



New York, January 15, 2006

# US *Italia* Weekly

Vol. I, No. 10, \$1.50



## OPINION FROM THE LEFT



### Decomposition of a "Mature" Democracy

by Vittorio Zucconi

Since they tell us that 2006—which I would like to begin by wishing a Happy New Year from the front page of this elegant, intrepid new weekly—is going to be the year of democracy in the world, let's take a look at the vital signs of democracy in a nation where it has just celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. At that age, it entitled to consider itself grown-up. I am referring, of course, to Italy.

The campaign for the April 9 elections has officially kicked off. Well, actually, it has never really ended because in Italy nowadays, as in the United States, political systems are living in a state of permanent campaigning that would have pleased Mao Zedong, who always won in the end anyway. But for a few weeks now, every since the obscene condition of Italy's crony capitalism became public—in a hailstorm of scandals and the painfully late resignation of Fazio from his post as governor of the Bank of Italy—the election campaign proper has begun. Not the kind of campaign built on slogans and TV appearances, replete with promises befitting a used car dealer, and designed for voters with an IQ equal to the average temperature of New York in January. No, the kind of campaign fought through engineered journalistic scoops, secret judicial inquiries suddenly leaked to the press, and wiretaps discovered like the proverbial skeleton in the closet of Italian politics, unearthed by knowing hands.

I confess—knowing full well that a journalist never should—that I do not understand, nor do I even follow, who did what in the current intrigue of left-wing cooperatives, right-leaning mafias, friends of friends, and small-town hoodlums. To my mind, the whole business has the same color and smell as the diapers that I change every now and then for my two grandsons when they eat something that disagrees with them.

But I do understand the meaning behind this flinging of dirty diapers. Once again, it's the classic "Craxi formula," named after the late disgraced prime minister (who was found guilty definitively), who was the mentor, godfather, and sponsor of Berlusconi. This formula is epitomized in the expression, "Since we are all thieves no one is a thief." Its method is to paint all political adversaries as crooks, calling them even bigger thieves than the members of the ruling coalition, and therefore undeserving of the public's vote, since they are just as criminal and corrupt as the government. But to use the judicial robes affiliated with one group of friends as weapons against judges affiliated with the opposition is to tarnish both the political process and the image of justice. As the sleazy private detective played by Jack Nicholson in the movie "The Two Jakes" said, "I may be the town leper, but I'm the town leper with the most fingers."

For the next three months in Italy, we will be witnessing a desolating race to the bottom, which will be won by the horse that is least lame, least asthmatic, least half-hearted, and most pumped up with effective drugs.

I am well aware that no democratic system or election campaign is perfect, that politics is a contact sport more violent and dirty than football, and that the age-old advice still holds that you should never look too closely at how laws and sausages are made.

The Third World tactics being practiced in this election—with all due respect for the poorest nations—and the rotten stench issuing from this never-ending campaign, however, is ratcheting things up a notch: worse than the dirty tricks of Nixonian memory, worse than the notorious Chicago voting lists that elected Kennedy, worse than the personal attack strategies perfected by the brain behind George Bush, Karl Rove. When the main weapon deployed by the majority to save itself from going down in defeat is to paint the opposition as even more rotten than itself, the Italian political system is depicted as a leper colony, hardly an ideal metaphor for democracy.

Vittorio Zucconi is the Washington correspondent for Rome's *La Repubblica*.

### Magistrates & Newspapers The Pitfalls of Absolute Judicial Independence

by Stanton Burnett



*Corriere della Sera* was furnished, by someone from the offices of Milan's magistrates, with confidential information about an investigation of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, apparently (at least the leak, if not the investigation itself) designed to damage Berlusconi at a delicate political moment.

The question is the date of this news item. Was it 1994 or was it last week? The answer is "yes."

In what seemed a replay of the 1994 drama, *Corriere*, with a "precise unity of intention" with the magistrates, according to Berlusconi's spokesman, started the new year with a headline telling Italians: "He bribed a witness—Berlusconi investigated." (*Corriere's* zeal to turn legal questions into statements of fact also surfaced recently with a headline and lead sentence both of which stated as a fact that the American soldier who shot Nicola Calipari had deliberately shot to kill. Only later in the story does one learn that this is merely the accusation in a case yet to enter the court room. The paper likes to skip legal niceties.) The spokesman, Paolo Bonaiuti, called it the opening of the electoral campaign for the April elections.

The magistrates' assault, and their use of *Corriere*, must give political observers a sense of déjà vu in its strong resemblance—at first-glance to the infamous Naples *avviso di garanzia* [notice of investigation] which was Act One in the quick fall of the then-six-month-old Berlusconi I government. On November 21, 1994, Berlusconi was in Naples preparing to host a 140-nation United Nations conference on international crime. It was a spotlight event; Berlusconi was staying in Enrico Caruso's old hotel suite, appropriate since the opening gala at the San Carlo Opera House starred Luciano Pavarotti. The *Mani pulite* pool in Milan had its own stars, Antonio Di Pietro and Piercamillo Davigo, who put the finishing touches on an *avviso* for Berlusconi and sent off two *carabinieri* (by automobile from Milan) to deliver the news and the document to the Council President. [Note: *Mani pulite*, literally "clean hands," was the famous 1992-94 anti-corruption operation.] Not satisfied with timing this blow for maximum international embarrassment for Berlusconi, the magistrates took an additional step to assure the political

(Continued on page 2)

Stanton H. Burnett is Senior Advisor at Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies. [stburnett@yahoo.com](mailto:stburnett@yahoo.com)



### A Trying Time for U.S.-Italy Relations C.I.A.'s Milanese Calipari Tragedy, "Holiday" Slaps Berlusconi Truth or Consequences

by James Miller



Since 1945, centrist Italian political leaders have sought to build and preserve a "special relationship" with the United States. The relationship was born in 1947-48 as an alliance against communism. The United States gained its objective of containing Italy's large Communist Party and limiting Soviet influence in Western Europe. Italy joined NATO (1949) and became a major strategic basing area for U.S. activities in the Mediterranean. Italy's centrist governing parties got a good deal in return: U.S. support against the internal communist threat, economic assistance, technological support, critical backing for Italian participation in emerging European integration efforts, and, on the diplomatic front, a reasonably free hand to pursue traditional Italian objectives in the Middle East and, subsequently, a cautious opening to the Soviet Bloc. The price was a limited surrender of Italian sovereignty. Under carefully written "Status of Forces" (SOFA) agreements, the U.S. military,

(Continued on page 2)

James E. Miller teaches American and European History at Georgetown University

by Paolo Janni



October 1943, along the middle of the Volturno River. We had been living in a cave for the previous several days as Allied and German troops battled each other above ground, with furious artillery fire during the day and frequent machine gun bursts at night, which to our teenage ears sounded somewhat like Spanish castanets, to our great amusement. Finally, after a silent dawn, we dared to poke our heads outside, much like woodchucks after a long winter. Two lines of American soldiers were advancing silently on both sides of the muddy road that ran through our village. One of them broke that strange silence, and with a raised hand, he shouted towards us "Hey, paisà!" He was an Italian-American soldier, reaching out to us with the friendliest and most familiar southern Italian way to greet people. At that point, the conversation among the adults began to take on tones and expressions that were unfamiliar to us.

(Continued on page 2)

Ambassador Paolo Janni is a Senior Fellow in European Politics at The Catholic University of America in Washington.

### Saving the Bank of Italy U.S.-Trained Mario Draghi Will Do the Job

Michael Calingaert



The appointment of Mario Draghi as Governor of the Bank of Italy is the best piece of economic news for Italy in many months. Substituting for the disgraced Antonio Fazio, who finally gave up his sinecure after months of mounting pressure, Draghi is the right person to undertake the onerous task of repairing the serious damage done to the reputations of Italy and its central bank by Fazio's behavior and actions. Rebuilding these tarnished reputations will be difficult and time-consuming, but the task is urgent.

The Bank of Italy plays an important role in the economic life of Italy, even if less so than in its heyday before the launch of the euro. Although the bank can no longer set interest rates and thereby affect economic policy, it fulfills two essential functions: it oversees Italy's banking system and it serves as a sort of economic conscience, assessing Italy's economic performance and hectoring governments and the public about changes that should be undertaken in policies and actions.

Since the early post-War period, the Bank has enjoyed a reputation as Italy's premier government institution, a symbol of economic stability and rectitude standing above the political fray and standing out in a weak administrative system. Its governors have been figures of international stature, widely respected inside and outside Italy, such as Guido Carli and future presidents of the Italian Republic Luigi Einaudi and the incumbent Carlo Azeglio Ciampi. Until the recent collapse of the Bank's credibility, statements by its governor had high resonance, both politically and economically. For these reasons, the Bank of Italy has historically attracted the most outstanding university graduates that enter government service, and its staff consists of top-flight economists who can hold their own with counterparts around the world.

(Continued on page 2)

Michael Calingaert, a former U.S. diplomat in Rome, is Visiting Scholar at the Brookings Institution's Center on the United States and Europe

### Rights Within Reason New York's Strike, a Lesson for Europe

by Glauco Maggi



"A taste of Paris." The *Wall Street Journal* resorted to stereotypes in

the title of its comment on the recent transit workers strike, comparing the paralysis of New York to the situation in the French capital. I couldn't agree less. Thanks to the single culture and trade union internationalism of Old Europe, nothing could be more unlike than a public transportation strike in New York and one in Italy or France. The relative frequency of such strikes is only one macroscopic indicator of how different they are. The average number of public transportation strikes in Italy is more or less one per 25 years—in a good year—while the last transit strike in New York was 25 years ago. And the next one—if I have understood correctly the reaction of Mayor Bloomberg, Governor Pataki, and the judge that fined the strikers and threatened to jail their leaders—will not be for another 25 years!

For Americans, the existence of a law that prohibits city, state, and federal employees from striking and that adjudicates the strike—in the present case—not as a right, but as a crime punishable by heavy fines and even jail, is seen as not remotely incompatible with the rule of law and freedom. For example, when the air traffic controllers walked off the job in the early 1980s, people learned that President Reagan had every right to fire en masse all 11,000 strikers. They had taken an oath not to strike when they were first hired; therefore, they had to pay the consequences for violating that oath.

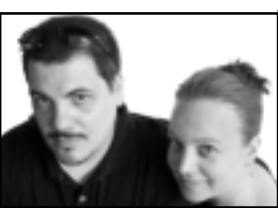
Italy is a world apart. Freedom in the "Bel Paese" is interpreted not as the freedom of the citizen to guaranteed services from public workers, but rather as the freedom of workers to defend their interests—regardless of their party affiliations or the area in which they are employed—even if this means going on strike. For that matter, in a country where there are strikes by hospital doctors, public and private school teachers, university professors, judges (in many cases, even to protest legal reforms approved by Parliament), how can you prevent the people in charge of radar, flight attendants, or pilots from each taking one day of the week to exercise their right to a work stoppage? How can you keep streetcar drivers from staging on-off, extended, partial, political, contractual, wildcat, or other kinds of strikes?

If there is one law on which both eager lawyers and even more eager judges agree, it is the law that punishes "anti-union behavior." If you are forced to walk because of a sudden strike organized by a trade union representing a minority of the workers, and find yourself talking with another citizen who, like you, is at the end of his rope after waiting more than an hour at the streetcar stop, better be careful not to let slip an expression like, "Jail 'Em!"—the front page headline of the *New York Post* on the morning of the third and last day of the Big Apple strike. Not that the Italians haven't felt, for years now, the pain of a situation that has made a mockery of the transportation network, from streetcars to trains, ferry boats to airplanes.

In recent months and years, the Italian Parliament has been stacked with parties and governments busily drafting laws that privilege the superiority of general public service over the contracts of worker categories in a position to hold the country at ransom, and often do so. The result, in typical Italian fashion, is a complex code of behavior that requires unions to notify that they are in a state of unrest, and, at certain times of year (winter and summer holidays), a ban on strikes. Once this bill had become law, out popped the exceptions. Above all, safe and sound were protections—advocated by the labor movement and a widespread culture of rights without responsibilities—for those who protest and strike by raising their voices and signs in rallies. In Italy, the expression "demonstrating, striking, and occupying the schools is good" is not a joke, as it would be in America, but a shared feeling on the platform program of a wing—that may be a minority in number, but loud and powerful in clout—of the political, unionist Left. The New York City transit workers' strike was a dead serious drama in which "everyone lost," as the mayor said. In Milan strikes are a farce, instead, where the winner is the one who exacts the highest ransom.

Glauco Maggi is a columnist for Turin's *La Stampa* and Milan's *Libero*. Alberto Pasolini Zanelli, our weekly "Opinion from the Right" columnist, is on vacation.

### Filmmaking Couple and Their Journey from Venice to New Orleans and Back "Watermark," a Tale of Two Cities Linked by Vulnerability



by Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiomo and Jerome Bongiomo

When the fashion in footwear in Piazza San Marco changed from ankle to knee-high to the current hip boots, we realized that the floods in Venice were a serious warning. We read the newspaper accounts and watched the news coverage of *acqua alta*, and learned about the proposed salvation in the form of the \$4 billion retractable floodgates, the MOSE dams. As filmmakers, we had tackled documentary subjects as diverse as the complex relationship of Italian-American men and their mothers (Emmy-nominated "Mother-Tongue") to the anatomy of a riot (current "Revolution '67"), but we didn't want to make what would become yet another documentary about Venice. We wanted to create fictional characters engaged in the real life struggle to save Venice who could deliver a powerful message to many people. The challenge with this story was how to convey the science, the stakes, and the ongoing battle over Venice's future so a wide audience could appreciate it, learn from it, and be entertained?

We wrote "Watermark," a screenplay for a feature length film, as our answer. Essentially a love story, it's the tale of an American woman, a biologist, who is sent to Venice to help save the disappearing wetlands of the lagoon. As she slowly discovers the beauty of the city, she meets and falls in love with an Italian engineer. When she stumbles upon some surprising data indicating that the MOSE dams may become an environmental catastrophe, she stands to lose it all - her job, her love affair, her future.

(Continued on page 4)

Marylou Tibaldo-Bongiomo is a director and her husband Jerome Bongiomo is a screenwriter. Their credits include the feature film, "Little Kings" (2003).



Matteo Pericoli

## FASHIONABLY ITALIAN

Jolly Hotel Madison Towers is located on the famous and elegant Madison Avenue, one block from Fifth Avenue, just a few minutes walk from the theatre district, the Empire State Building and Grand Central Terminal.



## JOLLY HOTEL

MADISON TOWERS

22 East 38th Street, New York, NY 10016  
Tel (212) 802-0600 Fax: (212) 447-0747 Toll Free No.: 1-800-22504340  
Website [www.jollymadison.com](http://www.jollymadison.com) e-mail: [res@jollymadison.com](mailto:res@jollymadison.com)



A fine Italian restaurant serving authentic Mediterranean cuisine. Tel: (212) 867-2260



## UNMISTAKABLY NEW YORK

Jolly Hotel Madison Towers offers superior and deluxe guest rooms and suites with luxurious Italian designs. The flexible, high-tech meeting rooms are ideal for conferences from 10 to 120 people.