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THE END OF CONSENSUAL POLITICS IN ITALY

by Sergio Fabbrini

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Boundaries of Italian Politics", Carleton University,
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Introduction

There can be no doubt that Italian democracy is passing through a profound change. Suffice it to mention that, between the elections (for the national parliament) of 1992 and those of 1994, the entire party system which had organized Italian postwar democracy was radically transformed. Already the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 had led, two years afterwards, to the transformation of the *Partito Comunista Italiano* or PCI (throughout the postwar period, the largest communist party in Europe) into a new party - although one with much less electoral clout - of the democratic left (*Partito Democratico della Sinistra* or PDS). But it was first the extraordinary success of the electoral referenda of 1991¹ and 1993², and then the onset in 1992 of judicial enquiries into political corruption (which began in Milan and then spread to the other main cities) that created the conditions for a radical transformation of the party system of what we may call the First Italian Republic of 1948-1993³.

Indeed, after the national elections held in 1994 with the new electoral law passed August 4, 1993 (majoritarian for 3/4 of the parliamentary seats and proportional for the remaining 1/4), the national parliament saw the practically total disappearance of the two political parties that had governed Italy either uninterruptedly after the war (*Democrazia Cristiana* or DC) or almost uninterruptedly after the early 1960s with the DC (the *Partito Socialista Italiano* or PSI). And, with them, the almost quasi-disappearance of an entire political class. It is suffice to say that, in 1994, the members elected for the first time at the Chamber of Deputies were the 71 per cent of the total members of that Chamber, while they were 42,9% (in 1992), and only 28,2% (in 1987), 32,1% (in 1983) and, on average, 35,2% between 1953-1979.

What are the reasons for this crisis? I would suggest that it cannot be explained unless it is related to the features of the model of democracy that organized the First Italian Republic. Italy has been traversed, in fact, not by a crisis of democracy but

instead by the crisis of a particular model for the organization of democracy, and specifically *the crisis of a consensual democracy* ⁴. Indeed, that of Italy is an extraordinary case of change *within* the (democratic) regime rather than change *of* the (democratic) regime.⁵ Of the consolidated democracies, only France has known a comparable experience, and specifically in the period 1958-1962 with the passage from the Fourth Republic (consensual) to the Fifth Republic (competitive). Whereas in France the change was imposed by external factors (the rebellion of the French generals in Algeria against the decision taken in Paris to grant independence to that country), in Italy it was induced by internal ones (although they were activated by the demise of the constraints imposed by the Cold War).

Consensual democracy

If the Italian crisis is a crisis of a consensual democracy, then what is meant by the latter term? I begin with the original definition. Although the phenomenon has been known for some time, the concept derives from a comparatively recent elaboration by the comparative political scientist Arend Lijphart, who in analysis of a number of small democracies of continental Europe reaches a surprising conclusion. And namely that in certain *socio-cultural* contexts democracy can work *only if the majority principle is not applied*. This is a highly significant conclusion if we bear in mind that democracy has traditionally been made to coincide with a political regime that guarantees the operability of that principle.

What, then, are the contexts that justify suspension of the principle? Lijphart provides a first answer in these terms⁶: those contexts connoted by deep ethnic-cultural cleavages, which sometimes overlap with religious differences. This is the case of countries like Belgium, Holland, Switzerland and, partially, Austria⁷. In those countries, cleavages among citizens are inflexible and permanent (a Fleming cannot become a Walloon,

whereas a worker can always hope to join the middle class, perhaps via his or her children), and they thus constitute a society rigidly segmented into closed sub-communities. Societies of this kind cannot sustain the competitive changeover of government leaders, because the winning leaders express *identities* irreconcilable with those of the communities represented by the losers. Anything but changeover, therefore: what is required in these cases is the stability of the political leaders, their unquestioned control over their respective identity communities, their ability to reach *joint accord* without affecting these identities. And in fact Lijphart adopted, for these countries, the definition of *consociational democracies*.

Drawing on studies by other scholars, Lijphart⁸ then provides a second answer: he points out that non-majoritarian forms of the regulation of the political process are in action also in societies not ethnically fragmented, but obliged for several reasons to look for conciliatory modes of governmental decision-making. And this, as in particular Giovanni Sartori⁹ pointed out since the 1970s, is the case of Italy and of France of the Fourth Republic (1946-1958), for their ideological polarization. Infact, their societies are fragmented by rigid cleavages, although these are cleavages which derive from conflicting ideological identities rather than from distinct ethnic identities. And - as has happened in the Italian case in particular - opposing ideological identities have assumed a geographical pattern which has given rise to veritable geographically-delimited subcultures. But, of course, these non-majoritarian forms of political regulation are also to be found in countries distinguished by neither ethnic segmentation nor ideological polarization. These are small countries (like Luxembourg or Iceland) or countries which have been subjected to particular geopolitical constraints (like Finland or Israel); in short, countries which have been forced to reduce outside pressures (economic or political) by adopting a conciliatory arrangement to their interiors.

Lijpart's awareness of the extent of the phenomenon obliges him to redefine his initial concept of consociationalism. In fact, he coins the term consensual democracy in order to include the countries considered in the second stage of his analysis. This latter, however, seems an unfortunate formulation, since it seems to imply that consensus is a preoccupation only of the countries in question (and not of the non-consensual democracies, although this is obviously not the case). Anyway, the term consociational democracy refers to those countries with an *ethnic-cultural* basis, while the term consensual democracy refers to those with an *ideological-cultural* basis. In both cases, these are societies with *non-homogeneous*, i.e. divided or plural, political cultures.

This is an important distinction to explain the different political synthesis that has come about in the two groups of democracies. The consociational democracies tend to constitute themselves around a government coalition *open* to all major parties in the national society, while the consensual democracies - and this is also for geopolitical reasons - tend to constitute themselves around coalitions *closed* to certain parties (in specific, to communist parties and, in general, to anti-system parties). The outcome in these latter democracies is that the arena of synthesis is the parliament, for it is in parliament that legislative majorities much larger than government ones are formed, while in the former democracies this synthesis may come about directly in the government. This distinction, however, does not affect the general thrust of Lijpart's argument: "In plural societies... majority rule spells majority dictatorship and civil strife rather than democracy. What these societies need is a more democratic regime that emphasizes consensus instead of opposition, that includes rather than excludes, and that tries to maximize the size of the ruling majority instead of being satisfied with a bare majority..."¹⁰.

In short, consensual democracy is a model of democracy - that is, it is one of the forms assumed by the regulation of the political process - proper to deeply divided societies. Decision-

making outcomes depend on agreement among political leaders representing the two or more sides of the division among citizens, and who have been appointed to create a common terrain between identities which do not wish to meet. While the aspirations of ethnic or ideological communities may be difficult to negotiate, nonetheless negotiable are the conditions that allow the reproduction of these aspirations. From this point of view, there is no significant difference between the two types of identity (ethnic and ideological): they both pursue non-negotiable goals. The point is that consensual democracy is based on the negotiation, not of goals but of the conditions that have enabled these goals to reproduce themselves over time. In these democracies, political leaders fulfil a central systemic function: that of activating a centripetal force in a centrifugal society. This is a difficult endeavour which can only be achieved if these leaders are able to exercise rigid control over their respective communities and, therefore, only if the latter do not establish reciprocal relations without their intermediation.

Oligarchism and corruption

If such is the case, then, besides being a cultural option, consensualism is the outcome of a systemic necessity. This was the pattern that emerged in Italy immediately after the Second World War under the threat of imminent (ideological) civil war. As democracy consolidated, by the second half of the 1950s this necessity had progressively imposed itself on the country's principal political actors, i.e. the party leaders. Already in the early 1950s (and exactly after 1953) the opinion had become widespread that Italy could not be governed through the coherent application of the majority principle¹¹. The reasons are obvious: first because one of the possible majorities (dominated by the PCI) would not have been internationally welcome; second because the minority (i.e. the PCI) prevented from becoming the majority was so slightly in the minority that without its cooperation the

country was ungovernable. Hence the progressive structuring of a consensual form of rule which could only be politically effective if it was able to adjust the entire social process to the exigency of stable inter-party agreement.

The point is precisely this: consensualism understood as a model of democracy has been able to stabilize itself only when congruence has been established among the behavioral logics underlying the various systems that constitute that model. A policy of accommodation among the parties which finds synthesis at the level of the system of government (in the executive as regards ethnic-based consensualism, or in the legislature as regards ideology-based consensualism) will only be successful if it is shielded against pressures from the electorate and, especially, if it is preceded and followed by the equally top-down management of all the public, social and economic institutions. This means that these institutions are structured from their interior, or else they consolidate a previous structure in a manner coherent with the structuring of politics. And given that the structuring of politics in a consensual democracy tends to centre on party-based oligarchies (i.e. on organized minorities which must be enabled to reproduce their power so that respect for accords can be assured), the stability of such democracy resides in its ability to create (or to preserve if it already exists) a structure of oligarchical relations in all the public, social and economic institutions¹².

On the structuring of the Italian politics along oligarchical lines, it is sufficient to recall that, at the Chamber of Deputies, the members reelected were the 61,8% in 1983 and the 64,8% in 1987 (of the total of that Chamber). Or it is sufficient to consider that, between 1958 and 1987, 2/3 of the members of the same Chamber were incumbents with more than one legislature and 39,7% of them were incumbents with three or more legislatures. Of course, the governmental parties, for their position in the state power structure, were more adverse to replace their parliamentary members than the opposition parties, if we think that, between

1953 and 1992, the DC members of the Chamber of Deputies, with three legislatures or more, were on average the 48,6% of the members of the DC parliamentary groups (while, for the same period, they were 34,4% of the members of the PCI-PDS parliamentary groups). But in this stable context of party roles, also the PCI-PDS fostered the growth of an internal political oligarchy: after all the oligarchical control of the party power structure and ideological resources was necessary in order to guarantee both the loyalty of the left electorate to the party and the reliability of the party in the bargaining with its governmental counterparts. Here, it is sufficient to recall that, between 1948 and 1990, the members reelected of the PCI Central Committee were, on average, the 77,9% of the total members of that leading board.

In Italy, this oligarchical predisposition of consensual democracy could fully developed for the huge state intervention, in the economy and society, largely controlled by the (same) parties. Lacking the threat of the alternation in government, the governmental parties could built up solid relations with the large structure of public administration, filling its top positions with personel coming from their ranks. That, at its turn, stimulated a deep intersection among the leaders of the interest groups and the functionaries of the diffused public services. A structure of political exchanges established, with the interest groups as suppliers of political support (to the parties) and the state services party-management as suppliers of economic and administrative resources (to the interest groups). Of course, the reliability of the exchange required the stability of the leadership positions both in the private and public spheres.

There is a large body of empirical research (under the title of *corporativismo*) which confirms the *diffusedly oligarchical* nature of both the economic and social system of Italy during the First Republic. Let me recall only the basic data on the economic system: in 1992 of the 11 largest Italian corporations, 6 were public (thats is state-party-controlled), 3 were associated

to multinational corporations and only 2 were private (Fiat and Iveco). If we consider, for the same year, the largest 30 Italian corporations, only other three were private with an Italian head (Olivetti, Publitalia e Barilla). That is, the five top Italian private corporations were controlled by a family-group while the other Italian largest corporations were controlled by the state (-parties). This is why the Italian capitalism was a family-party capitalism. Of course, as with all the democratic oligarchical systems, there were tensions and strains among the sectional oligarchies, but each of them knew that their own rivalry had a line not to exceed. In sum, as Vittorio Foa¹³, one of the founding fathers of Italian democracy, said: "in Italy there exists a veritable system of groups founded on privilege and exclusion, on closure to access".

The Italy of the First Republic therefore assumed the pattern of an oligarchical democracy; that is, a democracy organized around a *network of organized minorities of party, public, economic and social origin*. An oligarchical democracy is a closed democracy which manages to reproduce itself as such precisely because, as well as the institutions of the state, also the economy and society are closed. Thus in Italy, a relation of reciprocal support and justification arose among the partitocratic gerontocracy, family capitalism, the corporativism of interest representation, the feudalism of the public apparatuses, the monopolism and then the oligopolism of television and the press¹⁴. An oligarchical democracy is not necessarily a corrupt democracy: or at least comparison does not authorize us to maintain that consensualism inevitably leads to that outcome, although corruption is much more plausible where there is not alternation in government. In Italy, however, the lack of governmental alternation combined with a huge state intervention created a formidable incentives structure to transform the oligarchical power in a corrupt power. At the end of 1995, 3.000 persons were under judicial inquisition (*inquisiti*) and 1.600 were sent to the

jury (*rinvitati a giudizio*) for crimes "against the public administration" (that is for political corruption).

The point is that, precisely because of their immobile structure, oligarchies can only reproduce themselves if the environment in which they operate has an equivalent inertia such as to justify their existence. And, broadly speaking, such inertia is inevitable wherever its internal divisions are culturally (more than socially) rigid. In countries of ethnic-religious connotation, change takes place internally to the relative sub-communities, and thus favours sufficient mobility internally to each of them while simultaneously ensuring the necessary stability of the external relationships among them; stability, indeed, consolidated by accommodation among the various oligarchies.

This, however, has not been the case of Italy. The intense modernization of the country throughout the postwar period has undermined the premises of consociationalism, fragmenting classes and interests and, above all, weakening the ideological identities that had justified it. Hence the wholesale penetration of society and the economy, as well as of the state, by the political parties in Italy signals the weakness of the party oligarchy rather than its strength. Not coincidentally, this weakness increased when social (and cultural) dissatisfaction began to spread after 1968, although it was in the Eighties that the cleavage between society and parties fully deepened. Infact, analysis of voting behaviour have shown that, since the demise of terrorism, i.e. since that second half of the 1980s, Italy has emitted repeated signals that its consensual clothing was beginning to chafe. In the words of Mannheimer and Sani,¹⁵ the 1992 elections saw the culmination of an electoral revolution which had substantiated itself "in the progressive erosion of the traditional political subcultures caused ... by secularization, higher levels of education, increased mobility, and much greater exposure to the most diverse cultural stimuli and messages...".

In short, if consensualism is conceived as a model of democracy, and not simply as a stance adopted by the political

leaders in their search for reciprocal accommodations, then, in Italy and for some time now, its ideological (and therefore social and electoral) basis has been shrinking. This is not to imply that Italian society has resolved its internal cleavages; rather that the new cleavages (geographical or fiscal) which have taken the place of previous ones no longer require consensual regulation to be governed. Consequently, once the terrorist emergency of the early 1980s had passed, the consensual model required to cope with a radically changed environment ended up by exacerbating these new cleavages¹⁶. The not entirely paradoxical effect of the diffusion of the oligarchies was therefore a reduction in the accountability of the political system and, specifically, a reduction in the responsiveness of the party system. The result was that the demand for change, once it had moved onto the public agenda, was inevitably addressed externally to the party system of the First Republic and therefore also externally to the left¹⁷.

The exit from consensualism

Of course, Italy is not the first case of a democracy in crisis because of changes in its environment. However, what is of interest in its case is the tenacious resistance that the political class (with few exceptions) has raised to such change. Herein resides, in the view of many scholars¹⁸, the specificity of the Italian crisis, given that there are numerous examples of institutional change within a democratic regime which have seen the participation of significant sections of the political class¹⁹. As a matter of fact, in Italy, at least since the first electoral referendum of June 1991, a manifest clash has arisen between a political class of "consensual" culture and the protagonists of change represented by the referendum movement (and indirectly supported by the investigative judiciary) who advocate a "competitive" system²⁰. As a result of this clash, when the change had been definitively accomplished, the country found itself bereft

of a coherent institutional perspective²¹. Hence the contradictory transition that ensued.

It should be added that, predictably enough, the elimination of the first ranks of the national political class coincided with a crisis of the party-controlled system of representation. Consequently, in the national elections of 1994 a formidable pressure arose for the direct expression of interests in the political sphere. And of course every process of self-representation benefits the best-organized interests or at any rate those endowed with greater resources of influence. And, as happened in the analogous process of democratic transition in the United States at the beginning of this century, big business²² has proved to be the social actor best able to combine organization with political influence. Infact, the winner of those national elections was the new born company-party Forza Italia, built up in few months thanks to the territorial structures of the Fininvest corporation and able to gather the support of the large electorate of the previous (and now dead) centrist parties. But given the ambiguity of the reformed electoral law and the astonishing level of political incompetence shown by the new elected parliamentarians (which were in 1994, I recall, the 71,0% of the total of the Chamber of deputies members), the second and third ranks of the old political class soon reorganized, filling after 1994 the top positions of the new parties as well as consolidating those already controlled of the old ones. Not surprisingly, they arrived to fill the largest part of the candidatures for the ~~incoming~~ 1996 national elections, especially on the center-left side.

The issue of the institutional reform of Italian democracy, when it was a tool -from the end of the Seventies to 1989- of an emerging section of the national political class (namely the new leadership group gathered around the Craxi's Socialist Party) to reduce the influence of the traditional DC-PCI unofficial alliance on the governmental process, produced nothing more than vanishing suggestions to rationalize the governmental

structure (and some important, but not strategic, micro-reforms, as the abolition of the secret vote in parliament for the confidence to the government and the law n.400 to strengthen the Presidency of Ministers Council, both approved in 1988). But the fate of the same issue changed, when it became a tool -from 1991 onward- of emerging regions of the north-east and civil movements to redistribute political power in favour of the periphery (and in disfavour of the center) and of the electors (and in disfavour of the parties). From here, the pressure for a federal reform of the state and for the direct election of the head of the government. In sum, in the Nineties, the issue of institutional reform was no longer a tool to redistribute power among (emerging and declining) élites, but to redistribute power among (an emerging society) and (a declining) politics.

But the bottom-up reform of a democracy is necessarily a contradictory process. If a virtuous relation in favour of reform is not created between "below" and "above", the change may be liable to dangerous distortions. The historical error of the best (and minoritarian) members of the Italian political class of the First Republic (those, that is, not involved in the political corruption of *Tangentopoli*)²³ was their failure to understand that the ideological conditions for consensual democracy were no longer in place²⁴; and therefore, after the success of the electoral referendum, their refusal to take account of the consequences of such massive demand for an alternating democracy²⁵. This refusal has prevented the formation of a coalition for institutional innovation endowed, apart from the indispensable civil energies, also with the necessary decision-making resources, and therefore able to govern the transition from consociation to competition. Hence derives the unpreparedness of Italian democracy for the unprecedented challenges raised by change (principal among which is certainly the conflict of interests that every form of self-representation provokes but which in Italy reached during the Berlusconi government of May-December 1994 the limits of democratic acceptability)²⁶.

Italian transition is bound to be a long-drawn-out process. This is inevitable when circumstances dictate a change in the model of democracy but without a 'top-down' solution being forthcoming, as instead was the case of France in 1958-1962 due to the strong leadership exercised by General De Gaulle. The introduction of an alternating democracy in a country such as Italy which never in its history as a united country (i.e. since 1861) has experienced such a system entails a major process of innovation. Firstly, in relationships between politics and the government, where the main task is to create the conditions (at the electoral-party and government level) for plausible competition between alternative poles so that electors can choose a government, and those who govern can be kept constantly under control by an effective opposition, without such opposition preventing them from governing or without recreating the conditions for consensual politics²⁷. And where the task is also to grant quasi-federal powers to the regional governments, so that broader access to public decision-making can be granted to citizens traditionally considered to be mere clients of the state administration.

Secondly, at the level of relationships between politics and the economic, social and public environment. If the foregoing analysis is valid, it will be impossible to achieve a politically competitive democracy in Italy until the market, society and the state are equally competitive and open. The need for anti-trust legislation in the radio and television sector (one of the most urgent necessities in Italy as of 1996) can only be met if it brings with it legislative action designed to eliminate all the oligarchies that were able to entrench themselves during the long consociative period (and to a certain extent during the previous Fascist one). In short what is required is a massive injection of competition into a situation in which monopoly or oligopoly have always predominated.

Conclusion: a mixed regime?

Consensualism by definition is neither virtuous nor vicious. It corresponds to a form of regulation of the political process employed in divided social, cultural, ethnic, religious or ideological contexts. When it has proved impossible to apply the majority principle, consensualism has provided an alternative model with which to ensure the democratic reproduction of a country. This has happened in Italy, where consensualism has enabled an ideologically divided society to remain free. However, like all forms of rule, consensualism tends to degenerate when it responds inadequately to the needs of the electorate that it is supposed to organize. And this too happened in Italy, when that the country's traditional ideological cleavage faded away after 1989. Hence derived, with the electoral referenda of 1991 and 1993 and with the massive electoral support of new political actors (the *Leghe*) in the north-east, the pressure of public opinion for the consensual model of democracy to be abandoned.

The national political class has found it extremely difficult to respond to this pressure, resisting it in a first phase (till the electoral referendum of April 1993), then adapting to it (thanks to the new electoral law of August 1993) with the aim to blunt its innovative thrust in the following phase till the end of the Berlusconi government in December 1994, and finally attempting to reverse it after the obliged resignation of the Berlusconi government, giving back to the parliament the power to form the government (the so called Dini government of the *ribaltone* of January 1995-April 1996) and monopolizing the representative positions for the election of April 1996. If that is true, then it cannot be a surprise the effort to recreate a new centrist political area around the incumbent president of the Council Lamberto Dini, able to attract, in perspective, the moderate components of both the center-left *Ulivo* and of the center-right *Polo*. Thus becoming an essential political ally for both coalitions. And, of course, an influential centrist party will reduce the bipolarization of the electoral competition, reopening the margins for post-electoral bargains among the political

leaders for the government formation: coherently with both the "parliamentary centrality" of the Italian system of government and the "political competence" of its traditional political class.

Nevertheless all these attempts, Italy has moved away from consensual equilibria, although the country still seems far from adopting a competitive system²⁸. A long process of transformation is now under way, with its dangers and opportunities. There are no reasons to fear that this transition will induce democratic breakdown in the country²⁹, given that Italy is now stably integrated into the Western democracies and possesses a mature economy, an articulated society, and a citizenry that is (for the most part) solidly democratic. There are many reasons to hope that Italy will join, although after a long road, the group of the Western competitive democracies. There are also some reasons to suspect that this transition will end up to institutionalize itself in a mixed democratic regime (neither consensual nor competitive). But: is it plausible to make permanent a transition?

NOTES

1 For the abolition of multiple preferences on the list vote. On this see G. Pasquino (ed.), *Votare un solo candidato. Le conseguenze politiche della preferenza unica*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1993.

2 For abolition of the proportional electoral system for the Senate and for its replacement by a majoritarian electoral system.

3 The date of 1993 is due to the fact that in that year, precisely on 4 August, after the results of the electoral referenda the national parliament enacted a new, largely majoritarian, electoral law (largely majoritarian in the sense that 75% of members of parliament are elected by a plurality system at the district level, while 25% are elected from larger constituencies by a proportional electoral system). For an excellent discussion of the consequences of this law for the elections of 1994 see S. Bartolini and R. D'Alimonte (eds.), *Maggioritario ma non troppo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1995. For the data on the political class, see M. Cotta and L. Verzichelli, *La classe politica italiana. Cronaca di una morte annunciata*, in M. Cotta and P. Isernia (edited by), *Il gigante dai piedi di argilla. la crisi di un regime partitocratico*, Bologna, Il Mulino (forthcoming).

4 For the definition of consensual democracy see the following pages. Here, it is suffice to say that I assume, reelaborating the literature on the argument, two models of democracy, relatively to the 24 consolidated democratic countries of the OCSE: the consensual model (proper of countries which cannot allow the alternation in the government of opposing political options) and the competitive model (proper of countries which can allow the alternation in the government of opposing political options). On this, see S. Fabbrini, *Quale democrazia. L'Italia e gli altri*, Bari-Rome, Laterza, 1994.

5 On this see the still masterly analysis by J. J. Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes. Crisis, Breakdown and Reequilibration*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press (4th edition 1991), 1978.

6 See A. Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Society. A Comparative Exploration*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977.

7 Partially, because in Austria socio-cultural cleavages are not so profound that they have induced the country to adopt a consociational model. Indeed, between 1966 and 1987 the two main parties alternated in government. I would say

that when consociationalism has arisen in Austria it has been because of the small size of the country.

8 See A. Lijphart, *Democracies. Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984.

9 See G. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976.

10 A. Lijphart, *Democracies etc.*, p. 23.

11 For a good discussion see S. Vassallo, *Il governo di partito in Italia (1943-1993)*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1994; and M. Calise, "The Italian Particracy: Beyond President and Parliament", and the comments by J. LaPalombara, M. Lorch, R. Y. Nannetti and G. Sartori, *Political Science Quarterly*, 109, n.3, 1994.

12 Although the terms 'elite' and 'oligarchy' frequently coincide, Italy is an excellent example of a substantial difference between them. An oligarchy is an elite which is able to self-reproduce its influence over time, while an elite exerts influence at a particular time. In short, one is a position, while the other is a function. Consequently, a democracy can do without the former but not the latter. Indeed, in its competitive variant, by favouring the permanent circulation of elites, a democracy may exploit the function of its elites without degenerating into oligarchism or anarchy. For this reason it is preferable to speak of political leaders, not political elites, when referring to consensual democracies like Italy. For the data on the Italian political oligarchy, see Cotta and Verzichelli, *op.cit.* and P. Ignazi, *Dal Pci al Pds*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1992; and for the data on the economic oligarchy, see "Mondo economico", n.52, December 25, 1993, A. Friedman, *Tutto in famiglia*, Milan, Rizzoli, 1998 and F. Barca, *Imprese in cerca di padrone. Proprietà e controllo nel capitalismo italiano*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1994.

13 In P. Ginsborg (ed.), *Le virtù della Repubblica. Conversazione a Formia*, Milan, Il Saggiatore, 1994, p. 57. On this see also P. Ginsborg, *Storia dell'Italia dal dopo-guerra ad oggi. Società e politica 1943-1988*, II vols, Turin, Einaudi, 1989.

14 For an insightful discussion of this topic see A. Manzella, "Il crollo della casa comune partitocratica", *MicroMega*, no. 4, 1992.

15 See R. Mannheimer, G. Sani, *La rivoluzione elettorale. L'Italia tra la prima e seconda repubblica*, Milan, Anabasi, 1994, p. 8.

16 Of course, this model also comprises the opposition of the left (i.e. the PCI). The left, in fact, interpreted the demand for democratization raised by the

upheavals of the 1960s and '70s merely in terms of the extension (to its representatives) of already-existing oligarchies. From public television to the universities, from the judiciary to the press, from the civil service to the financial administration, the left demanded and obtained more places at the table; but not that the table and the criteria for selecting those invited to sit at it should be changed. For this reason, A. Pizzorno ("Le difficoltà del consociativismo", in *ibid.*, *Le radici della politica assoluta*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1994) is right to emphasise the responsibility of the left, which justified this process of oligarchization in the name of ideological struggle. For a detailed and careful reconstruction of postwar Italian democracy see D. Hine, *Governing Italy. The Politics of Bargained Pluralism*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993.

17 This explains why the left failed to take advantage of the collapse of the government parties (the DC especially). Still today, criticism of the oligarchy is entirely absent from the program of the largest party on the Italian left (the PDS), while it has been appropriated by the right with extraordinary electoral results: see L. Bobbio, "Dalla destra alla destra. Una strana alternanza", in P. Ginsborg (ed.), *Stato dell'Italia*, Milan, Il Saggiatore, 1994.

18 See A. Mastropaolo, "Perchè è entrata in crisi la democrazia italiana? Un'ipotesi sugli anni Ottanta", in M. Caciagli, F. Cazzola, L. Morlino and S. Passigli (eds), *L'Italia tra crisi e trasformazione*, Bari-Rome, Laterza, 1994

19 See the most recent case of Belgium, which became federal in 1993, and the excellent discussion of diverse cases in K. G. Banting, R. Simeon (eds.), *Redesigning the State. The Politics of Constitutional Change in Industrial Nations*, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 1985.

20 For a good discussion see P. Corbetta, A. Parisi, "Ancora un 18 aprile. Il referendum sulla legge elettorale del Senato", in C. Marshon, G. Pasquino (eds.), *Politica in Italia. Edizione 1994*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1994. I do not want to underestimate the role of the Northern League in the change of the Italian democracy, but I think it has been much less crucial than that of the referendum movement in defining the strategic direction of the change. As it is shown by the declining electoral importance of that League. For a different view, see T. Gallagher, "Rome at Bay. The Challenge of the Northern League to the Italian State", *Government and Opposition*, 27, n.4, 1992.

21 As well argued by S. Ceccanti, "Riforme istituzionali: passato e futuro", *il Mulino*, n.5, 1994; and especially by A. Barbera, "Transizione alla democrazia maggioritaria? Riflessioni in due puntate", *Quaderni costituzionali*, XIV, no. 3, 1994.

22 Especially if monopolistic, and especially if activated in the strategic sector of mass communications, as in the case of Fininvest owned by the entrepreneur Silvio Berlusconi. On the American experience, see the study by M. Shefter, *Political Parties and the State. The American Historical Experience*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994, especially chap. 3.

23 See S. Waters, "Tangentopoli and the Emergence of a New Political Order in Italy", *West European Politics*, 17, n.1, 1994.

24 On this, see the excellent analysis by M. Salvati, "L'imprevista ma prevedibile caduta di un regime", *il Mulino*, no. 2, 1994

25 It is worth pointing out that a high 83% of the electorate voted in April 1993 electoral referendum for abolition of the proportional system for the election of senators.

26 As well explained by A. Lyttelton, "Italy. The Triumph of TV", *The New York Review of Books*, XLI, no. 14 (11 August), 1994.

27 Of course, there is no single model of competitive democracy to draw upon, since it has come about in both the majoritarian democracies (Great Britain, New Zealand, Canada, United States, Australia, V Republic France) and the non-majoritarian democracies (Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Greece since 1974, Spain since 1976 and, as we have seen, Austria in the period 1966-87). For this reason, I believe it is appropriate to call this set of democracies 'competitive', rather than 'majoritarian or Westminster-type'. These competitive democracies, and the consensual ones mentioned above, constitute the entire population of the consolidated democracies I mentioned in note 4. To these should be added three special cases: Denmark and Portugal, which fall between the two models; and Japan, a conundrum for those seeking to draw up a classification. Here I shall restrict myself to saying that Japan is a truly "non-common" democracy, but which at the institutional level can be considered *potentially* a competitive democracy. On all this see again S. Fabbrini, *Quale democrazia. L'Italia e gli altri*, Bari-Rome, Laterza, 1994.

28 M.J. Bull and J.L. Newell ("Italy Change Course? The 1994 Elections and the Victory of the Right", *Parliamentary Affairs*, 48, n.1, 1995) conclude their perspicacious analysis of the 1994 national elections, which brought the right to the government, although for only seven months given the governmental crisis of

December 1994, in the following Gramscian manner: "It ...seems too early to talk in terms of an 'Italian revolution' or a 'Second Republic': the old regime may have collapsed: a new one has yet to be made". On the nature of the Italian political transition, see the recents G. Pasquino (edited by), *L'alternanza inattesa. Le elezioni del 27 marzo e le loro conseguenze*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubettino, 1995 and G. Di Palma, *Approcci allo studio del cambiamento in Italia*, mimeo, 1995.

29 As well argued by G. Pasquino, "Introduction: A Case of Regime Crisis, and P. McCarthy, "Conclusion: Inching Towards a New Regime", both in G. Pasquino, P. McCarthy (eds.), *The End of Post-War Politics in Italy: The Landmark 1992 Elections*, Boulder, Westview Press.

ABSTRACT

Italy is witnessing the crisis of its consensual model of democracy, rather than the crisis of the democratic regime *per se*. Consensualism organized Italian democracy for all the long post-war period, given the impossibility of a change-over of the government for the presence of the largest Communist party of the western world. Consequently, if in other democratic countries, consensualism has been justified by their ethnic cleavage, in Italy it was the ideological cleavage to justify the politics of accommodation. With the deep and prolonged modernization of the country, that ideological cleavage progressively disappeared. The end of the Cold War did the rest. Since 1989 a systemic transition started, then accelerated by the explosion, with 1992, of judicial inquiries into political corruption in all the major Italian cities. Important sectors of the citizenship asked, through successful electoral referenda in 1991 and 1993 and through massive support of new political actors in the north-east regions of the country, for a more competitive democracy. The old political class first resisted this pressure, then adapted to it and finally tried to reverse it. The transition is going to last, but there is no reason to fear it will induce a democratic breakdown of the country.

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