
Paolo Soave, *Una vittoria mutilata? L'Italia e la Conferenza di Pace di Parigi*, Rubbettino Editore, Soveria Mannelli, 2020, pp. 160.

Paolo Soave's book analyses an important theme in twentieth-century Italian history, namely the country's so-called "mutilated victory" in the First World War with the outcome of the Paris Peace Conference. This is a question that has been neglected by most of international historiography but is of central importance in Italy, as the author points out: the political, economic and social consequences of the war itself and of the Paris Treaty de-legitimized the entire liberal political class and helped to usher in one of the darkest periods in Italy's history. As the title indicates, the book's focus is not on the war as such or even on the subsequent peace negotiations, but on the inception and spread of the concept of "mutilated victory" in the Italian social and political context. Soave accordingly investigates the political implications and the effects of Italy's failure in the peace talks, explaining the consequences

for the imagination of public opinion in a country that was heading towards the advent of Fascism.

The Paris Peace Conference, as Italy imagined it, would finally realize the aspirations that arose during the Risorgimento and continued after the unification of Italy by the liberal governments. The ruling class of liberal Italy took the country into war with various objectives: to finally gain the status of Great Power, as the government considered the conflict “its last chance of realization” (p. 114); to acquire the lands claimed by Italian irredentists, for which protracted diplomatic efforts had been made; to fulfil the imperialist aspirations of a part of the government; and ultimately to quell the revolutionary riots that would have shaken the country in the event of a failure in peace negotiations. Contrary to what was foreseen in the various programs, including the “maximum program” and the “minimum program” prepared by the Minister of the Colonies Ferdinando Martini, the peace negotiations took place in a tense atmosphere, which Aldrovandi Marescotti went so far as to call “diplomatic war” (p. 14).

In the three chapters, plus introduction and conclusions, the author analyses important diplomatic issues with thorough use of Italian, French, British and American archival sources and diplomatic documents, in order to elucidate the mistakes made by the Italian delegation during the discussion of the terms of peace. The first chapter considers the reasons that led the liberal ruling class to the decision to intervene in the conflict and reconstructs the diplomatic relations between Italy and the allies through the war's end. In the second chapter the author develops the main theme of the work: the Paris Peace Conference. In this context Soave underscores the importance of the new protagonist that emerged during the conflict: the United States. The latter, in fact, “after having contributed to the Entente's war effort with large loans, material aid and finally 2 million troops,” heavily influenced the peace negotiations through the intervention of President Woodrow Wilson in support of his “Fourteen Points,” which he considered the only proposal “worth pursuing” (p. 38). In the final chapter, the author develops his analysis of

the events that led to the crisis between Italy and the allies and, therefore, the fall of the Orlando government following the failure of the Italian delegation in Paris. The final period of the peace negotiations was marked by the occupation of Fiume by Gabriele D'Annunzio and his fellow soldiers, who "transformed the 'mutilated victory' into a concrete political-military program" (p. 95). Parallel to the issues deriving from diplomatic action, Soave manages to bring out the real problems that tormented liberal Italy in its twilight years: "the ineptitude of a ruling class that had dragged the country blithely into war," indirectly causing hundreds of thousands of deaths and an equal number of wounded and maimed – a social bomb that was difficult to control (p. 13).

However, the author does not dwell only on the unpreparedness of the Italian political class, which "had not been able to adapt to the changed international conditions that emerged during the peace conference," but above all examines a series of themes that he considers essential to grasping the complexity of this historical period. Soave accordingly assesses the "particular Italian political-institutional context" to bring out "the factors of continuity and discontinuity during the unitary foreign policy, which was always oriented towards the consolidation of the original profile of latecomer Power," but also the failure at the negotiating table, which revealed the scant consideration that the allies accorded to the Italian state (p. 13).

The main aim of the work, then, is "to elaborate an organic interpretation of the 'mutilated victory' that considers the various planes on which it was articulated." When this outcome was still only feared, it was the subject of a fierce national debate fueled by Sonnino's critique of the democratic interventionists; nor was the government particularly cohesive on the foreign policy line to follow. When the "mutilated victory" materialized in the first Parisian failures, even stronger tensions broke out in what, with the rise of Fascism, became the twilight of liberal Italy (pp. 12-13). The "mutilated victory," in conclusion, is treated as a phenomenon that had powerful effects on the country, which "experienced the bitterness of feeling more vanquished than

victor”: basically the “national tensions” that had been mitigated for many years found a revolutionary outlet (p. 111). The “mutilated victory,” as the author states, was “the nationalistic elaboration of political-diplomatic events and was divided into two phases”: that of D’Annunzio, culminating in the occupation of Fiume, and then that of Mussolini, purely political and instrumental, favoured by the end of the impetus of war and the decline of liberal dreams (p. 111).

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