

ABSTRACT

In this work it is carried out an analysis of the historical figure of the statesman and political liberal Gaetano Martino, a man who, both in his ministerial commitment and outside of any government structure, more than any other Italian politician contributed to the international re-launch of our country in the fifties and sixties. It is also provided an account of Italian foreign policy of the same time since it is not possible to separate it from Martino's work.

Gaetano Martino was a doctor - a surgeon - specialized in physiology, a subject which he also taught, and that was the main topic of many of his publications. He was a very good one, thanks to the years of specialization and practice spent abroad, especially in Europe and Latin America. His medical and scientific education was not only of exceptional value, but also very up to date with the latest discoveries and theories of his field of study.

It is therefore worthwhile asking what were the real motivations for a university professor to become one of the most passionate Italian politics of his time (1940s) and to stay in the political arena for almost two decades.

This is the question I asked myself when I started to "dig" into the rich documentation that still exists on this Italian political man. This work aims at giving an answer to this question – however limited that might be.

Gaetano Martino's relatives were among the notables of Messina. They were *magna pars* of the political elite of Messina which took on the duty of rebuilding the town after the Big Earthquake of 1908. His father was elected Mayor for more than one mandate. It is therefore reasonable to think that young Gaetano Martino was brought up with a clear political idea, which can be defined as that of the typical upper class of a provincial town: conservative but not reactionary since he always welcomed new ideas.

For example, unlike many other Italian politicians of the same party, both Gaetano Martino and his father for a long time refused to subscribe to the Fascist Party and when Gaetano finally enrolled in the Party it was because it would

have been otherwise impossible for him to teach. Yet it is thanks to his being anti fascist that he was elected Rector of the University of Messina, and subsequently member of the Constituent Assembly in 1946.

Martino's metamorphosis had begun: he arrived in Rome as a Rector and a professor of physiology, and was immediately noticed for his skills and expertise in constitutional law by his Constituent colleagues, who were legal experts. I think that was the occasion that aroused in him the desire to contribute to what in some ways was the "Birth of a Nation": The Italian Republic.

After the important period of the Constituent Assembly, he was in charge of several parliamentary committees, Minister of Education and Foreign Affairs and in many other occasions, even outside of a government team.

His activities in foreign policy correspond, as we have already said, to the will of Italians to stand with equal dignity among the other nations of the world. In fact, because of its recent past Italy was poorly estimated and it was hence forced to overcome many obstacles. This would eventually drive Italy from unfavorable international consideration due to fascist dictatorship (which moreover had lost a war) to once again being a modern and democratic State with a dignity equal to that of other Nations.

For this reason, the contributions of Martino's foreign policy were several and important, both in Europe and worldwide. For example, as a Foreign Minister he was concerned that Italy wasn't part of the United Nations yet – having asked for admission years before. In this context, Martino and his diplomats worked hard to heal what they considered a manifest injustice against Italy, and their incessant work was crowned by the long-awaited admission.

Also the first group of European integration supporters (founded during a conference hosted in Messina), can be considered as a direct offspring of Martino's passionate and continuous work. In fact, he firmly believed in the possibility of a united Europe – a vision which had been circulating among the most farsighted thinkers of the Continent for centuries, so that the idea of a United Europe could be considered as the natural evolution of what in the Middle

Age was theorized as universal monarchy. For Gaetano Martino, Europe was a spiritual home that already existed: it only had to emerge from the theories of political philosophy and be transformed into organizations and institutions with a real force and power.

Along with this one and other problems of international politics of the fifties (South Tyrol and Trieste, Suez and Hungary crises, world disarmament, decolonization) also the difficulties that Martino met on the side of domestic jurisdiction are underlined in this paper. He faced problems both in his own government team, and also in terms of negative political evaluation formulated by press, public opinion and Parliamentary opponents.

In this work I try to revive the problems of international politics of the mid twentieth century, having in mind the point of view of a passionate liberal politician of Messina, a physiologist "lent" to the policy, who had been educated, both as a man, and as a surgeon and politician, in my own hometown .

Gaetano Martino was also an example of a way of thinking, conceiving and applying national policy. He was a leader, with many others, of an era lived with unselfish commitment by men of strong virtues, occasionally lent to the policy (as it was his case), who once they entered in the race, worked together to pursue the ideals and beliefs they shared.

Martino studied at Einaudi's and Croce's school, and discovered his passion for politics - which would never leave him - during the enthusiastic days of the Constituent Assembly. Despite being a liberal, hence certainly on the right wing of Parliament, Martino conceived the parliamentary hall as the place where discussion and confrontation among different parties and political ideologies took place. He was also sure that it was the only place where different approaches to the same problem should be discussed, and where the contribution of all participants was not only welcome but also due.

Gaetano Martino had many political opponents - especially the left wing of the parliament that mocked him whenever it was possible. Yet, with very few

exceptions he knew how to acquire respect, and above all, how to respect his opponents while continuing to consider them as his rivals .

Martino was convinced that being a politician was a real mission at the service of the state. Max Weber, in a Conference of 1919 said: "There are two ways of doing politics: you can live for politics or you can live of policy" and Martino discovered that he enjoyed , despite all the efforts that it required, to live "for" policy. Certainly his commitment was not due to economic reasons and his inner spring was a genuine and unselfish passion aimed at social and economic improvements of Italy and Italians. In fact, for his foreign activities with the UN, in Europe and in Geneva, and the idea that his Country should arise again as soon as possible after the defeat of the war, Martino can be defined as a "patriot".

Obviously this cannot be separated from the position of Italy after the war: it stood in the anti communist Western Atlantic deployment. For more than ten years, in fact, the position of Italy in foreign policy coincided exactly with that of Martino, while the internal politics of the country was inspired by the centrism of A. De Gasperi.

This "heroic" way of doing politics ended at the dawn of sixty-eight, almost coinciding with the death of Martino, and perhaps since that date the second part of the sentence of Weber has been applied: politicians live "of" policy. The politician of the third millennium, not only in Italy, is self-referential, and due to the lack of a binding mandate succeeded in turning policy into a sort of aberration, the first cause of popular disaffection towards the world of politics in general.

In fact nowadays the word "politician" is understood as an insult, synonymous of profiteer, mafioso, unable to respect the programs declared during the electoral campaign. If any of today's politicians behaved according to the highest ideals and values that distinguished Gaetano Martino he would be laughed at and considered as a being out of time and even dangerous for himself and others.

Martino was an eminent representative of the so-called First Republic, and if it is true that it rebuilt our country from ruins after the war, it is also true that it tragically fell apart - many years after Martino's death - with the investigations defined "Mani Pulite" and "Tangentopoli". What was supposed to be the beginning of a renewed and improved Italian political season, was very soon transformed into the Second Republic, which seems to be even worse than the first. Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa and his novel *The Leopard* must be cited here as "Mani Pulite" did not provide a new and different political class, but rather followed the cynical but truthful words pronounced by Tancredi Falconeri: "If we want things to stay as they are, we need that everything changes."

It is not given in this paper a too hagiographic picture of Gaetano Martino, even if his remarkable qualities as a man and politician are highlighted. Even Martino, of course, had his limitations and his qualities can't be separated from his human faults and weakness.

For this reason I also focus on some less known aspects of his life. For example, from some biographical notes, one might deduce that Martino, perhaps immediately after the war, was part of EVIS (Volunteer Army for the Independence of Sicily, founded by Antonio Canepa) and probably was also a notable member of a southern Masonic lodge, which apparently was in contrast with the Grand Orient of Italy.

Even admitting these hypothetical dark sides, if a comparison between a political figure of more than fifty years ago as Gaetano Martino, and any politician of our days was made, we would realize that what is modern is not necessarily better.