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H-Diplo has commissioned reviews of the Makers of the Modern World Series (Haus Publishing), which concerns the Peace Conferences of 1919-23 and their aftermath. The 32 volumes are structured as biographies in standard format or as specific national/organizational histories. *http://www.hauspublishing.com/product/229*

H-Diplo Book Review of Spencer M. Di Scala. *Vittorio Emanuele Orlando: Italy*. (Makers of the Modern World Series), Haus Publishing, 2010. Pp. xvi + 303pp. Notes, chronology and further reading. ISBN 978-1-905791-79-8.

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Reviewed for H-Diplo by **R.J.B. Bosworth**, Reading University/University of Western Australia

On 30 May 1919 Alberto Pirelli, a young industrialist with global experience who was a member of the Italian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, wrote to his father and head of the family firm, Giovanni Battista, at home in Milan. Two bitter but amusing jokes, Alberto reported, were circulating about Italy's chief delegates, Prime Minister, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando and Foreign Minister, Sidney Sonnino. They were that "the meetings of the Big Four were like a bridge match where dummy is always the same player [Italy]". The other witticism of the moment underlined that Italy had two chief figures in the peacemaking, "one who says nothing in all the languages that he knows [Sonnino] and the other who keeps speaking in all those that he does not know" [Orlando].[1]

The fact that these stories were passed on, however wryly, by a sophisticated Italian who was no political radical, deserves emphasis as background for anyone picking up Spencer Di Scala's latest book. They do so given the reiterated claim in *Vittorio Emanuele Orlando: Italy* that its author is contending against a critical and anti-Italian "bias that pervades the [English-language] historiography of Italy" to achieve a new, fairer and more objective reading of Italian diplomacy. Di Scala assures us that, in this process, he will demonstrate

[1] Cited by N. Tranfaglia, *Vita di Alberto Pirelli (1882-1971): la politica attraverso l'economia* (Turin: G. Einaudi, 2010), p. 137.

that Orlando "stands tall in the panorama of modern Italian history" (p. xiii). Since the brief study is part of a 32 volume series designed to "describe the personalities, events and circumstances surrounding the countries that were remade after the Paris Treaties" (as the press release from the publishers in somewhat curious phrasing pledges), Di Scala has assumed the task of 'speaking for Italy' in a way that, at least Pirelli's joke contended, Orlando failed to achieve in 1919.

And so Di Scala begins a narrative about an Italian nation already formed in classical Rome but resurrected in a liberal Risorgimento. United Italy is nobly won against oppressive Austrians but thereafter hampered by economic backwardness and ill-fortune in the decades that led to 1914. Soon, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, born with his country in 1860, is brought to the forefront of the stage. By 1897, he is a member for Partinico outside Palermo in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, then and later, a 'Mafia' town. As Di Scala phrases it with due care: "At that time no one could be elected without Mafia consent, and Orlando was no exception. However, during this period the Mafia respected 'men of culture' more than it did later, and the Professor had made such a name for himself that his compromises with the organization are said to have been minimal" (p. 14). Soon the aspiring Sicilian lawyer earns ministerial positions under the patronage of Giovanni Giolitti and, from November 1914, under his more conservative enemies and successors. In parliament, we are told, V.E. Orlando had become a man who counted.

In the next four chapters, however, Orlando mostly slips back into the shadows while Di Scala gives his patriotic reading of pre-1914 Italian foreign policy, the nation's entry into the war and its efforts to fight it. In this regard, Austrian persecution of Italians in its empire, Di Scala is sure, meant that, by the time of the July crisis, "the possibility of getting Italians to support Austria in a war did not exist" (p. 33). The Triple Alliance was dead and Italy certainly did not "betray" its erstwhile allies (p. 84). Nor were its territorial ambitions any greedier or more foolish than those of others. After 24 May 1915 Italy's course, Di Scala concedes, did have its ups and downs. But Orlando deserved to emerge as Prime Minister on 31 October 1917 because he understood "how the First World War had transformed war into a modern conflict of peoples — a total war" (p. 63). Moreover, worthily, Orlando was still good enough a liberal to want to defend 'civil rights', opposing the harsher ideas of military commander Luigi Cadorna (which included the ancient punishment of decimation).

Di Scala argues predictably that "Italy's military effort hardly deserves the dismissals it received from its allies after the conflict (and still receives in the English-language literature)" (p. 78), and then does his best to explain away the major defeat at Caporetto: "The Italians", he states, "were not the only ones to lose a major battle in the First World War, and their dogged resistance and recovery prevented the Central Powers' from tellingly focusing on the Western Front "(pp. 95-6). Now Orlando becomes national leader and bravely confronts "herculean tasks" (p. 98). Allegedly using as his model "the ancient Romans" after their loss to Hannibal at Cannae (p. 107), he rallies "popular sentiment" (p. 109) and "enhances the will of the Italians to resist their hereditary enemy" (p. 111). The result is victory. It is, however, a pyrrhic triumph given self-interested foreign deprecation of the contribution made by Italy. "The idea of 'mutilated victory' thus", Di Scala maintains,

"had its origins in the outlook of the Allies" and they must bear major responsibility for the birth of Fascism in March 1919 and its consequent rise to power.

It is only in his seventh chapter that Di Scala actually gets Orlando and Sonnino to Paris. There, the narrative stays in its now accustomed groove, with the two virtuous men having to confront the "Italophobe" Clemenceau and the "self-righteous" Wilson (pp. 136-7), as well as a more generic mean determination not to treat Italy with the respect deserved by a Great Power. The result is slight territorial gains in the Alto Adige and Istria and a deep "resentment" of the Italian nation's losses in "the epic battle it waged in Paris against the most powerful country in the world [the USA]" (p. 162). Di Scala then provides a brief further review in a chapter devoted to recounting what Orlando said about events at the time and in his later memoirs.[2] Thereafter the narrative moves quickly on to Fascism, with the repeated claim that the mistreatment of Italy at Paris was a major cause of the dictatorship. Orlando's twisting path through Mussolini's rule is described and justified, with Di Scala urging that the Nazi alliance was another matter provoked by the failings of the Versailles peace-makers (but, he argues, Italy's second nine month hesitation in 1939-40 before entering the war bore no comparison with what had happened in 1914-15).

With the Second War, the book is not quite over, however, since Orlando lived on into the Republic and remained active as a politician and jurist. He was 92 when he died and, at least according to the faithful Di Scala in his rousing last sentence, even "if historians have consigned him [Orlando] to oblivion, … in Italy's popular consciousness, he will always be the 'President of Victory'" (p. 221). Entranced by this upbeat conclusion, the sceptical reader is doubtless meant not to ask whether there is such a thing as "Italy's popular consciousness" or, if there is, whether one Italian in a 100 000 could today recall who V.E. Orlando was, however worthy a liberal or Sicilian. In any case, surely it was structures, international but especially domestic, and not personalities that lay behind Italy's fate at Paris and explained why its leaders found themselves playing dummy on the tables of global diplomacy with quite a bit less than total free will.

What, then, should be made of this little book? As a text directed at high school students who need to read a defence of Italian participation in the First World War, it will have its uses. Though scarcely stylishly written, it is competent enough, if scarcely novel, in its rapid survey of Italian political history from the Risorgimento to 1922 and beyond. Its claims to offer a historiographical revolution are, however, misplaced, both because of its own slightness and because the mainstream of Italian diplomatic historians have been and continue to be at least as patriotic as Di Scala, people well defined as assuming the task of staying at home to lie for their countries. With a few notable exceptions, they are one social and intellectual group who have moved seamlessly thorough Fascism and the Republics of Christian Democracy and Craxian socialism on to Berlusconi and the 'post-Fascism' of Gianfranco Fini. No doubt, often, foreigners who write about the least of the Great Powers are less pious in assessing the course of Italian history, and at times gratingly so. Yet genuinely democratic history must be a critical project, just as it must keep up with

[2] V.E. Orlando, *Memorie (1915-1919)* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1960).

conceptual changes in the discipline. In that regard, Di Scala's book is best viewed as a somewhat quaint period piece, with the author still fighting Italy's national diplomatic cause in the First World War when that issue is in almost every sense long dead and buried.

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