

Book reviews

Mark Donovan and Paolo Onofri (eds), *Politica in Italia: I fatti dell'anno e le interpretazioni. Edizione 2008*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009, pp. 350. ISBN 978 88 15 12542 2.

Fifteenth years into the so-called Second Republic, Italian politics is characterised by a sense of fatigue, disillusionment, and scepticism. This is the message that the editors convey in their introduction to this *Politica in Italia* volume that charts the events of the year 2007. Resisting the temptation to turn this edition of the annual series into an analysis of the making of Prodi's eventual 2008 defeat, the editors and contributors to the volume turn their gaze to longer-term political developments and offer their own interpretation of these trends. Contingent choices and durable features blend in determining the onset of a general disillusionment about the possibility of a veritable renewal of Italian politics, even as the much longed-for alternation in government appears to gain a firm foothold.

The keyword of the Introduction is 'antipolitics' – that 'chronic dissatisfaction' (p.57) that Italians harbour against their political system, whether of an 'ideological' or a 'pragmatic' nature. What had been thought to be the key to the solution of Italy's short-lived and ineffective governments – alternation in government – appears ineffective against the overdrawn identity crisis of the Italian left and its incapacity to reconstitute a reformist-progressive position as a counterweight to the populist-personalist message proposed by Berlusconi. As we will learn, similar difficulties are experienced by the Italian right. It is thus up to a popular and politically engaged comedian, Beppe Grillo, to fill this void by using some of the same simplified language that Berlusconi uses (even though his blog and legislative initiatives are, according to the editors, far from comical). To explain the third electoral victory of Berlusconi and his eventual comeback at the helm of Italian government the authors must analyse the chequered reforms of the 2006-2008 Prodi government, the extreme fragmentation of the coalition supporting him, and the mistakes made during the first few months of his mandate.

The contributors to the chapters of the first part of the volume – by Marc Lazar on the birth of the Democratic Party (PD), by Mark Donovan on the sources of fragmentation within the right-wing camp, by Duncan McDonnell on the 2007 local elections, by Gianfranco Baldini on the

referendum campaign and electoral reform – analyse the reasons for the difficult creation of a bipolar political system. Lazar describes the peculiar ‘birth pangs’ of a new centre-left party (the PD) that apparently has fewer difficulties reconciling the confessional and non-confessional positions of the leftist fringe of the old Christian Democrats (DC) and the moderate fringe of the old Italian Communist Party, respectively, than in becoming a truly new political subject which is not just a collation of the old secretariats and the old members. Donovan detects similar difficulties in generating a new political subject within the right camp as this seeks to acquire a unitary identity (Partito della Libertà) after having been a mere coalitional *entente* (Polo della Libertà) and an instrumental cohabitation (Casa della Libertà). Both alliances respond more to the need to join forces in order to defeat the opposite formation than to the desire to seek convergence towards a common programme and a future destiny. A disturbing element for both projects is the ambiguous position of the DC-splinter parties (UDC, UDEUR) still attempting to reconstitute a centre-party. And yet the contours of a different, more conventional political system can be gleaned also from the outcomes of the local elections, which seem to confirm the rule that the opposition parties tend to do better in ‘second-order elections’, be they local or European. These birth pangs take place ‘in the shadow’ of the electoral-law referendum, which some welcome as the only remedy for the ill effects of the 2005 electoral law – which managed to create an ‘all-Italian forced and fragmented bi-polarism’ (p.135), as Baldini dubs it – and some try to sidestep, without success, by forging a bi-partisan consensus on a German, or Spanish, or French electoral law.

The second part of the volume is dedicated to several policies that preoccupied representatives of the Italian political system, and public opinion, in 2007. It includes a chapter on foreign policy, by James Walston, that describes the (moderately successful) attempt to find a new role for a medium-sized power like Italy; a chapter, by Lucia Quaglia, on the reform of the Bank of Italy designed to secure stricter financial controls; a chapter on the thwarted attempts at liberalisation, by Andrea Boitani; a chapter on fiscal federalism and local utility reforms, by Massimo Bordignon and Gilberto Turati; and a chapter on the social policies of the centre-left government, by Massimo Baldini and Paolo Bossi. Together, these chapters offer an analysis of the objective challenges facing Italy and the economic policy theories that could provide an answer to both right-wing and left-wing governments, and hence provide a narrative that spans well beyond the year 2007 and a sometimes sophisticated discussion of the economic and technical issues involved. The overall impression is that while ‘what needs to be done’ in most policy areas is unequivocally clear to both sides of the political spectrum, neither is willing to incur the political costs of carrying it out (with the partial exceptions of foreign policy and financial oversight reform, which are more shielded from public attention). So

liberalisation, local, and social policies prove a hard testing ground for both right- and left-wing governments.

Finally, the third part of the volume is dedicated to two issues that particularly agitated Italian public opinion in 2007: unconventional family formats (*unioni di fatto*) and personal security. The chapter by Luigi Ceccarini on unconventional family formats – non-married and same-sex couples – constitutes an opportunity to discuss the new way in which the Catholic Church has been intervening in Italian political debate since the demise of Christian Democracy, in turn a testing ground for the new way in which the Church intends to be present in the global political debate by taking a stand on issues on the ‘bio-political agenda’ such as abortion, the day-after pill, in vitro fertilisation, stem-cell technology, living wills, euthanasia and human cloning. Laura Sartori discusses the widespread sense of personal insecurity, often rightly or wrongly associated with illegal migration and the problematic integration. In both cases, we discover that Italian public opinion is not so different from public opinion elsewhere, yet its cultural heritage constrains the official debate within narrower alternatives.

All in all, this is a very informative and pleasant book to read which, however, changes ‘register’ several times – from the exquisitely political to the more technical, from the short- to the long-term perspective. The Italian political system changed also during 2007, but at a slower pace and with greater hesitation than Italians probably wished for themselves.

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Arnaldo Forlani, *Potere discreto: Cinquant’anni con la democrazia cristiana*, a cura di Sandro Fontana e Nicola Guiso, Venezia: Marsilio, 2009, pp. 256. ISBN 8831796836.

Arnaldo Forlani (1925-) may not provoke the sinister feelings we sometimes associate with the name of Giulio Andreotti; nor has he shown the resolute attitude of Amintore Fanfani, or the intellectual subtleties of Aldo Moro. Within the Christian Democratic galaxy, however, he has played a crucial role, and at the heart of the party; in fifty years of militancy he has always been at the forefront, and often in key positions: he was twice political secretary (1969-72 and 1989-92), Minister of Defence (1974-76), Minister of Foreign Affairs (1976-79) and Prime Minister (1980-81).

This book is framed as a long interview on the whole of his political experience, including the years following his involvement in the *Tangentopoli* scandal (1992) and his subsequent retirement from public life.

The editors, Sandro Fontana and Nicola Guiso, are well-known Christian democratic journalists and intellectuals, whose public positions were already important in the final years of Forlani's career. The interview starts with the 'Epilogue', which is devoted to Forlani's dramatic exit from politics, within the context of the corruption scandals that overthrew the First Republic in 1992. The assessment of those events is still highly problematic and we cannot but register Forlani's defence of his mandate as political secretary (pp. 27-29). If we leave aside for a while the much debated controversy between the main ruling parties and the judiciary in the early 1990s, we can more calmly appreciate the political significance of an interview which touches on all the main aspects of Italy's contemporary history within the European and Atlantic framework. Moving on from the Resistance and the Cold War, Forlani's measured answers deal with the age of the economic miracle, the subsequent descent into the 'years of lead', up to the rise of Craxi and eventually Berlusconi. More than the large variety of the issues discussed, what is here deeply striking is the centrality of the role of the Christian Democratic party (*Democrazia Cristiana*, DC).

There is no better guide than Forlani to the turning points, the key moments, and the main protagonists of its history. The party is omni-present, omni-pervasive, with its relentless dialectic within and without, its factions, wings, allies, opponents, and above all its gradual but restless evolution within the framework of Italian and European politics. Probably better than any other politician, Forlani expresses with a distinctively sophisticated language the continual work of mediation, negotiation, and weaving he embodied for almost five decades. His tone is always moderate, all controversies and tensions are downplayed, and throughout the whole interview Forlani strives to highlight the unity, consistency, and sense of direction of the impressive DC machine, especially in the most crucial moments. 'Discreet power', such is a literal translation of the book's title: and it seems particularly appropriate.

Forlani's power was discreet because of its almost invisible nature, made up of tactics, oscillations, imperceptible movements, a continual search for new arrangements, new balances, and new settlements. But it was power nonetheless. With regard to its 'creative' nature, as re-affirmed by the interviewee all along, it was used to modernise a country which rapidly abandoned its originally agrarian traits and became one of the world's leading economic powers. The darker, more contentious flipside of power itself remains, though, rather unexplored. Forlani warns against the widespread habit of tracing Italy's history back to international conspiracies, foreign interventions, and obscure forces. Such a warning is helpful for the political scientist, too, because an empirical analysis should be grounded in data, despite all their limits, on the actors and their interpretations. From another viewpoint, however, the often tragic experiences of the Italian people, their expectations, their suffering, seem to remain on the horizon.

Forlani's politics might have been less arrogant, less spectacular, and much more measured than the politics of his Second-Republic followers, especially those on the centre right (p. 240). Yet his was a sophisticated, complex approach, sometimes distant from daily needs and often prisoner of problematic dilemmas when it was time to choose between the conflicting interests of a myriad of actors. Forlani's final remark on the need for a more 'humane' politics, following Maritain (p. 254), is certainly very valuable, but how can we be sure that such politics was that of the DC rather than an updating of it?

In sum, the book is worth reading because it sheds light on the heart of partitocracy, and its more remarkable interpreters. The reader should approach such a hotly debated era without prejudices, but also bearing in mind that new historical conditions call for updated political solutions, and certainly not for a vague nostalgia for the past.

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Aldo Agosti, *Palmiro Togliatti: a biography*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2008, pp. xix + 339. ISBN 978 84511 726 9.

This life of Togliatti, written by a Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Turin, an expert on the socialist and communist movements, first appeared in Italian in 1996. It has been described as the most authoritative biography of the Italian Communists' longest-serving leader. Togliatti was one of Europe's great Communist survivors, a foundation member of the Party in Italy (PCI) who led it until his death in August 1964. From early persecution at the hands of Mussolini's fascist state the PCI emerged in the late 1940s as a mass party with deep roots in Italian society. Until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 it was considered the most successful Communist Party in Western Europe. Togliatti's life is therefore of interest to anyone concerned with the twentieth century Left and its relationship to the Bolshevik Revolution.

Togliatti was born in 1893, the third child of primary school teachers. He was brought up mainly in Turin and though his father's work forced the family to move around Italy (including a time in Sardinia) it was in Turin that he returned after his father's death in 1911, to study at the university. Italy's industrial capital experienced the social radicalisation of these years more intensively than anywhere else on the peninsula. It was a time when Giolitti's liberal experiment had opened an imperial chapter with the beginning of the war in Libya and the unleashing of a fervent nationalism. Togliatti's intellectual ability and intellectual enthusiasms in

these student years are indicated by Agosti's anecdote concerning his translation of a large chunk of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. His politics, such as they were, seem to have been liberal. In October 1911 he met Antonio Gramsci, already familiar with the university's small socialist group and a friend of its leading figure, Angelo Tasca. By August 1914 Togliatti had joined the Italian Socialist Party (PSI). Like Gramsci, he was critical of Italy's 'comfortable' neutrality in the Great War and hopeful that a British victory would set loose a tide of liberalism across the European continent. He joined the army in 1916 and yet by the end of the war, Agosti tells us, he was convinced that the conflict had shown the inability of the capitalist world to renew itself or overcome its own contradictions. Like Gramsci he was drawn to Bolshevism, a socialist project which they perceived as original in both theory and practice.

When *Avanti!* was launched in December 1918 Togliatti was often to be found at its Piedmontese head office and it was from here that, together with Gramsci, he launched *L'Ordine Nuovo* in May 1919. In these pages they began to develop their ideas of the Turinese factory councils as embryonic soviets in an Italian context. In the PSI's factional struggles Togliatti was to be found on the pro-Moscow revolutionary wing, favouring the creation of a Jacobin party modelled on the Bolsheviks – a position reinforced by the wave of factory occupations in Turin during August-September 1920. But when the PCI was formed in January 1921 the tide was already turning against the Left. Like Amadeo Bordiga, the first leader of the PCI, Togliatti failed to see the novelty of fascism and even welcomed its development as an opportunity to dispel the illusions of liberalism and reformist socialism. By 1922 he sat on the PCI's Central Committee, no longer a mere journalist. Though personally exposed to fascist violence, the formation of Mussolini's government in October 1922 initially occasioned no reappraisal of the meaning of the fascist phenomenon. But if he was slow to realise what fascism would mean for Italy Agosti finds evidence that Togliatti was quick to develop his ideas about the significance of the Bolshevik state, and increasingly drew strength from his membership of the world Communist movement which had a workers' state at its centre. By 1923 fascist violence against the PCI was such that only a clandestine existence was possible. Togliatti disappeared from political work for some months (December 1922-April 1923) and Agosti thinks that he underwent some sort of personal crisis, faced as he was by the need to decide for or against the life of a professional revolutionary. The Communists were forced to use *Avanti!*, the socialist newspaper, to appeal to him to contact headquarters. By March 1923, however, he affirmed in print that the revolutionary's life was a mission full of self-sacrifice, deprivation and even exile, and Agosti takes this as evidence that Togliatti had decided on his future course. His attitude to the PSI, meanwhile, continued to reveal his commitment to the creation of a 'pure' Communist Party uncontaminated by reformist currents. Thus,

although he didn't like the Comintern's interventions in PCI politics to enforce the united front with the PSI in 1923, he was enthusiastic about its 'Bolshevisation' initiative the following year. In 1925 he announced his opposition to party factions on these grounds, proof of his support for the ideological Bolshevisation of the PCI and a contribution to it.

Togliatti's death in the Soviet Union four decades later was marked by demonstrations of respect from Khrushchev and other members of the Politburo. An edition of *Pravda* edged in black announced his demise. In Italy his passing brought crowds into the streets and prompted intellectuals like Elio Vittorini to thank Togliatti and the PCI for making Italian democracy possible, a judgement Agosti upholds over forty years later. In explaining his life Agosti reverses the familiar argument that Communism brought fascism into existence:

'...the birth and first stages of development of Italian fascism were the horizons of Togliatti's cultural and political development, and marked him more deeply than the October Revolution.

'...Togliatti's attachment to pre-war socialism was tepid and skin-deep. His support for the Russian Revolution was initially based on only distant and indirect knowledge...It was rather the defeat suffered by the Italian workers' movement...that tied Togliatti indissolubly to a project of global revolution in which the initial Italian defeats were merely episodes, lost battles, in a war that would be ultimately won' (p. 294).

But Agosti never explains why Togliatti regarded 'the errors and horrors of Stalinism as incidental accidents' on the way to socialism or why his post-1945 commitment to an Italian road to socialism – democratic and parliamentary – coexisted with unwavering dedication to Communist unity and support for Soviet socialism as a superior form of democracy as well as a superior form of economy. He suggests that the cautious Togliatti 'led his party away from Stalinism' by making the operation as painless as possible and that may be true – an honest reckoning of the Soviet experience, say in 1956, might have split the PCI into fragments. Togliatti, one of Agosti's sub-headings says, was 'a man between two worlds'. But I think that while Italy was where Togliatti became a socialist, the evidence points to the world of Bolshevism as the compelling force in Togliatti's subsequent career from as early as 1923 until his death in 1964. All the milestones in between reveal him to have been a convinced advocate of unconditional support for the Bolshevik state and he accepted the consequences of that position as the Soviet system evolved into the personal and often savage dictatorship of Stalin. The fact that Togliatti was not killed by this juggernaut is proof enough of his years of loyal service to it but even when he returned to Italy in 1944, after many years of exile, the unwavering loyalty to Moscow did not falter.

Stalin's death occasioned fulsome tributes and when Khrushchev denounced the dead dictator three years later Togliatti did everything he could to minimise and dampen the criticism and continued to praise the superior democracy of the USSR. He was famous, however, for concluding that there was no obligatory Soviet road to socialism, no single Soviet model. There was now 'polycentrism' – though an odd one considering that he continued to assert the superiority of Soviet democracy. In any case polycentrism was not as radical as it sounded. Stalin himself had sanctioned different roads to socialism after the Second World War. Critics within the PCI like Guisepppe Di Vittorio and Terracini wanted to go further than Togliatti in 1956 and dissociate socialism from 'violence and massacres'. They saw the need to dissociate the Party 'from a sort of legend of cynicism' and to make the Italian road to socialism seem real by having a political discussion about it involving the Italian people (p. 237). This 'outbreak of reformism', as Togliatti called it, worsened with the Poznan riots and the armed Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolt. He not only supported the repression but statements of his can be interpreted as calling for it (p. 242), though Agosti thinks this an exaggeration. What is not in doubt is Togliatti's Stalinism. Agosti's book is a disappointment in shedding little light on its foundations or those of the post-1945 PCI.

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Eamonn Canniffe, *The Politics of the Piazza: The History and Meaning of the Italian Square*, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2008, pp. 288. ISBN 978 0 7546 4716 4.

When politicians want to create a new political regime, they are often intelligent enough to employ the craftsmanship of architects, urban designers, and artists to represent their ambition in the public space. The built results, for example palaces, parliaments, courts, archives and squares, can be easily discovered in the capitals of the pre-modern (Rome, Moscow) the modern (Saint Petersburg, Washington DC, Paris, Vienna) and the post-colonial (Brasilia, Chandigarh, Islamabad, Dacca) world. On the other hand, there are many cities, for example in Central Europe and in particularly in Germany, which have lost the status they once had as the centres of power during the process of nation-building. These cities often demonstrate by the richness of their palaces, town halls and churches that they had an exalted reputation in the past. In this way it is possible to read a city as an historical text. In this respect, the names of streets can be helpful as well. It is well known, however, that political regimes are inclined to use only the names

of uncontroversial politicians to represent established power in the specific historical period of a nation, a city or an event. Canniffe brings us to another, piece of empirical evidence, more precisely to the Italian square, in order to convince readers that studying the history and meaning of power and space has a relevance that goes beyond understanding the margins of politics.

The book has four parts: the roots of the Italian urban form (Rome, Christianity, the Middle Ages), the early-modern city (from the early Renaissance to the Baroque period), the city and national consciousness (neo-classicism, the Risorgimento and Fascism), and urban expression in an age of uncertainty (neo-realism, neo-rationalism). Although the book reflects the history of its subject, the Italian square, the author's longer term aim is 'to provide a context for the urban form which is cognisant of the successful examples of the past, a continuity which any designs for future urban spaces would be foolish to ignore.' The focus of the book is indicated in the initial sentences of the introduction. 'By their very nature urban projects are engaging examples of direct political influence on building. The size of such an enterprise and the need for considerable coordination requires the sort of collective effort that only a political process can provide. This book explores the history of Italian urban space through the relationship between political systems and their methods of representation in architecture' (p.1). In this manner the author attempts to achieve two sub-goals. On the one hand, the materials account for the history of the development of the square as a genre of urban space dependent on the times these spaces were developed. The second sub-goal is to create a platform from which to reflect critically on the 'present ethos of public open space, assailed as it is by the demands of traffic, by increasing commercialization of space, and lack of appreciation as a phenomenon which is held in common and therefore requires some degree of decorum from buildings and people' (p.15).

Concerning this second goal, the author gives an exemplary instance in the book's introduction by referring to the components of the public space at the Piazza Sidney Sonnino in Rome. As I myself spent a considerable portion of a recent period of sabbatical leave in most of the cities and public realms Canniffe is referring to, I hope not to be biased by saying that all the examples in the book are very well chosen to illustrate the author's periodical structuring of the political influences on the emergence and sustainability of the Italian square. However, I do not remember the Piazza Sidney Sonnino very well. Then again – and this is a piece of advice to all readers of the book – I would suggest using Google Earth to get the almost physical feeling of going around by yourself in the spaces reviewed in the book. By managing the examples of the book in this way, one can also experience the principal method of research employed here and which is claimed to be vital for any architectural historian. This

method is not documentary or archival or bibliographic, but the experience of the place itself in the generality of its effect, since juxtapositions and discontinuities play an important role in the aesthetic composition of the piazza (p.10).

The book is not only interesting from an historical and scientific perspective but it is also relevant for evaluating actual practices in urban development. First of all, it emphasises the idea that reading spaces as a text is probably possible for selected public places in, for instance, a city or a town, but not for the urban fabric as a whole. In particular, Italian cities, almost all of which have a history of two thousand years or more, are the result of many political struggles throughout the ages. Sometimes a new regime has been successful in replacing the built environment of a former period, and in establishing new signs of its own power. However, one can imagine – and this is somewhat underexplored in my opinion – that there have also been many power games that have ended up with a more or less explicit decision not to change the existing urban ensemble at a specific place at all. From a power perspective, these political processes – well explained in the agenda-setting literature in political science – have been as relevant as those which resulted in changes that for us typically represent the period of the Roman Empire, the Renaissance, the Baroque period or the Risorgimento. Notwithstanding this, the effect is a ‘layering of history’ in the urban space, but not a visually full representation of the power struggles that have taken place over the ages. That is why, historically speaking, urban public spaces should be evaluated not only as the result of decisions taken in specific periods, but also as the result of resistance to processes of up-grading to the desires of new political powers. From that point of view the non-built environment can be of even greater importance than the built results.

On the other hand, Canniffe is very conscious of the methodological pitfalls involved in interpreting the observable objects of the built environment. For instance, ‘[i]conography, as two and three dimensional visual images, as text and most importantly as commonly understood narrative ideas, might easily be exposed in a public space, and thereby find an audience for its specific messages. The forming of that public space is itself a product of an ideological process, ...’ (p.2). Then again,

how might we define those urban spaces where history has been manipulated for political ends, based on narratives which are highly selective if not fictional? It is necessary to explore how cultural and typological memories are exploited, and the study of Italian architecture and urbanism provides a fertile territory for exploration because of its direct exploitation of historical memory to support the political claim to power, ... In the historic situation the public nature of urban projects meant that the state and (in the specific cultural conditions of Italy also the significant political entity of the church) sought to produce architectural

embodiments of the prevailing ideology through an often explicit iconographic programme. The pressures to manifest aspects of progress and renewal, while simultaneously relying on recognizable precedents culled from historical forms, produced curious hybrids. These divergent elements are often barely resolved but create the picturesque and disparate forms characteristic of Italian urban space, an aesthetic which has been widely admired since connoisseurship developed during the renaissance. In this regard periodization always presents a problem to an architectural historian, since the ties which bind an artefact to its era of production are not necessarily the strong ones. In any creative discipline the aesthetic choice is seldom uninfluenced by contingent matters and the same is certainly true of urban spaces (p.2).

Though it is tempting to do so, I will not use the limited space available here to go deeper into the headlines of the different parts and chapters of the book. I prefer to recommend the book to a variety of readers. Not only to those who are interested in the classical examples of Italian squares (Forum Romanum, Piazza del Campidoglio, Piazzetta San Marco, Piazza della Signoria, Piazza del Campo, and so on) and their political backgrounds, but also to those who are looking for information on recent developments in the public spaces of Italy. I myself was very inspired by the chapters in which the work of Scarpa (in Verona and particularly at the bomb site in Brescia) and Rossi (Modena and Fontivegge) was explained.

Finally, Caniffe brings his narrative to the politics of the present by directing our attention to the huge advertisements found in urban spaces. For example, the Armani Wall in Milan functions, not mainly to protect pedestrians and other traffic passing long-lasting conservation projects, but seems to be politically accepted as permanent. In my view it is in these chapters about urban expressions in an age of uncertainty that the author best realises his second sub-goal. However, this part of the book suggests some critical remarks as well. The author is certainly better versed in the history of art, urban design and architecture than he is in the terms of the (recent) debate about power relations. The territorial impulses of nation-state regimes in combination with embedded institutions have nowadays to cope with the initiatives of more flexible, if not fluid, networked powers of businesses and other transnational actors. Despite this, Caniffe has provided a well-structured and well-partitioned book on the politics of the piazza. Not only is Italy the place to be for such empirical work, but also the case-studies in the different chapters are exemplary and insightful and illustrate very well the dominant political discourse in a specific period.

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