

Book Reviews

Paul Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola*, London: Routledge, 2011, hb. £85.00, pp.192, 978-0-415-58968-0.

Italian philosopher Julius Evola (1898-1974), and his position on the right, close to fascism, was a marginal figure in the intellectual debate of the first half of the twentieth century, but he became crucial for neo-fascism, in such a way that his political thought is unavoidable for anyone interested in understanding the *weltanschauung* of the European radical right since World War Two. Notwithstanding the renewed interest in his work in the 1990s owing to the electoral success of the Italian extreme-right, there hasn't been until now a 'full-length study in English' (p.ix). Paul Furlong fills this gap with his 'critical introduction' to the political and social thought of Evola. Furlong not only aims at understanding the influence of the Italian thinker on European neo-fascism but also wants to do away with simplistic views that underrate Evola as a shameful writer because of his racism, neo-Nazism and instigation of violence, a writer ultimately marginal to mainstream philosophical debates of the second half of the past century. Furlong's analysis of this 'secular theologian of tradition' (p.153) is balanced, emphasising his relevance as an example of intellectual anti-democratic thought, as well as its mechanisms of survival and dissemination in contemporary times. Among the dozens of books and the vast number of articles of the Italian author, Furlong selects the volumes that, in his view, constitute 'the core of his thinking' (p.ix), allowing him to contextualise Evola historically, politically and culturally, and isolate the tenets of his 'rigorous political doctrine' – tradition, in its metaphysical and historical dimensions; the concept of empire; race, gender, and anti-Semitism – and their impact on the strategies of the radical right in the period since World War Two.

Furlong stresses the centrality, in Evola's thought, of both the belief in the ontological reality of the Supreme Being and the hierarchical inferiority of the empirical world, whose autonomous knowledge is only partial. Evola's interest in metaphysics put him in a permanent dialogue with classical metaphysical thinkers such as Vico, De Maistre Lamennais, de Bonald and Bachofen, and with contemporary thinkers of Tradition such as René Guenon, Arturo Reghini, Mircea Eliade, Ananda Coomaraswamy and

Frithjof Schuon, and finally with the philosophers of idealism, Giovanni Gentile and Benedetto Croce. In this intellectual network Furlong emphasises Evola's distinguishing features regarding Tradition, and the dichotomies Orient/Occident, Action/Contemplation, masculine/feminine, paganism/monotheism, as well as the different paths of reconnection to the Supreme Being that older civilizations naturally knew and that the advent of history interrupted, opening the way to cyclical decadence. With this background in mind, which Evola developed in the *Revolt against the Modern World* (1934), Furlong analyses the Italian philosopher's fondness for the 'aristocracy of the spirit' as the only agent capable of understanding and accomplishing such lost connection. Belonging to the aristocracy is not determined by mere biological or cultural factors; it is a trait of 'the man who has become different', the man whose 'personal equation' grants him the capabilities to fight the 'hidden war' (p.49) of History, side by side with the forces of the cosmos, reflection of the Supreme Being, and containing the differentiating order (through the 'wet and dry path' of magic and myth). Against them stand the forces of subversion that have caused an undifferentiated and uniform modernity (the epoch of decadence or Kali Yuga, accelerated since 1945 by the victory of the USA and the USSR).

Furlong shares the view of Claudio Risé – and of Evola himself in his intellectual autobiography *Il Cammino de Cinabro* (1972) – by analysing the volumes of the Italian philosopher in the post-World War Two period (*Gli Uomini e le Rovine* (1953) and *Cavalcare la Tigre* (1961) not as alternative, but complementary, proposals. Despite the pessimism regarding the possibility of reversing the path of decadence, in Furlong's view, Evola does not offer a political programme but a manual of conduct to those men committed to action or to staying immune to decadence itself. Especially through the analysis of *Gli Uomini e le Rovine*, Furlong gives a portrayal of Evola's conception of the State, understood less as a model to follow, and more as the original source where the 'differentiated man' may find authority, sovereignty, and leadership as absolute and static principles. This serves as the basis for both Evola's criticism of absolutist and totalitarian regimes and his indifference toward the debate on the rights and duties of citizens. In the first case, absolutism (which requires terror) and totalitarianism (which requires a centralised bureaucracy) constitute a degradation of the traditional State, in which command and obedience derive from a natural hierarchic recognition. In the second case, because the individual, the family, and the corporation constitute inferior hierarchical levels in the structure of the state they cannot give form to the State, but must conform to it. In Evola's mind equality between individuals is an artifice, a subversion of the hierarchical, organic and natural principle of Tradition. If men are not equal, their rights and duties cannot be equal. There is no place for individual rights, or for the Rights of Man, but only for differentiated rights (according to each individual condition) and differentiated liberties

(prime among them the freedom of each individual to know what to be). For this reason the differentiated man – the ‘absolute man’ – has the right to oppose the decadent State that undermines the principles of Tradition.

With this in mind, Furlong sheds light on Evola’s thought on imperialism and nationalism. Evola sees nationalism as, in essence, the offspring of liberalism, modernity and bourgeois subversion, which announced the arrival of the fourth state that destroyed the traditional order of empire. Within the empire nations find a just hierarchical order; outside of it they are mere tools of chauvinistic nationalisms, and of regimes interested only in material conquest in the name of contingent realities such as fatherlands. In Evola’s mind, nations and fatherlands are not ends in themselves but tools for the differentiated man to reach the heights of the superior order of empire. Thus, Evola’s imperialism is not a synonym of the modern materialist expansion but of a return to the origins, where spiritual principles prevail over natural principles. This imperialism is at the antipodes of internationalism. Thus, with this distinction, Furlong characterises Evola’s heterodox position regarding both the palingenetic ultra-nationalism (in Roger Griffin’s formula) of fascism, and the biological racism of Nazism.

Furlong dedicates an entire chapter to Julius Evola’s racism, which remains the most controversial theme of his doctrine. The author explains Evola’s hierarchical distinction between the ‘race of the body’ the ‘race of the soul’ and ‘race of the spirit’. According to Evola, the race of the spirit congregates an aristocracy that is in line with Tradition. In contrast, the race of the blood, based on belonging to the same genetic source, ends up homogenising the masses. Evola’s racism is thus more refined, paying attention to quality rather than quantity, although reiterating prejudices such as the inferiority of blacks and Australian aborigines. In the same manner, regarding anti-Semitism Evola does not satisfy himself with the already established prejudices, and defends a view close to Sombart’s; the Jewish spirit, which contains the germs of subversion, is not the heritage of a race defined by blood, but it evolved into the heritage of modern man, assisting him in the path of decadence. After explaining the complexity of Evola’s racial positions, Furlong states that the Italian philosopher committed one of his biggest mistakes when he decided not openly to condemn the Holocaust, which helped strengthen the association between the radical right and ethnic cleansing.

Furlong compares Evola with other right-wing theorists, such as de Maistre, Lamennais, de Bonald, Schmitt, Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin. But the centre of Furlong’s analysis is the connection between Evola’s thought and the post-war strategy of the radical right. Evola is at the centre of three different strategies. On the one hand, Evola’s plan for a right-wing anarchism in *l’Arco e la Clava* (1968) influenced all the radicals who saw the rebellion of the 1960s as a sign of decadence but who, nevertheless, looked

with interest at the revolts against modernity epitomised by the Beat Generation and existentialism. On the other hand, Evola's philosophical analysis of decadence influenced those radicals (such as the French Nouvelle Droite of Alain de Benoist) committed to the battle of ideas for seizing the political imaginary. Finally, the role played by the 'differentiated man' in the battle against the modern world inspired radical organisations such as the Ordine Nuovo, and intellectuals like Franco Freda, committed to accelerating the end of the system. Furlong is controversial in this regard because, even though he recognises the complexity of the relation between Evola's thought and extreme right-wing terrorism, he supports the idea that Evola was responsible for the extremist violence. This has been often debated, beyond the scientific community, and it is far from generating any sort of consensus. Thus, statements such as 'There can be little doubt about the importance of his work as an ideological justification for far-right political terrorism in Italy and to some extent elsewhere in Europe in the 1960s and in the 1970s' (p.16) would probably benefit from a more profound treatment from the author, who knows well the scholarship on extreme-right wing violence. This need to deepen the analysis only reinforces the fundamental importance of Furlong's study for an understanding of the radicalism of the neo-fascist right in post-World War Two Europe.

Riccardo Marchi and José Pedro Zúquete
Universidade de Lisboa

Bill Emmott, *Forza, Italia. Come Ripartire dopo Berlusconi*, Milan: Rizzoli, 2010, hb €19.50, pp.251. ISBN: 978-88-17-04492-9.

Bill Emmott, made famous in Italy for having been editor of the *Economist* when the magazine began in earnest its anti-Berlusconi 'unfit-to-rule' campaign, has, having retired from that position, taken on Italy more generally by deciding to write a book about the country, focusing on what is good about the place. His motives for doing this are 'personal' emotions deriving from his own role (through the *Economist*) in Italian politics and his personal experiences: irritation, indignation, delusion, sadness, rage. In explaining his motives to Italians, he was struck by their response to his idea - why would anyone want to write a book about what's good in Italy when things overall are so bad? As he notes, no Japanese would have reacted in this manner to such an idea about Japan, and this perhaps speaks volumes about the Italian people. Yet, it was these responses combined with his experience of analysing the Japanese case that led him to his main theme for this book: rather than viewing Italy in terms of a division between, say, North and South, it might be better to view the country as

divided between two sets of forces: good and bad (evil?), in short the Mala Italia and the Buona Italia.

The Mala Italia amounts to the clientelism, corruption, criminality and the general abuse of public office to favour friends and family. It is a form of network, whether implicit or explicit in nature. The Buona Italia, on the other hand, seems to be pockets of 'resistance', groups and sectors where Italians are doing their best to do well (honestly) and to turn the situation around overall. These two sets of forces are in (latent, at times real) competition with each other, and it is this situation that explains why Italy appears to be a bird (or plane) that either should not fly but can...or can fly but should crash... but doesn't. More importantly, it is an analysis of the Buona Italia that convinces him, contrary to those Italians reacting to his idea of such a book, that Italy can, in fact, be changed for the better.

What follows is less detailed analysis based on empirical evidence (for this is not, and never claims to be, an academic book) than a series of conversations with successful people (mostly but not only entrepreneurs) across Italy, although where facts are missing Emmott knows where to find them, as the references to political and economic analyses of the country throughout the book demonstrate. Ultimately, however, the overall impression is that his are a series of informed opinions (many of which Italianists would share) than incisive analysis. Emmott uses these (successful) parts of the jigsaw to argue that they demonstrate what is possible in Italy, elaborating further by giving some indications of what should be followed in order to re-build Italy 'after Berlusconi'. Emmott's belief that it is not possible to re-build Italy under Berlusconi is suggested very clearly in the subtitle of the book - 'how to re-start after Berlusconi' - and in the fact that Berlusconi barely gets a mention.

Overall, the book is a patchwork and it is probably less useful to dwell on the detailed examples or prescriptions than to emphasise more generally the value and limitations of this sort of approach. The value of this approach lies in the more nuanced picture the book provides of a country which has been victim to what might be described as negative stereotyping. Emmott, by contrast, and in keeping with an approach of many Italianists, attempts to overcome this stereotyping, not by rejecting outright certain negative images of the country, but rather by simply avoiding them and doing what is less often done: identifying what is 'good' about the country. This provides a different and novel account rarely found in the literature on Italy. The limits of this approach are apparent when the author tentatively takes the next step which is to suggest that these examples of the 'good' Italy demonstrate what the country could become if only.....The problem here is that more work would need to be done to show how exactly these often rather isolated successful activities can be used as models to promote other 'good practices' in other parts of the country. Without this, the actual 'status' of the examples is left unclear. Indeed, in

reading the book the axiom 'the exception proves the rule' kept coming to mind. Put another way, for an Italianist who knows the politics of the country well and who knows the deep structural problems confronting it (which, of course, go beyond any single politician) one is left with the uncomfortable feeling that the examples provided may be exceptions which prove the (Italian) rule rather than demonstrating the potential of achieving something different on a grand scale. Yet, even if this is the case, there is no doubting the book's value as a refreshing, thought-provoking and challenging read from a leading international public intellectual.

Martin J. Bull
University of Salford

Rosario Florenza, *Le elezioni amministrative della Prima Repubblica: Politica e propaganda locale nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra (1946-1956)*, Donzelli Editore: Roma, 2008, €32.00, pp.258, ISBN 978-88-6036-260-5

Le elezioni amministrative della Prima Repubblica provides a rich and much needed description of the political, social, and cultural climate surrounding local elections in the first ten years of the Italian Republic, between 1946 and 1956. The book makes an important contribution to the literature on elections, political parties and institutions, by offering a local perspective on a difficult process of democratic construction. It provides an in-depth analysis of local political life in post-war Italy, an aspect that the literature has often neglected, and of the emergence and consolidation of the new political elites, as they begin to frame the new centre-periphery relationship. This thorough historical inquiry draws on local newspapers, political speeches and manifestos, election posters and satirical sketches from those years, but also on a rich cultural production of films and literature that reflect the mood of the times. The author well depicts the general turmoil and excitement, but also common people's sense of confusion and distrust, which characterise these first elections.

The first three chapters articulate the characteristics of three rounds of local elections - in spring and autumn 1946, in 1951 and 1952, and finally in 1956. From the start, the two main opposing fronts of the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party occupy the political stage, with the Socialist party often holding the balance of power in coalitions, and a corollary of smaller right- and left-wing parties and lists. In the South, monarchic parties and right-wing lists that express people's scepticism towards politics and institutions (*liste qualunquiste*) enjoy much support, and the charm of charismatic personalities exerts great influence over the electorate.

The 1946 elections are particularly important and are rightly given more space within the book. They mark the rebirth of democratic life after

over twenty years of fascist dictatorship, as they precede the first general elections on 18 April 1948 by nearly two years. For the first time suffrage is universal as the right to vote is extended to women. In these first local elections, the degree of politicisation and 'ideologisation' is very high and transcends problems specific to the local administration, as the debate has a national scope and is dominated by bigger themes such as democracy, fascism, religion, and the Soviet Union. However, the emphasis is on participating in the democratic process, as all political parties agree on the same message that no matter who you vote for, the important thing is to vote (*'Votate per chi volete, ma votate!'*). Educational material is distributed to teach people why voting is important, how and where to vote, and political activists are encouraged to reach out to their family and community members and take them to the polling stations.

The 1951 and 1952 elections experimented with a new electoral law for local administrations and, for the first time, 79 Provincial councils were elected. These elections were characterised by deeper ideological conflict; they more evidently reflected national dynamics and influenced the national debate. The Christian Democrats had enjoyed a landslide victory in the 1948 general elections and had turned their attention to the agrarian reform in the South, with the ultimate political aim of widening their political support and loyalty against the monarchic aspirations that still characterised much of southern politics. Local elections thus became the litmus test of this new political strategy, but revealed the weakness of centrism as a governing formula, in the context of a complex political system. Particularly in the areas affected by the reforms the Christian Democrats' support actually decreased to the advantage of right-wing parties and populists such as *il re per burla* (the prankster king), Achille Lauro, in Naples.

Finally, by the 1956 local elections, electoral movements and political dynamics had fostered heated political debates within intellectual and cultural circles about the development of society and the economy, as the new mass industrial revolution had taken off. The Left wobbled in the wake of international events, as Russian tanks strangled Budapest's democratic aspirations, whilst the Christian Democrats continued to search for an alternative strategy to centrism to gain greater independent bargaining power. These elections marked the reinforcement of the Christian Democrats' dominant position, the retreat of the Right and the 'fluidisation' of the Left, with the Socialist Party back on the centre stage of Italian politics, its support growing as it distanced itself from the Communist Party and moved towards the political centre.

Each chapter reports a detailed analysis of the tone of the election campaigns, the symbolism, the propaganda and the speeches, through a vast range of bibliographical materials from the time. Unfortunately, an equally detailed and reasoned analysis of election results is missing. The

sections on election results often lose the reader in endless lists of percentages of votes received by each party, which are incorporated in the main body of the text. Greater use of tables could have simplified the reading of such data. An extra section at the end of each chapter might have offered the space for a more in-depth reflection on the results and a summary of the main characteristics of each election.

The last chapter offers an interesting synchronic analysis by focusing on specific themes such as geopolitics; localism and the sometimes difficult relationship between local pride and national identity; education in democratic processes and the building of democracy, and the impact of national leaders' speeches during election campaigns. As this last chapter tries to cover perhaps too much, some aspects are treated in superficial terms and the reader is sometimes left with a feeling of unfinished work. This is reinforced by the absence of a concluding chapter that could have offered some final reflection summarising the main points.

Overall, this is a refreshing and very enjoyable historical account of the enthusiastic, albeit challenging, building of Italian democracy, from a new perspective compared to most work on post-war politics, that of local elections. Revisiting that phase of Republican history can certainly provoke some important reflections on the ongoing contradictions of Italian democratic culture and on the strength, or lack thereof, of Italy's current democracy.

Sonia Busu

London School of Economics and Political Science

Rosario Forlenza, *La Repubblica del Presidente. Gli anni di Carlo Azeglio Ciampi 1999-2006*, Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2011, pp.153, pb. € 16.00, ISBN 978-88-8103-747-6.

In the last ten years many scholars, from political scientists to sociologists, from historians to linguists, have drawn attention to the personalities and role of presidents of the Republic in the Italian political and institutional context, breaking legal scholars' monopoly on the field. The reason is that the presidential role is constant and incisive in a large number of political spheres - ranging from government-formation, to policy-making and national integration - notwithstanding the advent of majoritarian democracy with all the limits one would have expected on the capacity for presidential action in these areas. In his essay, Forlenza focuses on the term of President Ciampi from 1999 to 2006, emphasising the public use of history by the President, i.e. the presidential reinterpretation of the national past in an effort to find the guidelines for action in the present. As the author himself points out, he mainly concentrates on the so-called 'historical Ciampi' (*Ciampi storico*), 'committed to defining a myth of national

foundation, which could create cohesion among citizens, as well as build and strengthen the feeling of national identity, and support republican institutions’.

The author draws on speeches given by Carlo Azeglio Ciampi during his seven-year term; on press articles by well-known journalists and scholars, and on the secondary literature. The book consists of five chapters, developing the afore-mentioned theme of Ciampi and history and in particular the relationship between Ciampi's interpretations and the complexity of history. More precisely, the first three chapters deal with the themes of memory, the country's history and patriotism promoted by Ciampi, while the last two chapters highlight the link the President discerned between the past and present of the nation.

The first chapter is probably the most interesting from the point of view of understanding how history and the common past have been the basis for rebuilding a sense of the Italian nation, after the nationalistic experience of Fascism and the oblivion to which the theme of nation was consigned by the First Republic's political and intellectual class. Ciampi designed a sort of journey through time where the main stops consist of the most relevant turning points in the process of Italian nation-building. Ciampi ideally linked the Risorgimento to the Resistance as founding events, but not only that, he also attempted to give these two historical moments universal symbolic meaning and value. Both the achievement of territorial unity and liberation from the Nazis are considered struggles for civil rights and freedom.

In detail, the Resistance is considered a collective movement, rather than an elitist one in the process of national liberation. From this perspective, the armistice (8 September 1943) has not the negative connotations of the homeland's death, as some historians maintain, but rather, a positive connotation, a sort of starting point for the Italian people's struggle for liberation, in a crescendo that links 25 April 1945 (the Liberation) with 2 June 1946 (the date of the referendum leading to the foundation of the Republic). According to Ciampi, the homeland never died, as the sacrifice of the Aquila Division in Cephalonia clearly teaches us. Only a love for Italy could explain the resistance of soldiers against the former German ally, in a situation where no clear military orders were given. But this attachment to Italy probably also inspired those young people, who at that time joined Benito Mussolini and the Republic of Salò. In Ciampi's words, even though they aimed to save the Italian nation, they were fighting alongside the wrong faction, failing in the attempt to link nation and freedom. The President did not intend to rewrite the past, but rather to propose an historical reconstruction seeking thereby a founding myth for Italy, one able to allow individuals to identify with the political community. Nevertheless, the policy of memory pursued by the President collided with the barrier of Italians' divided memory.

In Chapter two the theme of homeland is connected with that of constitutional patriotism. The concept of constitutional patriotism took shape in Germany during the 1980s. It builds a sense of collective belonging based, not on exaltation of homeland, culture, descent or race, but on democratic institutions and on ideals such as justice, legality, liberty and civic ethics. In other words, at the heart of national identification lies identification with the principles of the Constitution, which is the most important civic pact. Moreover, this idea of patriotism does not conflict with a sense of belonging to other collective entities, from regions to Europe itself. Ciampi's attempt is to promote constitutional patriotism or at least a civic religion, with the aim of rediscovering Italian symbols (the flag and anthem) and rituals (such as public holidays).

Chapter three focuses on the Anniversary of the Republic (2 June). Forgotten and expunged from the civic calendar in the 1970s, it was reinstated as a public holiday only after the turn of the century. Ciampi tried to transform the civil ceremony, traditionally limited to a military parade, into a real popular festival.

Chapter four opens with the connection between past and present: the focus is on the New-Year's-Eve messages, through which presidents describe and interpret the events of the year. For Ciampi, history is the most important source in the attempt to ground the traditions and values that unite Italians as a nation. This is so clear that the author states that the President offered a 'Republican lesson' every 31 December, focusing especially on the Risorgimento, good governance and territorial unity. The civic engagement of President Ciampi was particularly explicit for young people with the traditional speeches at the beginning of the school year.

Chapter five too is devoted to the attempt of President Ciampi to connect past and present, and focuses on his visits to the Italian provinces. Ciampi's narrative of Italy does not clash with the reality of that Italy of the regions and municipalities, industrial districts and local cultures, because such diversity is the force underlying unification of the country. As mentioned, the pluralisation of patriotism does not undermine the idea of nation, but on the contrary enriches it. Ciampi's journey through Italy is both an application and a test of his constitutional patriotism.

To sum up, Ciampi's frequent exaggerations in the area of patriotic rhetoric and its civic pedagogy often caused perplexity among historians, especially because it seemed to reinforce the stereotype of 'Italians as good people' as well as the teleological view of history. However, his project was the first consistent attempt to strengthen the civic and political idea of nation carried out by a major public figure since 1946. Despite citizens' great appreciation for Ciampi and his work, Italians' national identification still has significant pre-modern and pre-political features, with a prevalence of cultural aspects. This is likely due to Italians' mistrust of politics and their representative institutions, with the exception of the

President of the Republic, who alone can reverse this trend in the long run and in any case can perhaps do so hardly at all. Forlenza's book has the merit of focusing attention on the importance of the symbolic dimension of politics and in particular on the complex task of national integration performed by President Ciampi. In particular, the essay highlights how difficult it is to give substance to constitutional patriotism through the common past (as indicated by Rusconi), without provoking misunderstandings that may trigger divisions, rather than the desired reconciliation within the community.

Selena Grimaldi
University of Padua