

Book Reviews

Elisabetta Gualmini and Eleonora Pasotti (eds), *Italian Politics: Much Ado about Nothing?*, New York and London: Berghahn Books, 2011, pp. ix + 301, pb \$59.95/£36.00, ISBN: 978-085745-457-7.

Historians of modern Italy generally view its politics in one of two ways: either through a glass half empty, or a glass empty. For the former, despite 150 years of rampant clientelism, corruption, cronyism and familism, Italy's political system has developed into something resembling a functioning modern democracy, albeit largely due to the exertions of Italian civil society rather than its political class. The lesson they draw is that while things might be bad now, the endeavours of Italy's virtuous 'reflexive' minority (Paul Ginsborg's description) hold out the prospect (however distant) of a better future. For the committed pessimists, though, the history of modern Italian politics suggests the opposite: the system is beyond redemption; bottom up efforts to effect meaningful change are destined to fail in the long-term, even if – very occasionally – civil society gains the upper hand. I place myself in the first group: the long list of reforms due to pressure from below, I have argued elsewhere, justify a guarded optimism; change for the better remains a possibility.

The 2010 edition of the ever-informative *Italian Politics*, it has to be said, offers little succour to 'silver-liners' like me. Nearly two decades on from *Tangentopoli* and the subsequent collapse of the 'first' Republic, politics in Italy in 2010 remained depressingly and all too familiarly mired in scandal, crisis and petty squabbles, with – at the end of it all – very little to show in terms of positive or substantial change. 'At the beginning of 2011, Italian politics is once again hanging in the balance', write Gualmini and Pasotti in their introduction (p. 62), while noting that 2010 'will surely be remembered as the year in which the deterioration of behaviour in public life reached heretofore unseen depths in well-established democracies' (p. 62). Progress indeed.

The ten chapters of *Italian Politics* explore the travails of the centre right and centre left and the emergence of the non-aligned New Pole for Italy (NPI) group, the regional elections of March 2010, political reform (education and justice) and broader political issues (four chapters on civil

protection, industrial relations, immigrant protest, and high-speed rail). The three chapters on party politics dutifully detail the bewildering and often unfathomable shifts and realignments within parties and coalitions, while simultaneously trying to separate the plentiful froth from the (limited) substance of political life. David Hine and Davide Vampa provide a thoughtful and well-balanced overview of the tensions within Berlusconi's People of Liberty (PdL) party, including a detailed analysis of the reasons behind the Fini-Berlusconi split. Stefano Braghiroli and Luca Verzichelli examine the 'odd couple' centre-left alliance of the Democratic Party (PD) and Italy of Values (IdV), the former moderate and pragmatic, the latter populist and provocative, as well as the inability of the left (and the PD in particular) to present itself as a genuine alternative to the PdL-Lega Nord (LN) government. Carlo Baccetti meanwhile shows that among the main beneficiaries of the ongoing crises within the two main political parties (the PdL and PD) were the small centrist Alliance for Italy (ApI) and Union of the Centre (UdC). In particular, Fini's decision to secede from the PdL and create his own new party, Future and Freedom for Italy (FLI), opened the way to a new coalition on the centre right – the NPI – made up of the ApI, UdC and FLI, with significant parliamentary representation. (In fact, the NPI subsequently struggled to make an electoral impact and suffered a fatal blow in May 2012 with the withdrawal of the UdC after its leader Pier Ferdinando Casini tweeted that the coalition was 'unable to represent the [popular] demand for change and innovation').

As Brunetta Baldi and Filippo Tronconi make clear in chapter four, the Lega was the real victor in 2010. In the March regional elections, the Lega won the presidential ballots in Piedmont and Veneto for the first time (and supported the winning PdL candidate in Lombardy); it secured the largest share of the vote in Veneto (35.2 per cent), and significantly increased its share of the vote outside of its traditional northern strongholds, including in 'red' Emilia Romagna (13.7 per cent). As with the case of the NPI, the contrast between the Lega's *annus mirabilis* in 2010 and its ongoing *annus horribilis* in 2012 is striking. Quite what long-term damage has been done to the Lega over recent months by its bitter and very public in-fighting, Roberto Saviano's claim that the Lega has links to the 'Ndrangheta, and Milanese prosecutors' allegations of corruption involving senior Lega figures (including Umberto Bossi) remains to be seen. In the short term at least, though, the Lega – which has always played up its anti-graft credentials – has been seriously weakened.

Despite the enormous and growing financial and economic difficulties facing Italy in 2010 (which ultimately cost Berlusconi his job in 2011), 2010 saw very little in the way of meaningful – and desperately needed – structural reform. Cuts to expenditure remained the order of the day, despite the obvious inefficiencies within the public sector. The one sector where cuts and reform were not mutually exclusive was education.

Indeed, as Giliberto Capano shows, the education minister Mariastella Gelmini used the urgent need to reduce spending to drive through potentially significant policy changes in both secondary and higher education. Capano goes as far as to predict that 2010 'could be remembered [...] as an epoch-making parting of the waves in Italian educational policy, and Gelmini could take her place in history as the most important reformer of the Italian educational system since Giovanni Gentile' (p. 157). Readers of the *Bulletin* will be aware, however, that other analysts are far from convinced of the likely efficacy of the new measures.

While academics debate the significance of the Gelmini reforms, there can be no doubt that justice reform in 2010 represented a wasted opportunity to get to grips with some of the most glaring failings of the justice system, not least the glacial pace of the judicial process. Instead, as Patrizia Pederzoli demonstrates, the Government continued to spend an inordinate amount of time and effort trying (but largely failing) to push through measures to protect Berlusconi from judicial investigation and prosecution. Not for the first time, the impression was that as 'Berlusconi fiddles, Italy burns'.

For this reviewer, the latter chapters of *Italian Politics* are the most interesting. David Alexander uses the Government's response to the 2009 Aquila earthquake to lay bare the limitations of civil protection and crisis management in Italy, not least the startling lack of preventative planning and development in areas of high seismic activity (which means that only one-third of buildings in areas of the highest earthquake risk are seismically resistant), the lack of inter-regional cooperation, and the huge 'regional variations in response capability' (p.191). Hardly surprising then, is Alexander's conclusion: 'It is difficult to think of civil protection in Italy [...] as a forward-moving evolutionary process' (p. 195). As for the Department of Civil Protection (DPC) itself, 2010 was a difficult year. In February, a scandal broke surrounding its liberal use of government ordinances (628 issued between 2002 and 2010). The use of ordinances had allowed the DPC to spend over €10 billion on contracts for a range of projects, often with no connection to civil protection or emergency management, without having to follow standard tendering procedures. A suspiciously large number of these contracts, totalling many millions of euros, had gone to construction companies linked to the DPC head, Guido Bertolaso. The scandal ultimately cost Bertolaso his job (he retired). Of more immediate import, it scuppered government plans effectively to turn the DPC into a limited company, with the Prime Minister as the sole shareholder. (For more on the DPC scandal and its handling of the Aquila disaster, see Sabina Guzzanti's excellent 2009 documentary, *Draquila*).

Were there *any* good news stories in Italy in 2010? Fiat's announcement that it was to repatriate production from Poland and undertake a €700 million modernisation of its plant at Pomigliano d'Arco

near Naples appeared to be one, confirmation of the remarkable turnaround in Fiat's fortunes, a boost to the southern economy, and a rare display of northern confidence in the southern Italian workforce. Nonetheless, as Marco Simoni shows, the terms of the investment proved controversial: the main metalworkers union, FIOM-CGIL, backed by the PD and IdV, opposed Fiat's insistence that workers agree to a package of new working conditions designed (according to the company) to boost flexibility and productivity. According to Simoni, union and centre-left opposition had little to do with the new conditions, which were in line with those long familiar to workers in much of the rest of Europe. Rather, this was a case of 'Italian actors [...] using issues of industrial relations as a means to clarify and strengthen their profiles' (p.216), evidence that 'the era of politicized industrial relations is not over' (p.213).

In her examination of the January 2010 immigrant protest/riot in Rosarno (Calabria) - dubbed the 'Rosarno Revolt' by the Italian media - Camilla Devitt argues that the standard explanations of the unrest (illegal immigration, illegal work practises, racism) ignore its real roots, namely the collapse of the southern citrus fruit industry in the wake of European-Union reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the global economic crisis. The contraction of the local economy and an increase in migrant workers from the north looking for seasonal work 'created the conditions for social conflict' (p.230). Of greater long-term significance, however, was the fact that legal migrant workers had felt able to organise and protest in the first place - 'a manifestation of the "coming of age" of immigrants in Italy' (p.235).

Whether Italy's politicians will listen to the 'new political voice' of Italy's resident immigrant population remains to be seen. One hopes they fare better than the local and environmental opponents of the TAV (*Treno Alta Velocità*) rail link between Turin and Lyons, whose long (and surely hopeless) struggle with central government is touched upon by Mauro Tebaldi in his examination of the development of Italy's high-speed rail network and the liberalisation of rail transport. The 'anti-TAV' protests, of course, formed part of a much broader picture of discontent and unrest in Italy in 2010. Besides the 'Rosarno Revolt' and subsequent national immigrant strike (March), the year saw huge student protests against the Gelmini reforms, ongoing protests in the south over the opening of new rubbish dumps, and the rapid growth of Beppe Grillo's recently established anti-corruption 'Five Stars Movement'. Given this, it is surprising that *Italian Politics* contains no in-depth investigation of the new politics of protest in Italy (the best we have is a three-page overview provided in the introduction). This though is a minor gripe. The volume as a whole demonstrates once again the continuing value and importance of the series.

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Carlo Chiurlo (ed.), *Filosofia di Berlusconi. L'essere e il nulla nell'Italia del Cavaliere*, Verona: Ombre corte, 2011, pp. 207, pb € 18.00, ISBN 978-88-95366-81-4.

The seven essays, written by different authors, dwell on the political phenomenon of Silvio Berlusconi, which is analysed on two different levels. The first one is more theoretical. From this point of view, Berlusconi is seen as a typical example of a post-democratic phenomenon, according to the theory espoused by Colin Crouch and many others. This kind of democracy is described as one which preserves the main democratic institutions, such as free elections, political pluralism and a competitive system, but deprives them of their meaning. One of the most important aspects of post-democracy is the debasement of public discussion and information. The transformation of politics into a show turns election campaigns into advertising campaigns. The advertising technique substitutes the free confrontation of competing opinions and public debate on ideas and projects. Berlusconi represents an extreme example of this, as shown by particular aspects and features which are highlighted in the book in a philosophical and symbolical analysis.

The second level deals more specifically with the Italian case. The problem examined by the authors concerns the cultural reasons for the political success of Berlusconi. How was it possible for him to conquer power and, above all, to hold on to it for nearly twenty years? The two levels are intertwined and throw light on each other in some interesting and stimulating ways.

A philosophy of Berlusconi, strictly speaking, does not exist. Berlusconi is an expression of the obscene. This is the central argument of the book. It is an argument which has been focused on by Baudrillard and Debray, and is used with particular forcefulness by Gian Luca Solla. He interprets the most feverish aspects of Berlusconi as a political phenomenon and, at the same time, focuses on the relationship between the obscene and post-democratic power. Obscene means what is behind the scene, what is apparent and what is to be hidden. In relation to the representative function which, in a democracy, the person who governs the country has, the obscene is, generally, their private life. One of the most important effects of the prevalence of the media in politics, and also in a period of post-democracy, is the erosion of the difference between public and private space. In the book, the category 'obscene' is radicalised beyond the limited use which the current idea of private space allows. The sex scandals and the public exhibition of sexual capacity and lust are both aspects of Berlusconi's obscene. The relationship existing between that kind of obscene and power is the central core of all the essays. The obscene is the tool through which power becomes unlimited and arbitrary: the obscene is

exhibited and shown off in the absence of any sense of responsibility or fear of consequences, conferring on power a sense of inevitability (p.130). The bringing of discredit onto itself doesn't damage power but reinforces it.

The obscene is illuminated also in a more exact sense, namely the relationship between sex and power in a gender studies prospective. Olivia Guaraldo focuses her interest on the reification of the woman's body which Italian television systematically used to portray women since the 1990s. Her quite convincing analysis leads to interesting theoretical issues. The first stems from the equivalence between power and sex: power is somehow sex and sex is somehow power. The possibility to have women at one's own disposal, buying them for money or offering them some advantages in their career or whatever, is a manifestation of power. Berlusconi shows off the obscene nature of power by having a monopoly of all women, pathologically representing the embodiment of the mythical father stigmatised by Sigmund Freud in the image of the primitive horde. In this respect, of particular interest is the aspect pointed out by the authors regarding women's uninhibited behaviour in the use of their own bodies to obtain material goods. The pattern of woman promoted since the 1990s makes a display of a feminist aura. According to that pattern, women claim the right to have power and to try to gain it by selling their own bodies and manipulating male sexuality and lust.

The chief relationship between power and sex based on the reification of the female body (reducing it to a mere object) is interiorised and reinforced, as Silvana Cavalieri points out. On a deeper level, the relationship between sex and power reflects the dynamic of control and domination of women achieved through sexuality, already underlined by feminist theory since the 1970s. Control over women is produced by the pseudoscientific construction of a passive sexuality, 'a place of symbolic subordination' (p.113) symbolised by the 'vaginal woman' - according to the famous pamphlet written by Carla Lonzi. The 'vaginal woman' is set beside the 'clitoral woman' which is the model of a new kind of sexuality, namely a self-aware, creative and emancipated sexuality rich in political importance. The analysis, otherwise sharp and interesting, is lacking in its overly literal consideration of the difference that is interpreted exclusively on an anatomic level instead of a symbolic one. This brings an odd error of perspective, so we can read, with a certain bewilderment, that 'if he (Silvio Berlusconi) had revealed without shame his revolutionary sexual nature, his association with lesbians, his uninhibitedness, we all would have changed our minds and we would have chanted in unison, "Thank goodness for Silvio" (*meno male che Silvio c'è*)' (p.126). In my opinion not much would change with regard to Berlusconi's attitude to women if he became involved in gay pride rather than taking part in the so-called family days. To read any positive meaning whatsoever into Berlusconi's 'sexual revolution' of the traditional passive and subordinate position of women, is

tantamount to forgetting that the ultimate philosophy of that position is always the equation of sex with power.

A final aspect of the book dwells on the relationship between 'obscene' Berlusconi power and Catholicism. In view of its extreme appearance in sex scandals and moral corruption, this question cannot be ignored. The essay by Italo Sciuto ("The Poverty of Catholicism") addresses this topic by approaching it from a moral point of view in an effort to understand 'on what kind of principle and for what kind of purpose a religious perspective readily agrees to act as a privileged trading partner with some of the most conspicuous protagonists of the principle of corruption' (p.163). The author reconstructs some important aspects of the relationship between the Catholic hierarchy and the Berlusconi government: from the Englaro case to the indifference to Berlusconi's glaring conflict of interests and the degeneration of public ethics. The analysis is focused on the 'original sin' of the Catholic Church, which is located, according to the perspective of Italo Sciuto, in the temporal power of the Church from Constantine's donation down to the present day. What fails to command sufficient attention is the more interesting question of the influence of Catholicism on Italian mentality and culture and, connected to it, Italian public ethics.

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Carlo A. Marletti, *La Repubblica dei media. L'Italia dal politichese alla politica iperreale*, Bologna: il Mulino, 2010, pp. 153, pb €15.00, ISBN 978-88-15-13964-1.

Twenty years after Silvio Berlusconi first 'took to the field', the Italian general election campaign of 2013 is clearly showing the complexity of a postmodern system of political communications in which the old and the new – 'smoke signals' to the experts and demagogic rhetoric – continue to be deeply intertwined. In this context, the reasons for which *La Repubblica dei media* was acclaimed when it was published two years ago retain all of their force, but not only that: there are additional reasons why the work is of interest when it comes to understanding the current political situation.

The book is the product of one of the most propitious opportunities for taking stock and reflecting on the future, that is, the *lectio magistralis* which Carlo Marletti, one of the founding fathers of the study of political communication in Italy, gave upon his appointment as emeritus professor at the University of Turin.

Two main analytic perspectives, historical and theoretical, are interwoven in the volume. In his contribution, the author's keen awareness of the historical method enables him to trace very effectively the principal stages that marked the evolution of relations between the media and politics in Italy, offering original interpretations even of well-known events. For example, in

one of the initial chapters of the book, the election campaign of 1948 is captured as a competition that was so polarised as to be almost entirely characterised by a logic of communication typical of majoritarian systems. This means, on the one hand, that the central objective of communication, in the context of what was a zero-sum game, was strongly to mobilise public opinion, and on the other hand that it was based on highly spectacular styles capable of reaching – by engrossing them – vast swathes of citizens. Through an analysis that combines personal recollections, scientific sources and a precise iconographic documentation, the author of *La Repubblica dei media* brings home to us the underlying significance of an election campaign which, though it predated the television era, was in many respects not simply ‘pre-modern’ – as was shown by the transformation of walls into unprecedented propaganda vehicles which anticipated future battles over election advertising and foreshadowed the ability to use old media in a new way. Above all, however, what Marletti does is to help the reader to understand better the unusual features of cases like Italy, which is too often perfunctorily classified as an anomaly.

Central, from this point of view, is the analysis of the passage from the quasi-majoritarian context of the ‘first edition of politics-as-spectacle in Italy’ (that is, precisely, the election of 18 April 1948) to a subsequent phase of multi-party politics increasingly dominated by the logic of self-referential forms of political communication by and for the political elites themselves. Reflecting precisely on this passage, Marletti in fact clarifies the systemic factors lying at the base of the relation between politics and the media investigating in depth a classic distinction, namely, the one between majoritarian democracies – more oriented to the public thanks to the need to build strong political majorities – and consensus democracies, more turned in upon themselves because driven to control above all the internal dynamics of the system by the need to weave the delicate fabric of agreement between the many political parties. The current relevance of this ideal-typical distinction, but also of the underlying trade-off between the principles of pluralistic representation and effective decision-making, seems more apparent than ever in the current phase of Italy’s political transition, which is in many respects ambiguously poised between the two models and oscillates between the two logics driving them.

No less central for an understanding of the 2013 election campaign and the communications strategies being deployed by the principal contestants, is on the other hand the reflection on the desirability of considering as complementary requirements that are often held to be opposites – such as the need for ‘spectacularity’ created by mediatisation and the need to find more subtle and precisely targeted forms of influence. It is no accident, as Marletti observes in the first chapter – emblematically entitled ‘*Si fa presto a dire media*’ (It seems easy to talk about media) – that even a leader like Silvio Berlusconi (who has always had a propensity to seek the favour of large audiences through television) has also acquired a more selective means of communication such as a daily newspaper. And despite the tendency of many to cultivate direct relations with citizens, none can completely free themselves of the need for

political communication within elite circles, something that requires less immediately transparent linguistic codes and more protected arenas. Just as one could add – by way of contrast – that in a mediatised democracy like Italy no one can afford to limit too much strategies based on appeals to the public – not even a prime minister as far removed from populist temptations as Mario Monti.

The fact is, Marletti explains, that every democracy is required to find a balance between two opposing needs, both indispensable: ‘the need to search for a unity of intents among the parties, and the need to involve the public in political affairs’ (pp. 20-21). Naturally, it is not easy to find this balance in the glare of the spotlight as the cases of numerous mediatised democracies show. In Italy, however, there are, in addition to the general difficulties, problems of a specific nature due to the unusual configuration of constraints, within and beyond political circles, in the relationship with the sphere of citizens and the media.

Chapter after chapter then, *La Repubblica dei media* describes the transformations that have taken place in Italian politics by focussing on the actors that have done most to change it and on the most significant turning points. What emerges is the history of a discontinuous process in which the practices of politics-as-spectacle have often touched the surfaces of political communication without leading to the abandonment of a ciphered language, built on coded messages and byzantine metaphors. At the centre of the author’s reflections are the drives – though long resisted by the party system – towards the personalisation of politics and the contradictions of a communication environment which, from the end of the 1970s to the beginning of the 1990s, underwent a kind of ‘incomplete modernisation’ process, that is, a process of modernisation as profound in economic and social terms as it was limited by the dynamics of a system of parties that were determined to maintain control, restricting the opportunities for influence on the part of journalists and public opinion. This self-referential character of Italian politics, Marletti aptly reminds us, has had ambivalent effects. On the one hand, it contributed to the stability, over time, of a democracy that was initially fragile, for long acting as a shock-absorber for the multiple tensions between the parties and even – during the ‘years of lead’ – for the powerful impact of terrorism. But on the other hand, it ended up driving apart governors and governed, undermining the parties’ capacity to provide representation and blocking the renewal of the political class. The result was that when Italy’s consensus democracy was hit by the *Tangentopoli* (‘Bribe city’) corruption scandal it collapsed, thus opening the doors to a system characterised by new imbalances, above all those connected to the decision of Silvio Berlusconi, the principal television magnate, to take to the field, and by the emergence and consolidation of a model built upon ‘pop politics’.

More than in the persuasive power of television – whose significance Marletti downplays very convincingly – the key element of these imbalances is to be found, according to *La Repubblica dei media*, in the hyper-reality created by

a consolidated system of communications, whose influence is increased by its strategic relationship with the world of politics. More precisely, such effects can have highly critical consequences from the point of view of the relationship between promises, announcement strategies and genuine political decisions. In a context in which the media exert an increasingly powerful influence over our perceptions of reality – rendering the world we live in increasingly seductive and bright but also less controllable – the space available for a politics of symbolism, designed to reassure citizens while avoiding the real problems, has increased. And the contest between the true and the false has grown increasingly complex.

Naturally the system has its self-defence mechanisms, and opportunities for making stories believable find their ultimate limit in citizens' direct experience, as is demonstrated by the periodic defeats of Berlusconi, without doubt the ablest of the narrators currently active in Italian politics. But in the absence of an alternative, equally effective, model of communications, recourse to the Italian version of symbolic politics – a version based on a strategy of announcements and proposals with the power to wrong-foot opponents thanks to the hyper-reality of the promises they involve – continues inevitably to suggest itself with a certain degree of success. This is in part because to confine oneself to meeting unrealistic announcements with realistic criticisms is to pursue one's opponent onto his own territory, thereby running the risk of 'opposing an image of negativity and pessimism to a positive, can-do image'. (p. 120). And it is in part because in the mediatised public sphere the challenge faced by democracies is also to oppose narratives based on the capacity to alter reality, by learning to explain what transformations are actually possible.

From this point of view too is the 2013 election campaign showing itself to be an important test case.

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Nick Carter, *Modern Italy in Historical Perspective*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010, pp. 342, hb £65.00, ISBN 978-18-49663-33-5.

Paul Corner, *The Fascist Party and Popular Opinion in Mussolini's Italy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 302, hb £65.00, ISBN 978-01-98730-69-9.

The failures of Italy's political system have long been attributed to the wider problems of failed unification, the timidity of liberal democratic values, the absence of a sense of state, and weak national identity. Fascism in many ways both confirmed these flaws in its political practice while attempting in its own way to provide a remedy. Its attempts were

ambitious, far-reaching and ultimately flawed. As one of the first modern 'mass' political movements, it planned a new kind of state based on corporative structures involving workers and employers in the expansion of industrial production; it sought to strengthen Italian identity in the aftermath of the First World War, and, through a strong leader and the mobilisation of opinion, cement a new allegiance to the nation. This was to be achieved ultimately, of course, through 'totalitarian' means, the role of the Fascist party, the centralisation of authority, the breaking down of the distinction between public and private and essentially through the process of 'making' fascist Italians.

The task of understanding Fascism, and thus the reasons for its failures have been a constant source of discussion in recent years. Some of the key debates are covered in Nick Carter's *Italy in Historical Perspective*, where Fascism is considered as one of the three modern political periods (in addition to Liberal and Republican) which have done much to shape the current predicaments. Here, in the case of Fascism, he gives an overview of the historiography and provides illuminating explanatory frameworks for evaluating its failures. His conclusion is that Fascism failed in its attempted 'cultural revolution'; in other words it never managed to implement its totalitarian ambitions, or penetrate in a sustained way the private spheres of Italian society. At the macro political level it did not 'impose itself upon the socio-economic elites' (p.162) that had helped bring it to power or take on the power of the Vatican. The state at local provincial level never achieved its objectives and had to rely on local elites, which were often disputatious, undisciplined and corrupt. Moreover it was constrained by an 'inherited state apparatus' (p.162), and while the party did secure new allegiances with the bureaucracy, it did not effectively 'politicise' its personnel in any fundamental way. Finally, and interestingly, Carter argues that 'the nature of Italian fascism itself was an obstacle to the creation of a totalitarian state and to the realization of the Fascist revolution' (p.163). This was because 'it contained too many competing fascisms ever to be able to impose a total culture' (p.163). Of course the support for *il Duce*, as Carter points out, should not be confused with popular support for Fascism. The format of Carter's book and the way he organises his argument, while at times it seems a little overloaded, does stimulate an original framework for reappraising recent arguments and research with very useful summaries of the key debates.

The failure of Fascism is the central theme of Paul Corner's *The Fascist Party and Popular Opinion in Mussolini's Italy* which makes excellent use of newly available archive material of informers' reports, and casts some new light on the extent of popular discontent with the regime. Corner, whose previous work on provincial Fascism broke new ground returns to his original theme in arguing that Fascism enjoyed much less support than many have suggested. He reminds us that Fascism was a 'series of

essentially local movements, centred on a town, or at most, a province, in which the aims of the Fascists might be very different one from another, according to local circumstances' (p.23). This meant that not only did it take on different forms in say, Trieste, Ferrara and Cremona, where local Fascists normally derived from existing elites and personnel (and often continued to be constrained by those well-established power bases), but the local organisations were often in conflict with the centre.

These tensions became acute in Fascism's second wave after the Matteotti crisis, the crackdown on dissent and the rise and fall of Farinacci as Party Secretary, whose dismissal after failing to curb the rebellious and violent provincial movements, marked the first failure of the centre to discipline and 'stabilise' the provinces. Turati's leadership also failed in this respect, despite the expulsion of around 100,000 members between 1926 and 1930. The ongoing problem this reflected was the 'difference' between 'fascism as "movement" and fascism as "regime"' (p.60), while the party was never able to impose a unified disciplined identity based on ideology or even consensus amongst the provincial groups. Party reports and correspondence testify to the problem the leadership continually experienced in recruiting high-quality leaders at local level, facilitating a generational progression amongst leaders; and therefore the intended accession to power of the 'new governing class' was never realised.

'Fascism was, in a way, a superimposition on local rivalries which continued to exist despite the allegedly unifying mission of the movement and which showed themselves to be stronger than the fascist message' (p.99). As the movement 'born to stamp out factionalism' (p.100) it had failed comprehensively.

The failures of Fascism however went well beyond the party. Informers' reports demonstrated a continual lack of enthusiasm for the more ambitious Fascist initiatives and the exaggerated claims of its provincial leaders. Any enthusiasm for Mussolini's claim, after the conquering of Addis Ababa, that 'Italy has its Empire', were short lived, according to Corner. There was no 'popular mood' of appreciation after the Ethiopian War, informers' found. 'What is really surprising', Corner tells us, 'is the speed with which the old pattern of complaints, grievances and resentments appeared among the population' (p.201).

On domestic matters the public's view of local Fascist leaders was often one of ridicule; the 'exhibitionism' of the little Mussolinis, their lifestyles, laziness, abuse of office and general incompetence often grounds for contempt. All in all, the impression that emerges from a study of the local federations in the late 1930s and in 1940-41 is not exactly that of perfectly functioning organisations, efficiently carrying out at a local level the orders of central government, creating and cultivating support, and directing the next generation towards the future fascist paradise of the new Italy.

Throughout the 'totalitarian phase' of the 1930s, the picture of the Italian people gleaned from informers' reports is one of an 'exhausted', 'apathetic' and indifferent population, less stirred by the racial laws and the prospect of war, than discontented by the absence of coffee and general financial hardship. As the 1930s came to a close they were even becoming less concerned about surveillance. (The queues of people trying to buy coffee, according to Corner, 'was a great vehicle of political discontent' (p.206)).

Corner's conclusion, therefore, is that major contributory factors to the failure of Fascism to come near to fulfilling its objectives were the inability of the Party to secure ideological allegiance, and the 'rising tide' of discontent towards the political class - despite the long-standing popular support for Mussolini himself. These factors prevented the development of the kind of state the Fascist leadership demanded. Corner's original research does more than offer insight into that period however; it will also help us to think again about some of its historical legacies which continue to shape contemporary Italy.

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