the war disabled, September 3, 1945, D 012871, FDB, CNSAS, 4.

¹³⁷ Constantin Schifirneț, "O concepție originală despre filozofia românească: Marin Ștefanescu" [An Original Understanding of Romanian Philosophy: Marin Ștefanescu], *Atheneum: Revista de Cultura a Românilor din Canada* [Atheneum: Cultural Review of Canadian Romanians], accessed May 17, 2020, <https://www.atheneum.ca/constantin-schifirnet/o-conceptie-originala-despre-filozofia-romaneasca-marin-stefanescu>.

temporarily banned due to public authorities believing it to be acting as a political organization¹³⁸ and as its president, Virgil Serdaru, had recently asked the minister of the interior Armand Călinescu, a staunch opponent of the Guard,¹³⁹ to release one of its members from detention.¹⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the authoritarian system generally kept ex-combatants acquiescent by catering to their sense of entitlement. One noticeable exception consisted in the regime's decision to enact fiscal policies unfavorable to less affluent taxpayers¹⁴¹ and take away some of the workers and the peasants' labor rights.¹⁴² These measures harmed the interests of a large part of the UNAL's membership. Consequently, many left the Union, having given up hope that the latter might effectively lobby the state, and stopped cooperating with the regime.¹⁴³ Notwithstanding these events, Charles generally acknowledged ex-militaries' calls for recompenses, confirming established benefits. For instance, public pensions were paid on time.¹⁴⁴

Furthermore, the king conceded additional privileges. To give a few examples, in 1938, the cabinet of Patriarch Miron Cristea gave disabled infantrymen, corporals, and sergeants who had previously seen their pensions downsized or revoked, due to unfavorable disability assessments, the opportunity to be re-evaluated.¹⁴⁵ Additionally, governments granted various state jobs to officers. They nominated generals and colonels as prefects and mayors, while numerous administrative posts were held by retired officers.¹⁴⁶ The regime

¹³⁸ Official statement issued by the president of the UNAL, July 7, 1938, D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 252.

¹³⁹ Keith Hitchins, *Romania: 1866-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 420-421.

¹⁴⁰ Memorandum sent by the UNAL president to the IOVFL, likely 1940, 12/1940, ONIOVR, ANIC, 22.

¹⁴¹ Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, *Sub trei dictaturi* [Under Three Dictatorships] (Bucharest: Editura Politica, 1970), 34-35.

¹⁴² Scurtu, *Istoria românilor*: volume 3, 285.

¹⁴³ Secret police report on the activities of the UNAL, May 6, 1938, D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 265.

¹⁴⁴ Police report on the Romanian population's states of mind, April 1-30, 1939, folder 17/1939, fund "Direcția Generală a Poliției, 1937-1948" (DGP 1937-1948), ANIC, 107.

¹⁴⁵ Constantin Hamangiu, ed., *Codul*: volume 26, part 1: *Coduri, legi, decrete-legi și regulamente, 1938* [Codes, Laws, Decree-Laws and Regulations, 1938] (Bucharest: Imprimeria Centrala, 1938), 349-350.

¹⁴⁶ Grecu, *Construcția*, 48.

also invited reserve and retired officers to lead the National Guard,¹⁴⁷ offering them perks.¹⁴⁸ Additionally, in 1939 pensioned NCOs saw their benefits increased to help them cope with rising living costs.¹⁴⁹

As discussed earlier, several war volunteers were still waiting to receive smallholdings by the time of the parliamentary system's demise. It appears the royalist government satisfied various among them. Specifically, it gave them preferential access to private plots in frontier areas.¹⁵⁰ Additionally, those living in the countryside and urban areas also saw their claims satisfied, especially the former. It was stated that by 1939 almost all rural volunteers had received a plot.¹⁵¹ A similar success was achieved in Bucharest. By 1940, the UFVR chapter in the capital was left with only 200 members, as many adherents had withdrawn from it due to having seen their needs addressed.¹⁵²

In general terms, old soldiers undoubtedly would have kept benefiting from the regime had it lasted beyond the summer of 1940. As a matter of fact, public authorities were planning to grant them additional advantages in 1941, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Romania's entry into the First World War.¹⁵³ It should also be noted that royal governments continued the parliamentary system's strategy of co-opting the fighters' movement, granting numerous veterans' associations representatives at the IOVFL General Office.¹⁵⁴ In particular, a war invalid sat at the Office's verification and control committee

¹⁴⁷ Comandamentul Gărzii Naționale S. IV Verde, *Regulament special pentru organizarea și funcționarea gărzii naționale (promulgat prin înaltul decret regal nr. 1687/939 publicat în Monit. Of. nr. 95/939)* [Special Regulations for the Organization and Functioning of the National Guard (Promulgated by High Royal Decree Number 1687/1939, Published in the Official Monitor, Issue 95/1939], 443/1939, MPN1, ANIC, 11.

¹⁴⁸ Text of the law regulating the organization and functioning of the National Guard, likely 1939, D 014727, FDB, CNSAS, 44.

¹⁴⁹ Letter sent by Colonel I. Mangu to the secretariat of the Party of the Nation, July 25, 1940, folder 868, fund "*Frontul Renașterii Naționale, 1939-1940*" (FRN 1939-1940), ANIC, 18.

¹⁵⁰ Text of law project, April 9, 1940, 2927, *Parlament*, ANIC, 62.

¹⁵¹ Secret police report on a ANVR gathering, April 4, 1939, D 012742, FDB, CNSAS, 234.

¹⁵² Report on First World War veterans' associations, February 3, 1940, P 0050745, FDB, CNSAS, 18.

¹⁵³ Minutes of the proceedings of an ordinary general meeting of the leaders of the Founders of Greater Romania, February 2, 1940, 2/1933, ONIOVR, ANIC, 133.

¹⁵⁴ Letter sent by the director of the IOVFL to the IOVFL staff direction, June 16, 1938, 5/1938, ONIOVR, ANIC, 7.

to represent these groups.¹⁵⁵ Charles also ensured that the *luptători* kept on enjoying the role of guardians of the nation, a function they had by then grown accustomed to. First of all, he carried on inviting them to patriotic ceremonies.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, the Heroes Cult, which in 1940 changed its name to the “Queen Maria” National Settlement (*Așezământul Național „Regina Maria”*),¹⁵⁷ was asked by the state to contribute to the latter’s nation-building project. Specifically, it was tasked with overseeing the embellishment of war monuments.¹⁵⁸

To the undoubtable satisfaction of the nationalist ex-servicemen, the regime also supported their public diplomacy activities. Specifically, as Charles sought to preserve Romania’s ties to its traditional international allies while nevertheless making some diplomatic concessions to Nazi Germany,¹⁵⁹ he lent his help to the Romanian *luptători*’s activities at the FIDAC and the CIP. For instance, Charles lavishly financed the FIDAC congress that took place in Bucharest in December 1938, allocating 700,000 *Lei* to this event.¹⁶⁰ The congress, it should be noted, was envisaged by the Romanian hosts as a way of fostering, among the former Allied countries, a spirit of defiance against revisionist expansionism.¹⁶¹ On the other hand, in 1939 Armand Călinescu, who had recently become prime minister, and Teofil Sidorovici, the commander of the royal youth organization, the Sentinel of the Fatherland (*Straja Țării*), honored the fighters by taking part in the visit to Bucharest which they had arranged for the president of the CIP, the German Duke of Saxe-

¹⁵⁵ Minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of the IOVFL’s verification and control commission, April 9, 1937, 34/1937, ONIOVR, ANIC, 2.

¹⁵⁶ Societatea Cultul Eroilor, Comitetul Central, *Invitațiune și programul comemorării eroilor ziua înălțării domnului, 18 mai 1939* [Invitation to and Program of the Commemoration of Heroes on the Lord’s Ascension Day, May 18, 1939], 289/1940, PCM 1925-1958, ANIC, 36.

¹⁵⁷ Valeria Bălescu, *Eroul necunoscut: istorie trecută și recentă* (Bucharest: Editura Militara, 2005), 51.

¹⁵⁸ Hamangiu, ed., *Codul*: volume 29, part 1: *Coduri, legi, decrete-legi și regulamente, 1940* [Codes, Laws, Decree-Laws and Regulations, 1940], 1164-1165.

¹⁵⁹ Rebecca Haynes, *Romanian Policy towards Germany, 1936-1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 69-112.

¹⁶⁰ Official statement issued by the president of the UNAL, July 7, 1938, D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 252.

¹⁶¹ *FIDAC: Bulletin of the Allied Legions*, December 1938

Coburg.¹⁶²

Ultimately, the crown's veterans' policies ensured that the fighters' movement lent a degree of support to Charles' rule. This support manifested itself mainly with regard to helping the regime acquire and retain public legitimacy – this legitimacy representing a key aim for Charles, who was eager to foster a cult of personality.¹⁶³ First of all, various returnees' groups took part in public ceremonies that aimed at giving credibility to the king's rule. For instance, in 1939, they participated at the celebrations for the anniversary of the promulgation of the royalist constitution.¹⁶⁴ As mentioned above, they continued joining patriotic ceremonies, which were now meant to buttress the anti-democratic order. For instance, the rite of the Heroes Day began spreading the message that citizens had to obey Charles to help defend King Ferdinand I's wartime legacy.¹⁶⁵ Additionally, those officers who joined the National Guard were asked to disseminate propaganda extolling the crown.¹⁶⁶ Old soldiers also publicly condemned the king's principal opponent, the Legion of the Archangel Michael. For instance, the leader of the Circle of Reserve Non-Commissioned Officers, Gheorghe Dumitrescu, publicly lambasted the Legionaries for murdering Prime Minister Călinescu.¹⁶⁷

Finally, it should also be noticed that moderate members of the movement were ready to accommodate, to a degree, the authoritarian system's anti-Semitic orientation, despite in all likelihood privately disavowing these policies. For instance, as this system began marginalizing Jewish ex-servicemen – barring them from possessing rural property

¹⁶² Project for the dinner offered to an international diplomatic delegation by the presidency of the council of ministers, March 15, 1939, 286/1939, PCM 1925-1958, ANIC, 259.

¹⁶³ Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), 204-205.

¹⁶⁴ *Universul*, March 1, 1939, 7/1939, ONIOVR, ANIC, 15.

¹⁶⁵ *Curentul*, June 5, 1938

¹⁶⁶ Text of public speech, September 3, 1939, 560, FRN 1939-1940, ANIC, 4.

¹⁶⁷ Minutes of the proceedings of a gathering of the leaders of the Circle of Reserve Non-Commissioned Officers, October 24, 1939, 12/1939, ONIOVR, ANIC, 21.

and holding public functions¹⁶⁸ - some local leaders of the UFVR acquiesced to the ministry of defense's demands to refrain from demanding military decorations for the Union's "minority"¹⁶⁹ members.

Rothschild claims that, before he fell from power due to sudden repercussions from his disastrous foreign policy, Charles was in control of the country's political situation.¹⁷⁰ Undoubtedly, the king succeeded in preserving the allegiance of the *luptători*'s movement. Crucially, this accomplishment rested on the fact that he proved capable of satisfying the ex-servicemen's sense of entitlement to a relevant degree.

3.2.2 1940-1941: The Veterans and the National Legionary State

In mid-to-late 1940, Romania lost most of its territorial conquests to long-standing international adversaries. Soviet Russia took Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, Bulgaria Southern Dobruja and Hungary Northern Transylvania, Maramureș and part of the Crișana region. The kingdom hence lost 6,821,000 inhabitants and 99,738 km².¹⁷¹ This turn of events was occasioned by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the fall of France to Nazi Germany, two developments that swiftly dismantled Romania's long-standing system of international safeguards. To counter his kingdom's increasingly precarious international position, Charles II had tried to woo Hitler towards acting as Romania's new diplomatic protector, however, the German leader agreed to Russian, Bulgarian and Hungarian claims over Romanian territories.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Grecu, "Legislația rasială," 129.

¹⁶⁹ Secret police report on the activities of the UFVR, likely 1938, D 012742, FDB, CNSAS, 215.

¹⁷⁰ Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 313.

¹⁷¹ Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria contemporană a României (1918-2007)* [Contemporary History of Romania (1918-2007)] (Bucharest: Editura Fundației România de Main, 2007), 87.

¹⁷² Hitchins, *Rumania*, 443-450.

Romanian *luptători* living in the aforementioned areas were harmed by the latter's separation from the kingdom. Notably, in Transylvania, the new local rulers took away the plots of land that some war volunteers and former members of the Romanian Legion of Italy had secured from Hungarians at the end of the Great War.¹⁷³ The UFVR leadership, which was headquartered in the Transylvanian city of Cluj, was forced to relocate to Bucharest.¹⁷⁴ Likewise, former members of the Transylvanian National Guards moved to Bucharest and re-founded the Union of Former Fighters of the Transylvanian National Guards, 1918-1919 (*Uniunea Foștilor Luptători din Gărzile Naționale din Ardeal, 1918-1919*; UGA), which had been initially established in 1939. This union's main goal was to exact material benefits for its members from the state.¹⁷⁵ Generally speaking, the loss of these territories traumatized the *luptători*'s community. Virgil Serdaru went as far as sending telegrams to Hitler and Mussolini, pleading them to help return Northern Transylvania to his country.¹⁷⁶

Romania's loss of territories spelled the end of King Charles' rule. As the king had made much of his readiness to repel external threats to his country while ultimately proving unwilling to back up his assurances with force, his popularity plummeted. For instance, the army despised him for mobilizing it to repel the Soviet takeover of Bessarabia, all while negotiating with the USSR.¹⁷⁷ The Legion of the Archangel Michael, now led by teacher Horia Sima, proved to be the only political force capable of exploiting popular outrage at the crown's ineffectiveness, seizing power together with its sympathizer General Ion Antonescu. Consequently, Charles was forced to abdicate, and his son Michael, by now a

¹⁷³ Gendarmerie report, November 13, 1941, 203/1941, DGP 1937-1948, ANIC, 32-33.

¹⁷⁴ Police report on the UFVR, March 14, 1947, 32/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 33.

¹⁷⁵ Police report on First World War veterans' associations, likely 1947, 32/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 24; statute of the UGA, likely 1940; founding statement of the UGA, October 25, 1940, D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 302-307; 308.

¹⁷⁶ Ioan Lăcustă, "Dictatul de la Viena, cenzura și 3 septembrie 1940" [The Vienna Award, Censorship and September 3, 1940], *Magazin Istoric* [Historical Journal], 9 (1998), 16.

¹⁷⁷ Maria Bucur, "Carol II of Romania," in *Balkan Strongmen: Dictators and Authoritarian Rulers of South Eastern Europe*, ed. Bernd Fischer (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007), 111-112.

teenager, was crowned once again King Michael I. As a result, the “Great Voivode Michael” Society, which by 1940 numbered 40,000 members,¹⁷⁸ changed its name to “Michael I King of All Romanians” Society for Infantrymen, Corporals, and Sergeants of the Campaigns of 1913-1916-1918 (*Societatea “Regele Mihai I al tuturor Românilor” a Veteranilor Grade Inferioare din Campaniile 1913-1916-1918*).¹⁷⁹ Similarly, the “King Charles II” Society of Reserve and Retired Active Officers, which by 1940 had 2,878 members,¹⁸⁰ changed its name to “King Michael I” Society of Reserve and Retired Active Officers (*Societatea Ofițerilor de Rezerva și în Retragere Proveniți din Activitate „Regele Mihai I”*).¹⁸¹

Together, the Legion and General Antonescu formed a dictatorial regime, the National Legionary State, which lasted from September 1940 to January 1941. This regime was marked by a rise in officially-sanctioned anti-Semitism. The government promoted the ‘Romanianization’ of the country’s economy, confiscating economic property and assets from its Jewish population. Another distinctive trait of the National Legionary State was the fact that Antonescu and the Iron Guard were increasingly at odds with each other, resulting in growing tensions between the two ruling factions. Eventually, in January 1941 Sima and the Legion attempted to seize total power for themselves through an armed uprising against Antonescu. However, the general put down the insurrection and continued ruling by himself through military dictatorship, staying in power until August 1944, when he would be deposed by Michael I.

¹⁷⁸ Report sent by the “Great Voivode Michael” Society for Infantrymen, Corporals, and Sergeants of the Campaigns of 1913-1916-1918 to the IOVFL General Office, October 25, 1940, 9/1940, ONIOVR, ANIC, 1.

¹⁷⁹ See, for instance, the letter sent by the Michael I King of All Romanians” Society for Infantrymen, Corporals and Sergeants of the Campaigns of 1913-1916-1918 to the IOVFL General Office, January 18, 1941, 9/1940, ONIOVR, ANIC, 7.

¹⁸⁰ *Societatea Ofițerilor de Rezerva și în Retragere Proveniți din Activitate “Regele Mihai I,” Darea de seama [Report], FB 0001202, BS, CNSAS, 159/3.*

¹⁸¹ Minutes of the proceedings of a gathering of the central committee of the “King Michael I” Society of Reserve and Retired Active Officers, October 14, 1940, 20, SCE, 203, AMNR, 469.

What was the general political conduct of the veterans' movement under the National Legionary State? It appears the ex-servicemen's associations, just as with the royalist governments, generally accepted the new illiberal regime while refraining from wholeheartedly supporting it. Remarkably, Romania's territorial losses did not push associated ex-combatants into backing the National Legionary State to a significant extent. In their conduct, they paralleled the general orientation of the army, which was ultimately lukewarm toward the country's new masters.¹⁸² As a matter of fact, in September 1940, Victor Gomoiu, the president of the UORR, resigned from his position as minister of health to avoid compromising himself with the new rulers.¹⁸³

To be sure, some members of the movement were likely goaded by Romania's territorial downsizing into supporting the right. Notably, Nicolae Hamat, who by the middle of 1940 had become president of the "King Ferdinand" Federation,¹⁸⁴ approved of a manifesto authored by General Gheorghe Băgulescu, a high officer who in the early 1920s had been involved with the Romanian National Fasces. In his manifesto, Băgulescu attributed Romania's national debacle to a communist fifth column, the elements of which needed to be apprehended and punished.¹⁸⁵ Additionally, Aurel Dumitraș, the president of the UGA, joined the Legion in October 1940.¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, generally, the ex-servicemen's movement supported the regime only to a limited extent. Notably, the leadership of the "King Michael I" Society of Retired and Reserve Active Officers wanted the Legionaries to refrain from meddling with the old soldiers' movement.¹⁸⁷ Additionally,

¹⁸² Rebecca Haynes, "Germany and the Establishment of the National Legionary State, September 1940," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 77, No. 4 (October 1999), 718-720.

¹⁸³ J. Tricot, "Victor Gomoiu and the Cantacuzène Commission," *Bulletin of the Transylvania University of Brașov*, 6, No. 51 (2009), 116.

¹⁸⁴ Secret police report on the activities of the Founders of Greater Romania, October 15, 1940, D 011662, FDB, CNSAS, 179.

¹⁸⁵ Secret police report on the activities of Nicolae Hamat, likely 1941, I 0407349, FDB, CNSAS, 36.

¹⁸⁶ Police report on First World War veterans' associations, likely 1947, 32/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 24.

¹⁸⁷ Minutes of the proceedings of a gathering of the central committee of the "King Michael I" Society of Reserve and Retired Active Officers, November 29, 1940, 20, SCE, 203, AMNR, 469.

UGA members stayed away from the Legion, notwithstanding Dumitraș' involvement with the latter.¹⁸⁸ Most importantly, it appears the movement complied with the dictatorship to satisfy the sense of entitlement shared by its members, rather than due to identifying with the regime's main ideological goals.

Generally speaking, the National Legionary State satisfied associated discharges' claims to preferential treatment, thereby preserving a generic kind of allegiance on their part. First of all, the regime kept on co-opting the ex-servicemen's associations. In December 1940, the state and various associations cooperated in establishing a general war participants' organization, the National Governing Body of the Fighters (*Comandamentul Național al Luptătorilor*),¹⁸⁹ which was led by General Băgulescu and, for a while, purportedly numbered “*tens of thousands of members.*”¹⁹⁰ It appears the associations involved with this initiative envisioned the Governing Body as a forum through which they might effectively convey their requests to Antonescu. For instance, even before the Governing Body was created, the “Glories of the Nation” Society asked Băgulescu to intercede with the government to raise pensions for war widows.¹⁹¹ After the Body was established, the Association of Romanian Pensioned Non-Commissioned Officers asked the general to help them increase their benefits.¹⁹²

Fighters of 1916-1919 were also allowed to hold onto the symbolic role they had enjoyed under previous polities. First of all, they were publicly extolled by the regime. In January 1941 Băgulescu and Ion Codreanu (the father of the deceased leader of the Legion of the Archangel Michael) attended a veterans' parade, during which Codreanu the elder

¹⁸⁸ Police report on First World War veterans' associations, likely 1947, 32/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 25.

¹⁸⁹ Secret police report on the activities of the veterans' associations, December 8, 1940, D 011294, FDB, CNSAS, 292-294.

¹⁹⁰ Letter sent by General Gheorghe Băgulescu to General Ion Antonescu, February 11, 1940, 314/1941, PCM 1925-1958, ANIC, 7.

¹⁹¹ *Curentul*, October 29, 1940, 12/1933, PCMSSI, ANIC, 210.

¹⁹² Police report on the activities of the Union of Romanian Pensioned Sergeants, January 17, 1941, 34/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 410.

lauded the ex-servicemen for their selfless service to the nation in the course of the First World War.¹⁹³ The fighters were also involved in official pedagogic initiatives. Specifically, they were invited to take part in patriotic ceremonies¹⁹⁴ and were publicly presented as paragons of civic virtue for other Romanians to imitate. Delivering a speech at the founding ceremony of the National Governing Body of the Fighters, which took place at the monument to the unknown soldier in Bucharest, General Antonescu extolled, in front of numerous fellow countrymen, living ex-servicemen and fallen soldiers for the selflessness and bravery they had displayed during the Great War.¹⁹⁵

Image 3.2: Caption: “General Ion Antonescu speaks.”



Source: “*Grănicerul*,” December 1940 (Image courtesy of the *Biblioteca Digitală a Bucureștilor*; further reproduction is prohibited)

¹⁹³ Secret police report on a gathering of veterans, January 14, 1941, 137/1937, PCMSSI, ANIC, 27.

¹⁹⁴ Program for the official celebrations of the festivity of January 1, 1941, likely 1940, 290/1941, PCMSSI, ANIC, 21.

¹⁹⁵ *Grănicerul* [The Border Patrol], December 1940

Image 3.3: Caption: “The war mutilated parade.”



Source: “*Granicerul*,” December 1940 (Image courtesy of the *Biblioteca Digitală a Bucureștilor*; further reproduction is prohibited)

Finally, the state allowed *luptători* to continue working as national ambassadors. To be sure, the long-standing international forums which war participants had employed in the interwar era were no longer available to them, as the CIAMAC had subsided in 1939,¹⁹⁶ while the FIDAC eventually waned in the course of the Second World War,¹⁹⁷ the federation of the Little Entente war volunteers presumably following a similar course. Nevertheless, Antonescu made Victor Cădere, who had been ambassador for Romania in

¹⁹⁶ Jay Winter, Antoine Prost, *René Cassin and Human Rights: From the Great War to the Universal Declaration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 63.

¹⁹⁷ Lyman Cromwell White, *International Non-governmental Organizations: Their Purposes, Methods and Accomplishments* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 237.

Yugoslavia since 1939,¹⁹⁸ a special diplomatic envoy to this country, thereby allowing him to keep on fostering ties of solidarity between the two kingdoms.¹⁹⁹

It should be pointed out that, crucially, the old soldiers' movement was ultimately allegiant to Antonescu and the crown rather than the Legion. Why did the Iron Guard fail to develop a strong relationship with this movement? On the one hand, as seen above, in the course of the 1930s, the Legion had failed to create strong ties to the latter. On the other hand, once in power – and notwithstanding the goodwill that Ion Codreanu showed toward the ex-servicemen - the Guard failed to make significant overtures to the *luptători*, actually alienating various among them. It is likely that the Legionaries' inflated sense of self-importance,²⁰⁰ coupled with the unchecked extremism which had come to pervade the Guard following the execution of Corneliu Codreanu,²⁰¹ made the Legion oblivious to the political expediency of catering to the First World War veterans' own sense of entitlement.

Notably, Colonel Ștefan Zăvoianu, a prominent member of the Legion, who was appointed as the police prefect of Bucharest following the establishment of the National Legionary State,²⁰² also became the head of the national office for the war Disabled, Orphans, Widows and Former Fighters. His nomination to the latter post undoubtedly exacerbated relations between the fighters and the Legion. As previously mentioned, Zăvoianu had already cooperated with the disabled's organizations, in the 1920s. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, having exploited invalids to carry out an administrative

¹⁹⁸ Ioana Cazacu, "Victor Cădere: Diplomat (1919-1944)" (PhD Dissertation, „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, 2012), 18.

¹⁹⁹ Report on Victor Cădere's activities, January 20, 1942, file "Cădere Victor," volume 2, section 145, fund "Dosare personale (1837-1950)," ADMAE, 262.

²⁰⁰ Roland Clark, "The Salience of "New Man" Rhetoric in Romanian Fascist Movements, 1922-1944" in *The "New Man" in Radical Right Ideology and Practice, 1919-1945*, eds. Jorge Dagnino, Matthew Feldman, Paul Stocker (London, New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 287.

²⁰¹ Ilarion Țiu, *Mișcarea legionară după Corneliu Codreanu* [The Legionary Movement after Corneliu Codreanu]: volume 1: *Dictatura regală (februarie 1938-septembrie 1940): Mecanismele schimbului de generație* [The Royal Dictatorship (February 1938 – September 1940): The Mechanisms of Generational Change] (Bucharest: Editura Vremea, 2007), 217-219.

²⁰² Florin Șinca, *Generalul Gabriel Marinescu. Polițistul regelui Carol al II-lea* [General Gabriel Marinescu. King Charles the Second's Policeman] (Bragadiru: Editura Miidecărți, 2018), 231.

fraud, he had since become unpopular among *luptători*. Therefore, his appointment as head of the IOVFL General Office was not well received by the movement. The “Glories of the Nation” Society, for instance, was against collaborating with him.

For his part, Zăvoianu attempted to undermine the associations, thereby further straining his relationship with the movement. He attempted to disband the war impaired’s societies²⁰³ and essentially drove the UNAL out of existence. Between November and December 1940, the IOVFL General Office banned the president of the Union, Serdaru, from lobbying for fighters’ benefits in the future²⁰⁴ on the basis of charges that were probably trumped up.²⁰⁵ Following Antonescu’s quashing of the Legionary uprising of 1941, the general would eventually execute Zăvoianu for having organized the massacre of a number of high-profile opponents of the Guard.²⁰⁶

Nevertheless, it appears Serdaru was so demoralized by the IOVFL Office’s measures against him that he thereafter ceased to be involved in the war survivors’ movement. It cannot have helped that, even once Zăvoianu was out of his way, Serdaru still lacked sponsors at the top of the state. Antonescu, who ruled singlehandedly following the repression of the Legion, was presumably not well disposed toward Serdaru. After all, as discussed earlier, in the early 1920s, the general had accused him of stealing state subventions meant to finance the UNAL’s activities at the FIDAC. Be it as it may, between 1941 and 1943, the year it was finally disbanded,²⁰⁷ Serdaru’s union appears to have been essentially inert.

²⁰³ Letter sent by the “Glories of the Nation” Society to the state forum for veterans, September 22, 1942; letter sent by the “Glories of the Nation” Society to the national defense ministry, October 13, 1942, 63/1942, ONIOVR, ANIC, 2; 24.

²⁰⁴ IOVFL internal communication, December 13, 1940, 12/1940, ONIOVR, ANIC, 10.

²⁰⁵ Memorandum sent by the president of the UNAL to the IOVFL, November 14, 1940, 12/1940, ONIOVR, ANIC, 28.

²⁰⁶ Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 55; Şinca, *Generalul Gabriel Marinescu*, 231-237.

²⁰⁷ Regatul României, *Monitorul Oficial*, January 22, 1943

Zăvoianu's measures as head of the IOVFL Office were ostracized by the associations. As a matter of fact, the SMIR convinced Antonescu to rend some of the colonel's measures null and void.²⁰⁸ Such provisions probably created a rift between these organizations and the Legion as a whole. Said frictions doubtless prompted the movement to stand aside while Antonescu eventually destroyed the Iron Guard. The deteriorating relationship between the *luptători* and the Legionaries was further disrupted because, at the time of their uprising, the latter targeted the former. Specifically, the president of the UFVR, Voicu Nițescu, was forced to endure a house search by members of the Guard.²⁰⁹

Following the quelling of the revolt, Antonescu established a different kind of authoritarian regime, namely a military dictatorship. Notably, the first cabinet he set up after the destruction of the Legion was made up almost exclusively of army officers.²¹⁰ To strengthen his regime, the general made gestures aimed at preserving the support of the organized fighters. He sent a message to Nițescu, deploring his mistreatment at the hands of the Guard and assuring him that he stood by his side.²¹¹ Additionally, he made public announcements that many reserve officers interpreted as offers to turn them into city and town mayors.²¹²

Ultimately, it might be stated that the associated old soldiers had acquiesced to the National Legionary State, nevertheless experiencing various tensions with one of the pillars of this regime, the Iron Guard. These tensions depended mainly on the fact that the fighters felt threatened by the Guard regarding their sense of entitlement.

²⁰⁸ Letter sent by the SMIR to the prime minister, July 17, 1941, 3/1938-1942, MR 1900-1952, CM, ANIC, 152.

²⁰⁹ Secret police report on the Legionary rebellion, likely 1941, P 0050745, FDB, CNSAS, 229-230.

²¹⁰ Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania, 1940-1944* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 69.

²¹¹ Secret police report on Legionary activities, likely 1941, P 0050745, FDB, CNSAS, 230-231.

²¹² Police report on the activities of reserve officers, likely 1941, 1/1941, DGP 1937-1948, ANIC, 42.

3.2.3 1941-1944: Mobilizing Veterans on the Romanian Homefront

Interestingly, Antonescu's regime proved, in some ways, to be more pragmatic than the Legionary State. For instance, public order was upheld exclusively by the army and the police. Additionally, while a public assembly was set up as an institutional replacement for the parliament, the dictator consulted on general matters with leaders of the old parliamentary parties. Nevertheless, this dictatorship itself was ultimately undone by radical political decisions. Tragically, its general denouement was shaped by Romania's involvement in the Second World War. Specifically, beginning on June 22, 1941, Romania began waging war against the Soviet Union on the Axis' side, struggling against the USSR until Antonescu's removal from office by King Michael in August 1944. In attacking Soviet Russia, the general had aimed primarily at winning back the territories which his country had lost the previous year. Specifically, he intended to directly take back Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina from the Soviet Union and convince Hitler to award Transylvania back to his kingdom by fighting against the latter at the Germans' side. The general allowed German troops to move through his country to facilitate Romanian-German military cooperation.

Initially, the Romanian army succeeded in re-capturing Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina and taking over Transnistria – the former two accomplishments earning Antonescu the military rank of marshal.²¹³ However, the country eventually suffered staggering military losses. To give a few examples, the army lost 98,000 soldiers at the battle of Odessa and 140,000 – 150,000 militaries at the siege of Stalingrad. On the whole, between June 22, 1941, and August 23, 1944, the kingdom's armed forces lost 624,540

²¹³ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 26, 62-83.

militaries.²¹⁴ At the end of 1943, the tide of the campaign against the USSR eventually turned against Romania and its military allies. Around the same time, American and British air forces began bombing Romanian cities. Eventually, in 1944 the Soviet army, having pushed Axis militaries out of its borders, entered Romania. On August 23, King Michael exauthorated Antonescu and ensured that his country entered the Allied camp, fighting against the Axis until the end of the Second World War.

Another tragic development under the marshal's rule consisted of Antonescu's decision to enact a vicious policy of extermination and deportation against the Jews who resided in the territories that came under Romanian military control. It should also be noticed that Romanian Jewish citizens from the Old Kingdom and Southern Transylvania were treated only relatively better: they were subjected to forced labor, financial extortion, and, in some cases, to deportation. Generally, the Jews' economic property and assets continued being confiscated as had been the case at the time of the National Legionary State. Additionally, numerous Roma citizens were subjected to deportation procedures.²¹⁵

What was the relationship between the marshal's governments and the returnees' movement? It might be stated that, just as had been the case under Charles' autocracy and the National Legionary State, the movement, for the most part, was influenced in its political allegiances by the priority of satisfying its adherents' sense of merit. To be sure, these members supported the marshal also out of a wish to see their nation recover its lost territories. This desire undoubtedly led them to endorse Antonescu's struggle for Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. Therefore, it might be presumed that, just as in the case

²¹⁴ Dinu Giurescu, *România in al doilea război mondial (1939-1945)* [Romania during the Second World War (1939-1945)] (Bucharest: All Educational, 1999), 107; Călin Hentea, *Marea nerostita istorie a luptelor românilor din antichitate pana in zilele noastre* [The Great Untold Story of Romanians' Struggles from Antiquity to Current Times] (Bucharest: Cartier, 2018), 328, 333.

²¹⁵ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 102-204; Vladimir Solonari, "Patterns of Violence: The Local Population and the Mass Murder of Jews in Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, July – August 1941," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 8, No. 4 (Fall 2007), 755-760.

of many other Romanians, ex-servicemen's approval for the initial stages of Romania's war campaign was prompted by the marshal's initial claim that military operations were aimed exclusively at recovering the provinces which Romania had recently lost to the USSR.²¹⁶ A message sent by the "King Ferdinand" Federation to the crown in the summer of 1941, following the beginning of Romanian military operations against the Soviet Union, promised him that this federation stood ready to defend the "*nation's borders*,"²¹⁷ a statement which suggests that it did not envision Romania's military campaign, at this stage, as a crusade for the destruction of communism.

Ultimately, most associated war participants did not identify with the dictatorship's ideological leanings, such as its pronounced anti-Semitism. Nor were they enthusiastic about Antonescu's general war strategy – specifically, his decision to have Romania commit extensively to the Axis attack against the Soviet Union. Unlike in the case of other Romanians,²¹⁸ the *luptători* associations, for the most part, were not radicalized by the kingdom's territorial losses into committing to the more extreme aspects of the military regime. Bearing this in mind, it is likely that such organizations made their support for the marshal conditional mainly on his willingness to provide their affiliates with the benefits they believed they deserved.

To be sure, some ex-servicemen identified to a relevant extent with the autocracy's ultimate goals. Some volunteers from the First World War spontaneously offered to fight in the anti-Soviet campaign.²¹⁹ The "King Michael I" Society of Retired Active Officers

²¹⁶ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 83.

²¹⁷ Letter sent by the "King Ferdinand I" Federation to King Michael I, likely 1941; letter sent to the president of the federation by the head of the royal military house, July 2, 1941, folder 4/1941, fund "*Casa Regala - Oficiale, Volum 4*," ANIC, 3; 4.

²¹⁸ Mariana Hausleitner, "Romania in the Second World War: Revisionist out of Necessity," in *Territorial Revisionism and the Allies of Germany in the Second World War*, eds. Marina Cattaruzza, Stefan Dyroff, Dieter Langewiesche (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 185.

²¹⁹ Notably, one Captain Dumitrescu, a veteran of the Second Balkan War and the First World War, took part in Operation Barbarossa as a volunteer, despite his advanced age (60 years). See *Soldatul: Foaie de Lămuriri și Informații pentru Ostași* [The Soldier: Explanation and Information Sheet for Soldiers], 235, 1942.

was rather vocal in appreciating its country's military alliance with Germany.²²⁰ Moreover, it seems to have approved of the state's attempt, in 1943, to create a single fighters' organization with paramilitary features.²²¹

Nevertheless, there seems to have been little enthusiasm for the regime's general course of action on behalf of most of the movement's members. For instance, many of the latter did not give widespread support to an extremist war participants' group that was founded around the end of 1940,²²² the Nationalist Fighters' Corps (*Corpul Luptătorilor Naționalişti*). The Corps' goals included disseminating nationalist propaganda, contributing to the Romanianization of the economy, and fostering ties of solidarity between the Romanian veterans and their counterparts from other Axis countries.²²³ Notably, among the leaders of the *luptători*, only Nicolae Hamat, Sever Bocu, a PNT politician²²⁴ and head of the Timișoara chapter of the UFVR,²²⁵ and a few others adhered to the corps.²²⁶

On the other hand, Victor Gomoiu, the president of the UORR, believed that Antonescu had entered the war merely due to cynical reasons, namely his unchecked political ambitions, and even confided these views to King Michael. Crucially, in 1941 Gomoiu elected to suspend the activities of his union completely once he heard a rumor that Antonescu planned to turn the veterans' associations into his party.²²⁷ Later, the

²²⁰ Police report on First World War veterans' associations, October 7, 1947, 32/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 151.

²²¹ Minutes of the proceedings of a gathering of the leaders of the "King Michael I" Society of Reserve and Retired Active Officers, September 23, 1943, 20, SCE, 203, AMNR, 520; police report on First World War veterans' associations, likely 1947, 32/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 13.

²²² Court judgement on a legal case involving Reserve Major Gheorghe Rădulescu, likely 1942, folder 5, fund "Corpul Luptătorilor Naționalişti" (CLN), microfilm edition, reel 2747, AMNR

²²³ Statute of the Nationalist Fighters' Corps, likely 1940, 31/1937, ONIOVR, ANIC, 89, 94; Statute of the Nationalist Fighters' Corps, likely 1940, 5, CLN, 2747, AMNR

²²⁴ Emilian Ghelase, "Bildungsroman for the Nation: Transylvanian Autobiographies of the Unification with Romania," (MA Dissertation, Central European University, 2013), 49.

²²⁵ Secret police report on the UFVR chapter in Timișoara, February 15, 1939, D 012742, FDB, CNSAS, 229.

²²⁶ List of leaders and organizers of the Nationalist Fighters' Corps, likely 1942, 31/1937, ONIOVR, ANIC, 86; report by the control committee on veterans' associations, concerning the Nationalist Fighters' Corps, September 2, 1942, 5, CLN, 2747, AMNR

²²⁷ Gomoiu, *Viața mea*: volume 4, 259, 266-267.

president of the UORR also went against the regime's intolerant political course of action by saving some Jews and Roma from deportation.²²⁸ To give another example, the UFVR did not accept volunteers of the anti-Soviet war in its ranks.²²⁹ At the local level, former fighters residing in Northern Dobruja viewed the Nazi troops which were stationed in this area with the same contempt they had felt for the German army during the First World War, going as far as to foment, among the local peasants, hatred for these military units.²³⁰

It might be claimed that the dictatorship secured the ex-servicemen's movement's acquiescence mainly by catering to its claims to benefits, to a significant degree. To be sure, the regime, like its predecessors, also used coercion to discipline ex-combatants. In 1942, the associations were placed under the direct control of the ministry of defense, which was empowered to disband them if they failed to comply with its instructions.²³¹ Additionally, the state prevented the *luptători* from protesting against it. For instance, in 1943, the head of the Bucharest volunteer gendarmes temporarily arrested Elie Bufnea, the leader of the Romanian combatants who had fought in the Russian Civil War, for indirectly criticizing the regime in a public speech.²³²

It is also true that the regime refused to substantially co-opt the fighters' associations, eventually disbanding several of them. First of all, it is likely that these organizations were weakened as many of their members were drafted for the war effort. Notably, the UORR had preserved 35 chapters until 1941. However, it decided to suspend its activities that year, partly since most of its members were re-enlisted in the armed forces after Romania joined Operation Barbarossa.²³³ The Union's president, Victor Gomoiu, was

²²⁸ Secret police report on Victor Gomoiu, May 19, 1951, P 013349, volume 2, FDB, CNSAS, 26.

²²⁹ Minutes of the communist secret services' interrogation of the former UFVR president Voicu Nițescu, June 8, 1955, P 0050745, FDB, CNSAS, 183.

²³⁰ Police report on the Dobrogean population's states of mind, June 13, 1944, 3/1944, volume 1, PCMSSI, ANIC, 37-38.

²³¹ Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva, *Buletinul*, January-December 1942, 28/1934, UORR, ANIC, 68.

²³² Secret police report on a gathering of the UFVR, October 31, 1943, D 012742, FDB, CNSAS, 322.

²³³ Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva, *Buletinul*, January-December 1942, 28/1934, UORR, ANIC, 68.

tasked with managing the Brâncoveni military hospital.²³⁴ The UGA's president, Aurel Dumitraș, was also enrolled in the army, eventually fighting in Russia.²³⁵ Later, active military personnel were forbidden from belonging to the old soldiers' associations, except those that gathered war volunteers.²³⁶ Second, the war disabled's associations were progressively undermined by the regime. Even after the removal of the Legionary Colonel Zăvoianu, the IOVFL Office immediately dissolved another association.²³⁷ Crucially, in late 1942, the state disbanded the "Glories of the Nation" Society²³⁸ and all the other associations representing the disabled followed suit in early 1943,²³⁹ together with, as mentioned above, the UNAL.

Nevertheless, the *luptători*'s movement remained in place in the course of the war. Its members kept on mobilizing politically to protect their rights. Crucially, for its part, the dictatorship provided various economic benefits to the combatants, mainly before 1943. First of all, Antonescu provided relief to those officers who had fled Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina in 1940, granting them 20,000,000 *Lei*.²⁴⁰ The state also instituted offices tasked with finding housing for pensioned refugees with reasonable rent fees.²⁴¹ Moreover, in September 1941, the government offered new plots of land to those recipients of the "Michael the Brave" order whose previous ones had been situated in Northern Transylvania or Southern Dobruja.²⁴² Generally speaking, the regime made various

²³⁴ Gomoiu, *Viața mea*: volume 4, 253-258.

²³⁵ Police report on First World War veterans' associations, likely 1947, 32/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 20.

²³⁶ See the order of day of the control committee for veterans' associations of November 21, 1942, 5, CLN, 2747, AMNR

²³⁷ Letter sent by the "Glories of the Nation" Society to the House for the War Disabled, Orphans and Widows, September 22, 1942, 63/1942, ONIOVR, ANIC, 2.

²³⁸ National defense ministry internal communication, November 5, 1942, 63/1942, ONIOVR, ANIC, 20.

²³⁹ Letter sent by the House for War Disabled, Orphans and Widows to the national defense ministry, April 21, 1943, 63/1942, ONIOVR, ANIC, 89.

²⁴⁰ Propaganda statement concerning the Romanian ministry of defense, likely 1941, 983/1932-1941, MPN2, ANIC, 296.

²⁴¹ Police report on a gathering of the Refugee Pensioners' Corps, May 29, 1941, 234/1937, DGP 1937-1948, ANIC, 230.

²⁴² Alesandru Dușu, Mihai Retegan, *Război și societate, 1941-1945* [War and Society, 1941-1945]: volume 1: *De la Prut în Crimeea (22 iunie – 8 noiembrie 1941)* [From the Prut River to Crimea (June 22 – November 8, 1941)] (Bucharest: Editura Rao, 2000), 325-326.

concessions to the war disabled and the officers. The former saw their pensions substantially increased in 1941, which reportedly made them amenable towards the government.²⁴³ They also benefitted from a further, temporary raise the following year. Similarly, pensioned officers saw their benefits raised twice – the second time temporarily – between 1941 and 1942.²⁴⁴ It also appears war disabled were given preferential access to teaching and administrative positions in schools.²⁴⁵

Tragically, the state began satisfying the ex-servicemen at the expense of other Romanians. It should be noted that the organized returnees, while generally refraining from endorsing Antonescu's Romanianization campaign, ultimately profited from it. A law granted war disabled preferential terms for renting the urban properties confiscated from Jews,²⁴⁶ while disabled and able-bodied fighters alike were favored in the distribution of Romanianized property and assets.

It should also be noticed that the regime granted the movement different forums through which the latter might articulate its requests to the state. On the one hand, the IOVFL Office and the National Governing Body of the Fighters were dissolved, respectively, around 1942 and in 1943.²⁴⁷ On the other, the state created new official representative bodies for the *luptători*. Around 1942, following a request made by the General Association of Young Reserve Officers with Short Conscription Terms,²⁴⁸ the state instituted a committee supervising veterans' affairs, formed by reserve officers²⁴⁹ and

²⁴³ Secret police report on the Romanian population's states of mind, February 25, 1941, D 0011581, FDB, CNSAS, 2.

²⁴⁴ Hamangiu, ed., *Codul*: volume 30, part 1, 1203-1204; Societatea Ofițerilor de Rezerva și in Retragere Proveniți din Activitate "Regele Mihai I," *Darea de seama*, FB 0001202, BS, CNSAS, 159/3.

²⁴⁵ Letter sent by the national culture and cults ministry to the vice prime minister, February 22, 1943, 241, fund "Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, Cabinetul Civil Mihai Antonescu" (PCMCCMA), ANIC, 36.

²⁴⁶ Letter sent by the of the presidency of the council of ministers' undersecretariat for Romanianization to the vice prime minister, September 1, 1942, 236, PCMCCMA, ANIC, 1.

²⁴⁷ Regatul României, *Monitorul Oficial*, January 27; March 10, 1943

²⁴⁸ Letter sent by the secretary of the General Association of Young Reserve Officers with Short Conscription Terms to Marshal Antonescu, July 8, 1943, 32/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 225.

²⁴⁹ *Timpul* [The Time], likely 1942, 32/1935, PCMSSI, ANIC, 79-80.

overseen by General Nicolae Ciupercă.²⁵⁰ Additionally, in 1942 a new official organization, the House for the War Disabled, Orphans and Widows (*Casa Invalizilor, Orfanilor și Văduvelor de Războiu*), took over the official duties which had been previously afforded by the state to the disabled's associations. Specifically, the House, the guiding committee of which included reserve officers, was tasked with providing the invalids with pensions and assistance.²⁵¹

Moreover, under Antonescu, officers decorated with the Order of Michael the Brave were given a say in the administration of social measures for the war disabled.²⁵² At the local level, the state instituted county, city, town, and village committees tasked with taking care of the needs of the war impaired. The various local committees were all meant to include war disabled.²⁵³ Notably, Antonescu proved receptive to some of the requests articulated by the *luptători*'s delegates through these forums. In 1942, the invalids of the First World War complained that they were receiving paltry pensions in comparison with the ones afforded to their counterparts of Operation Barbarossa, prompting the government to raise their emoluments.²⁵⁴

Like its predecessors, the military dictatorship granted the *luptători* conspicuous symbolic honors. First of all, Antonescu gave the veterans a prominent role within the local committees that oversaw the electoral plebiscite²⁵⁵ which confirmed his rule in March 1941.²⁵⁶ Subsequently, he invited fighters to patriotic ceremonies such as Ascension Day²⁵⁷

²⁵⁰ See, for instance, the order of business of the control committee for veterans' associations of November 21, 1942, 5, CLN, 2747, AMNR

²⁵¹ Hamangiu, ed., *Codul*: volume 30, part 1, 1799.

²⁵² *Soldatul*, 202, 1942

²⁵³ Governmental guidelines for the assistance for war disabled, orphans and widows, likely 1942, folder 231, PCMCCMA, ANIC, 1, 3; Hamangiu, ed., *Codul*: volume 30, part 4, 3793.

²⁵⁴ Dorel Bancoș, *Social și național în politica guvernului Ion Antonescu* [The Ion Antonescu Government's Social and Nationalist Policies] (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 2000), 349-350.

²⁵⁵ Text of decree-law, February 25, 1941, 983/1932-1941, MPN2, ANIC, 231.

²⁵⁶ Giurescu, *România*, 66.

²⁵⁷ Așezământul Național „Regina Maria” pentru Cultul Eroilor, București, *Invitație și programul comemorării eroilor în ziua înălțării domnului, 29 mai 1941* [Invitation to and Program of the

and May 10th.²⁵⁸ Veterans were also allowed to continue working as educators and ambassadors of the nation. In particular, they were given an important role in the state's nation-building project. After all, Antonescu aimed at educating the country on patriotism through the cult of heroes.²⁵⁹

In particular, he aimed to use this cult to legitimize his military campaign against the Soviet Union. For instance, in his public speeches, he conflated the heroic deeds of the First World War fighters with those of the soldiers who were fighting against Russia. In 1942, addressing the unknown soldier on Heroes Day, he claimed: “*under the details engraved in your tomb, are now peremptorily gathered all of our Heroes who fell beyond the Prut and Dniester rivers ... for our land and justice, for You [and] Your flame.*”²⁶⁰ Moreover, he publicly presented the Romanians who had fought in 1916-1920 as paragons of nationalist, martial virtues to his fellow countrymen. For instance, delivering a speech in front of soldiers from the anti-Soviet war, Antonescu extolled the generation which had fought in First World War (including himself), presenting it as a model they should strive to imitate.

Commemoration of Heroes on the Lord's Ascension Day, May 29, 1941]; *Invitație și programul comemorării eroilor în ziua înălțării domnului, 14 mai 1942* [Invitation to and Program of the Commemoration of Heroes on the Lord's Ascension Day, May 14, 1942], FB 0000627, volume 3; volume 5; BS, CNSAS, 43/743.

²⁵⁸ Program for the official celebration of May 10, 1941, likely 1941; Ministerul Afacerilor Externe – Direcțiunea Protocolului, *Programul serbării naționale de 10 mai 1943* [Program of the National Celebrations of May 10, 1943] (Bucharest: Imprimeria Centrala), 291/1941, PCM 1925-1958, ANIC, 53, 113; 142.

²⁵⁹ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 70.

²⁶⁰ Bălescu, *Eroul necunoscut*, 306.

*Soldiers, I come from a turbulent and bloody generation which fate led, in the course of four decades, through four wars and four uprisings. It is the generation that left behind the highest number of crosses and graves along the endless paths through which it was led, by a unique fate, to a challenging and manly struggle to build Romania. It is the generation that, despite being plunged countless times by the relentless wave of battles from the heights of glory into abyssal depths, nevertheless forged the Great Union. It is the restless generation that had at its forefront Ferdinand I. It is the great generation whose brilliant and immortal motto was and still is: "By dying, we shoulder our duty." ... Soldiers, fight the way we fought and the way all our forefathers fought, all for one and one for all, for the holy law of our eternal rights.*²⁶¹

Therefore, the state helped the *luptători* with regard to their pedagogic efforts. Not only, as mentioned above, did public authorities invite the combatants to official war commemorations, but between 1941 and 1942 the government also lavishly funded the “Queen Maria” National Settlement, providing it with a budget of 18,735,594 *Lei*.²⁶² It also planned to build new commemorative buildings, such as an ossuary in Bucharest that was meant to preserve the remains of soldiers who had died in the First World War.²⁶³

It should be noted that the *luptători* also kept on undertaking public diplomacy activities, albeit to a much lesser degree than in the interwar era. Notably, Nicolae Hamat attempted to strengthen cultural and political relationships between Romania and Francoist Spain by working in a society named “Romanian-Spanish Action” (*Acțiunea Româna-Spaniola*).²⁶⁴ To some degree, the state helped the combatants in these efforts. In September 1941, Victor Cădere was made minister plenipotentiary to Portugal, a post he would formally hold until July 1944. As a part of his duties, he worked on preserving Romania’s ties to this Iberian country, thereby helping fulfill one of the Romanian kingdom’s primary diplomatic goals at the time.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ Public speech given by Marshal Ion Antonescu, likely 1943, 794/1943, MPN1, ANIC, 111, 115.

²⁶² Așezământul Național „Regina Maria” pentru Cultul Eroilor, *Dare de seama asupra activității Așezământului pe timpul dela 1 Aprilie 1941 la 31 Martie 1942* (Bucharest: Tipografia „Lupta” N. Stroila), 32, SCE, 204, AMNR, 251.

²⁶³ *Sentinela: Gazeta Ostășească a Națiunii* [The Sentinel: National Military Gazette], May 23, 1943

²⁶⁴ Secret police report on Nicolae Hamat, 1942, I 0407349, FDB, CNSAS, 38.

²⁶⁵ Cazacu, “Victor Cădere,” 18, 299, 308-312.

Mainly as a result of these various concessions, the movement cooperated to some extent with the dictatorship. Essentially, it supported Romania's war effort through a variety of means. Its members visited wounded soldiers who were recovered at hospitals, to preserve the latter's morale,²⁶⁶ and provided field hospitals, staff,²⁶⁷ and financial support²⁶⁸ to help cure them. Additionally, they donated money to the families of the soldiers who had fallen on the Eastern front.²⁶⁹ They also buttressed the state cult of Marshal Antonescu – a cult that disseminated a messianic public image of Romania's leader²⁷⁰ – publicly stating the necessity of supporting him to win the war.²⁷¹

Moreover, as mentioned above, ex-enlistees continued performing the pedagogic and ambassadorial activities they had grown accustomed to in the course of the previous 20 years. It should be pointed out that, in performing pedagogic activities, the fighters began praising the fallen soldiers on the Eastern front as fresh examples of heroism and patriotism - presenting them, in other words, as worthy successors to themselves and their deceased comrades.²⁷² In addition to fostering a shared cult of heroes, the ex-servicemen cultivated public worship for the Romanian nation. Specifically, they meant to strengthen longing for their nation-state in its pre-1940 condition. For instance, in 1941, they asked permission to stage a patriotic ceremony on June 28, the day when the Soviet Union's occupation of Bessarabia had begun.²⁷³

²⁶⁶ Letter sent by General Ion Antonescu to the president of the "Glories of the Nation" Society, August 19, 1941, 63/1942, ONIOVR, ANIC, 12.

²⁶⁷ Letter sent by the Nationalist Fighters' Corps to General Inspector Sunățeanu, July 15, 1941; judgement on a case involving Reserve Major Gheorghe Rădulescu, likely 1942, 5, CLN, 2747, AMNR

²⁶⁸ Letter sent by the Nationalist Fighters' Corps to the General Director of Romanian Theatres and Theatrical Plays, October 30, 1941, 1, CLN, 2747, AMNR

²⁶⁹ List of financial contributions to families of fallen soldiers in the anti-Soviet campaign, likely 1941, 983/1932-1941, MPN2, ANIC, 137.

²⁷⁰ Călin Hentea, *Propaganda în război* [War Propaganda] (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2014), 193.

²⁷¹ Secret police report on the activities of the UFVR, November 18, 1943, D 012742, CNSAS, 319.

²⁷² *Sentinela*, May 10, May 23, October 10, 1943; *Soldatul*, 259, 1942

²⁷³ Letter sent by the Nationalist Fighters' Corps to the propaganda ministry, June 13, 1941, 1, CLN, 2747, AMNR

Unfortunately, the *luptători* movement proved also ready to acquiesce to official anti-Semitism, albeit probably often dissenting, in private, from this political course. After all, as late as 1941, the veterans' association known as the "Heroes of the Nation" Society (*Societatea „Eroii Neamului”*) made a Jew an honorary member.²⁷⁴ It should be noticed that, in the course of the war, the dictatorship's anti-Semitic course also affected Jewish *luptători*. For instance, Jewish combatants were deported from the municipality of Dorohoi and Southern Bukovina, being subjected to forced labor.²⁷⁵ Crucially, in 1942, the regime requested that the war participants' associations expel all of their Jewish members, an order which these groups appear to have generally complied with.²⁷⁶

Was the limited cooperation between the movement and the regime a durable one? In general terms, it appears that it survived until the marshal was deposed in August 1944. Nevertheless, it should be noticed that in time war participants grew more distant from Antonescu. As a result, organized *luptători*, on the whole, would acquiesce to King Michael's removal of the marshal from power.

First of all, the military reversals which were suffered by Romania, beginning in late 1942, undoubtedly strengthened, among various ex-servicemen, the belief that the marshal's war strategy was fundamentally untenable. To be sure, as in the case of the rest of the Romanian population,²⁷⁷ ex-enlistees refused to publicly voice their misgivings about the national army's defeat at Stalingrad. Nevertheless, it is clear that this major military debacle alienated various among them from Antonescu and brought them closer to the old parliamentary parties. Notably, in 1943 the UFVR invited PNL and PNTȚ politicians to one of its public gatherings.²⁷⁸ At the local level, the UGA chapter in Sibiu elected a new

²⁷⁴ Letter sent by the military commander of Bucharest to the national defense ministry, July 16, 1941, 3/1938-1942, MR 1900-1952, CM, ANIC, 15.

²⁷⁵ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 220-221.

²⁷⁶ Report on veterans' associations, November 30, 1942, 63/1942, ONIOVR, ANIC, 42.

²⁷⁷ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 98.

²⁷⁸ Secret police report on the activities of the UFVR, October 29, 1943, D 012742, FDB, CNSAS, 290.

leading committee, the members of which had been involved with the PNL.²⁷⁹ In strengthening links to the parliamentary parties, which had preserved a generic pro-Allied orientation,²⁸⁰ these fighters likely hoped to disentangle Romania from its present alliance with the Axis.

Additionally, as Romania's involvement in the war led to severe economic problems, the state experienced difficulties in providing ex-servicemen with the expected benefits. Notably, the regime failed to honor some of the *luptători*'s established privileges. In 1942, both the SMIR and the "Glories of the Nation" Society reported that some members were not receiving their pensions.²⁸¹ In the same year, the government withdrew the invalids' discounts on train fares.²⁸² As, around that time, discharged disabled of the Eastern Front reportedly complained that they were being underserved by the marshal in terms of pension rights and reductions on train rides, it is likely the impaired of 1916-1919 also harbored a strong degree of dissatisfaction toward the statesman, for similar reasons.²⁸³

Additionally, it became impossible for the regime to address issues that had long beset some categories of old soldiers. In June 1944, the marshal shelved a reform project to sensibly improve war pensions.²⁸⁴ Ultimately, in the final phase of the country's war effort on the Axis' side, the dictatorship faltered to some extent with regard to satisfying returnees' sense of entitlement. These shortcomings must have made a negative impression on numerous fighters – especially those who depended the most on the state's financial help - thereby undoubtedly prompting them to acquiesce to the coup d'état which was enacted by the king. Unsurprisingly, following the coup, the "Michael I King of All

²⁷⁹ Secret police report on the UGA, likely after 1945, D 012358, FDB, CNSAS, 21.

²⁸⁰ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 230-231.

²⁸¹ Police report on the "Glories of the Nation" Society, April 7, 1942, 32/1935, PCMSSI; report sent by the SMIR to the gendarmerie garrison of Focșani, October 31, 1942, 63/1942, ONIOVR, ANIC, 211; 47.

²⁸² Bancoș, *Social și național*, 349.

²⁸³ Secret police report on the war impaired of the Eastern Front, June 21, 1943, 29/1943, DGP 1937-1948, ANIC, 3.

²⁸⁴ Letter sent by the finance ministry to the national defense ministry, June 2, 1944, 545/1944, PCMSSI, ANIC, 21.

Romanians” Society for Infantrymen, Corporals, and Sergeants of the Campaigns of 1913-1916-1918, an association that championed the rights of some of the most deprived veterans, confirmed its loyalty to the monarch.²⁸⁵

Summing up, under the military dictatorship of Marshal Antonescu, a limited process of cooperation took place between this regime and the veterans’ movement. As with Romania’s previous political regimes, this autocracy secured the cooperation of the movement primarily by catering to its claims to material and symbolic rewards. Before 1943, associated fighters were at their most accepting of the marshal due to Romania’s victories on the Eastern front and the fact that the dictatorship proved successful at providing them with various benefits. Importantly, as shown above, these veterans’ policies ensured that organized *luptători* consented, albeit in a limited manner, to Antonescu’s general political course of action. However, subsequently, the regime began experiencing severe military defeats and shortcomings in delivering benefits to the ex-servicemen. While not forceful enough to compel the movement to make a clear break with Antonescu, these factors nevertheless prompted it to accept the crown’s coup d’état eventually.

3.3 Comparing Italian and Romanian Veterans’ Policies: How Ex-Servicemen’s Sense of Entitlement Persistently Influenced Their Political Allegiances

In this section, I perform synchronic, and generalizing comparisons between the case studies of Italy and Romania for the years 1939-1945. Through this comparison, I highlight the following political dynamics which took place in these two case studies, between 1939 and 1944, i.e., from the outbreak of the Second World War to the downfall of the

²⁸⁵ Letter sent by the “Michael I King of All Romanians” Society for Infantrymen, Corporals and Sergeants of the Campaigns of 1913-1916-1918 to King Michael I, September 20, 1944, folder 16/1944, fund “*Casa Regala – Oficiale, Volum 3*,” ANIC, 1.

dictatorships of Benito Mussolini and General/Marshal Ion Antonescu. First of all, former fighters' movements based their allegiance to public institutions and major political organizations on local establishments' willingness to continue treating such movements as corporate groups and share the latter's values. Second, the two countries' respective regimes harnessed the support and cooperation of most of the movements' activists by catering to their sense of entitlement and beliefs.

In these case studies, most associated ex-combatants felt compelled to cooperate with the authoritarian polities they lived under by a plurality of factors. Before these kingdoms became involved in the Second World War, an essential motivation for doing so appears to have been the desire to keep on being treated as a corporate group by the state. As a matter of fact, in the case of Italy, ex-enlistees had been collaborating with their nation's repressive regime, for this purpose, since the 1920s. After the advent of King Charles II's personalist system of government, in 1938, this became the case also for a high number of Romanian ex-soldiers, who chose to work with the king to keep on enjoying the benefits they had been entitled to under parliamentary governments, in addition to seeing the flaws of existing state veterans' policies addressed by this new authoritarian leader.

Once Italy and Romania became involved in World War Two, ex-soldiers' wish to be rewarded kept playing an essential role in their decision to support illiberal statesmen, although other factors were also at play. Notably, former fighters also wished to help defend their fatherlands from military invasion and, in the Romanian case, following the summer of 1940, to recover the national territories which had been recently lost to Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union. While these additional motivations at times played a paramount role in shaping the loyalties of associated fighters, it appears they were not the determinant ones, in the long run, unlike veterans' wishes for recompenses.

That fighters' movements supported autocratic polities in wartime, to a great degree, to preserve their positions as corporate groups and as guardians of the nation might be evinced from the fact that their adherents often failed to identify to a relevant extent with the ultimate ideological objectives of their governments. This pragmatic mindset is especially evident in the case of the Romanian veterans' relationship to the short-lived National Legionary State: most organized ex-servicemen refrained from supporting one of the two political pillars of this regime, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, as they felt neglected in their sense of entitlement by the latter.

Ultimately, it is likely that ex-combatants kept on supporting these regimes, in the long run, chiefly as a result of the latter's policies, which provided them with a variety of privileges. Crucially, in the closing stages of Italian and Romanian dictatorships' rule, the majority of the movements' members appear to have grown quietly disaffected with their respective rulers while still formally collaborating with them. In these final phases, not only had Mussolini and Antonescu experienced severe military setbacks, but their veterans' policies appear to have incurred in significant shortcomings due to the economic disruption brought about by the war effort. The latter complication undoubtedly played a relevant role in ex-militaries' acceptance of the monarchical coups, which removed these strongmen from power.

With regard to the Italian case study, it should be noted that associated ex-soldiers living under the pro-Nazi Italian Social Republic, between 1943 and 1945, often gave conditional support to this statelet, essentially attempting to continue to preserve and improve their status as a corporate group and be treated as custodians of the fatherland, while remaining uninvested in the RSI's objectives. Importantly, as the Republic's dire financial straits and collapsing infrastructure led to various issues in enacting provisions

for World War One returnees, the latter seemingly became even more superficial in backing the RSI than they had been in collaborating with Mussolini's previous dictatorship.

Crucially, both the Italian and the Romanian dictatorships were prompted by the nationalist veterans' political priorities to cater to these ex-soldiers' claims. The Italian Fascist regime, the RSI, and the three repressive regimes that held power in Romania between 1938 and 1944, all strove to give ex-servicemen the rewards they asked for. Importantly, it should be noted that the Italian Social Republic attempted to replicate the veterans' policies of the Fascist regime. With regard to the Romanian case study, all three dictatorships ruling over this country provided material, symbolic, and political privileges to the ex-servicemen. In the case of the National Legionary State, General Antonescu created ties of solidarity to the war participants, essentially countering the Iron Guard's more antagonizing stance. Once he established his personal regime, Antonescu continued cultivating his links to associated veterans. Importantly, while he ended up disbanding the associations of the war impaired and the UNAL, he was careful to provide ex-combatants with new forums for articulating their requests to official authorities.

Ultimately, comparing these two case studies highlights, on the one hand, the persistent influence of the patriotic veterans' sense of entitlement over these combatants' inclinations and, on the other, the necessity for states to satisfy this feeling of deservedness, in exchange for these individuals' acclamation. Finally, this analysis indicates that the fighters' movements underwent a degree of radicalization in electing to collaborate with the dictators, helping buttress these statesmen's prestige and enforce some of the latter's policies.

Conclusions: The Influence of State Policymaking over the Political Activism of First World War Veterans

4.1 Contextualizing Veterans' Political Allegiances

My dissertation demonstrates that, both in Italy and Romania, between the end of World War One and the conclusion of World War Two, nationalist soldiers who had served in the first of these conflagrations were prominently influenced, in their political leanings, by a sense of entitlement they had developed at the time of their military service. Specifically, numerous Italian and Romanian war returnees wished for their respective states and societies to provide them with goods, services, and esteem, as recompenses for their combat activities. These concessions included several items which ex-combatants viewed as necessary for retaining or improving their pre-existing socio-economic statuses, such as plots of private land and war and military pensions. In addition, ex-servicemen asked for benefits that might help them pursue their fundamental ideological goals – which consisted of protecting the kingdoms they had fought for, through peacetime means – such as financial and organizational aid for their pedagogic and diplomatic activities.

Consequently, a high number of Italian and Romanian ex-combatants' readiness to accept the political regimes which were in place in their respective countries after 1918 depended greatly, albeit not exclusively, on these regimes' willingness to entertain the requests for benefits these returnees conveyed to them. Specifically, in both realms, the majority of the associated war participants provided support to those political organizations that promised to grant them the provisions they felt they deserved. It should be noticed that this pattern persisted through the whole time span under analysis. Crucially, it had dire consequences for the first Italian liberal democracy, which succumbed to, among its many

adversaries, veterans disgruntled by what they considered to be insufficient provisions to their benefit.

Comparing the Italian and Romanian case studies helps underline the dynamic mentioned above. Specifically, the synchronic comparison enacted by this dissertation delineates that, in both the Italian and Romanian kingdoms, democracies and dictatorships earned consent from nationalist veterans mainly, although not solely, by satisfying these war returnees' claims to privileges.

This dynamic is especially clear when comparing the Italian and Romanian liberal regimes of the 1920s, as shown in Chapter One. As underscored by this chapter's comparison, these two regimes owed the state of their political relationship with nationalist ex-combatants' movements mainly to the extent to which they were able and willing to cater to these ex-servicemen's claims to rewards. On the one hand, the Romanian parliamentary parties and governments conceded the demobilized soldiers' movement several of the recompenses the latter was seeking. Additionally, when in the mid-to-late 1920s the National Liberal Party eventually underserved the war participants, a democratic alternative to this group came to the fore, in the guise of the National Peasant Party. The latter quickly attracted the support of numerous discontented ex-combatants, ensuring that their dissatisfaction was not exploited chiefly by the far right.

In Italy, on the other hand, before the March on Rome, the main parliamentary groupings and governments failed to provide nationalist war returnees with many of the privileges they wished for, while sometimes also treating these ex-soldiers' associations with insufficient respect. Therefore, the Italian nationalist veterans' movement was estranged from various democratic politicians to varying extents, by the time the Fascists seized power. As a matter of fact, before the March, the Fascists had already begun making inroads in this organization – while not hegemonizing it – by helping some of its members

accomplish their goals or promising to do so in the future. Crucially, after Mussolini came to power, the majority of the movement came to support his government, mainly – although not exclusively - as he provided its members with several benefits they had been waiting for since the end of the war. He also turned the movement into a fully-fledged corporate group. While most associated ex-militaries did not spontaneously accept to be subordinated to the National Fascist Party – as a matter of fact, they had to be coerced in doing so, in many instances – thereafter, they essentially resigned themselves to be its subjects, in exchange for the special consideration they enjoyed.

The political dynamic mentioned above – Italian and Romanian nationalist fighters being willing to support patrons that satisfied their affiliates’ sense of entitlement – was also at play in the rest of the interwar era and the Second World War. In other words, the various regimes which held sway in Italy and Romania in this era preserved the acceptance of these movements by catering to the latter’s followers’ claims to rights. These developments are evident through further comparisons of the Italian and Romanian case studies.

As shown through the comparisons enacted in Chapters One and Two, in the interwar era, both the Italian Fascist regime and the Romanian parliamentary system were compelled to offer similar incentives to associated ex-combatants living under them to retain the latter’s loyalty. Both political regimes had to overcome the challenges brought about by the Great Depression’s impact on their finances and national economies, to preserve organized war participants’ consent, eventually braving these obstacles. It appears that, on the whole, Italian Fascism satisfied the local ex-combatants’ associations more continuously and extensively. It notably used its recently established empire in Ethiopia, as well as the older colony of Libya, to make up in part for some shortcomings in its veterans’ policies. As a result of its strategy and efforts, Mussolini’s autocracy held onto

the support of the war returnees' movement – a backing which, on the whole, was rather superficial and selective, to be sure. As for Romania, in the 1930s, this kingdom experienced severe setbacks in its attempt to satisfy war returnees' expectations of special treatment due the global economic crisis. Nevertheless, by the time King Charles II's authoritarian regime was established, in early 1938, the Romanian parliamentary parties had eventually repaired their relationship to the ex-servicemen's community, to a significant extent, by restoring various advantages previously enjoyed by the war returnees, in addition to granting the latter some additional perks.

Ultimately, comparing state veterans' policies and the political alignments of ex-servicemen in Italy and Romania for the years between the late 1920s and the late 1930s reinforces the notion that, in both countries, many discharges ascribed great importance to having their claims to privileges recognized. Finally, jointly analyzing state policymaking and the political alignments of demobilized soldiers in Italy and Romania, at the time when these two countries were simultaneously ruled over by dictatorships and involved in the Second World War, further confirms that old soldiers' movements were often ready to support politicians who satisfied their affiliates' demands for preferential treatment. Specifically, as shown through the comparison enacted in Chapter Three, Mussolini's autocracy, the Italian Social Republic, and the strongmen who controlled Romania between 1938 and 1944 offered, or tried to offer, similar incentives to organized former fighters to retain their backing. Crucially, most of the latter collaborated with these various illiberal players – albeit in an often-limited manner - to receive the advantages they desired. In doing so, they underwent a process of limited radicalization.

It should be noted that, at times when war participants felt especially underserved in their claims to a special status, they appear to have accordingly reduced the measure of support they conceded to the regimes they were cooperating with. For instance, under the

National Legionary State, Romanian ex-soldiers seem to have shied away from lending much support to the Iron Guard, as the Legion undermined, in some instances, their representatives. Additionally, in the closing stages of Mussolini's regime and Antonescu's rule, it seems that most organized fighters grew quietly estranged from the dictatorships they were consenting to, as attested by their ultimate acceptance of the monarchist coups that put an end to such regimes. Crucially, it appears this estrangement stemmed from increasing shortcomings in Mussolini and Antonescu's veterans' policies, in addition to other factors. Finally, it should be noted that the pro-Nazi Italian Social Republic's failure to extensively cater to the former soldiers' claims to benefits undoubtedly represented one of the main reasons why these men provided a diluted form of support for the Fascist puppet state.

The resilient link between the ex-servicemen's claims to rights and these individuals' political alignments prompts several considerations that might enrich the recurring academic debates on veterans' activism in Europe in the aftermath of the Great War. First of all, this bond suggests that, while long-term factors affected European ex-combatants' conduct, short-term factors played a substantial role in shaping these behaviors. In other words, judging from the Italian and Romanian case studies, it appears that, after 1918, many war returnees in Europe were to some extent fluid in their political proclivities, being essentially ready to follow those factions which promised to satisfy their claims to benefits and at least partially aligned with their values. Consequently, it might be argued that, across the continent, many former fighters accepted, or radicalized against, specific politicians mainly as a result of post-war factors, i.e., these actors' decision to champion or neglect discharged troops' hunger for rewards.

My research findings also caution against wide-ranging applications of Mosse's brutalization theory as an explanation for the radicalizing patterns which involved scores

of returnees in the aftermath of the first global confrontation. Specifically, my research suggests that former fighters were often prompted to turn militant more by post-war developments, than by extreme personal wartime experiences. In other words, numerous European war returnees were probably still moderate or reformist at the time they underwent military demobilization and returned to civilian life. It might be argued that, among those discharged patriotic soldiers who eventually turned against the liberal parliamentary systems they lived under, supporting militant parties and movements, few did so out of extremist tendencies developed at the battlefield. Instead, many more possibly did so as, after 1918, their claims to recompenses were not adequately acknowledged by their institutions.

Additionally, my findings support the suggestion made by Edele and Gerwarth that, around the world, significant shortcomings in official concessions to fighters tended to act as a major radicalizing catalyst for the latter. Moreover, my analysis suggests that numerous veterans asked their states, in addition to a special socio-economic status, for advantages that might help them attain some of their core ideological goals. For instance, as shown above, numerous activists militating in Italian and Romanian ex-soldiers' associations considered it essential that their public institutions include them in official war commemorations and ceremonies. Importantly, in harboring such hopes, many of them hoped not only to revel in the gratitude of the crowds observing them, but also to achieve the goal of protecting the Italian and Romanian fatherlands. In partaking in these public rites, they desired to shape the beliefs and attitudes of the latter's audiences, to imbue these spectators with their own values, so that observers might defend this nation in the future. To the latter end, these individuals also wished to be granted financial and organizational help in enacting patriotic pedagogy and public diplomacy.

On the topic of veterans' activism, it should also be noticed that the degree to which the Italian and Romanian states accorded *combattenti* and *luptători* the privileges they sought depended, among other factors, on these ex-combatants' actions and choices – namely, their ability to exploit the political opportunity structure they operated within, to recognize and take advantage of those opportunities that might help them successfully pressure institutions into satisfying their claims. Especially in the Italian case study, many veterans flanked far-right forces to see their calls for recompenses satisfied by official institutions, a strategy that yielded results in terms of obtaining or preserving a special status and role. At the same time, it should be pointed out that this strategy ultimately backfired, as it forced fellow travelers to suffer firsthand the catastrophic consequences of their nations' military involvement in the Second World War.

Furthermore, my study supports the case made by Newman on the limits of state cultures of victory, concerning such cultures' potential for moderating the political conduct of the war returnees living under them. Specifically, while it is often assumed that soldiers of the First World War living in defeated nations were the most likely returnees to give in to political fanaticism, Newman shows that many ex-servicemen residing in victor countries also espoused a similar behavior for a variety of reasons. In his study of interwar Yugoslavia,¹ he points out that the veterans' policies connected to the official culture of victory promoted by this kingdom's liberal political system often failed to deliver material rewards to former fighters, causing many among the latter to embrace authoritarian politics. Crucially, if flawed policymaking represented a significant trigger for Southern-Slav ex-combatants, a similar dynamic also appears to have taken place in Italy and Romania. In the latter two kingdoms, as in Yugoslavia, liberal parliamentary systems, for different

¹ John Paul Newman, *Yugoslavia in the Shadow of War: Veterans and the Limits of State Building, 1903-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 12-13, 79-81, 99.

reasons and at different times, failed to satisfy to a relevant degree the claims to benefits of their respective returnees' groups, prompting many members of the latter to embrace their respective countries' right-wing grassroots movements and parties. Ultimately, the Italian and Romanian case studies underscore the likeliness that faulty veterans' policies represented a relevant shortcoming of European cultures of victory.

4.2 The Contingencies Which Enabled Nationalist Veterans' Support for Authoritarianism

My analysis, among other matters, indicates that, both in Italy and Romania, numerous war returnees backed authoritarianism mainly as this political phenomenon at times managed, to various degrees, to capitalize on the disaffection which ex-servicemen felt toward pluralist political actors due to the latter's unwillingness or inability to satisfy their requests. Essentially, the existence of this political dynamic, in addition to the fact that the latter was rather relevant, supports three compelling statements made by scholars of Italian Fascism – contentions which, I contend, can also be applied to various right-wing authoritarian organizations and the illiberal regimes that came into being, before 1944, in Romania.

First of all, my inquiry argues in favor of those academics, like Paxton and Riley, who propose that Italian Fascism secured widespread popular consent by appealing to social constituencies which felt inadequately represented, in their interests, by established political organizations. This kind of consent-building process definitely underpinned the pervasive relationship that came into being between far-right authoritarian politics and nationalist veterans in Italy and Romania. Specifically, while various former fighters came to support Fascism out of hyper-nationalism, many others undoubtedly did so out of believing that this political force's rivals were not doing enough for them. It should be

noted, for instance, that, in Italy, many members of the *combattenti*'s organizations did not entertain revolutionary purposes before or during the First World War. Nor, after the conflict, did they feel compelled to flank the Blackshirts due to frustrations with Italy's territorial settlement or hatred towards internal enemies. In other words, it appears the Blackshirts ultimately gathered much of their following among war returnees by capitalizing on other political forces' inability or unwillingness to address the needs and aspirations of ex-enlistees. This following, hence, arose primarily due to historical contingencies occasioned by the miscalculations committed by non-far-right political actors.

Importantly, a similar dynamic took place in Romania in the interwar era: various extremist parties and movements, including the fascist Legion of the Archangel Michael, amassed sizeable support from veterans, mainly at times when the parliamentary system failed the latter, in terms of sponsoring their claims. In highlighting the importance of these contingencies and post-war factors in general, my research transcends established theoretical outlooks on veterans' radicalism, proposing that national political cultures and brutalizing war experiences perhaps were not the main catalysts for such intransigence.

Second, Griffin proposes that fascism, including its Italian variant, acquired widespread popularity in interwar Europe due to acute socio-economic tensions. He also suggests that many followers of this political phenomenon supported it due to its stance on single public issues, providing it with qualified backing instead of wholly endorsing its general ideological tenets.² This kind of relationship arose in Italy and Romania, between many discontented nationalist ex-warriors, on the one hand, and various illiberal right-wing organizations and regimes, on the other. Specifically, it appears a high number of former

² Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 679-680, 767-799, 806-820, Apple Books edition.

fighters who ended up backing or sympathizing with these entities probably did so mainly out of appreciation for their stance on benefits for ex-soldiers, showing little spontaneous interest in their principal goals and ideals. Accordingly, the kind of support these ex-servicemen offered was limited and superficial. For instance, ex-soldiers collaborating with Mussolini at times privately dissented and often showed apathy for his radical objectives. In Romania, support, among the local war returnees, for the plethora of anti-parliamentary groups that came to the fore in the early-to-late 1930s decreased as the state improved its provisions aimed at these individuals. Most notably, during the Second World War, ex-servicemen living under strongmen eventually grew apathetic toward the latter, partly due to increasing shortcomings in their official systems of recompenses.

Third, while the support given by numerous ex-servicemen to far-right politics was indeed contingent and qualified, it should be reiterated that, as long as they were satisfied in their claims to benefits, these supporters and flankers did assist such politics in relevant ways. Most notably, they lent authoritativeness to Italian and Romanian dictatorships through the propaganda activities they carried out in the name of these regimes. These developments suggest that Italian and Romanian right-wing radical politicians were apt, at least until the Second World War, at using material incentives (in addition to symbolic and political ones) to secure compliance and that such incentives represented a considerable part of their attractiveness. Berman proposes that Italian Fascism's societal appeal consisted of addressing pressing collective issues, especially by shielding citizens from economic downturns.³ My research indicates that authoritarianism stabilized consent through extensive welfare policies both in Italy and Romania, albeit mainly in the former country. In other words, this kind of despotism successfully employed economic

³ Sheri Berman, "It Wasn't Just Hate. Fascism Offered Robust Social Welfare," *Aeon: A World of Ideas*, March 27, 2017, <https://aeon.co/ideas/fascism-was-a-right-wing-anti-capitalist-movement>.

enticements, in addition to coercion and propaganda, to buttress itself. This pattern is evident when looking at the veterans' policies proposed or enacted by Italian and Romanian strongmen, who addressed former fighters' wish to elevate or retain their existing place within their countries' social pyramids.

Finally, on a separate note, it should be noted that “*moral emotions*” and “*affective bonds*” played an essential role in ex-servicemen's decision to endorse anti-parliamentary trends. Specifically, in the aftermath of the First World War veterans' movements came together and operated as the result of their members' assumption that they deserved to be compensated, by their liberal states, for their military service. In those instances when democratic politics failed to grant them what they wished, as in Italy in the early post-war years and in Romania in the 1930s, ex-combatants often started supporting illiberalism out of a strong sense of moral indignation. On the other hand, Mussolini's regime ingratiated itself to many *combattenti* by conceding them several privileges, a tactic that fostered gratitude for it among them and gave rise to affective bonds between these parties. Ultimately, the Italian and Romanian case studies suggest that emotions, far from clouding the judgment of veterans, strengthened these political actors' resolve to pursue rational strategies to achieve their goals. Therefore, as put forward by Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta,⁴ studying the ways emotions underpin and influence social movements' political actions can help us gauge the ways these movements arise and evolve through time.

Ultimately, my research findings propose that scholars studying the links between ex-combatants and illiberal politics in interwar Europe employ highly nuanced readings of these ties, taking into account the likeliness that they depended on constellations of factors

⁴ Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper, Francesca Polletta, “Emotional Dimensions of Social Movements,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, eds. David Snow, Sarah Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 418, 422, 425.

and that they were occasioned by a variety of radicalizing catalysts, among which a frustrated sense of entitlement played a relevant role.

4.3 Future Research Avenues

My research findings suggest a variety of potential research paths on European veterans' political activism with regard to the period between the two World Wars. To begin with, they suggest that scholars studying the shortcomings of official provisions for returnees analyze whether such inadequacies played a relevant role in the processes of political radicalization that influenced numerous ex-combatants across Europe. In particular, it might prove fruitful to ascertain whether extremist political actors, on the right and the left, secured the support of ex-servicemen by promising to grant them a special socio-economic status and public role, similar to what occurred in Italy and in Romania. While these issues have already been investigated with regard to several national case studies, other contexts still require this kind of scholarly analysis, independently from whether they pertain to victor or defeated nations of the First World War. Bulgaria, a country which so far appears to have received little academic scrutiny in terms of surveying the political activities of its First World War enlistees, might especially benefit from this kind of analysis. Additionally, these matters still need to be investigated comprehensively at the regional and local levels. For instance, it might be ascertained whether states discriminated, in terms of benefits, those subjects who had fought against them in the war of 1914-1918 and whether, if so, these subjects took up radical beliefs as a result.

Moreover, my Romanian case study proposes new avenues of inquiry for the study of the transnational circulation of radical political ideals and practices in interwar Europe. More in detail, it argues that grievances related to state veterans' policies prompted war

participants living under democratic polities to look with interest at the (allegedly) better policy arrangements that were in place under authoritarian regimes. Ex-enlistees might have developed a wish to establish dictatorships in their own countries, in the attempt to replicate these favorable provisions. In other words, while, as recently indicated by Alcalde, European ex-servicemen living in democracies were often prompted to attempt to replicate foreign authoritarian political models as the latter fitted with their hyper-nationalist priorities, it might be speculated that some of these imitators were motivated also or exclusively by material grievances related to the flaws in their own states' systems of rewards. Therefore, to better understand the reach and appeal of militant political ideals and practices across borders, it is still to be ascertained whether, aside from Romania, the veterans' policies of such authoritarian states as Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany represented a radicalizing influence over the ex-servicemen of other European countries.

It might also prove stimulating to conduct thorough academic inquiries on the relationship between veterans' claims to rights and authoritarian organizations and regimes, in Europe, for the period following the Second World War. With regard to the two countries analyzed in this dissertation, it remains to be seen if, in both of these contexts, fighters of the latter conflict or the First World War embraced authoritarian ideas and practices under the political regimes in power after 1945. First of all, it is to be assessed whether in Romania, before 1989, the local communist dictatorship managed to persuade discharged personnel to collaborate with it, in exchange for a set of formal privileges - thereby replicating, to some degree, the cooperative relationship that had taken place between the ex-combatants' movement and the illiberal governments of 1938-1944. As a matter of fact, while Romanian communism marginalized the main organizers of the local First World

War combatants – for instance, the UORR president Victor Gomoiu⁵ and the FIDAC activist Victor Cădere⁶ were subjected to prison sentences – beginning in the 1950s, it involved ex-servicemen in its war commemorations.⁷ This development suggests that the said regime was interested in co-opting ex-combatants. Therefore, it would be useful to investigate, on the one hand, whether Communists managed to secure the support of numerous war returnees by granting them a special socio-economic status and support for their own nationalist pedagogic and diplomatic initiatives – in addition to generally extolling patriotic values.⁸ On the other, it might prove fruitful to ascertain whether these potential collaborators made a significant contribution to the political entrenchment of Romania's new masters.⁹

An additional potentially stimulating inquiry is represented by research on ex-combatants' political orientations under the Italian and Romanian democratic regimes that came into being, respectively, after the military defeat of Fascism and Nazism and the downfall of the communist statesman Nicolae Ceaușescu. Specifically, it is to be understood whether, under such regimes, far-right political actors managed to secure a degree of support from former fighters due to hypothetical shortcomings in state veterans' policies, to assess whether a strong sense of entitlement represented, also in these contexts, a powerful radicalizing influence over former fighters.

With regard to republican Italy, a case study on which some insightful scholarship has already been produced, existing studies suggest that this kind of dynamic did not take

⁵ J. Tricot, "Victor Gomoiu and the Cantacuzène Commission," *Bulletin of the Transylvania University of Brașov*, 6, No. 51 (2009), 116.

⁶ Ioana Cazacu, "Victor Cădere: Diplomat (1919-1944)" (PhD Dissertation, „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, 2012), 18-19.

⁷ Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-century Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 167, 178, 180.

⁸ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 190-191.

⁹ At the time of writing, Constantin Iordachi is developing a chapter on the relationship between former soldiers and the Romanian Communist regime, for an upcoming edited volume.

place: in the early post-war years, the Italian state gradually, albeit in a piecemeal manner, fashioned a comprehensive system of recompenses for ex-enlistees, including those who had fought for Mussolini before his first regime was toppled. Consequently, the main veterans' associations remained tolerant of republican governments and the antifascist mass opposition parties.¹⁰ As a matter of fact, the ANC, known after 1946 as the National Association of Fighters and War Returnees (*Associazione Nazionale Combattenti e Reduci*),¹¹ even survived an attempt by a rival association, the Union of Italian Fighters (*Unione Combattenti d'Italia*), headed by Marshal Giovanni Messe and denoted by conservative leanings, to woo away its following.¹² It should also be noted that Italy's antifascist political system enacted a comprehensive land reform in which the National Institution for Fighters played a role,¹³ which undoubtedly ensured that many veterans received a private plot of land. It also officially honored the fallen soldiers of the Second World War and developed nationalist rituals such as an Armed Forces Day¹⁴ – ceremonies which in all likelihood made the nationalist ex-combatants believe public authorities were supporting their goals of strengthening the fatherland through patriotic pedagogy.

Moreover, it appears in time the state further elevated veterans, including *combattenti*, to a special socio-economic status. Gradually, it turned 47 former fighters' organizations into state institutions – thereby allowing them to enjoy public funding – and

¹⁰ Agostino Bistarelli, *La storia del ritorno: I reduci italiani del secondo dopoguerra* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2007), 147-258; Marco Mondini, Guri Schwarz, *Dalla guerra alla pace: Retoriche e pratiche della smobilitazione nell'Italia del Novecento* (Sommacampagna: Cierre Edizioni e Istituto Storico della Resistenza e dell'Età Contemporanea della Provincia di Vicenza "Ettore Gallo," 2007), 127.

¹¹ Bistarelli, *La storia del ritorno*, 175.

¹² *L'Italia d'Oggi: Organo Ufficiale dell'Associazione Nazionale Combattenti e Reduci*, March 24; March 29; April 19; July 5, 1955

¹³ Gian Luigi Gatti, "Esser reduci: Le associazioni fra ex militari" [Being a Returnee: The Ex-Militaries' Associations], in Mario Isnenghi ed., *Gli italiani in guerra. Conflitti, identità, memorie dal Risorgimento ai nostri giorni*: volume 3: tome 2: *La Grande Guerra: Dall'intervento alla «vittoria mutilata»*, eds. Daniele Ceschin, Mario Isnenghi (Turin: Utet, 2008), 924.

¹⁴ Mondini, Schwarz, *Dalla guerra alla pace*, 171, 212.

financed 194 work cooperatives established by these men.¹⁵ It also appears governmental parties, taken as a whole, championed values that aligned with the moderate nationalism upheld by these associations. Notably, the main incumbent party across the whole time span of the Cold War, the Christian Democracy, manifestly embraced patriotic beliefs, albeit ones that were heavily laced with Catholic overtones and the doctrine of Atlanticism.¹⁶

Moreover, even after the Iron Curtain came into being, the *combattenti*'s movement appears not to have viewed leftist opposition parties with enmity. As a matter of fact, the shared experience of opposing Nazism and Fascism to liberate Italy, in the final stages of the Second World war, created some vague ties of solidarity between patriotic veterans and leftist parties, as attested by the fact that the former eventually federated their associations with the representatives of the left-wing guerrillas who had fought against Mussolini and Hitler in 1943-1945.¹⁷

Nevertheless, the relationship between associated combat survivors and politics in post-World War Two Italy still requires comprehensive scrutiny. Notably, it remains to be ascertained whether the state actually supported ex-servicemen's attempts at pursuing public diplomacy activities abroad to shore up the Italian fatherland, an inquiry which would help thoroughly assess the degree to which public authorities granted veterans an official role as guardians of the nation. It is also to be seen whether, at any point, neofascists and other far righters managed to profit to any degree from the frustrations that might have

¹⁵ Francesca Somenzari, "Le principali associazioni reducistiche del secondo dopoguerra" [The Main Returnees' Associations in the Second Post-War Era], *Storia e Futuro: Rivista di Storia e Storiografia On Line*, April 2020, accessed June 26, 2021, <http://storiaefuturo.eu/le-principali-associazioni-reducistiche-del-secondo-dopoguerra/>.

¹⁶ Paolo Acanfora, *Miti e ideologia nella politica estera della DC: Nazione, Europa e comunità atlantica (1943-1954)* [Myths and Ideology in the DC's Foreign Policy: Nation, Europe and the Atlantic Community (1943-1954)] (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013), 20-76.

¹⁷ Federico De Angelis, *Per una storia dell'ANPI: "Ricordare il passato, capire il presente, costruire il futuro"* [For a History of the ANPI: "To Remember the Past, to Understand the Present, to Build the Future"] (Cologno Monzese: Lampi di Stampa, 2016), 116.

been experienced by former fighters in demanding that the republic acknowledge their rights. After all, while republican governments conceded veterans much of what they asked for, they still failed to satisfy all of their requests, at times prompting ex-soldiers to undertake mass agitations. For instance, in the 1960s, the ANMIG enacted numerous public demonstrations to pressure cabinets into granting pension raises to its members.¹⁸ Bearing this in mind, it would be helpful to investigate whether any strand of right-wing illiberalism managed to capitalize on these frustrations, even if to a limited degree.

¹⁸ Francesco Zavatti, *Mutilati ed invalidi di guerra: Una storia politica* (Milan: Unicopli, 2011), 194-197.

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ANIC - *Arhive Naționale Istorice Centrale* [Central Historical National Archives], Bucharest, Romania

ASDMAE - *Archivio Storico-Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri* [Diplomatic-Historical Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], Rome, Italy

BAR - *Biblioteca Academiei Române* [Library of the Romanian Academy], Bucharest, Romania

CMMIG - *Casa Madre dei Mutilati e Invalidi di Guerra* [Motherhouse of the War Mutilated and Disabled], Rome, Italy

CNSAS - *Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității* [National Council for the Investigation of the Security's Archives], Bucharest, Romania

ISREC - *Istituto Storico della Resistenza e dell'Età Contemporanea di Forlì-Cesena* [Historical Institute of the Resistance and the Contemporary Age of Forlì-Cesena], Forlì, Italy

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