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La ragione e la passione. Le forme della politica nell'Europa contemporanea, by Paolo Pombeni, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2010, 715 pp., €42.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-88-15-13668-8

Since the appearance in 1985 of his *Introduzione alla storia dei partiti politici* (known in revised editions as *Partiti e sistemi politici nella storia contemporanea*) Paolo Pombeni has exerted a profound influence over the academic study of political history in Italy. His project of pursuing a conjoined analysis of the development of European political systems and the writings of great thinkers and social scientists on political parties – from the classical liberalism of Benjamin Constant through to Max Weber, Roberto Michels and Maurice Duverger – has opened up particularly fruitful lines of inquiry, promising to put the history of political parties and movements on a more solid cultural footing.

His latest book, *La ragione e la passione*, which brings together and revises material that has previously appeared in essays and articles appearing between the mid-1980s and the present day, is closely linked to the intellectual project that Pombeni established with the success of the *Introduzione*. Indeed, it could be said that the chapters of this book set out the main research projects through which Pombeni developed his approach and put it to the test, focusing on the continual interplay between history and theory, between real-world political trends and contemporaneous advances in political theory.

The texts collected here are divided into three sections. In the first section, Pombeni presents a number of case studies relating to the development of Western European constitutions and political systems, with a particular focus on Great Britain, the 'mother' of the political institutions of nineteenth-century liberalism, and for many years the privileged object of study of the young discipline of political studies throughout Europe. Using the approach of comparison with one of the 'classic' cases in the analysis of the structuring of public space in the period, Pombeni has offered the Italian public some major contributions to the better understanding of the historical dynamics that led to the birth of political parties. Shaped and developed within the system of political institutions defined by the modern state, parties are understood here as actors in the life of those institutions and in their decision processes, initially with an overwhelmingly parliamentary base but subsequently developing an ever more substantial and significant presence in society. A similar process of development is set out, across the different essays collected here, in the context of the 'discovery' by contemporary culture of this new

dimension of politics. It is in the light of this continual interchange between culture and institutions that we can best appreciate Pombeni's invocations of the work of James Bryce, Ostrogorski, Elie Halévy and – in the context of Italy after unification – the rediscovery of Liberal political debates that was proposed by Marco Minghetti (2003).

Pombeni has always taken pains to use the major states of central and northern Europe as his standard of comparison, setting the Italian situation in a broader context and abandoning the language of 'exceptional' or 'unique' conditions. The governing assumptions of the second section of this book also arise out of this framework (which is very traditional, and may be inevitable once we start to look more broadly by setting Italy in the context of the development of the political systems of the Mediterranean states; the findings of Ridolfi (1999) are interesting in this context). The second section is devoted to the evolution of the party form in Italy, from unification to the First Republic. The political history of united Italy has traditionally been seen as divided into distinct periods, demarcated by a series of key turning-points: the crisis of the Liberal state and the birth of Fascism; the collapse of Italy's political institutions during the Second World War; the establishment of a democratic republic after 1945. Without downplaying the importance of these turning points, and taking into account the key contributions of constitutional history and of the sociology of political institutions, Pombeni shows how, across the years, the relationship between citizens and political institutions can be interpreted by reference to continuities that have previously been undervalued. In particular, Pombeni stresses the presence of substantial anti-system opposition forces – which are excluded from the political mainstream or only partially included – and the consequent necessity of a government 'in the centre'. From the era of *trasformismo* to the years of Christian Democrat rule, this was a distinguishing feature of the Italian political landscape – a landscape defined by a society that was thoroughly backward by the standards of modern democracies, while still being undeniably dynamic in its attempts to keep up with the leading edge of the Western world. In particular, with specific reference to the twentieth century, Pombeni has consistently endeavoured to put historical clothing on Duverger's controversial remarks, set out in his classic 1951 study, on the broad similarities between the workings of the great party-machines of the era, whether they are working within the socio-political context of competitive democracy or that of the one-party state of an authoritarian regime. From this point of view, even the Fascist party form, considering its institutional presence and its key representative role, which made it a kind of 'clearing house' for society, can be seen as a sort of foretaste of the 'sovereignty' of the great mass-membership parties – and hence as a phenomenon from which Italy's post-war democracy would not succeed in liberating itself. That said, unlike some less intelligent or hastier work, Pombeni's writing has always had the merit of not overstating the parallels between the rule of the Fascist party-state and the much-abused *partitocrazia* of the First Republic. Pombeni always bears in mind the huge juridical and institutional differences between the two regimes, differences that were amply made clear by the classic studies of Mussolini's state (e.g. Aquarone 1965) but which are today too often forgotten.

The third part of the collection is dedicated to 'other' forms of representation and expression of political power – 'other' in comparison with the classical party-form that was

dominant throughout the twentieth century. Engaging with the Weberian analysis of charismatic leadership and with attempts to define a concept as complex and difficult to pin down as ‘populism’, here again Pombeni seeks to invoke classical political theory as a means of understanding those phenomena that seem most strikingly specific to our period.

In conclusion, while this book does not offer scholarly contributions that are entirely original and distinct from Pombeni’s earlier work, it is nonetheless an interesting collection. Above all, it is one that will be useful to anyone who wishes to engage with both political theory and political history, as it brings together in one place and gives a coherent form to some of the most striking findings from an entire career of academic research, restating some of the key passages in the intellectual trajectory of one of the most influential Italian scholars of recent years in this field of study.

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Ennio Flaiano and his Italy: Postcards from a changing world, by Marisa S. Trubiano, Madison, NJ, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010, 225 pp., US\$49.50 (hardcover), ISBN 978-08-38642-13-9

Best known – if known at all in the United States – as Federico Fellini’s collaborator and screenwriter on such masterpieces as *La dolce vita* and *Otto e mezzo*, Ennio Flaiano (1910–1972) was a prolific and polyhedric writer, journalist, novelist, critic and dramatist whose work offers fascinating insights into the changing nature of Italy before and after Fascism and the Second World War.

Flaiano was born in Pescara and had a complicated relationship with the city of his birth. At 18, he left Pescara and went to Rome to study architecture. He soon found his way to the café society of writers, novelists, journalists and intellectuals, although, as they all noted, Flaiano was never completely at home or even at ease in this world, always seeming to have something about him of the classical ‘provincial’ in the cosmopolitan city. It was precisely this outsider status, both geographically and intellectually, that, according