

Editorial

G2, P3 and the Berlusconi Government: What Future?

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The purpose of the *Bulletin* is to provide policy-makers, academics, journalists and others who need to know, with incisive, up-to-date information about the current state of Italian politics. The present issue fulfils that mission in at least two important ways. The first is captured by the phrase, '*De te fabula narratur!*', famously used by Karl Marx in the preface to *Das Capital*, which he wrote 'in England, inspired by the industrial revolution which first took off in that country'.

But he wrote the book in German. In the preface he explained the relevance of the English experience to still agrarian Germany with a Latin phrase...which translates "Of you the tale is told." By this Marx meant that the future of Germany was already visible across the water in England. And so it was. Germany industrialized too toward the end of the 19th Century (Feenberg, nd)

So it is with our symposium articles on Italy's 'second generations', the 'G2', guest-edited by James Walston and Isabella Clough Marinaro of the American University of Rome: Italian policy-makers are having to grapple with the implications for citizenship law; with issues of racism, and with various other demographic and social issues arising from the country's recent history of immigration – just as policy-makers have had to do elsewhere in Europe where the situations of immigrants and their children are as major a political issue as in Italy. In the United Kingdom, for example, one of the most salient issues in the election campaign earlier this year concerned Conservative proposals for an annual limit on the number of non-EU economic migrants as well as Liberal Democrat proposals to allow "law-abiding families" without the correct papers but in the country for ten years, to "earn citizenship" (Liberal Democrats, 2010: 76) – precisely the issues high on the policy-making agenda in Italy at the moment.

So as debate gets under way in Britain about the details of new controls that look set to come into force next April, members of the novel coalition government such as Teresa May and William Hague might want to explore how these matters have worked out in Italy. We will be sending them copies of this issue of the *Bulletin* – there could hardly be a better example of the real-world relevance of work on Italy even to those who may not be especially interested in that country *per se* – and we shall welcome their feedback: in today’s increasingly utilitarian world, academics are under constant and growing pressure to justify what they do in terms of its bearing on the concerns of outside ‘end users’. This means that academics have the right to expect such end users to take at least some time – if not to be proactive – in telling academics what their concerns *are*. As editors of the *Bulletin*, we will be highly delighted to publish research on Italian politics – like, for example, Francesco Marangone’s regular updates on the legislative activity of the Italian government – that in whatever way addresses the needs of non-academics outside that country: we, like the vast majority of our colleagues, actively *want* to feel that we are making a real contribution to the collective well being. But in that case, policy-makers have to tell us what research they seek from us!

The second way in which this issue is informative of the Italian situation is in virtue of its general debates on ‘the current state’ of Italian politics – Anna Pitton’s report on the London School of Economics discussion, in March, and the Birmingham roundtable, “Berlusconi and Beyond”, being particularly relevant here. The latter in particular speaks eloquently to the unpredictability of change in Italian politics (and therefore, we would dare to suggest, to the need for a publication such as ours!): at the time of the roundtable, in February 2010, Berlusconi was securely in office; he still dominated the political scene to a degree unmatched by any other postwar leader; the likely consequences of departure from office on his part were unclear (though the roundtable did delineate factors relevant to identifying these). The following month, the regional elections – as the articles by Antonio Floridia and Alfio Mastropaolo in this issue make clear – did little to change this. As Mastropaolo (p. 147) argues, “the election outcome was much as was to be expected. The centre left lost where it was expected to lose; the centre right won where victory was a foregone conclusion”. Consequently, as Floridia (p. 144) notes, the result of the poll “essentially highlighted once again all of the dilemmas afflicting Italian politics without resolving any of them”.

Since then, the scene has come to look very different – an appearance of essential stasis, if not stalemate, having given way to one much more evocative of the idea that significant change in the near future is possible if not likely. The most significant developments since the beginning of the year seem to be the following. First, there has been a steady decline in Berlusconi’s popularity. In January, twenty months after he had taken

office, his approval ratings remained, at 48 percent, a point above the level to which they had *already* declined ten months after the start of his second government in 2001. Since then, they have collapsed to 39 percent, their lowest since the entrepreneur took office (IPR Marketing, 2010).

To a significant extent this will have been due - second - to the growing salience of conflict within the ruling coalition, particularly within the Popolo della libertà (People of Freedom, Pdl) , expressed by the sometimes very public rows between the Prime Minister himself and Chamber-of-Deputies president, Gianfranco Fini. On the one hand, Fini represents the old National Alliance wing of the party, whose roots are predominantly in the South, which is suspicious of the 'federalism' demanded by the party's principal ally, the Northern League, and which stands for a Pdl that is more than an empty shell, a mere vehicle for the ambitions of its leader. On the other hand, the strengthening of the Northern League thanks to the regional elections has heightened Berlusconi's dependence on it - while he has never made any real effort to "reflect on the nature of the [Pdl], its organisation or its mission", allowing it to be "yet another 'personal party', deprived of an ideological profile and image clearly separate from [that of] Berlusconi himself" (Newell, 2010: 2). If this has always been a potential threat to the entrepreneur's authority (by depriving his party of alternative means of retaining voters' loyalty in the event that his image becomes tarnished), then this factor together with the first one have reinforced the aspirations of people, like Fini, anxious to succeed him as leader of the centre right.

Nor has the Government's position been helped - third - by a number of high-profile scandals, not least among which has been the P3 affair, so called because of a range of alleged illegalities committed by entrepreneurs, members of the judiciary and high-profile Pdl politicians apparently organised in a network of connivance which, some suggested, had the same characteristics as the famous Propaganda 2 (P2) Masonic lodge. P3 seemed to provide a rationale for the Prime Minister's dogged pursuit of proposals that mired him in controversy: the so-called gagging law (*legge bavaglio*) limiting the conditions under which telephone tapping could be used in criminal investigations and preventing the recordings from being published. And by suggesting a Pdl riven by underground faction fighting carried on by dubious, even illegal means, P3 necessarily created the impression of a leader that was losing control of the situation; surrounded by warring bands on all sides; weakened - paradoxically - by a style of politics of which he himself had been the apparent exemplar.

The upshot was that by late June, divorce between Berlusconi and Fini - apparently offering leadership for all those seeking the modern conservative party committed to law-and-order and due process which Italy had never had - seemed to be a distinct possibility. And the threat that Fini's supporters in Parliament might exit the Pdl to form their own

groups in the two chambers raised the spectre that the Government's hold on power would be fundamentally weakened.

As we go to press, therefore, the future of Italian politics presents itself with all of its usual considerable uncertainty – and, consequently, its considerable fascination. It is precisely because we are confident that we share this fascination with not inconsiderable numbers of our fellow political scientists that we are confidently hopeful of receiving from them, for future issues, the contributions that will enable us to continue to make a success of the publishing venture that this journal represents.

References

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