

Editorial

Waiting for Godot: Italian Politics and Society in the Summer of 2012

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When we launched the *Bulletin* four years ago our intention was to provide readers with information about Italian politics that was as up-to-date as the information they would find in the daily and weekly print media aimed at the general public, and as rigorous as the analysis they would find in the journals aimed at academics. Our objective, in other words, was to fill the gap between the two sorts of publication by offering analysis of the latest trends and developments in Italian politics that was both incisive and insightful. We think that the articles in the current issue fulfil this remit wholly. As we were preparing to go to press, the themes closest to the forefront of Italian media attention were the state of the political parties in the run-up to the forthcoming general election; the Government's handling of the Euro-zone crisis; Italian prowess on the sporting field. This edition speaks to all of these issues directly.

The first arose as a consequence of the May local elections which saw the forces of the centre right deserted *en masse*. Those of the centre left were unable effectively to capitalise on the discontent which was, instead, expressed by the spectacular advance of Beppe Grillo's MoVimento Cinque Stelle. As a phenomenon that had grown up without the support of the mainstream media, almost entirely through the horizontal dissemination of information through the Web, the MoVimento achieved results confirming the significance of post-modern forms of campaigning whose significance had already been apparent – as Marinella Belluati and Giuliano Bobba discuss in some detail – at the previous year's local elections. Then, thanks to post-modern campaigns, centre-left candidates had managed to do very well in some places, notably Milan; but as this year, their performance generally suggested that conventional party politics was in crisis and needed to be reinvented. As Claudio Radaelli and Samuele Dossi argue, the crisis is one that has been 'brought about by changing patterns of representation, the role of the media in politics, and processes of Europeanization and globalisation' (p. 63). These have disadvantaged the left in competition with the right. However, the Radical Party, they suggest, has a political repertoire offering interesting lessons about how to address

the four challenges – and therefore, one might add, has lessons especially relevant to the Italian centre left. These forces will also find significant admonitions, in the general-election run-up, in the results of the research reported by Elisabetta De Giorgi – which suggests that if they have not been enjoying unambiguous successes despite the evident difficulties of their opponents, then this is at least partly due to the great problems they have had over the years in presenting to centre-right governments opposition that is ‘singular, competitive and alternative’ (De Giorgi, p. 152).

Another major consequence of the May elections was to undermine somewhat the stability of the Monti government as questions were asked in both of the large parties supporting it about how far the less-than-satisfying outcome had been due precisely to the decision to sustain in office a technocratic government pursuing measures of austerity. When the last issue of the *Bulletin* was published, the Government had taken office just a few weeks previously and through his regular updates on the legislative performance and productivity of the executive, Francesco Marangoni was able to present an ‘end-of-term report’ on the outgoing Berlusconi government. Here he draws on the battery of indicators used to assess government activity in past issues to assess the current administration eight months into its term.

The Government’s activity will almost certainly have been accompanied by a reinforcement of the attitude tendencies discussed in the articles by Fabio Serricchio and by Albertina Pretto and Loris Gaio; for the Government is one that took office precisely to deal with the state of economic emergency bound up with the Euro-zone crisis. Both the manner in which it assumed office and its subsequent actions have highlighted the democratic deficit currently at the heart of the EU with voters decreasingly able, through their decisions at national elections, to influence public policies – increasingly constrained by decisions taken at the less-than-fully-accountable European level. Under such circumstances, the evidence of growing Euro-scepticism of Italians – once stereotypically viewed as ‘Euro-enthusiasts regardless’ – is, perhaps, hardly surprising; nor, given the crisis, is the evidence of a resurgence of extrinsic orientations to work – Italian citizens giving increasing relative importance to what jobs offer in terms of material security, correspondingly less to what they provide by way of opportunities for personal growth.

What was for long thought to lie at the base of Italian attitudes towards Europe was the impression that it offered a vehicle for overcoming perceived shortcomings in the country’s own institutions – perceived shortcomings that were very much reflected in the attitudes of the Italian graduates interviewed by Francesca Conti when she asked them about their reasons for emigrating to the UK. Against such a background, the two major sporting events of the summer of 2012 – the European Football Championships and the Olympic Games – had special significance; for by

offering, as Simon Martin points out, a unique means of inculcating loyalty, sport has always provided an antidote to Italians' negative views of their country as a state. This 'inverted patriotism' (Dickie, 2001) has always, as Samantha Owen's analysis reminds us, been very much bound up with the country's diversity, differences having been historically included but not accepted. And as Mario Balotelli took his team to a 2-1 victory in the European semi-finals on 28 June, his experience demonstrated that 'there is only so much that even highly talented sportsmen with huge exposure can achieve' in fostering acceptance despite Italy's diversity (Martin, p. 61).

What this and this edition's other pieces do, then, is to offer a revealing picture of the state of Italian politics and society as, towards the end of July, the country was about to break for the summer. As so often in the past the predominant impression was one of waiting. A technocratic government was 'temporarily assuming the responsibilities of parties that [found] themselves in a state of obvious weakness' (Marangoni, p. 135) while a weakly integrated society stood by, discontent, but apparently willing to let the executive get on with the job of austerity - uncertain, pending the general election, as to what the future shape of Italian politics would look like.

References

- Dickie, J. (2001), "The Notion of Italy", in Z. Baranski and R. J. West (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 17-33.