The Significance of the Italian Elections

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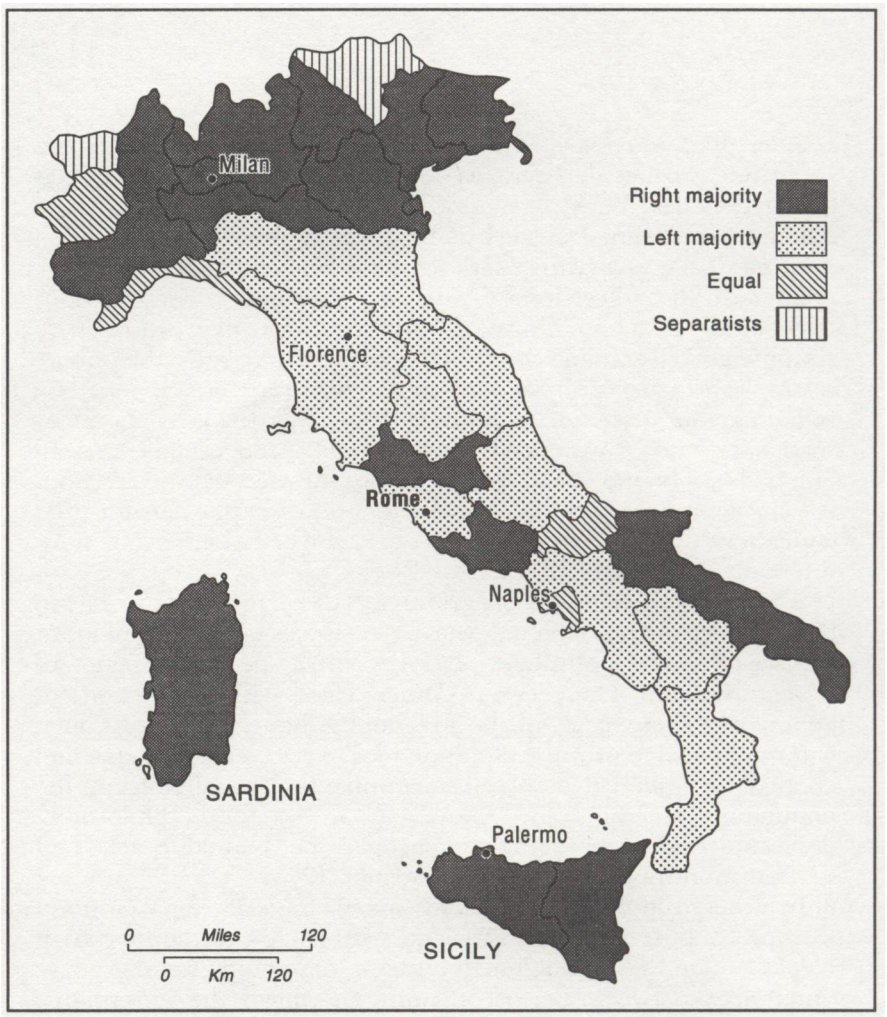
FREQUENTLY IT HAPPENS IN HISTORY THAT REVOLUTION is followed by restoration or sometimes by reaction. The events that have convulsed Italy for the past two years can be described as a legal revolution. The Italian elections of 27 and 28 March can be seen as forms of restoration, or reaction, or continuation of revolution by other means. From 1992, the enthusiastic popular acclaim which accompanied the thundering clang of prison doors and the scandalous tumble of famous heads resulted in an unexpected final conclusion: the victory of an assorted coalition of rightist and moderate forces, the Freedom Alliance, led by the media magnate Silvio Berlusconi, which gained an absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies and a qualified majority in the Senate. It was the most important Italian election since 1948, when, after the abolition of the monarchy, Stalinists attempted to seize power democratically.

At the apogee of the Italian revolution, the Left triumphed in big-city mayoral elections of December 1993. From Rome to Venice, the parties which dominated Italy for decades suffered a spectacular loss of support. The clear message of the local elections was that most Italians wanted a clean break with the past. Former Communists (now renamed the PDS, or the Democratic Party of the Left) were catapulted into the leading role as the core of the coalition which was destined to win general elections. It appeared that the Progressive Alliance, a broad church of leftist parties, was unstoppable.

The outcome of the vote of 27 and 28 March was profoundly influenced by the electoral rules. Because the proportional system of the past was considered as the cause of all the Italian ills, a law was passed for a new electoral system, which gave the elector the chance to vote twice: 25 per cent of the seats were assigned by proportional representation and 75 per cent of the seats were assigned by the winner-takes-all simple majority. This hybrid system (which will be changed in the near future) had perverse effects; above all, the first-past-the-post system had a notorious first-past-the-post effect: the centrist parties, like the British

How the Regions Voted

Chamber of Deputies



Liberal Democrats, ended up with far fewer seats than votes. The political centre was formed mostly by what remained of the Christian Democrats, turned into the Italian Popular Party. They were squeezed almost to insignificance by the big blocs to their left and right.

THE ALTERNATIVE

Italians had a choice in the economic field between policies projecting social democracy and policies espousing market-oriented values. The programme of the losers (the left Progressive Alliance) underlined austerity and severity, within the frame of existing social structures and services. The programme of the winners, the Freedom Alliance, included deregulation, particularly of labour law, and privatization; they promised to simplify and streamline the baffling tax system, reduce the public-sector debt, curb central and local spending, create jobs, by reducing the costs of employing new, particularly younger workers, and by encouraging small and medium-sized enterprises. In the social field, the programme of the Freedom Alliance proposed rebuilding sectors like public health and education; the alternative was the construction of a non-interventionist state.

According to electoral programmes, these promises were not the usual nostrums about lowering taxes, deficit and inflation; they were the ambitious platform of a peculiar blend of Reaganism and Thatcherism. When faced with accusations of demagogy, the experts of the Freedom Alliance declared that it was not foolish to promise a million jobs in two years: Reagan had created 19 million new jobs in a country that had five times the population of Italy, and thanks to an economic philosophy different from over-regulated Europe, the United States had created more than 35 million jobs since 1973.

In foreign policy, Berlusconi styled himself 'a committed European, but . . .' a good friend of the US and supporter of NATO. On these problems, and on many others, there are differences between Berlusconi and his allies: the autonomist Northern League, which strongly supports a federalist reconstruction of the state (with relative independence for the wealthy and industrialized north) and National Alliance, a rightist group whose heartland lies in the south of the country.

Table 1
Chamber of Deputies

Party	Number of seats	Percentage of vote
Progressive Alliance	213	32.2
Pact for Italy	46	15.7
Freedom Alliance	366	42.9
Others	5	9.2
Total	630	

The turnout was 86.1 per cent of an electorate of 48.3 million (minimum voting age 18).

Table 2
Chamber of Deputies

Percentage of vote for bigger parties within the three main blocs

Party	Percentage*
Freedom Alliance	
Forza Italia	21.0
National Alliance	13.5
Northern League	8.4
Progressive Alliance	
Democratic Party of the Left	20.4
Communist Refoundation	6.0
Greens	2.7
La Rete	1.9
Democratic Alliance	1.2
Pact for Italy	
Popular Party	11.1
Segni Pact	4.6
Others	9.2

*Percentages are calculated on the basis of proportional representation permitted for 155 seats, one quarter of chamber.

Table 3
Senate

Party	Number of Seats	Percentage of vote*
Progressive Alliance	122	33.0
Pact for Italy	31	17.0
Freedom Alliance	155	42.0
Others	7	8.0
Total	315	

*Percentages are calculated on basis of first-past-the-post system.
The turnout was 85.5 per cent of an electorate of 42.7 million (minimum voting age 25).

TECHNOCRATS AGAINST POPULISTS

From a certain point of view, the 1994 Italian general election has been described as a confrontation between ex-fascists and ex-communists, and there is some truth in this interpretation; from another point of view the same election can be described as a confrontation between technocrats and populists. In the final years of the First Republic, the last two Italian governments (Giuliano Amato's and Carlo Azeglio Ciampi's) took important steps towards reducing the budget deficit, curbing the unceasing rise in public debt, and promoting wage restraint. These two governments were openly endorsed by Confindustria (Employer's Federation), which during the elections affirmed that the road to recovery did not depend on who was in government. Even many international authorities, for example the central European bankers, who met in Basel at the beginning of March 1994, declared that the road to financial restoration was already decided and that whoever won would make no difference.

During the election campaign, the PDS affirmed that if it won, it would again back the outgoing Prime Minister, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, a former governor of the Bank of Italy. Very well respected in international circles, he is a banker with no party affiliation (but of progressive leanings) who was not running for parliament. He led the country's political reform and made several plans for economic austerity. The masterpiece of his political achievement was the agreement in July 1993 between employers, trade unions and government, linking wage increases to productivity and ending wage indexation.

By an irony of history, the nucleus and framework of the technocratic-oriented coalition were the heirs of the Communist Party. It was Western Europe's largest communist party, strictly allied with Moscow. After the collapse of the Soviet empire, the Italian Communists changed their party's name, and many of them even became born-again libertarians: following the Europe-wide retreat of former left parties from socialism, the PDS supported privatization of state industries. This party is not a revolutionary party; it does not talk of the end of capitalism; it is in the tradition of European social democracy. It tried to put itself across as the Italian equivalent of the British Labour Party or Germany's SDP. In fact there are more differences from, than similarities to, the old communists. But there are doubts about its mentality: the PDS cannot hide the kind of left-wing culture which is judged by many as worse than communism itself. This mentality is partly rooted in religious tradition (with a neat separation between good and evil), partly rooted in ultra-democratic tradition (with heavy emphasis on equality), and partly rooted in extremist tradition (with an outright refusal of piecemeal social engineering).

The Progressive Alliance was an eight-party coalition, from the Greens to an anti-Mafia movement, from the true believers of Communist Refoundation (which broke with the PDS over its acceptance of free-market principles) to the moderates of the Democratic Alliance. Together with candidates drawn from business and Oxbridge-educated intellectual circles, and alliance combined candidates who supported raising taxes on Treasury bonds (the favourite haven of Italian savers) and withdrawing from NATO. Communist Refoundation was also calling for a halt to privatization of state industries. These differences raised many doubts about what the eight parties really had in common. However the leftist parties grouped in the Progressive Alliance presented a carefully un-radical programme, generally acting as custodians of moderate policy. The reasonable Left peculiarly combined elements from the intelligentsia, the press, the magistrature, the trade unions, the employers, and many people hoping that the political change would have given them room to have their say.

The Italian Communist Party has never been excluded from local government and economic affairs;[1]; for this reason the

[1] G. Sacco, 'L'Italie par des voies secrètes', *Commentaire*, Spring 1993, 16, 61, pp. 45–52.

PDS seemed to many voters relatively, but not entirely pure. In the end, the PDS's strenuous support for a relentless clean-up of political corruption appeared controversial or disturbing to many voters. In a stereotyped culture where descriptions of abject individuals abound, the worst villains are the bullies who exercise tyranny and the hypocrites who dictate morality.[2] In the propaganda of the Freedom Alliance the progressists were depicted as both communist hypocrites, greedy for power, and also speaking disingenuously of Progress and Reason.

Seeking to confront the anti-communism of Berlusconi, the Progressive Alliance tried to ridicule the enemy: 'Berlusconi is like a Japanese general who never knew when the Second World War was finished . . . The right-wing alliance fought a primitive anticommunist campaign that emphatically recalled that fight in 1948, when communists were defeated . . . The only difference is that in 1948, there *were* communists.' But anti-Leftists retorted that in the electoral symbol of the PDS there was still clearly recognizable the old hammer and sickle that in the recent past had flown over the concentration camps in Siberia. For them, Russian communism had fallen, but the Italian communist mentality was still in service.

A MARKETING MIRACLE

Until the elections, a large portion of the Italian vote was stable and rigid: Catholics ready to support the Catholic party, workers ready to support the Communist Party, and so on. Another portion was volatile. Even in the last days before elections, polls showed that many voters were uncertain. The proportion of undecided voters was estimated at anywhere from a quarter to a half. At the same time surveys indicated that many people were not interested in politics; a high percentage were disappointed, angry, indifferent, demoralized, and even terrified by the Italian political chaos.

In all the advanced democracies, voters are sceptical or in revolt. In Germany a special word, *Politikverdrossenheit*, has been invented for explaining the new form of exhaustion with politics. But for a long time confusion and uncertainty were dominant in Italy: not only old ideologies and loyalties were dead, but also many Italians were unsure about their savings and jobs. In order

[2] J. Mortimer (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Villains*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993.

to describe the mood of the country, maybe it is indicative to say that it has the world's lowest birthrate.

In this propitious ground for false messiahs Berlusconi above all spotted a niche for himself that was in fact a black hole left by the vanishing of the old centrist and moderate parties. In just three months he created the new party which Italians were searching for, and sold it to them.[3] When he moved into the vacuum, he was at the head of an empire which included, among others, Italy's biggest advertising agency, its largest publisher, three national TV stations, a huge supermarket chain and a real-estate firm. These economic structures were used to provide a political organization in the country. In order to orchestrate a campaign planned in the same way as the launch of any commercial product, the electoral campaign machine was co-ordinated by a public relations specialist from Saatchi & Saatchi. The quest for votes was conducted with the best professional equipment, by people who spoke little of ideologies and more of polls, advertising and marketing.

Berlusconi is the owner of the world's most successful soccer team; the name of his political movement is, in itself, a football rallying cry: Forza Italia (it has been translated as 'Go on Italy', or 'Go for it, Italy', or 'Come on, Italy'). Using the model of football fan clubs, he organized about 13,000 local political parties to back his candidates. Above all, he packaged himself as the Italian dream and told depressed people what they wanted to hear after two years of nervous anxiety about their future. While leftists promised austerity, if not blood, sweat and tears, Berlusconi said: 'we are going to create a new Italian miracle!', referring to Italy's glorious transition from shattered Second World War loser to the world's fifth mightiest economy.

This was music to millions of voters' ears. Presenting himself as an innocent outsider, he seduced the electorate. The centrepiece of his political philosophy could have been lifted from a speech of Ronald Reagan or Margaret Thatcher. He presented himself constantly as pro-religion, pro-business, pro-family, and anti-mismanagement, anti-bureaucracy, anti-collectivism, and so on.

[3] This was the first time in Europe that a political idea had been sold to the public in the American style. In Italy Americanization is more rapid than in any other European country. In the USA the extraordinary impact of visual communication has revolutionized both consumer marketing and political campaigning. See R. Putnam, 'Per rivitalizzare la democrazia americana', *Queste Istituzioni*, No. 90–91, 1992, pp. 40–49.

He portrayed himself not as a conservative, but as a pioneer statesman who was seeking to renew the state and society.

Confirming his reputation as risk-taker and creative person, Berlusconi formed an apparently *impossible* alliance between water and fire: the separationists of the north and the nationalists of the south.[4] Then he promised tax cuts, state deficit cuts, higher pensions, one million new jobs. In spite of the predictions of experts on the opposition side who were saying that his declarations were demagogic, he began a huge television campaign, which put out his message for days to all Italy's viewers, from housewives to chief rabbis. Foreign observers said that his crusade was disinformation and entertainment and bore 'comparison to both Mr Perot's nationwide hook-ups, and President Clinton's use of televised town hall meetings' in the last American election campaign. Smiling like a snake charmer and speaking like a television evangelist, he changed the destiny of the nation. Owner of the biggest television network outside the United States, Berlusconi has frequently been compared to America's Ross Perot. But, generally speaking, some have described him as a hybrid between Ross Perot, Donald Trump, Rupert Murdoch and Bernard Tapie — with an obvious and enormous difference: the capability of being the decisive political winner in his country. (After the elections Forza Italia received congratulations from Lady Thatcher.)

While the PDS leader has been urging investors not to fear a leftist government, much of Berlusconi's rhetoric centred on the attempts to start a red scare. Also from this point of view, Berlusconi was well attuned with the times: rightly or wrongly, many voters were sceptical about the real intentions of the former communists, even when they seemed the only alternative to the past corrupt system. Berlusconi tried to demonstrate that they were not the only alternative and that they were not respectable. He said:

> The arrival of the left to power would be disastrous. Look at the mess in our state-run television, the public health and hospital system, our universities and the maze of more than 200 taxes Italians pay. What has happened in these sectors they would like to do for the rest of the country. And remember, the PDS until a few years ago was still an enemy of NATO and the US.

Forza Italia largely benefited from the spontaneous outburst of professionals and businessmen who were successful in private life

[4] For the vast debate on the fragmentation of the national state, see C. Jean (ed.), *Morte e riscoperta dello Stato-nazione*, Angeli, Milano, 1991.

and wanted to help change the country by entering politics. These people had a clean image and a respected reputation: a well-known general who resigned from the army in despair over the country's weak posture; a well-known magistrate who abandoned the magistrature because of conflicts about the communist role in the Italian party system; a well-known economist previously the youngest president of the Montpelerin society; a well-known political scientist, and so on. These personalities made Forza Italia look as if it could be relied upon to carry out promises to improve the business climate, to relaunch the economy, to reduce taxes and provide more jobs. In its essence, the message of Forza Italia was *populistic*: sent to *the good people* unified and levelled by television. It had the effect of a massive shot of adrenalin for the silent majority of the Italian electorate.

AN ATTEMPTED CHARACTER ASSASSINATION

Until the beginning of the year, analysts had supposed that the PDS was virtually the winner of the game. Only days after Berlusconi announced his candidacy, opinion polls made him the front runner. The anti-Berlusconi offensive relied on several weapons. At the beginning his enemies said that he entered politics to save his empire, financed heavily by debt; later, they added that he faced a conflict of interest between becoming a politician and his role as owner of one of the country's largest economic groups: 'in the United States or in Europe a man who owns, among other things, three television networks would never be allowed to become president or prime minister.' Berlusconi replied that the existing laws permitted his taking part in politics, that his networks were impartial, and that if he won, he would create a sort of blind trust in order to secure separation of powers.

In the last days before the elections, all the skeletons rattled in cupboards, and Berlusconi was accused of almost everything — both true and false. From his intimate relations with a socialist leader awaiting trial on corruption charges, to his inscription to the P2 pseudo-masonic Lodge, a clandestine club of prominent businessmen, magistrates, bankers, soldiers, which in the 1970s became embroiled in dubious conspiracies alleged to prevent any participation in government by the communists. Berlusconi vigorously denied active membership in the P2 Lodge, and claimed that the insinuations were 'absurd, nonsense, untrue' and only made 'because they want at all costs to prevent my

victory'. When plainclothes agents raided his headquarters in Rome to examine the list of the candidates (which normally was at the disposal of the public) at the absurd request of a magistrate investigating links between freemasons, Forza Italia and organized crime, Berlusconi protested that 'these things happen only in a totalitarian state', and attacked the prosecutors directly.

For Berlusconi the siege of the magistrature and the press has been very close to Ronald Reagan's Teflon years. But Berlusconi did something more than Reagan: he used the rumours to his benefit. When newspapers reported that the mob saw Forza Italia as its most likely ally, he claimed his only experience of the Mafia was an attempt by the organization to kidnap his son years ago. Every time he was accused, he disputed publicly with magistrates, investigators, columnists and reporters, calling them all part of a smear campaign. Elections show that most Italians trusted him, or at least preferred him.

Probably the promoters of the anti-Berlusconi crusade had forgotten the first rule of the character assassination code: scandals are not caused by accusations. Scandals are the final effect of a complex chain: they occur when things have already gone badly for the victim; if confidence is secure voters are clement with their leaders, suspicions dissipate quickly, and support grows instead of diminishing. In the end, crushed by hysterical and extreme propaganda, the electors had a desperate choice: between the heirs of communism and the heirs of fascism, which is the least awful? Between people suspected of links with the Mafia and people suspected of despotism, which is the least dangerous? Starry-eyed Italians chose razzmatazz modernity.

ANTI-FASCISTS AND POST-FASCISTS

An important part of the Freedom Alliance is the National Alliance, a party which is on the extreme right in the Italian Parliament. The extreme rightists have been on the periphery of Italian political life for decades, and secured a steady 6 per cent of the vote in the 1992 elections. Now they have a little more than doubled their percentage, but remain in any case a minority movement in Italy and in Europe: Le Pen won 14.4 per cent of the vote when he ran for president in 1988, the Flemish bloc won 25 per cent of the seats in a local 1991 election, and Jorg Haider won 22.6 per cent in the Vienna elections in 1991. The growth of the Italian extreme right is part of a general growth of the

European extreme right, but it has nothing to do with phenomena like antisemitism, racism and xenophobia which exist outside Parliament. The official extreme right party, National Alliance, is rather a means for controlling and maintaining within the democratic framework many anti-system tendencies (which are dangerously increasing, and that could increase even more in the future). On the platform of National Alliance the main themes are: law and order, patriotism, presidentialism.

The National Alliance leader, Gianfranco Fini, has tried to transform his party from a bunch of picturesque reactionaries and nostalgic die-hards into a conservative European grouping, similar to that of the French Gaullist tradition. National Alliance is very different from German extreme right, led by a former Nazi SS officer.[5]

Fini placed fascism entirely 'in history', because 'fascism belongs to the past'; he changed the name of the party; he said that liberty and democracy were prominent values for him and he declared himself *patriotic* rather than *nationalist, post-fascist* rather than *neo-fascist*. Some observers suspect that these declarations could be opportunistic: Austrian extreme rightists are grouped in a *Freedom Party*. But they describe the Holocaust, as 'a lie without end'; while Fini describes Hitler as 'a criminal'. Intelligent and respected — unwillingly — even by left-wingers, Fini succeeded in keeping extremists and skin-head thugs on the leash (even if few supporters continue to give the stiff-arm fascist salute or to sing the hymns of a time that all of Fini's allies hoped had gone forever).

From this point of view, the party was maligned as a neo-fascist party despite its leader's protest that he had no interest in resurrecting an era that he would rather forget (he stated that he personally considered Mussolini 'the greatest statesman of the century', adding however that he was certainly not a model for the present). Italian politics is at a stage in which the prefixes *post*

[5] Imposed by Hitler, in the Italian puppet fascist state under complete Nazi control, from 1943 to 1945, race laws caused deportation of thousands of Italian Jews to death camps during the Second World War. However, the differences between fascism and Nazism, and between the sovereign fascist state before 1943 and the Italian puppet fascist state under German occupation after 1943, were enormous, especially in the policies regarding the Jews. See the moving memory of Ivo Herzer (published at the same time as the debate on post-fascism), 'Fascist Italy's Forgotten Rescuers', *The Washington Times*, 29 March 1994, and, for a broader perspective, see R. De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*, Einaudi, Torino, 1993.

and *neo* have acquired much symbolic weight: if National Alliance is a post-fascist party it is impossible to say that it is the first neo-fascist party to enter a democratic European government since the landing in Normandy.

For half a century, Italy and Europe have been ruled by attitudes that arose from the Second World War and the cold war: anti-fascism and anti-communism.[6] Consequently, an important political problem has been what to do with the votes that went to the extreme right or to the extreme left. In France, for instance, the extreme right and extreme left are isolated, or used to discredit adversaries: he who allies with them takes a serious risk of losing credibility in the constituencies.

Now the Italian situation is singular in Europe, because it is characterized by the presence of the supposed neo-fascists or post-fascists in a governmental majority. Having stated that the Italian extreme right is very different from the German, French and Austrian extreme right, we must also observe that as the moderate right-wing Italians have joined the extreme right, so the moderate left-wing Italians have joined the extreme left (following an old strategy: *pas d'ennemies à gauche*). Then either the extreme right or the extreme left had to be present in the governmental majority.

The inclusion of National Alliance in the governmental majority caused some consternation abroad, but for many observers this is not the biggest Italian problem: since the end of the cold war there have been enough new problems on the political scene; people know that fascism and communism are out-dated and failed to respond to the stresses and strains of modernization.

A NEW BLEND OF ITALIAN REAGANISM AND THATCHERISM?

Some observers judge the government of Prime Minister Carlo Azeglio Ciampi very critically, because unemployment rose, the debt continued to grow, and the gross domestic product declined by 0.7 per cent (the worst performance since the war). Just a few days before the elections, governmental sources revealed that spending in 1994 was liable to overshoot the budget target by $8.8

[6] For more information on these matters see F. Sidoti, 'The Extreme Right in Italy: Ideological Orphans and Countermobilization', in P. Hainsworth (ed.), *The Extreme Right in Europe and the USA*, Pinter, London, 1992.

billion: as a result of the recession biting deeper, the treasury receipts were lower than expected. But other observers say that, given the circumstances, Ciampi's government performed successfully. Above all, it vigorously endorsed law-enforcement personnel in the struggle against organized crime. Ciampi's government also overcame spin-offs of wasteful state enterprises and tackled problems of redundancy and restructuring. In many difficulties the government sought an agreement with the trade unions, trying to reconcile economic austerity with the necessity of avoiding exasperating social conflicts. Thanks to a devaluation-led economic surge (in 1993 Italy ran a $30 billion balance-of-trade surplus, its largest ever) in 1992 and 1993 Italy achieved the best export performance of any major industrialized country. But the virtuous circle remains fragile. Highly positive figures and highly negative figures of the Italian economy are strictly interlaced. Now some experts fear that the process of political reform of the country could come to a halt and the economic gains made in the past two years or so could be jeopardized by the new electoral majority.

These apprehensions give rise to the true alternative for the future of Italian politics: either by remaining on the borders of technocratic solutions, and in this case the real political problem would be how to get the necessary electoral majority for the technocrats, or by finding the solution where even Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher failed: leaving behind the welfare state and what Ralf Dahrendorf called the social democratic century, in order to build a new political, social, economic model. Now that the end of the cold war permits a wider and deeper shuffling of internal affairs, in a situation complicated by the international recession, the task is difficult for the Italian political leaders. The danger is that Italy might become ever less governable, and in this way it is disconcerting to see that the new coalition lacks figures with experience in the art of governance. In this case, instead of witnessing a new Italian miracle, we could be witnesses to a process of creative destruction as new methods gain ascendancy.

A period of upheaval and serious instability could begin if the winners of the election do not convince financial markets that they are serious about key issues such as reform of the state bureaucracy, privatization and fiscal stringency. If the new economic initiatives were to be a failure, and if the economy got out of control, Italians could be excluded from the mainstream of European integration. Therefore, after the virtual reality of the

electoral period, the real world is set to make short work of rosy electoral promises. In an abyss of economic crisis there is above all the risk of a confrontation with trade unions, largely controlled by the leftist parties. If difficulties arose, divisions among the Freedom Alliance partners could arise too. The marriage of convenience could be at an end.

In a social structure characterized by a large middle class, centrist policies are destined to be winners. Only divisions within the political leadership can pave the way for leftist forces, as happened in France when Mitterrand won. For years, from the late 1940s to the early 1970s, the industrialized nations enjoyed an unprecedented period of rapid growth, with improving productivity, soaring living standards, and rising incomes. In the 1980s unemployment has inexorably grown even in boom years, adding to the economic dictionary a revealing new term: *jobless growth*. We all understand how exaggerated Galbraith's image of the affluent society was; however it is also true that he gave a fair picture of many social groups in a prosperous economy. These groups have expressed support for centrist forces, but in recession-plagued Western Europe they tend to move their positions to the right and they could move further right, if their economic situation gets still worse. In Italy a prolonged recession has cost 11.3 per cent of Italians their jobs; in the south unemployment affects around 20 per cent of the population.

A CALCULATED RISK

Berlusconi has been depicted as the Mafia's candidate, but he takes with him people who are the severest opponents of organized crime: the rightist National Alliance, which has always proposed a strict law-and-order programme. Berlusconi has also been depicted as a candidate of a corrupt old system, but he takes with him the most severe opponents of the old system: the Northern League, which has always proposed a total reconstruction of Italy. Even if he wanted to, Berlusconi could not resurrect either the old men or the old method of governance. Necessarily he and his allies must invent something new.

It is a curious, but comprehensible alliance, kept together by two elementary and prepolitical feelings: fear and hope. Fear of a coalition where the ex-communists were in a dominant position, and hope in another coalition promising a new Italian miracle. For two years Italians suffered the disclosure of humiliating

scandals. The propaganda of Forza Italia had the effect of a euphoriant drug. Previously many people had said: 'We need revolutionary change in order to bring our system up to the level of the other democracies.' But as time went on it became clearer and clearer that other democratic leaders, from Clinton to Hosokawa, also have many challenges to face.

Although still in Italy today there are more scandals to be disclosed than in any other European country, the most important thing is that from March 1992, when the judicial investigations began, the system changed, and the permanent power of corrupt political parties was destroyed. Since then the judges have been revealing details and culprits, and are still doing so; but no longer does the moral question seem to be the first Italian question. In any case, in the future the search for legality will be much more puritanical than in the past. From this point of view the elections represent not only the achievement of cynical or visionary Italians, but also the achievement of political realists who preferred to choose the least of the evils, and to take a calculated risk to substantially renew their country.

Italian transition comes at the conclusion of the cold war era and at the beginning of a new era. Not only in Italy, but everywhere in the world, global change is 'out of control'.[7] No one knows what will be the outcome.

[7] Z. Brzezinski, *Out of Control, Global Turmoil on the Eve of the 21st Century*, Scribners, New York, 1993.