

Ballaró host assesses Italian education system

Giovanni Floris suggests a reform to remediate lack of organization in schools

By Caterina Rotunno

Ballaró has become one of the most followed political talk shows on Italian TV, where confrontations between various political party leaders and personalities from the world of finance, union leaders, and pollsters make it to the front pages of newspapers. The popular political show is set to be shown in Canada on Tuesday evenings on RAI Italia.

The talk show's moderator, Giovanni Floris, has also authored books on various dominant social issues. One released this past summer deals with a much heated current topic: the Italian school system. From the RAI studios in Rome, Floris talked to *Tandem/Corriere Canadese* about the issue.

One review describes your book as being accusatory as well as a labour of love for the Italian school system. Do you agree with this opinion?

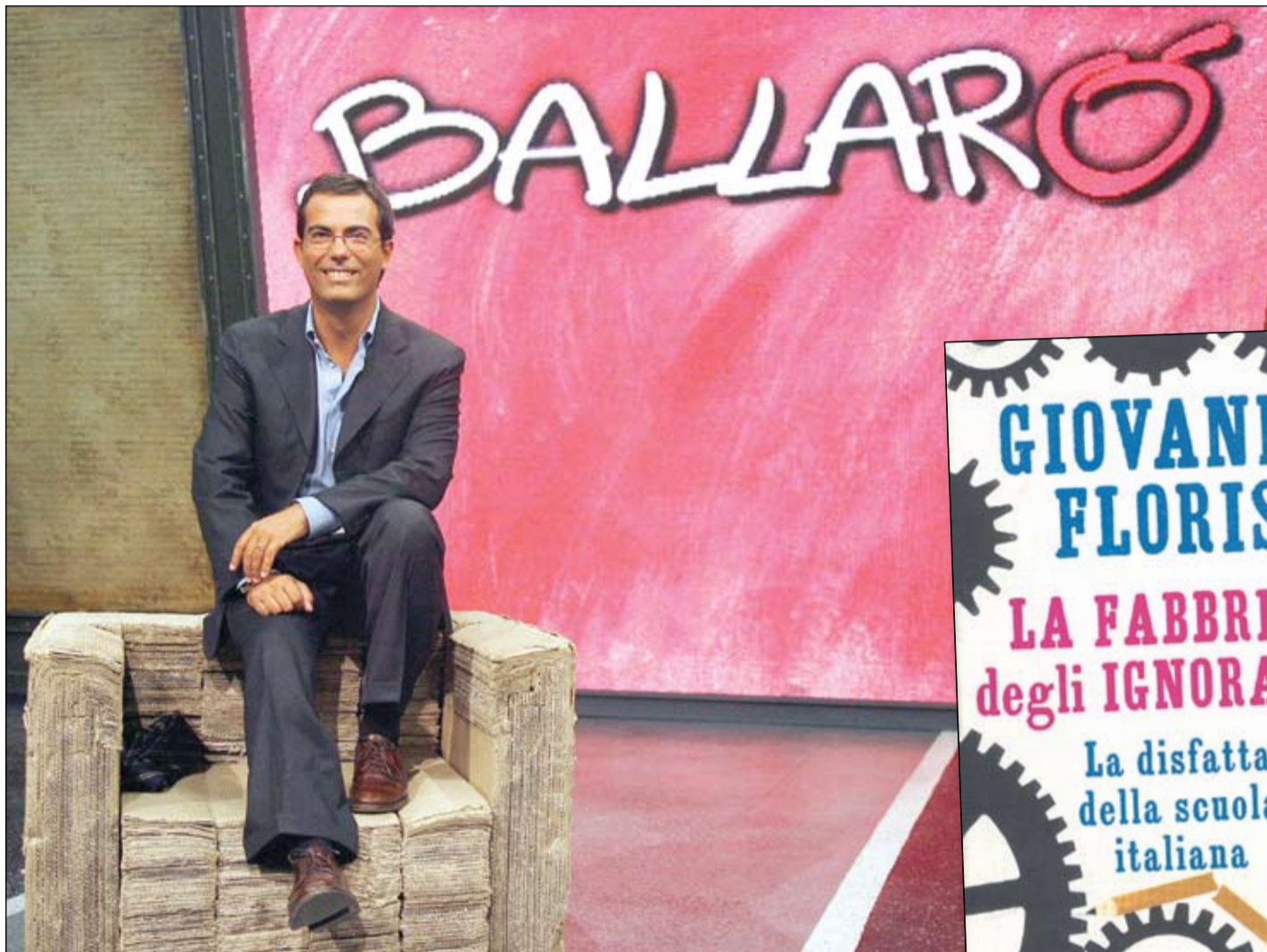
"Certainly. I'm convinced that in Italy, the re-launch of the nation from an economic and cultural point of view is closely tied to a re-evaluation of the Italian school system. It is a resource-rich system with a lot of know-how and great tradition. The Italian professors are the point of reference from which to begin anew and attain true reform in Italian schools. This doesn't take away from the fact that the school system is currently in bad shape. We're losing too many students through middle- and high school because it does not help to improve one's social and economic condition. All too often, students from poorly educated families are not able to pursue further education. For every 1,000 children enrolled in first grade, only 666 get a diploma, and 171 acquire a degree. Today's is a cynical school system, which 'saves' those who are salvageable, but doesn't waste time with those who have little possibility of making it."

What are the main problems with the Italian school system?

"Italian schools have huge organizational problems, and a real problem assigning funding, which is not enough to fully implement its programs. Imagine an old vehicle with too many malfunctioning parts that guzzles up a lot of gas."

In regards to the Gelmini Decree (which involved cuts of 8 million Euros from schools and 1.5 from universities) what impact has it had?

"It's just an accounting measure, because true reform requires revisions of the mechanisms that are causing the



Giovanni Floris, host of the popular Italian political talk show, *Ballaró*, has focused on the current bad state of the Italian education system, in his new book (right).

Giovanni Floris' research book on what's wrong with Italy's education system is powerful, lucid, and perfectly addresses the reality. It's a dimly hued snapshot supplied with statistical data, tables, and graphs, that do nothing more than evaluate and confirm the considerations of the author.

It is a denunciation, a warning cry, for those who must provide for — and put in order — a school system that inevitably determines the future of a nation and a civilized society. A school of noble traditions, fallen into Medieval times, with crumbling structures and teachers wandering about like farm hands.

A nation where one earns less as a teacher than by sweeping sidewalks, cannot pretend to have a future. And the good teachers are rewarded with stagnating careers.

Floris singles out the schools as the main cause of the current cultural failure in Italy. But one needs to begin from a lucid analysis and concrete facts, to be able to bring back the school system that the world once envied. And this is precisely the hope that runs throughout the pages of the book.

— C. R.

squandering of public money. If there is no intervention to modify these mechanisms and at the same time financial resources are cut, the wastefulness continues unaltered. Maybe some savings can be achieved, but it would surely be minimal and for sure a marginal achievement in comparison to any renewal project for the public Italian school sector. To avoid wasting money would require reforming the school and university systems. And the Gelmini Decree is not a reform but rather a cut in funding."

One of the criticisms aimed

at Italian schools — also coming from an international level — is related to the excess numbers of teachers compared to other countries.

"I don't agree with this objection. It's true that the numbers are high, but we have to ask ourselves the reasons for this phenomenon. For example, there is inadequate infrastructure in Italy, making it necessary to have a school in each mountain village because there aren't enough buses or other means that connect them to more populated centres. In the Nether-

lands, there's a school in every one or more cities, but there are trains that take you from one city to the next in 10 minutes. In Finland, students can count on taxi services that will pick them up at home at the city's expense and take them to the closest school. In Italy there are towns that are connected by buses that come once a day. So it's normal for there to be many schools and as a result, many teachers. That's why a reform is necessary that takes into account all these factors and takes corrective action."

If the schools are not enjoying optimal health, the universities seem even worse off. Some would like a university that is open to everyone and accessible for those with very low income; others want a university that aspires to the criteria of meritocracy and competitiveness.

"I don't think the problem is to compare collective university with meritocracy. Meritocracy is for the masses and should not be a method of selecting out the fortunate elite, but should be a system of exalting the talents of everyone. As well, the issue of merit is an issue in favour of the masses. By looking at the merit of the students, it provides and creates opportunities irrespective of economic and social

that look at the merits and professionalism of each teacher."

As far as the Italian community here in Canada is concerned, it's sometimes difficult to understand the protest demonstrations for a school that in their lifetimes was considered a model of excellence throughout the world. What happened?

"I don't think that the demonstrations are news. They occur at the start of every school year. Nevertheless, the school demonstrations that took place throughout Italy had heavy mass participation. The problem is that if one intervenes in an organization that is aware of requiring reform and causes more difficulty, it's obvious that the backlash becomes more forceful and determined. The Italian school system embarked on a massive literacy campaign after the war, teaching the Italian language to the majority of the population. Since then, the



conditions. As well, it's evident that the Italian university reforms, as well as those of the school system, have to proceed by way of a series of measures

situation began deteriorating year after year. Now we find ourselves at a time when strong but intelligent intervention is necessary." ♦

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