

Corruption in Contemporary Politics

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Political Corruption in Italy

James L. Newell and Martin J. Bull

As Pizzorno (1992) points out, the potential for corruption is inherent in all liberal democracies because in such systems the function of political inter-mediation between electorate and government is largely carried out by private agents (that is, parties) using private resources and because the activity of inter-mediation is not separable from activities designed to gather the resources necessary to carry it out. But if corruption can thus arise *in* democracies, it is also subversive *of* democracies (della Porta and Vannucci, 1999a: 9), this by virtue of its tendency to undermine confidence in the application of universalistic criteria in the exercise of power and therefore, ultimately, its tendency to undermine confidence in democratic institutions themselves.

From the latter point of view, corruption in Italy presents something of a paradox. On the one hand it is perceived as extensive. In the mid-nineties, for example, Paul Ginsborg (1995: 3) branded the country as 'one of the most corrupt democracies in Europe'; and more recently, in 2001, Italy achieved the relatively low score of 5.5 points (and twenty-ninth out of 91 nations) in TI's Corruption Perceptions Index.¹ On the other hand, notwithstanding its extent, there is plenty of evidence of the sense of public outrage from time to time provoked by the revelation of individual episodes of the phenomenon, while judicial attempts to combat it continue. Paradoxically, therefore, corruption scandals in Italy actually bear witness to the strength of democracy in that country and to the vitality of at least some of its public institutions (della Porta and Vannucci, 1999a: 11).

Newness, scale and varieties of corruption

There is consensus among observers of the Italian case concerning both the newness and the scale of corruption, at least in broad terms. And that is that while corruption has been a more-or-less salient feature of politics in Italy for many decades, the 1950s and 1960s were a rather quiet time in this respect. There was then a significant acceleration in the spread of political corruption from about the mid-1970s so that when *Tangentopoli* (Bribe City)

was at its height two decades later it was possible to say that corruption had become systematic and routine.

Mauro Magatti (1996: 33–4) suggests that there were at least four factors involved in the spread of corruption from the mid-1970s. First, in the 1950s and 1960s corruption had been an elite phenomenon involving small numbers of large firms and the leaders of the political parties – petty corruption involving public officials and local administrations being still a relatively isolated phenomenon. Later, the places of the old administrators were gradually taken by new arrivals of a lower moral calibre. Secondly, networks of connivance were initially restricted and lacking in solidity, thus making illicit transactions difficult to undertake and hence correspondingly rare. Later, networks of entrepreneurs and politicians socialized in the practices of corruption spread and gained in solidity. Thirdly, the Cold War-induced ideological conflict between Christian Democrats and Communists placed heavy restrictions of an ethical–normative nature on corruption and on the ends to which it could be put. Later, ideological conflict declined in intensity. Finally, rates of economic growth in the initial post-war period were sufficiently high as to ensure that demands for improvements in the quality of life would be channelled into entrepreneurial activities that involved few contacts with the political parties. Later, rates of economic growth slowed down, with demands for improvements in the quality of life as a consequence being increasingly directed at the state and increasingly satisfied by the parties staffing the state.

Figures given by Cazzola (1988) show that from the mid-1970s, reported crimes of corruption and embezzlement involving the public administration rose significantly, going from 412 in 1975 to 1065 in 1985. Meanwhile, annual averages rose from 514 in 1963–75; to 681 for 1976–78; to 808 for 1979–86. As regards press reports of corruption, the influential national daily, *la Repubblica*, carried reports of 117 separate cases of political corruption between 1976 and 1979; 110 between 1979 and 1983; and 208 between 1983 and 1986 (Cazzola, 1988: 67).

This growth appears to have touched the entire spectrum of relations between the state's politico-administrative apparatus on the one hand, and civil society on the other. Adapting the conceptual framework suggested by Rose-Ackerman (1978), Magatti (1996) deploys a four-fold categorization to describe the varieties of corruption that contributed to the overall growth in the phenomenon from the mid-1970s. First, there is the corruption that arises as a result of the power to take decisions concerning the allocation of public money – what to buy, from whom to buy it, according to what criteria and so forth – that is typically deployed in the area of public works contracts and that of tendering for the supply of goods and services. These two types appear to have accounted for about a third and a quarter respectively of the recorded cases of corruption between 1976 and 1992 (Cazzola, 1993; Magatti, 1996: 39).

Secondly, there is the corruption that arises from the power to supply resources, public services and permits for the carrying on of a range of

economic activities. Particularly significant within this category seems to have been that range of activities associated with town planning, building permits and planning permission all of which can have a dramatic impact on the value of private land holdings and which appear to have accounted for some 16 per cent of the recorded cases of corruption between 1976 and 1992 (Cazzola, 1993; Magatti, 1996: 39).

Thirdly, there is the corruption that arises from the power of public officials to investigate private conduct and impose penalties where such conduct is discovered to be illegal. Particularly significant in this category seems to have been the area of tax and tax inspection. Here corrupt exchanges were given significant encouragement by the complexity of the relevant legislation (Magatti, 1996: 52). For, by making both inspectors and inspected aware of the near certainty that some irregularity could be found if it were searched for, the laws thereby gave the two sides a 'built-in' incentive to deal with the situation by reaching some mutually beneficial accommodation.

Finally, there is the corruption that arises at the level of Parliament and its members when in exchange for items of legislation of benefit to single firms and/or powerful economic groups, individual politicians personally, or their parties, receive payment for their role in securing such legislation. The extent of corruption among parliamentarians that was uncovered by the *Mani Pulite* (Clean Hands) investigations produced one of the most striking and frequently cited sets of statistics concerning corruption in Italy, revealing, as it did, that by the time the scandal broke, the sphere of public policy making had to a large degree degenerated into a market place for mutually profitable exchanges and the construction of alliances between economic and political potentates willing to stop at nothing to achieve their objectives (Magatti, 1996: 55). Hence, by November 1993, requests for the lifting of parliamentary immunity had been issued against over half the members of Parliament, while almost all the members of the government that had held office at the time the 1992 election was called found themselves under investigation – as did the leaders of all the governing parties along with significant proportions of the parties' administrative officials and local-level leaders.

If these data testify to the degree to which corruption had, by the early 1990s, spread to the highest levels and become systemic, then the declarations of politicians seeking to defend themselves by arguing that 'since everybody was corrupt, no-one was corrupt', were revealing of the degree to which, when corrupt practices become routine, they fail any more to arouse any sense of culpability on the part of those who engage in them.²

Causes of corruption

The individual moral failings revealed by the absence of such feelings of culpability are, however, inadequate for the purposes of *explaining* corruption and its spread. A key concept here is that of *partitocrazia* (literally 'partyocracy'), referring to a considerable degree of overlap between the personnel

of the parties on the one hand, and interest groups and administrative positions on the other, making it difficult to draw clear boundaries between these entities and to know, in any given case, in what capacity individuals were acting. This implied recruitment to positions primarily according to the criterion of political party-affiliation and only secondarily, if at all, according to technical competence to perform the job in question. It also implied that political power was exercised through the party leaders more than through an executive accountable to Parliament (Partridge, 1998: 69). The importance of *partitocrazia* lay in its role in sustaining and perpetuating a clientelistic mode of managing power relationships. Clientelism in turn fed corruption by virtue of what it has in common with the latter, namely, the fact that it represents an exercise of power that is unrestrained by rules embodying the value of *universalism*.

Clientelism has for long been a well-established feature of Italian political culture, but two factors in particular were important in its post-World War Two manifestations. One was the establishment of universal suffrage in the specific economic circumstances of the immediate post-war years. Clearly, possibilities for the development of organized political parties would always be limited until the suffrage extensions immediately prior to, and following, the fascist period, so it was not until after the war that mass-membership parties could develop on a long-term basis. At the same time, these parties found themselves operating in a country significant parts of which were poor. Unemployment was high and traditionally, much economic activity, especially in the South, had been beholden to the state for its implantation and development (Allum, 1973: 166). In the South in particular, suspicion and mistrust frequently made collective action difficult. The immediate post-war years thus saw the emergence of a new class of party politician who, once elected to public office, found, on the one hand, that he controlled access to the principal source of wealth, and on the other hand, that he was faced with a mass of isolated individuals (electors) each in search of a protector.

In such circumstances, the nature of the post-war party system created a definite incentive for the parties to seek to outdo each other in the supply of the kinds of protection (favour) electors sought. First, the Cold War-induced ideological conflict saw the permanent exclusion from any potential role in government of the second-largest party, the Italian Communist Party (PCI), while the fascist legacy ensured that the extreme right would likewise be excluded from any role in government. If this ensured the permanence in office of the centre-based Christian Democratic Party (DC) and the smaller parties in their orbit, it also meant that clientelism became an effective substitute for competing on the basis of policy programmes – which would have undermined that minimum degree of coalition solidarity necessary permanently to exclude left and right extremes in the first place. This in turn facilitated the development and consolidation of *partitocrazia* by stimulating the parties to engage in the *lottizzazione* (sharing

out), on the basis of relative bargaining power, of ministerial and administrative posts, to be exploited for patronage purposes.

Partitocrazia and the clientelism it sustained are central to an understanding of corruption in Italy because of the way in which, in the management of power, clientelism undermines incentives to remain within the confines of what is lawful and because of what it has in common with corruption. As far as the first of these issues is concerned, clientelism allows power to be exercised in an arbitrary fashion because it represents a denial of the value of universalism, that is, 'the principle that all persons should be evaluated in the same way, regardless of who they might be' (Sharrock, 1977: 507). And because clientelism denies the significance of impersonally applied rules, those whose power depends on it face lower moral costs in resorting to illegality to defend their positions whenever these are threatened. If they do decide to resort to illegality, then the corrupt exchange presents itself as a (more or less feasible) possibility that has much in common with the patron–client relationship. It too is based on an individualistic exchange. It too denies the value of universalism. The positions that allow their incumbents to patronize clients frequently provide access to the resources that can provide the basis for corrupt exchanges.

While the centrality of clientelism in Italian political culture has traditionally provided fertile terrain for corruption, since the latter is an exchange relationship, explaining its actual incidence in recent years also requires mention of the specific demand and supply factors that have been at work in this time period. For, while cultural factors may create a certain predisposition, or vulnerability, to corruption, in the final analysis its actual incidence will be a function of its costs and benefits for each of the parties involved.

On the supply side, a major role in the Italian case appears to have been played by the decline of Cold War–ideological conflict, and the growing costs of politics. Since Italy's main party of opposition was a Communist party, Italy was contested terrain between the two world power-blocs (della Porta and Vannucci, 1999b: 14) and under these circumstances, the DC and its governing partners on the one hand and the PCI on the other, received generous funding from the United States and the Soviet Union respectively. However, with the declining intensity of the conflict and the emergence of *détente* in the 1970s, funding from the super powers began to dry up.

Meanwhile, the costs of politics, already relatively high in Italy, were increasing. On the one hand, Italy's list system of proportional representation, allowing the voter to express preferences among his chosen party's slate of candidates, raised the cost of campaigning beyond what it would otherwise have been by ensuring that candidates from the same party were just as close, if not closer rivals for the coveted parliamentary or local council seats as candidates from other parties (Newell, 2000: 49). On the other hand, the media and office revolutions were pushing up information and propaganda costs and making necessary large investments in order to provide party

offices with the necessary equipment (Rhodes, 1997: 65–6). Of course, funding from abroad was only one source of finance for the parties, but for a variety of reasons it was difficult to compensate for this loss and meet the increased costs by raising the flow of income from other sources. For example, the 1974 party finance law, introduced in the wake of the oil scandal of that year, outlawed donations from public-sector companies and thus banned a source of funding that had previously been legal (Rhodes, 1997). So there was a corresponding increase in the propensity of parties and individual politicians to seek funding by offering to sell their services and decisions.

On the demand side, the most important stimulants to the purchase of favours seem to have been bureaucracy (Rhodes, 1997: 65); entrepreneurs' lack of trust in the efficiency and impartiality of public action (della Porta and Vannucci, 1999a: 16); a situation of legislative uncertainty and administrative inefficiency. In such circumstances, a system of corrupt exchanges offered entrepreneurs a means of re-establishing the degree of certainty and predictability in their dealings with their environment that they needed in order to be able to make rational business decisions (Magatti, 1996: 69).

But if all this is true, then it raises a question of timing. After all, a lack of confidence in the impartiality and efficiency of the public authorities was long standing. Therefore, if the demand for illegitimate decisions and illicit services really *was* stimulated by this, why was corruption pervasive only from the mid-1970s and not before? Part of the answer to this question has to do with the fact that when corrupt exchanges are marginal phenomena, the search for reliable partners will be difficult, while as networks become established, corruption will then spread in a self-generating way (della Porta and Vannucci, 1999b).

Dynamics of corruption

Corrupt exchanges violate contracts that agents have made with principals. Therefore, they are inevitably deemed to be illegitimate. Therefore, they inevitably involve a risk of punishment, and this risk will be inversely related to the number of individuals already involved in corrupt exchanges. One of the reasons for this is that in a society where bribery is rare, it will be widely assumed that the behaviour of at least most other people is honest. Consequently, attempting to bribe in a society where bribery is rare carries with it a relatively high risk of being reported to the authorities – this as the result of the moral outrage provoked by an overture that threatens the security of everyone. Conversely, in a society in which bribery is widespread, expectations concerning the honesty of others will be correspondingly lower with the result that the moral barriers to bribery will also be lower. Consequently, attempting to bribe in a society where bribery is widespread is unlikely to provoke moral outrage and therefore, all other things being equal, to carry a relatively low risk of being reported to the authorities.

It is the inverse relationship between the extent of corruption and the risks associated with it that in turn allows it to feed on itself. It was essentially because of this logic that, given the initial conditions described above, 'the system of bribes' (della Porta and Vannucci, 1999b: 15) then expanded so dramatically from the mid-1970s onwards, spreading until, by the time the *Mani Pulite* investigations began, it had 'thoroughly infected every sector of the state, local, and central administrations, public agencies and enterprises, the military apparatus and the bureaucracy, including the judicial power' (della Porta and Vannucci, 1999b: 15). The analyses of della Porta (1993, 1996a, 1998) and della Porta and Vannucci (1997, 1999a,b) suggest that the processes involved were typified by the gradual transformation that overtook the party most heavily implicated in the early 1990s scandals – the Socialist Party (PSI) – in the period after it first joined the government in 1963. This event led to a major split in the party as a result of which it lost contact with its working class and trade union base. And because of the significance of political affiliation for appointment to so many positions in the public sector, the PSI began gradually to attract less ideologically motivated 'business politicians' for whom the party became a source of upward mobility.

Since public positions were distributed as rewards for loyalty to a particular political leader, it was necessary for the business politician to develop *ad personam* electoral and party followings. For these served as resources to be placed at the disposition of political patrons when decisions about the distribution or renewal of positions were being made. And since business politicians had a tendency to view public resources as personal property, their followings would often be constructed in ways that were themselves corrupt. For example, in exchange for public works contracts, licences to trade and so forth, firms could be induced to offer employment to individuals indicated by the politicians. Persons taken on in this way could be relied upon to be faithful to the politician 'because of their fear of losing their jobs if they [ratted]' (Allum, 1973: 162). Even more importantly, they could be relied upon to influence others of their group. Once public-sector positions had been acquired, the acceptance of bribes and other abuses of responsibility offered the means of acquiring even larger clientele followings and thus opportunities to accede to positions of ever-increasing importance. For example, part of the proceeds of corruption could be invested in improving the effectiveness of the politician's political machine. Or, as revealed by Mario Chiesa, the first politician to be caught up in the *Tangentopoli* scandal, proceeds could even be used to pay the subscription fees of party members (della Porta and Vannucci, 1999b: 79).

If processes such as these meant that clientelism and corruption were mutually reinforcing, then the spread of the latter was further reinforced by the corrupt politician's need to ensure that the persons for whom he acted respected their side of agreements reached, and by the need to ensure the silence of those who might otherwise report him to the authorities. The first need

arose from the impossibility of using the authorities to force clients to pay if they decided to cheat, for as della Porta and Vannucci (1999b: 45–6) explain, 'there can be no legal recourse for settling disputes within the corruption market'. In southern Italy, transactions were often underpinned by making use of the services of organized crime from which the corrupt politician would receive the services of the threat of physical violence in exchange for using relationships of connivance with the judicial authorities to provide protection from threats of prosecution. The second need was often met by implicating potential 'squealers' themselves in the process of corruption by offering a share of the bribe money – in effect, exchanging silence for part of the proceeds. At other times it could be met by fear, the business politician using an ability to influence things to create a reputation for being powerful.

Anti-corruption laws and campaigns, remedies and solutions

On 17 February 1992 Mario Chiesa, then the Socialist head of a Milanese old people's home, the Pio Albergo Trivulzio, was arrested 'in the act of taking a 7 m lire (\$4,000) bribe from the owner of a cleaning company' (Gilbert, 1995: 126). As a business politician, Chiesa had built his career through the skilful combination of corruption and the clientele practices described in the previous section. Despite having ingratiated himself with Bettino Craxi, the PSI leader, the latter refused to help him, publicly dismissing Chiesa as a *mariuolo* ('little rascal'). Chiesa decided, therefore, to empty the sack (Newell, 2000: 54).

Chiesa's confession set off a domino effect as his naming of names led others to confess and they in their turn to do likewise. In this way, the investigation quickly brought to light the massive networks of 'mutually beneficial linkages' (Waters, 1994: 170) that existed between the political parties and groups of entrepreneurs in the city – before spreading out to catch in its nets politicians, officials and entrepreneurs in an increasing number of towns and cities in other parts of Italy as well. By the end of 1993, it had reached the highest levels of the state, and by 1995, the annual number of accusations of corruption and extortion had reached 1,065 cases involving 2,731 persons – as compared to an average of 252 cases involving 365 persons per year between 1984 and 1991 (della Porta and Vannucci, 1999b: 3). *Tangentopoli* precipitated the most serious political crisis in the history of the post-war Republic, leading to the complete disintegration of all the parties of government; a restructuring of the party-system itself, and attempts at institutional and constitutional reform that led observers to view Italian politics as having begun an (hitherto incomplete) process of transition from a 'First' to a 'Second Republic'.

Tangentopoli owed much to an influx into the profession of a new generation of younger magistrates from the early 1970s. As a consequence, a

novel interpretation of the judge's role had gained ground within the judiciary: from being a passive *bouche de la loi* (Guarnieri, 1997: 158) the judge was to adopt a far more active stance and – through penal initiatives in the areas of workplace safety, environmental pollution, tax evasion, fraud, corruption and so forth – to act as a 'problem-solver', attempting to tackle the great social issues of the day (Di Federico, 1989: 33). In the past, politicians had usually been able to defend themselves from the threat of judicial investigation by using informal relations of connivance with individual members of the judiciary whereby the activities of excessively zealous junior magistrates could be curbed – via marginalization, transferral or pressure – by superiors more sensitive to 'political needs' (della Porta, 1998: 11). In 1992 such possibilities were considerably diminished by the great popularity of the investigations – which also curtailed the capacity of political leaders to sanction those breaking the previously all-prevailing conspiracy of silence. This then induced ever increasing numbers of individuals to collaborate (della Porta and Vannucci, 1999b: 267), something that was assisted by the judicial investigators' own strategy of offering suspects the prospect of being held in custody if they refused to co-operate or immediate release if they did, while also using custody to keep them ignorant of whether, and how much, fellow suspects might have confessed. This made it impossible for suspects to agree to keep silent and created a rush to confess that could be likened to a series of falling dominoes.

A second factor helping to explain why *Tangentopoli* unfolded when it did is the end of the Cold War and the crisis of the PCI which, in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Berlin Wall had transformed itself into a non-communist party with a new name – the Democratic Party of the Left – and undergone a major split leaving it considerably weakened in electoral terms. This made it clear to investigating magistrates that they could now attack the governing class without running the risk that, in so doing, they would thereby enhance the likelihood of the Communists coming to power. It also made it clear to entrepreneurs that, for the first time in 45 years they 'could foster a crisis of the political system without risking [their] own survival' (Calise, 1993: 556).

Finally, the economic effects of corruption also played a part in the timing of the scandal. On the one hand, by perpetuating the maladministration on which it fed, corruption led to a growing fear on the part of entrepreneurs that they would be unable to compete effectively in the increasingly integrated European markets. On the other hand, by bringing ever-increasing levels of public indebtedness (since politicians had to spend if they were to have the contracts on which to collect bribes) corruption raised the prospect of Italy being excluded from the single currency envisaged by the Maastricht Treaty. In a situation, then, in which public spending had drastically to be curtailed, the rising costs of corruption eventually became unsustainable.

Impact of political corruption and exposure of political corruption

Tangentopoli brought about a complete disintegration of the traditional parties of government and a complete restructuring of the party system through four related impacts: financial, organizational, electoral and institutional.

The financial impact was straightforward. Given the sheer scale of the parties' dependence on corrupt forms of funding, by reducing the amounts available from illegal sources of financing to just a trickle, the investigations pushed all the traditional parties fairly quickly towards bankruptcy.

The organizational impact led to the parties' virtual disintegration. That is, the spread of corruption had considerably weakened the parties' organizations by favouring the recruitment of individuals whose motives were venal, while penalizing policy and ideological commitments. The process was self-reinforcing – a gradual decline in the numbers of ideologically committed members tending to reduce the attractiveness of membership for those with similar ideological beliefs; a growth in the numbers of members whose motives were instrumental tending to make membership more attractive for those of like mind – and weakened the parties organizationally by virtue of the concomitant decline in reserves of members' loyalty and commitment. Hence, when *Tangentopoli* destroyed the basis for instrumental relationships by effectively cutting off the flow of resources that sustained them, it left the parties vulnerable to complete collapse. The sudden collapse of the parties is reflected in the dramatic decline in the figures for party membership which, according to one estimate, went down from 3,804,000 in 1991 to 1,330,000 in 1993 when *Tangentopoli* was at its height (Follini, 1997: 250).

The electoral impact was a haemorrhage of support in the voting booths for all the traditional parties of government. Having already in 1992 polled its lowest share of the vote at any general election in the post-war period, in November 1993 the DC saw its support, at 11 per cent, fall to less than a third of its post-war average. The PSI's collapse was such as to reduce it to the small change of electoral politics, but none of the traditional governing parties was spared. Facing breakaways of local federations and the desertion of members *en masse*, after June 1993, the five parties from which governments had continuously been drawn since 1945 had largely ceased to exist as credible political forces.

The institutional impact was on the electoral law, which, in April 1993, was changed by referendum (promoted by a referendum movement led by dissident Christian Democrat, Mario Segni), the new law providing for three quarters of the seats of both chambers to be distributed according to the single-member, simple plurality system, one quarter to be distributed proportionally. Largely as a consequence of the new law (which forces parties to seek electoral alliances if they are to maximize their parliamentary representation), elections since 1993 have seen the emergence of an essentially

bi-polar party system. This, it was hoped, would contribute to a reduction in levels of corruption through giving voters the power to determine the political composition of governments directly, and through governments' corresponding awareness that rectitude was the price of retaining voters' confidence.

Yet, if the financial, organizational, electoral and institutional effects of *Tangentopoli* are clear, the policy impact (in terms of preventing or controlling corruption in the future) is more open to question. There have been various reforms. Most of them (such as measures concerned with the privatization of large public enterprises and the reform of public administration) have had implications for the phenomenon as a by-product of other ends (della Porta and Vannucci, 1999a) and, it is true, have in many instances had a significant impact on those conditions known to favour corruption. Lengthy administrative procedures; an absence of checks on the possibilities of collusion between politicians and public employees; a lack of accessibility of the public administration: these are examples of some of the conditions that have been tackled. On the other hand, measures passed with the explicit intention of combating corruption have been few and of an ambiguous character. For example, one of the two proposals of the anti-corruption Commission (established in 1996 by the Chamber of Deputies) that had been passed by the end of 1998 actually narrowed the circumstances in which a defendant could be found guilty of abuse of office (della Porta and Vannucci, 1999a: 41).

In a country where the exposure of corruption had been so dramatic as to lead the traditional governing parties to be displaced by completely new parties in a new, bi-polar system, such legislative inactivity may at first sight seem strange. It is to be explained by three factors. First there is the incomplete consolidation of bi-polarity in Italy's multi-party system – something that has allowed the lack of inter-party consensus, and the system of interlocking vetoes to which this gives rise, to continue to act as a considerable obstacle in the path of would-be reformers. Secondly, though reform and political renewal were, when *Tangentopoli* was at its height, central battle cries of many of the parties that now dominate the political stage in Italy, these cries no longer have the political usefulness they once had now that the old parties have been displaced. On the contrary, since a number of the politicians that have stepped into the places of the old ones have not themselves been free of suspicion in matters of corruption, it has in some quarters been asserted (and in others with equal vociferousness denied), that continuing judicial activity against corruption has developed into a kind of witch-hunt against individual members of the political class. And this lack of consensus at elite level on the value and significance to be attached to continuing anti-corruption investigations in part accounts for the third factor, namely, that with the passage of time, popular interest and enthusiasm arising from periodic revelations of corruption has gradually given way to a lack of interest, and in some instances even hostility towards judicial investigators.

The political success of Silvio Berlusconi is perhaps the best example of this shift. Despite being under recent and ongoing investigations on several charges relating to money-laundering, links with the Mafia, tax evasion, bribery, and even complicity in murder, Berlusconi nevertheless actually built his campaign for the 2001 national election around the notion that the election amounted to a referendum on himself – and went on to win handsomely (Newell and Bull, 2001).

Conclusion

The prospects, then, for Italy to move from the category of 'quite corrupt' countries to one or other of the less corrupt categories are, for the moment uncertain. On the one hand, recent years have seen the appearance of several signs that would augur well for the future. Prior to the early nineties, the spread of corruption had been encouraged by a political system whose features also fed the popular discontent that would ultimately play a significant role in bringing about corruption's exposure. With the exclusion of left and right extremes and the inability of the governing parties to compete on policy, *clientelismo partitocratico* developed as a significant alternative basis of party competition. This in turn sustained administrative inefficiency and a situation of policy paralysis as the governing parties, in their perpetual squabbles over the distribution of posts to be exploited for patronage purposes, were unable to achieve any kind of governmental stability. It therefore spoke positively to likely future developments when, in the early 1990s, the judicial investigations that brought down a by-then largely corrupt political class were sustained by a wave of popular indignation which also fuelled pressure for a significant change in the electoral system. In a situation in which the traditional parties were disintegrating, the new law facilitated the emergence of a restructured party system with strong bi-polar tendencies as a result of which it was reasonable to anticipate significant measures of reform. Some significant changes have been made, particularly in the area of public administration.

On the other hand, hostility towards the political class and its actions is not the same as widespread support for reform of the conditions which facilitate corruption, and in this context it is worth noting Ginsborg's (1996) remark that while bringing down an entire political class, the *Tangentopoli* investigations failed, beyond intellectual circles, to induce any widespread reflection on those cultural traits of clientelism, nepotism and tax evasion in which the activities of the *Tangentopoli* defendants were ultimately rooted. Since, in a democracy, parties and their leaders are by definition responsive to the wishes and moods of voters, the failure of Parliament to tackle corruption more energetically than it has done in recent years is necessarily tied, to a degree, to these popular attitudes. And what is especially worrying is the possibility that popular attitudes and elite-level inactivity come to reinforce each other.

At the elite level the largest governing party, *Forza Italia*, is essentially a vehicle for the political ambitions of its rich leader. Consequently, effective action against corruption could well continue to elude Italian reformers despite the profundity of the changes in the country's party system. For in continuing to insist that the judicial investigation of the accusations of corruption that have been levelled against him would amount to a political witch-hunt, *Forza Italia's* leader, Berlusconi, reinforces that deeply rooted particularistic strain in Italian culture according to which law and its enforcement is ultimately assumed to be negotiable (LaPalombara, 1987). This can only perpetuate corruption and other acts of impropriety for, while it is in the interest of citizens collectively that an overall state of legality prevails, if politicians and parties tolerate *illegality*, then individual citizens will begin to find that their own interests are best served by acting illegally themselves. Italian democracy, therefore, still has a long way to go to rid itself of corrupt practices.

Notes

1. <http://www.transparency.org/documents/cpi/2001/cpi2001.html>. See also Luca Fazzo, 'Corruzione, L'Italia sempre tra i peggiori', *La Repubblica*, 29 June 2001. The 2001 result was an improvement on the previous year's score of 4.6 and thirty-ninth position, but still leaves Italy in a poor position relative to its First World counterparts.
2. See, for example, what the Socialist deputy, Sergio Moroni had to say in his 1992 suicide note to the President of the Chamber of Deputies (Colaprico, 1996: 31–2).