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ABSTRACT

The Demise of the First Fascist Regime
and Italy's Transition to Democracy: 1943-1948

This paper deals with the Italian transition to democracy, identifying phases and thresholds from the ousting of Mussolini in July 1943 to the first parliamentary elections of April 1948.

From a comparative perspective, two elements acquire major explanatory importance. The first is the role played by existing institutions: the monarchy and the armed forces. Mussolini's failure to fully "fascistize" the State, together with the survival of the monarchy, allowed the king to dismiss the Duce just as he had been responsible for Mussolini's appointment to the position of prime minister twenty years earlier. Mussolini could not count on a bureaucratized Fascist Party or on the pro-monarchist military.

The second element is the role played by international events and actors both in the demise of the fascist regime and in the creation of a democratic one. In contrast with Franco's Spain, Mussolini's Italy had staked much of her prestige on a swift and successful military intervention in World War II. Apparent defeat therefore accelerated the crisis of the regime. At the same time, power was not seized by leftist forces (whose contributions in denying legitimacy to fascism and in fighting during the resistance against Nazi-fascism were great indeed) because of the international support given to conservative and moderate forces, first by Churchill and later by the Americans.

The paper analyzes in some detail the political struggle which ensued after Mussolini's ousting--a struggle characterized by the conservative and moderate forces' attempt to coalesce around the monarchy, the progressive forces' split on the issue, and the Communists' decision to postpone it until the end of the war severely weakened their camp. Moreover, Communist Secretary Togliatti's attempt to maintain a working alliance with the Christian Democrats was made at the expense of possible gains by northern workers and southern peasants. The pace and level of mobilization were increased only after the exclusion of the left from the government in May 1947. By then, however, the counter-mobilization of the moderates had already reached a level sufficient to guarantee them electoral victory in 1948.

Collaboration among all anti-fascist forces continued up to the enactment of the new constitution at the end of 1947 and laid the ground for a successful transition. The very fact that the left did not win the elections, but could find in a progressive constitution the legal means to pursue its strategy, represents the turning point of the Italian case. In the light of international constraints and circumstances, one might have expected a difficult transition had the moderates lost, and a more problematic outcome.

THE DEMISE OF THE FIRST FASCIST REGIME AND ITALY'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY: 1943-1948

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After almost 20 years of rule, Benito Mussolini was overthrown as leader of fascism and prime minister of Italy's government on July 25, 1943. The political framework of the Italian republic as we know it today was established in the following years, and was sanctioned in the fateful elections of April 18, 1948. For all practical purposes, those elections marked the end of the transition to democracy and the termination of any form of collaboration between the Christian Democrats and the Socialist-Communist coalition, and subsequent Italian political life has been dominated by the issue of whether and how open confrontation or renewed collaboration among those political forces should take place.

With the benefit of hindsight, many turning points and sharp breaks can be identified during that five-year period. While the transition from the authoritarian regime to a democratic republic was essentially completed by June 2, 1946, its overall political outcome had not yet been decided. To precisely understand the dynamics of the transition, therefore, attention must also be paid to the events following the instauration of the republic and the election of a Constituent Assembly, and to the results of the first legislative elections of April 1948. As we will see, those results were also the product of some of the same processes and conditions which were involved in the initial transition from fascism.

Fundamentally, there were four phases in the process of transition. The first, which started on July 25, 1943 and ended on September 8, 1943, involved the overthrow of fascism and the reversal of Italy's position in the war. The second phase, the resistance, dated from September 9, 1943 to April 25, 1945, the liberation of Italy. The third phase comprised the creation of the first civilian governments staffed by the parties which participated in the Resistance movement, the intensification of political conflicts and struggles, and the breakup of the tripartite ruling coalition composed of the Christian Democrats (DC), the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in May 1947. Finally, the fourth phase was characterized by the full impact of the Cold War on the Italian domestic situation leading to the polarization of political alignments and the formation of a Popular Front (Socialists and Communists) which was severely defeated in the April 1948 elections. Each phase is important for a full

understanding of the process of transition and also for revealing the nature both of the authoritarian regime which collapsed and of the democratic regime which was established.

The Demise of Fascism

In synthesis, the demise of fascism was the product of a vote taken by the Fascist Grand Council "calling for royal leadership and the rehabilitation of moribund state institutions."[1] This vote (by 19 out of 28 members) created the conditions under which the king could dismiss Mussolini as prime minister of Italy. Historically responsible for having appointed Mussolini in 1922, the king now assumed responsibility for his dismissal as well. No single institution opposed the king's action, and the immediate reaction of the population was one of enthusiasm accompanied by preoccupation--enthusiasm for the fall of fascism; preoccupation regarding the continuation of the war.

Many issues were raised by this bloodless breakdown of a 20-year-old regime and by the lack of organized reaction and opposition to it. The two most important issues are, of course, the nature of the regime (and its apparent weakness) and the determinants of its demise. The two are definitely related, and their analysis will yield the elements needed to explain the overall process of breakdown and to understand the subsequent transition to a democratic regime.

It has been correctly pointed out that the Fascists' totalitarian attempt to integrate Italian society into the state did not succeed.[2] Italian fascism can be characterized as a failed totalitarian experiment which allowed the persistence of that degree of limited pluralism which has been singled out as an important characteristic of authoritarian regimes.[3] The presence of the monarchy created what Mussolini called "the tragedy of the diarchy," that is, the impossibility for the Duce to completely "fascistize" the State.[4] Limited pluralism manifested itself, on the one hand, in the existence of the monarchy and the preservation of its constitutional powers, the persistence of an army whose loyalty went to the king rather than to Mussolini or to fascism, and the continuity of a State apparatus already bureaucratic and authoritarian, but fragile and cumbersome; and, on the other hand, in the inability of fascism to create viable institutions of its own to replace or supersede the traditional institutions. The House of Corporations never really took hold (while the Royal Senate remained a respected body), and the National Fascist Party became more and more a bureaucratic organization, overstaffed and largely passive.[5] Ironically, the only body which could exercise real power and play an active role, the Fascist Grand Council,[6] was the one which took the initiative in the ousting of Mussolini and, consequently, in the demise of fascism (a connection which most of its members were well aware of).

Not even in civil society had fascism acquired hegemony. Landowners and industrialists enjoyed a free hand and, protected from the working class and its smashed organizations, made high profits both in peacetime and in wartime. Most important of all, through the Concordat signed by Mussolini and the Lateran Pacts, the Church was able to reacquire and to see its role in civil society legally sanctioned. While the Church

never became an anti-fascist institution, and in some instances was deeply compromised with the regime, it prevented fascism from acquiring full hegemony over the minds of many Italians.[7]

Does this mean that fascism never had the consent of the Italian population? On this point, the debate is still rampant and acrimonious. According to the very influential, but also very controversial, interpretation of Renzo De Felice, Mussolini and his regime did enjoy the consensual support of large social strata after the February 11, 1929, agreement with the Church, and probably until the creation of the Empire in May 1936, following the conquest of Abyssinia. The issue, of course, is whether that consent was a purely passive acquiescence to the existence of a regime which granted security and internal peace to most of its citizens, or whether it involved active support for the choices and policies made and implemented by that regime.[8]

In order to arrive at a balanced assessment of the quantity and quality of consent which fascism received, one cannot refrain from pointing to one historical fact. Despite the persistence of anti-fascist activities throughout the "ventennio," the great majority of the population "did not demonstrate a willingness to consider the regime as a mortal enemy which had to be overthrown at any cost or, even less, to run serious risks in order to achieve such a goal."[9] On the other hand, it is also true that fascism never engaged in massive mobilization efforts after its phase of initial consolidation, and therefore potential conflicts were largely avoided (with a few exceptions, such as a clash with the Church and Catholic associations in 1931).

Expressions of support became, as in other authoritarian regimes, fundamentally ritualistic and symbolic (such as "ocean-like mass meetings"), while oppositional activities never enjoyed widespread support. In a distorted way, Mussolini was aware of the underlying component of his consensus: "To speak the truth, I have not even been a dictator, because my power to command coincided perfectly with the will to obey of the Italian people."[10]

In short, fascism never enjoyed full control over the Italian political system and its members. It was unable and unwilling to destroy and reshape all political and bureaucratic institutions (there was no Gleichschaltung as in Nazi Germany), and therefore it was compelled to share power with the fundamentally monarchist State apparatus and with the Church. It was unsuccessful in creating its own institutions: e.g., the House of Corporations, the National Fascist Party, the Fascist Syndicates. It adroitly exploited a pervasive climate of authoritarianism in Europe and the imperfect democratization of the previous Italian regime, but it proved unable to build a large amount of support for its aims and goals. This said, however, one must be very cautious in concluding that fascism was consequently and certainly doomed. Indeed, the debate over the determinants of the fall of fascism is still quite lively and open, for good reasons.

In this debate, two extreme positions are easily identifiable. According to the first, the crisis which led to the demise of fascism was the product of personal and dynastic motivations, those of "patriotic" fascist members of the Grand Council and of the king and his close advisors. The crisis was the final attempt by the monarchy to dissociate its responsibilities from those of the regime and to save itself institutionally. According to the second position, the crisis was rather the product of political events, class contradictions, socio-economic problems, and clashes of interest. Here emphasis is placed on the changing orientations of major financial and industrial groups and on the March 1943 strikes in northern factories.[11]

While all of these elements were important as accelerators of the decision taken by the Grand Council and by the king, and were instrumental in shaping the further evolution of the transition, there is no doubt that "the cleavage between the regime and the people was the product of the war and its tragic failure."[12] The war and the invasion of Italy by the Allies acted as detonators of the internal contradictions and ideological and structural deficiencies of the regime. With them came the fundamental revelation that Mussolini did not represent the will of the Italian people in any way, and that fascist institutions were hollow and the penetration of the fascist "mentality" quite limited.

There is, however, one element which deserves additional consideration. The decision to overthrow Mussolini must be placed in the context of the dynamics of the war and the nature and evolution of Italo-German relationships. In particular, some attempts were made during the autumn and winter of 1942-1943 either to obtain better equipment and more resources from the Germans or to disengage Italy from the war altogether. When both options proved to be impossible, the conspirators became aware that Mussolini was <u>the</u> obstacle to a separate peace--hence the decision to get rid of him.

Two groups were working to achieve fundamentally the same goals. One group, representing the old pre-fascist political class, which the king contemptuously called the <u>revenants</u>, was led by Ivanoe Bonomi. The other was a group drawn from the fascist political class and given some cohesion and much strength by Dino Grandi, former minister of foreign affairs and speaker of the house. Both groups intended to achieve the same goals: Mussolini's replacement and Italy's disengagement from the war. The king and his entourage, military advisors included, were to play the role of arbiter.

Grandi asked the Grand Council to approve his resolution that the dictatorship be declared ended "because it has compromised the vital interests of the Nation; it has led Italy to the brink of military defeat; it has eroded and worn the trunk of revolution and of fascism itself."[13] Grandi's aim was to prevent "any solution of continuity in our constitutional life." Understandably, he bitterly resented and denounced the behavior of those military leaders who decided to transform a constitutional act into a coup d'état characteristic of "a Balkan or South American country,"[14] and he proved unable to free Italy of the responsibilities for the war.

Mussolini's overthrow and his subsequent arrest and short imprisonment signalled the end of the authoritarian regime, but by no means the return to a democratic regime, albeit of limited democracy. The transformation of the Italian authoritarian regime partook of two strategies: on the one hand, it was a transfer of power made possible by the existence of the monarchy; on the other, it was a surrender of power made advisable by the fact that the war was still going on.[15] Grandi himself might have led the transition, but decided not to in order to clearly mark the return to constitutional government and also because he wanted to play the role of negotiator with the Allies. In the end, given the "withering away" of fascism and its leaders, the king felt entitled to play the decisive role--however indecisively.

Two issues had to be immediately tackled: the selection of a prime minister and new government, and a solution to the war. It is not clear how much opportunity the pre-fascist political class really had to provide the prime minister and personnel for the first post-fascist government. Grandi pressed for a solution of this kind, but the king decided to follow the route of a "monarchist restoration," as Deakin puts it.[16] An aged and rather discredited Marshal Pietro Badoglio formed a government composed of military men and civil servants. The message was clear: the king wanted to stress the continuity of the State and its apparatus, and in all likelihood to turn the clock back to 1922 (a concrete implementation of the thesis that fascism had only been a "parenthesis" in the history of Italy). With varying nuances, the reactions of the opponents of fascism were negative. Still, Badoglio was given a chance due to the difficult circumstances: "We will forgive Badoglio his past dealings, if he reverses the Italian situation by declaring void the treaties with the Axis and stating immediately that we are at war with Germany."[17]

Indecision, opportunism, and inability to correctly identify the alternatives or evaluate the costs and benefits have variously been imputed to Badoglio's proclamation that "the war continues." According to some scholars, however, there was more to it than sheer incompetence and lack of courage--for example, fear that the Germans might occupy Rome, or preoccupation with the conditions which the Allies were imposing for an armistice with Italy: i.e., unconditional surrender. In the 45 days between Mussolini's fall and the signing of the armistice with the Allies on September 8, 1943, however, no preparation was made for withstanding the likely German reaction. Thus, "the escape from Rome and the lack of orders to the Army [were] intended to secure for the King and his entourage the exclusive representation of the Italian people vis-à-vis the Anglo-Americans and, at the same time, to prevent or at least to delay the anti-German struggle."[18]

At the close of the first phase, some aspects of the Italian experience deserve to be stressed in a comparative perspective. First, the impulse toward the transition came fundamentally from within the configuration of forces which made up the fascist regime or gravitated around it. Second, the world war created more than simply accelerated the conditions for the demise of fascism. In its wake, the regime was unable to maintain its grip over the country because: (a) it was deemed

responsible for entering the war and suffering a series of crushing defeats, (b) the internal situation revealed the emergence or re-emergence of some socio-political opposition (e.g., the northern workers' strikes of March 1943), and (c) some "reserve" institutions existed and indeed had preserved some autonomy and legitimacy of their own (above all the monarchy, but in a different way and in a different sphere the Church as well). The latter point also suggests or makes clear Mussolini's failure to fascistize Italian institutions and social life, at the same time showing the resiliency of traditional political institutions and social forces (as well as the old political class).

A combination of factors related to the aftermath of World War I, the polarization of opinions in a supposedly pre-revolutionary climate, the transition from a limited to a mass democracy, and the incomplete democratization and differential rates of democratization of various institutions and Italian political life made the rise and consolidation of fascism possible. A similar configuration of factors--that is, the disruptive impact of World War II, and the changed attitudes of State institutions and political and social forces toward fascism--played a decisive role in its demise.

A profoundly different outcome was not likely because of the survival of institutions not fully identified with fascism, and of large sectors of the moderate-conservative pre-fascist political class. In light of the experiences of other Mediterranean European countries, one might speculate as to why the Italian armed forces did not play a more active role. Lacking any tradition of active and independent involvement in politics, hampered by imminent military defeat, without a truly charismatic personality, an outstanding "condottiero," though backed by the monarchy and perhaps also because loyal to it, and perceiving their prestige and their future as tied to the monarchy, the armed forces could not and did not play any meaningful role. A military dictatorship was ruled out at the beginning of the transition process: institutionally not viable, politically unprecedented, and diplomatically counterproductive. The option was fundamentally not even entertained.

All this said, it is likely that if Badoglio had immediately surrendered to the Allies the transition might have stopped at a less than democratic outcome. Some liberalization might have ensued, but the process of democratization would have been seriously delayed. The monarchy would have acquired a respectable face, but the most important features and certainly the major institutions would not have changed significantly. A minor broadening of the political arena would have been necessary, but the struggle for the establishment of a democratic regime would have been hindered more than helped by the recognition that, after all, the king and Badoglio had brought peace to Italy. The vacillations of the royal entourage and various attempts at playing shrewd games prevented a development of this kind, producing a more complex and prolonged transition to a more democratic regime.

The Resistance Movement

The armed resistance movement which was launched in the northern part of German-occupied Italy represented not only the climax of two decades of anti-fascist propaganda and activities but also the start of a new political organization: the Committees of National Liberation (CLN). These Committees were the product of the clandestine struggle of some old parties and of the new circumstances. Staffed and strengthened by the return of some famous exiles and by the release from prison of many anti-fascists, the CLN were rejuvenated by the influx of a great number of young Italians. While military action in central and northern Italy was of utmost importance, the resistance movement consistently attempted to create the foundations for a new democratic and republican State in the various zones which it succeeded in liberating from the Germans.

A new constellation of actors emerged side by side with the old actors, the monarchy and the State apparatus. It was composed, first, of the Allied commanders in Italy, and, second, of the Committees of National Liberation and their representatives. The most important issue on which they clashed was the relationship between Badoglio's government and the anti-fascist parties. It is from the development of the many facets of this issue that one can proceed to an analysis of the preconditions for the transition to a democratic regime. Up to the appearance of the new actors, in fact, Badoglio's government represented, more than anything else, monarchist continuity, and was in no way related to anti-fascist public opinion.

It is easy to understand why the king resisted all pressures to dismiss his new prime minister and, for that matter, to abdicate. He hoped to save the monarchy and to be able to legitimate or, better, to relegitimate, his own position by accomplishing a smooth transition to a new regime of limited democracy. If worst came to worst, he might abdicate in favor of his son Humbert. The constellation of forces supporting the king included all those who wanted to avoid "a jump in the dark"--that is, all of those groups who strove to preserve the continuity of the State and prevent the emergence of an institutional vacuum. In essence, the monarchy was the remaining rallying point for Italian conservative forces, and they behaved accordingly.

The Allies, too, had to take sides on this issue. "Washington and London differed substantially in their attitudes toward the abstract merit of kingship. Churchill, whose opinion usually counted most in the Mediterranean, intended unquestionably to uphold the royal binomial of Victor Emmanuel and Badoglio."[19] The British prime minister feared that any politico-institutional change at this stage might impair the war effort. Foremost among his motivations, however, was concern over the political future of Italy. Churchill wanted to prevent, or at least postpone, any increase in the influence of the left. He operated accordingly, and thus became a staunch supporter of the Italian king.

In the meantime, representatives of six parties had created the Committee of National Liberation in Naples under the leadership of Ivanoe Bonomi. The so-called "hexpartite" included representatives of the Liberal Party, Labour Democracy, Christian Democracy, Action Party, Socialist Party, and Communist Party. Among them, none was favorable to the existing institutional arrangement. The spectrum of preferences ranged from those of the Liberal Party's representative, the famous philosopher Benedetto Croce, to those of the Socialists and the representatives of the Action Party. While Croce remained a monarchist but advocated the abdication of the king in favor of his 6-year-old grandson, the latter were fervently pro-republican and totally unwilling to collaborate with the king and his prime minister. Adamant pro-republican sentiment was dominant--in fact, unquestioned--among the leaders and members of the Northern Committee of National Liberation located in Milan.

All of these events were taking place while Italy was divided into two halves, both, though in a very different way, occupied by foreign powers. In northern Italy, moreover, Mussolini's puppet Social Republic (Repubblica Sociale Italiana, RSI), buttressed by the Germans, had provoked a lively resistance movement in which leftist republican elements played a major role. In the south, relations among the parties and between the CLN and the government had reached a standstill. Preceded by the Soviet Union's recognition of Badoglio's government and the exchange of diplomatic representatives, Communist Party leader Palmiro Togliatti's return to Italy after almost two decades of exile set in motion a solution to the political stalemate.

The "svolta di Salerno" (March 31-April 1, 1944) was not only one of the most controversial historical decisions of this or any other period of Italian history. It was also a turning point in the dynamics of the transition, and clearly affected the transition in multiple ways. Briefly, the Communist leader abruptly put an end to months of bickering among the representatives of the six parties by indicating that he was willing to collaborate with Premier Badoglio regardless of whether Victor Emmanuel stayed on the throne.[20]

It would be comforting to find <u>the</u> official and authoritative Communist interpretation of that momentous decision. At the time that the "svolta" was communicated to the leaders and members of the PCI, disagreements and differences of opinion immediately appeared (later to be subdued), but even today Communist historians and political leaders have not reached a uniform appraisal. Indeed, since the party is currently undergoing a process of critical assessment of its own past, there is no reason to believe that the "svolta" will not soon be criticized, particularly in light of its consequences.

From the point of view of the evolution of the international system and its swift restructuring, there is no doubt that Togliatti's initiative was specifically based on a sober and perhaps pessimistic evaluation of the prospects for change in international politics.[21] With reference to the conflicts taking place in the Italian situation, some historians claim that Togliatti introduced into the relationships of power among the various forces "an autonomous and original inspiration."[22]

Other Communist historians have stressed "the lesson of the revolutionary method" which Togliatti taught to the members of the CLN.[23] Many of these members, in fact, considered Togliatti's line either at best a mistake or at worst an unscrupulous move to strengthen the PCI, if not an outright betrayal of the republican position.

On balance, it is appropriate to conclude that "in the 'svolta' of Salerno, international motives--of the USSR, of Stalin--were combined with national motives--of the PCI, of its 'insertion' into the country and, even more, into the mechanisms of the State. After the 'svolta' the formulation and the construction of the 'partito nuovo' begin. After the 'svolta' also begin the costs--for the country in addition to and more than for the party--of the operation of insertion [into Italian politics]."[24]

The immediate outcome was the king's retirement and the appointment of Prince Humbert as Lieutenant General of the Realm, with the actual transfer of power to take place when the Allied troops entered Rome. Having dropped the institutional "pregiudiziale," the CLN parties were now free to accept positions in the cabinet led by Badoglio. This was immediately done, creating the preconditions for Badoglio's replacement. After the liberation of Rome on June 4, 1944, the conditions had been met for the formation of a new cabinet. "For sure, the hypothesis of the monarchist-representative State was still alive, only the institutional referendum would be entrusted to dissolve it, not without difficulties, in June 1946; but the hypothesis of the monarchist-administrative State, which had been at the roots of the ruinous experience of the forty-five days, was definitively defeated and filed away by the 'svolta of Salerno.'"[25]

It is difficult to underestimate the impact of the "svolta," particularly its long-term effects. For better or for worse, Togliatti put the Communist Party at the service of the national cause; the war of national liberation took precedence in his strategy over the goals of socio-political reforms. The Communists were asked then, and are still inclined today, to justify that decision not on the basis of an irreconcilable contrast between national interests and class interests, but on the basis of a temporary postponement of the latter. The justification was that without achieving the liberation of Italy, it would be impossible to struggle for social reforms. The so-called theory of the "due tempi" (two speeds) was of course immediately criticized both inside and outside the party.

Moreover, while Togliatti explained his line in terms of the importance, and in practice the supremacy, of national interests over any others, his strategy did indeed serve interests which were not at all national. Paradoxically, but certainly not without his previous knowledge, the line implemented with the "svolta" served Soviet interests, or what the Italian Communist leader perceived them to be. But most important of all, the line launched at Salerno was intended to serve the interests of the Italian Communist Party. To some extent, the PCI needed to present itself as a responsible party willing to collaborate in the liberation of Italy without resorting to maximalist demands.

All the more so in domestic affairs, insofar as the Party remained, or was obliged to be, identified with the Soviet Union.

The success encountered by Togliatti's line is indicative not so much of its "correctness," as many Communist writers put it, but of many other important factors. First of all, objectively speaking, Togliatti's line introduced the least amount of change in the politico-institutional framework. And those changes which were deemed indispensable followed very smoothly and without the pressure of popular demands. The constellation of moderate and conservative forces which had supported Badoglio's government and defended the monarchy, if not the king himself, were obviously strengthened and heartened by Togliatti's decision. To some extent, they were even justified a posteriori in their resistance to the changes advocated by the Socialists and by the Action Party. Needless to add, the institutional question was to burden the Italian political system for two additional years.

As for the other parties' perception of the PCI and the Communist image, there is no doubt that reservations concerning the "duplicity" of the Communist strategy found their starting point from the "svolta di Salerno." The unscrupulousness of the Communist leader, his almost complete disregard for the positions of the other parties of the left, and the demonstration of PCI unity and discipline following such a momentous decision alarmed the other parties and many sectors of the emerging Italian political class.

Finally, Togliatti and his collaborators were fond of pointing to the "svolta" of Salerno as a turning point in the conception of the Communist Party as the living instrument of the revolution. From that moment, they have claimed, the very idea of the "partito nuovo" was born, a mass party which addresses its appeal to all sectors of the population, a mass party which is more than a class party, a truly national party. While this is certainly correct, there was another, more disturbing implication of the way the "svolta" of Salerno was decided upon, communicated, "explained," and later quickly accepted by the Communists, especially those working in the northern CLN and in principle opposed to it. Giorgio Amendola has put it in very honest and concise terms. Expressions of dissent against Togliatti's policy were rapidly blocked by Togliatti himself: it was "the end of a regime of more open discussion. This regime had had its inconveniences, but it had accustomed us to so frank a relationship that we would not have easily recovered."[26]

In sum, the "svolta" of Salerno had positive consequences for all those who in the domestic situation as well as with regard to the international balance of power thought, hoped, and acted to achieve a stable political and institutional outcome--that is, for those who strove to keep the political struggle confined to the various existing institutional actors: the monarchy, the Allied Military Government, the Soviet Union, the hexpartite government, the Church, and the top echelons of the different parties, the PCI included. The influence of the masses remained, for the time being, suppressed.

It was in the armed resistance movement that this influence continued to be felt. Unfortunately, for geopolitical reasons, the war of liberation could be conducted only in central and northern Italy. Therefore, its political impact on those areas where it was most needed in order to stimulate political awareness and political mobilization and to break the chains of subordination to traditional authorities of all kinds (the old local notables and the Mafia, the Fascist representatives, the priests, and the new local notables) was nil. To the well-known cleavage between north and south in economic terms, a socio-political cleavage was added in these two fateful years--a cleavage based on political perceptions and experiences, which has not yet been mended.

If politics had to remain institutional politics, then it is easy to understand why the war of national liberation was not encouraged by the Allies, especially not by Churchill. General Alexander's misguided proclamation to the partisans "to halt large-scale military operations" because of the impending winter (November 13, 1944) was interpreted by many as an attempt to disband the resistance movement, and as such was sternly rejected by the partisans. Notwithstanding Alexander's motivations, there seems to be little doubt that the partisans were seen as a destabilizing force, even more so after the Communist-inspired uprising in Athens in December 1944.

As for the political maneuverings, two issues became paramount. The first had to do with the purging of all those in positions of responsibility in the fascist regime. The second concerned the role, present and future, of the Committees of National Liberation. Both issues were, of course, extremely important for the shaping of the new regime and were recognized as such by the participants.

Once more Churchill played a very influential role in this phase. First of all, he vetoed the ascent to the office of prime minister of one of Italy's most prominent and capable statesmen, Count Carlo Sforza. Bonomi's second cabinet therefore was weakened from the beginning because the Socialists and the Action Party stayed away from it. Sforza was appointed High Commissioner of Expurgation, but he soon had to resign in order to defend himself against Churchill's personal attacks. The result was that "the purge program ground to a near halt by year's [1944] end. The conservatives had triumphed; the purge machinery ceased to be a political weapon and was turned over to the jurists who, understandably, were reluctant to apply ex post facto legislation."[27]

It is fair to add that while the conservatives clearly understood the political advantage of becoming a rallying point for all those who were thus saved from expurgation (and there were many, since, after all, fascism had enjoyed at least a passive mass acceptance, but a somewhat active consent among bureaucrats and numerous groups of government employees and middle sectors), the representatives of the left-wing party underestimated the problem. At best, they believed that they would be able to sweep away all remnants of fascism once they came to power.

For different reasons and from different perspectives, the Communists and the Socialists shared this approach, while Action Party leaders refused to compromise and took a more adamant stance against fascist influences. There is no doubt that the Socialists believed that power in post-war Italy would fall into the hands of the left. When that happened, a new political class would inevitably emerge. Their idealistic expectation vanished very slowly. On the other hand, while at the rank-and-file level many Communists shared the Socialist position (something which made collaboration at this level rather easy), at the top, Togliatti in particular showed his realism (or the pessimism of the intelligence, as Antonio Gramsci would have put it) by accepting as a fact of life that no full purge was possible. In the war of attrition foreseeable for post-war Italy, therefore, even repentant fascists should not be thrown automatically into the arms of conservative parties. (This policy was immediately applied to party recruitment.)

The lack of a severe, rigorous process of political expurgation was especially evident in three sectors: the top ministerial bureaucracy, the prefects, and the armed forces. Only 403 high-level bureaucrats were retired or suspended from their offices. As for the prefects (the real backbone of the Italian State), "the conservative request to repeal the prefects appointed by the CLN was motivated by the need to avail oneself of 'impartial' functionaries, in view of the forthcoming elections: only very few of the men appointed by the CLN accepted the government's offer to transform themselves into career functionaries, and the [parties of the] left aimed at the possibility of keeping open the prospect of the institutional transformation of the State, sacrificing the renewal of the personnel of one of the most decisive nerves of the Italian State apparatus."[28]

As for the armed forces, the issue of their renewal had two aspects: on one hand was the expurgation of the officers compromised with the fascist regime and, even worse, with the Italian Social Republic. "The expurgation was never completed, notwithstanding the fact that Minister of War Jacini declared in August 1945 that as many as 688 generals and 83 colonels had been retired. To tell the truth, the selection had been made in a rather chaotic way which did not affect the officers compromised with the past regime."[29] On the other hand, there was the legally sanctioned possibility for partisans to become members of the armed forces, retaining the rank they had acquired during the resistance struggle. Few partisans, however, took advantage of this opportunity, while most of those who opted for an army career encountered hostility, and were discriminated against, so that by the end of 1947 the Italian armed forces had been reconstituted as an instrument of the government more than of the new republican State.

Behind all these phenomena lay the dispute over the nature and role of the CLN. In the north of Italy especially, these Committees might have transformed themselves into genuine ruling organizations, creating a new type of democracy largely supported by the mobilized sector of the population and wholly outside the traditional channels of political influence. Once more, it was the division within the leftist camp which prevented this solution from being implemented. Once more,

the line of division passed between the Action Party, which was in favor of a full and immediate transformation of the CLN into governing bodies, and the Communists, who pleaded the case for the participation of the large masses organized by the major parties.

The controversy was critical. It involved three major aspects: the timing of the socio-political changes, the nature of the forces entitled to introduce those changes, and the very quality of the changes. Empirically related to each other, these aspects have to be kept analytically distinct in order to appreciate the differences of opinion (and behavior) among the parties of the left.

With regard to the timing of the changes, the Communist position fundamentally meant the subordination of all reforms to the liberation of Italy, and effectively discouraged any attempt in northern areas to introduce irreversible political changes or changes in the ownership of industrial companies. The Socialists and the Action Party, in contrast, were in favor of creating conditions which would anticipate a new structure of the State: republican, democratic, decentralized, and with rigorous limits on private property. The Christian Democrats were content to take advantage of the differences of opinion within the left. This meant that their positions were not challenged and that the past involvement of the Church in legitimizing the fascist regime was not called into question. Moreover, the postponement of any change after the liberation of Italy had a practical effect only in the north, where the parties represented in the CLN were subject to pressures from the grass-roots and where the struggle against the fascists and the Germans had opened up new political spaces. In central and southern Italy, one can speak of a rapidly achieved consolidation in terms of power relationships and, above all, in terms of the restoration of the socioeconomic fabric of the system.

By far the most important aspect of the post-1943, and especially the post-1945, situation was the mobilization of large popular sectors into politics. Two new parties were, so to speak, obliged to mobilize large masses of Italians: the PCI and the DC. The Socialist Party was also a mass party, while the Action Party, especially strong among intellectuals and influential because innovative, remained a small elite movement. Because the Communists acutely perceived that political competition in post-war Italy would entail struggle among organized groups, their foremost attention was addressed to the Christian Democrats and the Catholic Church. Their efforts were directed toward maintaining a good relationship, close ties, and a working agreement with the representatives of a party (the DC) whose strength among popular and progressive sectors they did not underestimate. What the PCI overestimated or misjudged was the willingness of the majority of those sectors to accept, let alone implement, incisive reforms.

The logical consequence of the Communists' policy of collaboration among mass parties, the primacy given to political considerations (and not to the dynamics of social movements), and their cool appreciation of international realities led Togliatti to accept the replacement of Action Party leader Ferruccio Parri as the first prime minister appointed after the liberation. Parri had been a political and military

commander of the resistance in northern Italy and was a direct expression of the CLN. Once more, for better or worse, Togliatti preferred a simplification of the political game by allowing DC leader Alcide De Gasperi to become prime minister. December 10, 1945 inaugurated the era of De Gasperi governments, one which lasted until July 28, 1953, and of DC hegemony over all successive cabinets to the present day. More than that, Parri's overthrow signaled the deflection of the "wind of the north"--that is, of the more radical aspirations for social change nourished by the resistance fighters and their supporters--in favor of the prudence which characterized the activities of the parties' representatives in Rome.[30]

Finally, the creation of the De Gasperi government decisively eliminated any possibility of transforming the CLN into autonomous governing organizations. From then on, politics would largely be institutional politics, and would have to pass through well-defined institutional channels without yielding to extra-institutional pressures or utilizing outside channels of communication and mobilization. To this end, a formal pact of collaboration was even signed among the three major trade-union movements (Catholic, Socialist, and Communist), which effectively blocked the more radical demands of some groups of northern industrial workers. The very quality of the changes to be introduced into the Italian socio-political and economic system was affected by the policy of moderation pursued at this stage by the PCI in a very disciplined manner.

In synthesis, the resistance must be understood as a transitional phase in the process toward a democratic regime, an interlude rich in implications and potentialities. In approximately 18 months, the amount of political activity and mobilization which took place showed that fascism had not succeeded in destroying Italian civil society and wiping out all organizational networks, as some authoritarian regimes in Latin America are trying to do.

It is not simply that many members of the pre-fascist Italian political class survived the ventennio--moderate opponents such as Croce, De Nicola, Bonomi, De Gasperi himself, living in the country and retaining some prestige and visibility; as well as outspoken enemies of the regime such as Salvemini, Sforza, Sturzo, Nenni, Togliatti, and Saragat, working in exile for its delegitimation and demise. It is also that during the oft-criticized period of Giolittian democracy (1900-1914), quite a number of Italian political organizations--parties and unions of the left as well as those belonging to the Catholic world--had been able to root themselves, to acquire the allegiance and the support of newly politicized groups. Organizationally and socially, and perhaps also culturally, they were rather well established in 1919. Only through a massive use of force and subsequent repression did fascism produce the retrenchment of this associational network and the apparent atomization of society. (It is astonishing to note, however, that the electoral implantation of the Socialists and Communists in 1946 was closely patterned upon their electoral strength of 1919 and 1921, with the Communists having of course made inroads into many Socialist strongholds. As for the Christian Democrats,

in addition to taking over the areas of traditional Catholic implantation, they absorbed the votes of the many southern notables and of the divided right. Thus, one must stress the importance of anti-fascist activities which continued throughout the 20-year rule--witness the incessant operation of fascist special tribunals--in keeping the loyalty and memories of the left alive, but also the role of the Catholic Church which, enjoying a relatively free hand in the social and cultural sectors, educated practically all of those Catholics who would make up the Italian ruling class after 1945.

The persistence of partisan identification is an obvious element of strength of the Italian case. To this one must add the impact of the resistance. While the consequences of the mobilization it produced were geographically limited, its political and symbolic impact was pervasive. On the one hand, it was correctly perceived as a rehabilitation for Italy which showed that fascism had not corrupted all the consciences. It was also considered a continuation of the Risorgimento and its crowning, particularly in terms of the radically democratic socioeconomic demands it promoted. Politically, the very existence and diffusion of the war of national liberation made it at first inconceivable and later impossible to proceed to the creation of a semi-authoritarian regime or to the restoration of a regime of limited democracy.

Moreover, the resistance also constituted or functioned as a relatively large-scale experiment in accelerated political socialization and recruitment of cadres for the parties of the left, establishing and moulding the necessary links between top national leaders and rank-and-file followers and sympathizers. Finally, these 18 months in which the Italian government enjoyed limited sovereignty, plus those few additional months during which the Anglo-American tutelage was still evident and influential, allowed the leaders of the different parties enough time to get to know each other well, obliging them to act within some ill-defined but real boundaries and to solve their conflicts, taking advantage of a sort of safety net--that is, without risking a breakdown because irreconcilable differences of opinion might have activated the intervention of the Allies.

From many points of view, therefore, the resistance was a substantially positive interlude along the path of transition to a democratic regime: from the cleansing of the fascist experience to the apprenticeship of political leaders who had to learn to live together. Its importance, and its exceptionality, for the subsequent stability of the democratic regime should not be underrated.

From Liberation to the Break-up of Tripartite Collaboration

The period from April 25, 1945 to May 1947 was characterized by major changes in the domestic and international situations, by shifts in the number and quality of the relevant political actors, and by a very dynamic pace of events. All of these elements were closely intertwined. The various international factors impinged on the Italian situation particularly through the interpretations given to them by the different Italian political actors. There were exceptions, however. Let us start with a brief identification of the changes in the international scene and their impact on Italy.

I have already mentioned that the defeated Communist attempt to take power in Greece was given an interpretation by Togliatti which excluded any insurrectionary effort in Italy. The "Greek prospect" was not simply a lesson drawn from those events--it was also a calculation made on the basis of the power relationships at the international and domestic levels, with reference to the presence of Allied troops in Italian territory until the end of 1945 (and the ease with which they might re-enter Italy). This is not to say that Togliatti had already renounced the prospect of seizing power, but merely that he was perfectly aware of the international constraints and therefore unwilling to use any means which might jeopardize his longer term perspective on the struggle for power. The insurrectionary path was barred from the very beginning, in his mind, even though the "comrades" were never openly and explicitly told so in that period--another instance of "duplicity" on his part.[31]

Chronologically, the second important event which influenced Italian political life between the end of 1945 and the elections of 1948 was the fact that the United States replaced Great Britain as the decisive power during that period. Churchill had played a very active and incisive role in buttressing the monarchy, in defending Badoglio and the continuity of the State apparatus, in downplaying the resistance's contributions to the liberation of Italy, and in opposing the transformation of the CLN into governing bodies. With the electoral victory of the Labour Party and a declining British interest in Italian affairs, American influence over Italian politics replaced that of Britain. Contrary to Churchill's stubborn determination, however, the Americans had no specific policy for Italy, no clear-cut design for shaping the Italian political system. Therefore, at least from the end of 1945 until May 1947, it was likely that autonomous Italian initiatives might have been successful.[32]

While the Communists were blocked by their allegiance to Moscow (and by the hope that collaboration between the USSR and the western Allies would continue) and, hence, remained very cautious in order not to rock the boat (the Socialists had to follow suit, compelled to do so by their "Unity of Action" pact with the PCI, already resented by some internal groups), the Christian Democrats quickly exploited the emerging international alignments. Of course, there were limits to a dynamic policy, but between complete subordination to the United States (which American policy-makers did not demand at the time) and a neutralist stance, there potentially remained enough space for leftist forces to find a more favorable position, thus saving their own domestic reform program.

When the Cold War started, the Italian left found itself utterly unprepared to face its development and consequences. The immediate outcome was the left's exclusion from the government in May 1947. From then on, the Christian Democrats and the Catholic Church were able to present the political struggle in Italy as a choice between civilizations. This led not only to the resounding defeat of the Popular Front in the elections of 1948, but to a propaganda campaign to thoroughly delegitimatize the Communist Party (as the "puppet," the "ally," the "representative" of the Soviet Union) whose effects are still felt today.

Perhaps there was no alternative to the PCI's close identification with the Soviet Union once the Cold War started. However, many scholars maintain that what was not inevitable was such a complete reliance on the United States by the Christian Democrats, and consequently the fact that many important decisions in the field of economic reconstruction were made with reference to American preferences. Once more, it is not that the United States dictated policy choices, but that the dominant forces in the Italian political and economic system opted for a capitalist reconstruction in order to obtain advantages from their allegiance to the United States.[33]

The advantages deriving from this kind of dependence were clear at the time and have retained their validity to the present day. It was not simply the possibility of participating in the European Recovery Program, and therefore rebuilding the Italian economy along a purely capitalist pattern (while the left had, of course, pressed for some nationalizations and workers had temporarily occupied some factories in the north). This was an important aspect. But more important and--in the eyes of the dominant groups in the Italian political system--decisive for throwing their support behind the United States (despite the reservations which some Catholic groups always harbored regarding the "American way of life") was the clear perception that the United States would protect their political power and act as a shield against Communist subversion.

I have probably overstressed the clarity of the conservative design and the determination with which it was pursued. Indeed, one ought to attribute the success of the moderate forces as much to their more "natural" homogeneity (without detracting from the fact that the Catholics-turned-Christian Democrats were not fully homogeneous with the Italian capitalist class) as to the mistakes and the heterogeneity of the leftist forces. A sober assessment of the dynamics of the Italian situation would probably point to differences of opinion and fluctuations in both the domestic alignment of Italian moderate forces and among U.S. policy-makers. The left was unable to exploit the opportunities which were open for political initiatives, while the Italian moderates and U.S. policy-makers quickly understood the importance and necessity of an agreement as soon as the first winds of the Cold War began to blow.

If international events and constraints shaped the framework within which Italian political actors had to implement their strategies, one should not forget that important changes had occurred in the Italian domestic situation. The first was the disappearance of the Action Party from Italian politics. With the benefits of hindsight, one can attribute the dissolution of this party to the coming to an end of most of the principles which the party had fought for and to a realignment of its actual and potential electoral and political bases.

The Action Party had taken a very intransigent republican stance (which would be vindicated by the results of the institutional referendum of June 1946). It had advocated the transformation of the Italian State on the basis of the structures of the CLN, conceived as popular and revolutionary bodies. It had stressed the

importance of creating Workers' Councils and the need for political decentralization, and had supported unity among leftist forces. The political base of the party was to be found among the middle strata and its leadership among the progressive intellectual bourgeoisie. Its ambition was to occupy a position in the center of the party spectrum.

As long as Parri remained in office as prime minister, the Action Party could indeed present itself as centrist in the Italian political alignment. When Parri was ousted, all of the contradictions came to the fore. It became clear that "without the support of the Communist Party, the reform program of the Action Party could not be implemented," as Leo Valiani, then political leader and later historian of the Party, appropriately noted. By the beginning of 1946, it was already evident that the most ambitious proposals for the reform of the State were doomed. Finally, not only had the Christian Democrats succeeded in occupying the center of the political alignment, pushing the Action Party to the left and therefore into competition with the Socialists and the Communists, but they were undermining the Action Party's electoral base as well. In the process of political radicalization which was occurring, the Italian middle strata were increasingly torn between the DC and the Socialist-Communist alliance, leaving no space for the Action Party. One might also question the feasibility of a strategy founded on the expectation that in a country such as Italy, after 20 years of fascism, a party would find enough support for a reform program among those middle strata, a large majority of whom had represented the backbone of the previous regime.

For all of these reasons, the Action Party's disappearance, following its convention in February 1946 and its poor showing in the municipal elections of March 1946, seemed inevitable. Its political goals appeared out of reach and its social base was evanescent. The irruption of mass parties into the Italian political scene and the nature of the two major Italian parties made the hypothesis of a political struggle based on an idealized British pattern very far-fetched--rendering the Action Party, which had cherished it, irrelevant. Its members and leaders joined either the Socialist or Republican parties and retained an important role in Italian politics (e.g., Ugo La Malfa, Francesco De Martino, Riccardo Lombardi, Emilio Lussu, Tristano Codignola).[34]

Until the beginning of 1946, the parties belonging to the CLN had collaborated on the basis of "parity"--that is, an equal allocation of ministerial positions--although in few instances, some parties had not joined the government (e.g., the Socialists and the Action Party remained outside the second government led by Bonomi). Moreover, in many cases local administrations had remained in the hands of the traditional local leaders, even if most of the fascist podestà (appointed mayors) had quickly been removed by the Allies.[35]

The timing and sequence of the first free elections in post-fascist Italy were, of course, matters of controversy. The left was in favor of early political elections--that is, the election of a Constituent Assembly endowed with legislative powers as well. The

Christian Democrats and the small rightist groups favored a different sequence: first municipal elections, then Constituent Assembly elections, in the hope of utilizing the power thus acquired at the local level (where many non-political factors might play into the hands of the "traditional" dominant figures and against the left) in order to influence the outcome of the elections for the Constituent Assembly. De Gasperi succeeded in securing the support of Alexander Kirk, the U.S. ambassador, and municipal elections preceded national elections. The two parties of the left, nonetheless, did very well, perhaps too well, producing some fear among the moderate sectors of the population. The DC also polled a large number of votes, strengthening the Communists' inclination to consider it the representative of all those sectors which the PCI could not reach.

The institutional issue also had to be solved through an electoral consultation. In an eleventh-hour effort, Victor Emmanuel attempted to save the monarchy by abdicating in favor of his son. However, it was the institution itself which was considered responsible for many unconstitutional deviations and which, as even this belated abdication showed, played the role of rallying point for all moderate and conservative forces. Humbert II was given the nickname "King of May." On June 2, 1946, the dynasty of Savoy, whose historical contribution had been the unification of Italy, was ousted by a popular vote of 12,718,641 (54.26%) against the monarchy to 10,718,502 (45.72%) in favor. The results not only reflected widespread support for conservative ideas, but showed that, particularly in the south, the republican and democratic "wind of the north" had not arrived.

At the same time, the Constituent Assembly was elected. Party fragmentation was very high: 51 lists received votes, but only 9 obtained seats. The Christian Democrats came out on top (35.12%), followed by the Socialists (20.72%) and the Communists (18.96%). The combined leftist vote was therefore higher than that of the Christian Democrats. The latter, however, occupied the central position in the political alignment, had retained the office of prime minister, and were quickly becoming the major object of support for the Catholic Church, the Italian bourgeoisie, and the United States. A new historical bloc was in the making: the Christian Democrats had already succeeded in producing a realignment of all moderate and conservative forces around themselves and were in the process of giving those forces cohesion and a socio-political project based on anti-Communism and support for capitalist reconstruction.

A final blow was dealt to the reformist hopes of some sectors of the left: the Constituent Assembly was not given legislative powers (the government retained them and the Constituent Assembly could only play a checking role over its acts) but only the task of drafting the Constitution. This task was very important indeed, and its fulfillment, according to most commentators, proved to be not only lasting but a true political monument to some of the demands which had emerged from the resistance movement. As Piero Calamandrei, a famous professor of law belonging to the Action Party, put it, the republican constitution was "a promised revolution in exchange for a revolution manquée." Approved at the end of 1947 and enacted on the

1st of January, 1948, the constitution represented the final act of the uneasy collaboration between the Christian Democrats and the Socialist-Communist group in the Assembly. So important was that period of collaboration, and so celebrated were its results, that to this day the Communists stress that while they do not have very much in common with the Christian Democrats, they drafted the constitution together.[36]

For international as well as domestic reasons, the left was losing its momentum. At the beginning of 1947, those Socialists who opposed the "Unity of Action" pact with the Communists split from the PSI and created what would become the Social Democratic Party (PSDI). By May 1947, all of the international and domestic conditions conducive to an easy ousting of the left from De Gasperi's government had been created. The Cold War was rampant. Its effects were already felt in France, where a Socialist prime minister had obliged the Communists to leave his government. The Americans gave their approval to De Gasperi's decision and, more than that, promised their financial and "ideological" backing. The era of the tripartite arrangement was over and the seeds of centrismo, of centrist governments with Liberals, Christian Democrats, Republicans, and Social Democrats were planted. This coalitional formula would dominate Italian political life until the early 1960s.[37]

In this climate, the elections of April 18, 1948 merely sanctioned a fait accompli. They did so with the high visibility and great reliability that only hard electoral data can provide. For the first and, so far, only time in the history of the Italian republic, a party, the DC, polled enough votes to secure an absolute majority of seats in the House of Deputies (elected according to proportional representation). United in a Popular Front list, heavily damaged by the Communist coup d'état in Prague in February, the Socialists and Communists lost more than 7% of their combined 1946 votes. Not only had the founding coalition of the republic come to an end, but two of the most important participants were now relegated to the role of secondary actors.[38]

What was accomplished by the Christian Democrats in this period was fundamentally the reorganization and consolidation of a powerful center. In the south (including the city of Rome), and in the various State branches, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, and the armed forces, the center-right had not been challenged, and enjoyed a head start. Togliatti's acknowledgment that De Gasperi, as representative of the majority party, was entitled to form a government was a boost for the entire center-right alignment, which found, if not a spokesman, certainly a powerful point of reference. On the other hand, the left showed itself to be divided on some important issues (the institutional questions, the politics of alliances, governmental collaboration), and it would remain divided on many other issues (the insertion of the Lateran Pacts into the Italian constitution, the Concordat with the Church, the relationship with the trade-union movement). Moreover, it underwent a process of political fragmentation with the decline and disappearance of the Action Party and with the Social-Democratic split in January 1947, which deprived the PSI of at least one-fourth of its votes and members and helped to establish the conditions for a splitting of the labor movement.

Utmost in Togliatti's mind, however, was the search for a credible and powerful interlocutor empowered to speak for the interests of the Catholics, large sectors of the popular classes, and the petty bourgeoisie (the ghost of fascism loomed large in Togliatti's mind). While this strategy might have prevented a bloody show-down with the right and avoided a sharp limitation of democratic rights and electoral competition, it certainly underestimated and did not anticipate the regrouping of the landowning classes and the industrial bourgeoisie around the DC.

Moreover, since Togliatti openly supported the efforts of Communist trade unionists to take full control of the unified trade-union movement while at the same time disavowing and discouraging those workers' groups which wanted to expropriate some factories, his strategy remained confined within more or less defined, but contradictory, institutional boundaries. Yet it was widely perceived as a purely opportunistic strategy. In fact, the PCI resorted to more militant tactics of mobilization at the end of 1947 and in late 1948, when national political power seemed out of reach, and the net result was to increase the fears and hostilities of the center-right without obtaining significant social or institutional advantages.

Throughout this period, the hardening of relations between the United States and the USSR reduced the left's opportunities to be perceived as a viable and non-dangerous political alternative. One might even speculate that, because of the international climate, Togliatti would have preferred a continuation of the tripartite coalition to a thin electoral majority for the left. He was painfully aware that the Popular Front would have been unable to govern if confronted with American hostility, lack of cooperation from the State apparatus, and the outright opposition of the DC and the Church. However, the abrupt end of the tripartite arrangement, the electoral defeat, and the split of the labor movement obliged the Communist leader to follow the inclination of many militants and resort to very aggressive opposition tactics, in Parliament and in the squares.

A Successful Transition?: "Ciò che é stato conquistato non é perduto"[39]

A balanced assessment of a transition from authoritarianism to democracy is always a difficult task, not only because it requires precise analytical standards, but also because the protagonists and the scholars are the bearers of wide political and ideological differences as to the desirability and the very feasibility of specific outcomes. While one should avoid oversimplifications and deceivingly simple dichotomies (restoration vs. revolution, but also authoritarianism vs. democracy), the Italian debate has taken some time to go beyond this stage. Some remnants of easy definitions and misguided accusations are still present in the debate among scholars and politicians. I will try to avoid them, and instead offer some considerations in a comparative perspective.

There can be no doubt that a transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one was accomplished in Italy, and that it was essentially the work of domestic forces. There is widespread, almost universal, agreement concerning the success achieved by democratic groups in defeating the representatives of the past regime in their attempts to prevent the democratization process, both by hindering the mobilization of new political forces and by retaining the monarchist institutional arrangement. The very emergence of mass parties, out of the resistance struggle and the efforts of Communist and Catholic organizers (the Socialists were already a mass party before fascism) provided the opportunity for expanded electoral and political participation. This is the most novel component of the Italian political system and at the same time the most important in explaining the persistence of the republican regime despite the many difficulties encountered and created by Italian democracy.

Differences of opinion exist and disagreements persist in evaluating the defeat of the Popular Front in its bid for power in the 1948 elections. While it might sound "impolitic" to say so, it is likely that the democratic regime was saved by the defeat of the Popular Front (I would not go so far as to say "by the victory of the Christian Democrats," since other outcomes in the distribution of votes were conceivable). Due to the international situation, in light of the strength of domestic forces opposing "communism," and, to be sure, taking into account the tactical and strategic postures of the PCI itself, a left-wing coalition would have found it extremely difficult to govern. Under tremendous internal and outside pressures, the coalition dominated by the PCI, at that time very loyal to the Soviet Union and organizationally centralized and politically "extremist," might have resorted to undemocratic deviations, further polarizing the domestic situation. Perhaps, malgré lui, and probably against the intentions of most Socialist and Communist leaders.

The consideration that the left-wing path was the most difficult to tread leads to a brief evaluation of the overall results of the Italian transition. Two extreme positions have been taken--on the one hand, by those who speak of the "resistance betrayed," and on the other, by those who stress that the outcome achieved in 1948 was, if not the best possible outcome, certainly one of the best,[40] and almost predetermined anyway, in the light of the circumstances (though more in its limits than in its configuration).

In the abstract, of course, it is clear that not all of the ideals of the leftist groups active during the resistance have been put into practice. The Communists' obsession with a continued collaboration with the Christian Democrats, with their strategy of political and social alliances, entailed a very high price in terms of socioeconomic reforms. Thus, for instance, more control by the workers over the production process in their own companies, better protection over working conditions, and decentralized bargaining were postponed or renounced until it was too late.

In between the restoration of a capitalist system and a revolution and the creation of a socialist system, there lie many more or less satisfactory options. The time and the ground for a revolution were not available, but opportunities for restructuring the Italian socioeconomic system were not exploited with determination and foresight. In particular,[41] the Communists utilized their working-class support to buttress political goals, essentially their governmental role, and not to pursue the establishment of better conditions for the workers in many local areas and industrial companies. Defeated at the national level and ousted from the government, they found themselves with poor leverage in the industrial sector--that is, powerful in their opposition, but powerless in their capacity to introduce changes. Thus, most of their energies had to go to the defense of positions, at the level of socioeconomic democracy, which had not been institutionalized when it was possible and which were easily rejected because of the new power relations. The 1950s represented the worst period for the organized working class and the many migrant workers.

The Italian political system was fully liberalized, if by this we mean the creation of a parliamentary democracy based on free elections, a reasonable protection of civil rights, and due process of law. But it was not democratized, if we refer to a process of expansion of democratic procedures in the socioeconomic field and in the workings of the State apparatus. Indeed, some pre-fascist or even fascist features were reacquired or retained. Thus, one can speak of limited democratization, a process subject to reversals but also to gains, but also of a limited democracy, at least formally--the PCI was long considered a non-viable political alternative.

What was not gained reflects the strength of the conservative forces as much as the limits of the left's approach and analysis vis-à-vis the problems of democratization. Fundamentally, the left proved unable to go beyond two major formulae: the first based on the idea of political decentralization ("la Repubblica delle autonomie") and workers' councils (in more modern terms: autogestion or self-management), and the second defined as "progressive democracy." But the left was not even united in the pursuit of these two goals.

The first formula was put forward by the Action Party, and was therefore doomed as soon as the Party disappeared, probably even before then. The Socialists and Communists were largely in favor of a centralized State; moreover, due to their control over the organized working class and their overall strategy concerning the role of the trade unions, they remained essentially opposed to any proposal which might increase the decision-making power of the workers regardless of their union affiliation. The Action Party formula showed itself to be, on the one hand, too modern, and on the other, without the necessary support of the workers, encapsulated by the Socialists and the Communists or tied to a somewhat anachronistic Catholic doctrine of "solidarity."

The Communist formula of a "progressive democracy" was very vague and obscure precisely in institutional terms. That is, either the Communists had in mind something resembling a "proletarian democracy" or "popular democracy," which would scare most potential partners, or

they simply envisaged a regime characterized by the powerful presence of the masses organized by the Communist Party, the partito nuovo. But then, the institutional shell would appear to be, with some ambiguities, still a representative regime. This was in fact the definition given during the electoral campaign of 1946: "a democratic republic of manual and intellectual workers ruled by a representative parliamentary regime."[42]

It is somewhat surprising, therefore, that the actual text of the constitution also contains, in addition to some traditional features (a bicameral Parliament, a Constitutional Court), many provisions dealing with the social aspects of private property, and with citizens' rights and not only duties--a constitution which is, as Calamandrei stressed, projected into the future, providing a framework which accommodates political struggles and makes room for progressive changes.[43]

All this said, however, having pointed out the various novelties of the Italian republic, one must be aware that considerable continuities with the past persisted. The State apparatus, in its multiple components, was largely able to survive and to thrive--so much so that it has revealed itself as the major stumbling block against which all reform proposals have run aground. It might therefore be appropriate to quote the sad words of a disillusioned protagonist of the resistance:

> After the insurrection, a new State might have been built in which De Gasperi would have remained in the opposition. The Socialists and the Communists, who would have to be the most important leaders, did not believe in it. One might also have restored the old pre-fascist State, provided the political class were renewed. De Gasperi believed in it. One could not do what the Socialists and the Communists believed--to keep indefinitely the interregnum of a weak State, always ready to yield to the pressures of the organized masses. De Gasperi put himself at work to restore the old State and was successful with the forced consent of the Socialists and the Communists themselves. He wanted to rejuvenate the political class and was successful, gradually dividing almost one half of the Socialists from the Communists and absorbing the former into the State of the restoration.[44]

Concluding Remarks

Italy partakes of northern Europe and southern Europe in its geography, in its socioeconomic structure, and in its political dynamics. Even the process of transition to a democratic regime provides an instance of the difficulty of locating the Italian case among other southern European cases. The authoritarian regime did not last as long as in the Portuguese or Spanish cases, while political instability and the role of the military have loomed much less significant than in the Greek case.

In Italy, the assets conducive to the demise of fascism were generally more numerous than in other southern European cases and in Latin America. Specifically, Italy could count on a democratic past, the traditions and the organizations associated with it, and (in the last,

decisive phase) a supportive international climate. Also important was the relentless struggle against fascism by its opponents in Italy and in exile. Finally, the resistance movement, the accelerated politicization of a new generation, the experiences and memories of a profound moral renewal, constituted one additional, probably irrepeatable, phenomenon.

These aspects explain why it was possible to overthrow the fascist regime and to start a process of transition to a democratic one. The democratic outcome, however, was not predetermined--certainly not in the very first phase when it was harshly resisted, more than by the forces associated with fascism, by the king and his military-civilian entourage which hoped for a stalemate of the process. The decisive blow to these hopes was dealt by the emergence and re-emergence of organized political parties. Relevant too, in a comparative perspective, is the fact that the armed forces had not been the ruling group, that they lacked any tradition of political involvement, were without a charismatic leader, and did not enjoy any support coming out of a defeat in war. Institutionally, the moderate and conservative forces did not offer a united, cohesive front. Moreover, they could not hope to be able to create one around a discredited monarchy, without the support of a well-organized party. When it became clear that, even with some ambiguities, the Christian Democrats were unwilling to play the role of unifying center for them, the majority of the conservatives still decided, tactically, to support the DC. This support helped to solidify the conservative front at the same time that it isolated the reactionary elements.

The organization and reorganization of social, political, and economic groups were facilitated by the relative lack of success which fascism had met in trying to destroy or wipe out civil society or accomplish a Gleichschaltung. Where success was achieved, as in Germany, democracy had to be imported. Moreover, the decisive impulse for a complete political reorganization came from the resistance movement. This period, a very productive interlude between the demise of the authoritarian regime and the inauguration of the democratic one, acquires even more relevance if one assesses all of its positive contributions. In particular, it created and strengthened a core of central values common to the major political forces, most of whom found an almost immediate translation into the constitution.

A final and very important asset of the Italian transition was the constitution itself. Its profoundly democratic character, its progressive potentialities, the very manner in which it was drafted and enacted, gave the major political forces a sense of involvement which cemented the democratic fabric of the country. With specific reference to the constitution, but also in more general terms, one can maintain that in this founding period the political leaders of all parties showed themselves to be much more advanced and farsighted than some socioeconomic institutions and groups, such as the Church and Confindustria (National Association of Manufacturers), which were largely dominated by very conservative spokesmen, whose supremacy might have produced intolerable tensions straining the system to the very breaking point, and whose power certainly delayed further democratic gains.

Perhaps the most important element of all was that the transition was piloted by the three major political groups, while at the same time countervailing powers remained dominant in their respective arenas: the Church in the socio-religious sector, Confindustria in the economic sector. The state of relative equilibrium, the uncertainty of the various competing groups about the quantity and quality of resources in the hands of the other groups, the probable risks to be encountered in an open, head-on confrontation, produced a situation of restraint among the successful (the DC, the Church, Confindustria) and of confidence among the defeated (the PCI and the PSI, the unions, the leftist intelligentsia). Therefore, it was not so much the defeat of the left which assured a successful inauguration of the democratic regime and its institutionalization, but the conviction that the outcome of the process was after all acceptable (and binding), that it allowed the left to enjoy positions of power in the many local municipalities and among many social and political organizations, chiefly the trade unions, and that it offered the prospects for significant changes and major improvements. The cards were not fixed.

Finally, Italy's regional position in the international system obviously acted as a constraint on the dynamics of the domestic political struggle. It set clear limits to socioeconomic transformations; it gave advantages to the forces locating themselves, more or less opportunistically, on the side of the "West." But it also, in the very first phase, worked to the advantage of those who intended to consolidate a democratic regime. If there is a lesson here, it is that the international climate can provide the impetus for the transition, but it cannot produce a successful democratic outcome unless many other conditions are simultaneously present. The best foreseeable outcome remains the one which creates a situation of relative uncertainty for all political forces and of clear risks for those forces trying to subvert the process of democratization. It is like walking on a tightrope, and those who do the walking are as important as those who may shake the tightrope or shout and hinder them.

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[1]C. F. Delzell, Mussolini's Enemies: The Italian Anti-Fascist Resistance (New York: Howard Fertig, 1961, 1974), pp. 231-232.

[2]A. Aquarone, L'organizzazione dello Stato totalitario (Turin: Einaudi, 1965), p. 290.

[3]J. Linz's well-known definition: "Authoritarian regimes are political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism; without elaborate and guiding ideology (but with distinctive mentalities); without intensive nor extensive political mobilization (except some points in their development); and in which a leader (or occasionally a small group) exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones" ("An Authoritarian Regime: Spain," in E. Allardt and Y. Littunen [eds.], Cleavages, Ideologies, and Party Systems [Helsinki: The Academic Bookstore, 1964] p. 297) is most appropriate to Italian fascism.

[4]Mussolini, as quoted by Ciano in his diary (from Aquarone, L'organizzazione dello Stato totalitario, p. 292), said: "it is the monarchy which, by its idiotic gassing, prevents the 'Fascistification' of the Army" (translation by H. Gibson, The Ciano Diaries, 1939-1943 [Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1946], p. 93).

[5]Aquarone, op. cit., pp. 301-302.

[6]For the composition and functioning of the Grand Council, last convened on December 7, 1939, see G. Bianchi, 25 lugio. Crollo di un regime (Milan: Mursia, 1963), pp. 519-526.

[7]See R. A. Webster, The Cross and the Fasces: Christian Democracy and Fascism in Italy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960); P. Scoppola and F. Traniello (eds.), I cattolici tra fascismo e democrazia (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1975), and P. G. Zunino, La questione cattolica nella sinistra italiana (1940-1945) (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1976).

[8]Specifically, R. De Felice, Mussolini il duce. Gli anni del consenso (1929-1936) (Turin: Einaudi, 1974); ID., Intervista sul fascismo (Bari: Laterza, 1975), and G. Amendola, Intervista sull'antifascismo (Bari: Laterza, 1976).

[9]Aquarone, op. cit., p. 310.

[10]Ibidem.

[11]The first position is held by L. Salvatorelli, "Situazione interna e internazionale dell'Italia nel primo semestre del 1943," in Il movimento di liberazione in Italia, 1955, nn. 34-35; the second by R. Battaglia, "Un aspetto inedito della crisi del 1943: l'atteggiamento di alcuni gruppi del capitale finanziario," in ibid. Others spoke of "an immense moral pressure" being exercised against fascism by many sectors.

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[12]Aquarone, op. cit., p. 311.

[13]Bianchi, op. cit., p. 566.

[14]Ibidem, p. 477.

[15]P. Schmitter, "Speculations about the Prospective Demise of Authoritarian Regimes and Its Possible Consequences," Latin American Program Working Paper No. 60 (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1980).

[16]F. W. Deakin, The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler, and the Fall of Italian Fascism (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962).

[17]Count Carlo Sforza, quoted by Bianchi, op. cit., p. 742. Bianchi also reports De Gasperi's opinion that while those who had overthrown Mussolini might reap political benefits, those who had to negotiate for an armistice would be in a less favorable position. Therefore, it would be a political mistake to participate in such an operation, according to him (p. 658).

[18]N. Gallerano, "Fascismo: la caduta," in F. Levi, U. Levra, and N. Tranfaglia (eds.), Il Mondo contemporaneo. Storia d'Italia-3 (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1978), p. 493.

[19]Delzell, op. cit., pp. 322-323.

[20]Ibidem, p. 338.

[21]E. Ragionieri, Storia d'Italia. Dall'unitá ad oggi (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), vol. 4, p. 2372.

[22]Ibidem.

[23]R. Battaglia, Storia della Resistenza italiana. 8 settembre 1943-25 aprile 1945 (Turin: Einaudi, 1964), p. 219.

[24]G. Quazza, Resistenza e storia d'Italia. Problemi e ipotesi di ricerca (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976), pp. 146-147.

[25]Ragionieri, op. cit., p. 2374.

[26]Quoted by Quazza, op. cit., p. 158. See also the entire chapter "Il dibattito sulla svolta di Salerno" in P. Spriano, Storia del Partito comunista italiano. La Resistenza. Togliatti e il partito nuovo (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), vol. V, pp. 314-337.

[27]Delzell, op. cit., p. 463.

[28]Ragionieri, op. cit., pp. 2406 and 2434. See also p. 2450: "perhaps in no other sector so much as in that of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the diplomacy, has there occurred as massive a continuation [between fascism and post-fascism] in all executive offices of the top cadres."

[29]A famous partisan commander, quoted by E. Cerquetti, Le Forze armate italiane dal 1945 al 1975 (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1975), p. 13. See also, for an excellent synthetic overview, G. Rochat and G. Massobrio, Breve storia dell'esercito italiano dal 1861 al 1943 (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), especially the last two chapters.

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[31]See the chapter "L'ipoteca dei vincitori e la'prospettiva greca,'" in Spriano, op. cit., pp. 420-450.

[32]For a very perceptive essay identifying the spaces of discretion open to Italian policy-makers, and in sharp polemic with Communist views, see E. Di Nolfo, "Sistema internazionale e sistema politico italiano: interazione e compatibilitá," in L. Graziano and S. Tarrow (eds.), La crisi italiana (Turin: Einaudi, 1979), pp. 43-77.

[33]See the essay by M. De Cecco, "Economic Policy in the Reconstruction Period, 1945-51," in S. J. Woolf (ed.), The Rebirth of Italy 1943-50 (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), pp. 156-180. See also the doctoral dissertation of John Harper, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington, D.C., 1980.

[34]See L. Valiani's chapter in L. Valiani, G. Bianchi, and E. Ragionieri, Azionisti, cattolici e comunisti nella Resistenza (Milan: Angeli, 1971) and the essay by G. De Luna, "Partito d'azione (1942-1947)," in F. Levi, U. Levra, and N. Tranfaglia (eds.), Il mondo contemporaneo. Storia d'Italia-2 (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1978), pp. 836-845.

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[36]As quoted by R. D. Putnam, "The Italian Communist Politician," in D.L.M. Blackmer and S. Tarrow (eds.), Communism in Italy and France (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 203.

[37]For an elaboration of this point see G. Pasquino, "Italian Democracy in a Period of Change," presented to the First Conference of Europeanists, Washington, D.C., March 29-31, 1979, now translated and published as "La demócracia italiana en un periodo de cambio," Revista de Estudios Politicos (January-February 1980), pp. 105-143.

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[38]Very appropriately, Ragionieri, op. cit., p. 2468, underlines "the extreme swiftness with which the break in the tripartite transformed itself into a head-on confrontation of the component forces: which constitutes a posteriori evidence of the depth of the cracks that had undermined it."

[39]"What has been conquered is not lost," Togliatti quoted by Ragionieri, op. cit., p. 2392.

[40]The two most articulate positions are represented by Quazza, Resistenza e storia d'Italia, op. cit., and by the Catholic-Christian Democrat P. Scoppola, La proposta politica di De Gasperi (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1977).

[41]The point is made in particular, and very convincingly, by B. Salvati, "The Rebirth of Italian Trade Unionism, 1943-1954," in S.J. Woolf (ed.), op. cit., pp. 181-211.

[42]Quoted by Quazza, op. cit., p. 171.

[43]See the essays edited by R. Ruffilli, Cultura politica e partiti nell'età della Costituente I: L'area liberal-democratica. Il mondo cattolico e la Democrazia Cristiana, II: L'area socialista. Il Partito Comunista Italiana (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1978 and 1979 respectively).

[44]L. Valiani, L'avvento di De Gasperi. Tre anni di politica italiana (Turin: Silva, 1949), pp. 38-39.