The New Prince

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I. Anything but the Left

> *For in every city are these two opposite parties to be found....*
>
> Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. 9[1]

The leading Italian author and Nobel laureate Luigi Pirandello, who lived under the Fascist regime, was once asked by a foreign journalist if he considered himself a Fascist. Smiling, Pirandello replied that he was neither a Fascist nor an anti-Fascist. When the journalist asked if he was therefore a socialist, the author forcefully answered that he was not a socialist, nor could he ever be one—"because I am Sicilian."

Pirandello's retort reflects a view held not only by Sicilians but by the Italian nation as a whole—conservatism and anti-leftist sentiment are basic components of Italy's national identity.

Such an assertion might seem surprising at first, for Italy does in fact possess strong leftist traditions which have produced outstanding thinkers, from the revolutionary ideologue of Italian unity Giuseppe Mazzini to Italian Communist Party founder Antonio Gramsci. The country has also experienced terrorist agitation by the left, from the anarchist violence of the

nineteenth century through the Red Brigades of the 1970s, and for decades has possessed the largest and strongest Communist party in the democratic world.

The history of the Italian state and people, however, shows that not only have the Italians never allowed the left to rule them, but even the majority of the "leftists" were so infused with the spirit of Italian nationalist conservatism that at crucial junctures they preferred the preservation of tradition and the social order to leftist revolution.

The Italians have never undergone a social revolution. Italy's social order has never been subjected to an enforced, comprehensive restructuring such as occurred in France, Russia or Nazi Germany. In this respect, the Italian political tradition resembles that of Great Britain or the United States, which have undergone major political upheavals but have maintained social and cultural continuity over the course of centuries. In contrast with these countries, however, Italy has never been under a clearly leftist government which sought to impose profound societal and economic changes by democratic means, such as the post-World War II British Labor government or the American New Deal of the 1930s. Nor has it ever suffered a destructive civil war, as did both these countries, which might have upset its consciousness and undermined its faith in the national heritage.[2]

Italy is unique in this regard in Western political history. Its vigorous social and cultural conservatism has enabled this once-beleaguered nation to become an industrial power without paying the price in bloodshed or suffering that often leads to leftist regimes. Despite Italy's problems, which cannot be overlooked, we should ask: What can be learned from the Italian experience and applied in different contexts to other countries?

II. The Civil Society

> *Reflecting on the matters set forth above, and considering within myself whether the times were propitious in Italy at present for a new prince and whether there is at hand a state of things suitable for a prudent and capable leader to introduce a new system that would give honor to himself and benefit the citizens of the country, I have arrived at the opinion that all circumstances now favor such a prince, and I know not of a time more fitting such an enterprise.*
>
> *The Prince*, ch. 26

Until about 150 years ago, Italy was divided into a large number of principalities and states, which in the eyes of many made it more of a geographical and cultural than a national reality.[3] Even in this period, however, leading Italian thinkers like Dante, Petrarca and Machiavelli sensed, and declared, that they belonged to a common national culture[4]—a nation boasting of cultural riches and commercial wealth, which made it an economic and intellectual giant in late medieval and Renaissance Europe. The most important source of this power, however, was its political culture, which enabled its citizenry to blossom.[5]

The reality of political division combined with a sense of cultural and national commonality evolved out of a unique political tradition of flexibility and balance among and within the various Italian states and, primarily, out of the ongoing search for stability without despotism. Examples of this search can be found in Venice, which was stable for centuries under the presumed absolute rule of the doge, a seemingly exalted duke who was actually a constitutional ruler with very limited authority, with the real power resting in councils of noblemen-merchants;[6] or the papal state which, despite its religious foundation, conducted policy based primarily on considerations of *realpolitik*.[7]

Because it was rooted in local institutions and practices, the social order in Italy was much stronger and more firmly established than in other countries with more centralized governments. Decentralization also facilitated the development of diverse economic, cultural, political and professional elites with a tradition of adapting to change while preserving the basics of the social order and the accepted values of society. These developments constituted the first glimmerings of a civil society.

Starting in the sixteenth century, the inner balance of forces in Italy was gradually weakened, and the country was conquered by foreign powers. This caused the gradual loss of Italy's leading economic status. But even during this period, most local and cultural traditions remained in place. These traditions stubbornly maintained their existence, exhibiting a willingness to assume different garb according to the demands of the current ruler, but without surrendering their continuity and vitality. This preserved the distinctive features of Italian political culture.

The continuity of ancient institutions and traditions over the course of centuries is obviously not unique to Italy. Italy, however, is distinct in the dimensions, duration and decentralization of that continuity. In Germany and Spain, one can find a few banks with a history of two centuries, but only in the various districts of Italy can one still find functioning banking institutions spanning five or six centuries.[8] In France, the nation's academic elite was concentrated in the Sorbonne, and academic life in England was similarly centralized in Cambridge and Oxford. For a long time, these were the sole academic institutions in these countries. In Italy, however, there were a large number of independent universities. Some, such as Padua and Bologna, have histories going back more than a thousand years, and today vie for the title of the oldest university in the world. Many other Italian universities are only slightly younger.

Italy's city-states of five and six centuries ago also developed the beginnings of modern political parties: Permanent groupings of politically active citizens called *parti*. One of these, the Guelf (pro-papal) party, whose ban-

ner was a red cross over a white field with the word *Libertas* inscribed upon it, was the forefather of the Italian Christian Democrats, whose party symbol is still the red cross on the white field and the word *Libertas*. Many other institutions, such as trade unions, neighborhood celebrations and urban traditions like the famous Palio of Siena or the Calcio of Florence, have held their ground for many centuries as well and intertwine to form an extensive network of social relationships in the Italian civil society.[9] Possibly the most important and strongest traditional element is the Catholic Church in Rome, which is the longest-lasting governmental institution in the world. It has been in existence since late antiquity, and for more than 1,500 years has exerted its influence on the political, social and cultural life of Italy.

During the centuries of division and foreign rule, many important Italian political thinkers expressed their disappointment with Italy's inability to unite, despite its magnificent past, and with its consequent subjugation to foreign rule. The most outstanding of these was Niccolo Machiavelli, who sought in his essay *The Prince* to guide a ruler into becoming the "new prince" who would free Italy from the foreign soldiers who were sowing destruction in the land.[10] These hopes were not realized in Machiavelli's time, nor for many long years afterwards, but they were not forgotten. Italians in following generations continued to nurture the vision of the "new prince" who would demonstrate, in the words of Machiavelli (quoting Petrarca), that their forefathers' pride "in true Italian hearts has never died."[11]

III. The Lion and the Fox

> *A prince, being thus obliged to make use of the characteristics of beasts, should choose those of the fox and the lion, for the lion cannot guard himself from traps, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves.*
>
> *The Prince*, ch. 18

Toward the middle of the nineteenth century, it became clear that the movement for Italian unification had become unstoppable. The benefits of unification, however, were accompanied by clear dangers. Some thinkers were concerned that existing privileges and rights would be taken away by a new and unpredictable regime. The principal fear, however, was that the casting off of existing frameworks would lead to a general undermining of societal values and an unbridled revolution based on the guillotine. This fear was intensified by the ideas and actions of revolutionary leaders such as Giuseppe Mazzini, the ideologue of the Italian liberation movement which sought to establish a republican regime, and Giuseppe Garibaldi, the military hero who attempted, time after time, to unite Italy through a tempestuous military conquest.

The revolutionaries' approach was opposed by conservatives, whose most prominent representative was the prime minister of Sardinia, Camillo Benso, Count Cavour. Cavour favored a slow and gradual process of constitutional unification, which would utilize mainly diplomatic, rather than military, means and would not pose a threat to the existing social order.

In 1859, these two approaches came into open conflict. The victory of the French-backed Sardinian army over Austrian forces made possible a political arrangement whereby an expanded Sardinia, including large portions of northern Italy, would be given international recognition. Cavour regarded this as a first and important step towards Italian unification. In a surprise move, however, Garibaldi then set out at the head of a small army

of volunteers, succeeded in conquering all of southern Italy within a few months, and threatened to make this territory the base for a revolutionary Italian state. Cavour now had to decide whether to agree to an immediate unification of Italy, with the accompanying danger of internal subversion by revolutionaries, or to risk a full-blown civil war. It was a situation reminiscent of Machiavelli's description of the properties needed by the prince who would unify Italy—the lion's strength and valor (Garibaldi) and the fox's cunning and prudence (Cavour). Combining their forces, they might succeed; divided, they were certain to lose.

Cavour resolved the conflict by acting on the assessment that Garibaldi and his followers were more Italian than revolutionary. He gave his blessing to the latter's action, but called upon Garibaldi to join his conquests in the south to the northern regions in a united Italian state, under a northern monarchical and conservative regime. As the Count anticipated, Garibaldi preferred national unification to a civil war and handed over all of southern Italy to the northern kingdom with a one-word reply: "*Obbedisco*" ("I obey").

Inspired by Cavour, a classical liberal-conservative regime[12] was established in the new state—similar to those in Great Britain or Austria-Hungary of the time—dedicated to a constitutional monarchy, a liberal economy and a conservative social order. The revolutionary left remained a marginal element. Garibaldi withdrew from public life, and Mazzini, who at first was not permitted even to enter the unified Italy, was removed from any position of influence in the new state. The revolutionary wing of the Italian liberation movement gave way to a consensus-based moderate-conservative regime, which united the traditional sources of local power with those revolutionaries who embraced the new order.

During the following half-century, this regime suffered no critical disturbances, and neither the socialist left nor the liberal-radical left gained a foothold in the government. Even devout Italian Catholics, who at first opposed the new regime because of its forceable conquest of the papal state, gradually accepted it, though without particular enthusiasm.[13]

But the crisis of World War I brought about the collapse of this political system. After the war, states throughout Europe had difficulty in contending with the demands of masses of angry demobilized soldiers, who filled the streets and insisted upon sweeping changes. The situation was especially acute in Italy, due to the frustration of having been on the victors' side without reaping the expected benefits of victory. The classical liberal regime, accustomed to power remaining in the hands of traditional elites and institutions, could not handle this undermining of the social order and began to lose control of events; the Catholics, whose support for the regime was tepid, were uncertain how to act; and it seemed to the revolutionary left that its hour had finally arrived.

The country began to descend into anarchy, which threatened to degenerate into a bloody maelstrom along the Russian model. The Communist revolutionary spirit was matched by a new force, the Fascists, consisting mainly of former leftists who had rejected internationalism in favor of a fiery nationalism forged on the battlefield. The Italians were forced to choose the lesser of two evils. In the end, the conservative Italian majority preferred the Fascists, who championed a political dictatorship but not a socioeconomic one, over the "Reds" who would institute a dictatorship in both spheres. This decision led to the appointment in 1922 of the Fascist Benito Mussolini as prime minister.

It soon became evident that not only was the economic-social impact of Fascism indeed limited, but the Italian conservative tradition was too powerful for Mussolini to dominate, and forced him to suppress his more totalitarian tendencies. The Fascist rule was characterized more by corruption and stupidity than by radicalism and brutality. In post-World War I Europe, which faced economic and military crises and bloodthirsty revolutionary and counterrevolutionary movements that took the lives of millions from Russia to Spain, Fascist Italy was not the worst place to be. Having lost democracy, the Italians felt that at least they were living under the least evil of the possible dictatorships.[14]

The Italians, however, supported Fascism only as long as it provided them with stability and freedom from the tempests that rocked the rest of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. When Mussolini changed direction after 1938 and attempted to emulate the Nazis by adopting racial legislation and embroiling Italy in the war, the Italians ceased to support him. The overwhelming majority of Italians (and not a few in the Fascist leadership) disassociated themselves from the racial laws, opposed Italy's entry into the war, and participated in it with blatant antipathy—until one bright day in the summer of 1943, when Mussolini was deposed without fanfare by a majority of the Fascist leadership which, in this difficult military situation, preferred its Italianism to Fascism. The conservative institutions—the King, the army and the Church—replaced Mussolini's regime in the blink of an eye, with not a person in all Italy willing to rise up in opposition.

The overthrow of Mussolini was intended to extricate Italy from a war it did not want, but neither the Nazis nor the Allies allowed such a move. Thus in the last two years of the war, Italy found itself torn between Hitler's forces, which had occupied the north of the country and established a puppet regime, and the Allied forces that controlled the south.

In the postwar period, the majority of the traditional Italian elites suffered a severe erosion of their status and power. The country was under Allied rule, and traditional sources of power such as the crown and its political supporters were accused of not having fought Fascism during the Mussolini years. Moreover, anyone identified with the political right anywhere in Europe in this period was delegitimized.[15]

These developments, together with the propagandistic Soviet claim that "Nazi-Fascism" was merely an advanced and natural phase in the development of capitalist regimes, be they conservative or even moderately liberal, succeeded in creating an absurd but widely believed identification of Nazism and Fascism with conservatism, Catholicism or anything else branded by Moscow as the "right." This charge was made despite the fact that throughout Europe, conservatives were among the most consistent opponents of

Nazism and Fascism. It was the conservatives who, unlike the USSR in the Ribbentrop-Molotov treaty, refused to accept Hitler and his actions once the war began: Leaders like the Polish Sikorski, the Yugoslav Mihailovic, the French de Gaulle, and of course Churchill, who led the only nation in Europe to stand against the Nazis from the beginning of the war to its conclusion. In Italy, conservative bastions such as the monarchy, the army and the Church never became "Fascist" but instead maintained their autonomy and eventually brought about Mussolini's downfall.

However, leftist propaganda and the prestige of a victorious USSR succeeded in creating the impression of a vast shift to the left throughout Europe, including Britain and France. Italy was no exception. The left played a central role in the Provisional Government and the Constituent Assembly of postwar Italy, and in 1946 a referendum was held in which the Italians decided, by a small majority, to abolish the monarchy—a decision which was perceived as an expression of a new leftist spirit in the country. As the leftist parties won ever-increasing support from the masses of new "anti-Fascists," it seemed that the Italian left was about to assume power.

The traditional conservative elements, veterans of the pre-Fascist classical liberal regime, seemed archaic to the public and enjoyed only minimal support. They also suffered from internal discord: The royalists, embittered and alienated by the abolition of the monarchy, loathed the republican conservatives; and the religious (Catholic) and secular (Liberal) conservatives were at odds with each other as well. It was not legitimate even to call oneself a "rightist" at that time: The anti-leftist forces were compelled to call themselves "centrists." The only important non-leftist element remaining in Italian politics was the Catholic Christian Democratic Party, which included diverse factions and defined itself as "center."

The elections set for 1948 therefore seemed certain to bring the left from partnership in the Provisional Government to full, exclusive power. The only question was *which* of the leftist parties—the Socialists or the Communists—would dominate a government of the unified leftist front.

At this juncture, however, the conservative tradition in Italy revealed its true strength once again: All the conservative elements in the country mobilized to support the one body which appeared capable of stopping the "Reds." Even most anti-religious conservatives supported the Christian Democrats. The local institutions which had always constituted the basis of civil society, the intellectuals and the Catholic Church, with all its resources, joined together into a new conservative camp.

The election results spoke for themselves: The main winners were the Christian Democrats, who took more than half the seats in Parliament and, together with the small Liberal Party, formed a strong "center-right" government opposed by the defeated and stunned left. Against all expectations, more than sixty percent of Italians made it clear that they did not want the left to rule. Even some members and supporters of leftist parties at the local level voted for the Christian Democrats in the general elections, in the spirit of a popular slogan of the time: "In the secrecy of the polling booth, God sees you—Stalin doesn't!"[16]

The 1948 elections proved to be a watershed that determined the fate of Italian politics for more than four decades. During the years that followed, in one election after the other, the situation remained virtually unchanged: The Christian Democrats continued to be the largest party, joined by several small parties in coalition governments; the left was incapable of gaining the reins of power.

Over the course of these decades, conservative governments led by the Christian Democrats instituted a stable democracy, an open and varied society that combined innovation with tradition, and above all a large degree of economic freedom. The result of these policies was the Italian version of the "economic miracle": Vigorous and sustained economic growth that brought a continuing improvement in the standard of living. Italy soon joined the group of the seven leading industrialized nations (the G7), and by the early 1980s it had become the fifth-richest economy in the world, overtaking Great Britain, which was by then straining under the consequences of a generation of socialist economic policies.

"In the secrecy of the polling booth, God sees you—Stalin doesn't!"

The flip side of the coin, of course, was that uninterrupted rule naturally led to increasing corruption among the ruling Christian Democrats. Time and again affairs involving corrupt government officials came to light. Moreover, the party was at the mercy of infighting which caused a change in government on average every year. All this, however, did not change the terms of the political equation. Despite the dizzying pace at which governments came and went, stability was maintained, with the same party in power during this entire period. Every time the Italians had to choose between the "crooks" (the Christian Democrats) and the "murderers" (the left), people held their noses and voted for the Christian Democrats.

In the face of this reality, many within the Communist Party—the main force on the left—gradually concluded that they must change or cease to exist. In the late 1980s, the party changed its name to *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (PDS—the Democratic Party of the Left), and its platform to that of a social-democratic party. These changes, however, failed to bring about a political upset, and the future seemed as secure as ever for Italian conservatives at the end of the 1980s.

IV. Clean Hands

> *And so these princes of ours, who had held their possessions for many years, have no cause to accuse fortune for having lost them; the fault lies rather in their own ineptitude … when adverse times came, they only thought of fleeing, instead of defending themselves.*
>
> *The Prince*, ch. 24

In 1989, however, the Berlin Wall fell, and in 1991 the USSR disintegrated. With surprising speed, the Communist threat to Europe simply vanished. And once the collapse of the Communist bloc removed the threat of the "murderers," Italians in increasing numbers began to ask themselves whether

the time had not come to deal with the "crooks." The public at large, which had previously been reluctant to undermine the political system, began to demand the heads of corrupt officials; the latter began to fall like dominoes, each dragging down the next in line.

A routine police investigation of a marginal case of corruption in Milan, code-named "Clean Hands," led to the uncovering of a well-oiled, all-encompassing web of corruption, bribes and other illegal benefits. The investigation was popularly nicknamed *Tangentopoli* ("Bribesville") and officially revealed what everyone in Italy already knew—that suitcases stuffed with bills regularly made their way from various bodies to parties and government officials in return for kickbacks and other benefits.

The extent of the blow delivered to the regime by Clean Hands is difficult to understand outside Italy, for this was not just another case of corruption at the top. The findings implicated virtually the entire political leadership (including at least three former prime ministers, innumerable government ministers present and past, and a majority of the members of Parliament at that time); most of the heads of the business sector, from top officials of government corporations to the directors of giant private corporations such as Fiat, Olivetti and Ferruzzi; a good number of local officials; and not a few law enforcement officials, judges and army officers. The entire world learned what the Italians had known for ages—that political corruption was even more extensive and significant than the criminal corruption spread by the Mafia.[17]

The aftermath of Clean Hands destroyed most of the ruling establishment in Italy and once again presented the left with what seemed like a golden opportunity to take power. Although some individuals from the opposition were implicated in the scandal as well, the very fact of being outside the government limited the extent of their involvement. And so the left hoped finally to form a government.

These hopes were encouraged by the clearly leftist slant of public debate in the country. Since the fall of Fascism, it had not been politically acceptable to be labeled as "rightist," so all Italy, except for marginal elements,

belonged to either the "center" or the "left." Though the majority of Italians voted for the anti-leftist camp, the political debate was clothed in leftist attire: Even anti-leftist individuals or newspapers were compelled to employ a socialist vocabulary in order to express their opinions in a legitimate manner, and the intellectual debate possessed a distinct reddish hue. Due to the decentralization of power in Italy, there were always vehicles for expressing anti-leftist and even outright "rightist" views. However, a majority of the more important and respected media in Italy had been a forum for leftist rhetoric since World War II.

Thus with the collapse of the "centrist" regime, politicians and businessmen who wanted to survive began to assume a more leftist coloration in preparation for the anticipated "new regime." Without a legitimate "right," and with the disintegration of the "center," it appeared that nothing could stand in the way of an imminent rise to power by the left.

There was, however, one person who escaped the devastation: After the dust had settled from the Clean Hands earthquake, billionaire Silvio Berlusconi, a man of considerable influence and public standing, walked away from the ruins virtually untouched by the scandals.

But the success of Berlusconi and his financial corporation Fininvest in remaining on their feet also left them completely exposed—due to his new prominence, Berlusconi's every action came under scrutiny. The left was suspicious of a man who was known for his forceful conservatism. Unlike other giants of Italian business, he had never sought favor with the left nor concealed his views. Clearly a rise to power of the left would deal a fatal blow to Berlusconi and his companies. And leaders of the left fanned the flames of these fears with declarations that on their first day in power, they would "take care" of Berlusconi and his holdings.

Berlusconi understood that Italy, his corporations and he himself were likely in the near future to be at the mercy of an unbridled left seeking vengeance if there were no force to stand in the breach. He began to hold talks with various individuals in politics, business and academia regarding his conception of "the party that isn't"—a new political force capable of

balancing out the political arena. He felt that not only did such a party already exist in the Italian soul, but that in a society in which a majority of people continued to be critical of the left and its values, the "party that wasn't" could become the dominant political power in the country.

V. "His Emitence"

> *[F]or men in general judge more by the eyes than by the hands, for everyone can see but only few have to feel. Everyone sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are....*
>
> *The Prince*, ch. 18

Silvio Berlusconi was born on September 29, 1936 in the city of Milan in northern Italy. He was educated in a school run by Silesian monks, afterwards obtaining a law degree from the University of Milan with a thesis on advertising. His was a bourgeois family of modest means (his father was a bank employee), and he supported himself as a student with occasional jobs that included selling vacuum cleaners and singing on luxury liners.

In the early 1960s, Berlusconi invested his family's limited capital in real estate, just when the construction market was undergoing a period of tremendous growth—one of the fruits of the "economic miracle" which was taking place at the time. His business affairs developed at a dizzying pace, and within a decade he controlled one of the most important construction firms in Italy. In the mid-1970s he discovered, before anyone else, the economic potential of a field which had just been opened to free competition—private television broadcasting—and in slightly more than a decade he created the largest private television network in the country, the only one to compete seriously with the government-owned networks. In the 1980s, while continuing to develop his construction and broadcasting interests, he entered new fields as well: His advertising firm, Publitalia, became the larg-

est in the country, he purchased one of Italy's largest grocery chains (Standa), he gained control of the important Mondadori publishing house, and he bought the renowned A.C. Milan soccer team. In the early 1990s, Berlusconi was the most popular personality in Italy, representing to his countrymen the realization of a dream: Still in his fifties, he was the richest man in Italy (he was sole owner of most of his corporation's companies, and his wealth was estimated at five billion dollars) and headed the second-largest private corporation in the land.

But Berlusconi's considerable professional and financial achievements were not the only basis for his unrivaled popularity among the public—after all, there are other successful billionaires in Italy. Berlusconi possessed three qualities that made him stand out: First, he built his financial empire with his own hands, steering clear of the corruption and demands for special treatment that characterized most large Italian corporations. Second, his corporation is profitable and does not need state subsidies—in contrast to groups like Fiat or Olivetti, whose staggering losses were covered for many years by sizable government grants (which, it later transpired, were often given in return for bribes). Third, Berlusconi is a natural communicator, who has built a reputation as a man who consistently expresses the views held by most Italians on many issues.

Indro Montanelli, the doyen of Italian journalists, who used to work for Berlusconi, claims (not as a compliment) that "Berlusconi believes he is a combination of Churchill and de Gaulle."[18] This offers a certain insight into Berlusconi's total identification with his public image. Just as de Gaulle was convinced that he represented France, and as Churchill saw himself as representing British history, so too Berlusconi and his image have long formed a single entity which, in great measure, represents the Italian national character.

This is Berlusconi's special genius as a marketer and communicator—he understands better, and before all the rest, the desires of his potential clients, the Italians. In the 1960s, he understood the longing of the new Italian middle class for high-quality housing, and he built the green suburbs

Milano II and Milano III. In the 1970s he sensed the increasing appetite for media diversity and established his television stations. In the 1980s he discovered the need of small and medium-sized manufacturers to publicize their wares, and turned his Publitalia into the largest publicity firm in the country. And in the early 1990s, he identified the increasing need for a new anti-leftist political camp after the collapse of the Christian Democrats.

Berlusconi developed and honed his marketing and communications abilities during years of traveling throughout Italy to meet his clients. He went to cities and towns and held meetings with small and medium-sized industrialists and merchants to persuade them to develop commercial ties with his group. Day after day, for almost a generation, Berlusconi met with clients and potential clients, and he has come to understand them deeply. He has thereby learned what the most astute students of the Italian nation already knew: This is a people whose nature has remained intact despite the political and technological changes of modernity, due to its innate conservatism. Italians adhere to their customs and traditions, adapting to their surroundings, but without abandoning the basics of their culture.[19]

Berlusconi has also internalized the ideas, demands and aspirations of the Italian middle class. These independents believe in hard work and detest governmental intervention; they are moderate Catholics whose lives center around the family, which in turn often functions as the core of their business. Berlusconi has come to know them, and they have come to admire him. They regard him as one of them. He offers the model of a successful family business which flourished thanks to diligence and common sense, and he does not disavow his past like other nouveaux riches.

Moreover, Berlusconi's methods and values are not those of the professional manager trained in business school. They are based on a different, more traditional system of values and ideas: That of the classical business "patron"—paternalistic and charming, personally involved in the affairs of his companies and their employees, easily excited or insulted, and influenced by such factors as community loyalty or family prestige, rather than merely by cold financial calculations. To this day, his preferred "board of

directors," for both business and politics, consists of a meeting of family members around the dining room table, and the small circle of his confidants is the one in which final decisions are made.[20]

An excellent example of the qualities that built Berlusconi's empire can be found in a story related by his right-hand man, Fedele Confalonieri: During a marketing meeting with thirty potential advertisers on his television networks a few years ago, Berlusconi bet Confalonieri that he could give each of the thirty participants a different compliment on the first handshake. "Your plant is admirable," he said to the first. "They tell me you have two degrees," he remarked to the second. "I hear you have recently become a father, my congratulations," to the third; "Your clothes are very refined," to the fourth, and so on. When they came to the last guest, Confalonieri was certain that Berlusconi would fail: This was a stranger, ugly and distastefully dressed. But Berlusconi did not flinch. He walked up to the man, shook his hand, smiled and said, "How nice to meet someone with such an impressive handshake."[21]

Berlusconi became such a popular figure in Italy that he received an accolade granted only to the few: A nickname so well-known that there is no need to state his name expressly. The legendary head of Fiat, Giovanni Agnelli, is the *Avvocato* ("the Lawyer"); Carlo de Benedetti, until recently the head of Olivetti, is the *Ingegnere* (the Engineer); and Berlusconi has won the title of *Cavaliere* ("the Knight"), based on the *Cavaliere del Lavoro* ("Knight of Labor", i.e., outstanding industrialist) award granted him by the state. Berlusconi's opponents prefer another nickname: *Sua Emittenza* ("His Emitence"), a wordplay on the honorific form with which Catholic cardinals are addressed (*Sua Eminenza*—"His Eminence"), alluding to Berlusconi's excessive influence on Italy through his media outlets. Others have named him *Il Grande Communicatore* ("the Great Communicator")—a deliberate reference to Ronald Reagan—because of his legendary public relations skills.

In the late 1980s, however, no one could have predicted that Berlusconi would soon make use of his skills as a communicator to enter politics directly.

VI. The Black Knight

> *And of all princes, for a new prince it is impossible to escape a reputation of cruelty....*
>
> *The Prince*, ch. 17

It is Berlusconi's practice to assemble his close associates from time to time for a Saturday meeting to discuss strategy. On such a Saturday, March 20, 1993, Berlusconi wished to deliberate on the projected results of a referendum to be held a month later, in which a proposal for changing the electoral system from a proportional one to a district-based, first-past-the-post system was expected to be approved by an overwhelming majority. Berlusconi posed the following question to his circle: Due to the disintegration of the conservative political establishment in the wake of Clean Hands, the new electoral system was liable to mean an overwhelming victory by the left in the upcoming elections. Faced with this danger, could and should Berlusconi and his group of companies take action?

Most of Berlusconi's inner circle, like himself, holds conservative views, but even left-leaning associates (such as talk-show host Maurizio Costanzo) thought the creation of a leftist hegemony in Italy would be disastrous for the country. Berlusconi therefore decided to attempt to reorganize the anti-leftist forces, leaving open the question of what role he and his corporation should play.

At first, Berlusconi attempted to promote the creation of a new conservative bloc as an "outsider"—a bloc which would be headed by an individual like Mario Segni, who was almost the only prominent Christian Democrat member of Parliament to remain untouched by Clean Hands. A group of men from Berlusconi's marketing company began to search Italy for conservative candidates to run in the next parliamentary elections. The delegitimization of the old political order made it necessary to discover a

new type of candidate, one capable of winning in local, personalized elections. Berlusconi's representatives sought such people from among municipal leaders, merchants, industrialists, academics, intellectuals and athletes. Their two main criteria were the candidate's anti-leftist opinions and marketing potential. A lack of prior political involvement or reputation was regarded as advantageous.

Meanwhile, following the referendum that approved electoral reform, the collapse and disintegration of the old centrist parties accelerated. In the local elections of June 1993, the left scored overwhelming victories in most localities. It became more and more apparent that if action were not taken quickly to establish a new anti-leftist bloc, the left could anticipate a victory of unprecedented dimensions in the next round of municipal elections in November 1993, and in the general elections in early 1994.

But the hopes of creating a new conservative bloc in time for the next round of municipal elections were dashed. Most of the veteran centrists who had not lost all credibility with the electorate preferred to hook up with the left—purportedly to "exert a moderating influence," but actually to avoid the political death universally forecast for non-leftist candidates in the upcoming elections. Worst of all, Mario Segni, who many in the center-right had hoped would emerge as a unifying leader, proved to be a total disappointment. He lacked the decisiveness and clear thinking required to establish speedily a new anti-left front. For months, while the political clock continued to tick, Segni vacillated between joining with the left in order to "moderate" it, and establishing a new centrist alliance to run against it. In the end, neither goal was attained, and Segni wasted a tremendous opportunity for support.

The local elections of November 1993 continued the "crisis of the moderates." In the wake of the collapse of the traditional center only two non-leftist entities of significance remained: The Northern League, a regional party based on anti-government agitation (principally against high taxation) and the personality of its mercurial leader, Umberto Bossi; and the National Alliance, an offspring of the neo-Fascist party which had purport-

edly repudiated its past. Both were relatively small parties lacking a national political base and the legitimacy to constitute a significant alternative to the left. The election results were as expected: A major victory for the left in most cities. In some places, the collapse of the moderates was so great that the field was left open to two leftist candidates who ran against each other. The victory of the left in the general elections seemed assured.

A closer examination of the political situation, however, would have revealed that the Italians did not actually want to be ruled by the left. Despite the collapse of the center and the lack of a reasonable alternative, the majority of Italian voters still sought to vote for non-leftist candidates. This was why many did not vote at all in the local elections, and why anti-leftist candidates from small movements, even extreme and problematic ones, received an amazing degree of support. In important cities such as Rome, Naples and Trieste, the National Alliance candidates received more than forty percent of the votes, compared with only a few percent in the past, and in Venice and Genoa the Northern League candidates received similar support. Milan, Italy's industrial and commercial capital, awarded an overwhelming victory to a mediocre Northern League candidate, just to avoid electing the candidate of the left. A majority of Italians were not willing under any circumstances to cast their votes for the left, and a sizable portion of the electorate was even prepared to vote for extremist parties that would normally receive only a miniscule percentage of the vote, in order to avoid supporting the left.

Berlusconi studied the results and understood them better than anyone else in Italy. His instincts and his years of daily contact with the middle class convinced him that the Italians remained conservative and anti-leftist. He knew the Italian public would give considerable support to the anti-leftist parties in the coming general elections, but this was not sufficient: There remained many indecisive moderate voters who opposed the left but would not give their votes to extremist parties. However, these voters—many of whom had not gone to the polls in the local elections—would support a right-centrist candidate, if they were given the opportunity.

Thus, during the hot summer nights of 1993, Berlusconi began to consider a new idea that had been raised by several of his advisors: He himself should enter the political fray. This was a path replete with obstacles, especially for someone so totally involved in the management of his corporation. But it also provided a great opportunity, and Berlusconi had always been enthusiastic over the prospect of new conquests. His closest business associate, Confalonieri, describes what was possibly the decisive period in Berlusconi's thinking, when Berlusconi "would watch political debates on all twenty or thirty television screens in [his villa in] Arcore, and he would say to me: 'There is no one, no one.'"[22]

As the thought of entering politics as a national leader turned into a decision, Berlusconi underwent a transformation. He burned all bridges to the past, abandoning the relationships he had until then maintained with the old political guard. In the Saturday meeting of September 25, 1993, he confessed to those present: "I will speak frankly to you: I was the slave of the parties for fourteen years [since his entry into the media world], but now I can no longer bear telephone calls of a certain type."[23]

Berlusconi finally entered the fray between the two rounds of the November local elections, when he answered a question regarding the results of the first round by declaring: "If I were voting in Rome, I would give my vote to [Gianfranco] Fini"—the leader of the National Alliance. This declaration immediately achieved two results: First, it signaled to Fini (as Berlusconi later would to Northern League leader Bossi as well) that Berlusconi was interested in a broad-based anti-leftist political front, which could include extreme parties such as the National Alliance and the Northern League within a more moderate framework. At the same time, Berlusconi apprised the Italian electorate of his goal of creating an alliance legitimate enough to earn the support of moderate centrists, which would have a real chance of victory.

This declaration resulted in scathing attacks against Berlusconi by the leftist media in Italy—aped by the international media—in an attempt to portray him as a Fascist. He appeared in cartoons in leftist Italian newspa-

pers in a Fascist uniform, and the Communist newspaper *Il Manifesto* labeled him "The Black Knight"—an allusion to Mussolini's Blackshirts. The left's hatred of Berlusconi reached such depths that the international media even spuriously accused him of anti-Semitism (within Italy, not even his enemies would risk making such a ludicrous claim). This charge was especially preposterous in light of the fact that Berlusconi's media group was consistently the most pro-Israeli and pro-Jewish in Italy, and many of its leading executives, such as his media advisor, Enrico Mentana, or his deputy at the time, Clemente Mimun, are Jews or are of Jewish origin. However, the media was unable to unearth any deed or statement by Berlusconi that could be interpreted as anti-Semitic or even anti-Israeli. Indeed, several statements and actions proved the opposite. Berlusconi's record is all the more remarkable because the traditional political and intellectual leadership of Italy, whether leftist or Catholic, is typically anti-Israel and at times even anti-Semitic.

Responding to these salvos against him, Berlusconi issued an adamant declaration that not only would he not recant, but he henceforth intended to play an active role in Italian politics. This announcement delineated the basis of his political program:

> The situation in our country is obvious to all, and the citizens understand it better than many commentators. A leftist alliance to take control of the country is forming ... around the former Communist Party. Many decent Italians, myself included, do not trust this alliance. At present, this leftist alliance around the forces and machinery of the former Communists, based on their programs, their people and their values, appears as a challenge to reason and a provocation against liberal economics and the market....
>
> In contrast, on the side of the spectrum which extends from the center rightward, there are various disunited political elements at play. Their political fate, if the situation does not change, will be to find themselves a minority in Parliament—that is, to lose. In a serious democracy, which is open to the possibility of changes in government, it is inconceivable that only one end of the political spectrum should organize to compete for victory. In a civilized country, someone who does not trust the programs,

values and people presented by the left—which is controlled by leaders with a Communist tradition—has the right to be properly represented in Parliament and to compete for victory....

My position, as an entrepreneur and as a citizen, is therefore necessary and very clear: I urge the scattered forces in the moderate camp to organize together.... Each will retain its independence, but that same democracy which enables changes of government requires disparate entities to form coalitions together. Otherwise, it is a joke.[24]

VII. A Patchwork Army

If men were good, this would not be a good precept, but since they are wicked and will not keep faith with you, you are not bound to keep faith with them.

The Prince, ch. 18

Despite Berlusconi's household name, organizational infrastructure, media outlets and political ties, his election bid still seemed to be a long shot at the end of 1993. Virtually no one believed he would be capable of running a successful campaign in the less than one hundred days remaining until the general elections in March 1994.

As was his wont, however, Berlusconi embarked on this task with fierce determination and tremendous faith in himself, designing most of the elements of his campaign on his own. He produced a simple and easily understood campaign ad, which was repeated incessantly; he wrote the words to his movement's campaign song—also simple and easy to understand; and he decided on a clear and simple message as his statement to the voters: That the rise to power of the left would be disastrous for Italy, since it would try to implement economic, social and cultural ideas which had proven

to be abysmal failures elsewhere. Consequently, anyone who regarded himself as committed to traditional values and a free market would have to support Berlusconi's center-right coalition.

Berlusconi also succeeded in creating, almost *ex nihilo*, a broad conservative political bloc. He founded a moderate center-right party, Forza Italia (literally, "The Italian Force"; in practice, this is a cheer for the national soccer team and means something like "Go, Italy!"), which attracted the urban middle class, the self-employed, moderate conservatives, those with roots in the classical liberal tradition, and admirers of Berlusconi personally.

However, this was still not sufficient, since under the new regional elections system, the votes received by each individual party count for nothing unless its bloc wins the district. Berlusconi, therefore, had to forge an almost impossible electoral coalition with the Northern League and the National Alliance—who were each willing to join with him, but not with each other, as the League's federalistic tendencies clashed with the Alliance's extreme nationalism. Berlusconi solved this problem by creating a joint ticket with the Northern League in the north and a parallel merger with the National Alliance in the south. This "Polo della Liberta e del Buongoverno" therefore consisted of different slates in different regions, but it was sold to the voters as a single movement.

Berlusconi was also supported by other groups prepared to run with him but not with each other, such as the Radicals—a small group which nevertheless enjoyed much prestige in Italy due to a number of referenda it initiated and passed against all odds. The Radicals advocated extreme economic and social libertarianism, which enabled Berlusconi to present a lively and risqué element that appealed to younger voters who would otherwise have cast their ballots for the left. The coalition also included a group of conservative Christian Democrats untainted by the scandals, who had left their party to found the Christian Democrat Center. This attracted conservative Catholic voters who opposed the liberal and secular Radicals.

In short, the coalition represented a mix of all the various trends in the Italian conservative tradition: The nationalist right (the Alliance), moderate conservatism and economic liberalism (Forza Italia), decentralization and

the defense of local traditions (the Northern League), the Catholic tradition (the Christian Democrat Center), and the defense of individual liberties (the Radicals).

Berlusconi prodded the conservative electorate from its slumber with incessant attacks on the danger a leftist victory would pose to the taxpayer. He concentrated on a simple message to the voter: Do you trust the left? Are the "ex-Communists" really *ex*-Communists? And the new conservative front proved to be exactly what Italians had wanted but could not find until then. The masses streamed to it, leaving the left stunned by the speed and scope of the phenomenon.

The results of the 1994 elections speak for themselves. The Polo della Liberta e del Buongoverno garnered about fifty percent of the seats in both houses of Parliament. The remains of the old centrist bloc headed by Segni won less than fifteen percent, and the leftist bloc received slightly more than thirty-five percent. The "party that wasn't" had scored an overwhelming victory.[25]

Soon after the elections, however, the cost of this hasty assembly of a new ruling bloc came to light. The coalition partners were extremely diverse, and relations among them were far from stable. The conservative bloc had been set in motion like a wheelbarrow, thanks to the push and balance provided by Berlusconi. But a wheelbarrow at rest is unstable. The new government quickly revealed itself to be a motley crew, derided as an *Armata Brancaleone* ("the army of Brancaleone")—a patchwork army comprised of whatever came to hand.[26]

Berlusconi himself was besieged by investigations of his past and his companies. The government's death blow, however, was dealt by Bossi, the leader of the Northern League, who decided to leave the coalition in order to embark on a new propaganda stunt: The call for secession of the north from the rest of Italy. When Berlusconi finally realized that Bossi was about to betray him and deprive the ruling coalition of the Northern League's support, it was already too late—the Berlusconi government fell, less than a year after its establishment.

Berlusconi had reason to expect that the new elections which he demanded would bring him renewed victory. But in smoke-filled back rooms, a new alliance was taking shape, with the sole purpose of preventing him from retaking the reins of power.

VIII. Strong Forces

> *It is much safer to be feared than loved if one of the two has to be wanting.*
>
> *The Prince*, ch. 17

Berlusconi's rise to power had worried many diverse political groups, and over the course of 1995 they found the basis for a common front in their shared desire to stop him. The left realized that Berlusconi could not win the elections on his own. The PDS therefore decided to divorce itself from the extreme left and to join instead with the anti-Berlusconi forces of the old center, with the aim of creating an electorally viable center-left bloc. This alliance was formed by the remnants of the old centrist parties: The PPI (a splinter of the Christian Democratic party); Segni's group; fragments of the Socialist, Social Democrat and Republican parties; and followers of the technocrat Lamberto Dini, a member of Berlusconi's cabinet who was appointed prime minister of the transitional government after Berlusconi's coalition collapsed.

The political base of each of these groups was small and growing smaller. Their real power lay rather in their role as mouthpieces for the key players in Italy's business world, who traditionally exercise decisive behind-the-scenes influence over political matters in the country. The economic elite's ability to act in a unified and decisive manner to defend its interests, while maintaining relative anonymity and avoiding dependency on any specific government or ideology, has won it the nickname of the "Strong Forces" (*Poteri Forti*): Like the force of gravity, they are unseen but wield great power.

The Strong Forces maintain an extensive network of connections and interlocking holdings in hundreds of companies, corporations and banks, including partnerships and excellent connections with the large government corporations, whose directors are often themselves protégés of the Strong Forces. All these elements provide continual mutual support and aid when needed, in a manner which overt economic interest would not allow. The network is based on extensive family and personal ties as well as business connections, and is therefore more durable than any fleeting political alliance.

The collapse of the Christian Democrats in the early 1990s triggered a panic among the Strong Forces, who feared the specter of a triumphant left. They supported Berlusconi in the 1994 elections, but with strong reservations. The Strong Forces do not like Berlusconi, since he has always been independent of their network of mutual ties and the network of government aid and corruption that developed under the Christian Democrats. While the rest of the economic elite sought the warm embrace of government and a public consensus granting them hegemony over the economy, Berlusconi sought to create new economic opportunities and compete on the open market.

In addition, many of the Strong Forces' companies were in serious economic straits in the mid-1990s, and they were desperate for a continuation of government aid, either direct (subsidies) or indirect (customs duties on imports). For this they could not rely upon Berlusconi, whose company had consistently refused government aid; moreover, his camp's championship of the free market threatened to undermine the cozy triangle of the business elite, government corporations and government aid. Berlusconi's continued rule would have meant increased market competition and the elimination of heavy government support for their network, a scenario they were determined to prevent. Thus the day after the 1994 elections, the Strong Forces began to take measures to undermine the Berlusconi government and torpedo its economic policy. And when the government fell, the Strong Forces were the prime mover behind Dini's appointment as head of the transi-

tional government. They believed it would be possible to reach an understanding with a cowed and beaten left after the debacle it had suffered in 1994.

Under the leadership of the Fiat corporation and its president, Cesare Romiti, the Strong Forces—whose heads had previously avoided the political limelight—openly sought to create a center-left ruling bloc committed to continuing the government handouts and financial protection instituted by the Christian Democrats.[27] Such a bloc would be subservient to the Strong Forces, who could dissolve it at any time via the withdrawal of their loyalists in the PPI and other parties if government policy were to veer to the left. Representatives of the old center and the Strong Forces therefore presented the PDS with a clear set of conditions: First, despite the fact that the left had greater electoral strength, the political alliance would be constructed on the basis of parity—half to the old center and half to the left. Second, the PDS would distance itself from the far left, and finally, the new alliance's candidate for prime minister would be a man from the center: Romano Prodi, a bespectacled bureaucrat of the old Christian Democrat school. As director of a holding company for government-owned corporations, Prodi was a favorite partner of the Strong Forces in sweetheart deals, and his bumbling appearance ensured that he would not arouse the suspicions of any Italian.

The PDS agreed to these terms, and a center-left political bloc named *Ulivo* (Olive) was formed, headed by Prodi. The Olive bloc encouraged Bossi and the Northern League to run by themselves, thereby splitting the conservative electorate. It also courted the votes of the extreme left-wing Refounded Communist (*Rifondazione Comunista*) party, which were essential for the bloc's victory at the polls. Although the Communists remained outside the Olive bloc and would not be invited into any Olive government, an indirect voting agreement was reached to enable Communist supporters to cast their votes for Olive bloc candidates without the need for a direct political pact.

Moreover, there were ongoing attempts throughout this period—though without any real success to date—to implicate Berlusconi in new scandals emerging from Clean Hands. About three hundred police investigations have so far been conducted against Berlusconi's companies, though virtually all have proved fruitless.[28] The suspicion that these investigations were politically motivated—Fiat, for example, was subjected to only a few investigations, despite having confessed to and been convicted of complicity in the network of political payoffs—meant that most Italians continued to regard Berlusconi as a business and political leader worthy of esteem. However, the investigations combined with the pressure exerted by the new center-left alliance to place him in a difficult position in advance of the June 1996 general elections.

The Olive bloc and the Strong Forces succeeded in isolating and weakening Berlusconi and the conservative bloc to a considerable degree. The Northern League ran independently; Prime Minister Dini suddenly discovered political aspirations of his own and established a small centrist party that joined the Olive bloc—which did not prevent him from retaining his position during the election campaign and using all the resources of the government to advance his candidacy; the Milan investigative teams continued to promise revelations of Berlusconi's corruption (which never came to pass); and the conservative bloc suffered an additional crisis when the extreme, neo-Fascist faction of the National Alliance defected and established the *Fiamma* (Flame) party, which ran independently in the elections.

Despite the mounting pressures, Berlusconi refused to participate in a cozy national-unity government with the left. Once again he offered his candidacy, confident that a majority of Italians, as always, would not want a leftist government—not even one which billed itself as "center-left" and was led by a harmless bureaucrat such as Prodi.

Berlusconi correctly gauged the desire of the majority of Italians, but it did not prevent his loss at the polls on April 21, 1996. The Olive bloc's divide-and-conquer tactics were successful: As in Israel in 1992, a divided right lost even though it received more votes than the left.

Yet the 1996 elections nevertheless demonstrated the power of Italy's conservative tradition. Even with the incessant deprecation of Berlusconi and the new center-left alliance, most Italians preferred conservative candidates.[29] And a look at the actual votes cast reveals that the Italian left weakened considerably from 1994 to 1996, especially among the young[30]—a fact that speaks volumes about the future of the Italian conservative political tradition. The rumors of its death appear to be premature—it is alive and well, and its future seems assured.

IX. The Conservative Camp

> *Furthermore, [the prince] should encourage his citizens and allow them to go about their affairs in tranquility whether in commerce, agriculture or any other kind of activity, so that no one shall refrain from improving his possessions for fear lest they be taken from him, and no other shall hesitate to engage in commerce for fear of taxes. A prince should rather reward such citizens and any others who may in any way enrich his state or his city.*
>
> *The Prince*, ch. 21

At present, Italy's first center-left government appears extremely fragile, due to increasing bickering among its component factions, and the long-term prognosis is not optimistic.

And Berlusconi? After the 1996 defeat, he went into seclusion for a time, and many who preferred to see him depart from politics argued that he was unwilling to be, and incapable of being, a long-term player in the ongoing political game. But Berlusconi, at sixty years of age, was still at the peak of his strength and ambitions. He was still the unchallenged leader of the conservative camp, as there was no one who could (or would) replace him as head of the center-right political bloc.[31]

At the end of his brief seclusion, Berlusconi gave those who had asked whether he was still dedicated to and capable of bringing about a conservative victory an unequivocal answer: Yes, he had decided to devote himself totally to politics, and Yes, he believed his personality and views were what was needed to lead the conservative camp to victory. In a letter which he recently published, he wrote:

> An evil wind blows over Italy at present: A spirit of regimentation, an illiberal spirit, a spirit of conformism, a spirit of *dirigisme* and self-righteousness. The battle, or war, that must be waged to restore the rule of law, maintain the guaranteed rights of the individual, defend democracy and ensure liberties will find me in the first rank, at its head.[32]

The main criticisms of Berlusconi have concerned his ongoing management of his corporation after his entry into politics. Berlusconi's critics justly regarded this as a dangerous mix of business and politics. Berlusconi's response was that even though he had resigned from all his official positions (except the presidency of the Milan soccer club) upon entering the political arena, he could not so easily divorce himself from the business he had built with his own two hands, and which he still owned. Today, two years after his entry into politics, Berlusconi still owns his group of companies and is involved in their management. However, he is currently completing the process of transferring ownership and management of these companies, partly to members of his family, and the rest by sale to the public.

Berlusconi stresses that his aspirations do not consist only of promoting himself as a leader. He abandoned his beloved business life in order to leave behind a permanent, well-established conservative political bloc that will constitute the natural ruling power in Italy. Beyond the alliance with additional right and center elements, he seeks to establish the Forza Italia party as the country's main political power—one which will expressly represent the Italian conservative tradition as he defines it: The preservation of traditional liberties, the economic freedom of classical liberalism, and Catholic social and cultural conservatism.[33]

Berlusconi views the split in the conservative camp between the liberals and the Catholics as a major source of the bloc's problems in the past. The collapse of the old liberal conservative regime and the subsequent rise of Fascism were due to that regime's neglect of its Catholic component, and the collapse of Christian Democrat rule in the late 1980s was caused in part by their abandonment of the liberal free market idea. Berlusconi therefore sees his party as heir to all the different streams of Italian conservatism, as all have contributed to its ideological, cultural and historical roots. He asserts that though the annals of Forza Italia and the center-right alliance span only three years, they share an "intellectual heritage that comes from afar and has deep roots: The principles and values that inspire us are, in effect, those of all the great Western democracies. They spring from the various fertile cultural traditions ... of Western and Italian history." Among these principles, Berlusconi cites the democratic-liberal tradition, the primacy of the individual and the citizen, the market economy, the freedom to express the aspirations of society, and even Karl Popper's "open society," all in opposition to the leftist tradition of collective totalitarian ideologies and the subjugation of the citizen to state and party. Moreover, he expressly notes four trends in Italy's conservative heritage: Federalism—i.e., decentralization and the protection of local interests; the European classical-liberal economic tradition; a hawkish and pro-NATO foreign policy; and the nation's Catholic heritage.[34]

The contemporary observer cannot help but be struck by the Italian political and intellectual elite's lack of faith in the ability of Italian conservatism to rejuvenate itself, even as late as 1993. The deprecation of any self-avowedly rightist party, and the more than four decades in which the right's intellectual illegitimacy had compelled most of its members to call themselves centrist, gave birth to an overly cautious conservatism that failed to present an intellectual alternative to the left, and settled instead for just keeping it from political power. In the early 1990s, the great majority of even right-wing intellectuals held little hope for center-right politics in Italy. This led many leading anti-leftists to oppose Berlusconi's entry into poli-

tics: They felt that even such a moderate rightist candidate stood no chance of acceptance by the public, and they therefore preferred Mario Segni, from the old, drab but safe center.

Berlusconi, on the other hand, sensed in the late 1980s that increasing numbers of Italian businessmen and professionals sought to shed the old stigmas and find a man who would represent their generation's conservative ideal. Berlusconi felt that he was the leader the Italians were waiting for: The one who would free them from increasing state taxation and economic intervention, from leftist cultural hegemony and from the threat of an unrestrained leftist government.[35]

Segni and many others fell victim to their own lack of faith in the possibility of a center-right alignment in Italian politics. Although Italy's conservative tradition had never allowed the left to take power on its own, almost everyone misread the depth and stability of Italian conservatism. The Italians, it turns out, were waiting for a moderate, overtly rightist candidate to whom they could award their votes.

Italy's intensely conservative tradition has come to the fore time after time in periods of tension and social crisis, when the threat of revolution and the left's rise to power hovers in the air. Italian society has proven that it can handle far-reaching changes, as long as basic social conditions remain intact. Throughout the last century of Italian politics, encompassing two world wars, a dictatorship and an unstable, corrupt democracy, the country's success has lain not in its form of government but in the social and cultural institutions that protected it from the most nefarious consequences of its governments. Italy's cultural traditions and institutions have enabled it to weather severe governmental storms of the type which lead to the downfall of many other nations.

Thus Italy is not merely a geographic entity, but a cultural ethos from which other nations can profitably learn: The societal richness and strength which comes from allowing diversity and decentralization, the preservation of the economic and social freedoms of the individual, and the nurturing of cultural and religious traditions can enable a nation to survive difficult periods and, even more importantly, do so with a minimum of bloodshed. And

a well-rooted conservative tradition, coupled with a political camp that protects that tradition, is crucial for the advancement and preservation of such a national culture.

As for Silvio Berlusconi, his popularity and ascent to power are a phenomenon no less cultural than political, and we may therefore expect it to continue. Like the colorful Renaissance military personae to whom he is compared, Berlusconi's personality and abilities motivate him to set personal and political goals far more ambitious than those of ordinary politicians. Berlusconi's strengths, however, became shortcomings in the political arena: His initial success fell victim to his own misreading of the political realities. Berlusconi was a lion but not a fox, and he charged ahead, oblivious to the traps that had been set in his path. His mistakes were the product of political inexperience and excessive optimism. He took the citadel of Italian government by storm, but time after time fell into the traps his opponents set for him.

However, Berlusconi continues to attract the support of a considerable portion of the Italian public, due to the very qualities that hurt him most in his first two attempts to gain power: His boundless self-confidence, optimism and ambition. It now remains to be seen whether Silvio Berlusconi has learned from his experience, and whether he will be able to hone his abilities and overcome his deficiencies to become the new prince sought by so many Italians.

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Notes

1. Quotations from *The Prince* throughout this article are the author's translation.

2. Like their Catholicism, which due to Italy's extreme proximity to the religion's centers and history never proved to be overly foreboding to the Italians (unlike other Catholic nations), being "left" (or "right") in Italy has always been more a matter of communal affiliation and a social context than an ideology, a matter of symbols and ceremonies. The Italians have always remained fundamentally loyal to the practices and patterns of their society and prefer caution and common sense in the determination of their future—and this is the essence of conservatism.

An interesting detail of the Italian uniqueness in this respect is that, unlike all other Western countries, the Italians never experienced a "constitutional break" in which the sovereign governmental continuity was interrupted by an act of revolution or rebellion against the sovereign: The Italian state was established by means of an orderly constitutional process, so that the rise and fall of Fascism and the transition to democracy did not entail a revolutionary period. This is in contrast not only to states such as Russia, France or Spain, which underwent a revolution, but also to the breaking of the constitutional continuity by Oliver Cromwell and his soldiers in England and by George Washington and the American rebels against their legitimate ruler, the King of England.

3. As was described, for example, in 1849 by the Austrian Prime Minister Metternich. William Murray, *The Last Italian* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1991), p. xv.

4. There are many examples of such a sentiment in the works of authors and poets such as Dante Alighieri, Francesco Petrarca, Niccolo Machiavelli and many others.

5. In the late Middle Ages, Italy was an exceptional arena for the search for governmental arrangements, both practical and theoretical, to a degree not known since the time of ancient Greece, if at all. Such a situation developed, in great measure, from the tradition of balances between rulers and subjects, with the authorities required to acknowledge the power of contexts of social identity (guilds or religious associations) or of local identity (neighborhood associations, urban institutions), in comparison with the weakness and relatively limited capability of the central government to impose its will by force. Power in Italy never resulted in political-social centralization and homogeneity, but rather maintained special-interest groups within the general framework: The nobility alongside the artisans' guilds, governmental administration alongside the rights of the Church, general laws versus local rights.

Thus was created a political culture with a relatively large degree of social, cultural and political flexibility, within a common geographic, religious (i.e., Catholic) and cultural (the strong Roman influence and the Italian languages which derived from it) context, with common rules, despite the existing differences.

6. Different versions of such a balance of power also existed in additional city-states, such as the republic in fifteenth-century Florence which was based on elected institutions and the periodic replacement of functionaries, although decisive power in the city was held by Cosimo de Medici (and by other members of the de Medici family in their turn), even though he held no governmental title and presented himself merely as a private banker to whom affairs of state were of no concern.

7. As can be seen from the fact that while the Jews were expelled from England, France, Spain and Portugal, in the name of the Catholic Church, similar action was not taken in Rome (or in the rest of Italy), the capital of the Church.

8. For example, Monte dei Paschi di Siena, which has been active as a bank since 1472, and which had functioned for centuries prior to that as an institution for the management of capital.

9. Thus, for example, the Italians enjoyed an amazing selection and quality of food, such as the largest number (more than five hundred) of cheeses in the world, which developed and are maintained on the basis of local traditions, at times uninterrupted for more than a millennium (e.g., Parmesan cheese from the area around the city of Parma). The French (who rank second in the world) have only about three hundred types of cheese; at one time, two hundred years ago, the French boasted more than six hundred varieties, but the French Revolution and its consequences harmed this tradition, and the French lost close to half of their cheese-making tradition, like many other intellectual and material assets which the Italians preserved, and still maintain to the present.

10. Cesare Borgia and Francesco Sforza, two prince-generals whom Machiavelli regarded as possessing the potential to become the leaders of all Italy, did not realize the hopes which were placed in them; similarly, Lorenzo ("the Magnificent") de Medici, the ruler of Florence to whom *The Prince* was addressed, succeeded for only a limited time in restoring peace and the internal balance in Italy but was unwilling to become, or incapable of becoming, the leader of a new Italian order.

11. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. 26.

12. The classical liberal regimes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were actually conservative in current terms. They favored a balanced regime with an aristocratic political elite, a capitalist economic system, and a conservative and elitist social outlook. They were called "liberal" because they championed parliamentary democracy and the preservation of liberties against the reactionary elements on the right and the revolutionaries on the left. In other words, classical liberalism was the opposite of the extreme democratic and radical views which are presently defined

as "liberal." After World War I and the entry into politics of the masses, the classical liberal regimes collapsed, to be replaced by dictatorships or the parties of the masses. Classical liberalism is identified, beginning with this period, with democratic conservatism and the conservative parties in the West.

13. The only problem of this regime was its relationship with the Church. The unification of Italy led to the elimination of the papal state. The Pope responded by going into seclusion in the Vatican, refusing to recognize the Italian state, and issuing an order to the faithful not to participate in the latter's political life. The young state, however, overcame this problem with relative ease. Despite the issuance of mutual threats from time to time and the declarations of a *Kulturkampf*, the actual relations between the state and the Church were quite cordial in this period. Italy is almost totally Catholic, and this identity is so profoundly imprinted in Italian culture that the two cannot be separated. Thus even the members of the elites, who were not characterized by a distinctly religious identity, and who did not hesitate to send their soldiers to conquer the papal state, always remained part of the Catholic culture, and never made a serious attempt to undermine the Catholic identity of the country or even the Church's influence within Italian society. The Italians are too intimate with Catholicism and the churches to be in awe of them. The church in Italy as always been more of a community center, marketplace, theater and school than an exalted and sequestered house of prayer. The Catholic God in Italy is not a judge with a severe countenance but rather an uncle with his sleeves rolled up, who winks at time and administers a complex system that sometimes clashes gears, but still functions.

14. Thus what Mussolini termed the "Fascist revolution" left intact the monarchy, the royal army and the majority of the social and economic elites, on both the national and local levels, and even reached a new and more comprehensive understanding with the Catholic Church. The "totalitarian" Fascists did not touch most of the organizations of the Italian civil society; in other instances, the mere changing of a name satisfied the Fascist regime. The "dictatorship" of the Blackshirts allowed a surprising degree of criticism to be heard, and even its system of repression was relatively moderate: Political punitive measures consisted mainly of pouring fish oil over its opponents; the imprisonment of only several thousand individuals, with some sent to internment camps (on islands in the Mediterranean— not exactly Siberia); and the number of executions during the twenty-year Fascist rule was, to the best of our knowledge, considerably less than 1,000. Thus Italian Fascism cannot be equated with the slaughter of millions by Stalin and the horrors of the Nazis. The means employed by the Fascist regime for internal repression were moderate even in comparison with the upheavals and bloody internal clashes that took place in most of the democracies during this period. This was primarily a consequence of the fact that Fascism and Mussolini did not impose their unbridled rule over the country, but were always forced to contend with independent sources of power within the society, which limited the actions of the regime and constituted a moderating influence upon it.

15. To a great extent, as an attempt to find a scapegoat: The left generally wanted the leftist trend within Fascism and Nazism to be forgotten; the Communists sought to bury the fact that, upon orders from Moscow, they did not fight the Nazis until 1941 (and in a not inconsiderable number of places even collaborated with them); very many who had been collaborators or even pro-Nazi functionaries or protégés attempted to clear their consciences and their past by their "joining" (in many cases, after the fact) the partisan struggle—whose wartime ranks suddenly swelled ten times over after the war.

16. *L'Europeo*, January 2, 1994, p. 16.

17. The Italian Mafia enjoys excellent public relations throughout the world. It is depicted as an organization of awesome power, a sort of state within the state. The reality, however, is much more prosaic. It is only one of several Italian crime organizations (such as the Camorra in Naples and the N'dragheta in the Calabria region), whose influence is concentrated mainly in certain regions of Sicily. Its influence or murderousness is less than that of similar crime organizations (in Russia or Colombia, for example), and even the influence of organized crime in America is greater and more significant than that of its Italian counterpart. Like everything in Italy, the Mafia is constructed of layers of local tradition and relationships, and therefore was, and will remain, a powerful force only in certain regions and circumstances; when it attempted to go beyond these conditions in the late 1980s, a period in which the state appeared especially weak, the crime organization was struck a major blow. Its heads were sent to prison, and the entire organization was greatly weakened.

18. Federico Orlando, *Il Sabato Andavamo Ad Arcore* (Bergamo: Larus, 1995), p. 200.

19. Murray, *The Last Italian*, p. xiv.

20. *Panorama*, September 5, 1996, p. 6.

21. Pino Corrias, et al., *1994 Colpo Grosso* (Milan: Baldini and Castoldi, 1994), p. 67.

22. Corrias et al., *1994 Colpo Grosso*, p. 94.

23. Orlando, *Il Sabato*, p. 130.

24. Orlando, *Il Sabato*, pp. 140-141.

25. The extent and depth of the victory caused general amazement, because Berlusconi—like Reagan and Thatcher—even succeeded in attracting voters traditionally identified with the left. Representatives of his party were elected to Parliament from districts such as the blue-collar Mirafiori quarter in Turin, which is a historic bastion of the unions and Communists. The reason for this was summed up in the response of a local worker who was asked why he voted for Berlusconi. He replied that in order to earn a living, he works on the side pasting wallpaper

after finishing his regular factory shift. This work, he said, is worthwhile only as long as the government does not require him to be licensed. "If the left were to win, the familiar licensing requirements would be the winners," he said. "Berlusconi promised ... not to deprive me of the possibility of continuing to put up wallpaper. That's why I voted for him." Corrias et al., *1994 Colpo Grosso*, pp. 195-196.

26. The term has its origins in the 1966 movie by Mario Monicelli with the same name.

27. Susanna Agnelli, a member of the family that owns Fiat, served as foreign minister in the Dini government. Her brother Umberto is a former Christian Democrat parliamentarian, and their oldest brother Giovanni, the head of the Agnelli family, is a senator-for-life and a powerful force in Italy. Giovanni once acknowledged his close relationship with the old political elite by saying: "In a certain sense, we grew together, and I know them all." Murray, *The Last Italian*, p. 193. Giovanni, however, was too smart and experienced to put all his eggs in a single basket. He provided behind-the-scenes support for Romiti and his sister in their efforts to form the new center-left alliance, but he publicly distanced himself from these steps, and took care to maintain good personal relations with Berlusconi.

28. The only actual charges brought against Berlusconi do not relate to political corruption, but to another matter entirely. It transpired that Berlusconi's company—like every other Italian corporation—had been forced for many years to pay income tax officials to prevent harassing investigations that the latter threatened to conduct. Berlusconi, like the others, does not deny the facts, but says this was not bribery. Rather, it was the consequence of a reality in which tax officials engaged in systematic extortion of medium-sized and large corporations, threatening to initiate incessant tax investigations which would undermine companies' business activity if they did not receive their protection money. In practice, all the corporations so threatened, from Armani and Fiat to Berlusconi's companies, made such payments. According to Berlusconi, this constituted extortion by representatives of the state, not acts of corruption by the businessmen themselves. It is noteworthy that no charges have been brought against the other corporations involved in this affair, such as Fiat.

29. In the elections to Parliament, the center-right bloc headed by Berlusconi received 44 percent of the votes, and the Olive bloc, 35 percent. This apparently was a smashing victory by the right, but, as was mentioned, the Olive bloc had made an electoral agreement with the Refounded Communists, who had received 8.6 percent of the vote, so that the extreme-left–moderate-left–old-center bloc succeeded in amassing 43.4 percent of the vote which, in a better territorial dispersion than that of its rival, provided the Olive bloc and the Refounded Communists with a small majority in Parliament. This was similar to the election results in Israel in 1992, when the right, which received more votes, lost to a better-organized and more united left.

Although Berlusconi had received more votes than the left, he nevertheless found himself with considerably fewer representatives in Parliament, mainly because the two problematic non-leftist parties, the Northern League and the Flame, ran separately this time, in contrast with the united front of 1994. The League garnered about ten percent of the vote (concentrated mainly in certain districts in the north and northeast of the country), and the Flame slightly more than one percent (mainly in certain regions in the center and the south). In both instances, the votes given to these parties ensured the defeat of the candidates fielded by the right in dozens of voting districts in which the election was decided by only a few hundred votes.

30. If the conservative bloc of 1994 is compared with the left and the old center in this election, the formal balance between the political blocs remained basically unchanged also in 1996, but not the percentages of the vote (the small increment brought by the former PPI voters who shifted to the right is balanced by Dini's supporters who moved to the left and joined the Olive bloc). Consequently, the election results of 1996 significantly express the truly difficult situation of the Italian left, and the strengthening of the conservative tradition in this country.

All the parties of the center-right bloc of 1994 together (including the League and the Flame) received more than fifty-five percent of the votes in the 1996 parliamentary elections, which was a significant rise in comparison with the approximately fifty percent they had garnered in the preceding elections. In contrast, the left and the old center together, despite all the government aid, the support of the Strong Forces, and the presumed moderation and reorganization within the context of the Olive bloc, succeeded in 1996 in gathering less than forty-five percent of the vote (as compared with almost fifty percent two years earlier). If this is the best result that the Italian left has managed to attain, while disguised as the center, and aided by difficulties and division within the right, the picture that emerges is unequivocal: The clear preference of the overwhelming majority of Italians is still conservative, and if no dramatic change in this inclination occurs in the coming years, the left-center will have extremely grave prospects in the coming elections.

Furthermore, it should be recalled that these were the results of the elections to the lower house of the Italian Parliament. The results of the voting for the upper house, the Senate, were more favorable to the left because only voters twenty-five years of age or older were eligible to participate in the latter, while the minimum voting age for elections to the lower house is eighteen. The significance of this distinction is clear: The left and the old center enjoy greater support among "yesterday's" electorate (the adult and elderly), while the support for Berlusconi's center-right among the young is decisive, and much greater than his support among the population at large.

31. Especially suggested as a candidate to replace Berlusconi with good electoral prospects was the leader of the National Alliance, Gianfranco Fini. The latter is called by many "the Englishman from Bologna" (*Panorama*, September 23, 1994,

p. 42) because of his reserved style. He is the most popular politician in Italy today, enjoying much greater support than his party, which still suffers from an extremist and somewhat problematic image. It is difficult to determine if the metamorphosis of Fini and his associates from post-Fascism to a legitimate party of the right with "Gaullist" ideas (Fini's definition) is sincere and complete. The author of this essay was witness to an MSI rally in Milan in 1991, in which Fini's entrance was accompanied by the shouts of a (small) part of the crowd: "Duce! Duce!" accompanied by the Fascist salute. On the other hand, Fini seemed to disapprove (albeit not in a forceful manner) of this response at the rally. At the present time, the attempts by Fini and the top leadership of his party to gain influence and their ambition to gain power are much more characteristic than any longings for the actions or symbols of Fascism. This trend intensified after the departure of the Flame, which had gathered about itself most of those who yearn for the Blackshirts and the raised arm. This gave Fini and his party a sufficient sense of legitimacy to proclaim formally that they are no longer committed to the Fascist principles or past.

Time will tell regarding the degree to which Fini and the National Alliance have changed, but someone who within only a few years has brought his party from the status of a minor and despised political element to that of the third-largest party in the country and a senior partner in the governing coalition is obviously not a fool. He is well aware of the fact that his candidacy to head the center-right bloc is especially supported at present by those who hope that this will lead to the departure of the more moderate elements in the wake of hegemony by the extremist Fini. Fini, who is only in his early forties, and whose party's extremist past is still too fresh in people's memories, realizes that he must, and can, wait so that in the future he will have the opportunity to become the leader of the entire conservative camp.

32. *Panorama*, September 12, 1996, pp. 28-29.

33. *Panorama*, September 5, 1996, pp. 6-7.

34. *Panorama*, August 22, 1996, pp. 28-29.

35. Even Berlusconi himself, however, vacillated for quite some time before taking such a step. He was influenced by the popular belief that right-wing politics would be "inconceivable" in Italy and found it difficult to act against the opinion of almost every "thinking person." It was only the extent of support in Rome for the post-Fascist National Alliance which convinced Berlusconi that he was correct in thinking an accepted and moderate rightist candidate stood a good chance of winning in the general Italian elections. This led to his decision to openly declare, "I would give my vote to Fini," thereby crossing the Rubicon into the political fray. Orlando, *Il Sabato*, pp. 234-235.