

*A Palermo marketplace, around 1900. A vendor of goat's milk serves up a drink. In the south, there were few roads, almost no money, and the vast majority were illiterate. "The saying went," historian Denis Mack Smith has written, "that a donkey cost more to maintain than a man." Italy has come a long way since then.*

# Italy

In the United States, Italy seldom makes headlines—unless, of course, Red Brigades terrorists abduct a U.S. general and hold him for 42 days (James Dozier in 1981), or Italian voters elect a porn queen to Parliament (“Cicciolina” in 1987), or the government falls again. After a Socialist-led coalition collapsed last year, the *New York Times* said that the Christian Democrats, who formed a new coalition, would “resume the old ways of muddle and fuddle, collusion and drift.” Indeed, the new coalition soon broke up. Nonetheless, Italy represents one of Western Europe’s surprising success stories. Here, Joseph LaPalombara tells how the Italians put the Fascist era behind them and created a vigorous economy and a highly stable (if bewildering) democracy; and Charles Delzell ponders the legacy of Benito Mussolini’s 21-year effort to restore the Roman Empire.

## ***PARTITOCRAZIA***

*by Joseph LaPalombara*

In March 1985, Bettino Craxi, then Italy’s prime minister, visited Washington. President Ronald Reagan greeted him with a firm handshake and a (somewhat) facetious question: “How’s your crisis going?” Craxi replied, “Very well, thank you.”

No doubt his other NATO allies had asked Craxi, the Socialist Party leader, the same question. When Americans or Canadians or Germans think of Italy, many imagine a sunny, picturesque Mediterranean landscape whose inhabitants are in chronic disarray. Judged by U.S. headlines, or by the accounts of its own newspapers, this republic of 57 million people seems always to be undergoing *una crisi*.

There are sudden strikes or Cabinet reshuffles. Organized crime—the Mafia in Sicily, the ‘Ndrangheta in Calabria, the Camorra around Naples—are only the leading players—has gained ground not just in the south but in Milan, Turin, and other northern cities. In a rash of violence that began in 1969 and continued into the mid-1980s, right- and left-wing terrorist groups murdered more than 400 innocents: train passengers, businessmen, professors, even an ex-prime minister. Aldo Moro, the Christian Democratic Party leader, was kidnapped, held for 55 days,

---

then shot to death in Rome in 1978.

Government in Italy seems feckless at best. Large budget deficits loom over the economy. Despite progress by government leaders in curbing tax evasion, the “underground” economy, where goods are traded and services performed out of the taxman’s view, accounts for perhaps a fourth of Italy’s gross domestic product (GDP). And, during the four postwar decades since the Republic was created, its wobbly parliamentary regimes have lasted, on average, a mere 10 months.

### The Family, Inc.

After being asked to form a new government last July (Italy’s 47th in the postwar era) and then having to endure two weeks of parliamentary maneuvering, Christian Democrat Giovanni Goria announced the makeup of his coalition Cabinet on television. At the end of his talk, the prime minister muttered an expression meaning roughly “Oh Lord, wish us luck.”

But Italy, I believe, needs less luck than many tidy-minded outsiders might claim.

The Italian nation-state is relatively young. Little more than a century has passed since the *Risorgimento*—that period of upheaval and cultural nationalism that led to the unification of Italy’s duchies and principalities. It culminated in the creation of the Italian kingdom in 1861 and its acquisition of Rome from the Pope in 1870. Yet the nation-building had only begun. “We have made Italy,” said the nationalist Massimo d’Azeglio. “Now we must make Italians.”

The process was fitful, first under six decades of chaotic parliamentary rule and later, after World War I, under Benito Mussolini’s Fascist dictatorship. Then came World War II and its aftermath.

Italy suffered no Dresdens or Hamburg firestorms, but its industrial centers and railroads were bombed out. The Allies had fought the Germans from Sicily to the Po Valley, and the countryside bore the scars. The surviving Italians were exhausted, morally and psychologically, by war and occupation, as attested by such bleak postwar films as Roberto Rossellini’s *Open City* and Vittorio de Sica’s *The Bicycle Thief*.

But four decades later, Italy has been transformed. Economic growth (2.7 percent in 1987) is close to the United States’ level. Foreign customers welcome such Italian products as Pirelli tires, Olivetti office equipment, and clothing from Benetton, a family firm near Venice that began distributing homemade wool sweaters during the 1950s and now has outlets in 60 countries. Italy produces a fifth of the world’s wine. And although they till Western Europe’s smallest farms (average size: 18.5

---

*Joseph LaPalombara, 62, is professor of political science at Yale University. Born in Chicago, Illinois, he received a B.A. (1947) and an M.A. (1950) from the University of Illinois, and a Ph.D. (1954) from Princeton University. His most recent book is Democracy, Italian Style (1987).*



Italians cheer Communist Party leader Enrico Berlinguer in Rome's St. John's Square in 1976, during the heyday of "Eurocommunism." Critics called the PCI "the other Church"; its "Pope" and "Holy See" were in Moscow.

acres), Italians harvest more wheat and corn than any other farmers (except the French) in the 12-nation Common Market.

Last year, Italy's National Institute of Statistics calculated that the country had surpassed Britain to become the Free World's fifth largest producer of goods and services. "*Il sorpasso*" was vigorously applauded by Italian pundits and politicians; Prime Minister Craxi even summoned his finance minister home from a conference in Paris after the latter was excluded from a special "Group of Five" meeting of his U.S., West German, Japanese, French, and British counterparts.

The British dispute the Italians' claim ("rubbish"), noting that they included dubious figures on the *underground* economy. Even so, Italy's economic achievements have been notable and under-reported, especially for a country that has few natural resources except sunshine and some large deposits of mercury.

Progress has undermined many of the old clichés about Italy.

As late as 1950, nearly 40 percent of the population lived on the land; now less than 13 percent are employed in agriculture. In the chronically underdeveloped south, where most of Italy's 2,600,000 jobless live, large estates were broken up during the 1950s so that parcels could be given to landless *mezzadri* and *braccianti* (tenant farmers and day

laborers). But the peasants, now used to living in villages and “dormitory” cities and working for wages, were not eager to become agricultural entrepreneurs. Land reform failed. By the early 1980s, some five million Italians were abroad—toiling in West German auto plants, as brick-makers in Britain, and at other factory jobs.

Another eroded cliché is the Italians’ alleged live-for-today mentality. The 19th-century poet Giacomo Leopardi complained that his countrymen’s “vivacity of character” equalled their unconcern for the future. Federico Fellini’s film *La Dolce Vita* (1960) renewed the charge.

Actually, concern about (or confidence in) the future among Italians has never been greater, to judge by Italy’s savings rate. It is higher than those of all other industrial democracies except Japan.

Eighty percent of all savings are accumulated by what Italian social analysts have come to call “The Family, Inc.”—families that include two or more income earners, including children. Partly because women now account for 35 percent of the work force (versus 45 percent in the United States), the numbers of such families are at a peak. A 1986 survey found that the *average* family had \$124,000 tucked away: \$85,000 in real estate, \$18,000 in bank accounts, \$15,000 in fixed-income securities, \$6,000 in stocks traded on the lively Milan exchange or in mutual funds, which in Italy are sold door-to-door.

### Five Men, 29 Governments

Stocks are winning acceptance as an inflation hedge. But the Italians’ favored investment remains real property. They are not quite as apt as Americans (51 percent to 64 percent) to own their residences, but they vie with the French as Europe’s leading second-home owners. For a Family, Inc. in an apartment in bustling Rome or Milan, a retreat in Tuscany or on the Adriatic coast is not *la dolce vita* but a necessity.

One reason that Italians have more to invest may be that they have fewer mouths to feed. Italy’s once-robust birth rate is now only half of Ireland’s, and roughly on a par with the low Danish and West German rates. The Pill and the legalization of abortion (1978) are only two factors. Although 97 percent of all Italian babies are still baptized in the church, only 30 percent of adults are practicing Catholics and fewer observe church dictums against birth control. Moreover, the young find many reasons to postpone marriage—for example, Italy’s fast-expanding university system, which now embraces 47 campuses. It has more than one million students, four times as many as Britain.

Another change involves the old drive to become *sistemato*, “fixed for life.” A “safe” job was the highest ambition of most Italians, especially those in the poor south. There, a public service job, because it carried life tenure as well as high status, was the epitome of *sistemazione*. Such posts required a politician’s favor; as in other Latin countries, the average man’s quest for security helped make patron-



Roughly the size of Arizona, Italy is the world's 15th most populous nation (57.4 million). About half of its land area is under cultivation. Over 50 percent of Italians live in five of the nation's 20 provinces: Lombardy, Campania, Latium, Sicily, and Piedmont. The three largest cities: Rome (2.8 million) and Naples (1.2 million).

client relationships a mainspring of political power.

The “get-fixed” drive survives, but less strongly among Italians who did not see the Depression. Thanks to other opportunities, they are less likely to view a government job as the best possible career—or to look to the state or to political parties for sustenance.

Even so, Italians still prize stability. Divorce was legalized in 1970 and supported by 60 percent of the voters in a 1974 referendum, but Italy’s divorce rate is the lowest of any West European country save Ireland (where divorce is not permitted). The incidence of murder, rape, armed robbery, and other violent crimes, as well as drug addiction and alcoholism, is low, notably in comparison with U.S. levels. The many competent municipal governments, in Bologna, Padua, Verona, Florence, and elsewhere, keep the streets clean and the buses running on time.

Unlike France, Italy has stuck loyally to NATO; unlike Greece and Spain, she has not made a fuss over U.S. bases.

So how to account for Italy’s odd mix of private prudence and apparent governmental chaos? While West German or Anglo-Saxon pundits smugly assert that Italians have the kind of government they deserve, I would argue that they have the kind of government they *prefer*.

True, Italian prime ministers enjoy little job security. Nonetheless, Italy has been, since World War II, one of Western Europe’s most stable democracies. Heeding the 1948 Constitution, which holds voting to be a “civic duty,” nearly 90 percent of the electorate (everyone over 18) casts ballots in national elections. And if governments come and go, their leaders do not. Since the war, five men—Christian Democrats Alcide de Gasperi, Amintore Fanfani, Aldo Moro, Mariano Rumor, and Giulio Andreotti—have served as prime minister five or more times. That they headed, all told, 29 different governments is almost irrelevant.

### Ousting the King

The French may prize Reason, and often strive to exercise it in politics; the Italians value ambiguity. It is useful in a society riven by age-old regional, class, and ideological disparities. Asked how things are going, an Italian may reply, *si tira avanti*—“life goes on.” And how are problems solved? *Ci arrangiamo*—“we improvise.”

The improvising began during the 19th century. After Italy was unified, Giuseppe Garibaldi (whose “Redshirts” conquered Sicily and Naples), Count Camillo Benso di Cavour, Giuseppe Mazzini, and other leaders of the *Risorgimento* struck a deal: Northern liberals would dominate the new Italy’s politics and economy; the *latifondisti* (large landowners) concentrated south of Rome would be allowed to continue their feudal ways (the cause of southern Italy’s chronic underdevelopment).

The northerners undertook to keep government in their hands via *trasformismo*. This was a practice of forming loose, shifting governing coalitions that may or may not have had much relation to election out-

---

comes or to distinctions between majorities and minorities in the legislature, but ensured that power would remain held by those used to wielding it. What Italians still call *la classe politica* was born.

The political class was sidelined—or co-opted—when Benito Mussolini took power during the popular turmoil after World War I. But when King Victor Emmanuel III ousted the *Duce* in 1943, the leaders of the renascent parties, united in their hatred of Fascism, agreed to put aside their differences and form a Committee for National Liberation.

To almost everyone's surprise, in their first postwar election (1946) Italians ousted the monarchy. In the voting for the Constituent Assembly, the Christian Democrats, founded in 1942–43 as the party of the Vatican, led with 35 percent of the ballots. That made the party's leader, Alcide de Gasperi, head of a provisional coalition government whose Cabinet also included Socialists, Communists, and Republicans.

### 'Christ or Communism'

The Socialists, who were the first (after World War I) to build a mass party, and the Communists assumed that Italy would soon become a "people's republic," much like those being established under Soviet auspices behind the Iron Curtain. That assumption seemed plausible, given the Italian Left's growing strength, the anti-Fascist sentiment that permeated postwar Europe, and the general expectation that the United States' occupation troops would quickly be brought home.

But de Gasperi proved to be a virtuoso at *trasformismo*. Deftly cutting deals with other party chieftains, he survived to head eight governments, still a record for an Italian prime minister. His anti-Fascist credentials were impeccable. A legislator in pre-Mussolini times representing the Catholic *Popolari* party, de Gasperi, like many *Popolari*, spent time in prison under the *Duce*. Released in 1929, he took refuge in the Vatican, where he worked as a librarian and helped launch the Christian Democratic Party.

Under his shrewd leadership, the Christian Democrats presided over a striking postwar economic recovery\* and successfully championed regional governments, progressive taxation, land reform, and freedom for workers to form unions. The party was fiercely anti-Communist, an attitude that still prevails among many of its leaders and even more of its voters. Although it began as the legislative voice of the Catholic church hierarchy, the party attracted such disparate folk as wealthy industrialists, shopkeepers, farmers, and ordinary laborers. (The intelligentsia, then as later, sided with the Left.)

---

\*The recovery's architect was economist Luigi Einaudi, governor of the Bank of Italy after 1944 and the first president elected under the postwar Constitution. While other Europeans (e.g., the British) set about creating a welfare state, Einaudi pressed an austerity program that cut inflation, stabilized the lira, and ended protectionism. Low labor costs helped produce high exports; Italy was fully competitive when Common Market entry came in 1957.

As the Cold War gained momentum elsewhere, power-sharing in Rome's Chamber of Deputies and Senate became difficult. In 1947, de Gasperi resigned and formed a one-party government—excluding the Communists and Socialists. A month later, the Truman administration offered \$1.5 billion in Marshall Plan aid, which was accepted. Echoing Josef Stalin, the Communists condemned the U.S. aid, which revived Italy's economy, as “an imperialist attempt to enslave the country.”

The election of April 1948, occurring just two months after the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia, became a referendum on “Christ or Communism.” The Moscow-line Communist Party replaced the Socialists as the most potent force on the Left. They would go on to win one in three ballots cast in Italian elections. But to keep the Left out of power, millions of Italians voted “against their own identity” and for de Gasperi's party. The Christian Democrats won 48 percent of the vote and a small majority in the Chamber of Deputies. But rather than try to govern alone, de Gasperi chose to name Cabinet ministers from smaller parties—Republicans, Liberals, and Social Democrats.

The coalition tradition he thus established would help ensure that Italy's democracy would be unlike any other.

Moreover, de Gasperi's decision to face “the problem of Communism” and the party's pro-Soviet ideology by barring its deputies (and



*A Fiat factory in Turin today. “Turin is a city of workers, employed by the biggest industry in the land,” said Giorgio Fattore, editor of La Stampa, not a place where “old ladies . . . meet to sigh over pastries.”*

the neo-Fascists' too) from Cabinet posts has been continued. All but four postwar regimes have been led by Christian Democrats;\* all since May 1947 have excluded the Communists.

During the 1960s, Italy's first postwar economic *miracolo*, wrought by exports of inexpensive Fiats and refrigerators and other appliances, began to fade. The Communists had gained strength under Palmiro Togliatti, their leader until his death in 1964. The party, which had accepted the Kremlin's crushing of the 1956 Hungarian revolt, was careful to condemn the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, as well as the rising political violence at home.

### Craxi's Grit

A still-unexplained December 1969 bomb blast on Milan's Piazza Fontana began a decade and a half of terrorism. Its most notorious actors were the Red Brigades, who had much in common with other "revolutionary" groups that sprouted in the West during the 1960s. The Brigades' founders were middle-class intellectuals—among them faculty members and sociology students at the University of Trento, such as Renato Curcio, a disillusioned Catholic student movement veteran. Far more focused than West Germany's Baader-Meinhoff gang, the Brigades aimed to "strike at the heart of the state" through violence; this would spur harsh repression that would, in turn, lead to a proletarian uprising against capitalism. But they got little encouragement from the Communist leaders, who included big-city mayors and regional officials.

Thus, even outside the Cabinet, the Communists had a strong if indirect influence on government. Then as now, few decisions in Rome were taken without consultation with their leaders. And the Communists could exercise influence through party-affiliated organizations, notably the 4.5 million-member CGIL (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*), the largest of Italy's three trade unions, all of which have political ties. It was the unions (including the CGIL) that in 1969 forced the enactment of the celebrated Workers' Statute, under which employees could be absent from work and still demand pay, and which made job reassignment subject to their approval.

But under Enrico Berlinguer, an appealingly professorial deputy from Rome who became the party's secretary general in 1972, the Communists mounted a strong bid for representation in the Cabinet.

Seeking to broaden the party's appeal, Berlinguer espoused "Eurocommunism": The Marxist parties in Western Europe could be fully independent of Moscow and, if in power, would accept continued membership in the Common Market and in NATO. In 1973, Berlinguer suggested that it was time for a "historic compromise," a power-sharing agreement with the Christian Democrats.

---

\*The other four have been led by Giovanni Spadolini (two governments during 1981-2), head of the Republican Party, and by Socialist chief Bettino Craxi (two governments, 1983-7).

## THE ITALIAN-AMERICANS

Boston's North End, New York's Mulberry Street, San Francisco's North Beach. These are, perhaps, the United States' best-known Italian neighborhoods. Ironically, most of the nearly four million people who emigrated from Italy to the United States between 1880 and 1920 did not think of themselves as "Italian." Hailing from Sicily, Calabria, and other southern provinces, they regarded themselves and their new enclaves as Sicilian, Calabrian, etc.

Thus, when sociologist Harvey Zorbaugh visited "Little Hell"—an Italian slum on the Near North side of Chicago—in 1929, he did not find a "Little Italy," but transplanted Sicilian towns and villages. "From the various towns of western Sicily they have come," Zorbaugh wrote. "Larrabee Street is a little Altavilla; the people along Cambridge [street] have come from Alimena and Chiusa Sclafani; the people on Townsend [street] from Bagheria . . ."



Mario Cuomo

Most Italians who migrated to the United States were southerners, forced by poverty and political circumstances to leave their homeland. Once in America, *contadini* (farm workers) provided new muscle for the nation's burgeoning construction, railroad, and mining industries. Italian-American *padroni* (labor agents) recruited many of the first immigrants and shipped them off to Pennsylvania's coalfields or New York's docks, where they sometimes faced hostile workers on strike. On their own, others found work as stevedores in New Orleans, as clerks and bartenders in Chicago, as fishermen in Providence, Rhode Island, and Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Few found the streets paved with gold. Large families wound up crammed into dilapidated walk-up tenements in Little Italies in Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia. Once the immigrants mingled with compatriots from other Italian locales, as historian Humbert S. Nelli has observed, they began "to think of themselves as *Italians* rather than as members of a particular family or emigrants from a particular locality."

Partly because the Irish already dominated the Catholic churches, even in Italian neighborhoods, Italian-Americans founded mutual aid societies, such as the Order of the Sons of Italy, which supported their members when they were sick and arranged funerals when they died. They also published newspa-

The Christian Democrats seemed to ponder the idea seriously, especially after the 1976 election, when the Communists polled a record (for them) 34.4 percent of the vote. But how would Italy's allies view the first inclusion of Communists in a NATO government? Although the prospect of a Red role in the key country on NATO's already soft southern flank alarmed many in the alliance, the new Carter administration in Washington equivocated on the matter for some time.

Finally, in January 1978, when it seemed that the "historic compromise" might actually occur, the White House declared the United States

pers, notably New York's *Il Progresso Italo-Americano* (1880).

Like the Irish and the Jews before them, the Italians quickly moved into skilled trades and professions, working as clerks, mechanics, salesmen, masons, painters, and plasterers. Some started their own hardware stores, restaurants, and trucking companies. Despite lingering prejudices, fostered by headlines and movies about the Mafia, second- and third-generation Italian-Americans made rapid progress after World War II; many attended urban colleges such as St. John's (Jamaica, New York), Loyola (Chicago), Fordham (the Bronx), and the City University of New York.

By 1963, about half of all Italian-American workers were employed in white-collar occupations—as doctors, dentists, and lawyers. They now live in comfortable suburbs such as Oak Park, Illinois, and Manhasset, New York. A 1980 Census Bureau study found that Italian-American families enjoyed a higher median income (\$21,842) than their Irish-American counterparts (\$20,719), and higher than American families overall (\$19,917). Italian-American executives have run Fortune 500 companies (Chrysler's Lee Iacocca) and major universities (Yale's former president A. Bartlett Giamatti).

With the Irish in control of the Democratic parties in New York, Boston, and Chicago, Italian-Americans made slower progress in politics. Some turned to the G.O.P. As historian Arthur Mann wrote about Fiorello H. La Guardia, New York's ebullient reform mayor (1933–45): "A Republican, he emerged as the first Italo-American successfully to challenge the political reign of Irish-Americans . . . [and] gave the lie to bigots who held that Italo-Americans were fit only for ditchdigging and organ grinding."

Thirty-six Italian-Americans, including Senator Alfonse D'Amato (R.-N.Y.) and Representative Peter Rodino (D.-N.J.), now serve in Congress. The nation's most prominent Italian-American politician: New York's Democratic governor, Mario Cuomo.

Thanks to hard-won material success, Italian-Americans, especially since the end of World War II, have been steadily moving out of their old urban enclaves. "When I was a kid, North Beach was 95 percent Italian, mostly from southern Italy, and there were many fisherman," Luigi Marciano, a 57-year-old chef at San Francisco's Green Valley Restaurant recently told the *New York Times*. "The Orientals came in and bought the land from the young ones . . . The Italian way has gone; the old are gone, and mostly the kids have moved and gone to [affluent] Marin County."

opposed to Communist representation in any Italian Cabinet. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, had persuaded his chief that the precedent set by such a power-sharing could become the United States' "greatest political problem" in Europe.

The appeal of a "historic compromise" and of Eurocommunism, possibly exaggerated at the time, faded with Moscow's crackdown on Solidarity in Poland and its invasion of Afghanistan. In last year's election, the Italian Communists wooed environmentalists and women (some 40 percent of their candidates were female). Yet they won less than 27

---

percent of the vote\*—a “broad rejection,” as party analyst Stefano Draghi observed, of the Communists’ “image and credibility.”

Despite their best efforts, the Communist leaders’ vague espousal of a “third way,” differing from both capitalism and democratic socialism, has only intensified most Italians’ anxieties. Then there is the name problem. “The best proof that Italy does not want to be entirely modern,” Guido Rossi, a Milan Communist, has said, “is that the biggest party on the left continues to call itself Communist.”

Communists have also suffered from the popularity of Socialist leader Bettino Craxi, whose achievements include the postwar era’s longest-lived government (two years, 10 months). Craxi showed the *grinta* (“true grit”) and *decisionismo* (decisive leadership) that Italians admire. He introduced American-style campaign promotion—not of the party but of the standard-bearer’s personality. In one television ad, a mock interviewer asked Craxi about nuclear energy. Said the staunchly anti-Communist Socialist chief: “Well, after Chernobyl even I was frightened, and I don’t think I am someone who frightens easily.”

Today, a number of academics worry that Italy suffers from what they call either “blocked democracy” or “stable instability.” There is no sweeping change in Italian politics, as Antonio Martino, a University of Rome economist, wrote recently, because in every election, the voters confront the same question: Will the Christian Democrats manage to keep the Communists out of government?

“No matter how inefficient, unstable or corrupt” are the coalitions formed under the Christian Democratic leadership, Martino noted, most Italians prefer them to allowing Communists into government.

### The Sharpshooters

Thus, from election to election, gains or losses by the major non-Communist parties are slight. “Victory” and “defeat” are largely a matter of perception. When the Christian Democrats won only 32.9 percent of the vote in 1983 (down from 38.3 percent in 1979), the Rome newspapers concluded that the party had suffered “an earthquake.”

In any case, to a degree that baffles Americans, election results have little impact on proceedings in the Chamber of Deputies.

The final vote on any legislation before the whole house must be secret, theoretically to make it easier for deputies to follow their consciences. In practice, secrecy weakens party discipline. While governments usually fall when one of the coalition parties withdraws, it may also occur when they lose a vote on a bill in Parliament. Very often, they are done in by “sharpshooters,” defectors from the ruling parties who

\*Numerous parties have voices in the 630-seat Chamber of Deputies and the coequal 315-seat Senate. Currently, the deputies include 234 Christian Democrats, 177 Communists, 94 Socialists, 35 neo-Fascists, 21 Republicans, 17 Democratic Socialists, 13 Radicals, 13 Greens, 11 Liberals, eight Proletarian Democrats, and seven others. In regional elections, voters may find 15 or more parties represented. Communists participate in “Juntas of the Left” that run Milan, Bologna, and Florence.

---

quietly vote against their own coalition government. After such a collapse, pundits and politicians spend days trying to identify the “traitors.”

Protracted legislative debates and sharpshooters-in-ambush cannot keep the Cabinet from enacting laws by executive decree (which the Constitution permits, if the laws later win parliamentary approval). Nor can they prevent parliamentary *committees* from enacting laws by a vote of the committee’s members. Thousands of measures are thus approved every legislative session, and some are passed unanimously; that is, members of the government and of the so-called opposition (including the Communists) actually do much collaborating.

### Once a Sicilian . . .

Such off-the-floor horse trading by the parties’ powerful chiefs is the form that *trasformismo* takes today. *Trasformismo* flourishes when parliamentary factions are not clear cut, governmental coalitions are loose and shifting, and the formation of public policies need only be marginally related to election results.\* To an untrained observer, it may appear that Italy’s political system is in a prolonged process of collapse. In fact, underneath the surface pyrotechnics, the business of government, like the economy, carries on.

The fact that Italy changes, in political terms, very slowly, is not surprising. Italians are, after all, conservative by nature. Italy remains a society in which a narrow circle of families control most of the wealth and much of the political power. While universal suffrage and mass-based parties have brought democracy to ordinary Italians, they have not unseated *la classe politica*—the ruling political class. A small number of northern families—e.g., the Agnellis and Olivettis of Turin, the Pirellis of Milan—still dominate industry; for the most part, southerners run the Italian bureaucracy.

The traditional family still anchors Italian society. To be sure, younger women are entering the workforce in increasing numbers. But, generally, conventional familial relationships prevail. The men, the breadwinners, go to work; the women cook and run the household. In the evening, the men stroll through the streets, often arm in arm, and crowd the small bars and *trattorie*, while the women (except in the big cities) stay home or visit friends and relatives. And unlike their restless American or West German counterparts, Italian college students usually live at home—where they often stay until they marry.

Italians, simply put, are not adventurous people. They prize church, community, family. They do not move very often, and when they do, they still cherish their provenance. A resident of Milan, whose *grandparents* migrated from Palermo would consider himself—and be recog-

---

\*Any citizen who gets 500,000 signatures on a petition may have an issue turned over to the voters in a direct referendum. It was thus that, during the 1970s, Italians approved the legalization of divorce and of abortion, both of which were ardently opposed by the Christian Democrats.

---

nized by the Milanese—as Sicilian. The Italians have a distinctive way of identifying themselves. A Milan resident born in Lucca would first say that he is Luccan, and second that he is Tuscan, the region in which Lucca is located. He would also say, with more than a little vehemence, that he is a northerner, and *not* from the south.

When in 1984 the Rome and Liverpool soccer teams were to play an important match in the Italian capital, a writer for the city's daily *Il Messaggero* advised visiting British fans that they "shouldn't be surprised" if "you find your team supported by a majority of Italians." Rome, he explained, "is foreign in Italy."

### Bail-out Socialism

Italians, unlike the Scandinavians or West Germans, generally take their vacations at home, in Italy—perhaps in the Dolomite Mountains, or along the Amalfi coast south of Naples. In their habits Italians are conformists. Rome, Milan, Turin, and other major Italian cities, unlike Paris, Frankfurt, or New York, are not teeming with ethnic restaurants. When Italians dine out, they do so not to experiment with foreign foods, but to enjoy better Italian fare.

Such provincialism, which Italians call *campanilismo*, is not unrelated to the postwar strength of Italian democracy. "Italy survives," British journalist Robert Harvey noted, because Italians have "a cohesive set of social values." To them, "it is unacceptable to treat your children badly; it is unacceptable to dump grandma in an old folks home. Violence (except to settle family scores) is unacceptable."

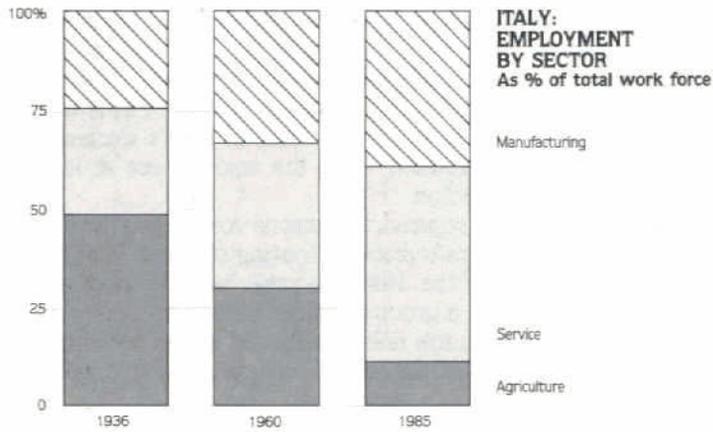
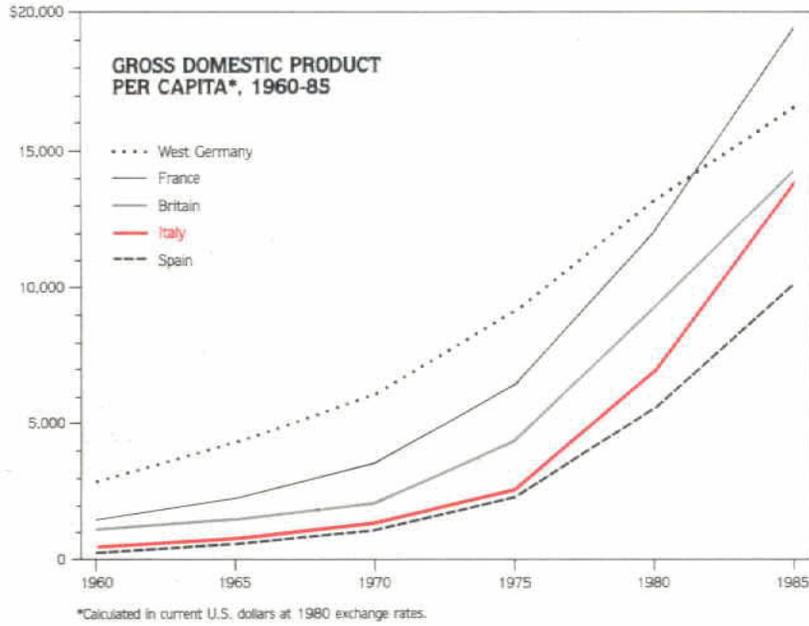
The Italians' essential conservatism is evident in industry too. It was the state, not risk-taking entrepreneurs, that created the nation's steel and textile industries during the 19th century. Today, government-owned firms account for about a fourth of Italy's GDP; prior to a recent spate of nationalizations in France, Italy's economy was the most "socialist" in the West after Austria's.

Rome does not own industries because some leftists thought the state should destroy Italy's capitalists; Rome bailed out the capitalists.

In 1933 Mussolini's Fascist regime set up the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction (IRI), initially to rescue three major banks that had invested their customers' money unwisely. Though meant to be a temporary expedient, the IRI established large holdings in other industries. Today it controls shipbuilding, the airlines, and 80 percent of the steel and metal-working sectors. In 1953 Rome set up another company, *Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi* (ENI), to command Italy's energy industries. With some 120,000 employees and overseas oil projects in Libya, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the Soviet Union, ENI now boasts annual revenues of about \$20 billion.

Managers at IRI and ENI owe their jobs to the *lottizzazione*, a patronage system whereby the major parties in the ruling coalition con-

THE ITALIAN ECONOMY: CATCHING UP



*Italy's economy is now more like Britain's than Spain's. Because many Italians work "underground," said then-Treasury Minister Giovanni Goria in 1987, such "negative indicators" as high joblessness "should be taken with a grain of salt."*

---

trol a certain number of jobs in the state-owned industries, in rough proportion to the parties' electoral strength. In banking, for instance, the ratio of Christian Democratic to Socialist managers now stands at roughly eight to one. But other parties have their fiefdoms too. Socialist leaders, for example, have much to say about who gets the top jobs at ENI. Economic efficiency is a secondary consideration.

### 'Propaganda of the Deed'

The parties actually wield more power than the central government itself. Hence many political scientists call Italian democracy a *partito-crazia*, or "partyocracy." The parties decide not only who gets patronage jobs but also such matters as control of broadcasting (the Christian Democrats, Socialists, and Communists each have leading roles at one of the three official RAI TV channels), which artists receive government aid, and even who performs at *La Scala*.

Of Milan's opera, a University of Rome historian once observed, "The members of the board are all representatives of the political parties, to the point that when they enroll the musicians, they ask what political party they belong to—yes, the players."

Neither this cozy system nor Italy's remarkable economic progress has eroded unemployment or helped the unions. Their membership peaked at about 12 million workers—more than half of the labor force—during the mid-1970s. Today, membership in the three major labor confederations is, by official count, under nine million. Some 100,000 manufacturing jobs are disappearing every year, owing largely to the decline of steel-making, shipbuilding, and other basic industries hurt by competition from lower-wage nations in Asia and elsewhere. Most employees now work for local governments, universities, banks, and in other hard-to-unionize, service-oriented organizations. Firms with 100 staffers or fewer now employ some two-thirds of Italy's workers.

As elsewhere in the industrialized West, the unions were at least partly to blame for their own decline.

With the Workers' Statute secured, the unions scored another victory in 1975. This involved the *scala mobile* ("moving staircase"), a pay-escalator system devised during the 1940s to raise wages periodically without disputes or strikes. With a group of business leaders (headed by Fiat chairman Giovanni Agnelli), the unions achieved an agreement to link the *scala mobile* to increases in the cost of living in a way that would bring every worker a *quarterly* increase in pay.

These victories were costly. By one reckoning, wage increases accounted for roughly 40 percent of the rise in the prices of Italy's manufactured goods between 1977 and 1979. And, ironically, with the Workers' Statute and the pay escalator in place, wage earners had less interest in paying union dues. And because the revised *scala mobile* acted to flatten the differences between high- and low-paid employees,



*Italy's most durable postwar Christian Democratic prime ministers (clockwise from upper left): Alcide de Gasperi (led 8 governments), Amintore Fanfani (6), Aldo Moro (5), Mariano Rumor (5), and Giulio Andreotti (5).*

skilled workers began to demand raises via under-the-table deals made at the plant level. The unions began to lose both members and influence.

Of all the paradoxes about Italian democracy, perhaps the most striking is that, while party politics permeates society, society seems to change so little. How can this be? Basic Italian conservatism is only one explanation. Another theory is that Italian politics is largely a *spettacolo*, a continuing drama, more talk than action, which pervades life on the peninsula. In the *spettacolo* of politics, Italians are not only spectators but also participants, not only the severe critics of politics and politicians but also their enthusiastic adherents.

In the theater of the Italian *spettacolo*, the urban *piazza*, or central square, is a stage. Rome, Milan, and even medium-sized cities such as Florence, Bologna, and Catania boast squares where a million or more persons may assemble. The right that Italians enjoy to "go down to the *piazza*," to voice one's views, is one that they exercise often and with relish. The *spettacolo* sometimes takes place via the media. In 1986 the government began a mass prosecution of 452 accused Mafia members in Palermo. The "maxitrial" became a *spettacolo*, as the defendants

watched the proceedings from cages erected in the courtroom, and Italians everywhere followed the trial on nationwide TV broadcasts. (In December 1987, 338 of the *Mafiosi* were convicted.)

Italy's terrorists skillfully exploited the *spettacolo* phenomenon to call attention to themselves. Following the 1969 Milan bombing, terrorist squads kidnapped, "kneecapped," maimed, wounded, or killed 1,775 victims in dozens of cities. The most serious and prolonged *spettacolo* began in Rome in March 1978, when the Red Brigades abducted Aldo Moro, killing five of his bodyguards in the process.

The Brigades probably struck at Moro because he had helped negotiate a "national solidarity" pact under which the Communists agreed to support the Christian Democratic government. In any case, from the carefully timed release of Moro's letters to family members to the announcement of his "trial"—and the cryptic message ("The Mandarin Is Rotten") that announced his death—the terrorists showed that what they most desired was "the propaganda of the deed." Moro's body was left curled up in the back of a car, around the corner from the Christian Democratic and Communist Party headquarters in downtown Rome.

"The more we grew militarily," observed Alberto Franceschini, one of the Red Brigades' founders, "the more we were living" in the headlines. "The society of the *spettacolo*," he claimed, "was using us as elements of the *spettacolo* itself." The enemies of the state, "the 'terrorists,' became the favorite actors of the state."

### Laws, Loopholes, Logic

The Moro tragedy proved a *doccia scozzese* (cold shower) for the ruling elite. Despite Moro's pleas that the Christian Democrats negotiate with his captors, they refused. So did the Communists, the Republicans, and the Liberals. But the Socialists, with Bettino Craxi's approval, rashly tried, via intermediaries, to make contact with the Red Brigades. One Socialist leader, Claudio Signorile, later admitted to an investigating parliamentary committee that by "going against the current [in the Moro case], we also hoped to gain some political space."

As it happens, the record of Italy's intellectuals on terrorism has been even worse than that of the Socialists. Beginning during the late 1960s, reflecting similar "cultural revolutions" elsewhere in the West, leading writers and university professors began engaging in attacks on the state. At Padua University, for instance, Toni Negri, a specialist on Kant and Spinoza who came to be regarded as the intellectual guru of the most extreme terrorists on the Left, openly condoned political violence.\* From such intellectuals, susceptible students absorbed theories

\*Negri became an emblem of Italian tolerance. Awaiting trial for being one of the Red Brigades' "brains," he was freed after winning immunity by being elected a deputy in 1983 under the banner of the Radicals (a small party whose flamboyant leader has espoused free heroin to thwart the Mafia). Later, after fleeing to France, Negri complained of being sent only half his parliamentary pay.

---

that, in effect, justified attacks on Italy's institutions.

These theories ranged from Friedrich Nietzsche's argument that the creation of anything worthwhile requires destruction first, to French historian Michel Foucault's distinction between "constructive" and "destructive" violence. Such abstract ideas did not fade in the face of real bombs and victims. During the Moro abduction, Leonardo Sciascia, a leading ex-Communist intellectual, chillingly declared himself "neither with the state nor with the Red Brigades."

Yet in combatting violence, officials in Rome, remembering Mussolini, took care not to turn the nation into a police state. "We respected civil rights," recalled former interior minister Virginio Rognoni of his antiterrorist work after the Moro affair. "There were no special tribunals." A law allowing suspects to be held for long periods without charges was repealed; it was "not proving useful against terrorism."

Indeed, the miracle of Italian democracy is this: Living in a pluralistic, divided society, with a high potential for conflict, Italians, in the end, manage to relieve tension and prevent strife. The ways in which they do so often seem illogical, devious, corrupt, and inefficient. Rules are made to satisfy various groups. Entrepreneurs run their businesses "underground," beneath the reach of Italian officialdom. In government and in state-owned industry, positions are filled first on the strength of the applicant's party membership, then on the formal basis of merit. Evading taxes or onerous regulations, ordinary citizens, at the very least, habitually skirt the letter of the law. "*Fatta la legge, trovato l'inganno*," goes a well-known Neapolitan saying: "Made the law, found the loophole."

The signs of such thinking are often highly visible. Especially in the south, the countryside is stippled with half-completed houses. They are built by poor folk who take years to complete them, one floor at a time, but have erected the basic framework quickly because the law bars the arbitrary demolition of any structure with a roof on it. Indeed, the flouting of building codes is so endemic that at one point the Rome government invited transgressors to confess their code violations, ask (and receive) forgiveness, and pay a fine. The time limit for the violations that could be forgiven *postdated* the law. Thus, citizens who had not yet sinned were given a chance to do so—a quintessentially Italian gesture.

Not all Italians have been content with the sometimes baffling or slipshod aspects of Italian democracy. The Communists, for a time, hoped to remake the society according to Marx and Lenin. Earlier in this century, Benito Mussolini believed he could transform the Italian peninsula into the cornerstone of a second Roman empire. During their 21-year reign, the Fascists were guilty of many sins, against logic and against humanity. In the end, it was their own countrymen whom the *Duce* and his followers, with disastrous results, failed to understand.