

News and Events

Italian Politics between Reforms and Revival: The 2009 CONGRIPS Panel at APSA

The Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (APSA) held in Toronto from 3 to 6 September 2009 featured a panel – the only one of the conference specifically dedicated to Italian politics – organised by Maurizio Carbone for the Conference Group on Italian Politics and Society (CONGRIPS). Chaired by Filippo Sabetti (McGill University) with Richard Katz (Johns Hopkins University) acting as the discussant, the panel provided a platform for four prominent scholars to offer to an attentive and inquisitive audience a balanced but vibrant set of analyses focused on change and continuity in contemporary Italian politics.

Sergio Fabbrini (University of Trento) presented a paper – published in the first issue of the *Bulletin of Italian Politics* – aimed at analysing the transition of the Italian political system since the beginning of the Second Republic from a consensus to a competitive democracy. Building on Lijphart's typology, Fabbrini observed that from 1948 to 1993 consociational practices in the legislature had been a characteristic feature of Italian politics, one that resulted in a lack of alternation in power between competing political forces, little sense of individual responsibility and lax attitudes toward corruption. In the First Republic, the proportional electoral system, the dispersal of power within the parliamentary system among many parties, and the limited decision-making power of the executive, created the institutional conditions for a democracy operating according to a consensual logic. This underpinned a system of interest representation that was neither neo-corporatist nor pluralist, but rather fragmented along the lines of ideologies embodied in parties that had almost exclusive power to distribute public resources.

In the early 1990s, a number of exogenous factors created pressures for change leading to the emergence of the Second Republic with the result of undermining the hold of the traditional parties on Italian public life and their replacement by new ones. Among these factors, Fabbrini emphasised the mobilisation of civil society around the demand for electoral-law reform and the emergence of a quasi-majoritarian system; the re-launching

of European integration, especially after the Maastricht Treaty; the judicial activity whose revelations give rise to the scandal that became known as *Tangentopoli* ('Bribe City'). The consequence of these pressures was the establishment of a fragmented but competitive bipolar system characterised by alternation in government between the centre left (in 1996 and 2006) and the centre right (in 2001 and 2008), followed also by a more bipolar orientation on the part of the electorate. Further, the executive strengthened its power at the expense of the legislature and new political leaders emerged, highly personalising political life. For Fabbrini the system of interest representation remained highly fragmented although it saw a radical corporatisation of the behaviour of micro-organisations competitively promoting their particular interests around fewer parties than before.

Finally, the present electoral system approved in 2005, based on party-list representation with a series of thresholds, has encouraged parties to form coalitions, if not to amalgamate, as shown by the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) and the People of Freedom (Popolo della Libertà, PdL). In fact, at the 2008 general election many small parties failed to achieve parliamentary representation, only six parties gaining seats in the legislature, and the Berlusconi government consisting of just two. Consequently, the Italian party system is currently among the least fragmented in Europe, holding out the prospect of a more competitive setting. However, Fabbrini cautiously observed that although alternation in government between centre left and centre right has replaced the logic of consensual democracy, competition is still feeble and incoherent as it has not been supported by a reorganisation of the system of representation or by thoroughgoing institutional reform.

Piero Ignazi (University of Bologna) focussed on the evolution (and the predominance) of the centre right in Italy since the beginning of the Second Republic, analysing coalitional and internal party changes from a cultural and anthropological perspective. The foundation of Forza Italia (FI) in 1994 represented the emergence of a new neo-liberal party, a real novelty in the panorama of Italian politics. The circumstances which enabled FI and its leader Silvio Berlusconi to win growing support and achieve political success included the increasing individualism developing in Italian society, a feature that has been exploited electorally with great success by the centre right. Later on FI underwent a transformation to become a neo-conservative party 'Italian style', ultimately embracing a populist rhetoric with the aid of which Berlusconi, as 'the only one elected by the people', has sought to circumvent the institutional checks and balances typical of democratic regimes.

After decades of ideological affinities with Mussolini's Fascism, and subsequent political isolation, in the mid 1990s the National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale, AN) strategically linked its search for a new identity

to its alliance with FI, moving from being a prototypical neo-fascist party to become a liberal neo-conservative one. The culmination of this trajectory has been the 2009 merger of AN with FI to form the PdL. However, for Ignazi it was worth mentioning the recent controversial statements of Gianfranco Fini, former leader of AN, and current President of the Chamber of Deputies, who often makes declarations that diverge from the political line espoused by other leaders of the centre right, notably Berlusconi.

The Northern League (Lega Nord, LN) is following a rewarding strategy based on the perception of insecurity associated with immigration, one of the most contentious issues currently on the agenda of Italian politics. Ignazi observed that by 'playing the racist card' the LN is adopting a noticeably rightist populism with a xenophobic rhetoric calling for zero tolerance and a crack-down on immigrants. The LN is also profiting from its strategic position in the centre-right coalition as a pivotal ally outside the PdL, thus obtaining for itself substantial power in terms of agenda-setting and intra-coalition bargaining.

Finally, for Ignazi the most erratic trajectory shown by the parties of the centre right is that of the Union of the Centre (Unione di Centro, UdC), a moderate Christian democratic party. After the split with progressive Christians at the beginning of the 1990s, the UdC and its predecessor parties had subsequently been part of the centre right until the general election of 2008, when its leaders decided to run alone, unaffiliated with either of the two main coalitions. Its modest electoral achievement might reveal itself to have been a case of political suicide or, conversely, a valuable political asset for future alliance-building strategies. Absence from the corridors of power for too long might stimulate the UdC to seek to reunite with the centre right, on the one hand, or to try an alliance with the centre left, on the other hand.

On the other side, balancing Ignazi's presentation, James Newell (University of Salford) ironically asked, 'What's left of the Italian Left?' For Newell, even though the Left had since 1996 been able to govern twice, it seemed that paradoxically it had not on those occasions wielded more power than it had done when it had been permanently excluded from government. Taking his point of departure from Bobbio's distinction between the Right (defined in terms of an orientation towards freedom) and the Left (defined in terms of a greater dedication to equality) Newell sought to examine the current strengths and weaknesses of the Left, as well as the opportunities and threats confronting it, in three arenas: those of party competition, public opinion, and pressure-group activity.

For Newell, even though, in 2008, the parties of the Radical Left were expelled from Parliament they were still firmly committed to the extension of equality, which thus represented an element of strength for a Left defined in such terms. Moreover, in combination they constituted a not

inconsiderable electoral force, having taken 10.2 per cent of the vote at the 2006 general election and 6.5 per cent of the vote at the 2009 European elections. Further, the PD increased its support from the 33.6 per cent gained in 2006 by the Ulivo and Italy of Values (IdV) to the 37.5 per cent gained in 2008 by the PD and IdV. Considering the potential loss to which the PD secretary Walter Veltroni had been subject in deciding to break with the Radical Left, for Newell it did not perform badly.

On the other side, one clear weakness is the fragmentation and lack of unity of the Left, with the PD unable to play a monopolistic role and the IdV aggressively challenging its predominance with an 'anti-Berlusconi' style of opposition. Pointing out that 'IdV and the PD clearly fish in the same pool of voters', Newell correctly noted that the 2009 European election result could hardly be described as a success, with a mere shifting of votes within the coalition having taken place rather than any increase in support.

Looking at opportunities, the fact that Berlusconi is the fulcrum around which the centre right is built makes its future heavily dependent on his continued popularity and his willingness to continue his political enterprise. With regard to the first aspect, the recent scandals had at least marginally dented his reputation, showing that he was not invulnerable; moreover, it could not be ignored that he would be obliged to leave the political scene, sooner or later. Then, for Newell, divisions within the centre-right might come to the surface, giving the centre left a valuable opportunity to regain power.

The permanent campaigning in which the current government is engaged, using support mobilisation as a key resource for governing, governing as an instrument to build support, represents a threat for the Left: this is a strategy the Prodi government had largely been unable to pursue effectively due to the internal divisions which prevented a coherent flow of communication from government to the public. As a result, the Prodi government was unpopular, while Berlusconi by contrast has enjoyed much more stable levels of public support. Another limitation for the Left is the massive imbalance in access to the media as a result of which it is unable effectively to promote its achievements. However, looking at recent polls, it has an opportunity in the seemingly greater priority given to a concern for equality than to the opposite orientation by most Italians generally speaking.

Finally, looking at the pros and cons for the Left within the pressure-groups arena, heightened commitments in civil society to issues of social welfare have leftist implications, even though they have recently appeared to be expressed independently of the parties and indeed to sustain a critique of the whole political system (including the Left which has been widely accused of being out of touch with the electorate). Newell concluded his SWOT analysis by arguing that the understandable

mainstream pessimism about the future of the Left should be tempered by due acknowledgement of its electoral resources and of the opportunities deriving from the weaknesses of the centre right and a vibrant civil society.

Maurizio Carbone (University of Glasgow) focussed on the continuities and discontinuities in Italy's foreign policy deriving from the change of government from the one led by Romano Prodi to the current government led by Silvio Berlusconi. His assumption was that after the end of the Cold War the centre right in Italy had been more favourably inclined to the United States and its positions, while the centre left had been more EU-oriented. The question was whether the new political order emerging with the outcome of the 2008 election had led to a bipartisan approach in foreign policy.

In this regard, the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the war in Georgia and the climate change/energy package represented important foreign-policy initiatives, especially in relation to the European Union. The Lisbon Treaty seemed to confirm the bipartisan hypothesis. Not only had it been strongly supported by the Prodi government, but Berlusconi too had wanted it to be adopted quickly. The result had been a unanimous vote in Parliament, with little debate, even if the Euro-sceptic LN had wanted the issue decided by means of a referendum.

Looking at the war between Georgia and Russia, Berlusconi pushed for the adoption of a conciliatory approach, backing the peace deal brokered by the EU through the French presidency. Nicolas Sarkozy had demanded an immediate ceasefire and re-establishment of the pre-war situation but even when Vladimir Putin failed to withdraw troops from Georgia, Berlusconi insisted on refraining from antagonising Russia. This support derived from the personal friendship between Berlusconi and Putin, and from Italy's dependence on Russian oil and gas imports. However, Carbone observed that the Prodi government had followed a pro-Russian approach when signing agreements concerning a wide range of sectors such as energy, culture, the military, and banking – thus pointing in the direction of continuity in policy toward Russia.

Finally, different attitudes toward foreign policy could be found between the two governments in relation to the EU 20-20-20 programme, an ambitious plan to reduce global warming with binding targets for cutting greenhouse gas emissions, improving energy efficiency, and raising the share of renewable energy. The Prodi government strongly supported the plan but Berlusconi, amid the global financial crisis and economic downturn that occurred in 2008, asked for a relaxation of the package's commitments. As a result, several concessions were granted to Italy and other recalcitrant states.

Carbone concluded by suggesting that rather than reflecting either a consistently pro- or a consistently anti-Europe line, all these initiatives were linked by the attempt to develop a pragmatic foreign policy, case by case,

one where the ultimate aim was to promote Italy's economic interests. It followed that in some cases the Berlusconi government would be supportive of the European integration process, particularly when no Italian interests were at stake, whereas it would not hesitate to oppose it when it clashed with Italy's economic interests.

Richard Katz focused his discussion on the question of what would happen after Berlusconi, and on the imponderables that currently derive from it – pointing out that the issue is indeed a pivotal one, one that will inevitably determine the future evolution of Italian politics. From 2 to 5 September 2010 Italian politics scholars will once again gather at APSA – on that occasion in Washington, DC, the venue of the next conference. The topic to be discussed at the CONGRIPS panel then will be the 2008 general election – with its landslide victory for Silvio Berlusconi along with the failure of the centre-left project for a single party capable on its own of offering a credible alternative to the current incumbents – and the implications of all of this for the further evolution of the Italian political system. In this regard, the main question will be whether the election has brought a sea-change in the quality of government in Italy, or not. The topic represents an ideal continuation of the previous one discussed at the Toronto conference, especially in light of the events that have taken place since then.

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What Freedom? Whose Freedom? The Oxford Debate on *la Repubblica's* Ten Questions

On the 21 October 2009, the Axxess Programme on Journalism and Democracy and Italian Studies at Oxford (ISO), in collaboration with the Oxford University Italian Society (OUIS), organised a panel discussion on the conflict between the Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, and some of the Italian press. The seminar, entitled 'What freedom? Whose freedom? Berlusconi and the case of *la Repubblica's* ten Questions', was chaired by John Lloyd, Director of the Axxess Programme and Director of Journalism at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Speakers included Dr Mark Donovan, Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Cardiff; Enrico Franceschini, the London Bureau Chief of *la Repubblica*; Maurizio Morabito, Press Officer of the London Circle of the centre-right People of Freedom party (Popolo della Libertà, PdL), and Andrea Biondi, Secretary of the London Circle of the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD). The audience for the seminar was very large and diverse, reflecting the interest

which this issue has aroused among scholars from a range of different disciplines.

This article offers a summary of the discussion held in Oxford, showing that the ten questions asked of Berlusconi by *la Repubblica* are a key episode for anyone interested in understanding the relationship between the media and democracy in Italy. The following section describes some of the background to the issue, offering a narrative of the events preceding the seminar in Oxford. The section after summarises the main contributions offered by the speakers in Oxford, as well as the main questions asked from the floor. The final section looks at the developments which occurred following the debate and demonstrates that the ten questions are an issue that will attract the attention of commentators, journalists and scholars for years to come.

The background

On the 28 April 2009, *la Repubblica* published an article written by Conchita Sannino, which reported Silvio Berlusconi's attendance at Noemi Letizia's eighteenth birthday party in Casoria, a town near Naples. The Prime Minister, who was in Naples for meetings connected to the rubbish crisis, brought an expensive necklace as a present and took a number of photos with the party guests, before going back to his hotel late at night.

Berlusconi's visit sparked much controversy. The days before the visit had been seen the publication of a number of articles, particularly in the right-wing press (e.g. *Il Giornale*, 31 March 2009; *Liberò* 22 April 2009), revealing that Berlusconi was thinking of selecting a number of young showgirls as candidates for the forthcoming elections to the European Parliament – as Richard Owen reported in *The Times* (23 April 2009): "I want young faces, new faces, to renew the image of Italy and the PdL in Europe," Mr Berlusconi said'. The visit to young Noemi Letizia's party was, moreover, seen by some as further proof of an alleged sex addiction. This view was shared by Mr Berlusconi's wife, Ms Veronica Lario. Following the article on his husband's visit to Noemi Letizia's party and the allegation of the selection of young showgirls as candidates, Veronica Lario referred to these episodes as 'shameless rubbish to entertain the Emperor' (*The Times*, 30 April 2009). On 3 May, Ms Lario then announced her intention to seek a divorce from the Prime Minister.

This announcement was not the only repercussion for Mr Berlusconi of the visit to Noemi's party. Following Ms Lario's action, on 5 May 2009, he appeared on *Porta a Porta*, a well-known television talk show, to address some of the issues previously raised. *la Repubblica*, a left-leaning newspaper which has always been highly critical of Berlusconi and of his governments, was not convinced by his explanations and decided to ask the Prime Minister for an interview to clarify matters about the case. They sent ten questions to the Undersecretary of State at the Prime Minister's office, Mr Gianni Letta, and waited for a number of days without receiving

any reply. Following this silence, *la Repubblica* decided to publish the ten questions in an article by Giuseppe D'Avanzo which appeared on the 14 May 2009. The questions were the following:

1. *Mr President, how and when did you first meet Noemi Letizia's father?*
2. *During the course of this friendship, how many times, and where have you met?*
3. *How would you describe the reasons for your friendship with Benedetto Letizia?*
4. *Why did you discuss candidates with Signor Letizia who is not even a member of the PdL?*
5. *When did you get to know Noemi Letizia?*
6. *How many times have you met Noemi Letizia and where?*
7. *Do you take an interest in Noemi and her future, or support her family economically in any way?*
8. *Is it true that you promised Noemi you would help her career in show business or in politics?*
9. *Veronica Lario said that you 'frequent under-age girls'. Do you meet any others or 'bring them up'?*
10. *Your wife says that you are not well and that you 'need help'. What is the state of your health?*

The questions were published in the newspaper daily and became the topic of a special page on the newspaper's website. *la Repubblica* started a full-scale campaign, combining investigative journalism and a number of very critical editorials, written by the current editor, Ezio Mauro; by the former editor and founder, Eugenio Scalfari; and by a number of columnists, among whom Giuseppe D'Avanzo was perhaps the most prominent. The campaign attracted substantial interest from the domestic, as well as foreign, press. On 23 May 2009, the British newspaper, the *Guardian*, even published an editorial, entitled 'In praise of... *la Repubblica*', in which it asserted that '*la Repubblica* is ploughing a lonely furrow and deserves support' (the *Guardian*, 23 May 2009). On 26 June, after more details concerning Berlusconi's private conduct emerged, including suggestions that he had organised private parties with prostitutes who had been paid by others to spend the night with him, *la Repubblica* published ten new questions in a further article by Giuseppe D'Avanzo.

Berlusconi's strategy with respect to the ten questions changed over time. Initially, the defensive line was that this was a private matter, and that his relationship with Noemi Letizia had nothing to do with sex. Berlusconi and his allies initially preferred not to hit out and decided to avoid the matter altogether. *TG1*, the main Italian television news programme, produced by a journalist, Augusto Minzolini, who is said to be close to Berlusconi, took the line that it would avoid what it defined as 'gossip' in order to concentrate on more serious events.

Berlusconi's defensive line changed during the summer. He decided to take a tougher stance and to hit back against *la Repubblica*. On 24 August, he sued the newspaper for €1 million, claiming that the ten

questions were 'rhetorical ... not aimed at obtaining an answer from the person to whom they [were] addressed, but designed to suggest to the reader that the person being 'interrogated' refuses to respond (*la Repubblica*, 28 August 2009).

Following Berlusconi's decision to sue *la Repubblica* and a number of other papers for damages, a demonstration to defend freedom of the press in Italy was organised. This demonstration was originally planned for 19 September, but had to be postponed following the death of six Italian soldiers in Afghanistan. When it finally took place, on 3 October, it saw many tens of thousands of people in the streets of Rome and other cities. On the same night, *TG1* producer, Augusto Minzolini, appeared on the 8.00 p.m. edition of the news broadcast to comment that he could not understand the motives behind this protest. 'The Italian media are free', Minzolini said in a controversial statement.

The panel discussion organised in Oxford on 21 October followed these developments. Its title, 'Whose freedom? What freedom?', was designed to reflect the difficulties involved in drawing a line between individuals' rights to privacy on the one hand, and the right of newspapers to inform on the other.

The seminar

The panel discussion, chaired by John Lloyd, Director of the Axxess Programme on Journalism and Democracy, was initiated by Dr Mark Donovan, Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Cardiff. Donovan outlined the evolution of the Italian political system over the last fifteen years. According to Donovan, Italy is undergoing a difficult transition in the direction of a two-party system and from this point of view is no anomaly in Europe. In particular, Donovan emphasised that if one analyses data from the Eurobarometer survey, it is clear that trust in institutions, government and Parliament is low in Italy, but not extraordinarily low by European standards. If only around 17 per cent of Italian respondents claim to have confidence in their country's political institutions, then the EU-15 average is 20 per cent, while the rate for the UK is 18 per cent.

The first main difference between Italy and the rest of Europe lies in the dramatic developments since 1990. The sudden collapse of the traditional governing parties produced a change in the identity of the elites, which allowed Berlusconi to manufacture his large share of support. The second anomaly is the role of the judiciary. To Donovan, the presence of factions within the judiciary, such as *Magistratura Democratica*, indicates that it is extremely politicised by European standards. The absence of a clear division between the career of prosecutor and that of judge is the main reason why some, particularly those among the centre-right parties, wonder about the extent to which magistrates can be impartial. A third anomaly, Donovan emphasised, is the role of the media. As suggested by Giovanni Sartori (*Los Angeles Times*, 11 September 2009), the fundamental

element of his [Silvio Berlusconi's] popularity is the fact that he controls 90-95% of all Italian television. For instance, the main public television channel never talks of his scandals. He has an octopus-like hold on almost all the media, newspapers included.

This has a number of consequences, ranging from the creation of an uninformed and misinformed public opinion to the possibly media-determined election outcomes.

To support this last point, Dr Donovan highlighted the importance of two key sets of data. The first one is the fact that for a very large part of the population television is the primary source of information. This means that appealing to the pluralism of the media as evidence that there is no problem with information in Italy is rather misleading. There may be different sources of information, particularly on the web, but there are large sectors of the population, especially the poorly educated and elderly female voters, who receive most of their daily news from television. Unsurprisingly, this is also the category where the PdL is significantly over-represented.

The second set of data emphasised by Donovan concerned the coverage of certain topics by national television news broadcasts. The Demos-Osservatorio di Pavia Media Research report on the differential reporting of crime by television news during periods of government of the centre-left and centre-right seems to suggest that the news might have influenced perceptions of insecurity independently of actual crime rates. As emphasised by Ilvo Diamanti (*la Repubblica*, 9 August 2009), this might have had a significant effect in determining election outcomes.

The introductory remarks by Donovan were followed by the contribution of Enrico Franceschini, London Correspondent and Bureau Chief of *la Repubblica*. Franceschini outlined the reasons why his newspaper has been questioning the Prime Minister over his recent behaviour through the ten questions. For Franceschini, the main issue driving the latter was one of accountability. In Italy, Franceschini argued, freedom of the press exists. However, the Prime Minister's control of the media which 'really matter', such as television, is a serious problem, making it very difficult for the press to fulfil its role of watchdog in the exercise of power.

Franceschini also argued that this had become even more difficult in recent times. He expressed serious worries about the recent media attacks on those who had dared to criticise Berlusconi. In particular, he drew the attention of the audience to the case of Raimondo Mesiano, the judge whose ruling required Fininvest, the holding company owned by the Berlusconi family, to reimburse Cir, the group owned by the entrepreneur and proprietor of *la Repubblica*, Carlo de Benedetti, €750 million for having bribed a judge during the takeover battle for the publishing firm Mondadori. *Mattino 5*, a daily programme shown on Mediaset-owned Canale 5, sent a journalist to report on Mesiano's daily life. The report

showed Mesiano walking, waiting outside a barber shop, smoking, and sitting on a bench. There was nothing particularly interesting about these images and yet the journalist continued to define the judge's actions as 'extravagant'. Claudio Brachino, the journalist who directs *Mattino 5*, said in a statement reported by *la Repubblica* that he only wanted to enable his audience to 'put a face to a name'. To Franceschini, this was a true case of character assassination, one which followed other similar examples. Insofar as this is allowed to occur, Berlusconi's critics will be more careful about speaking out. And journalism may become somewhat less free as a consequence.

These criticisms were rebutted by the third speaker of the evening, Maurizio Morabito, Press Secretary of the London Circle of the centre-right PdL. Morabito argued that the problems of press freedom in Italy predated Berlusconi. He used evidence from Freedom House, the think-tank which, in its 2009 report, had famously classified Italy as having only a partly free press, to show that Italy's ranking had only marginally worsened during the Berlusconi era. What is more, he emphasised that many of the reasons behind Italy's poor score had nothing to do with Berlusconi, as they arose from threats to journalists made by criminal organisations, or from the fear of job cuts in the media sector.

Morabito then moved to the topic of *la Repubblica's* ten questions. His first point was that the freedom of *la Repubblica* to ask these ten questions in the first place was itself a clear sign that the Italian media were, in fact, free. Moreover, Morabito added, the ten questions were not as innocent as *la Repubblica* made them sound. Many of them were openly allusive to events which might never have taken place and their repeated publication made them look more like a rhetorical device than genuine questions.

To Morabito, the real problems with the Italian media, whose structure he did not hesitate to call 'feudal', were not ones connected to Berlusconi. The Italian state-owned television network, Radiotelevisione Italiana (RAI), had always had a tendency to follow the Government line, whatever the executive's political colour. Freeing RAI from political influence was thus a problem that went beyond Berlusconi. A further problem was the Ordine dei Giornalisti, a public body, membership of which is obligatory for those wishing to practice as journalists. It was, according to Morabito, a 'guild' that ought to be closed down. Lastly, Italy had libel laws that were too restrictive, in that they had allowed politicians from both the left and the right successfully to sue journalists and cartoonists too often. The adoption of something along the lines of the American First Amendment was something which would help the Italian press to become truly free.

The last contribution was the one offered by Professor Andrea Biondi, Secretary of the London Circle of the centre-left PD. Prof. Biondi argued that there were a number of aspects to the anomalous relationship between

Berlusconi and the media and that it was important to separate the different issues. The one he concentrated on was the presence of effective pluralism in Italy. He emphasised that newspapers were not particularly relevant in this respect, as, in Italy, aerial TV had overarching importance. Issues such as property and the control of television in Italy, the role of cable TV and the agreements between RAI and Mediaset should have a far higher place on the agenda of European institutions and of the Opposition, which he blamed for not having done enough.

The presentations were followed by a long debate. Dr David Hine, University Lecturer in Politics at the University of Oxford and member of the ISO steering committee, remarked on the failures of Italian journalists. If the value system and the institutions are not fully working, this is also because journalists have not been able to explain to the public their importance and, in particular, the importance of having independent umpires. The failure of the value system, Hine argued, is also a cumulative failure of the last forty to fifty years of the media.

Professor Federico Varese, from the Department of Criminology, compared the Italian situation with the one in Russia, particularly in terms of the harassment of those who oppose the government. Professor Martin McLaughlin, Professor of Italian at Oxford and a member of the ISO steering committee, won sustained applause when he asked why Berlusconi refused to answer *la Repubblica's* ten questions. Maurizio Morabito argued that Berlusconi could not now reply to *la Repubblica* as this would be seen as a capitulation to the enemy. 'Berlusconi will answer' – Morabito concluded – 'but only when he is able to gain advantage from the replies'. This was a very interesting and, perhaps somewhat prophetic, conclusion to a most interesting debate.

The aftermath

At the beginning of November 2009, Berlusconi finally decided to address *la Repubblica's* ten questions. He did it through the pages of *Donne di Cuori*, a book written by Bruno Vespa, a long-standing RAI journalist who has never been seen as particularly inimical to the Prime Minister. The questions were answered in an indirect way, without ever citing the questions themselves. *la Repubblica* took this as a victory, although it also emphasised that the answers were indirect and elusive. Still, it decided to remove the ten questions from its newspaper and its homepage.

Despite this decision, the questions re-entered the Italian political debate a few weeks later. Once again, Oxford University was very much at the centre of this, as the occasion for their re-emergence was the Reuters' Institute for the Study of Journalism Annual Lecture, given by Carlo De Benedetti, chairman of the Espresso-la Repubblica group and a fierce opponent of Berlusconi. The ten questions, De Benedetti argued, were the consequence of a simple consideration: 'It is the view of this newspaper, a view that has been expressed on many occasions, that where there are

contradictions in power, there is a natural space where journalism must carry out an investigation'. Such investigations are the way to create an 'illuminated citizenship', a concept which created much controversy in the Italian right-wing media in the days following the lecture.

Regardless of the position one may take in this debate, the fact that politicians, journalists and commentators are still arguing over the ten questions even after answers have been given, demonstrates that they have become a milestone in the relationship between the media and democracy in the age of Silvio Berlusconi. According to *la Repubblica*, the questions were means of showing a) how journalism ought to be practiced and b) how many other sources of information were quite simply not doing their job. According to Berlusconi and many in his party, the questions asked by a biased newspaper are not an essential part of the democratic process, as accountability is mostly (or even solely) enforced by the decisions made by the public when voting.

These two different views of democracy and of the role of the press seem almost irreconcilable. The fact that they emerged quite clearly during the debate made it impossible to draw conclusions that could be shared by everyone on the panel and in the room. This should hardly be a surprise: the success of the Oxford debate lay precisely in the fact that it had been a microscopic reproduction of the debates that have been going on in Italy for the past fifteen years. Deriving a workable solution would probably have meant that the panel was discussing the wrong question, or, indeed, the wrong ten questions.

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Conferences and Seminars

Berlusconi and After: Prospects for the Opposition

British Midland Institute, Birmingham, Friday 12 February 2010

This one day conference will assess the current crisis surrounding Silvio Berlusconi's government and explore the fortunes of the opposition, including the Democratic Party and the movements which have emerged in civil society in recent years. It will bring together journalists, policy-makers, academics and students of contemporary Italy. Speakers include: Daniele Albertazzi (University of Birmingham), Geoff Andrews (The Open University), Andrea Biondi (Partito Democratico), Francesco Grillo (Vision), James Newell (University of Salford), Charlotte Ross (University of Birmingham), Paola Subacchi (Chatham House). This event is organised by The Open University in association with Open Democracy, Vision, Bulletin of Italian Politics, Soundings, and Department of Italian at

Birmingham University. For information contact Julia Ornelas at: j.ornelas@open.ac.uk.

Italian Politics Group, Political Studies Association (60th Anniversary Conference)
Edinburgh, 29 March – 1 April 2010

A number of panels will be held at the 60th Anniversary Conference of the Political Studies Association, Edinburgh, 29 March – 1 April 2010. The programme will include eight sessions of a workshop on “Party Leadership in Western Europe: Strictly Personal”, organised by Duncan McDonnell (University of Turin) and James L. Newell (University of Salford), a panel on “Morality, Political Scandals and the Detachment from the Political Process”, organised by Daniele Albertazzi (University of Birmingham) and James L. Newell (University of Salford), and a panel on “Italian foreign policy since the end of the Cold War”, organised by Maurizio Carbone (University of Glasgow).