

# A Concise History of Italy

2nd Edition

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## Executive Summary

*Includes significant quotes from the book.*

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## The Geographical Determinants Of Disunity

### The Vulnerability of a long Peninsular

As Italy does not yet exist, “The peninsular” shall serve to talk about the land of City States which could be considered loosely as the nation of Italy. Given its position in the Mediterranean Sea, early trade routes put it at the foremost crossroad of Europe. The Alps were not a significant barrier to the need for continued access by traders. Duggan says about the land mass:

*position in the centre of the Mediterranean. With long coastline, gently sloping beaches, and many natural harbours, the peninsula was highly attractive to overseas settlers, Greeks from Corinth, Euboea .*

It was prone to attack, as many records show. The long history of attack from Islam-Saracens is documented in the book by *Lorenzo Malta*, about my own birth town “*Francavilla Angitola, Historia Fragmenta*”. However, the proximity of Africa, also presented valued opportunities for trade. Sicily’s, port city of Syracuse was only 160 kms from North Africa. Whereas the Mediterranean hub’s closeness was an advantage to all Europe during the Middle Ages; the opening up of the Atlantic sea lanes post 16<sup>th</sup> century was to the greater detriment to the peninsular.

The disruption of Trade Routes by new lanes of commerce, led to the City States’ economic decline and by the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries also to political marginalisation. The knock-on effect of this was that Political Power gravitated to the North of the peninsular and the beginning of the disenchantment between the North and South. The advent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw Geopolitics shift to France becoming the Hegemonic Power; counterbalanced to some degree, by Britain. During 1806 to 1815 Britain occupied Sicily to counter the influence of Napoleon, to secure shipping lanes and key interests it had in Egypt and India. Russia and Austria at this time were strengthening their involvement in the Balkans and it also marked the time as the beginning of Colonisation of Africa. By the time Italy became a nation in 1860, it did not have the muscle to go it alone in Geopolitics and the fledgling Nation moved to ally itself to other Powers.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, Italy’s geography gave some glimmer of potential for advantage and the ‘card’ was played by Count Cavour in 1846 with a railway proposal to improve trade between East and West. The idea was to leverage the Suez Canal (1869); however, this plan did not work so well due to the high tariff levels eventually imposed by the Suez Authority. This tangible strategy for the South was to be the resurrection of the Trade Routes of a previous era between the Italian cities of Naples, Salerno, Amalfi and Palermo and commerce centres of Byzantium in the Far East; Africa and the Levant in the Near East. Conquests playing out at the time forced Italy’s commercial interests to gravitate towards France and Spain and thus of much greater benefit to the North. This also persisted after 1860 even with State intervention in the South, to stimulate its Economy. Count Cavour’s interest to continue with South’s development waned and he

refocussed attention to developing stronger links with Germany and Austria. The South drifted towards the influence of Spain via its outpost in Naples and marked by dispensing of Titles to those who could afford them. The peoples continued to be terrorised by the 'Inquisition' which lasted until 1782 in Sicily.

### **Soil & Climate**

The key features of the peninsula were the mountainous terrain and environmentally high rain fall. The effect of this combination was the prevalence of marshes in the low-lying areas and being infested malaria carrying mosquitoes. Some works were implemented towards flood mitigation and enhancing the potential for agricultural enterprise. Fruit trees of Asiatic were introduced including Pistachio, peach & almond before Roman times. In later centuries (5th to 10<sup>th</sup>), cotton, rice, sumac oranges lemons and mulberries were introduced, most likely by Arabs. The introduction of mulberry trees led to the silk industry. The Po valley's silk industry was implemented by small holding peasant farmers and was the major industry the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The temperate climate in the South suited tomatoes, prickly and maize which were introduced from the Americas. Allocation of the limited flat land to pastures was not a priority and limited the meat production for human consumption. The higher consumption by horses also limited their availability and there was a higher reliance on mules and donkeys.

There was a population explosion of sorts from 1660 to 1800's, due mainly to the dramatic fall in mortality rates. This in turn had the effect to encourage emigration to relieve the stresses of population growth had on limited resources. Italy lacked natural resources including coal to support emerging industries elsewhere. The outcomes were that the Northerners preferred to go to South America; people from the South immigrated to North America in greater numbers due to cheaper transatlantic fares. Social unrest also emerged as an issue due to the need for employment opportunities and wage justice. Common labour interests led to Calabrian and Sicilian labourers to activism and call for revolution through emerging groups such as the 'Carbonari'. Socialism became the collective focus for the labourers in the PO valley which together formed an uncomfortable alliance. Post WWII, Communists targeted the Southern peasants with mixed success due to the alliances of small plot holders/PT sharecroppers/day labourers and the lingering feudal system which prevailed till mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Duggan summarises:

*For centuries the lives of the vast majority of the population had centred around small communities, many of which had distinctive customs, political traditions and dialects.*

The mountainous terrain, tended to reinforce fragmentation of the regions and continuation of the status quo, including the fact there was only subsistence cropping of grain prior to 1860. Industrialisation was inevitable however there was no budding capital market to facilitate the enterprises and had to rely on state support for their

introduction and continuity. This would be a potent mix later, to be able to manage via the political will and avoid corruption. There were no comparable navigable rivers to London and Paris and movement of goods had to rely on antiquated Roman Roads and the South; mule tracks. The Church's hold over the peasantry was an impediment. Catholicism, however, with a tinge of superstition, folklore, and even pagan practices; was strong enough to withstand post war liberals & socialists. The Church's religious guild status was its trademark religious festivals (FESTA). Other social drawbacks limiting progress were that *Law & Order* was largely lacking in the South compounded by hostile terrain, lack of roads and brigands that were outlaws with the capacity to challenge the establishment if the need arose. The Italian language was only spoken by 2.5% of population, Victor Emmanuelle II, 1<sup>st</sup> king was a French speaker and spoke dialect in cabinet as did the first Prime Minister, Count Cavour. Also, there existed Greek speaking communities, Albanian towns and Catalan Alghero was spoken in Sardinia

## Disunity and conflict: from the Romans to the Renaissance 400- 1494

### The Dark Ages 400-1000

Duggan: *In the realm both of the substance and ideals, long centuries of Roman domination bequeathed and enormous legacy to future generations of Italy.* A would-be glorious future would be a national dream, however there a powerful force which are not easily tamed. Dante Alighieri pined for a peaceful land in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. Niccolò Machiavelli wish in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was for a return to some form of civic normality which had served to make Italy great in the past. The Renaissance marking the same century was a period of enlightenment and failure and Duggan says: *belief that Italians had a duty to make themselves worthy of their heroic past.* Unfortunately, the misdirected bravado whipped up the nationalistic fervour led to fascism and poorly envisioned military aggression in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

From the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Italy under the Roman Brand was losing its hegemonic superiority even though Roman Legions expanded the Empire into the Balkans and Asia. There was a marked decline in agriculture that would otherwise been the mainstay of a growing economy for the peninsular, as the power base shifted to the Eastern Empire of Constantinople. Duggan notes that *... 'after the 1st century, relatively few Emperors were of Italian origin'* At the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century the Ostrogoth's invasion led to famine, underlining the precariousness for the ability to produce food. There was a marked rise in church power that would gradually increase over time and had some success to retain Rome and surrounding lands. The Lombard were a semi nomadic people which had developed skills in working and using horses for warfare but were noted for low administrative skills and relied on existing duchies for political management. The influence by the Dukes, on political matters, stymied any idea of unity for the peninsular. The Lombard military machine was unable to conquer the entire peninsular and in time these people adopted indigenous customs and Lombard law became intermingled with Roman Law to serve as their new system of law and doing away with kinship and private justice.

There was progress in agricultural development and land clearance escalated from the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Eastern Emperors controlled Sicily and the lower regions of the peninsular, now Calabria. What this meant that there was to be a relative continuity which reinforces Greek culture in the gateway cities of Naples and Bari. The downside of this was that it perpetuated low quality political structures. Trade was manifested by links with the Levant which did enhance the standing of commercial centres. By the 11<sup>th</sup> century Salerno had become an exceptional Intellectual Centre and boasted a renowned medical school. Along the way, there was new element added to the mix by the Arabs attack and conquest in 827 of Sicily and parts of the mainland coast. The Arabs introduced new infrastructure which came to be seen as residual benefits for the regions because of this occupation.

From the Rome perspective, there was renewed belligerence from the Lombards. Pope Stephen II engaged the Franks for support and it was given. In 773 Charlemagne returned against the Lombard presence in the North, resulting in Italy becoming part Frankish Empire. However, despite the Frankish administrative knowhow, this did not translate into a durable state in the peninsular as to become a unified Italy. The Church continued association with France and a by-product was the advent of the First Crusade in 1096. The effect of this new expedition to open routes to the Holy Land was to continue the enrichment of Northern Cities and produce a class of mercantile elites. With wealth came the feeling of empowerment and the elites' exercised this with push-back to existing systems with the aim for autonomy in order to control their own destinies.

### **The age of communes 1000-1300**

In Rome and the Greater South, the Papacy excerpted control over the Noble Families. Pope Nicolas II allied the Church to the Normans and encouraged them to conquer Sicily which was still in Arab hands. From 1061 to 1091 the Norman State emerged with strong centralised governance; any moves to assume autonomy from local Barons was quashed. There enmity between the Normans and the Eastern Empire resulted in closure of trade between the Levant and the Southern economic zone. The loss of benefits to the South greatly enhanced the commercial position of the North. The disparity may have occurred anyway due the much greater availability of arable land for agriculture in the North. But it is noteworthy to underscore this as it served to erode standards in the South so early in the history of the peninsular. The Normans were not so concerned with the economic welfare of their charges and continued policies of oppression to enhance their system's power and wealth bases. This was evident in the sophistication of their courts, poetry, science, and a bureaucracy staffed by Arabs and Greeks.

By contrast in the North cities expanded during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, mainly due to the immigration from the rural areas. New industries began to evolve in the artisan labours to support the growing cities. As wealth trickled down to be shared in the new construction industry, power also became decentralised as more citizens improved their social standing. There came about a new politico as Duggan says: '*popolo* arising from guilds. *arti*' which translated into a form of military power of armed personnel aligned to the leaders of guilds '*anziani*' or '*priori*'. Challenges to the developing order came from the Holy Roman Empire under the leadership of Frederick Barbarossa ad Emperor since 1152. However, he had limited success to restore imperial authority over 30 years in Northern Italy. Barbarossa's grandson Frederick II restarted the campaign to subdue the communes in the North lasting from 1225 to 1250. Frederick grew up in Sicily, which by inheritance Sicily had changed hands from Normans to German Hohenstaufen Dynasty.

Frederick II's ambitions for the Northern Communes were at loggerheads with those of the Papacy, resulting in a near thirty years' war and being pivotal to the destruction of the Hohenstaufen Dynasty. While the conflict there was canvassing by both sides for



the support from the city to their respective causes. The split in allegiances resulted in two factions forming; *Ghibelline (empire) Guelf (papacy)*. These were bitter rivals which competed for power and included murder and expulsions. Frederick II died in 1250. His illegitimate son Manfred took up the mantle to continue the struggle. The Pope enlisted the help of Charles of Anjou, the brother of then French King. Charles defeated and killed Manfred and gained the kingdom of Sicily.

### **Renaissance Italy 1300-1494**

The campaigns of Frederick II and Manfred were the last serious attempts to introduce a degree of political unity in Italy before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The legacy left by the bitter rivalry between the *Ghibelline and Guelf factions* was a complex web of ineffective alliances; *Dante* then a victim of these machinations and in exile cried “*O servile Italy, breeding ground of misery, ship without a pilot in a mighty tempest.*” Papal power also waned and Pope Boniface VIII had a falling out with the French King and was arrested in 1303. In 1316 the Curia was established in Avignon for the next 60 years. This enjoyed a fair degree of autonomy.

The cities were faced with continuing challenges and the *Popolo* articulated an expansion in the political base. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century cities in time of crisis would appoint a *Temporary Dictator* usually from one side of politics. The office was known as *podestà* and would operate under set guidelines for ruling on matters. The office bearer could be dismissed. Over time, variations of this office evolved depending on circumstances. This led to some form of permanency to be known as ‘*lordships*’ or “*signori*”. This gave the position recognition and a level of stratification began amongst those that would wish their ability for influence be recognised. Thus, there evolved subsets of Titles and Honours which could be purchased to suit power plays and intrigues amongst their perceived peers.

The greater cities of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries were neither feudal as in the South nor “*signorial*” with its begging’s since being disrupted on the larger stage. Venice was a Republic headed by a hereditary aristocracy. Florence was also a Republic distinguished by the Medici banking empire which retained the Papal Account. Banking did not always play out well and the Medici empire followed bankruptcy predecessors Bardi and Peruzzi banks. These Bankers made loans to Edward III, England for the 100-year war, but failure to repay them bankrupted them. The Medici, Pazzi and Rucellai Banks grew out of the debacle. The Florentine economy flourished and had excellent water from flowing streams to underwrite a strong millinery industry. Competition to Florence came from Flemish and Catalan merchants.

In the South society had stagnated by the imposition of a feudal kingdom ruled by the Angevins until 1442. Acknowledgment that the terrain was a limiting factor to efficient communications, some autonomy was tolerated. Barons that arose from this system were loosely connected to the monarch but mostly did as they wished. Spanish, Alfonso

of Aragon ascended to the Sicilian Throne in 1416. This was followed up by the conquest of Naples, & wars contra Florence, Genoa, Milan, and Venice

The Renaissance, which the period between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries became known, set new standards for progress art and literature. However, the darker side of humanity continued to wreak bloodshed because of ever-present self-interest. This was compounded by the advent of the Black Death in 1348 which impacted by slowing the economy and increase in poverty giving impetus to civil unrest. Giovanni Boccaccio wrote the Decameron about this episode. Spirituality was also under attack as the Papacy contended with the threat of holy men which challenged their orthodoxy. Papal forces carried out purges against those as it saw as subversive, such as *Francis of Assisi* who preached austerity. The Church also moved to condemn usury and the resulting guilt assumed the nobility with dubious past and sins proved to be a boon for the religious orders with bequests to church coffers, charitable works such as hospitals, hospices, and orphanages. The son of Money Lender, Reginaldo Scrovegni commissioned Giotto Arena Chapel Padua, earned him a place in *Dante Inferno*. It was common practice to have patrons to artistic commissions to write themselves into the landscapes of works.

The needs for food to supply their cities provided a constant source for conflict. Thus, art and war went hand in hand as administrators struggled to keep the food supplies constant against changing environmental conditions which could initiate famines. The period was marked by *Papal Schisms* from 1378 where at times there two and even three rival Popes. External threats came to bear from the Ottoman Empire which had captured Constantinople in 1453. The threat posed by new hegemonic Islamic Power forced a coalition of the major city states which formed the Italian League to counter the threat. France was also in the wings as another threat through its marital alliance of Louis of Orléans with the Kingdom of Naples' Valentina Visconti. The League was not able to contend with the many *moving parts* represented by threats from the Turks enslaving captives, intercity states rivalry, Papacy, powerful family interests. This culminated into Charles VIII of France invading over the Alps.

## **Stagnation and Reform 1494-1789**

### **The invasions of Italy**

Against the backdrop of economic uncertainty, the foundations laid down by the Medici and Strozzi Families ensured their longevity and relevance in the city states. The wealth that their banking systems generated however was becoming unproductive as they invested mainly in villas and works of art. That said, more pressing events were to change the peninsular. War initiated by Charles VIII of France made the indigenous wealthy now just pawns in the bigger game of territorial grabs. Spain controlled Sicily, Naples, and Lombardy. There was a cascade of events in the French Monarchy with death and shuffling of territories. In Spain new alliances formed with the marriage of Ferdinand (Castile) and Isabella (Aragon). Wars were costly and the need for cash at times mitigated their continuation. Weaponry on both sides was similar and not providing any advantage and battles became quite protracted thus propagating cash burn. There was a culmination to the treachery of the times; by the chance inheritance and consolidation of administrative power under the Hapsburg prince, Charles V. This gave the peninsular some respite and culture, art and science began to flourish. Galileo Galilei made his pronouncement for a heliocentric universe.

### **Social and economic developments in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries**

The economy had recovered from the plague of the previous century and population increased steadily and further underpinning the economy. Credit was made readily available by the banks and there was an explosion of construction of palaces and public buildings. The provision of bank credit was used by sovereign nations such as Spain to finance wars and fleets and exploration. The possibility of the capital being unproductive, however, introduced a strong element of sovereign risk. Governments could become insolvent. In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain defaulted on its debts and this led a run on the Italian and German banks in early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

In the North, new land reclamation projects were undertaken for agricultural expansion. Leonardo da Vinci was contracted to bring the Adda and Ticino rivers under control. Suitable areas on mountain sides were cleared to be utilised for crops and vines. Florence textile industry expanded and silk manufacture became an emerging industry. Advances were made by innovations in technology exemplified by the introduction of a water powered mill, aiding silk production. Pilgrim tourism marked by the Vatican jubilee in 1600, gave a major boost to the economy. There was noted prosperity after 1530 and the law became more effective in settling disputes. There was relative administrative calmness even though the laws were enacted and enforced by foreign occupying powers. This is not to say that their full acquiescence to foreign rule. In the South, the Nobility also tried to expand agriculture through initiating new settlements; some 400 new towns were established. Economic resurgence in Naples was marked by the manufacture of luxury goods.

The princes of the various states used the uptick in the economic cycle to consolidate their legitimacy for future hereditary claims to their positions. New constitutions were drafted to be inclusive of the nobility through councils, senates and in Sicily its own parliament. It was also made clear that the monarchy of the state still ruled supreme. Things bubbled along on this assumption of presumed relativities. However, below the façade of economic bliss, things were not so rosy for the continuation of prosperity as Duggan notes:

*"In the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> C the merchant entrepreneurs, who had been the mainstay of the Italian Economy since the Middle Ages, began almost everywhere to turn to a way of from commerce and industry and adopt instead an aristocratic lifestyle"*

Other wealthy families in the North diverted money from trade to property investments and in the south Duggan notes:

*"In the South, the nobility grew in both size and political importance, assisted by the crown's sale of titles and its alienation of rights and dues. Between 1558 and 1597 the number of marquisates in the Kingdom of Naples seems to have trebled."*

The diversion of productive capital made the Italian Economy vulnerable to decay. In the process, Italy became an importer of finished goods from France, England and Holland and became mainly an exporter of primary and semi-finished goods. The quintessential issue for Italy coming into play were the Guilds, which imposed layers of regulation in work practices. These included demands for higher pay thus making them less competitive. Also, there was significant effect by the economies of scale that could be realised due to its fragmented home markets, accentuated by state rivalries, extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of the elite that preferred to invest in palaces rather than industry. Resulting poverty also meant that demand from the broader base was weak.

The effect of the Middle Classes migrating their wealth to property led to phenomenon of absentee landlords. This had deleterious effects on the land by contractors which leased farms but would have little interest in the land's welfare and its maintenance for future productivity. Productivity thus declined accordingly. Unemployment rose because of the poor land management. Food shortages became an insidious eventuality and its affordability gave rise to brigandage. Duggan notes:

*"Calabria appears to have been particularly infested, largely because the terrain offered such good cover. ....Banditry was caused mainly by rising unemployment and poverty, but the fact that Italy was a patchwork of states also encouraged it, as brigands could flee across a border when pursued"*

Other European economies were experiencing downturns and a world recession at this time made things even worse for the peninsula's disparate economy. Italy between 1620 and 1640 had a structurally weak economy whereby the public debt had tripled.

This was made even worse by wars. In response to financial problems; governments tried to raise capital by selling Crown Lands, monopolies, titles and privileges. In the South this led in effect 're feudalisation' based on archaic laws rather than a market economy; power gravitated back to the landlords including the Church at the expense of the peasantry. In the North there was trend away from share farming and farms were tended by the employment of day labourers by owners thus improving the potential for farm yields. Italy's economy in 1620 was also deleteriously impacted by the agricultural recession led by the slow decline in the price of wheat. Landlord reaction to this was to search for other means of investment and legal surety rather than invest in new farming techniques to improve yields. This led to the deterioration of land quality and the encroachment of the original marshes in the lower Po region. The practice to quarantine some land to the Nobility for hunting or pasture accelerated the migration of the unemployed and starving peasants to the cities.

There were variances of this theme of desperation with some city states being greater or lesser affected. In the Po Valley by the 1650's landowners tried to diversify their crops to rice and maize to circumvent the recession. Good land management practices were implemented such as crop rotation with industrially usable flax and hemp. The north thus achieved a credible level of stability that included the split up of large landholdings to more viable acreages. Still, this did not translate in a well-defined middle class and governance was retained by the Nobles and professional civil servants whose positions were heritable. There was an influx, especially in the South of Spanish Aristocrats bringing with them traditions, courtly values, privilege, preoccupation with honour and vendetta. The Spanish administered over wretched destitution of the poor from Florence to Naples. In 1647, following poor harvests and hikes in taxes, there was insurrection in Naples and Palermo and although Spanish regained control, little was done to improve the welfare of the populace. There was knee-jerk reaction by the church to blame the events on demons and witches and administrators to oust the unemployed and non-long-standing residents in their attempt to preserve food stocks.

### **The Eighteenth Century: The Era of the Enlightenment Reforms**

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Spain's days as world power however were counting down. Its economy could not manage the burdens of empire and in 1700 Charles II, the last of the Spanish Hapsburgs died. The war to determine the Spanish succession to the Throne lasted for a decade.

In the North, Piedmont moved to reform its economy; but there was a big issue to be reconciled that is with property tax. Dues payable for land owned by the nobility's feudal systems and the Church were difficult, if not impossible to collect. The responsibility for its collection was subcontracted out which resulted in scams, fraud and general abuse by both sides of the fiscal system. In Central Italy there was concentration of land ownership limited to a few families which could leverage feudal privileges. This led to an imbalance, whereby the tax burden rested on the poorer end of the scale; as example. In Lombardy 75% of the taxes came from owners with only 25%

of the wealth. Any sense of fairness was not assisted by the chaotic state of the legal system which had festered into statutes by the long history of political fragmentation. In the South lawyers were in abundance, and they earned their lucrative fees defending wealthy families' immunities and privileges and thus limiting states' ability reasonable inflows of revenue for social structures and public works.

On a quirkier note, criminals could get sanctuary in churches which would also double as headquarters for their operations. Enlightenment reformers targeted the Church for its privileges and power that was amassed over centuries. The Churches were in effect mini states but would not willingly share its wealth as a social responsibility and thus contribute to the economy. Religious holidays under the auspices of the Churches, made the economy less productive due to time lost and festivities fuelled by alcohol perpetuating downtime on the job. The Churches' hostility to usury put industries in Italy at a disadvantage, to those economies in Protestant Countries. Concentration of wealth made it difficult to have progressive reforms due to the high resistance from Church and Nobility. Famines resulted in 1763-1766 due to the lack of timely reforms. This did however lead to a reality check. In Tuscany, the Grand Duke Leopold (1765-90) ended the tax privileges to the wealthy, fiscal systems simplified and land was sold off to create a freer market, whereby owners with 'skin in the game' would improve yields. Naples followed suite and it became a laboratory of the Enlightenment. In 1754 Antonio Genovesi, a priest was appointed Prof of Political Economy at the University of Naples with the objective to share knowledge gained from Italy's peers in Holland and England. In the South feudal impediments persisted through orchestrated litigations by the landowners. There was some progress after 1776. Unfortunately, the budding reforms in Naples were hampered by the advent French Revolution which stymied its possible progress and Duggan notes:

*"Naples, the failure of the Bourbons to break the power of the feudal nobility left the southern economy vulnerable and southern society perilously unstable"*

## The Emergence of the National questions 1789-1849

### The impact of the French Revolution

The effectiveness of the Enlightenment Movements was mixed and their continued uncertainty and the social ills of poverty, banditry, begging and vagrancy cast doubts that any viable solution would be found. Notable successes; the States were able to limit the power of the Church and break the stranglehold of the unproductive nobility, although with some trepidation. Search for the common purpose led to the rise of freemasonry in the 1770's; later in the 1780's sects such as the *Illuminati* began to explore and spread rhetoric of socialism. Ironically writers as Jean-Jacques Rousseau used the *American War of Independence* which was in play and with a platform based on people's right to self-determination in its own laws to promote their socialism cause.

The notion of Nationhood was thought of and key proponents emerged such as Genovesi who brought attention to the need for some economic unity in the peninsula. In 1789 the French Revolution acted as a catalyst to some of the ideas which evolved from the initial egalitarian beliefs based on some sort ideal for equality for citizens. However, the *French Revolution* brought many of the reforms underway to a halt, ideas of the *Enlightenment* were thought to be the basis to the breakdown of order in France and could be as unsettling in Italy. Princes bunkered down and retreated from any support they may have inferred in recent times. Freemasons were persecuted from Torino to Palermo. Unrest in the peasantry again emerged in the 1790's, although it may have been to some degree limited to the oppressive landowners' taxes. There was general concern, however, for the unrest to escalate into widespread violence and possibly, revolution. The risk for an invasion by France was a looming threat to any longer-term national evolution.

Napoleon Bonaparte then at just 26, invaded over the Alps 1796-99, ousting the Austrians from Lombardy, pushed into Veneto, 'liberated' Bologna and Romagna from the Hapsburg Austrians. Devoid of any resistance, Napoleon mandated two new republics and by the end of the campaign the Treaty of *Campoformio* was signed. As part of this treaty, Venice was cynically ceded to Austria. Whereas the people always struggled with the concept of nationhood, in Napoleon's first invasion, he assumed that Italy was a Nation. In 1796 Napoleon launched an essay competition to address a 'crystal ball' question 'which type of government is best suited to the happiness of Italy?' This was won by *Melchiorre Gioia* who based his thesis on a *Republic*. By 1799 coalition forces ousted the French and Jacobin rule prevailed and although limited in its accomplishment, it did give impetus to the fledgling Italian Nationalism. There were new regional alliances developed and Rome became a republic in 1798 under the Jacobins rather than be aligned to the Papal State.

Divisions inevitably arose across various groups; the Jacobins mainly came from families with property and thus preferred to limit their democracy to the sale of church

lands not their own lands. Factions' complicated things and further fermented disunity and weakened the Jacobins. Naples became a Republic 1799, Jacobins failed to gain popular support due in part to their not resolving to break up feudal lands. Inability to rein in taxes alienated the peasants and acrimony with the church made matters worse in the South. In 1800 Napoleon's second coming occurred and this time it was to be a more permanent conquest. The Kingdom of Italy was set up in the North in 1805, with Milan as its Capital. Naples was taken by Napoleon in 1806 and given to his brother Joseph. Sicily and Sardinia were not conquered but lost their autonomy. Sicily's Bourbon King fled in 1806 and occupation by the British to protect sulphur mining from the French. Sardinia was home to the Savoy dynasty and semi protected by the British operating in Sicily.

The governance of the territories became imbued with French influence in administration and Duggan notes:

*"A single pattern of departments and districts was set up; internal customs barriers were abolished; weights & measures were standardised; education was reformed; the tax system was reorganised; and Napoleonic civil, penal and commercial codes imposed."*

In practice many of the reforms were never implemented due to the resistance by landowner classes; weak government which became the norm suited them just fine! French reliance on rationalism was at best misguided when it came to the Italians. Lack of educational diversity meant that reliance on the nobility was inevitable and maintenance of the status quo assured. Sale of Church property gravitated to those who could afford to pay viz., the middle-class landowners, peasants missed out again. In Piedmont (North) typical purchases were made by noble families. The Cavour's & d'Azeglio's; fortunes were made during French Rule. French attempts to abolish feudalism resulted in a *'mixed bag'* of policies which were dependent on previous Jacobin progress.

In the South for instance, (1806-8 where feudalism was still entrenched), laws for the division of common lands caused unintended loss of privileges to the nobility. Joseph Bonaparte compensated the nobility by the confirmation by legal title to traditional landowners. However, loss of feudal revenues had considerable impact on the nobility and some had to sell out anyway. In the South beneficiaries were those that could pay for very cheap liberated land; these were doctors; lawyers, estate managers, leaseholders, merchants, and money lender. Overall, the sale of church property did little to benefit peasants and agricultural output. Owners became figuratively *'the new barons'* which viewed land as a status symbol, rather than an opportunity for economic productivity. As to the issue of what Italy really meant to Napoleon; it was real estate to be carved up for his family and to be a source of revenue to finance his military expansionism. Therefore, ideals for real reform for Italy were a sideline act to fiscal and political considerations.



But there was one idea which lingered and took 'root' and that was 'nationhood'! As a result of the French expeditions, Italy was drawn closer into Europe with notable improvement in trade with roads over the Alps. The Cavour's and d'Azeglio's exposure to the greater Europe accumulated valued experience and gave rise to visions of opportunity. Italians served in the French Army with distinction thus enhancing social vitality and help discard the notion of Italians being decadent, cowardly, and morally corrupt.

### **From Restoration to Revolution, 1815-1849**

In opposition to the Napoleonic regime, Secret Societies were formed by the middle classes including the *Carboneria* in the mainland South, but again it was much too fragmented to be effective against the French and therefore calls for revolt went largely unheeded. One opportunity arose in 1815 after Napoleon's escape from Elba; Joachim Murat attempted to rally liberals to expel the British from Sicily and the Austrians from Venice. Unfortunately, Murat's eventual defeat led to return of deposed rulers: Victor Emmanuel II returned to Turin (Piedmont & Sardinia), Ferdinand III to Florence and the Pope to Rome (from Avignon). Regressive reimposition of laws occurred, a purge of French appointees, Jesuits reclaimed their status in education and censorship, Jews were forced back to ghettos, customs barriers reimposed, resulting in damage to the economy. Duggan notes:

*"Ideologically, the Restoration was marked by rejection of any notion of progress through the application of reason, and a belief instead in the superior merits of tradition, authority, and hierarchy sanctioned by religion."*

Victor Emmanuel II's power became allied to Britain, Prussia, Russia and Austria. Austria played a front role with its Hapsburg troops in the suppression of any possible insurrection against the monarchy. Overall, there was an ongoing plethora of intransigent issues that persisted in the various states.

Had the circumstances been better, there could have existed greater stability; however, that period of *Restoration* was at a time (circa 1815 to 1845) that Europe was going through a general economic slump. The effect on Italy was stagnation in agriculture causing deflation of incomes. Worker's tenure was disrupted and forced to accept either day labouring jobs or move to the cities. The overcrowding in the cities caused the usual malaise of begging, petty thieving etc. Liberal dissent, secret societies which had begun during Napoleonic times, resurfaced. These were somewhat based on structures of freemasonry rituals and symbols. Objectives were not so clear to many of the adherents. By example, the Sect *Sublime Perfect Masters* 1818, created by Filippo Buonarroti, had three levels. Most secret was the abolition of private property (communism). There were no clear plans which could be enunciated; at best all that could be envisaged was for the formation of a *Northern State*. In the South the *Carboneria* was a loose alliance of army officers, professional men, artisans and lower

clergy, also without clear goals. Other attempts at reformation such as that of Cesare Balbo provided little tangible lasting progress.

The lack of any cohesive strategy by the various groups exposed them to inevitable push back by the establishment; in Lombardy the Austrians purged members of secret societies, the Papal State imprisoned and sentenced to death members of Santarosa's fellow conspirators that had participated in the patriotic coup against the King. The Naples government's attempts to spur on the economy after the Napoleonic wars left a huge public debt. Luigi de' Medici tried to stimulate industrial activity via tariffs, state contracts, imposition of price control of grain, attempt to attract foreign investment into the Kingdom. Grain price maintenance at unsustainable low prices meant alienating farmers/landowners. Tariffs in imports may have assisted the new class of foreign manufacturers in Italy but retaliatory duties were imposed by other jurisdictions on commodities such as olive oil exports. Heavy industry factories were built between Naples and Salerno; textiles factories were built by the Swiss and English. de'Medici's plan however was flawed. He was unable to prevent the re-emergence of Church Power and its stranglehold on government policy resulting in damage to the economy. The effect was lower agricultural production which meant that the domestic economy was not so robust. The poor could not afford manufactured goods and therefore limited demand for these discretionary items. Consequently, industry relied on state backing for survival and the economic model was never able to be becoming self-sustaining

There was some residual liberal momentum which compounded onto earlier activities, particularly in the South. To counter this, there were also territorial ambitions by titled Dukes and there was some thought given to collaborative efforts to further both sides. But this turned out to be a bad idea that did not gain traction; peasants were unreliable as viable political entity. In any case, it was common belief that revolutionary governments were usually short lived by fact they these were stacked with conservative landowners. Austrian troops were deployed to prevent further rebellious initiatives in some cases to the applause of the peasants. As of 1830 City-State rivalries persisted which further undermined any possibility of unified governance. Secret societies were inadequate in their purpose to restructure the peninsular. Giuseppe Mazzini divined by his mother for greatness was *Romanticist* (visions of Rome) rather than an *Enlightener*. Mazzini was member of the *carbonari*. His views were differentiated to that of the moderate liberal peers, in that he would include religion in his platform for governance. To that point, it was common practice to think in terms of the French Enlightenment following the Revolution and its loathing for the Catholic Church as it was seen as a political obstacle to any coming revolution Duggan Notes:

*"The masses had to be persuaded that God no longer spoke through the Pope but through the 'people' gathered together as nations..."*

Mazzini introduced concept of '*duties*' rather than '*rights*' and set up another secret society '*Giovani Italia*' with some similarities to the '*Carboneria*' but adequately

differentiated to safeguard the movement and not to repeat past mistakes of the 1820's. This attracted a young sailor from Nice, *Giuseppe Garibaldi*. The Society only lasted a few years, but there was further incremental benefit to the idea for a republic for the people.

Meanwhile events in Europe including accelerated industrialisation, compared to Italy overshadow and mitigate the progress in the various rebellion movements. There were other half-baked ideas for nationalism, some with foundations in the literary authors of the time. In 1843 there was one moderate idea that came from exiled Piedmontese priest, Vincenzo Gioberti, who wrote a long-winded hymn that included the idea that Italy should become a confederation of states. This was to be underpinned by Piedmont Army in a 'neo guelf' sort of way. This percolated through the communities, however with little chance of success given that the church tended to veto everything which it deemed progressive; for instance, street lighting. But then the ideal was now on notice for Italians as worthy of further discussion. It was given impetus by its overall fit with the European narrative for change.

In mid-March 1848, a revolution in Vienna triggered an uprising in the Milan insurgents. Sardinian monarch, *Charles Albert* and his government headed by Cesare Balbo in Piedmont, was forced to support the insurgent's patriotic war against Austria, then, occupying Lombardy. After an initial success, Charles Albert reneged on the insurgents in favour of the aristocracy to pursue the incorporation of Lombardy into Piedmont. In the end this just became another opportunity to grab territory and eschewed by other nationalists in Naples, Tuscany and Rome and led to the eventual failure of the war against Austria. Mazzini focuses on Rome in a hope to spark a national revolution. Tuscany, Sicily, and Venice rejected any idea for a union with Rome. *Charles Albert* in 1849 attempted another foray against Austria, but preparations lacking and appointment of a Polish General as nominal leader proved ineffective. The King abdicated (*in favour of his son Victor Emmanuel II*) and was followed by further unrest and internal warring. Siege of Mazzini's Rome by the French brought defence by Giuseppe Garibaldi, now an experienced guerrilla leader via republics in South America. The last outpost to hold out against the Austrian forces was Venice. It was also left defeated but the fight back by Roman and Venetian republics won the democrats admiration, respect and publicity for future independence.

## Italy United.

There are historical Interpreters for the “*springtime of the people*” which would put Mazzini in the same context as Karl Marx; viz., there were real oppressors and tyrants to struggle against and issues such unemployment, prices, taxes, and a desire for a new social order. These were core social concerns which could fuel insurrections in European cities. Duggan notes:

*“The idea that governments should prevent change and freeze society in the interests of a narrow elite, seemed untenable in a world that was already beginning to be transformed by industry and science.”*

Britain’s Industrial Revolution led the way to change. In the peninsular middle classes grew and became more assertive and the North was well advanced to gaining political recognition. Liberalism indeed had to take root to keep up with Europe and possible prosperity. International travel opened minds to the possibilities and for Italians to emulate such progress as they saw. The best-known liberals were Sella, Jacini and Cavour which came from the wealthier regions of the North. In the South the norm of absentee landlords, lack of infrastructure and weak rule of law meant that liberalism lacked general appeal. The principal of freedom was not well understood; neither were urbanisation, capitalism, and morality if these were not based on religious values as taught by the church. These were quite at odds to the events driving change in Britain. Duggan notes:

*“..the bourgeoisie....North and South, saw modernisation as fraught with local dangers; and their fears were given moral sanctions by the church.”*

### **Cavour and the Triumph of the moderates**

Through 1848-9 Austria tightened central political control in the North by revoking earlier concessions. In the South, King Ferdinand II (*King of the Two Sicily's*) prevailed, but now became a frightened isolationist. The French facilitated restoration of the Pope in Rome. Piedmont retained its constitution giving credence that Victor Emmanuel II was of some value to the Austrians. He married to an Austrian Princess but was left wanting as a Statesman. His preference to underscore his reputation was to propagate his boasting of libido and physical traits as personal assets. Governance was based on parties which resembled ‘sects’ rather than functional political organisations. These parties had wilful disregard to the interests of the majority. The main player in the retinue was *Count Camillo Benso di Cavour* with interest in state progress was based on economics, political and moral principles. Cavour was not in favour of revolutions and believed there to be a middle path to pursue, he hated the anti-materialist, Giuseppe Mazzini. Count Cavour retained some interest in national identity but was not in favour of national unity. He was sceptical as to whether Italy was really a nation at all! As a

Piedmontese he was culturally more French than Italian, spoke Italian with difficulty, and lacked knowledge of Italian history.

Cavour became Prime Minister but was at odds with Victor Emmanuel II's Catholic principles which led to the non-impartiality of the Monarchy toward the church. This in turn gave way to the Monarch's veto of legislation concerning church affairs. An irreconcilable impasse came to the fore between the Monarch and the Prime Minister. Cavour resigned in protest, forcing the King to rethink his strategy as there was no other person capable to take over the Government. This led to an accommodation of Cavour's position and evolved into relative independence of Ministers to perform their legislative duties more effectively.

Cavour was not content with a hands-off approach to free market forces and believed that it was government's role to be involved in appropriate projects to ensure private initiatives be successful. This translated to the investment of public money and in turn led to higher debt taxes. The gamble paid off and the initiatives were productive with textiles, armaments and shipping benefitting from the investments. European states were precipitating towards further unrest and proved to be a precursor to the Crimean War. War initiated by France with Britain later joining forces to prevent Russia's expansion eastward in 1854. Italy participated in the war but had missed its opportunity to register its terms before the Victor Emmanuel II committed its troops. Therefore, Cavour was at best on the sidelines at the 1856 Paris peace congress. He was viewed as trying too hard to disparage Austria which proved to his detriment in the eyes of the British Government which lowered its level of trust in Cavour.

During the 1856, Paris peace congress, Napoleon III had sympathies for Italy and nominally a *carbonaro* because of his growing up and educated in Italy. Pragmatism however prevented him from supporting the concept for Italian Unity. Also, the possible destruction of the Papal States was viewed as an impediment due to pushback that would occur by French Catholic opinion against this outcome. Napoleon III's preference was for an enlarged *North Kingdom* vassal to France and a federal structure for the rest of the Peninsula, with the Pope as president. In 1858 Cavour and Napoleon III, conspired to war against Austria, but the deal nearly fell apart as Victor Emmanuel II had second thoughts on the marriage of his pious 15yo daughter to Napoleon III's amoral cousin. In 1859 War with Austria was realised; first in Piedmont as a French war proxy, thereafter Napoleon III committed France to the war. Napoleon III backtracked to an armistice position when he realised that Cavour was planning to annex Papal States and the possibility of Prussia joining in on Austria's side. The outcome of this armistice was that Lombardy went first to the French and then hand balled to Piedmont; Austria kept Veneto....Cavour was enraged and resigned.

## **1860**

There was continued jostling 1859-60 for influence amongst the key players Napoleon III, Victor Emmanuel II and Cavour who returned to office secretly ceding Nice and

Savoy to France. Giuseppe Garibaldi was none too pleased with Cavour's tristes that palmed off Nice to France, as he was born in there. Garibaldi's suspicions were later confirmed that Cavour's real interest was for a bigger, better Piedmont and not as he believed the unification of the peninsula. Events in Sicily were conducive for Garibaldi to take advantage of the civil unrest which had fermented due to the usual suspects of taxes, prices, and greedy landowners. Mazzini was plotting from England to launch a popular movement. Crispi was accomplished in bomb making techniques and believed that the King, Victor Emmanuel II would be more supportive than his Prime Minister Cavour. Garibaldi succeeded brilliantly with 1000 men against the Bourbon force in Sicily then on to Naples. Francesco Crispi's following in the peasant population enhanced the strategy. There was some peasant dissent which was brutally handled with summary killings to caution off further dissent. Similar to French ambitions to thwart Austrian hegemony in the previous year; now Britain was in a position to view Italy as means to balance the power on the continent. Britain lent support to Garibaldi to deter Napoleon III from intervening.

Peasants were ignorant of how things may play out and there was little reason for their supporting the cause of this new nation "Italia". The failure by the elites to articulate what benefits the new nation would deliver led to resentment. Victor Emmanuel II was a Garibaldi (*Democrat*) sympathiser but Cavour (*Liberal*) dreaded the possibility of his marching on Rome/Papal States. He tried hard to be act as a spoiler in the advance by Garibaldi with an attempt to stop a crucial rifle shipment. Later when the shooting stopped, Cavour used heavy handed tactics to have Sicily annexed to Piedmont through a rigged plebiscite. Further north, Cavour feared Garibaldi taking the Papal States and to the consternation of the French, marched on Rome. Other states, Umbria and Marche were defeated and resistance crushed by summary shootings. Victor Emmanuel II was content with the growth in his Kingdom and continued south and 25/10/1860 Garibaldi handed over his authority to the King. Duggan notes: "*Against all odds, and largely by accident, Italy had been made*" near Teano, North of Naples.

### **The New State**

In the aftermath it could be reasonable to ask whether the fighting was a *War of Liberation* or in fact a *Civil War*? Cavour stacked the deck to ensure he would win and his form of order to prevail. Democrats were sidelined, Garibaldi shunned, and Mazzini remained bitter and in exile. Overall, the *Status Quo* remained, and the popular sentiment was that Piedmont had conquered Italy and imposed its charter on it. The transition was devoid of debate as to how best develop a constitution to render Italy a nation for the people. From Economic perspective unilateral decisions were made; the abolition of trade tariffs led to hardship especially in the South. The fledgling manufacturing sector was dependent on protection led to closures in Naples of the textiles industry, artisan workshops and engineering factories. Higher taxation was imposed to manage the burgeoning public debt which did not help with the hardship being experienced by all. The additional debt burden was piled on to Piedmont's existing public debt which now had to be shared by the whole of Italy.

Once again, the need to raise revenue the proverbial 'cash cow' to be milked and the selling sell church and communal property was legislated and brutally implemented. There was an upside possibility for the peasants to share in the land redistribution. This however was never realised as the Government had not made any provision for credit to be available and thus most of the sales went to the original owners. The Government failed to reach out to the poor. The peasants had supported Garibaldi (Democrat) and there were expectations that they would at least share in the common land that was sold. Cavour's concerns rested with the middle classes to release the latent entrepreneurship to stimulate the economy and thus indifferent to the needs of the peasants. Private wealth became the prime criteria for power and voting; citizens had to have paid 40 lire in taxes to be eligible to vote thus limiting the vote to 2% of people. Wealth was not as evenly spread out as in other European countries and was concentrated into a narrow base. The military and police were set up mainly to suppress dissent in the '*have nots*'. The coercion that was implemented was not a fair means for the politicians to govern. Unification was not universally supported by the South where 'liberalism' was not embraced as it was elsewhere. This made the governance quite difficult.

Conflict between Garibaldi and Cavour persisted and there was a possibility of real popular uprising to truly embed democracy. Garibaldi crossed Straits of Messina with volunteer force but was halted by National Army in Calabria. He tried five other times but eventually the fervour of the democrats faded. The Pope was not pleased with the unification either. Pope Pius IX excommunicated the King Victor Emmanuelle II and his ministers, he worked against Cavour's Liberals and aimed to set up a far right movement to safeguard the church and undermine the state. The church's contentious plan for self-preservation, lead to suspicion of clerical conspiracies. The South faced mounting chaos based on social protest, crime, opposition to military conscription, draft dodgers were rounded up and arbitrary shootings of *undesirables* were prevalent. In 1866 there was a general uprising in Sicily, by ex-Garibaldi supporters, summary executions followed. The Mafia as synonym for bandits appears for the first time as scapegoats for the rebellious behaviour.

Faced with the prospect of becoming a failed state, Governance was restructured via set of provinces, each with its own government appointed prefect, often a personal friend of the King or the Prime Minister and usually from Piedmont (North). It wasn't until 1900's that the civil service began to admit Southerners in large numbers, otherwise most political appointments were made based on loyalty rather merit. There was little attempt made to develop an independent bureaucracy that would deal fairly in matters between government and the citizens as it was instituted in the German parliament (*Rechtsstaat*). There was a tendency for politicians to build up power bases through nepotism and later by complex administrative laws that in the long run would induce gridlock in proceedings. Duggan Notes:

*“From the start, therefore, the liberal state faced an overwhelming problem of legitimacy. Centuries of political and economic fragmentation were not easily transcended. ...without the backing of the Catholic Church, it had few sources of moral authority on which to draw on...attempts to rewrite Italian history in a patriotic key or endow the House of Savoy with an aura of greatness....*

Haste and brutal expediency destroyed much of the goodwill that Garibaldi, had helped generate during the unification of Italy.



## **The liberal state and the social question 1870-1900**

### **The taking of Rome**

In Italy's recent past wars in 1866 between Prussia and defeating Austria saw the return of Veneto to Italy. Prussia's victory over France in 1870 led the recapture of Rome by the Italian Government. Pope Pius IX retained a small Vatican enclave, thereafter a law was passed in May 1871 to guarantee financial security, the safety and continuity of the Papacy. The fatuous progression from Caesars' Rome to Popes' Rome; was it possible now to have a Rome of the People? Was it possible to Liberation and peace? There was disagreement amongst the intellectuals as to how morph the spectre of Rome's past to a new relevant future. All up it was realised that it was "*not so much the dawn of a new era but the end of one.*" whereby wars elsewhere in Europe dictated events and delivered a significant benefit to the country.

The sense of what's next gave an aura of anticlimax that left and Francesco Crispi wondering how indeed to remain relevant. Poor voter turnout did auger well for governance. Aimless Deputies unsure of how to identify and align policies for the common good, became intransigent issues. There was general inability to formulate a clear vision for what did Italy stood for, given such a disparate electorate making up the fledgling nation. The ever presence of the church/Catholicism in opposition to the state was another layer that added complexity and despair. The *Southern Question* as to how to help the poor continued to be bogged down as any program involving negotiations with landowners to relinquish land was an impossible task. Political allegiances would change to ensure the status quo remained in their favour.

Social ideology by this time was identifiable as *Right* and *Left* had to grapple with the abstraction of national identity and some need for materialism to wade out of the crippling poverty. The *Liberal Construct* for prosperity implemented by Cavour had run its course and sentiment gravitated to Socialism. Guidance away from Socialism, to have the people trust institutions had to be argued by politicians and contemporary writers alike against persistent clerical influence seemed hopeless. A purge by a Great national war may provide the answer.

### **Italy 1870's**

As a country in comparison with other nations Italy seemed to be quite backward; it had high birth and death rates. By the beginning of WWI, population had reached 40 million even with the mass immigration that was underway. Italy had an agriculturally based economy even though historically; it had been an urbanised society. Poverty was all pervasive and the freedom of nationhood seemed like a cruel joke; to the peasants the state meant "*military service, taxes and arrogance of the leisured classes*".

Industrialisation and trade were ineffective due to the weakness of internal demand due to lack of disposable income and priority need for food. Share farming gave peasants options and some flexibility to share risk of continuity from year to year. Day labourers

lived a precarious life whereby 50% of the time they were not able to find employment. There were limited dietary options: polenta in the north, acorns, chestnuts, rye elsewhere; universal low meat intake representing a continuation of the past 30 years, Pellagra (vitamin deficiency) became widespread in the northern plains. Malaria was prevalent over 50% plus of the nation; it brought under control with the introduction of DDT. Tuberculosis was another scourge which was endemic in the population. Homes when owned would be shared with livestock and usually featured earthen floors. In the South it was common practice to inhabit caves, grottoes, and necropolises.

By the 1880's manufacturing was based on state purchases for defence. Distribution of factories was limited to Piedmont, Liguria, and Lombardy. One bright spot was silk production which proved to be a sustainable industry which amounted to become a third of world market. Harsh working conditions had to be endured; child labour as young as 4yo augmented the cheap labour (this was later legislated to limit having children under the age of 9). There was no protection from the legislature which considered 'labour conditions' as an unnecessary luxury. Education was viewed as means to bind loyalty to the state and avoid the grasp of socialism and clericalism. However, 2/3's of the populace remained illiterate and, in the South, it was close to 100%. Casati's Law 1859 was passed to provide basic classes but this was no more than a veneer to gloss over the issues. Facilities were inadequate to implement any effective programs; teachers were lowly paid. The burden for the lack of teachers was relieved by enlistment of clerics at the consternation to previous reservations for working with the clergy. Teaching was in done in Italian, whereas would be pupils only communicated in dialect; resulting in poor attendance. Military service proved to be more effective in raising literacy levels in soldiers. Overall schooling was not universally supported and regarded with suspicion by landowners in Sicily which believed that the schools were a breeding ground for revolutionaries.

Education themes were based on loyalty and work ethic; but Carlo Collodi (Pinocchio fame) focussed his fable on sloth and dishonesty of the ruling classes, which saw the aims of education as to support their needs and no concern for the poor making progress to self-determination. There was a systemic poor mix of professional graduates. There were too many lawyers and doctors relative to the needs of the economy exacerbated by the depression from 1873. The effect this had on the South in the elections of 1876 was a notable shift to the *Left of Politics* away from traditional dominance by the 'conservative' landowners. A proliferation of petty lawyers from lower middle classes was complemented by the unproductive growth in the public service, ranks of Nationalists, Fascists and Journos. These groups swelled to absorb this job-lot of underemployed professionals.

There was a general aversion by Italians to invest in capitalist enterprises, preferring real-estate to safeguard their wealth. Fortunately, there was some balance due to the industrial culture prevailing in Veneto, Lombardy, and Tuscany. Lombardy, encouraged by the church gravitated towards engineering professions and a tradition for embracing

technology to innovation. The Milan Polytechnic was established in 1864 and boosted the professional standing of engineers. This progressiveness was not reflected in the government and bureaucracy and thus lacked the activism to propel a strong industrial base for the nation.

### **The Struggle for an Authoritative State 1876-1900**

Political *Left-Right* agendas evolved along traditional lines, viz., Right: *Law and Order*, the Left comprised of the Garibaldians, Mazzinians and an influx from Southern Deputies. Overall, the *Left* did not present a coherent platform to represent the needs of their constituents. By the 1880's, the *Left-Right* political dynamic lost all meaning and became an agglomeration factional interest. Due to the lack of credible reform proposals; ad-hoc legislative agendas prevailed. Electoral suffrage was effectively in name only, because at the insistence of the Southern landowners, the peasants were excluded from voting on literacy grounds. Southern Deputies had no qualms to barter their support openly and usually to retain the status quo viz., policing of the peasants, and maintenance of tariffs on wheat to benefit the landowners.

Italy's tariff position on wheat gave some protection to Italy's balance of trade deficits but domestically rising food prices disadvantaged the poor disproportionately. Trade war with France 1888 made things even worse. Peasants faced the possibility of destitution and many took the option of immigration mainly to America. Cheap wheat from America forced rethink of the Italian industry mix. A steel plant in Tern was established; even though Italy had a shortage of coal; however, it did lead to the desired industrial development.

The conflagration stoking political unrest gained momentum because of desperate needs of the poor. As a result, the Governing Elites needed to contend with the growing challenges of Socialist agitation. Anarchism also made its presence with the arrival of Russian, Michael Bakunin in the 1860's who got a following amongst students and artisans especially in Naples. The notion of communal autonomy (commune) in opposition to the state appealed to audience in part because of the resentment to taxation and military service. This was in part supported by Garibaldi but not Mazzini. The split in the established labour union in 1872 into Marxism and Anarchists led to greater support for the latter. It to be that the participating populace had little interest in state control of everything. Strongest support came from Romagna. However, attempts to start national revolutions failed twice. Failure was due in part to the high degree of spoken dialect differences in the regions. Anarchists diversified from insurrection to pernicious terrorism. Attempt made to assassinate the new King Umberto I in 1878 failed but succeeded in the 2<sup>nd</sup> go in 1900; also assassinated the President of France in 1894, Spanish PM in 1897 and the Austrian Empress in 1898.

From the late 1870's the agricultural crisis trended higher. Unemployment in the Po valley led to labour unrest with consequently strikes, violence and despair. The Military and Police were petitioned to intervene and did so, on the side of the landowners. This

also included forcible dissolution of peasant leagues, societies and lifting of tariffs. The Government was forced to expand the political base to try and mitigate the emerging revolutionary tendencies and try to encompass their interests. Andrea Costa rejected anarchism but there was residual harbouring for revolution; activism continued with new local leagues springing up under the sponsorship of middle-class interests to improve work conditions and raise political awareness. Further disparity between North and South continued to compound as Deputies put regional interests ahead of National the good. The Church on was positioned as an outlier of these movements. There was some belief by organisers that reconciliation with the Church would hinder the march of socialism. However, this was resisted by Leftist Deputies which already had some of their own interests based in Freemasonry. Parliament lost respect and was seen as a vehicle for trivial pursuits to be disparaged by writers, poets, and journalist alike. The Vatican was not impressed with the erection of a statue of Giordano Bruno in Rome; but did mobilise resources to fight socialism-liberalism.

The 1880-90's were marked by Government and Bank scandals; including an epoch where *Banca Romana* started printing its own money. Unsecured loans/bribes to politicians were common to receive beneficial audits. The Prime Minister resigned because of this scandal. Francesco Crispi was his deputy and was also implicated however he refused to resign and later became Prime Minister. Crispi as PM focussed on patriotism and signalled intention to wage war to consolidate people's concept of nationhood. Crispi had two terms as PM but had little grasp of economics and failed to steer the economy to develop a better the nation. He believed that the issues facing Italy were moral in nature and pursued a belligerent foreign policy; this in turn undermined investment confidence. He wished to implicate France's military and revolutionary past to evoke a vision for possible war with its neighbour. For this to work it required the involvement of Germany; Crispi failed to convince Bismarck. Later he pined for a war in Africa to lift the status of the national spirit. But only disasters resulted from forays into acts of aggression at *Massawa/Eritrea and Dogali/Ethiopia* and later *Adua (Adwa)* which was meant to avenge the previous two defeats.

Eritrea attracted the interest of a young monk Giuseppe Sapeto whilst preparing for a missionary posting in Cairo, Egypt and in 1837 was sent instead to Abyssinia. He became an advocate for European involvement and targeted the French to take up the opportunity. In 1866, a few years after the unification of Italy he switched his attention to getting Italy involved in North Africa as the Suez Canal was nearing completion. The Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs and King Victor Emmanuel II were receptive to the notion to have a coal port for Italian steamships in the Red Sea. Plans went into action in 1869 and Sapeto accompanied Admiral Alfredo Acton to the Red Sea to scout out a suitable location. An acquisition was made and a deposit paid to representatives of the indigenous Danakil peoples at Assab Bay. By this time the Suez Canal had opened and a private company which had been looking to establish a steamship line through the Suez Canal for a trade route to India made the purchase facilitated by Sapeto. The area was in a deserted area about half-way between Annesley Bay to the north and Obock to

the South, then under the influence of the Ottomans and Egyptians. In 1882 Italy took possession of the outpost from the private Italian owners and established Massawa (1897 to Asmara) as the Capital and the colony lasted until 1947.

The colonisation of Eritrea led to Italian aggression in Ethiopia with an undeclared war between 1887 and 1889 and resulted in the first Italian defeat at Dogali near Massawa. The Treaty of Wuchale (named after the small town where it was concluded) was signed to end this skirmish and improve relations between the two countries. Unfortunately, translations between Amharic and Italian proved to be its undoing as disagreements arose from the disparate interpretations. King Menelik II walked away from the treaty; Italy tried to impose a protectorate status over Ethiopia. This led to the First Italo-Ethiopian War in 1895 and Italy's defeat at the battle of Adwa (Adua) with 5,000 troops killed. Ethiopia was supported by the French and the Russians. There was spitefulness in Europe from alliances between Austria, Hungary, and Italy on one side and France and Russia on the other. Italy was also being courted by England with countries all wishing their own hegemony to prevail in the Horn of Africa.

In 1893 Crispien began his second term as PM; the Socialists had set up a National Party in Sicily and there was the rise of an organisation known as the "*fasci*"; an artefact of local Sicilian intellectuals as a means to mobilise peasants to improve their pay and conditions. Violence subsequently increased and troops sent to crush this movement and the Socialist Party suppressed. -Crispien tried to implement land reform but as was the norm, stiff resistance from landowners made it impossible. This made the *Banca Romana* scandal to resurface and Crispien had to go into damage control. He abandoned the 'national' interest through parliament and turned to greater authoritarian means to govern the nation. Defeat at the *Battle of Adwa* made Crispien's position untenable and institutional crisis followed. All the factions tried to enlist the support of the King to have parliament adhere to the constitution; but unsuccessful in the first instance, the following May, Martial Law was implemented. The Army opened fire and killed some 80 people; organisations considered as being subversive were dissolved, leaders imprisoned; the King Umberto I, foolishly decorated the General in charge of the operation.

## **Giolitti, the First World War, and the rise of Fascism**

### **Economic Growth and Idealistic Revolt**

The governing structure of the 1890's for Italy was unable to cope with the array of conflicting interests. Crispi was frustrated about the parliamentary indecision and shopped around to determine whether a change in the model may offer better outcomes; a presidential style with an unelected consultative Senate was discussed with the Queen and later the German model was also considered. Crispi's nostalgia for the *Risorgimento* grew as the impasse persisted. Marxism made the rounds of the universities/intellectuals in the 1890's. An upswing in the economy offered a relative reprieve and a possible new path for *Liberalism* via materialism (consumer). *Giovanni Giolitti* (Piedmont) an ex-civil servant; believed that Italians had a price and could be bought. He was a political pragmatist but lacked a vision to the making a cohesive nation. He became influential in formulating and propagating the notion that economic development based on industry would deliver prosperity. GDP grew and outpaced the growth in population and transformed the previous subsistence quandary into sustainable confidence for the future of manufacturing.

Progress was marked by Primary school attendances improving greatly. Industry milestones included the establishment of *Fiat* in Turin in 1899, followed by other car makers; Lancia and Alfa Romeo in 1906. *Pirelli* grew rapidly to become the first multinational company. Sugar Beet production became a formidable enterprise in agriculture. Traditional sectors such as textiles were revitalised. External factors such as the growth in world demand helped Italy at this crucial juncture. Current accounts were aided by tourism and remittances by expatriate Italians back to the homeland had tangible economic benefits. There were six million that had emigrated between 1900 and 1910. The Banking sector was cleaned up (Treasury controlled money printing). Investment banking facilitated electricity generation. This further enhanced Italy's competitive advantage and factory capacity.

In the South a different scenario was unfolding because of cheap transatlantic fares and promises of good wages being paid in the US. Southern Italian emigrants also sent remittances back to family often to buy small plots of land to invest in their future. However noble the thought of and ownership may have been, it proved not to be such a worthy plan. Once the plan progressed and they would be farmers tried to make the plots productive, there came a realisation that such small-scale agriculture would prove to be unprofitable. The plots would eventually have to be sold. Overall social benefits, as usual, mostly favoured the existing middle classes. There was some sympathy by those who well above substance living that the low wages led to inadequate diet and quantity of portions. The inadequate food intake, made for a low-quality worker that was physically and mentally weak and thus limiting their productive capacity. At the other end of the social scale, Italy still struggled with being able to provide adequate

employment opportunities and therefore there was underutilisation of the well-educated; job security offered by civil jobs made these highly prized.

Philosophical soul-searching raised questions as to how to continue cultural and political development. Benedetto Croce determined that the ills of society would be better served by eschewing the existing ideologies of consumerism, socialism and even democracy. His movement aim was to divert people's disposition from *positivity* to *idealism*. The movement attracted young middle-class white-collar men. These would be energised by radical journals that burst onto the scene with opinions to contradict politicians and innovations of the day viz., telegraph. Giolitti failed to grasp the value of the intellectual movements to build a broader political base. Resentment grew amongst the middle classes which had by now been mobilised into an unchallenged *Futurism Movement* leading to the ideals of *fascism after 1918*.

### **Giolitti's Political Experiment**

Giolitti was mindful of the historical events which had been implemented by Crispi to deter socialism. His approach was to avoid previous mistakes which had alienated the working classes. Foremost were the low wages that were deleterious to workers dietary and general health. The cumulative effect of the conflicts between workers and employers had been to enhance the appeal of socialism. Giolitti was in favour of a balance between the needs of industrialists and worker benefits based on supply and demand. He steered clear of using strike busting instruments such as the police and army and to retain workers' allegiance to the state. He was handed some synergy to his motives by the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) that came to conclude:

C Duggan notes:

*"..that Italy could not possibly have a socialist revolution, unless it first underwent a process of industrialisation and created a modern bourgeoisie and a factory proletariat."*

By 1902, Socialist led unions had been formed against a backdrop of government neutrality and union militancy which led to the creation of the *Chambers of Labour*. Giolitti continued with social reforms that delivered child labour laws and women work hours and by 1907 day of rest. There were some conflicts with industrialists; travel and better understanding of capitalism soothed tensions but simmered below the surface.

C Duggan notes:

Prevailing view was that *"Production must take precedence over the social justice....Otherwise Italy would remain an impoverished second-rate power."*

The discord between industrialists and Giolitti did weaken his position as contradictions in the state's *hands off policy* could not deliver all necessary solutions to complex issues and violence ensued. His parliamentary majority relied on Southern Deputies and he elected to run dual policies for the Industrialised North to continue modernisation and preservation of the *latifondo* economy in the South, viz., absentee landlords, feudal remnants, and harsh working conditions.

The Socialists by this time were facing internal headwinds from ideals proposed by opposing ideologue reformers, Claudio Treves and Filippo Turati. Labour disputes were often violent with police opening fire on union protestors resulting in many deaths. The balance of power between the Socialists and Giolitti which he lost in 1904; got it back in 1908 and lost again in 1912. The political play in 1912 resulted in Benito Mussolini gaining prominence. In the public arena, writers, and journalists together with the dissident young became loosely classed as the *Nationalists*. Giolitti underestimated their influence believing that they could be *bought off with reason*. However, the Nationalists became exponents for the value of war to teach Italians about dying for ideals and purge the bourgeoisie of what Vilfredo Pareto called “*its stupidly humanitarian sentiments*” and *forge a new elite*.

The strain in 1907 between Giolitti and the Industrialists found a release with the advent of Nationalists. The impending European war sparked a crisis in the Balkans, colonial rivalry in Africa added to Nationalist's appeal. The Congress held in Florence formed the Italian *Nationalists Association* and represented *the* start of a major political movement with war mongering foremost in its mind. In Giolitti's continued pursuit of idealism, political appeasement and gamesmanship led him to make a forced error; the invasion of Libya. This ultimately destroyed Giolitti's political support by giving impetus to the *Italian Socialist Party (PSI)* and other radical groups. Giolitti begins to court the Catholic Church, which was becoming amenable to the inevitability of secular government and need to choose between Liberalism and Socialism. In 1904 Pope decreed for Catholics to vote but made it clear that the church would remain at arm's length. The Church was still sore about losing territorial state control in earlier skirmishes with secular governance. The results of the venture were lukewarm and benefits limited. The secret deal between Giolitti and Pope Pius X, unleashed a revolt against Giolitti when it became public. This proved to be a spoiler to any lasting alliance. On another front there developed a possibility in the South to enlist the rural conservatives which now had voting for almost all adult males. This also did not play out so well due to lack of effective political organisational platforms to harness voter numbers. The economic boom which coincided with the election of Giolitti, only marginally benefited the South. PSI gained representative numbers. Liberalism, without the allure of materialism did not have the elixir for earthly comfort to present to the religious faithful nor the utopian visions offered by socialism to the workers. Liberals only option left was patriotism and war which began in May 1915

### **Italy & WWI**

The lead up to WWI saw Italy aligned with Germany and Austria-Hungary however a misstep with Serbia soured these geo-political relations. Italy remained neutral at first but suffered from anxiety for fear of missing out on the spoils of war. On the flip side of this was that there may be benefits value to nation building. The reasons for entry into the war amongst the agitating groups were mixed; Futurists and Nationalists were all in favour of war. Under normal circumstances, PSI would be anti-war however the pro stance was taken by the bright but volatile journalist Benito Mussolini. Subsequently he



was expelled for his presumption in contradiction of the Socialist charter. PSI saw Italy's entry into the war as an opportunity to ferment the revolution; at last! The government headed by Giolitti had mixed sentiments with pros and con cadres for entry into the war. In the end a seditious deal hatched by the Prime Minister and the foreign secretary saw Italy enter the war on the side of Britain and France. The agitators including Mussolini were delighted. War was seen by the activists as naively settling scores against the establishment and the perceived unpatriotic Socialists. Most of the population was quite ominously ambivalent.

Front line soldiers of the army were mainly peasants from the South. Objective was to redeem historical territories South Tyrol and Istria from Austria: Horrors of war prevailed and made worse by inadequate military supplies and food rations. Terrorising the soldiers by arbitrary decimation to discourage desertion was used because the task to punish culprits was impossible to police. Now young officers including Mussolini who had enlisted and Marinetti clung on to the misguided belief that the war was 'heroic'. This was propaganda to reinforce Italy's mercurial entry into the war and to counter the sullen reality of the nation's morass existence and the threat of further social splintering. The war conducted under the pall of Marshall Law whereby politicians were banned from war zones thus their being sidelined meant that they were not given any political 'brownie points'. Political recriminations followed at the end of the war.

For Industry on war footing proved successful to develop and aircraft industry from nothing before 1914. Under a well-developed government strategy to designate essential industries as "auxiliary" which assumed state control of critical resources such as coal greatly improved productivity. Companies such as Fiat were beneficiaries of the plans implemented. An aircraft industry flourished and there a general feeling of wellbeing amongst the workers. The momentum was not able to be sustained and the post war economy became deflated and many old issues such employment security resurfaced hand in hand with militancy.

### ***The collapse of the Liberal State***

The end of WWI in November 1918 ushered in a fortuitous new era in geopolitics. There were winners; by way of the democratic block being enhanced with Italy joining Britain, France, and USA. The losers were the autocracies including Russia and in December 1918 Italy adopted votes for all men and thus the beginning of Democracy for Italy. The new democratic framework for the nation spelled trouble for the liberals which lacked the party organisations to remain relevant. The labour unions backing for the socialists gave this party the necessary means to mobilise activism on its behalf. The Catholic party came into being as the *Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI)* led by priest: Don Luigi Sturzo.

Italy's share of the territory of the post war carve up was quite modest by the gain of Trent, the South Tyrol and Istria, but missed out on Dalmatia and Italian speaking port of Fiume (Rijeka). The fallout from this perceived failure by the government led to recriminations against the incumbent Prime Minister Orlando and he was replaced by

Nitti in June 1919. Continuing discontent led to Nationalist Military coup in 1919 led by D'Annunzio. He secured Fiume for about a year allowing for experimentation in governing principles. Nitti prevaricated to intervene for fear of mutiny in his own army and was eventually replaced as Prime Minister. Giolitti was drafted to the position for a 5<sup>th</sup> time. He sent in the navy to quash the rebellion whereby D'Annunzio in December 1920.

In the wings Mussolini, now back as an editor paper he had founded in Milan, drooled with jealousy of D'Annunzio's coup. His political sympathies lay with the left but believed this did not have the credentials to gain mass popular support. So he set up a new movement the *Fasci di Combattimento* in Milan. This had similarities to the PSI political agenda and therefore the lack of differentiation resulted in a 'no show' in the Nov 1919 elections. What to do next; lurch to the Right? He elected to ditch Left Wing policy elements and what remained was a skeletal framework comprising of basic Nationalistic opinions. This gave him the needed dual justification for the war he had passionately supported and his anti-socialistic pronouncements he had made prior. It worked and conservatives drifted in.

Mussolini's new party was anointed figuratively with *manna from heaven* by the fact that the PSI continued to agitate for revolution and was emboldened by the Bolsheviks victory in Russia 1917. Strikes threatened food supplies, unemployment soared; factional discontent fermented cross interest squabbles; landowners came under threat of compulsory acquisitions. Landowners and industrialists under such threats looked to Giolitti's government for support; but none was forthcoming. Was this the revolution starting? The leadership of the PSI did not capitalise in the prevailing turmoil preferring to believe that the working class was not adequately robust to get the job of revolution done. Certainly, there were other factors which loomed. The new geopolitical alliances now in place would mean exposure to intervention by France, England or even the US. The lack of Socialist will in this social flux gave rise to the far-left syndicalist movement which dominated and Anarchists (university graduates) led by *Antonio Gramsci*. Gramsci initiated an experiment to have elected factory councils as an initial step to build a worker run state. The lack of leadership and experience in such an artificial structure highlighted its weakness and reason for the movement to continue. The downturn in the economy in mid-1920 saw workers scramble to retain their jobs as employers looked for ways to cut costs to remain competitive. Thus, the movement faltered. Also, the model had not grafted well into the other cities.

The recession of this period laid foundation for the fascist movement. para-military squads started to terrorise Slav speaking councils in Istria & Friuli. The Socialists were now deemed 'national enemy' and scapegoats for the recession. There was a ready supply of men, many with military experience to swell the ranks of the squads. These were drawn from small holding farms and sharecroppers who were disaffected by the PSI land collectivisation ideal. Pooches were undertaken of *Chambers of Labour* as retribution for all ills resulting from the downturn. Working class socialism collapsed.

Gramsci was disgusted by the acquiescence of the PSI leadership in the face of the deadly confrontation and kicked off the *Italian Communist Party* (PCI). The PCI Won 15 seats in parliament; but it was considered more like a clique than a real political force. The PCI gave the fascists a new target to vilify as “*Italy now had a real Bolshevik enemy in its midst*<sup>1</sup>”.

In any case for its part the fascist movement was no more than a rabble; the *squadristi* was a hateful faction of this and sponsored by landowners and businessmen for their mutual dislike of socialists. Police and army lent a hand and materiel as pay back for the abuse they had received at the hands of the socialists. Consequently, Mussolini struggled to get any cohesive momentum in which to stamp his authority. His attempts to do so backfired when he attempted to reconcile with the socialists. There was a threat to replace him with D'Annunzio. Giliotti was somewhat sympathetic to the fascists and allowed Mussolini to run a party; believing that this would moderate their often-violent activism. Following the elections of 1921 the success only emboldened them and became more militant. The Fascists had 35 deputies in parliament, PSI and Communists had 138 making task of governing more difficult.

The *Squadristi* caused mayhem across northern and central Italy. Mussolini was duplicitous in the control of the *Squadristi* for incremental gain of political power. Balbo and Farinacci acknowledged the skill set and agreed to allow the formation of the Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF). The *Squadristi* leadership ‘ras’ understood that they were the source of the power behind the new party. Mussolini was a captive leader with favours to repay. The question would be whether he could covertly manipulate the mission to suit a stable participation with ministerial positions. Unfortunately, the *Squadristi* wish for a revolution persisted and at a rally was organised in Naples on 24/10/1922 and 40K called for a march on Rome. The march on Rome had historical connotations of grandeur worthy Mazzini, Garibaldi et al; however, this march on 28/10/22 was a rag tag band of ill-equipped misfits. Mussolini stayed away in Milan. The King Victor Emmanuel III, for obscure reasons did not sign a decree to send in the military to disperse the rain-drenched rebels Mussolini was summoned to Rome and at 39 became the youngest ever Prime Minister.

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<sup>1</sup> C Duggan

## Fascism

### Return to Order 1922-25

Giolitti was not impressed with Mussolini, believing him to be insecure and that he could be moulded to become part of the establishment. There was a general longing for a settling of the political mood and that the *squadristi* to be quietly repurposed and be a catalyst to political vibrancy. The Fascists had their day in the sun with implications of a *coup d'état* type parade to mark their ascendancy to mainstream politics. Mussolini's allegiants included the *Establishment* and *Fascist Capos* with contradictory positions to each other. Each had to be rewarded in some way for their disparate forms of support. However political skill was unfortunately lacking; Fascism proved to be aimless in the service of the state. Citizens craved for a level of stability. Mussolini showed some initiative with appointment of cabinet posts to include a mixture of the prevailing political factions. Attempts were made to discipline the *squadristi*, which continued hell bent on insurrection. In 1923 Mussolini took the initiative to limit the influence of the 'ras' such as Roberto Farinacci, by the formation of the fascist Militia (MVSN) to nudge the power gravitas towards central command.

In other notable reforms, Mussolini stopped further land transfers to peasants to the delight of landowners. He took steps to reconcile with the church by allowing religious symbols to be displayed in public and repair of war damaged churches. He began major reform programs which included compulsory religious education in primary schools. There was an effective consolidation of the compact but influential, elitist Nationalists into the PNF which broadened the fascist's popular support base. The earlier anarchistic ideals of the *squadristi*, which included slogans such as '*me ne frego*' (I do not give a F\*\*Kdamn) began a trajectory of evolution by the more enlightened new members that had shown talent in formulating cohesive objectives such as ending class distinctions. Electoral reformation was instituted by the *Acerbo bill*, 1923. The formula of this Bill gave 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the seats to the party which won largest popular vote (>25%) and was supported by Giolitti et al.

Unfortunately, past indiscretions by the fascists against the Catholic PPI kept hostilities between the church and fascism ongoing and did not support the Acerbo Bill. The PPI did not react cohesively to the historical violence that had been perpetrated on the lower clergy and Catholic unions. This allowed Mussolini to leverage the evident internal differences and led to a split in the PPI's executive structure. The outcome was that the *Popolari* were expelled from Mussolini's cabinet. The PPI had become a spent force. At the elections of 1924, the fascists had an eclectic mix of candidates winning 66% of the vote. Attempts were made to curb *squadristi* violence but to no avail and in any case inconsequential. Mussolini got the respectability which he craved for; Socialism was marginalised. But still below the surface there remained the *squadristi* demands on Mussolini to deliver on the revolution. To press this demand home, the extremists kidnapped and killed the reformist Socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti. Although

circumstantial evidence indicated Mussolini's involvement, this was not central to his troubles. He had to grapple with the quandary for which principles fascism stood for: the constitution of subversion? Appeasement of the *squadristi* was an impossible undertaking.

The opposition party's protest strategy in parliament was a pathetic gesture by way of condemnation for the murder was to simply walk out! The King, Victor Emmanuelle III, could not act in any meaningful way. The walkout gave Mussolini the opportunity to bar the deputies from returning to parliament. This hastened process of de-legitimisation of the PPI and PSI. These were later banned, after and an attempt was made on Mussolini's life. Newspapers exposed that high level fascists were implicated in the in the murder of Matteotti. The *Squadristi* continued with defiant demands that put Mussolini under continued pressure which could only be resolved by the resignation of his government. Of the options open to Mussolini, he surmised that the *squadristi* would also lose in their threats to terrorise; therefore, on 23 Jan 1923, Mussolini confronted all his detractors in parliament and taunted them to indict him: "*if fascism has been a criminal association....the responsibility is mine*". Neither the king nor the opposition called his bluff for fear of civil war. Such was the high cost was paid by Italy's democracy for Mussolini's temerity and King's prevarication.

### **Party and State**

A Fascist dictatorship ensued, still devoid of clear principles to articulate a cohesive ideology. There was evident a reactionary factional mentality that served to manage vicissitudes of current affairs. This compounded Mussolini's myopic ideology but he twisted this to aggrandise himself by projecting "*spontaneity, intuition, impulse and faith*" as valued traits. His personal charisma did give some credence to this stance. In administrative reality not much had changed; the King still was head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces, no purges took place, the public service remained mostly unaffected. In any case the fascists did not have the means to be functional administrators and Mussolini was in effect a Prime Minister who could be dismissed at the Kings command at any time.

The ongoing *squadristi* problem needed to be resolved and Mussolini duplicitously gave the task to and ex *ras* and now secretary of the PNF, Roberto Farinacci. He failed as expected and was sacked due to the murder of eight liberals by the *squadristi* on his watch; one down! His replacement was Augusto Turati who managed Mussolini's intent with diligence. A purge of the *squadristi* membership effectively annulled their power base. Replacements were selected from more mainstream politically agreeable personnel. In the South these were drawn from the aristocrats of the time. A new centralist hierarchy was implemented, thus clearing any residual *ras* connections. Thus the state and fascism had morphed with the state taking prime position of authority. Political Opposition was banned and from Oct 1926 following a series of attempts on Mussolini's life. The press was affected by new censorship laws forbidding criticism of

the government. Newspaper owners cowed to Mussolini and fired offending editors as needed.

The progress to a one-party state was aided by the failure of previous models of government that had lost any sense of moral Authority as in UK nowadays. There was general acceptance to the idea that loss of certain freedoms was OK; if this provided a greater level of security compared to liberalism movements which had led to constant states of civil strife. Thus in 1926 the Public Safety Law was to rebalance personal liberty and security and weighted in favour of security for the State resulting in greater police powers. The ideal of the post 1789 need for a coming together and mend the centuries of division and based on liberal principles came to an end; Fascism was going to remedy the failure of the liberals by the construct of the *corporate state*. Thereafter shape the national character through propaganda.

### **The Fascist Economy**

By 1925, the persistence of the emotional approach to the economy was foolish against the backdrop of the pragmatic competitor nations. In this narrative the liberal ruling class were to blame for Italy's relative poverty and unfettered boldness would the creativity needed to turn Italy's fortunes around. There was a policy leaning to the side of employers resulting in lower wages and harsher work conditions; workers were told to *suck it up* as it was productivity imperative in order to be competitive against other nations. Attempts were made to balance the budget by slowing public works; reduction in the manufacture of military hardware (Ploughs or Guns), in the end however, the economy was assisted by an uptick in the world economy. Improvement in Italy's economic fortunes gave a reprieve for the Mussolini's misadventures such as the of murder of Matteotti.

Still, unrest lay just below the surface for the one-party state system. Industrialists and landowners received favours and the trade unions become stronger and more militant. Out of the triumvirate of vested interests, something had to give! *The Syndical Law* (drafted mainly by Alfredo Rocco, minister for Justice) became a signature fascist instrument for economic management. This attempted to emulate the German model for cartels and unions. Strikes were banned but employers remained unencumbered resulting in the disparity in wealth distribution which eventually led to the *corporate state* in 1934. This was yet another fascist construct that had contingents of employers and employees making up an enterprise's executive but lacked the experience to be effective business managers. In the South any promises of even handedness were totally discarded and it was generally accepted that political manoeuvring rested with the ruling classes. Land reclamations as per the marshes around Rome, were a good idea but infighting, especially by South landowners (*latifondisti*), as usual made the outcomes much less significant. Subsequently conditions deteriorated for labourers and small landowners for whom circumstances became even more profound by the US imposing emigration quotas. The notorious world recession beginning in 1929 exacerbated a lot

of the poor; exports such as for citrus contracted; small landowners were forced to leave farming for the big cities. Crime in these cities increased commensurately.

The edict to drive up the birth rate was at odds with the reality of continued over population in the South. Even so, large families were encouraged by the availability of family benefits in the 1930's and regressive levied taxes on unmarried men. Despite the initiatives to drive economic activity by population the overall benefits were negligible. Due to the *Great Depression* many of the agricultural initiatives of the Liberal era were discontinued. Wheat crops received special attention following a poor harvest and this had some success to make Italy self-sufficient. Unfortunately, it also led to misallocation of land for the purpose at the expense of other essential crops. The protection given to wheat cropping had the effect to shield inefficient farmers in the South.

There was good progress made in industrial output that benefitted Northern states. The *Great Depression* was less severe in Italy due to coincidental initiatives undertaken in setting up IMI (*Istituto Mobiliari Italiano*) & IRI (*Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale*). The government intervened to save the banks and in effect nationalised 25% of Industry which included steel, shipping, and electricity. The intention was to return them to private ownership but by 1937 IRI became a permanent Agency with a hybrid approach to share transactions. Some benefits arose whereby IRI become a training platform for the next generation of managers. A welfare system of payments was introduced. Improvising in the short term seemed to have at least achieved the primary goal to move away from materialism "*fascism was an attempt to construct a national community in Italy.*"

### **Forging the Fascist Nation**

Whereas liberal governance had failed to achieve common purpose for the masses, fascism attempted to unify belief by a combination of ethereal myths, symbols, leadership cults and *weaponizing* hopes and fears; C Duggan notes

*"by the 1930's 'fascist man' was no longer a young barbarian. He was a patriotic, hard-working church going father."*

Mussolini was being apotheosised with the support of the church and facilitated by the press to the cult figure '*il Duce*'. This was aided and abetted by his mistress Margherita Sarfatti In her 1926 best-selling biography '*Dux*' which portrayed him as the distillate of Past Roman Emperors. As a cult figure, Mussolini floated higher than the law and avoided responsibility for the malaise resulting from the inept policies instituted. PNF became a joke with membership exploding for the perceived necessity of patronage..."*Necessita Familiari*" (*for the sake of the family*). *Giovinetza* (Youth) was prominent in the indoctrination process for boys and girls with emphasis on paramilitary parades. *Dopolavoro* was another initiative to network workers through recreation clubs: films, billiard halls, and trips to the beach. The regimes encouraged sports activities; motor racing, soccer, cycling, flying, boxing, and skiing; Mussolini sons were pilots. Italo

Balbo a former *ras* from Ferrara accomplished notable achievements in long distance flights.

Although Mussolini is credited with coining 'totalitarian' his implantation was quite superficial at best, as he needed the support of the elites of the time to make meaningful change. The Church distrusted him for this, but concessions given were enough to win ' support. The Rome question was settled with the Vatican being given 'Sovereign State' status and compensated for the loss of its papal territories. Religious teaching was expanded to include secondary schools. Payback was the securing of political consent for a plebiscite to for the church to back a single list for nominations for the Chamber of Deputies. This enhanced his international position and political agenda.

Mussolini and the Church both knew that they were competing for the ideology for the spirit of the people. The church subsequently took the high moral ground in the shuffle and in doing so succeeded in undermining the foundation of fascism. Foremost in such implications was the Church was now in control of spirituality once more. Mussolini reacted with an attack on *Catholic Action* and received concessions; but was quite ineffective to regain influence over the populace. Future Democratic leaders came out of the church movement. There was a semblance of trans positioning between the church and fascism in the hierarchal constitutions which gave people the perception of interchangeability. However, the pagan principles of fascism drew closer analogies to Roman Caesars than the Popes *romanita*. *Romanita* aligned to fascism made it appear as it was a home-grown entity whereas liberalism and democracy; well, they were just imports! The influence was wide ranging and appeared in art and architecture

Attempts were made to quarantine Italians from foreign words entering the lexicon. Propaganda was used to promulgate fascist ideals mainly in primary schools. Pushback on these issues came from the bureaucracy which was still monopolised by old elites. To its eternal detriment, fascism had not purged them from their posts and they continued with conservative agendas; the church also had been given a free pass and further ameliorated fascist influence. Conditions by mid-1930's were harsh in the South, Dad confirmed this; corruption and organised crime were rife; Mafia had been driven underground by fascism, but still notably very active. The interwar years were handicapped by the lack of intellectual capacity to generate new ideas as distinct from the feel-good mentality (positivism) of the Duce cult. New graduates became increasingly frustrated with the meanderings of fascism.

### **The war and the end of Fascism**

The thrust of initiatives by Mussolini were to prepare the nation for war as means to forge a collective identity. Most of the bellicosity was directed towards internal cliques PSI (socialists), PCI (Communists), liberals, foreign grain imports and demographic decline. Notably however there was little preparation for external aggressive expeditions outside of Italy. In the European context Hitler became the *new kid on the block* that demanded immediate attention. Hitler's withdrawal from the *League of Nations* was an



ominous sign for things to come. First off the mark was Nazi coup against the Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss. The coming together of like minds was inevitable with the perception that Hitler was becoming a protégé of Mussolini. Although Mussolini was dismissive of Hitler at first, Hitler became the catalyst for the resurrection of past ambitions to expand territory. Following the brutal repression of tribesmen in Libya, Mussolini expanded his preparative horizon and by 1935 Italian forces invaded Ethiopia. A domino effect ensued with sanctions imposed by the *League of Nations*. Ostracism by France and England raised the already high-cost stakes of the Mussolini's adventurism even higher. In this hostile landscape, Italy's options became limited and Mussolini was forced to take succour from Germany. The Rome-Berlin Axis was consummated in 1936.

The war won in Ethiopia exorcised past demons of the defeats Italy suffered from its incursions in North Africa, last of which was at Adua, Ethiopia in 1896. This won Mussolini acclamation by misguided admirers such as Benedetto Croce and the widow of Baratieri the commander for that failed campaign (Crispi was then Prime Minister). This gave the victory a superficial appearance of grandeur, that the Caesars had indeed passed their mantle to fascism. The resulting bravado blinded Mussolini from clear thinking and he made unrealistic interpretations as that the British had lost interest in war. This misguided logic also led Mussolini to send forces to Spain to support General Franco in the civil war against the Republicans. The brutality of this is captured in *"For Whom the Bell Tolls by Ernest Hemingway"*.

In 1937 Mussolini visits Berlin and given a rapturous welcome by Hitler. This gave impetus to morph craven Nazi ideas to the detriment of Italian culture, society, and military. To Italy's eternal shame Mussolini fell in line with the Nazi anti-Semitic doctrine even though Mussolini at one time had a Jewish mistress. There was some consternation by the general population and the church, towards the racially charged laws that were enacted. The critical issues however were the sanctions imposed on Italy by the opposing nations and the impost on people daily struggles to survive. Trading options became limited to Germany where Italy had little to offer. Economic restructure including introduction of cartels and price fixing paid some dividends but added tax pains which included the forced loan 5% for the value of housing to the government. Oil exploration led to the formation AGIP, new fibre replacement from cotton to rayon technology was implemented to reduce import costs. Mussolini surrounded himself with sycophants and thus no serious challenges were made to his views and for common sense to prevail. By this time Illness was causing Mussolini constant pain and a source of anguish in his enacting executive responsibilities. In a scenario for impending war, Italy was poorly prepared in both materiel and strategic planning, further exacerbated by squabbles amongst the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

The balance of opinion has been that Mussolini's military skills were non-existent with high reliance on blind faith in his intuition. He had served as a draftee in the WWI with noted distinction and had gained basic knowledge of warfare. Hitler's invasion of Poland

may have been known by Mussolini from his visit to Berlin but none the less Italy was not prepared to support it. Mussolini prevaricated with demands for munition supplies for joining in the war which was underway. Events moved much too quickly and in 1940 was forced to take up the mantle to throw Italy's support for Germany. Bells tolled in Francavilla and my grandmother cried for her three sons. Wishful thinking lay at the foundation of Mussolini's beliefs with half-baked plan to take Albania. In late autumn 1940 Mussolini invaded Greece.

Mussolini committed 200K troops to the Russian front, Nth Africa, battle of El Alamein beginning of the end for the Axis forces by July 1943, Italy faced invasion.

War years intro of rationing, peasants withheld produce for own use & black market. Union unrest fanned by communists. Italy imploding.

Unrest continued to ferment; King was a paper tiger but still had option/power to dismiss Mussolini; king retained loyalty of the army. Leading fascists concluded that Mussolini was a liability and needed to be deposed if any possible salvage was to be achieved from the fiasco.

1943, Allied forces landed in Sicily virtually unopposed; any sympathy for fascism and its neglect of the peoples need was thin

July 4, 1943, Dino Grande senior PNF party figure had a motion passed for the king to resume full constitutional powers; Mussolini was arrested when he visited the king the next day.

## The Republic

### The Resistance 1943-45

The fall of Mussolini left the hesitant King Victor Emmanuel III ill prepared to deal with the Germans which poured in to reinforce their positions in Italy. Command structures for the armed forces were feeble and led to their effective dissolution. In 1946 the King in an act, perceived as cowardice in the face of the Nazis moved to Brindisi and was the beginning of the end for the Monarchy. Mussolini was rescued from prison in a daring operation by the Germans and installed as a puppet government. Elements of the anachronistic *syndacalist* laws were reinstituted ineffectively but quite brutal in their application. Communists agitated in factories with successful strikes against the establishment. The *Republic of Salò* as it became to be known, was given some support by the extremists such as Roberto Farinacci; Mussolini was a sick man and continually savaged by the Nazis. His daughter Edda deserted him for ordering the execution of her husband Count Ciano for voting against him at the Grand Council Meeting 24<sup>th</sup> July 1944. Mussolini's death at the hands of the partisans in April 1945 seemed more like an act of mercy than a punishment. The humiliation of his corpse was immaterial as death had relieved the torment of his debilitating illness. His mistress Claretta Petacci was caught up in the furore and her humiliation was an unfortunate casualty for poor judgment on both sides.

The Allies progress through the South was slow; giving time to the North to organise their resistance against the Germans; these were collectively known as partisans. The partisans were a mixed bag of soldiers and escaped prisoners of war. Their insurgency was aided by local peasants to carry out sabotage against German forces. The partisans also used their combatant status to settle old scores on their own kind in a sort of low-level civil war. Political opportunism came into play for the partisans to select an allegiance from activist parties including the Communists (biggest), Action Party (Liberal, intellectuals), and the Christian Democrats with support from the clergy. The Communists toyed with the support from Stalin with the return of Palmiro Togliatti from Moscow. However, Palmiro concluded revolution would prove an improbable task given the chaos of previous wishful iterations and to no avail. C Duggan notes

*"...Italy still had a long way to go before a socialist revolution could succeed. Democracy, he felt, was a prerequisite."*

There was concern by Churchill about the post war role that the communists may play. The partisan offensive coordination continued in the North which led to the setting up of Committees of *National Liberation*. The eventual hand over to the British and anti-fascist forces in April 1945 and the prevention of *Scorched Earth* by the retreating Germans were valued outcomes.

## Reconstruction 1945-48

The experiments that led to the political principles and fascism were scrutinised and earmarked to be discarded for a more inclusive framework for decentralised government. A new motherhood ideology arose from the partisan's struggle against fascism that. This would supposedly release the perceived victims' moral initiatives to lead Italy to a productive future. Unfortunately, the process of liberation via the South created a significant disparity in the North-South psyche because for the people south of Rome there wasn't a resistance movement necessary and thus no new ruling elites emerged. In this case a generational status quo remained in the hands of the landowners and the Mafia; which peculiarly reflected *liberal or fascist* ideals that mimicked previous allegiances by their grandfathers to the *Bourbonists and moderates* of that era.

Immediate constitutional challenges emerged as to how it may be possible to formulate a new social order by leaders that harboured communist sympathies but now this toxic ideology was at odds with the Western Powers. A seemingly intractable scenario developed by the jostling of the existing ideology ingrained in the public service, emerging inflation, unemployment, and the ever-present North-South economic gap. How to contend with the remnants of fascism was also acritical issue. One outlet was a spate of spontaneous purges that spilled over into civil vendettas with a count of 15K killed in 3 months in early 1945. However, if purges were to be implemented systematically, what criteria would suffice as millions had joined the PNF. Ferruccio Parri proposed that collaborators with the Nazi's or the *Republic of Salò* should be criminally sanctioned. Recriminations could have been far reaching however in the end some pragmatism prevailed in a populace that had many taints in its collective mindset. The judiciary feared being implicated and resisted this cause; eventually the idea gave way to an amnesty as proposed by the communist leader Togliatti at the disgust of Ferruccio Parri the Prime Minister. For the legislators, the premise of individual rights was not seen a priority by the existing unelected bureaucracy who still had considerable sway over the formulation of public policy and legislation. This bureaucracy was mired in an era that predated individual rights so now just saw people as subjugates of the state. This restrained public support and frustrated the well-meaning politicians whose legislations were not enacted because of the backlog of paperwork not being processed in Rome by the recalcitrant bureaucrats.

The lack of meaningful dialogue as to how to purge the fascist established Judiciary and Prefects meant that anachronistic decisions were being made to benefit their preferred Fascist paradigm at the detriment of the partisans needs and press freedom. The search for a constitution was addressed with trepidation. The constitutional objective to sweep away the fascist influences came at the expense in that it reverted to the weaknesses of the anachronistic liberal system. In the resulting procedural vagaries, outward appearances of reformation cloaked a plethora of existent unsavoury concepts. The Monarchy had to be adjudicated on, given the perceived cowardice by the King Emmanuelle III and its close association with fascism. In a desperate attempt to save

the dynasty, the King abdicated in favour of son Umberto. This did not pay dividends and a referendum vote for Italy to become a Republic won out. The North-South divide reared up again with each taking opposite positions; the South voted overwhelmingly to retain the Monarchy and the North overwhelmingly for a Republic.

Sicily was an outlier for the Republic as it had defied coming under centralist governance after the unification in 1860. Fascism did not endear itself to the Mafia in its attempts to eradicate it. In time fascism abandoned the island and let it to its own management. The prospect of a democracy that was left controlled spurred landowners to initiate a succession movement. Among the commanders of the militia was bandit *Salvatore Giuliano* to combat the police and military. In parallel to the unrest in Sicily the Constituent Assembly elections for 556 delegates were being held in 2/6/1946 resulting in the makeup of the party system: Christian Democrats 207; Communists 104; Socialists 115. Principles agreed on for the political system was universal suffrage for males and females. There would be two chambers with a President to be the nominal head of state with limited powers; proportional representation, the Judiciary to be an independent branch. There was also to be autonomous regional governments with Sicily to be given special consideration. It would have its own elected parliaments in part to prevent separatist movements. The piece meal approach was reminiscent of the previous attempts to formulate for freedom and still maintain national unity. Resulting structures proved in fact to be quite idealistic and there was inadequate follow through to enact laws to implement the functions intended. Existing fascist laws remained on the statutes.

The Italian Constitution came into effect 1/1/1948. The insecurity of the legislators, due in part to the historical spectre of the *Resorgimento*, was evident and therefore still could not reconcile the promised freedoms, because of the possibility that these may be used to subvert the Republic. Communists were gun shy, given their fate in earlier times (20's & 30's) and were amenable for the adoption of church preferences to be included in the constitution. Togliatti did not exploit the North unrest post war; he was resigned to the idea that Italy would join the western capitalist alliances. Togliatti was greatly influenced by the ideas of *Antonio Gramsci*. He wanted to position communism within civil society and to counter the church. He was somewhat successful and gained credibility with writers; filmmakers and artists whose works influenced the younger generation. He encouraged followers to read John Steinbeck (*Grapes of Wrath*). The Christian Democrats became aligned with the church and its key values but tried to differentiate itself from being seen as a Vatican construct. Competitive political stances emerged whereby consumerism played out in accordance with other *capitalist economies* and resulting in cash flows to support this economic initiative. Under this glitter, Communists struggled to sell their product for social equality based on the Soviet model.

*"The dreams of ordinary Italians in the 1950's were made in Hollywood, not Moscow."*

Capitalism had emerged during fascism in its desire for a self-sustaining economy. Free trade became the hallmark of the new Republic with influences by the staunch monetary

conservative Luigi Einaudi. Hydro Electric infrastructure had not been damaged by the war and thus continued to provide cheap power. Electricity became the backbone for exporters of manufactured goods and their success imbued them with as tangible profits to buttress their further power and influence bases. The textile industry flourished once more. The influential respect for the industrialists was evident in the allocation of capital resources flowing in from American aid and later accentuated by *Marshall Plan* being implemented. Labour relations were redeveloped nominally to meet the needs for the new workplace environment. Employers still retained the upper hand. Worker security was enhanced and detailed in the conditions making up the *Scala Mobile* was a means to peg salaries to inflation; however, wages were the lowest compared to their worker peers in Europe. Cheap labour however was assured by the oversupply of people and lack of industrial positions and thus continued dependence on agricultural work. In the South underemployment was far worse where employers had little incentive to innovate and thus relied on the government to condition and deliver compliant labour force.

Circumstances by 1947 saw the Communists and Socialists struggle to gain political influence. Their viability was made more precarious by the need for the church to distance itself from the coalition that included communists and socialists in the *Cold War* era between the West and the USSR. Therefore, the Coalition of Alcide De Gasperi was dissolved. On the 18/4/1948 the first parliamentary elections took place. The Christian Democrats were backed by the church and pulpit propaganda. Women voters were especially susceptible due to higher church attendances. There was disquiet by the Americans about the possibility of a communist win with due justification because Italians had a soft spot for Stalin who was affectionately known as *Baffone*. This image of Stalin was later shattered by the revelations made by Khrushchev in 1956. In February 1948 Soviet military adventurism elsewhere, eroded support for the communists in the elections. Christian Democrats won 48.5%....

*"the only time in the history of the Republic when a single party secured an absolute majority."*

Weakness in the opposition meant that Italy effectively became a one-party state!

### **Italy in the 1950's**

Following the Christian Democrats - De Gasperi election victory, it was determined that the party needed to appeal to broader support base to reduce its reliance on the church. There was a pressing need to build networks with the industrial-finance leaders and generate *grass roots* mass appeal across discernible classes. This was not much different to previous iterations of factional leaders trying to improve their political capital. The Church's support could be ethereal in nature with policies changing with each Pope incumbency. There was also the risk of secularism eroding that faith and morality-based voter cadre. The fascist structures offered a certain appeal to divine the foundations for the new party from the state and public money on offer. The South again came into the

spotlight given the universal vote which was in place. However, the *fly in the ointment* was a new communist dynamic which came into play. Having discarded the communist's disdain for the South evidenced in a previous epoch, the apparatchik now believed that the peasants were to become a vital addition for the revolution cause. *Fausto Gullo* was a Calabrian Communist who attempted to improve the peasant's lot by issuing decrees to disburse land and facilitate social class improvements through formation of cooperatives. Bloodshed followed with left wing leaders being murdered in Sicily by landowners. At the behest of the right-wing leaning mafia, in May 1947 Salvatore Giuliano killed eleven peasants at a May Day rally in Palermo. Christian Democrats were unnerved and moved to reverse the Gullo directives in favour of the landowners and thereafter gained their support. The peasantry lost out again!

The Christian Democrats were a disparate amalgam of factions for which policy attributes had limited scope for appeal to each faction. The veil of Catholicism did act as a feeble unifying element albeit across class structures and encompassing an ideal for '*social justice*'. The southern peasants were not wholly abandoned but did not gain much from the deliberations. Landowners fretted about making their mark as their forefathers had done. The soulless shade of communism was ever present to pick the bones should Christian Democrats not continue to deliver on reforms promised once American aid had been concluded.

In 1950 Christian Democrats enacted three laws to break up large land holdings based on criteria set out including extension of credit. Italy however did not have the wealth to underwrite a more comprehensive transformation and only around 5% of the peasants benefited from the program. Naturally, there was considerable resistance by landowners who exploited loopholes in the proclamations to avoid break up of their lands. In any case Christian Democrats believed above all that economic growth was essential and this was only possible by a Northern bias and industrialisation. Interestingly, the left also needed this to work if it were to have any chance of creating a sustainable worker's movement. All this was reminiscent of the Giolitti's beliefs as in both cases, then and now, the South was seen as a reservoir of votes. The North voting patterns were fickle; in the South votes could be manipulated. Throughout political history the peasants had been excluded from any power sharing formulae. In this new political paradigm, the landowners and the mafia coalesced into a nefarious legate, with authority assumed from *clientelism* which delivered a virtual gerrymander that could never be rehabilitated. The patron-clientele system so skilfully used in the past viz., money for votes was to be a winner once more! The feeble promise of hope only, was enough to keep it going because it was underwritten by the traditional feudal ethos.

The Christian Democrats played on the family morality issue to their advantage, even though there were serious underlying conflicts as to how officials would need to dispense their duties when it came to the law and their own relatives. Corruption and empire building were inevitable consequences of these matrixes. The Public Service became bloated and ineffective. The *movers and shakers* of the Christian Democrats

became de facto barons as the pyramid style introductory programs paid dividends to the party's political machine as membership swelled. The exponential growth in membership was reminiscent of the fascist phenomena in the '30's when the potential for job security was also a motivating factor. The 1950's failure for land reform saw a peasant exodus to the cities where they had to struggle for any opportunity but usually become destitute or turned to crime. Many continued on to the north and became a source of cheap labour. There were sporadic clashes because of repressive actions by authorities; left wing activism grew and inevitably blood was shed between 1948-54 in Bologna reminiscent of the fascist period.

### **From 'Economic Miracle' to Social Protest Italy 1960's**

In the '50's Italy was a marginal economy; industrialisation in the north was modest and based on lower tech manufacturing such as foundries. Employment was weighted towards agriculture and there was some prosperity in the Po valley. Other regions in Italy suffered from the fact that farms were too small to be efficient. Living standards were relatively lower than in other European countries; the range of nutritional complements were limited and poorer people generally could not afford to buy protein/meat. This was especially pronounced with the southern day labourers. Utilities such as electricity, potable tap water and toilets were not common features in houses. Illiteracy was widespread and limited the scope for the work force to be productive.

By the '60's Italy's fortunes had turned round and industry had caught up to the wider Europe. The scooter (Lambretta) industry flourished, Fiat came of age with the model 600, homes had refrigerators, protein/meat became affordable to most Italians.

De Gasperi embraced the *Common Market* to reduce unemployment and as a means to stabilise Italy's economy and it became a foundation member in 1957. The *European Economic Community (EEC)* free trade benefits were realised quickly through increased exports; the pace of which was just behind that of Germany and Japan. The Brand *Olivetti* was a standout winner in product development and market acceptance. The transformation to become an industrialised nation was spectacular in its implantation and thus leaving its peasant past in the wake of the success.

1-Underwriting of the success was increased consumer demand, cheap energy with gas from the Po Valley and some low-quality oil discoveries in Sicily. The timely Government's investment in the steel industry was also critical in broadening the industrial base to enhance the potential for a better manufacturing product mix.

2-IRI (Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale) had been retained as a State Entity and continued to develop infrastructure in telephony and road building. Other State Brand Assets already in operation including *Alitalia* and *Alfa Romeo* were well managed and competitive. Certain serendipity helped along the way. Unfortunately, the downside was that the activity was concentrated in the North. The South did not benefit and was left in the usual malaise and had to contend with a twofold wage differential was the norm



between the North and South. Overall poor planning in the development of schools, hospitals and public transport meant that these did not keep in sync with the transformation underway. Fellini's adrenalin infused film '*La Dolce Vita*' was a mere mirage to the consumer commoners.

3-Cheap labour flowed into the Northern Cities from failed attempts for a better life in Southern cities, putting considerable population growth pressure in cities such as Milan and Turin. Life became even harsher for these internal economic migrants where employment prospects were transient at best and made worse by illiteracy and incompatible mixed dialects spoken.

The Church preached against any left leaning activists and communists from pulpits and radio programs. It was also attempting to stifle youths engaging with symbols of modernity such as attending night clubs, listening to jazz music and other aspects of life it deemed to be licentious. The Christian Democratic Party was helped by Nikita Khrushchev's explosive revelations 1956 regarding the Stalin purges of the 1930's. Stalin's reputation was quickly destroyed and with it the very foundations of the PCI movement (communists). The *Hungarian Revolution* further undermined Togliatti's position and many members left the PCI in disgust. The Moscow appeal was no longer tenable and a home-grown strain of socialism had to be concocted if it indeed it still was to have a place in Italian politics.

The Italian Socialist Party (PSI) disengaged from the PCI's clinging to the ghosts of Moscow and migrated to the centre of social democracy. This was regarded as an opportunity in the making by the Christian Democrats to form a coalition with PSI and alienate the PCI. Pope Pius XII died and was succeeded by Pope John XXII in 1963. The new Pope redirected the church away from party politics in Italy to refocus the church on its grass roots pastoral mission. This gave Christian Democrats a newfound vigour to negotiate with the socialists. All seemed well and December 1963, the Socialists began to participate in the Governance of Italy. The PSI faction believed its mandate was to reform housing and address the education gap between North and South. The outcomes did not meet expectations nor were these adequately articulated to its far-left leaning members. This resulted in the PSI becoming fractured and followed up with a split in its ranks and thus making it less effective in a coalition. As the dominant coalition partner, the Christian Democrats no longer had the urgency to enact reform agendas or to work on industrialists to either modernise or improve working conditions. Notably the PSI and Communists were *gun shy* because of the events of the 1920's where collusion between the fascists, police and army was effective to break up strikes. If this were to occur in the current context, it could lead to a right-wing coup. On the other hand, both left wing parties showed restraint from agitating more forcibly, believing that a failure of the centre-left alliance would open the way for reactionaries to cause havoc in Italy.

The political transition in 1945 without a fascist purge had left enclaves of the fascist bureaucracy in place with the potential for insurrection. A coup by right wing activists against the government came to light in 1964 and in 1970 there was another attempt by neo fascists from the Republic of Salò. Coup attempts continued during the remainder of that decade. There were no serious repercussions but erosion of authority did ferment unrest as it did in previous times.

The failure by the *Christian Democrats -Left coalition* to manage the State-Owned Enterprises led to a burgeoning Public Sector. Civil Servants and IRI Managers used the system of *clientelism* to build bureaucratic virtual kingdoms wherein they assumed authority. Mismanagement in public offices became the norm and a decline in efficiency and effectiveness ensued. An attempt to straddle the North-South living conditions gap resulted in a failure in the intent which was to switch from agricultural commodities and nation building infrastructure to industrial production. The location for factories to be built was poorly thought out and no attention was given to the supporting component supply chains to make these factories perform efficiently. A skilled labour force was also lacking. Corrupt practices for implementing plans became rampant that ensured common sense evaluations such as consideration for experience did not feature highly in processes to award contracts.

Law and order had been attempted by the *Piedmontese* in 1860's, but narrow elitist interests ensured that the law favoured the North and not the nation. Therefore, in the contemporary era, the North could not claim any moral superiority that could be premised for acknowledgement by the South that benefits had been bestowed on it. After 1945 Christian Democratic Party dragged its feet on the same issue and concentrated its energy to just keeping the communists in the South in check. After 1945 The Christian Democrats used *clientelism* with the entrenched corrupt practices of the South to perpetuate a system of sycophantic governance that reinforced the debilitating effects of Southern Society on itself.

### **The Revolts of 1968-1973**

The rapid changes that were experienced post war were cause for celebrations, however the disruptions occurring also gave rise to discontent of the old ways and demands on politicians came with high expectations. This phenomenon was rolling out worldwide and Italy had to contend with its share of the upheaval. Sign post events being thrashed out included the Vietnam War, idolisation of *Mao Tse Tung*; global protests continued at infinitum. But whereas spirited emotions abated elsewhere, Italy's youth angst continued. Related issues of protest for Uni students were the faltering education system which in 1962 saw the introduction of compulsory secondary attendance till the age of 14, swelled student numbers. University entry was loosened resulting in unsustainable numbers entering thus leading to chronic overcrowding on campuses. Furthermore, teaching staff support services failed to cope. Marxist influences crept into militant movements aided by perceived grievances which in turn morphed into a common indictment of Italian Society. The high number of graduates

from university was much more than the economy could absorb. Given that the employment prospects for graduates were low, many of the unemployed became militants for antiestablishment causes.

The intractable dispositions led students to seek solutions in Leninist/Stalinist groups and resort to violence if necessary. This was the re-emergence of the '*new left*'. The general operational rhetoric of the groups was abstract unintelligible speak fests. These manifestations had low potential to create any mass movement, thus frustration and desperation led them to embrace terrorism. Meanwhile the workforce had its own grievances for unrest, as wages had stagnated. Public services and housing were far inferior to other comparative parts of Europe. Militant worker mindsets fermented into strike action. The materialism now evident in TV commercials fuelled desire for the good life. Unions were also a target for worker discontent as these had failed to improve their lot. The Militant Student Groups misinterpreted the status quo as many came from well-off middle-class families and could not really relate to the prevalence of scarcity. The reality was that workers just wanted capitalism to deliver for them and not as the students wished, viz., to lead them to an ideal which to the workers was an incomprehensible collectivist utopia.

During 1969-73 there was a general economic improvement in which conditions including wages that doubled, trade unions were doing their job more effectively; unrest subsided and any thought of revolution faded. There was however residual dissatisfaction with the Central Government and in 1970 regional government was instituted. There were fifteen of these elected councils plus the five autonomous regions already in place. Their legislative responsibility encompassed housing, health, and agriculture. In time, the left-wing elements gained prominence in these administrations just as the Christian Democrats had feared. This new layer of government gave the wealthy regions of the North and Centre of Italy an air of superiority which could take the country back to its fragmented past. Significant laws that came on to the statutes were worker rights to appeal unfair dismissal and the divorce law was widely supported by the progressive middle classes. Divorce was a quantum shift for a mostly catholic nation but attempts to have it repealed by the Christian Democrats failed in 1974.

### **Recession, Terrorism, and the 'Historic Compromise 1973 -1982'**

As an indication of the mood of the nation, a survey identified that 72% of Italians were dissatisfied with Democracy compared with much lower rates in Britain (45%) and Germany (20%). This may have influenced the terrorism that was a feature of activism in the North and organised crime in the South which perpetuated the attrition in confidence in Italy's institutions. Consumerism such cars and especially TV, had a unifying effect on Italians. The phenomenon had not been soundly delivered by the education system, military service, political rhetoric, religion or war. Language had become more uniform because of the widespread uptake of TV as an influential medium. This sharing in the new status symbols of society came at the cost of religious participation, weaker family ties and general erosion of the old order especially in the

South. The political focus of earlier decades had been ideological struggles to bury fascism and the moral struggles between the Christian Democrats and Socialism/Communism. These were no longer relevant and relegated to ideological relics status. What remained in the 70's were remnants of *political clientelism* which had become a means to preserving power with all its nefarious connotations. The moral degradation of politics was exemplified by the widespread use of graft for favours and was prevalent across big domestic and international companies; The American Company *Lockheed* was a particular case in point which colluded in corrupt practices in the allocation of air defence contracts. In this case the Social Democrat Mario Tanassi was convicted and jailed. Another twist in the political unrest was that terrorist group membership included senior figures in the secret police that had fascist leanings. These shadowy players were tempted to engage in *coup d'état* against the democracy.

The oil shock of 1973 hit Italy hard because its industries were heavily reliant on oil. The effect of the high oil price on Italian industry was that it ameliorated the low wage regime that had underwritten it's for competitiveness to date. Italy's only option to counter this effect was to devalue the lira as was the case in Australia with the \$A. This caused a knock-on effect to the benefit to exports but higher domestic prices and seemingly uncontrollable inflation. Monetary and Fiscal policies implemented to shore up the existing quite liberal public insurance (dole), spending in the South produced an untenable public debt that was much higher than any other country in Europe. To remedy this dilemma, the government borrowed heavily which reflexed into increased interest rates and the need to raise taxes. All of this was predictable by classic economic models but alas politics makes for strange bedfellows.

An economic bright spot of sorts emerged in the North and Centre of Italy where these regions engaged in a 'black market economy'. This took the form of the sprouting of small family-based enterprises, which in order to survive against established manufacturers, skimmed on statutory payments and used non-unionised labour. The salvation to the political class was that this provided employment opportunities producing export ready competitive goods. The pervasive infiltration of *Clientelism* into political machinations made it almost impossible to curtail public spending. The buying of votes to retain power evolved such, that any catharsis could not expunge its toxicity from the Christian Democrats. The failure to kick start industry in the South (60's) meant that it relied on the public purse for support. The 1970's recession closed off immigration that had been an effective relief valve against social stagnation. Subsequently unemployment grew; organised crime flourished in scope and brutality.

The Mafia in the '50's was localised in western Sicily, parts of Calabria and Campania. The influx of Public money for works opened much more lucrative pickings in the new crop of Politicians that needed *Clientelism* patronage for votes. A Parliamentary Commission was set up in 1962 to investigate mafia influence in the letting public works contracts. The edicts which formed the basis of its operation had visibility and appeal to the unemployed of Palermo and slums of Naples. This cadre came to regard the Mafia

as a pathway to lifelong enrichment; the need to work was obliterated from their conscience. The Drug trade to the USA was spectacularly successful with a cash flow to be invested in a range of businesses. By the 1980's Mafia insurrection resembled that of a minor civil war with public figures such as magistrates being murdered on a regular basis. The state was under siege and attempts to reign in the Mafia power escalated to even more violence.

In the North there was a different but as sinister playbook unfolding. Civil war was being waged by right wing Neo Fascists and left-wing terrorists' groups. The Neo Fascist Party in 1972 increased its vote and at the political fringes there were other groups intent on destroying democracy through bomb attacks. Later as the activity of nihilist fringe groups decreased the effects were offset by an increase in left wing terrorism (*Red Brigade & Prima Linea*); thus, perpetuating a hellish pantomime for chaos which the neo-fascists did not have to create but still benefitted from the disturbances to civil order. The rebellious behaviour by the antiestablishment groups was further fermented by the middle-class intellectuals that may have had past family exposure to the *Resistance*. Also, there were foreign models which were used as templates such as the *Tupamaros of Uruguay* by *Red Brigades*. The emergence of the '*new left*' and the failure of its party *Lotta Continua* at the ballot box had left these groups disenfranchised and their leadership believed that armed struggle was the only avenue open to it. By 1976 there were over a hundred left wing organisations drawing succour from Neo Marxists such as Toni Negri, a Psychology Prof at Padua University. The main targets for the extremists' violence were public servants; the most famous of these was the kidnap and murder of the President of the Christian Democrats, Aldo Moro (1978).

Investigative failures to find the Moro killers severely tarnished the reputation of Authorities'. A right-wing conspiracy was presumed as Moro had floated the idea to have the communists form a coalition in government. Naturally the right-wing faction of the Christian Democrats was not enamoured with this stance. The lead up to the Moro assassination had its origins with the '*historic compromise*' after the centre-left coalition experiment of the 60's had run its course. The PCI's (communists) new leader was Enrico Berlinguer, a wealthy devoted Catholic Sardinian who had come to realise that the only a power sharing arrangement with Christian Democrats may deliver social progress. Berlinguer needed to avoid a right-wing coup as had occurred in Chile (Salvador Allende). Moderate Christian Democrats, Giulio Andreotti, and Aldo Moro were sympathetic to the overtures as a means to fighting the recession. The arrangement gave the PCI a voter boost in the middle classes but remained behind Christian Democrats in its overall support. This hybrid political model blurred the social objectives and blurred the political window in the respective traditional *left-right* voter bases. Under this strained coalition, some reforms were implemented including making abortion legal. However, the spoils of governing now had to serve both '*pigs*' at the trough.

In March 1978, PCI was nominally part of the government but had not secured any cabinet posts. The Moro murder, election of conservative Pope John Paul II and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan started the 'white anting' of this most improbable alliance. The PCI base became disillusioned with its party and drifted off because Nation building compromises were not foremost in their reckoning for their wellbeing. The fears of the PCI had been based on the need to avoid the collapse of democracy and thus refrained from applying extreme resolve to get its way. Thus, the PCI was hamstrung to take advantage of the new wave of social agitation that came from feminists; the new and the new and highly vociferous *Radical Party*. Issues on that table included unemployment, housing, sexual equality, police powers, prisons, and family law.

Without the support of the PSI little progress was made in gaining recognition and remained in political limbo. The new PSI secretary *Bettino Craxi* revisited the ghosts of the PCI (communists)-PSI (socialists) alliance and vowed never to engage with the PCI ever again. His preference was to rake over the coals of the centre-left formula of the 1960's for a shot at redemption and maybe with a bit more muscle. Thus, this new accommodation consolidated Christian Democrats continued longevity. The PSI vote vacillated but on balance there wasn't a significant bounce in its poll numbers. Corruption began to mirror that of the Christian Democrats. Investigations of r *kickbacks* for public works contracts by officials in Milan led to arrests and imprisonment; Craxi was implicated and forced to resign.

*"By the spring of 1993, the scandal of the **tangentopoli** (bribetown) threatened to discredit, if not to destroy, the entire political and business establishment in Italy: a thousand businessmen and politicians (mostly) Christian Democrats and PSI were in goal"*

### **The End of the First Republic**

The 1984 recession ended and a dramatic upswing in the economy lifted national pride and there was a feeling that this represented a 'second economic miracle'. Inflation was brought under control (from 21% to 4.6%) It is noteworthy to mention that Paul Volker's strategy in the USA was behind this turnaround as the western world had likewise made significant gains. Other contributing factors were that labour was restructured and Fiat for example, laid off 24K workers and used the opportunity to rid itself of militants of recent years. Unions were unable to react effectively. Labour costs were lowered to levels like those in the 1960's. Small business flourished as exemplified by *Benetton* success in fashion. The Milan stock exchange quadrupled over a 5year period in the id eighties. Share in the prosperity, however, was far from uniform with the poor left living below the poverty line in all regions and accentuated in the South. Unemployment remained a scourge providing rich pickings for organised. Demography in the South was still an issue with birth rates still higher than the north.

From a political perspective there was some cause for optimism; terrorism had been defeated and there was some hope that corruption of the past had been contained. Between 1978-85 the elderly socialist, ex partisan Sandro Pertini was President and

enjoyed a high approval rate that in turn gave a boost to the credibility to the institutions of power. The Christian Democrats were now in the wings trying to regroup as a first step to restore their credibility. Giovanni Spadolini as leader of the Republican Party became the first non-Christian Democrat to become prime minister since the end of WWII. He led a coalition of five parties that included the Christian Democrats so not completely off the stage. From 1983 to 1987 Bettino Craxi from the PSI faction; led a most successful government and longest since the war.

The assassination of Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa in Palermo 1982 brought focus back on the mafia and a police force drag net resulted in thousands being detained including prominent political figures. There was breakthrough by Giovanni Falcone to have Tommaso Buschetta, divulge Cosa Nostra secrets and to inform on members was a watershed in the prosecutions of the Mafiosi in the trial of 456 suspects in Palermo.

Optimism proved to be ethereal as another recession wave came into being. The good fortune of the recent past had not been used to buttress the economy against future downturns. Social services and state industries needs were paid to the detriment of the burgeoning deficit that by 1992 was at 120% of GDP. There is a critical need to have a rethink of the political structures and Craxi set up a commission of enquiry to explore options. A pre-emptive model like that of the French Presidential Model was favoured. The Collapse of communism in Eastern Europe (1989-91) proved to be destabilising due in part that now the fear factor was no longer an element to vote for Christian Democrats to keep communism at bay. The PCI agonised over the collapse of the Soviet Union and in 1990 dissolved the party to emerge in 1991 as the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS). But the unity was short lived and the hard-line communists split to form the PRC and joined a plethora of other minor parties in the chamber. The elections in 1987 and 1992 saw the Christian Democrats vote fall below 30% in the latter election. Support was more robust in the South; money flows were considered much more important than ideology.

The moral crisis of the 1990's reached the heights of the Presidency; Francesco Cossiga (DC) was implicated in a 1950's right wing coup plot and terrorism and was under investigation. Resurgence of the mafia just added to the crisis as many of those convicted in the '80's were being released from prison. In 1992 Falcone and his wife were blown up. Also, the second most senior anti-mafia judge was also assassinated.

The possible remediation through the EC for relief was no longer a valued option as Italy's Political will was left wanting when it came to enacting pro EC legislation to reign in public debt and coupled with budget deficits were considerable impediments to businesses integrating in a single market. The middle classes of the North had no wish to be left behind and suffer deteriorating standards of living because of the incompetence of the Central Government propping up the perceived 'cash burn' in the South. Uncontrolled crime made things even worse. The *Northern League* emerged (Venetian League and Lombard League) from this resentment and a call was made to

make Italy a *Federation* rather than continue as a unified republic. *The Northern League* was led by Umberto Bossi. Its manifest was to embrace new technology however its soul searching for meaningful symbols to reflect its status was the anachronistic medieval knight.

This new toxic mix of ideology ushered out what is generally thought of as the '*collapse of the First Republic*'; however, there was no clear indication that Italy had viable new model. The objectives by the Northern League were quite shallow and did not address the misgivings of past failures. The concept of regionalism and a Northern Republic favoured by Bossi did not fit the nuances of the recent past. If implemented the South would have been further devastated. Without continued state subsidies and the spectre of organised crime would have proven too powerful for any political system to contend with.

The void left by Christian Democrats enabled the neo-Fascists (MSI Party) to gain influence. Gianfranco Fini marketed the party as a 'post-fascist' force committed to national and Catholic values. Known as the *Alleanza Nazionale*; it emerged 1994 with a 20% vote in the South. *Forza Italia* a upstart of just 2 months before the 1994 elections by *AC Milan Football Club* owner Silvio Berlusconi. The football symbolism was quite effective as a promo tool. The Party stood for less 'red tape' supposedly to release the entrepreneurial spirit inmate in Italians. As it turned out however, Berlusconi was to emerge as the prime beneficiary of such policies. Berlusconi's past had been intertwined with Craxi in the 80's. His brother Paolo had been arrested and rumours had it that Silvio had entered politics to save his business empire and possible links to organised crime in Sicily.

In 1994 Forza Italia got 21% of the vote and in an alliance with *Alleanza Nazionale* and Northern League Berlusconi became prime minister. He and Bossi were strange bedfellows and soon were in a power struggle. Berlusconi promises proved to be an illusion and policies just protected his business interests. Structural issues such as employment, debt and looming EU monetary union were not addressed. Squabbles with the judiciary persisted and his efforts were forcibly aided by the fact that he owned TV stations and an Advertising Agency. Public disaffection with his policies ensued in anyway and the Milan magistrates announced that he was under investigation for false accounting and was forced to resign. Again, magic bullet salvation failed to confer any real stability to the nation. Furthermore, Andriotti the renowned and highly experienced politician was also caught up in the dragnet for connection to the mafia. The Chief magistrate Di Pietro, hailed as a hero of anti-corruption, but in the melee of the times became a victim of the judiciary and charged with illegal activity and in the ensuing couple of years had to fight to salvage his reputation.

In the mid 90's, Italy's best possible endgame was to join single European currency and this meant swallowing a dose of reality about the state of its economy. In the 1996 elections a slightly left off centre coalition to be known as the 'Ulivo' coalition was



headed by the technocrat and former general manager of the Bank of Italy, Lamberto Dini. He became prime minister from Jan 1995 and forced through the necessary reforms albeit with creative accountancy to enable Italy to join the common currency in 1999. He was helped by the political will of other EU leaders which lowered the bar to ensure the outcome for Italy and other countries to join. Not all went smoothly however and there was push-back from one of the coalition partners *Rifondazione Comunista* which did not support further cuts. A rework of the governing coalition numbers was done in haste as no one could envisage a future without participation in the Europe experiment.

### **Italy and the Beginning of the Twenty First Century**

The *Northern League* made obnoxious racist manifestations against the South and called into question the need for a united Italy. This did not auger well for the political will that needed to contend with the disparate elements of the geography, the Church and national character which was now being laundered in full view again as had been for centuries. As communism no longer held any political sway there emerged an opportunity for Silvio Berlusconi to revise the past. He began to question the value that the partisans injected into the post war Republic by its resistance in fighting the Republic of Salò (1943-45). The Neo Fascists would spuriously argue that at least fascism was fighting the Moscow menace in preservation of the 'fatherland'. Thus *neo fascist Alleanza Nazionale* surged in the 1996 elections. Later in 2003 Silvio Berlusconi reinforced his revisionist dogma by making further conciliatory utterings about Mussolini as a benevolent dictator.

The political malaise had not dissipated and the need for some sort of stability became a yearning that could not be easily otherwise filled. The absence of Catholicism and communism from the political mix diminished the field of choices but still there was no clear formula for Italian cohesion and the question arose as to whether a 'presidential' figure could fill the gap? It certainly fit the media's need in which Berlusconi had a near monopoly. Media ownership was a major factor in Berlusconi forays in several campaigns that followed. Independent international surveys showed Italy's press not being classed as 'free'. Berlusconi's media assets tailored him for the 'presidential' image and he succeeded in the 2001 elections in a coalition with his own *Forza Italia*, *Northern League* and *Alleanza Nazionale*. In 2006 Berlusconi was narrowly defeated by Romano Prodi from the centre left party in coalition with a disparate weak group of ideological leftovers from previous eras. This lasted until 2008 when Berlusconi was reinstalled until 2011 and making him the longest serving head of state since Mussolini.

Historically the media had become concentrated by disproportionate support by Berlusconi's for the socialist Prime Minister Bettino Craxi in the 90's. To the detriment of the nation the near monopoly was not handled well by centre left and Prodi failed to call it out and break up the monopoly when it had the opportunity 1996-2001. The Centre-Left elitist had a craven view that TV had any relevance in politics. Berlusconi knew better. Stats from the time indicate that 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of voters never read a book or a

newspaper. Also, the education system again was in disrepair with 2 million classed as illiterate and 15 million as semi-literate. Berlusconi used TV to project positivity of himself and plaster over the shit storm that he was in most of the time that included sex scandals and criminal allegations. In policy matters Berlusconi promoted regionalism and tinkered with the Constitution but had no clear plans to tackle the intractable issues of low neither GDP nor mafia crime in the South (Campania, Calabria, and Sicily). His supposed business acumen did not materialise into any tangible favourable outcome. But his extravagant lifestyle made headlines world-wide and gained him popular support and electoral appeal.

GDP growth at 0.25% for Italy was marginally just higher than that of *Zimbabwe and Haiti*. Public debt was by 2011 120% of GDP and insolvency loomed for the nation made worse by the GFC in 2008. At the heart of the economic woes was that Italy had entrenched poor labour practices, high taxes, insurmountable red tape, monopolies, cartels, and an infective justice system. Italy does not have a tradition of R&D and universities did not feature in any of the renowned world institutions logs. It did rank as 69<sup>th</sup> in the corruption stakes compiled by *Transparency International*. Consequently, this all fed into poor investment growth. Berlusconi meddled to prevent the takeover of the failing Alitalia by Air France; and then gave it a monopoly on the most lucrative Rome-Milan route. Other areas of interest were edicts that would prevent him being prosecuted for criminal cases brought against him and other related issues such as tax evasion were swept under the carpet. Berlusconi was critical of *Roberto Saviano* who campaigned against organised crime, hypocritically espousing that it tarnished the reputation of the nation!!

Economic disaster continued to compound and Italy teetered on collapse as borrowing costs skyrocketed. By November 2011 Berlusconi lost his majority and was replaced by an economics Professor, Mario Monti who assembled an unelected strike force government to calm the markets. The values on which to build a nation as per the previous 200 years had proven once more to be elusive to entrench. Since the *Risorgimento*, Italy as a nation was unable to reconcile the

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*“...competing claims of religion and secularity, public and private interests, centralisation and local autonomy, freedom and authority, rights and duties, North and South ....”*

Since the unification, the country's leaders have always been left wanting in their stewardship. The blue-sky opportunities that the early 1990's seemed to offer were squandered by the Berlusconi forays. Shall this pattern continue into the 2020's?