

Understanding Italian Politics: Forleo in History

Stanton H. Burnett (November 04, 2007)



We are lured away from our exploration of electoral politics by the fog-bound current case of magistrate Clementina Forleo. She has already made her mark on history. ...

... By making some wire-taps available to attorneys, she so damaged two of the three principal ex-Communist contenders for leadership of the then-unborn Partito democratico that the field was left open for Walter Veltroni. What the intercepted phone calls revealed was not so damning in itself, but

it was enough to puncture the balloon of exceptionalism (the idea that Marxists live on a different moral continent from other politicians) which surrounded them.

There are some serious issues to be explored here --- the political and juridical meaning of the release of documents concerning current cases and the method of their release, the political motivation of magistrates' choices about what cases to pursue and with what level of energy, etc. --- but it would be rash to try to pronounce on those topics at our current level of information about Forleo and Catanzaro magistrate De Magistris. So we confine ourselves today to the most bizarre elements, the tabloid stuff, which may give more clues than tabloid stuff usually gives.

On this level we have Forleo's effort to refuse police escort, her expressed belief that she has more to fear from inside the law enforcement establishment than outside it, the perhaps-irrelevant death of her parents this summer, and, especially, the tone of the polemics. The extreme edges of these polemics are, on the one hand, the suggestion that La Forleo is deranged and, at the other extreme, the comparing of her intrepid and dangerous struggle with those of Falcone and Borsellino, the heroes who fell in the war against the Sicilian Mafia. Wacko the lady may be, but until there is some proof of this, she deserves to be taken seriously. And any comparison with Falcone and Borsellino is also, for the moment, ridiculously exaggerated and completely misses a more interesting parallel with recent history.

Who today recalls Tiziana Parenti? A quick refresher may lead the reader to some interesting reflections on the Forleo hubbub.

Of the prominent members of the Milan pool of magistrates who kept us entertained in the early 1990s with the great and terrifying circus of Mani pulite, two of them did not have a history of links with Magistratura democratica, the party (yes, it deserves that name) that had promised two decades earlier to bring about political revolution in Italy via the courtroom: Antonio Di Pietro and Tiziana Parenti.

Parenti, like the others, labored at following leads along the trails of probably-illegal financing of Italian political parties. But her leads took her to the Red cooperatives of Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna. She had some knowledge of where to look: a handsome Tuscan from Pisa, she had youthful political experience in the Marxist-Leninist extra-parliamentary groups that disturbed Italy in the 1970s. She had been a magistrate in Milan for more than a decade when she joined the Mani pulite pool.

Parenti discovered the financial links between an official of the Communist Party, Primo Greganti ("Comrade G" in some newspapers) and Ecolibri, a publishing house run by Paola Occhetto, sister of Achille Occhetto who at that time was national secretary of the PCI (and, later, leader of the new-born PDS). Her further investigations turned up illicit financing to the party coming from Eumit of East Berlin, a company controlled by STASI, the East German secret service. The funds went to the PCI/PDS through a series of Red cooperatives. So Parenti sent avvisi di garanzia to Paola Occhetto, to Marcello Stefanini, the national chief of administration of the PCI/PDS, and to several other party officials.

While the Greganti part of the case turned to low comedy (Greganti testified that when "a stranger" handed him 621 million lire he had no idea why and so used his unexpected good fortune to buy himself an apartment on Via Tirso in Rome), Parenti made two other discoveries. One was a huge cache of documents detailing the East German support of the PCI.

The other thing she discovered was that her colleagues who swam in the Magistratura



democratica stream play rough.

The deputy chief of the pool, Gerardo D'Ambrosio (card-carrying PCI member later elected to parliament) came to the party's rescue. He took the case away from Parenti with the statement that Parenti "was not in line with the Pool." Her colleagues publicly attacked her mental health (a reminder of how things were once done in Eastern Europe, or does the Milan Palace of Justice just attract nutty lady magistrates?). In June 1996, Panorama revealed that the documents Parenti had sequestered in the offices of the PDS, in several cooperatives, and specifically in Greganti's office, had been lost.

The deranged magistrate Parenti miraculously overcame the mental problems that so worried her solicitous colleagues and was elected to parliament in 1994, re-elected in 1996, where she served until 2001. Modern medicine is truly wonderful.

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