

## Comment:

### *Europe Unravelled*

On a wall in the hilltop town of Fiesole above Florence a series of posters was pasted. The message was simple, but incomprehensible to a foreigner without the help of an Italian political exegete. The slogan read: 'End the One Party state'. The interested observer, who might be sympathetic to this aim, was advised to vote for the Party of the Democratic Left, the former Italian Communist Party. The One Party state was, of course, Christian Democratic Italy.

The continual political crisis of Italian political life for the past 47 years has actually been underpinned by a certain stability. Although fifty governments have taken office in that period the country has enjoyed a great measure of prosperity. The aftermath of the war saw it transformed from an agricultural country to a leading industrial nation with an outstanding reputation in design and technology. Much of this was achieved through Christian Democratic management. Blessed by the Catholic Church, Christian Democracy offered a broad-based coalition which provided a strong bulwark against Communism. Resistance to the Communist threat seemed to permit any amount of political fixing, wheeling and dealing, ethical compromise and sheer chicanery. Now, the complex tangle of Italian political life is unravelling and the implications for government are difficult to estimate. It is clear that one of the main pillars of the European Community may be in for a prolonged period of political instability which could have grave consequences for the Community itself.

One of the haunting images of the 1970s was the strained and tortured face of Aldo Moro, former Prime Minister of Italy, President of the Christian Democratic Party and personal friend of Paul VI, staring from a photograph taken by his terrorist captors. In 1978 Moro was kidnapped on his way to the Italian parliament to announce the 'historic compromise' with the Communist Party, which would have brought it into the Italian government for the first time. During the subsequent weeks of captivity, much of it in the very centre of Rome, the Italian authorities attempted with extraordinary incompetence to discover his whereabouts. Moro was finally assassinated in a most cruel and inhuman fashion and his body contemptuously dumped in the boot of a car parked near the headquarters of the Christian Democratic Party. Paul VI, in a characteristic pastoral gesture, celebrated a memorial mass for Moro in St John Lateran, the cathedral church of Rome. Moro's family, although deeply grateful to the Pope, refused to attend. They found the presence of prominent Christian Democratic politicians offensive. In their view the party had drastically failed its leader and had cruelly left him to die.

One of the consequences of the recent scandals in Italy is the

resurfacing of allegations that senior members of the Christian Democratic party blocked attempts to release Moro. Allegations have also been made that some of these same politicians may even have ordered the kidnapping. The circumstances of the investigation and its failure to locate Moro or to release him from captivity are shot through with riddles and mysteries all too common in Italian political life. It may well be that some of these questions may be answered in the near future, along with similar questions as to the disappearance of vast amounts of aid to the areas stricken by the 1980 earthquake. Doubtless, the results of this investigation will prove extremely unpalatable. Something which suggests that Italy, like other countries which have begun major investigations into corruption, may find it easier not to pursue these enquiries. However, major damage will have been done to the international credibility of the country and its political system. As Giulio Andreotti, veteran Christian Democrat and seven times Prime Minister of Italy, now accused of alleged links with the Mafia has said: 'I am bitter not so much for myself as for Italy. It is our country which is going through this, and it will be difficult to rebuild its image, especially abroad.'

The corruption scandals in Italy point to a massive lack of confidence in the public life of the state. It has been observed that the substance of many of these revelations has been generally suspected by much of the population for many years. The existence of a network of corruption may come as no surprise; the extent of it may do so. The privatisation of power, and the diversion of the common resources of the state into the private treasury of patronage has become a way of life which reaches down throughout all sectors of society. It cannot be untangled by the prosecution of those seen to be responsible at the highest level of government. If the former Minister of the Interior responsible for the fight against the Mafia is proved to have had close links with the same organisation what confidence can anyone have in any of the actions he took during his period of office?

The end of the Cold War has generated a crisis of order both in the heart of Europe and at its periphery. The European Community is powerless to affect events in Bosnia. Any action against Serbia will give Mr Yeltsin's opponents yet another stick to beat him with. Germany, in recession because of the problems caused by the integration of the east, cannot finance any policing policy at Europe's unravelling southern fringe. Now Italy is facing political paralysis whilst the Liga Nord is drawing the support of all of those disillusioned by the present scandals who would be quite happy to see the south of the country cast adrift and left to its Mafia bosses. 1993 was supposed to be *the* year for Europe. The alarming tendency seems to be towards a re-run of the 1930s.

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