INTRODUCTION: THE YEAR BEFORE THE ELECTIONS

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The Jubilee of the Catholic Church is the most frequently mentioned event in the chronology that precedes this introduction to the sixteenth edition of *Politics in Italy*. It could not have been otherwise, in light of its impact on Italian public life and visibility in the mass media throughout the year 2000. The “first planetary and media jubilee,” as Gianfranco Brunelli terms it in his contribution to this volume, stands at the center of this book’s section on Italian society. Consider only some of the salient events that marked this celebration: May Day, which the trade unions left nearly entirely for the Pope to celebrate; the Gay Pride demonstration and the attendant protests from the Vatican; Haider’s visit; the arrival of tens of millions of pilgrims to the Eternal City, the impressive amount of public works brought to completion in Rome, and the added visibility of Rome’s mayor Francesco Rutelli. In the imagination of most Italians, the year 2000 will remain the Jubilee year.

In spite of the Pope’s many meetings with social groups, however, the Jubilee had much less of an impact on the political imagination. As a result, Brunelli’s essay concentrates on the external aspects of Jubilee, emphasizing the worldwide attention that the Church gave to the event and its internal aspects, especially the uneasy compromises that emerged within the Church’s different currents and groups as it designed and managed the event.

Italian political life, in spite of the shadow projected by St. Peter's Basilica and the church's other palaces, maintained its own pace and concerns. The most salient were signs of the legislature's impending demise. Even as the governing majority defended itself from the opposition's repeated calls for the Parliament's dissolution, it could not ignore the need to prepare for an early electoral clash. The Jubilee entered this process, when the Center-Left coalition chose the Roman Mayor as its presidential candidate.

The Regional Elections of 16 April, and the Leadership of the Center-Left

Hovering over the horizon lay the prospect of impending national elections. Even the year's own contest, the elections in the fifteen ordinary-statute regions, became little more than a stepping stone towards a renewed battle for control of the Parliament and government. The opposition framed the competition as a general rehearsal of its presumed future triumph. Massimo D'Alema, the incumbent Prime Minister, finally accepted this interpretation. He framed the outcome of the vote as an assessment of his government's performance, and linked his candidacy for the coalition's leadership at the next national elections to the regional results. As a result, D'Alema helped to shift the competition to the national terrain, the preferred venue of his antagonist, Silvio Berlusconi. The *Polo's* leader, in fact, personally led an extensive and fully national campaign, as he circumnavigated the entire peninsula by boat and unleashed the full force of his television companies in these regional elections.

Once again as has happened in the past and so often happens in other political systems, the campaign for regional elections was entirely based on national themes. Berlusconi's fierce proclamations on the confrontation between communism and anti-communism echoed the worn-out formulas of the First Republic. Even as preparation for the popular state reform emphasized the functioning of regional bodies, nobody paid much attention to the performance of the regional governments. Regional reform resurfaced only after the polls closed, and only then did the new government and its majority again put forward a federalist reform project. Note the relative minimalism of this plan. It included elements of the proposal the Bicameral Commission had formulated, contrasting with the loud calls issued by the presidents of the Center-Right regions for a massive "devolution" of powers from the central state.

Still, the newly designed direct elections of the regional presidents may allow these office holders to play a national political

role. This Constitutional reform (enacted in November 1999 in anticipation of the April elections) was meant to eliminate the residual elements of governmental instability and diminish the personalization of political electoral competition. It should be seen as another step toward the new regional institutional identity that Gianfranco Baldini and Salvatore Vassallo analyze in another chapter of this volume.

In spite of the direct elections, the regional presidential candidates practically disappeared from the pre-electoral scene that was dominated by the D'Alema-Berlusconi duel. D'Alema expected his coalition to conquer at least ten regions, adding one to the nine it had won in 1995. The voters, instead, conferred victory on the Center-Right in nine regions, giving seven to the Center-Left. Helped by many observers and political commentators, the Center-Right proclaimed a crushing victory, a preview of its success at the next national parliamentary elections. Indeed, the Center-Right conquered regions that account for about 32 million inhabitants, compared to the 16 million that live in the regions the Center-Left won. And even as it lost in the populous Campania region, it took Liguria, another large and politically significant region that had been "red" for more than a decade.¹

How large was the Center-Right's political success? An answer to that question needs to examine the relationship between Berlusconi's Polo and the Northern League. From its inception, the strained alliance between these two forces joined with the D'Alema-Berlusconi duel to define the election contest of 2000, and these will strain the alliance in the 2001 competition for the Chamber and the Senate. Subtracting the Northern League's total from the Center-Right victory provides for an electoral win of no more than a couple of percentage points.

D'Alema, in keeping with his approach, drew the implication of the defeat: a few hours after the results were announced, he presented his resignation to the Head of State. As a result, he relinquished both the post of Prime Minister and leader of the Center-Left coalition. Within a week, the selection of Giuliano Amato to head the government solved the first problem. It took several months to answer the second problem. At the end of the summer, the Center-Left chose Francesco Rutelli as its prime ministerial candidate in the elections of 2001.

Gianfranco Pasquino's chapter examines the process and the implications of the transition from the D'Alema government to the one led by Amato. The new cabinet had a rather unhappy beginning. Politicians played musical chairs around the total number of ministerial and under-secretarial posts and the criteria by which

they should be assigned, returning to the much criticized practices of the First Republic. The preceding D'Alema government, which lasted for less than four months, has been felicitously described as "a coalition government, rather than a coalitional government," i.e., it was not the by-product of a cohesive political alliance, but a patchwork of diverse political forces.² The same can also be said of the Amato government. First, viewing Amato as Craxi's accomplice, Antonio Di Pietro's group refused to join the coalition and left the Democrats. Then, converts from the Center-Right, first among them the representatives of Mastella's UDEUR, and, more visibly, representatives of the Democrats, joined the Amato government, taking a less prominent role than in the two D'Alema governments. Berlusconi attacked, claiming that the mere presence in the majority and the government of public officials who had been elected in 1996 on the Polo's lists, and the fact that Amato was not even a member of Parliament delegitimized the government. He called for the dissolution of the Chambers and immediate elections. Furthermore, political squabbles forced Amato to include several minor groups and to remove two important ministers in the D'Alema government. He replaced Luigi Berlinguer (Public Education), and Rosi Bindi (Health). Both of these political heavyweights had drawn the opposition of doctors' and teachers' associations and were under attack for their reform efforts. The new government came to life in a weakened state.

Amato had promised the majority and the head of state that he would keep the legislature going until the end of its natural term. To reach that goal, he had to pass the budget so as to avoid financial default and to enact institutional, especially electoral, reforms. Given the turbulence within the majority and pressure from the opposition, the threat of Parliament's early dissolution never disappeared. The opposition leader never stopped asking for new elections. By July, Berlusconi had already begun his electoral campaign, flooding Italy's streets and squares with gigantic posters and electoral slogans.

Before Amato could confront Berlusconi, he had to engage the members of his coalition. Although some were willing to support his cabinet, none wanted him to be their leader in the upcoming electoral competition. Amato had other aspirations. Because of his long record of success in government and support from parts of the Democrats of the Left (DS) and the SDI, he hoped to lead the Center-Left. From the very moment Amato became Prime Minister, however, the Democrats and the other wing of the DS opposed him. The Democrats, who had previously been searching for an alternative to D'Alema, now looked to replace Amato. In the end,

the results of summer polls, and the alleged success of Rome's City Hall in the organization of the Jubilee, launched Francesco Rutelli's candidacy. In June, Amato threatened to resign, and hinted the government would not survive the choice of a candidate other than himself, and, throughout the summer, he insisted he was the right candidate. Finally, while participating in a television show on 25 September, the Prime Minister unexpectedly announced he would step aside in favor of Rutelli.

The Restless Majority

Before discussing the record of the Amato government, we will examine the politics of the new majority. For now, we will note that this government, like the Center-Left governments that had preceded it, outperformed its parliamentary majority. Throughout the year, all Center-Left parties or groups were as contentious and inconclusive as in the previous years. In contrast, the Center-Right alliance appeared more cohesive. The unquestioned and absolute leadership of Silvio Berlusconi burnished this image; reinvigorating success at the regional elections, and the awareness the Northern League's comeback had made it stronger. The Center-Right is discussed here and there in various contributions to this volume; by contrast, two chapters are devoted to the fortunes of the majority's two main components, the DS and the Center groups, because of their very complexity.

Confused and jerky moves describe the coalition's politics. Carlo Baccetti richly describes the "crowded stage" of this political formation's nerve center. The details are necessary because the year was filled with many key moments with many protagonists, at times political groups and at times single individuals. Each piece of the complex mosaic is significant.

Only one of the Centrist political groups, the Italian Popular Party, has the electoral following and traditions of a political party. The others are "taxi parties," like the small Spanish parties that emerged in the aftermath of Franco's death: their members could all fit in a single cab. There can only be a few members of the Democratic Union for Europe, Clemente Mastella's *UDEUR*, no matter how efficiently its leader maneuvers within the Center and the entire Center-Left coalition. Very few politicians follow Lamberto Dini, whose grouping, Italian Renewal, even lost some senators and deputies. Antonio Di Pietro's political movement, created the day after the Amato government came into being, is totally personal.³ Similarly singular, at least judging by its first moves in 2000,

is the party of the former CISL secretary, Sergio D'Antoni. The Democrats are more numerous than the passengers of a taxi, but only because they have many members who seek political leadership. Before bolting, Di Pietro had been one of them, and many of those who remained were at odds with their elected president, Arturo Parisi. Born in 1999 with the goal of unifying all the Center-Left into one party, the Democrats hardly managed to bring together a part of the center, and even lost some of their components during the year.

Battles within each group, as well as conflict between the groups, characterize the Center. Strategic goals varied across groups, and also among individuals within each group: they ranged from the building of a Third Pole, to the rebuilding of the Olive, in which its own supporters held different views.

In September, after many uncertainties and many moves and countermoves, the PPI, Democrats, *UDEUR* and Italian Renewal formed a new alliance, which was neither singularly electoral nor fully political, the *Margherita*. What pushed the Democrats to accelerate the founding of the *Margherita*? When Rutelli was designated as the coalition's candidate for Prime Minister, the new alliance immediately took him as their leader.

In addition, when Romano Prodi left Italian politics to lead the European Union, he further weakened his party, the Democrats. Without his presence, the party's leaders lost their unifying symbol and source of political advice and leadership. And so, Prodi's alleged difficulties in Brussels mixed with the political hopes of his erstwhile allies to feed rumors of his impending return to his party and political coalition. In the chapter devoted to the European Commission's presidency, Jeffrey Anderson examines Prodi's year in Brussels. Anderson attributes the problems to objective obstacles in the structure of the European Commission, which derive from its ill-defined duties and powers and the pressures that come from the Council of Ministers and the member-states.

For their part, the Democrats of the Left were preoccupied with internal matters. Their National Congress took place 13-16 January in Turin, the first since the party's creation out of the PDS, in February 1997. The event marked the political opening of the year 2000. As Paolo Bellucci, Marco Maraffi and Paolo Segatti write at the beginning of their chapter, the Turin Congress had several goals: to affirm Walter Veltroni's leadership, to redefine the DS's organizational structure, and to clarify the relationship between the party and the coalition. More generally, the Congress sought to redefine the cultural and programmatic identity of a party that had absorbed various individuals and groups, Catholic, Lay and Social-

ist, from the reformist tradition. Neither the Congress, nor the subsequent debate, nor the Assembly held to elect D'Alema party President in December resolved any of these matters. The party and its leaders have not provided a convincing analysis of the nature and the role of a Left party in contemporary Italy.

Perhaps the DS is still undecided about the appropriate style of leadership. If the alternation between Veltroni and D'Alema signaled this dilemma, the model embodied by Antonio Bassolino, the populist mayor of Naples, is probably not the solution. Felia Allum and Marco Cilento offer Bassolino, a former *PCI* "cadre" who transformed himself into a charismatic leader, as an example of the personalization of local politics that has followed the recently instituted direct election of mayors. After a first mandate crowned by concrete results and high popularity, Bassolino's road turned bumpy. He faced political troubles in his municipal home base, served as a minister in the D'Alema government for a few months and, finally, ran for president of the Campania region. Bassolino's electoral victory squandered his political capital and did not protect him from the winds of coalition politics. By the end of 2000, Bassolino seemed a long way from the model of a new political leader.

The Government and the Reforms

Between the end of 1999 and the beginning of 2000, the government and parliament sought to address some issues on the agenda. As Baldini and Vassallo illustrate in their chapter, an agreement was found on the new composition of regional governments, and provisions were formulated for the new regional statutes, two measures that would influence the regional elections and governments in the following year. Constitutional amendments on fair process and voting rights for Italians abroad were also approved. As the year passed and these proposals did not become current legislation, recriminations between the majority and the opposition intensified.

By contrast, the promise to reform the electoral system – one of the commitments the new Prime Minister had assumed when confirmed to the post – went unfulfilled. The effort failed because of differences within and between the two electoral coalitions. On 21 May, Italians voted in a referendum, which sought to abolish the proportional quota of the current electoral system. This campaign brought to light unbreachable disagreements among the parties and disillusioned many voters. Because turnout did not reach 50 percent of the electorate, the referendum failed, bringing down with it several other proposals.⁴

Amato's government, however, displayed some notable successes. Working with the parliament, it managed to complete Bindi's reform of the health system. Franca Maino's chapter presents the content of the legislative decree 229/99, known as the "Bindi reform," and of the legislative decree 56/00. The first deals primarily with the organization of the National Health Service. It has significant implications for the managerial autonomy of the local health Corporations and for the powers assigned to regions and municipalities. It attracted media attention for the ways doctors reacted to the regulation of public versus private medical practices. The second decree, which deals with the financing of health care, addresses the broader and much debated issue of fiscal federalism. The reforms, which had the support of the new minister Veronesi, sought to prepare for future challenges. In October, the Senate, with the Polo's abstention but with the opposition of the Northern League and the Refoundation, approved the framework law on social security, a reform the Prodi government had already initiated. This changed the principles of social security 110 years after the Crispi law. It is especially attentive to the disabled, the young, and the destitute. Both changes addressed critical social problems.

This volume also examines road safety, another theme that requires urgent and radical legislative measures. Rodolfo Lewanski reminds us that throughout the 1990s, Italy failed to keep pace with other European countries and continued to suffer the pain and social costs of a high number of road accidents. The Center-Left governments inaugurated policies to reverse the trend. In March 2000, a law came into force requiring motorbike drivers to wear helmets. In addition, the government outlined a plan for road safety, included this issue in the general transportation plan, and enacted other relevant measures. Lewanski regrets the partisan nature of this issue. In parliament, the Polo's parties fiercely opposed many of the provisions proposed by the majority. The truth is that by "security" the Right only means public order and the struggle against criminality, of all types and levels. In 2000, this only, or primarily, meant petty crimes.⁵

The Right also labeled as "security" the social and institutional problems caused by immigration, be it legal or illegal. The Northern League turned these problems into one of its war-horses, and many followers, if not also the leaders of *Forza Italia* and AN, lean towards a racist stand. This development occurs, as the very title of Harlan Koff's contribution underscores, at a time when Italy, like the other major European countries, appears to be transforming the issue from one of immigration to that of integration. Koff

assesses the impact of the 1998 Turco-Napolitano law, which underwent minor changes in December 2000, and notes several other important legal developments. Together these suggest that despite strong opposition, Italy has begun to accept the path to a multi-ethnic society.

Several other critical reforms pursued during 2000 need to be added to the list. The opposition and organized groups of teachers and students continued to oppose efforts to reform the schools and universities. These debates signal that this battle will continue. Still, after years of absolute inertia, the efforts represent a major turn-about as far as the renewal of Italian education and its alignment with European models are concerned. Finally, before the end of the legislature, the majority will manage to vote an initial reform that will change the state structure in a federalist direction. Here too the Center-Left and Center-Right stand against each other.

We can also point out that in February 2000, the D'Alema government presented to Parliament a plan to reform the "severance insurance fund" (TFR), to which employers must currently pay contributions for all their employees. Here too, polemics continued throughout the year. The government's project met with support from the Unions, but the employers' association (*Confindustria*) openly opposed the measure. Among other things, *Confindustria* insisted that any changes in the Tfr must be part of a broader pension reform. Vincent Della Sala argues in his chapter that *Confindustria* sees pension reform as linked to changing the basic structures of Italian capitalism. Retirement issues are connected with those of labor flexibility: in both cases individuals ought to be freer to manage their own resources.

Throughout the year, *Confindustria* criticized the governmental majority. It raised its voice even louder after D'Amato took office. According to Della Sala, D'Amato symbolizes the direction of Italian capitalism. The conflictual attitude vis-à-vis the government and the unions, a more market oriented finance, and the increased role of private investors rather than the state may indicate that Italian capitalism is moving closer to the Anglo-Saxon model and away from the Rhine model. This path, though, still appears to be a long one.⁶

Toward the Elections

At the end of the year, the government and the majority could take pride in the good health of Italy's public finance and economy. Declines in the still enormous public debt dropped Italy below

Belgium, in this negative ranking. At 106 percent in 2000, it is lower than in the previous year and confirms the trend toward further reductions. Furthermore, in 2000, the budget deficit was 1.5 percent, lower than that of prior years. Fiscal pressure declined from 43 percent to 42.4 percent, and Italians received a rather significant "fiscal bonus" at the end of the year. Inflation rose to nearly 2.5 percent, a rate much higher than in recent years, but it rose in tandem with the other EU countries, because of factors that were exogenous to the particular economies. Positive signals came from employment rates, which rose by 1.5 percent, and from unemployment rates, which, for the first time in ten years, declined to a point just above 10 percent. GDP rose 2.9 percent, the highest rate in the past thirty years; industrial production grew by 4 percent, and global investments by 6.8 percent; prices at the point of production went down, and there were 100,000 more companies that were created than failed. In the South, numerous signs pointed to the resurgence of economic growth. Wages for dependent workers grew by 4.1 percent and family consumption, as the record shopping of Christmas 2000 clearly indicated, increased by 3.3 percent. The government took credit for a more solid economy and for levels of growth and inflation that are aligned with European levels.

The opposition, not surprisingly, questioned some of these numbers, while maintaining that growth should have been higher still. "They describe a country that does not exist." Leaders of the Polo maintained that whatever successes occurred had been borrowed from their program with respect to labor flexibility, tax reduction, job training, and new technologies. Finally, they added, a government lacking popular legitimacy could only do little or nothing. Public recriminations between the government and the opposition entered the electoral climate.

Still, precisely for the reason identified by the Polo (although they misread its impact), the Amato government managed not to be heavily influenced by the parties. It was not the absence of popular legitimacy, but the presence of key ministers who did not hold seats in the parliament (including the Prime Minister himself). The government, however, did accede to its majority, or rather to individual deputies and senators, when it came to voting the budget. The framework of the budget law was preserved, with all the positive elements the government had included. It gave back important sums to families, especially to those in the middle and lower income ranges, and to businesses. It also continued to pursue policies that provided incentives for job creation; abolished the tax on first houses and reduced rates overall; provided for maternity payments, and abolished the copayment on medical prescriptions; and

raised pensions. By multiplying budget items at the time of voting, though, deputies and senators maneuvered to shower benefits on the voters. Indeed, the state general accountant, Andrea Minorchio, critically noted that the Chambers doubled the government's 76 legislative proposals to more than 150. These numbers and authoritative criticisms gave the Polo an opportunity to claim that electoral maneuvering spoiled the budget.

On 24 December, a large majority passed the budget bill, marking the year's last political-legislative act. On the eve of one of the richest Christmas seasons in memory, the deputies voted to distribute gifts, not just for Christmas but for the impending national elections. At the end of the year 2000, the political clouds parted and the image of national elections appeared on the immediate horizon.

(translated by Serenella Sferza)

Notes

1. On the electoral results, in addition to the chapter by Baldini and Vassallo, see some of the contributions in A. Chiaramonte and R. D'Alimonte, eds., *Il maggioritario regionale. Le elezioni del 16 aprile 2000*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000.
2. S. Fabbrini, *Tra pressioni e veti. Il cambiamento politico in Italia*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2000, p. 161.
3. On the definition of this category which, however, does not apply to all subjects listed here, see M. Calise, *Il partito personale*, Laterza, 2000, pp. 53-58.
4. On 3 February, the Constitutional Court approved fourteen referenda out of the twenty-one for which signatures had been collected, thereby unleashing the Radicals' protests. On the crisis of the referendum as a political tool, see M. Donovan, "La fine dell'Anomalia referendaria in Italia?," in M. Gilbert and G. Pasquino, eds., *Politica in Italia. Edizione 2000*, Bologna, Il Mulino, pp. 69-87.
5. By catering to, but also instigating, the present leanings of most people, the Right has managed to put security against petty crimes at the top of their concerns and the political agenda. They have also turned this issue into an important theme of electoral debate. The majority has accepted this terrain, even though they also have taken credit for the statistics, which show declines in crimes of all kinds.
6. On the path followed by Italian capitalism, see the 1999 episode analyzed by D. Woods, "Le trasformazioni del capitalismo italiano: un'analisi dell'acquisto di Telecom Italia da parte dell'Olivetti," in M. Gilbert and G. Pasquino, eds., *Politica in Italia. Edizione 2000*, Bologna, Il Mulino, pp. 203-221.