

capital investment. The application of the program also posed the question about the possibility of liberties in the modern society. Both models of application of liberalism, the European case and the US case, were influential and discussed in depth. Last but not least in our enumeration, the text presents diverse debates where one can see the principles in action, for example the electoral law and reforms to the constitution; the fight against protectionist tendencies; the defense of contracts as voluntary agreements; the evolutionist view of society as creator of civilized values; and the condemnation of totalitarian dictatorship in its different variations.

As a result of the description of some of the contents and ideas of the anthology we hope that it would be clear that our opinion that the book constitutes a remarkable endeavor to unfold the main ideas, proposals and realizations of the liberal trend of thought in the conformation of Argentina. It is applied to an adequate time lapse, as well as a polished selection of authors and texts. Although one may prefer in some particular case other ones, without any doubt the scholars presented on this work are representative and adequate for a first work of this nature in English.

Nevertheless what has been said, one could pose himself the question about the further evolution of the liberal thought in Argentina after 1940, as well as its main influences. In this respect may be it is not so inappropriate to ask for a second volume where these issues could be covered. To sum up, and in terms of the points of view behind the chosen texts and the selection in itself, the book constitutes a great stimulus to the historically grounded intellectual debate about the influence of the liberal thought in the conformation of Argentina.

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GIANNI MARONGIU, *La politica fiscale nell'età giolittiana*, Florence, Leo Olschki editore, 2015. Pp. xx-530. €49,00. ISBN: 978-88-222-6389-6.

Gianni Marongiu, emeritus at the University of Genoa, who has been teaching tax law for forty years in the Universities of Trieste, Genoa and Milan-Bocconi, was concerned not only with the (ever-lasting) problems of the Italian tax system over the last 50 years, but also with the history of the tax system after the Italian unification. The volume under review comes after *La politica fiscale dell'Italia liberale dall'unità alla crisi di fine secolo*, published in 2010 by the same editor. This volume deals with the so called “*periodo giolittiano*”, i.e. the period since the first Giolitti government (1892) to the eve of WW-1 — the fifth Giolitti government (1920-21) is ignored in this volume. The period is rich of events and ferments: from the peasants' riots against great landowners to the birth of Unions, the rise of the bourgeoisie of professionals and entrepreneurs,

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having interest sharply divergent from those of the major landlords so long the dominant class, the rise of nationalism. Marongiu describes the changes of the Italian tax system in relation to the evolution of the political and socio-economic frame. Description of the context takes much of the volume: Marongiu is a keen scholar who likes to quote precisely economists' and politicians' opinions as to tax policy choices and other relevant policy actions. He reports data on the Italian economy and the yield of taxes from statistics of the period. *La politica fiscale nell'età giolittiana* is more an essay on Italy's history over years which were crucial for the country's growth, rather than a text of public finance or of tax law.

Marongiu's analysis highlights the strong opposition to any project of radical change of the tax system aimed to make it more equalitarian and favourable to economic growth. But, why, in the last decade of the XIX century, was so urgent to reform the tax system? Most of the yield accrued from internal custom duties, the salt tax, customs on cereals, petrol and sugar taxes: all indirect levies which obviously bore higher on less wealthy people. Internal custom duties (levied by both State and local governments) had further heavy shortcomings since they had high administrative costs and penalized the poorer Southern regions, where the so called "closed Municipalities" (i.e. municipalities closed by walls) were more frequent (on the contrary, in many Northern cities/towns the walls were shuttered to allow for urban expansion). Direct taxation was not, of course, completely absent: there were property taxes on land and buildings, an estate tax, the "*imposta di ricchezza mobile*" which was levied on different types of income with different rates, the "*imposta di famiglia*" levied by municipalities on the family's global ability-to-pay measured by some synthetic index. But the share of these taxes on the overall tax yield dropped sharply in the last two decades of the century. Specifically, landlords' contribute to cover costs of public expenditures was low. And taxation was proportional, in spite of the decreasing marginal utility of income which should have suggested progressive taxation (conclusion reached by economists in the second half of XIX century).

Giolitti and some other politicians were strongly supporting a reduction in indirect taxation and an increase in taxes on incomes and land, with a modest degree of progressivity. Main instrument of this reform should have been the "*imposta complementare progressiva sul reddito complessivo*" (a progressive tax on global income to be added to the pre-existent flat rate taxes). It was a correct project, inspired by some more advanced countries' experience. But opposition by big landowners and the most conservative party was strong and various attempts of reform failed. Specifically, minister Gagliardo's project (1893, Government Giolitti I) which included both a progressive estate tax and a progressive income tax beside pre-existent flat-rate taxes, and Wollemborg's bill (Government Zanardelli, 1901) that entirely redesigned the State and Local governments' tax system, reducing the burden on essential goods and introducing a modest degree of progressivity in the State income tax (the "*imposta di ricchezza mobile*" was introduced in 1862 with proportional rates); opposition by the dominant class was so strong that adjusting Wollemborg's project twice could not made it approved

anyway. Nor was ever approved Giolitti III's bill (1909) which added again a State surtax on overall income ("*imposta complementare progressiva*") to pre-existent flat-rate taxes and to the "*imposta di famiglia*", a tax on the family's ability to pay levied by local authorities with some degree of progressivity.

Really, the tax system was only partially revised by gradually reducing the wheat tax (the most hated tax) by act 25/ 1902, by introducing a tax on building sites first (1904) in the municipalities of Rome, Milan and Turin, then (since 1907) in all cities or towns, by applying progressivity to the estate tax (inheritance tax) and by introducing the stamp duty on Stock-exchange contracts. In this period, also tax reductions to favour the underdeveloped southern regions were introduced first.

Therefore some valuable reforms were done, but not as much as most reformers would have retained necessary. Marongiu's volume stresses the great difficulty of making tax reforms comprehensive and though the Author deals with events happening more than a century ago, some considerations are still very actual. Let me quote, for instance, this period that Marongiu takes from the journal *L'Economista*, march 7, 1875:

We can say that in the latest years almost no measure taken to restore the exhausted Treasury had not negatively affected the Local Governments' finances and therefore reduced the degree of freedom and autonomy which the fundamental law had granted to local administrations.

140 years have elapsed from then, but the sentence might have been written yesterday by a keen observer of present policy. And the impression that tax policy in Italy is very sticky stems also when reading this Luigi Einaudi's sentence (in *Cronache economiche e politiche*, vol. II) about petrol custom duties at the end of XIX century-beginning of XX century — sentence that *mutatis mutandis* would fit well to actual petrol excises:

If we examine tariffs adopted by other States, ignoring those like England, Sweden, Norway, where petrol pays no custom duty, we find that in no European State the custom duty is so high as in Italy ; only the Spanish one is closed to the Italian one, but not so much....

The volume may be read by readers having different interests, who will anyway find something interesting in it. Scholars in economic history, for instance, will find of interest not only the several pages about Italy's tax problems but also pages on municipalization of local public services, the nationalization of railways and of life insurance (with the foundation of INA- Istituto Nazionale Assicurazioni), as well as pages on the first economic measures to boost development of the Southern regions, and on the successful substitution of government bonds with new bonds bearing much lower interest rate.

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