

# The Italian unification. Ricasoli and administrative centralization

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In this essay the author examines two questions, which help to understand the political and institutional choices of the Tuscan statesman. The first issue concerns Ricasoli's move to a favourable position on centralization, which became apparent during the parliamentary debate on Minghetti's project for decentralization. The second question focuses on the centralist measures adopted by the first Ricasoli government, after Cavour's sudden death. According to the author's hypothesis, those choices were made not only by the Tuscan statesman, but also by the council of ministers as a whole, together with the moderate majority of the ruling classes, and not only by these two groups.

**Key words:** Historiography, administrative decentralization, political and institutional choices, Tuscan statesman

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Historiography has dedicated important works to Ricasoli's passion for centralisation. Some prominent scholars have identified the reasons for his conception of a strong state, while others have reconstructed the conflicts inside the ruling class that, between the end of 1860 and during 1861, affected choices in the areas of organization and the projects of administrative decentralization presented in parliament by Minghetti, minister of the interior in Cavour's last government. Due to his training and experience as governor of Tuscany at the time of unification, Ricasoli was a staunch advocate of decentralization, but between February and May 1861 he changed his position on centralization. Through the study of Ricasoli's *Carteggi* and other available sources, in this essay I examine two questions, which help to understand the political and institutional choices of the Tuscan statesman.

The first issue concerns Ricasoli's move to a favourable position on centralization, which became apparent during the parliamentary debate on Minghetti's project for decentralization. The reasons for this choice can be traced to the discontent manifested in Tuscany towards the new governor Sauli, who had been sent by Cavour to hold the post after the abolition of the lieutenancy by the royal decree of 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1861. It was in this period that the close associates of Ricasoli pronounced their criticisms of decentralization, by means of petitions to Parliament and the publication of pamphlets.

The second question focuses on the centralist measures adopted by the first Ricasoli

government, after Cavour's sudden death. According to my hypothesis, those choices were made not only by the Tuscan statesman, but also by the council of ministers as a whole, together with the moderate majority of the ruling classes, and not only by these two groups. On close inspection, the main protagonists of Italian unification were called, during the summer of 1861, to make decisive choices on administrative organization in relation to the crisis of the Lieutenancy in Naples and on the rise of brigandage in the south (10, 77-90).

1. The protagonist of the events of the 'risorgimento' that led to the removal of the grand duke of Tuscany, Ricasoli began to put his faith in Piedmont as the state which was politically able to bring the other regions into a future Italian nation. From the very start, a close relationship between Tuscany and Piedmont emerged. Which state model was it necessary to build? Ricasoli, a convinced unionist, argued for the need to create a new order based on a mixture of the different traditions of the peninsula. This process would have prevented the extension of the centralism of Piedmont, a system already adopted by the grand duchy of Tuscany for the abolition of municipal autonomies, and opposed by the ruling classes (9, 77-78).

The provisional government of Ricasoli, pursuing the plan for autonomy refused, during the summer of 1859, firstly the promulgation of the laws governing Sardinia's public law, and then the publication of the Albertine statute. When the intricate diplomatic situation, which led to the inclusion of Tuscany in the kingdom of Italy by plebiscite had been resolved, Ricasoli proposed the formula 'union with the constitutional throne of Vittorio Emanuele or separate reign'. At this time, in answer to a note of Cavour's, he stated that Tuscany, because of its traditions and culture, could not lose its personality and be absorbed by another country. According to the baron, with Italian unification, Tuscany joined "the love of its noble traditions to the instinct of self-preservation" (8, XVII/1, 373-376).

Such were the precedents of Tuscan autonomy, which was recognized by the royal decree of 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1860. The lieutenancy, with a governor, was established: the lieutenancy was given to the Prince of Carignano, while the office of governor was given to Ricasoli. The lieutenant, according to the decree, commanded the forces of land and sea, exercised the power to pardon, commute sentences, and to appoint and dismiss employees of the administration, in the name of the king. Florence was chosen as the temporary centre. The governor had a director for each of the branches of government and public administration, which in Tuscany had been the responsibility of the outgoing ministries of the interior, of justice and ecclesiastical affairs, finance, trade, public works, and education. War and the navy were devolved to ministers resident in Turin (12, 25-26).

Ricasoli, having been offered the office of governor for his loyalty to the king and his knowledge of Tuscan affairs, undertook to arrange "the new provisional", as he called it, with Cavour, while waiting for the administrative order throughout the peninsula to be decided on (8, XVII/2, 845). However, in the second half of 1860 the conflict between Tuscany and Piedmont broke out, which was made worse by Cavour's personal antipathy to Ricasoli. Some initiatives of the latter encouraged the democratic volunteers for the invasion of the Papal States, in opposition to the government of Piedmont, which led the count to reduce the powers of the governorship of Tuscany. On October 13<sup>th</sup> 1860, in fact, the Prime Minister wrote to Farini, who was now heading, with Victor Emmanuel II, the expedition in central Italy and in the south, that the council of ministers had decided to confidentially let Ricasoli know of the termination "of the abnormal state of Tuscany at the end of the year" (8, XVII/5, 2264).

Cavour's project to reform the powers assigned to Tuscany must be seen in this context. A royal decree of February 14<sup>th</sup> 1861 abolished the lieutenancy and replaced it with the governorship, to which were attributed only the "policy services, public security, and administration of the National Guard" which were competence of the Ministry of Interior (1, 229). The last word on the final structure of Tuscany as a regional unit had not been said, at a time when the commission at the council of state was finishing its work and the government was preparing to present to Parliament the draft on

administrative reorganization. In the spring of 1861 the offices of the chamber of regions vetoed the project by a majority vote, while Ricasoli was making his mind up in favour of a centralized system. What were the reasons for this change?

2. In early March 1861 the new governor, Marquis Francesco Maria Sauli, arrived in Florence. Immediately after the settlement, the *Carteggi* attest a change in Ricasoli's thoughts on administrative organization. A first reason should be sought in the management of Governor Sauli. On March 19<sup>th</sup> 1861, on Garibaldi's name day, some events, organized by the volunteers of the southern army veterans, took place in Florence. Having learnt the news, Ricasoli was for a hard line, but after discussions with the minister of the interior he learned that Sauli had considered the episodes negligible and that the prefect Bossini had described the events "with too vivid and frightening colours" (6, 157). From Bossini he later learnt that the reasons for the failure to control the demonstrations were misunderstandings between the prefecture and the governor. "Distrust – Bossini wrote to Ricasoli on March 30<sup>th</sup> 861 - is the dominant quality of the character of Sauli, and this freezes and petrifies everything" (6, 166). The correspondence of the Tuscan statesman, which was carried on almost daily, criticized Sauli's methods of government and his absence from "Palazzo Vecchio".

Meanwhile, with the approach of the discussions about administrative re-organization, some petitions against the imposition of the governorship arrived in parliament. Ricasoli's friends, Bianchi and Giorgini, were taking different positions about the future administrative structure. Celestino Bianchi, one of his closest collaborators, urged the Tuscan statesman to use his experience and enthusiasm to induce parliament to reconcile the authority of the state with the free movement of the provinces. "Regions, - he wrote - as centres of government, such as Tuscany, for example is now, has always seemed to me the best way to solve the problem" (6, 250). Ricasoli, however, began to change his mind about the utility of the governorship. While he had been in the post, this sort of administration had seemed a fruitful arrangement. With Sauli in charge it seemed an obstacle, a powerful hindrance to the direct action of central power.

The deputy, Giovan Battista Giorgini was favourable to centralization. A professor of criminal law institutions and canonic and civil institutions, Giorgini joined the first Italian parliament in April 1860, becoming a reference point for the 'clique' from Tuscany. In early May 1861 he informed Ricasoli about the drafting of a paper on the regions that would be published before the debate in the house on administrative law (4, 59-85). A few weeks later he wrote that "the laws of Minghetti will not pass away." The provisions, according to Giorgini, "could perhaps be attempted in an old and exhausted state, not in one to be built, where it is important, at least for now, that the authority is strong and present" (6, 268-269). Giorgini sent this letter on May 16<sup>th</sup> 1861 while he was in Pescia, his hometown. On the same day the work of the parliamentary committee began, during which Ricasoli declared his opposition to the Minghetti project. What was the role played by the Tuscan statesman within the commission?

Ricasoli intervened for the first time, at its meeting on May 16<sup>th</sup> 1861, stating that he was against "the system of the region in its two aspects, government and administration" (17, 416). When interviewed by Minghetti on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, he declared himself against the regions, but accepted a compromise of transition to the southern provinces, for which he was willing to tolerate the existence of special commissioners with duties similar to those granted to the Governor of the provinces of Tuscany. On 24<sup>th</sup> May he agreed to the proposal of Lanza, who envisaged the establishment of extraordinary officials with the aim of coordinating multiple provinces in matters of public safety and to supervise the administration as a means "of breaking through from a government of the Lieutenancy to a stable and definitive government"(17, 430). Lanza noted that his proposal was not accepted by the majority of the commissioners, so he withdrew it.

While the debate was being held, on May 29<sup>th</sup> 1861, Cavour, who had supported Minghetti's project, fell ill and on June 6<sup>th</sup>, eight days later, he died. One result of this was clearly seen. The choice of Ricasoli as president of the council was the first sign of a general retreat by the ruling classes

towards positions favourable to centralization.

3. In the drive towards centralization, of course, Ricasoli was the right man at the right time, because he took up the prevailing mood of the 'unitarians'. Precisely in this period the *Relazione* of Tecchio (president of the commission for the review of Minghetti's project) was presented to parliament, which expressed the consensus of the entire liberal-moderate ruling class against decentralization. The main theses were: the need not to change the administration too often, and to let it evolve according to a natural rhythm, and the desire to consolidate the *status quo* with the addition of a few essential items to update Rattazzi's organization. On the emergency and "transition" measures requested by the minister of the interior, which provided for the union of several provinces of the south under the leadership of a governor or a commissioner for the abnormal conditions in which they found themselves, the commission was divided with a majority against the measure. It therefore suggested that government action should be strengthened, granting more powers to the prefects than those provided by Rattazzi's law of October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1859 (17, 467) .

After the approval of the transitional rules in parliament, the question of the survival or the abolition of the lieutenancies was left open. On this aspect the conflict between Minghetti and Ricasoli was concentrated, a subject which was dealt with for the first time in an interesting essay by Passerin, who was unable to use Ricasoli's *Carteggi*, then unpublished (16, 210-215). In the month of July Ricasoli started to put Minghetti under pressure to abolish the lieutenancy in Naples. The minutes of the council of ministers and the correspondence of the main protagonists witness to the debate and the political conflicts within the central and peripheral institutions. In the face of the objections from Minghetti to the abolition of the lieutenancy, Ricasoli insisted on the immediate need for centralization. Why, at that moment, did the Tuscan statesman press for the adoption of that measure?

The reasons are to be found in the rupture which was taking place between the prime minister and the lieutenants in Naples, Ponza di San Martino first and then General Cialdini. At the heart of the matter was the policy followed for the re-establishment of public order, made more urgent by the application of the draft law and the spread of gangs of brigands. Bearing in mind the request for military reinforcements advanced by San Martino, the government resolved to entrust the military command to General Cialdini. In all probability the liberal policy of San Martino, which aimed at reconciliation, contrasted with Ricasoli's directives which ordered a vigorous fight against banditry (18, 200-210). San Martino, having perceived that the new military commander would be unwilling to accept the directives of the civil government in the work of repression, offered his resignation. The new lieutenant, Cialdini, assumed both civil and military powers.

Cialdini began a hard fight against banditry, but kept open the duality of powers between the central government and the lieutenancy. With the decision to lean towards liberals, including the most extreme, of all factions, the new lieutenant introduced tough measures towards the Bourbon elements, arresting and expelling bishops, aristocrats and senior officers of the old army from the realm. This policy, implemented militarily and with no respect for the law, caused the first doubts in the government. In the middle of August the conflict between Cialdini and Ricasoli began. Minghetti wrote in his *Diario* that Cialdini wanted to resign because he was "in disagreement with Cantelli and Di Blasio" (2, 382). From that moment the conflict between the prime minister and the lieutenant of Naples, on the management of the southern provinces and the fight against banditry, began.

To understand these events, the attitude of the French towards the new unitary state must be taken into account. Faced with the grave situation in the southern provinces, Napoleon III, as early as the month of July, had confirmed his judgment that Italian unification was both premature and artificial, and on the need for a different political-territorial arrangement of the peninsula. Worried about the international repercussions that the situation in the south could have, Ricasoli invited Cialdini to act energetically, within the law, urging him to get his hands on any Bourbon plots and gather evidence (7, 285). Interpreting these guidelines as an implicit lack of confidence in his work, Cialdini resigned. "You – he wrote to Ricasoli - demand some sensational trial, some important

political condemnation in order to clarify the Bourbon intrigues and justify our conduct against reaction abroad. I am convinced that we will not get anything for a long time. You want to cover weakness with a mask of strength. Confessing that I am weak, I would prefer to act patiently in order to become strong" (7, 467-468). The crisis led Ricasoli to speed up the abolition of the lieutenancy. In this way, the prime minister hoped to break the administrative constraints that bound Naples to the rest of the south, and to develop a more intense local life in the area.

4. The decision was taken by the cabinet at its meeting on August 20<sup>th</sup>. In the report it is stated that it adopted the provisions on the southern provinces on the basis of the deliberations of August 15<sup>th</sup>, deciding on the termination of the lieutenancy in Naples "on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1861" (ACS, *Minutes of the Council of Ministers*, August 20, 1861). This was the terse report. In his *Diary* Minghetti noted that, since the date for the abolition of the lieutenancy of Naples had been set for October 1st, "I give my formal resignation" (2, 385). The next day he described the work of the session to Peruzzi, who had left for the mission in the south, noting that his resignation had been accepted in silence and that "Cordova and De Sanctis clustered around, exculpating themselves" (3, 60). The measure, which was gathering consensus among the ruling class in the south, had been approved by all the ministers.

On August 21<sup>st</sup>, Ricasoli also informed Peruzzi about the measure, criticizing the work of Cialdini, which had exaggerated the reactionary movement and alarmed the whole of Italy. He accused all the lieutenants of being more or less antagonistic to the central government. "So - he wrote - there are two governments in Italy and, it follows logically from this, people are saying that the cause of Italy depends on Naples" (7, 516). Ricasoli now felt the need to prove the Italian government's ability to control the southern provinces to the great powers. With a limited return to normality having been achieved in the organization of the state and of good administration, the Tuscan statesman thought that would be sufficient to reduce the authority of Naples and encourage the other southern provinces.

For these reasons Ricasoli ignored the technical and political difficulties, which cautioned against the abolition of the lieutenancy. To Minghetti, who raised these difficulties, it seemed appropriate to engage the local ruling classes in managing the business, to broaden the channels of participation and envisage, in the transition phase, coordinating bodies between the local authorities. Now the relationship between the two statesmen finally collapsed. "Minghetti - wrote Ricasoli to Peruzzi - delegate more and more every day. This makes me feel a lot of bitterness. I do not have any beneficial influence over him, nor do my reasons have any weight with him" (7, 512). Behind the human aspects of the division were deep political differences.

Ricasoli, after Minghetti's resignation, did not alter from the centralized choice. The institutional story, therefore, ended with the adoption of the decrees of October 1861, which sanctioned the ultimate failure of the project of regional order and the triumph of order on a provincial basis. With these measures the title of prefect was assigned to all the princes of the provinces (governors and intendants general), the district stewards were given the title of governor, and degrees, wages and allowances of government officials were unified throughout Italy. The distinction, which had been in place up to that time, between the governor (political) and the superintendent (administration) was now abolished; the prefect became the main representative of the government in the province under administration. The presidency of the provincial deputation was given to this official, who had control over the legality of the acts of municipalities and their costs, the choice of auditors, the opportunity to participate in the meetings of the provincial council and to intervene in the process of dissolution of the municipal councils. Other decrees moved some of the powers of the ministries to the prefectures in areas concerning health, public security, worship, education and public utilities. The prefect, aggregating functions and powers far beyond those enjoyed by his predecessors, thus became the pillar of the state structure, in which political and administrative centralization were linked to bureaucratic decentralization (14, 75).

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