



OPINION FROM THE LEFT



The Doubly Revolutionary Election

by Vittorio Zucconi

The election of an elderly, Western-educated, bourgeois, moderate Neapolitan gentleman with the unmistakable pedigree of a militant communist is a revolutionary event in Italian political history. It might sound like an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms, to call Giorgio Napolitano "revolutionary." The new president of the Italian Republic, a personal acquaintance of mine, has been coming to the U.S. since 1978, when, in theory, card-carrying members of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) had to denounce their party membership as a crime on the visa applications. If he was a "communist," then so were Willy Brandt, Helmut Schmidt, François Mitterrand, Luis Zapatero and Tony Blair.

At 81 years—the age when, to paraphrase George Clemenceau, "Any man who is still a revolutionary has no head" (while anyone who is not a revolutionary at the age of 20, "has no heart")—there is nothing revolutionary about Napolitano's political action. As minister of the interior, the person in charge of the police forces and therefore of the heart of the state, he did an exemplary job in protecting the security of all citizens.

What is new is the collapse of the senseless barrier that prevented anyone with a "communist past" from occupying the top post in a republic founded on a constitution that carries the signature, among others, of Umberto Terracini, a true communist of another era. The attempt to stop persons such as Napolitano (or D'Alma) from climbing the stairs to the Quirinale Palace, the seat of the head of state, is offensive and beggarly. The same would be true of any future attempts to block the road of anyone who had fought, like Gianfranco Fini, within the Movimento Sociale, a party inspired by Fascism and whose founders and leaders included exponents of Mussolini's puppet regime at Salò.

These specters of historical grudges, kept alive to serve the electoral interests of those who evoke them, recall the sad, absurd concerns that surrounded the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960. Back then, Kennedy was accused of not representing the values of the majority of Americans, who did not profess the Roman Catholic faith, and his brief season in power proved, also to those who did not appreciate the fact, that anti-Catholic prejudices were idiotic, to put it mildly.

But Berlusconi had good reason to oppose Napolitano, since he understood the two revolutionary aspects of his election: 1) It affirms the unity of the Italian people, by electing to the top post a Neapolitan, a *terrone* (slang for what Americans would call a "hayseed"), a son of that heart-rending, magnificent city that too many Northern blockheads disdain, reject, and refuse to recognize as a fundamental part of our national identity as Italians. 2) It makes it much harder to divide people with slogans about communists eating children, boiled or roasted, and to threaten the state, which is under siege from people threatening to stop paying their taxes. Giorgio Napolitano is, of course, not a saint, genius or hero. He will have to be watched out for—with classic Neapolitan irony, I hope—the usual flood of saliva that RAI, the official organ of adulation for whoever is in power, is starting to send his way. Actually, he does have one major shortcoming. He is too serious, too reflective, and—at the risk of being accused of slander—too boring. Exactly what is needed for a country that has been occupied by too many clowns and dancing girls that confuse public life with an episode of American Idol.

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



Giorgio Napolitano upon being elected as the Italian Republic's 11th president.

Bush's Purges The Last Gasp of the Big B

by Ennio Caretto

Before 2006 is over, some of the West's top political leaders in the early 21st century may have become an endangered species. In other words, this year just might see the demise of the three B's: big B, middle B and little B. Bush, Blair and Berlusconi. The Italian premier was defeated at the polls (by a nose), while the purges that the British prime minister and the American president are carrying out to save their skins may prove to be useless. The days are numbered for Tony Blair, whose party is in revolt. If the Democrats take over the U.S. Congress in November, Bush may wind up facing impeachment. Should the three B's fall victim to their own doctrine of regime change, it would be one of the great ironies of history. An example of "He who lives by the sword, dies by the sword."

With a job approval rating of 31-32 percent in the polls, Bush, like Blair, has been forced to reshuffle his cabinet. In all probability, he is still not done. The job performance of Treasury Secretary Karl Rove is the scandal that has already become distinctive. The sword of Damocles is hanging over the head of election guru Donald Rumsfeld, who is responsible for the Iraq fiasco, is also under attack. The problem is whether in this game of musical chairs the president is choosing the right men and whether they will be able to halt his precipitous slide. In my opinion, the answer is no. The reason

(Continued on page 2)

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U.N. Journal U.S. Can't Escape Iran's Messy History

by Joe Lauria

I confronted John Bolton and Condoleezza Rice at the U.N. recently over Iran. They refused to answer my questions, which go to the heart of the current crisis.

Britain and the U.S. say they want to bring democracy to Iran. The problem is Britain and the U.S. overthrew Iranian democracy in 1953. To rescue some nationalized oil fields, the C.I.A. and British intelligence re-installed a brutal monarchy. Twenty-five years later, Islamic extremists seized power from the Shah and still wield it.

Bolton says Washington's feud is not with the Iranian people, which is administration shorthand for "We are about to target your government." I reminded him U.S. credibility with the Iranian people was zero because the Iranians remember 1953, even if most Americans never heard of it. I asked him, "Would we be in this mess today if the U.S. hadn't snuffed out Iranian democracy 53 years ago?"

"That is a question of deep historical significance on which I believe the U.S. government probably has no position. I have views, but I think I'll not express them," Bolton told me.

But it is precisely history that a distracted nation must understand to free itself from the grip of media-transmitted jingoism. There is lingering public enmity towards Iran because of the hostage crisis, which a lesson in history could help explain.

Bolton's push at the U.N. for a Security Council resolution threatening

(Continued on page 2)

Joe Lauria is a freelance correspondent covering the U.N. for the *Boston Globe* and an investigative reporter for the *Sunday Times of London*.

Prodi's Turn Where Is the Strength for Reform?

by Elena Comelli

The image of "Italy comes back!" behind a grinning Romano Prodi has been cheering us up for a few days now, but as far as I'm concerned, any optimism about the prospects for an economic recovery may be deceptive. The *Unione's* victory will not automatically bring Italy back. The reforms that have not been made in the past five years of the Berlusconi government—missed opportunities that derailed the Italian economy—cannot be enacted by themselves. And without those reforms, the train cannot be put back on track.

So what is the possibility of things starting up again? Very limited, given the current status quo. There is not much probability that Prodi, forced by his skimping majority to walk the tightrope of coalition in-fighting, has the force to push through a serious campaign of liberalization and cuts in government spending. Enacting structural reform means taking on a series of vested interests and cash cows. Whoever does so risks bringing down upon themselves the anger of the affected categories, which will inevitably try to convince the most accessible members of Parliament to defect. A task of this type thus requires a government with a commanding majority, like the one the Italians just sent packing. The past five years, which were spent passing laws custom made to defend the prime minister's personal interests, represent a wasted opportunity to reform the economy that will not be easily repeated.

(Continued on page 2)

Elena Comelli is a business reporter for Milan's *Quotidiano Nazionale* and *Corriere Economia*.

President Napolitano A Visionary Given His Due

by Joseph LaPalombara



Giorgio Napolitano's election as the Republic of Italy's eleventh president has landmark implications. As a former leader of the largest Communist Party in Western Europe, his elevation should remove any lingering doubts some Italians, or others abroad, may have regarding the legitimacy of the Democratic Party of the Left (DS) into which the former Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) has morphed.

Diehards among Italians will resist acknowledging that this is so. Indeed, Silvio Berlusconi's electoral campaign tactics demonstrated that one can still get a lot of mileage from deliberate efforts to frighten the voters. No one among Italy's former Communist leaders is better suited than the newly named President to render any such fears passé.

Napolitano is much more than a seasoned politician, whose involvement in Italian politics dates from his youthful anti-fascist resistance during World War II. In the formative years of the Italian Republic, as he assumed more and greater responsibilities within the PCI, Napolitano also became an articulate leader of that party's moderate and reformist, as opposed to its radical and Stalinist, wings. As Stanton Burnett has recently pointed out in these pages, Napolitano was among the earliest Italian Communists to recognize and to argue the need for a change in the PCI's ideological and public policy orientations, including in the foreign policy sphere. He saw the need for Italy to accept the Marshall Plan, the EEC, and the Atlantic Alliance and NATO. Unlike many within his own party, he had no illusions about the extent to which Communism, as practiced behind the Iron Curtain, amounted to a monstrosity.

It was thanks to his efforts, and of those within the PCI with whom he was closely associated, that the PCI (now the DS) eventually accepted a more moderate and democratic socialist approach to political change. Those who opposed these changes, including the abandonment of the Communist Party label, split off to form other parties on the extreme left, a place where Napolitano has tried never to locate himself.

I have had the pleasure and privilege of knowing this distinguished Italian for several decades. In the 1970s, along with a handful of academic colleagues, we managed to persuade the U.S. Department of State to issue visitors' visas to a few of the leading reformists then-called Euro-Communists, who were officially barred from entering this country. Napolitano was one of the earliest such leaders to take advantage of this dispensation. His meetings with this

(Continued on page 2)

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OPINION FROM THE RIGHT



A "King" from the Left

by Alberto Pasolini Zanelli

Once upon the time there was a king... This is an old story, but it is about a king of Italy, who on a beautiful day in May 1946, acceded to a throne he had long coveted. He was a handsome king and everyone was supposed to rejoice over his accession. But instead, the Italian people were summoned just one month later to vote on a referendum, asking them whether or not they wanted to keep the monarchy. A narrow majority was opposed, so the king had to say goodbye to the throne, hand his palace over to the president of the new republic and go into exile. That is why he is still remembered today as "The May King."

The voters who wanted to oust him included a young man who resembled him in many ways. He had the same features, the same pose, the same dignity, a natural-born member of the House of Lords. But this never happened, because on the same day that the Italian voters decided to abolish the monarchy, they also dissolved the House of Lords. The young man thus became a card-carrying member of the Communist Party. But there is no escaping Fate. On another beautiful day in May, exactly 60 years later, that same young man was elected president of the Italian Republic. Now he will be living in the same palace where the king used to live. The "young" man's name is Giorgio Napolitano. And there will be no referendum this coming June.

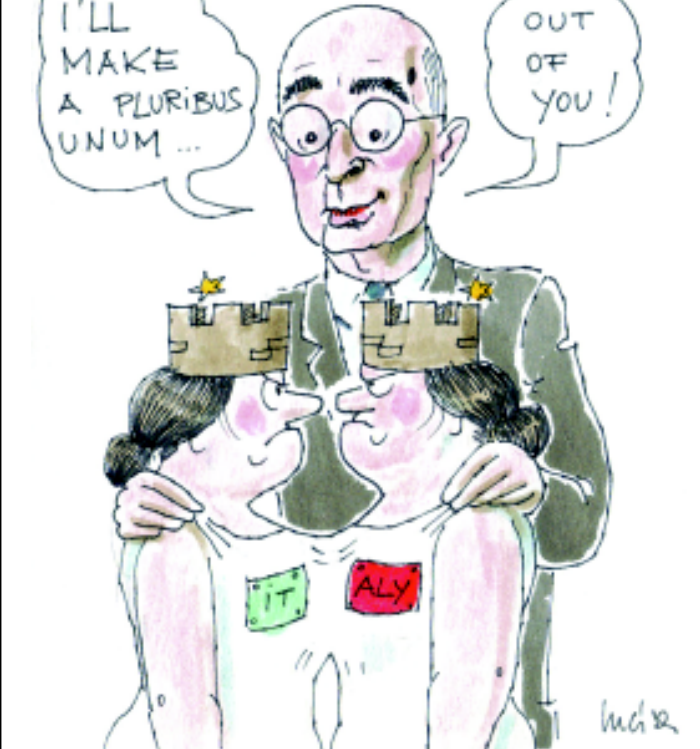
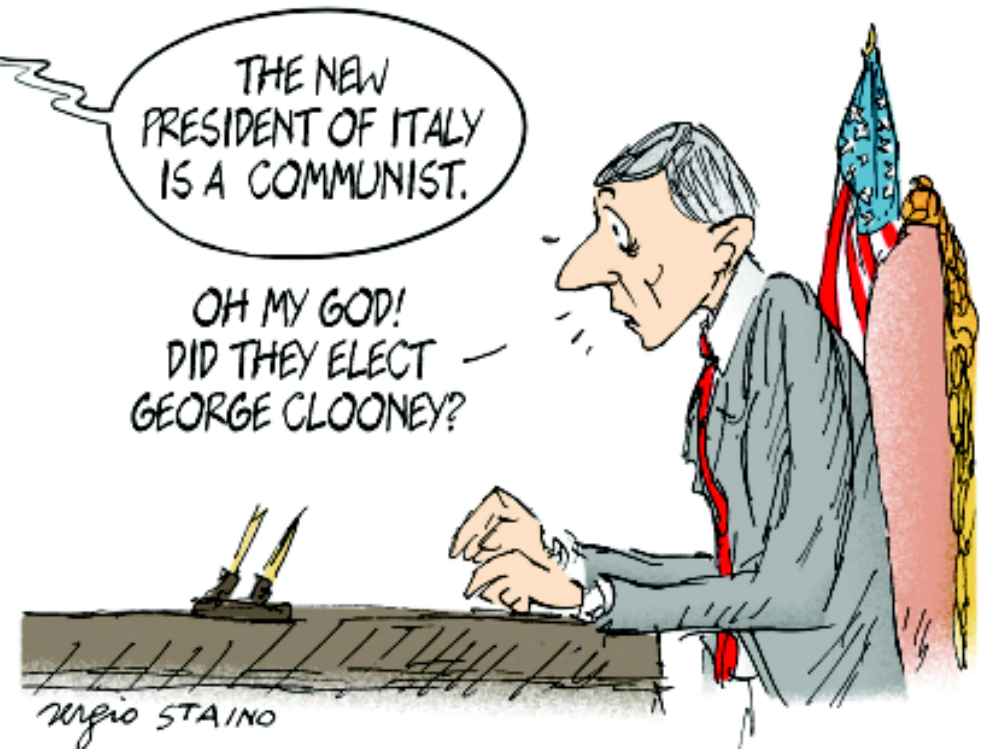
I know this sounds like a fairy tale, but why shouldn't it? Magic might be one way to describe Italian politics today. All the ingredients are there, starting with an ugly duckling. Napolitano is the first communist to attain such a high post and with the affection and the trust of electors that far outnumber those from the ranks of his own Center-Left coalition. I know many conservatives who would have been delighted to vote for him, had the price not been to boost the fortunes of the leader of the Center-Left, the far less popular Romano Prodi.

Should Napolitano be considered a communist or a former communist? For several decades, he has been known as the most open, modern, moderate, and liberal member of the communist leadership. It is only fair to say that when the Italian Communist Party (PCI) decided to change its name and its ideology to become the Democrats of the Left (PDS), Napolitano was not following them: They were following him. On the other hand, he is the model post-communist member of the reformed left. He has the same pose, seriousness and discipline he showed when he belonged to the PCI, then a totalitarian party. Although he had hoped for a change in the party line, he always stood by it. At one of the most embarrassing moments in PCI history—the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary—Napolitano was given the thankless task of defending this action, and he did. "The Soviet intervention," he said, "did not only contribute to saving Hungary from chaos and counterrevolution. It also saved world peace." His heart wasn't in it, but he was speaking for the party, not himself.

Napolitano has always been a man with a strong sense of loyalty and duty. These are exactly the qualities demanded of him in his new role, which is largely ceremonial, but highly esteemed. He has great experience as former minister of the interior (the second most powerful place after the prime minister) and former speaker of the House. He was recently made a senator-for-life. In a few days, he will turn 81, which makes him six years younger than Giulio Andreotti, who almost got elected as speaker of the Senate a week earlier. Talk about an Italian gerontocracy?

Let us not forget that there has been a Senate in Rome for about 2,700 years and that it was invented, as its name implies ("senate," from sense, senility), to accommodate an aging membership. Napolitano was first elected to the chamber of deputies in 1953, while Andreotti first became a member of the cabinet in 1946. This does not make him the oldest serving statesman in the world. That record goes to Norodom Sihanouk, who is still the King Father of Cambodia. He was appointed to the throne in 1941, by decree of Marshal Pétain, leader of the French Vichy government.

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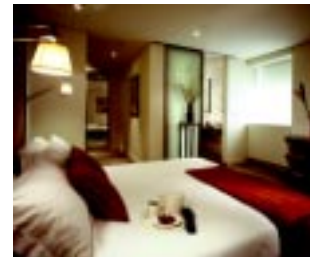
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