ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This issue of Italian Politics and Society has been published with the support of McGill University.

DEADLINES AND FORMS

This newsletter is distributed twice a year, usually in the spring and autumn. Articles, research notes, summaries of conference proceedings, as well as commentaries and announcements meant for inclusion in the Autumn number should be sent before September 1. Those intended for the spring number should reach us by March 15, no later. All contributions should be submitted in a commonly used word processing format. Citations and references should follow the American Political Science Association Style Manual. The booklet Style Manual for Political Science can be requested from APSA at 1527 New Hampshire Avenue, Washington, D.C., 20036, USA.

BACK ISSUES

Back-issues can be obtained for five dollars each or ten dollars for any three issues. A complete set of the newsletter since January 1977 would cost $120, including postage. Send your requests to vincent.dellasala@soc.unitn.it

QUERY

Re: Congrips membership or dues:
Richard.Katz@jhu.edu

Remember: We welcome your reactions. Please send note and notizie for the next issue to j.rhopkin@lse.ac.uk

Tony Masi and Filippo Sabetti

ISSN 1497-0716

ITALIAN POLITICS & SOCIETY

The Review of the Conference Group on Italian Politics and Society

No. 60, Spring 2005

FORMER PRESIDENTS


In This Issue:

Symposium

Are Single-Country Studies Obsolete?
Pepper D. Culpepper, Single Country Studies & Comparative Politics
Miriam A. Golden, Single Country Studies: What Can We Learn?
Julia Lynch, Can One Country Be Better Than Two for Comparative Politics?

Temi e Voci

Joseph LaPalombara, Giovanni Sartori and Political Science in Italy
Gianfranco Pasquino, La Scienza Politica di Giovanni Sartori
Angelo M.Petroni, Liberalismo e Amministrazione Pubblica
Alfio Mastropaolo, Per un Centro Sinistra Democratica
Scipione Novelli, Le Elezioni Regionali del 3 e 4 Aprile 2005
John Zucchi, John Paul’s Controversial Legacy

Epistulae

Percy Allum, Naples, The Promised City
Grant Amyot, Siena, Causes and Cures for Economic Decline
Claudio Antonelli, Trieste, Giorno del Ricordo 2005
Marco Brundenz, Trento, Cosa Sucedde alla Lega Nord?
Riccardo Pelizzo and Massimiliano Landi, Singapore, Italy From Afar
Claudio Riolo, Palermo, Giudiziarezazione della Politica
Micheluguglioni Torri, Delia, Il Decline dell’Italia nella Specchio Indiana
David Vogler, Florence, Quality of Life and Happiness in Italy

Research Dossier

Gregory Hanlon, The Decline of the Italian Military Aristocracy
Richard Drake, The Italian Revolutionary Tradition
Sergio Fabbri, Il Governo di Parisi in Italia
Ferdinando Fava, Decostro le Frontiere
Alberto Tonini, Quale Politica Estera verso il Medio Oriente?
Silvia Canella and Carlo G. Laclau, “Cattaneo Vivo”

Note e Notizie

Congratulations and “Buon lavoro!”; Congrips at APSA 2005; Troubling Puzzles; Past and Ongoing Conferences; Calls for Papers

Book Reviews

Federico Varese, Has Fascism Returned to Italy?
C. Perissinotto on John Habert’s books; Pellegrino Antini’s Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well; A. De Grand on M. Degl’Innocenti’s L’epoca giovane; G. Silano on N. Everett’s Literacy in Lombard Italy; B. Giordano on T.W. Gold’s The Lega Nord and Contemporary Italian Politics; P. Doerschler on Y. Rickers Ein Stuck Heimat finit man ja immer; G. Pasquino on G. Sartori’s Maltempo; D. Roberts on J. T. Schnapp’s Building Fascism, Communism and Democracy; S. Soroka on P. Sniderman et al’s The Outsider; S. DiScala on F. Turati’s Rifare l’Italia!
BOOK REVIEWS

Has Fascism Returned To Italy?

Federico Varese
Oxford University


A short film directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini in 1966, La Terra Vista dalla Luna, opens with a caption printed over a fixed image: “Seen from the moon, this movie ... is nothing and it has not been created by anybody ... But since we are on planet Earth, it might be better to let you know that it is a fable written by Pier Paolo Pasolini.” It is a fable about the power of neo-capitalism and consumerism over the minds and actions of its two protagonists. The American way of life had just reached Italy, and Pasolini had witnessed first-hand its homogenizing force. He called it ‘new Fascism’, “more insidious, elusive and destructive” than the historical kind—which had failed to unify the country’s various cultures—, because it “assimilates and homogenizes.” Two foreign observers of Italy, David Lane, The Economist’s correspondent from Rome, and Paul Ginsborg, who teaches at Florence University, are now also arguing that fascism has returned to the country.

Lane begins his book on the beaches of Lazio in January/February 1944. “That winter was among the coldest in Italian memory, which added to the terrible suffering of soldiers, bivouacked in foxholes and trenches.” The fighting at Anzio, after Allied landings, was bitter and Lane believes that that the British and Commonwealth troops who were killed there died in vain. He believes this because, on becoming Prime Minister in 1994, Silvio Berlusconi invited Mussolini’s political heirs into his government, and the country began to slide back into old habits. A commission was created to purge left-wing interpretations of 20th-century Italian history from school textbooks, and a senator from Forza Italia, Berlusconi’s party, proposed to mark 9 November as a national holiday. The date is that not only of the fall of the Berlin Wall but also of the day when, in 1926, “17 communist members of parliament had been arrested and the fascist-controlled parliament had taken measures to establish special tribunals”. Berlusconi’s “dictatorial tendencies” were also on display in his reaction to critical reports in the British press, which echoed Mussolini’s fuming eighty years before against the press of the same country. And just as Milan had been Mussolini’s power base—Lane continues—so it is now Berlusconi’s.

Ginsborg opens Berlusconi: Television, Power and Patrimony with the story of a distinguished American historian who was asked what it was like to live in Italy under Fascism. “I didn’t really notice”, he replied. And, Ginsborg continues, “it is even easier now not to notice”. Ginsborg does draw some distinctions at the ideological level: while the 1920s dictator stated that “the fascist conception of power is for the State not the individual”, the twenty-first century mogul praises individuals as their own best guides of what is good for them, a combination of straightforward neoliberal ideology and Italian lack of respect for the law. Ginsborg thinks, however, that “the two men form a kind of commentary on one another’s character” and that the charisma of both has been carefully constructed. He ends the comparison on a somewhat nightmarish note, imagining a not-so-distant 2013, “when ‘the piccoli Forzisti’ go to bed at night clutching in their small palms the medal of Silvio B., as the ‘piccoli Ballilla’ did with that of Il Duce in 1935”.

How seriously should we take these recurring references to historical fascism? Since Lane devotes significant portions of his book to the connections between Berlusconi and the mafia, and draws on extensive judicial evidence as well as interviews with key prosecutors, we can best start in Palermo. In October 1925, Mussolini appointed Cesare Mori, a career functionary in the Ministry of the Interior, as prefect of Sicily’s regional capital. Not much interested in legality, Mori was a ruthless enforcer, his remit being to regain control of territories not fully under the sway of the increasingly totalitarian
state. Between 1926 and 1928, 11,000 people were arrested in Sicily, 5,000 in Palermo province alone. Some 800 carabinieri were dispatched to join the Palermo force, and parts of the countryside came under military occupation. Despite offers from sections of the Sicilian aristocracy to find a mediated solution, the Prefect went for total victory, imposing a reign of terror. Tonino Calderone, a mafia boss, recalls in his memoirs that all the men of his Catania family were arrested by Mori and shipped off to a prison island. When the prisoners threatened to revolt, the Fascist regime sent in the navy. The revolt subsided.

It was common for the police not only to arrest suspects but also to slaughter their animals, sell their property and deport their families. Charlotte Gower, an American anthropologist doing fieldwork in the village of Milloca in 1928, described the suffering brought about by Mori. Milloca was then one of the remaining pacified areas of Sicily. "The police descended in forced in the early hours of one morning in January 1928. The square was filled with bleating sheep, goats, horses and mules, the suspects and the bereft families of those who had escaped arrest." The police forced this assorted company to march across ten miles of difficult terrain to a nearby town, where the suspects were put in jail. The families of those who had evaded capture were not to be released until the men gave themselves up. By the autumn, a hundred villagers were sitting in jail out of a total population of 2,500. Mori didn’t stop at villagers and peasants. The Palermo chapter of the Fascist Party was closed down in 1927 because of mafia penetration, and a former member of Mussolini’s government was investigated. The historical verdict is that Mori dealt a severe blow to the mafia, but he did not eliminate the reasons for its existence.

Lane believes that strong financial and political connection exists between Berlusconi and the mafia. Drawing on a wealth of circumstantial evidence, he argues that Cosa Nostra, having regained its strength after the Second World War, laundered drug money from the mid-1970s through a small bank in Milan, Banca Rasini, where Berlusconi’s father had worked all his life and which lent substantial sums to Silvio’s real estate business. Despite the best efforts of prosecutors, it is impossible to trace the origin of some 94 billion lire that made its way into Berlusconi’s coffers between 1976 and 1985 (£40 million, by my calculations), 29.7 billion of which were in cash or cash equivalents. Considering also that a reputed mafioso and drug trafficker lived in the future Prime Minister’s Arcore villa for almost two years (1974-76), that a top manager and friend of Berlusconi, Marcello Dell’Utri, has proven links with Sicilian criminals (on 11 December 2004, a court in Palermo sentenced him to nine years for being the representative of the mafia in Berlusconi’s conglomerate; he has appealed the sentence so his links to criminality are still sub judice), and that prominent Mafiosi have been instrumental in setting up the first Forza Italia clubs in Sicily, one is hard-pressed to put it all down to coincidences. Berlusconi’s judicial reforms—the newly approved Ciamita law, for example, which gives a defendant the right to challenge the court on the grounds of ‘genuine suspicion’ that the judge is biased and the various attempts to curb judicial independence—seem likely to help the mafia.

Lane’s narrative glosses over some elements of the chronology that emerge more clearly in Ginsborg’s shorter account. The Banca Rasini started financing Berlusconi as early as 1962, while the mafia has needed to launder its proceeds from the drug trade only since the mid-1970s. It is possible that some drug money was directed to Berlusconi’s Fininvest through Banca Rasini in the 1970s but, however good the grounds for suspicion, we do not know for sure. An alternative account would say that Berlusconi’s empire was built up in the 1960s using money that the Italian middle and upper classes had been exporting illegally to Switzerland, in defiance of restrictive regulations in the capital market that a neoliberal should anyway oppose.

More significantly, by arguing for a steadfast alliance between Berlusconi’s business and the mafia, Lane misses the opportunity to explore the scope for conflict between the two, and so fails to expose the unstable nature of any such alliance and to write more general about the nature of criminal protection. In the early 1970s, Berlusconi was afraid that his children would be kidnapped for ransom by petty criminals, and asked his Sicilian friend Dell’Utri to arrange for effective protection. In an act of hubris, probably dictated by his ignorance of the real workings of the mafia, Berlusconi agreed to hire the man suggested by Dell’Utri, the mafia boss Vincenzo Mangano. Threats from petty criminals now stopped, but coded messages began arriving from the “real thing”. Most ominously, after a dinner party in 1975 at Arcore, a guest of Berlusconi was kidnapped as he was leaving the villa, but was allowed to escape after a few hours. Both the police and Berlusconi himself immediately suspected this had been set up by Mangano, who was briefly arrested. Was this the mafia’s way of telling Berlusconi how it saw their relationship?

Although the available information is patchy and we cannot rely on the collaboration of the
victim himself, a more nuanced story than the one that emerges from Lane's narrative can be pieced together. (Any honest reconstruction of such matters must declare itself to be partial and speculative.) In a phone conversation that investigators interpreted as referring to the mafia, Berlusconi confided to a friend in February 1988: "You know, they told me that if I do not do that certain thing [in the next six days] they will chop off the head of my son and mail it to me, and will hang his body in Piazza Duomo in Milan." In the same exchange, he refers to similar threats he received a decade earlier.

In November 1986, a bomb exploded in front of the headquarters of Fininvest in Milan. Berlusconi immediately phoned Dell'Utri: "This is surely from Mangano, it has the hallmark of the 1975 warnings." The message was indeed coming from Cosa Nostra, but from the family led by Totò Riina, a ruthless boss even by mafia standards, who ordered—among other things—the killing of prosecutors Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino in 1992 and the bombing campaign in Rome, Florence (Uffizi Gallery) and Milan in 1993. But as for the meaning of the message, it is fair to say that we do not know. A mafioso turned state witness has suggested that the mafia was trying to signal to Berlusconi that it was ready to ditch its traditional political allies and turn to Berlusconi's political patron, the Socialist Party (PSI) leader Bettino Craxi. One might wonder why it had to detonate a bomb rather than simply pick up the phone, but it is a fact that in 1987 the deputy leader of the Socialist Party, Claudio Martelli, stood for elections in Palermo and the PSI increased its share of the vote by 6 per cent.

Dell'Utri himself, who appears in Lane's account as a loyal friend of Berlusconi, is a complex figure. A top manager of Berlusconi's group, a founder of Forza Italia and known to Berlusconi since his university years, he has long-standing ties with Sicilian criminals, including Calderone. At the time of the 1988 conversation about the threats against Berlusconi's son, he had been complaining that Berlusconi had stopped inviting him to the New Year's Eve party traditionally organized at Arcore and attended by many grandees, including Craxi. Being excluded from such a symbolic event had significant implications. "I could have left Berlusconi [in 1994], as I did in 1978," Dell'Utri said in the course of a court deposition in Turin in 1996. Since Dell'Utri has been the trait d'union with Cosa Nostra, dines with the likes of Calderone and was found guilty, in April 2004, of attempted extortion in Palermo, his words can now be read not just as the remarks of another disgruntled employee but as a veiled threat to withdraw a very special type of protection. Dell'Utri even sued Berlusconi in 1994, although the matter was settled before the hearing. He was allowed to stand for Forza Italia and was elected to the Lower House in 1996, then to the Senate and, twice, to the European Parliament.

Even if we leave morality aside, mafia protection is a double-edged sword. In some instances, the mafia does come to the rescue of corrupt entrepreneurs, enforces cartels of producers and punishes defectors from illegal agreements. But in the world it runs, there is no such thing as a "right" to the protection one has paid for. Mafiosi can ask for more favours or more money, turn against their dutifully paying clients or, on a whim, fail to deliver what they promised, as convincingly shown by Diego Gambetta in his book on the Sicilian mafia. (Although Berlusconi had been paying protection money for his business interests in Sicily from at least 1988, the Berlusconi-owned shopping outlet Standa in Catania was bombed in 1990, resulting in 4 billion lire of damage.) In 1992 two Christian Democrat politicians close to former Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti were killed in Palermo arguably by the mafia, the most credible explanation of their death being that they failed to deliver what they had promised, and not for lack of trying. Other deaths had been planned, including those of Andreotti's son and Claudio Martelli. The story of Berlusconi's relationship with the mafia is emblematic for those entrepreneurs and politicians who think they can use the mafia for their own purposes and, years later, find themselves in its clutches.

Is it still possible to equate Berlusconi with Mussolini? Sending in the fleet to shell a mafia prison-camp and keeping the families of suspects as hostages is a far cry from being terrified at the prospect of losing the Honoured Society's support, and hence possibly granting it favours. Berlusconi is perhaps no less detestable than Mussolini, but for different reasons, which should not be obscured for the sake of damming him further. Contrasting attitudes towards the mafia reveal a key difference between the two regimes. Mussolini's aim was to build a Fascist state, and anyone who stood in the way—including the mafia—had to be destroyed. Arguably, Berlusconi is not interested in the state except insular as he can use it to serve his business interests. Not surprisingly, the national debt has escalated during his time in government.

To deal with the mafia, Lane advocates granting more power to prosecutors, but this purely punitive approach has clearly failed to eradicate the organization in Sicily. Until we understand fully why entrepreneurs turn to it for protection, we will not be able to devise a successful strategy to curb.
corruption and the demand for mafia services. At the heart of the problem is a deeply ingrained lack of trust in institutions of authority. Such an attitude is the outcome of many encounters with people in position of authority, rather than the product of some impalpable 'Mediterranean' culture.

Seen from Pasolini's lunar perspective, Berlusconi may represent a new sort of power. This, broadly, is the view of Paul Ginsborg. For him, Berlusconi's brand of fascism involves creating a way of life centred on the need to acquire consumer goods. In satisfying this need, Berlusconi's TV channels peddle behavioural models that are normative in nature and are reflected in his party's political promises. His TV stations offer the picture of a 'normal' family, acquire and self-interested, 'surrounded by a multiplicity of commodities, [...] tolerantly Catholic, vaguely inclined towards gender equality but with mothers still playing a central role as providers of services'. Ginsborg links exposure to TV programmes and adverts to support for him at the polls: housewives bombarded with seductive ads vote for Berlusconi in vast numbers, as do young people partying in the night clubs of Rimini who vote Forza Italia because, as they told a journalist, 'his television is full of young people, his party is a young one, and he makes them dream of success'. Just few miles away from the clubs—Ginsborg notes—you will find forty hypermarkets along a ten-kilometre stretch of road, a proximity suggesting a causal relationship between consumption and voting. Not surprisingly, the book ends on a note of defeat.

To evaluate the plausibility of this analysis, one might ask a counterfactual question. Had Berlusconi never existed, how different would the values and the behavioural models promoted by commercial television and dished out to the Italian public have been? Ginsborg, I suspect, gives his subject too much credit. Consumerism is part of the project of capitalist modernity and the product of the many people who profit from it, not of one man. Not surprisingly, when Berlusconi's TV channels were partially blacked out in October 1984 for being in breach of Italian law, their programmes for the day included The Sopranos, Dallas, Dynasty and High Noon.

Italian consumerism predates Berlusconi. In 1974 Pasolini wrote of a 'faceless' power associated with television transforming peasants and workers into a new middle class, fuelling further production and consumption. This power promoted 'moderate' values by ruthlessly eliminating the alternatives, thereby appearing to Pasolini even more totalitarian than historical Fascism. Thirty years ago, the efforts made by Enrico Berlinguer, secretary general of the Communist Party, to convince Italians of the virtues of limiting consumption to essential goods represented a genuine attempt at mitigating, if not preventing, the coming of American consumerism to Italy. Although green movements across the globe expressed similar concerns and embraced some of his suggestions, Berlinguer was going against the grain of Italian society.

The rise and persistence of Berlusconi's near-monopoly of commercial television is due to the myopic calculations of three political parties, the DC, the PSI and PCI at the time of the new 1984 law that allowed him to resume broadcasting, and of the centre-left government that, when it had the opportunity to regulate commercial television, failed to do so. Berlusconi's project is a complex mix of a genuine political message that interprets the interest of a significant section of the voters (including housewives) and an attempt to avoid scrutiny in the courts. More crucially, it involves much wheeling, dealing, and mediating with the still powerful political and social constituencies that resist Berlusconi's plans. Seen from the moon, Berlusconism might look like a levelling and pernicious power that one could never hope to curb. Seen from the Italian beaches of today, it is a tale with more than one plotline.

**Note**

I am grateful to Diego Gambetta, Vittorio Bufacchi, Barbara del Mercato and Richard Caplan for their suggestions on an earlier version of the paper.

---


**Cristina Perissinotto**  
University of Ottawa

The pleasure to speak with author and *maistro pizzaiolo* John Abatecola is that he so clearly and consciously embodies the success of the Italian-American experience. He will in fact convince you, with unbound enthusiasm and juicy anecdotes that if you so far have assumed the Italian-