

## Roundtable

### Berlusconi and Beyond: Prospects for Italy

*On 12 February 2010, the Open University (with the support of the Department of Italian Studies, Birmingham University, Open Democracy, Vision, the Bulletin of Italian Politics and Soundings) sponsored a roundtable entitled, 'Berlusconi and Beyond: Prospects for Italy', which was held in Birmingham at the Birmingham and Midland Institute. The roundtable participants were Daniele Albertazzi, Bill Emmott, Francesco Grillo, Jim Newell and Paola Subacchi. The following is an edited transcript of the morning's deliberations, which were devoted to the significance of Berlusconi for Italian politics, and how his role is to be understood. The afternoon's deliberations concerned the state of the parties of opposition. Geoff Andrews, who organised and chaired the event, began by making the case for the importance of the topic, a case that itself comes to be questioned by participants as the debate unfolds.*

**Geoff Andrews:** Good morning everyone. Welcome to this Open University politics debate on 'After Berlusconi'. Welcome. It's nice to see so many people – so many Italians – coming: we're looking forward to a very engaging debate. First of all I'd like to introduce you to this building, which is one of Birmingham's most architecturally pleasing buildings, set up I think in the 1850s. And Charles Dickens was one of its earliest supporters, so do enjoy the building while you're here. This meeting has been organised by the Politics Department of the Open University, being supported here by the Open University in the West Midlands. Incidentally, today in the office in Birmingham we're having what we call a 'Stress-down Day': so I don't want to curb any enthusiastic debates; but we'll look forward to convivial relaxing discussion. Also, we have been supported by a range of other organisations, many of which are here: Open Democracy (David Hayes, who is the editor, is here with us today); the *Bulletin of Italian Politics*; *Soundings*; Vision (Francesco on my right is from Vision: I'll introduce him in a minute). And the Department of Italian Studies at Birmingham University has also been very supportive, so we've got a wide range of support.

It's quite a timely meeting I think because, certainly in the foreign press, Berlusconi is given a lot of attention: particularly in the British press, actually. And the question that editors always ask their Rome correspondents is, "Why is he continuing to rule? You know: three times

he's been re-elected; he keeps being re-elected. Where is the opposition?" So those are the kinds of questions we're going to look at today. This is a discussion we want to continue after today. There's been a bit of a lead-up to the discussion: we're issuing ten questions to the official opposition which are going to be published in the Italian press and by Open Democracy next week. So there is going to be a debate that continues, and partly for that reason this meeting is going to be recoded. Now I'd like to introduce you to our speakers and the roundtable. And this morning's session will focus on Berlusconi and his recent... I hesitate to use the word 'crisis': I think I used the term 'crisis' in my original correspondence and people pointed out to me that he's fourteen points ahead in the opinion polls, you know: "Crisis? What crisis?" In any case, we'll talk about what we often regard as the scandals surrounding Berlusconi and the possible outcomes, the options and the different scenarios. And this afternoon we're going to look in particular at the opposition, the situation of the Italian opposition.

On my right, Francesco Grillo is Director of Vision, an Italian think tank based here and in London as well. They are currently doing projects on the politics and economics of happiness; the future of universities. And Francesco has written for most of the Italian newspapers. Daniele Albertazzi is Senior Lecturer in European Media at Birmingham University: he's written on communication strategies, styles of propaganda and mass media relations with political parties, so [is] an expert therefore on the politics of Berlusconi. He's also written on right-wing populism in Italy and recently on left-wing movements. He's one of the editors of *Resisting the Tide: Cultures of Opposition in the Berlusconi Years*. Paola Subacchi is Research Director at Chatham House whose mission is to be a world-leading source of independent analysis, informed debate and influential ideas on how to build a prosperous and secure world for all. It is also the originator of something called the Chatham House Rule, which is to encourage freedom of information and open discussion, and we'll hope for more of that. Her research interests are in global economic governance and the international monetary system. Bill Emmott on the end of the platform is the former editor of the *Economist*; and many of you will remember the edition he edited before the 2001 election, "Unfit to govern", with a picture of the Italian Prime Minister on the front. The Italian Prime Minister responded by comparing him to Lenin (I'd like to say that Bill is much better looking!) and subsequently the *Economist* was termed "a communist magazine" - which surprised many of us on the left in Britain! He is currently writing a book on the problems facing Italy's attempts to reform, so we'll look forward to hearing from him. Now Jim Newell is on his way: he's just rung me from a Birmingham traffic jam and I'll introduce him when he comes: he's professor of politics at Salford University. So these are our panellists. I'm going to ask Francesco to start. He's got quite an

interesting proposition he's going to tell you about - of the political earthquake quite likely to hit Italy if Berlusconi were to leave office.

**Francesco Grillo:** OK thanks Geoff. I must say that when I came here I thought I was likely to be the least anti-Berlusconi [of the participants]. But it seems to me that this is not entirely true, also because the objective of the meeting... this time hits the opposition. (Which opposition?, by the way. The first question is: Who is the opposition?) With ten questions similar to the ten questions that were put to Berlusconi and that became the *tormentone* of the Italian media last summer, we'll challenge the opposition.

In any case I will try to say things which are also sort of, as Geoff was asking, provocative, and not entirely obvious when somebody talks about Italy and about Berlusconi. Basically, what I proposed to Geoff was that the prospects for Italian politics and the 'after-Berlusconi' question could be articulated in terms of four distinct questions that we want to try to discuss (to answer them being a little bit more difficult). The first question is: Is it a good thing that there is an 'after Berlusconi' and therefore that he quits? The answer may be quite obvious, but I'll try to elaborate on that. The second question - which is sort of linked to the first - is: What would immediately happen to Italian politics if Berlusconi abandoned the centre stage? The third question is: How likely is it that there will be an 'after Berlusconi'? Franco Massimo, the columnist of *Corriere della Sera*, yesterday said that an 'after Berlusconi' is not likely to happen before 2020. And the fourth question is: What should be done by whomever - starting from the opposition, and probably also some media - if they really wish Berlusconi to quit, wish that this 'after Berlusconi' happens?

So, very rapidly, because I have seven minutes, is it a good thing that Berlusconi quits? First of all, Italy nowadays is performing - I am a sort of economist - much worse than it used to before the Berlusconi era. Somebody may argue that the Berlusconi era started before Berlusconi entered politics officially in 1994, i.e. with Bettino Craxi. However, the reality (as we have discussed with Bill quite a few times: after all, we are doing a project on happiness that contests the validity of GDP as a measure of the well-being of a society) is that in 1995, at the beginning of the famous second republic, Italy was, among the big EU economies, second only to France in terms of GDP per capita. Nowadays, we are last among the EU-15 countries - and not only in terms of GDP, but also in terms of the performance of Italian universities; performance in terms of most basic things like tourism and probably also happiness. So Italy is much worse today than before this Berlusconi saga. Is Berlusconi responsible for this decline? My short answer is that he did not create the problem. He exploited the problem.

By the way, here we are not just talking about an economic problem. We are talking about a transformation of an entire political landscape into a

gigantic soap opera. If you try to follow Italian politics, it is like a soap opera. The narrative of this story is a soap opera. We have an earthquake practically every day. Just talking about these two last days, on Wednesday we had the resignation of Bertolaso who is the head of – I think it is ‘Homeland Security’ – the equivalent in Italy, because of a scandal relating to preparations for the G8. He was one of the most likely heirs to Mr Berlusconi. The day before, Massimo Ciancimino, the son of a mayor of Palermo who was convicted for Mafia membership, revealed – it was not the first time – that the birth of Forza Italia was decided by the Mafia and the State. So every day we have an earthquake that [could] bury the most powerful political system – and yet, as in a soap opera, if you watch this soap opera after five hundred *puntate*, everything is the same: the actors are the same, and affairs that the actors are worried about are absolutely the same – completely irrelevant to concrete happenings in everyday life. But the most striking thing is that people like the soap opera: this is the most interesting issue. So my short answer is that yes, I would personally like Berlusconi to quit so that at least the soap opera finishes because I do not like soap operas that much.

The second question is what would happen immediately if Berlusconi quit? I already sort of gave the answer. It is that there will be an earthquake ... like in the soap opera, if the protagonist dies or whatever, everything will be ... But there is also a political reason: he’s the glue, Berlusconi, of the People of Freedom party – that was, by the way, a very bad affair for the National Alliance of Gianfranco Fini because it was a takeover – but he is also the glue of the Democratic Party: I don’t know if Andrea will agree with that, but the main characteristic of the Democratic Party is that nobody really knows what the Democratic Party is for – which is lucky for the Di Pietro movement, for Casini’s party or whatever: the Democratic Party has, at the very least, a huge identity crisis. One of the questions that I would like to ask Bersani is if it was really a good idea to establish this Democratic Party; but the only *raison d’être* of the Democratic Party is Berlusconi.

**Geoff Andrews:** so just to clarify: the implications of the earthquake are not only for Berlusconi’s allies but also for the official opposition.

**Francesco Grillo:** Absolutely. Quite a few analysts think that in the case that Berlusconi quits, the Democratic Party will split the day after. But coming to the third question, How likely is it that Berlusconi will quit?, people are very pessimistic in Italy. I don’t think it will happen because of the magistrates, because he enjoys very large support – at least one half of the Italian population – and I don’t think it would be conceivable for him to be eliminated through some juridical trial. On the issue of business, Mediaset is in much better shape today than it was ten years ago: they have an operating profit of half a billion euro, so they can even withstand the

[outcome of the trial involving] De Benedetti. [In terms of his] health, when I think that Berlusconi is my father's age I am really impressed: my father is also a rather energetic guy, but I think that they probably fabricated two or three Berlusconis and used one for each... [In terms of] politics, I don't think that with [the current] Democratic Party [his departure] is that likely. No: I think that the possibility is that people will get tired of the soap opera and that the economic crisis, which is very real, will change things.

**Geoff Andrews:** Let me just ask you a question. You say that you don't think that the legal trials will see the end of Berlusconi – but people in Britain would probably say that these are very serious charges: because the Constitutional Court has ruled that he doesn't have parliamentary immunity, he's facing trials. Now how is it possible, do you think, that he will be able to escape these trials?

**Francesco Grillo:** Now it is really impossible, also because it is boring, to follow the political twisting [concerning] these matters, but... last Monday there was another law that was passed that again [involve] a sort of immunity. It's called, "*Il legittimo impedimento*": *Il legittimo impedimento* means basically, 'the legitimate obstacle'; ... [it] does not apply to a doctor who has to do some surgery, no: only if you are ...a member of the Government. [A] member of the Government [can claim to have] 'a legitimate obstacle' – a justification, like when you go to school, not to [be present at] trials. I think that this was passed by the Senate and will go to the... I personally don't think that it is going to happen – but also for a more fundamental reason which is a political one: if Berlusconi really is the glue of the Democratic Party and not only of the People of Freedom, there is a vested interest of all the main political actors in Italy that Berlusconi survives. Because what I think Bill ... realised quite some time ago is that it is the whole political class in Italy that is completely deligitimised. We are talking about the worst class, also if you look [at] the background of these people. We are doing some sort of enquiry into this: how many people speak English, and then their cost. The Italian parliament costs as much as the French, Spanish, German and British put together. So the cost of this political class is so huge, and their effectiveness is so small, that they are completely deligitimised. I am not a relative of Beppe Grillo, but he is right and Berlusconi knows that. So there is a vested interest; otherwise, you do not explain why the centre left did not [pass] the conflict-of-interests law that would have eliminated Berlusconi. So there is a vested interest of the entire political elite to....

What should be done by those who want the 'after Berlusconi' to materialise? I think three things: number one, not to talk about Berlusconi any more. It was a good intuition of Veltroni [who] performed quite well, honestly, in the election. He never mentioned Berlusconi by name. So in general, not to talk about political affairs that have to do with Berlusconi,

because basically 85 percent of the political news are about Berlusconi – meaning his wife, his daughter, etcetera, etcetera. ... [Second], create a dream: you cannot win, in any country of the world, just because you are a little bit better in managing your *condominio*: you must create some narrative that is capable [of being] ... It must be a sustainable dream obviously: I am an Obama fan so... we are talking about something like that. And number three: I would...quite honestly – and on that front I sort of agree with Casini and I will probably scandalise my British friends – dare [to suggest] that it is not completely immoral also to think of some sort of way out for this guy and his political system – of some sort of law on *pentiti*, so that he [leaves] the scene and we can [get] back to talk[ing] about serious matters. Thank you.

**Geoff Andrews:** Thanks Francesco. I'm just going to ask for some response from the other panellists on this earthquake question. Does any body want to come in?

**Bill Emmott:** Well I'll come in if you like. I mean, one, I'm shocked that Francesco wants to give Berlusconi a way out: that's caused an earthquake at this end of the table. This is like providing a villa for Saddam Husain! No, I shouldn't have raised that! But, second, I wonder whether that would work, really. I mean: does he want a way out in that sense? What's very interesting about him is that, one, he doesn't have an ideology, so he's not an ideological figure, but he's a systemic figure: he's part of a system that preserves his power ok. One threat to it is from the magistracy and you give him a way out from that – but he is also intoxicated by power and he is surrounded by people who want to use his power. I mean, as you say, he is not, as a single person, the problem. But a whole structure that feeds off him is the problem. So the question is: how do you deal with that – with all of the people who are basically using him as well? So why would he want to go out? But secondly, all the people who are using him: why would they want to lose that glue that they have? That would be my question. And perhaps, third, to add to that, I absolutely agree with Francesco that the thing that the foreign press, that foreign readers, need to understand, is that the left are complicit, particularly in doing deals – doing deals now over the immunity and all of that. When [D'Alema] comes to London in a couple of weeks' time, you should ask him: why are you doing deals with this man over this? Why aren't you confronting him, and doing deals over the conflict-of-interests law? Basically, they have kept him in power.

**Geoff Andrews:** Thanks Bill. There's one question I wanted to ask Francesco: you mentioned that Veltroni – Veltroni being the last leader of the opposition to fight an election against Berlusconi – was right not to mention Berlusconi by name and to try to avoid too much identification on

the person of Berlusconi. But he had a very low vote in the polls; and also, if he doesn't mention the name Berlusconi, then – this is partly, really, what Bill was saying – the whole question of the conflict of interests, the cult of illegality, also doesn't get discussed. I mean... you're seeing it as a strategy the centre left should adopt; but I'm seeing it as a strategy that doesn't work. I'm wondering what other people think about that?

**Daniele Albertazzi:** I think that a lot of things have been raised so I will touch upon many of them quickly. The first one is that I think the left is even more at fault, apart from the issue of finding a way out for him. I think the main issue is that the centre left has been in government for almost as much as he has, and legislation on the conflict of interests hasn't been passed, and this is I think a huge, huge issue that simply cannot be explained by members of the left in any convincing way.

**Bill Emmott:** Well it can. It can't be explained in an honest way...

**Daniele Albertazzi:** You can find explanations for it, but how do you address your own supporters and explain that in a convincing manner? Second, there are very few people who switch from centre right to centre left and vice versa in Italy and as a provocation we could say that if we look at general elections since 1994, Berlusconi has won all of them because in 1996 he lost because the Lega Nord decided to stand for the election on its own. Otherwise he would have won. Of course, you never know what would have happened: in theory you should never simply add the votes of people who don't stand together; but the Lega Nord got 10 percent of the vote and that's why Prodi got in. In 2006, he was wrong in saying that Prodi didn't have legitimacy to be prime minister, but the political message of the election was very clear: after five years of Berlusconi being prime minister and despite the fact that there were clear signs that among the middle classes who had sent him to where he was there was a lot of discontent about, for instance, his inability to lower taxation – despite all that, despite his having been in power for five years, the centre left, [while] expected to win by a very large margin...won in the lower chamber by a tiny number of votes. And in fact in the Senate the centre right got many more votes than the centre left. So as I am saying, this doesn't in any way mean that Prodi wasn't legitimate, because...he got more votes and so on and so forth. But the political message was very clear: he almost managed to win even the 2006 election.

Going back to what he is, I think he is a glue, not just of the Popolo della libertà, but importantly he is the glue of the centre right. He is the glue of the Popolo della libertà: this is obvious because this is the party that brings together neo-fascists inspired by Alessandra Mussolini all the way to the Christian democrats of [Gianfranco] Rotondi who is in government. So

it is a very heterogeneous party. If we talk in terms of variety of positions, ideologies, values, it is very diverse....He has demonstrated very clearly... when responding to the creation of the Pd - but also finding [in the party's creation] a very efficient way to get rid of the internal opposition of the Udc - that he can destroy it and re-create it at will. He created the Popolo della libertà overnight. And some politicians of what is now the Popolo della libertà went on television and admitted very openly, "We didn't know that he was going to do this". Prestigiacomo said so on national television: "We weren't consulted; but it's a good idea". Now it's since 1994 that within the centre right they talk about creating a unitary party; there have been discussions for many years; there have been conferences; they've invited members of the Udc, members of Forza Italia, Alleanza Nazionale. And within each of these single parties, there were people who argued very strongly that in Italy we needed a single, strong, unitary, conservative, centre-right party. It was never done, because doing it through a kind of step-by-step process would have involved, perhaps, a leadership challenge; but anyway [it] would have involved a long process, like the one the Pd has gone through. It was done overnight to respond to a threat, but very, very efficiently. In fact in a matter of days it became clear that the Popolo della libertà already attracted the support of a very large number of people. So he is the glue of the Popolo della libertà; and he's got the means, also the financial means of course, to keep this together.

But I think importantly...that he is also the glue of the centre right, because the Lega Nord has increasing strength, especially in some regions in the North. The recent surveys that have been published in *Corriere della Sera* seem to show that the party is around 10 percent in terms of attracting support, which is very, very good because it means that in some areas of Italy it attracts 40 or 50 percent. And as part of a research project, in the past few months we have interviewed several mid-ranking leaders of the Lega - and also national leaders of the Lega such as Dal Lago who is the president of the Lega Veneta and also vice president of the Lega Nord in Parliament - and they all say the same thing: "Berlusconi gives us the guarantee that the federal reform will be passed within this parliament... like devolution was approved and... repealed in a referendum: but devolution was approved despite strong opposition from within the Udc and also Alleanza Nazionale and Forza Italia itself". And they say, "Berlusconi is giving us this guarantee". And Berlusconi knows that if he wants to keep the Lega Nord on board, really there are only two themes the Lega Nord is interested in: federalism - and fiscal federalism has already been approved - and, importantly, the issue of law-and-order and immigration. Being tough on immigration and law-and-order is not embarrassing for Berlusconi because a lot of centre-right voters would actually agree with this approach. It was more difficult to pass federal reform because the Popolo della libertà does very well in the South, and



Berlusconi is also the guarantee for people in the South that this federalism will not necessarily be against them. But if Berlusconi steps down, I don't think it is necessarily the case that the Lega Nord will want to continue this alliance: we don't know what price the centre right will have to pay.

And we have also asked this question to *leghisti* supporters: we went to Pontidia which is, as you know, one of the main events in the life of the Lega. And this is attended by hard-core supporters. And among other things – because we are really interested in what they think of other centre-right leaders – we posed the question: “If Berlusconi [were not be] Prime Minister, who would you want to see as Prime Minister” (apart from the *leghisti* because otherwise they would of course say “Bossi”) “[from]... within the centre right?” The only figure that attracts some support is Tremonti, who has always been seen as a friend of the Lega; but even so, [he is] only mentioned by 35 percent of respondents. Then we also asked: “Within the centre right, who are the politicians you see as sharing some of the values of the Lega Nord?” Tremonti, again, is mentioned by 65 percent of respondents. And there is Brunetta, a former socialist, who is now speaking very loudly about the public administration, and he is seen as a figure who is [in] some way a friend. And finally, only 30 percent indicate Berlusconi. Now the impression... is that the activists of the Lega do not like Berlusconi: they have an opinion of him that is actually pretty similar to the one they have on the left; however, they know that Berlusconi has the power and the possibility to give them something that they really want, which is federalism. If he steps down, I think they would want to renegotiate their alliance anyway: we don't know what would happen.

**Geoff Andrews:** I want to ask Paola – because Francesco has also got this view about the...foreign-media reporting of Berlusconi [and] we've got many journalists here from Italy, so it would be very interesting to see the exchange – about the extent to which the Italian case should be seen as exceptional, because there's this debate: Italy is represented as not a normal country, which is the title of my book; and we have the debate from Italy, saying, “You have your own problems in Britain: Berlusconi is no different, in a way, to other figures you might have in Britain”. So there's been this debate – sometimes defensiveness – when discussing Italy, and so on. [So] I wanted to ask Paola: in what ways is the Italian case under Berlusconi exceptional?

**Paola Subacchi:** I don't know actually. Let me start from another point of view. I'm not really sure what this debate is about; and also I'd like to say something about why I'm here because I do not write about Italy, I'm not an expert on Italy, besides being Italian myself. Maybe I'm here because of a reply that was published by the *Financial Times* some months ago to an article that Geoff published on, again, the latest Berlusconi turmoil.

I work for a policy institute which is totally focussed on foreign policy, so I take a very international point of view... So when I look at this debate about Berlusconi and what's going on in Italy, it seems incredibly parochial and inward-looking. And, frankly, ... I don't care about Berlusconi: I don't like him; I've never supported him; I don't think he is good for Italy. But frankly I don't think that Berlusconi is the problem: the main problem is probably the system and the system which...allowed Berlusconi to become prime minister in 1994 and stay there for so long... Is it plausible to stop talking about Berlusconi? I wish it was; but it's not possible because he has become a sort of obsession for both the Government and the opposition – and again, he is the Prime Minister of Italy, so you can't really stop talking about him. But I think we need to think about where Italy is going with or without Berlusconi. And Berlusconi is for me the tip of an iceberg and represents a system which has some not particularly healthy features. And again, the question is – it is a question to which I have an answer but which I'd like to bounce back to the audience – would Berlusconi be possible in Great Britain? And do you think Britain is a system which does not allow people like Berlusconi (or I can say a lot of other names) to become Prime Minister?

But the thing which worries me, and I didn't see the article in *Corriere della Sera* yesterday, is this 2020 scenario [and] ten years of Berlusconi – not Berlusconi himself [but rather] ten years of this debate [and] what Berlusconi does, what we do. It seems to me, and again I stress this, [that] too inward-looking a debate is not beneficial to anybody. We do not have any concrete proposal [about] how to come out of this situation. In the meantime, while Italy is so busy, and [while] the press and the opposition and the Government (and the press which is favourable to the Government and the press which is favourable to the opposition) discuss this issue, the world goes on! ... This is a decade of transition: the Chinese are preparing themselves to take over the world (let me be emphatic here!); the Americans are probably discussing their decline, if it is another decline... [So] you know there are a lot of things going on in the world, and Italy is just looking at Berlusconi. And frankly, it's a bit pathetic... It's just [that] we've got this clown, depending on how you want to classify this jester: he could be a corrupt guy; he could be a clown, a very eccentric man. But you know that's not the point.

Italy is losing relevance on the international [stage], and I can see this from my point of observation. It is definitely relegated to, I would say, a mid-sized power. It is losing relevance in Europe. This morning I had a lot of calls from various members of the press asking whether Italy is going to be [the] next one after Greece and Spain and Portugal. So it's the 'Club Med' again: Italy is not perceived as [being] at the same level as Germany, France and the UK in Europe. It is clearly losing weight at the international level, partly because it is no longer a strategic country [on] the international

[stage]. And ... again, I do not see any particular change from an economic point of view. From a social point of view, the signs of distress that were there before Berlusconi are still here... So I think we need more than a dream: ...we need some concrete proposals and some thinking about what we want to do, and if we care about this country. And [we need] to face some of the structural problems which have been there for a long time: they're still there, and will probably remain even after Berlusconi unless something can be done. I don't know what can be done, frankly, because if I look at the state of the country, I'm very pessimistic; but there might be something, and maybe somebody can have some good ideas. But you know talking at length about Berlusconi in a sort of obsessive way, I don't think helps.

**Geoff Andrews:** I just want to bring in Francesco again, because you think that the foreign press has been quite superficial in its discussion of Italy at times.

**Francesco Grillo:** Yes, it has been rather superficial ....

**Geoff Andrews:** Can you say why? – because we are also fascinated at the same time.

**Francesco Grillo:** ... apart from the *Economist*: the Bible!

**Bill Emmott:** So the real question is: Is it even more superficial about Italy than about everything else?

**Francesco Grillo:** No. Sometimes you have the impression that ... articles [are] almost... copy-cuts of articles that have been published by Italian newspapers, especially *la Repubblica*. This is a general impression, but I think that this is changing.

I also wanted to say something about something that was said first of all by Paola. (I sometimes think I'm dysfunctional because when I am here with Italians I criticise Italy, and then when I am with British people I try to defend it a little bit). I am not denying – this is the very first statement [I made] – that Italy has some structural problems, big structural problems. Most of them, by the way, materialised in the last twenty years. [T]hink, for instance, of the aging of our ruling class, of university professors: in 1990 we had the youngest university-professor body in Europe... Now we have the oldest. So I am talking about something that is sort of structural, like [the] exchange of the intellectual elite in Italy etcetera. With the managerial elite it's the same thing, you know.

However...I don't know if Italy is so exceptional – for instance in this political crisis, this transformation of politics into a soap opera or

something that has been captured by business interests – because if I think about the recent history of the United States or France and Carla Bruni and George Bush and something that has also happened here, [then] it's a different scale, but we were discussing about the expenses of the MPs etcetera. There is somebody that may argue that in fact Italy is a laboratory [for] some transformation, some problem that is much broader than Italy – which probably [explains] why – notwithstanding what Paola was saying (which is very true) [about] the debate [being] very inward looking, very parochial or whatever – Mr Berlusconi is the second-most mentioned politician of the world: we did this research on Google. It is true that [most of this stuff] is about his personal life – [but] this is in fact what I was trying to say before: we need to talk about Berlusconi as Prime Minister, about politics. To be very honest with you, I don't think we should care very much about his sexual performance etcetera. So I am not sure that Italy is so exceptional...

Also I am not entirely sure that to be exceptional is such a bad thing in general. I would not wish, like Massimo D'Alema, that Italy becomes a normal country. Yes, it must be normalised in terms of many parameters, but I would not wish any country of the world to become 'normal', also because, what is 'normal' by the way?

Not talking about Berlusconi by name, Geoff: Veltroni did not do very badly: he got 30 percent or something of the votes, which was more or less the same votes that the democratic left and the popular party together got at the previous election. So it was not so bad after the Prodi experience which was, you know, not exactly positive.

I have a question for Daniele because he said that Berlusconi is the glue for the centre right which is very true. My question to him is if he is also the glue for the centre left, and if this is the reason why the conflict-of-interests law was not passed.

[Coming] to the point [made by] Bill: well, I was asked to be provocative, so it is a good thing that there was an earthquake. But I completely agree with you that it's a system problem, [that] it's not only Berlusconi. Probably it is the entire club of his friends – which, by the way, have also got a name: they belong to some secret association, of which we also know the name, or at least Di Pietro seems to know the name, or [so] he pretends. In any case, I don't know if... this thing can be conceivable, but I am happy that you didn't raise a moral issue: British people have sometimes got these moral problems with creating a way out for somebody that is a big problem. You mentioned Saddam Hussein: Italy [made] an effort before the war with the guy that then was killed... and the idea was to create a way out for Saddam Hussein at that time. I don't think it was so morally inconceivable to create a way out at that time for Saddam Hussein: such a thing would have avoided a war like the one that we had, so you must be somehow realistic and balance the costs and the benefits. If giving

a way out to Berlusconi also gives a way out to D'Alema, I would not [be] that unsatisfied to be honest.

**Bill Emmott:** No, my point on that isn't a moral one, you're right. It's more a practical one as well: you're giving him a way out so you also give everyone else also some of these protections, some of those ways out; but secondly, when you give him this way out, does he really leave? In other words: OK, he no longer needs politics to defend himself against the magistracy, but he's still there: he still has Mediaset, he's still the focal point of Italian politics.

**Francesco Grillo:** I at least wish that, if there must be an agreement like this, it is transparent. What I see now is that people, on the centre left also, are constantly making deals like Daniele was saying; but then, you know, they are the apostles of the moral battle: this is pure hypocrisy and is completely inefficient. So, if there must be something like that, it must be really transparent. This would be moral: to be at least transparent.

**Paola Subacchi:** Can I ask you a question? I am still not sure what the point of this discussion [is]. What do you really want, in your ideal world...? How do you see Italy? Obviously an Italy without Berlusconi: but how do you see Italy as a modern, efficient country?

**Francesco Grillo:** This is another conference!

**Paola Subacchi:** Well, but maybe you can tell us because you want obviously... The point is: Berlusconi has to go, I think, and everybody will love that, but I agree with Bill: it is not like once Berlusconi's gone, everything is solved. There is a system; Berlusconi is the expression of a system; Berlusconi is the expression of Italian exceptionalism. And you didn't answer my question, whether Britain would be able to express somebody like Berlusconi. Do you think this country has the sort of checks and balances and institutional framework, and political system and electoral system, whatever you want to call it, which really creates this sort of firewall against Berlusconi or anybody like him?

**Francesco Grillo:** On this second question, I am not British so...

**Paola Subacchi:** But you live in this country, so you probably know.... and you work in this country...

**Francesco Grillo:** But no: I think Bill and Geoff are in a much better position to... [On] the question of what should be the Italy after Berlusconi, we have ten questions for the opposition [and] they can be a tool: I have...

well everybody can have his own idea, but it would be interesting to understand what kind of Italy... at least if Berlusconi's not there anymore we can discuss about what [kind of] Italy we want. But it's a different session of the conference.

**Geoff Andrews:** I just want to welcome Jim Newell, professor of politics at Salford. Do come and join us, Jim: we'll find a place for you. In the meantime, I want to open up discussion now to people in the audience.

**Paul Furlong:** There is a lot one could say about the ideas that have already come up, but at this point the only direct comment I want to make is to say how much I agree with Francesco that the issue goes deeper than Berlusconi. And I think it is a perfectly logical conclusion that he draws - which I also agree with (and this is contrary to Paola Subacchi's position) - that Italy is not an exception: Berlusconi does not simply come out of the ether, as it were, as a result of his great entrepreneurial spirit and his imagination and his talents, which are undoubted. Underlying Berlusconi's emergence and longevity and impact is a crisis, a political crisis, of mobilisation and participation that affects not just Italy but many other countries in the developed world. And I think that to see Italy as - I don't whether this is what Paola wanted to say - suffering from this uniquely, [is] not entirely correct. Of course, it's true to say that it is difficult to imagine a Berlusconi-type figure emerging in Britain, but that's partly to do with the different political cultures, the way in which the decline of the traditional mass parties in the developed world has occurred, and the different impact it has in the different historical contexts and the different political cultures that we find ourselves in, in individual circumstances. But overall, many countries in Europe are affected - and indeed it happens elsewhere and in North America - by the decline of the capacity of mass mobilisation of the traditional parties. And underlying that are broader economic factors, it seems to me. Italy is not unique in that; and therefore it seems to me that the solution lies in finding new ways, new forms of political participation in developed countries. That - if we're looking for a *dopo Berlusconi*, what happens after Berlusconi, a positive solution for Italy, as a positive solution, in different contexts with different figures in other countries - has to be, to find new forms of political participation that really, actually work. It's not just Berlusconi and we shouldn't personalise it like that. That's my comment.

**Raffaella Bianchi:** I have a few comments and a few questions for some of you. I agree with...Francesco Grillo...when he says that the...debate should not be about Berlusconi in Italy. I agree with him because Berlusconi is a man of [the] media and advertis[ing] and Publitalia was his company... And the motto...was [that] you should talk about the product either badly

or in a good way, but you should talk about it. The most important thing is that there's a spotlight on the product. When he entered into politics, he became the product himself. And it is not that Forza Italia or his political party [emerged] from one day to the other: all his [advertising] empire [went] into that. What is particularly interesting, and what is the exception, I think - [and] I totally agree with Furlong when he [says] that this is a huger picture in which there is more attention to the personalisation of politics than to political parties - [is] that there is a thing called "Berlusconism": a culture which is bigger than Berlusconi himself, which is more important and pervasive, a culture of machoism. Yesterday I read [in] *l'Unità*, this leftist newspaper, that Italy is seventy-second in the leagues for gender, after Rwanda....

Maybe we should stop talking about Berlusconi - in the sense that the left should set the political agenda of this discussion.... They are looking for a compromise and discussion with Berlusconi's party - but that is not what the grassroots want. The grassroots want [them to take up] the main issues that are [emerging] at the moment, which [have] a lot to do with fear, and with the crisis... and this comes to my question for Daniele Albertazzi: I'm interested in that poll that you did in Pontida: when did you do that? ...the crisis is hitting very hard in the area where the Northern League is strong, like Brescia: Brescia has much heavy industry and all these people are now without a job or with little prospect: I wonder what they will vote at the next election.... is the grassroots of the Northern League interested in real federalism now? Or is it more the crisis and the financial crisis? And how much can the Northern League work for that?

I just have a last question...for Paola Subacchi: Don't you think that the international role of Italy is less important because the Cold War is finished, so we are not strategically important? [That] it's not very much Berlusconi's fault - just that we are a minor power and we are a little country, and that's it? It's not just because of Berlusconi: it's because we have a minor role as compared to the past.

**Chris Brammell:** It seems to me that it's quite right that there's a crisis of political mobilisation: the old parties are failing both in the UK, say, and in Italy, perhaps in much the same way: the old historical certainties have gone; the civil war in North Italy, the Second World War, are all irrelevant perhaps now, I don't know; the class conflicts between the Communist Party and the Christian Democrats: it's all in the past, perhaps. But it seems to me that what none of the speakers has mentioned - what seems to me to be the crisis in Italy, which pre-dates Berlusconi and is really highlighted [by] Berlusconi - is a failure of the rule of law - whether you look at the role of the Mafia in the South, the role of the Mafia in the North, the Masonic lodge, the left-wing conspiracies, Berlusconi particular: that what you have in Italy that perhaps you don't have in the other large countries in

western Europe, is a failure of the rule of law and the failure of Italian institutions to get a grip on that problem. I just ask: am I right or am I wrong?

**Paola Subacchi:** Well, first of all I agree with you: there is a grass-roots movement (and the latest is the Tea Party in the United States); and this is a signal of the crisis of traditional politics, and that's what fed Berlusconi and Forza Italia and the subsequent developments.

But let me go back to the exceptionalism of Italy, and again: all your interventions seem to confirm that Italy is, in many respects, an exceptional country.... I'll just give you a few numbers: these are OECD numbers just to show from my point of view, an economic point of view, the exceptionalism of Italy.... So Italian GDP per capita increased like every other country's between 1994 and 2007 but much less than these other three main European economies, Germany, France and the UK. Average GDP growth: Italy, '85 to 2006, 1.7; France, UK and US, well above 2 percent; US almost 3 percent. Germany is the exception here - but because in that period they had the reunification.

And [when] we look at the social statistics... [this] is a country of constrained modernisation. Italy for a lot of reasons - again I ask the colleagues here, political scientists and historians, to tell us more about this constrained modernisation - is a country which has the Catholic Church imposing its own grip and [is] a...country which is still trying to come to terms with modernity. Again, a typical example, to go back to what you quote in *l'Unità*, [is] employment rates for women: in 1994, Italy had 35 percent of women in the labour force - against France, Germany and the UK [with] well above 50 percent. In 2007, there were 46 percent women in the labour force, which is a number - even if there had been an increase - lower than where Germany, France and UK were in 1994. And again, Italy is well below the EU 27 and the OECD average.

Employment rates: Italy has a big problem with young people - again, huge unemployment. The aggregate unemployment rate is basically average compared to Europe, but there is a big gap in terms of young people. There are a lot of young people who are unemployed. Or maybe they are employed but they are not in the statistics because they are in the black market: again, the size of the black market in Italy is another example of Italian exceptionalism even if all economies have got a portion of black market; but in Italy it's a large portion and we still don't know how much it is. And sometimes we joke, and the Government did that: they say, "Well, after all, we did very well in the economic crisis because of our black market".

Self employment: Italy has got a large proportion of people who are self-employed. One quarter of the labour force is self-employed: the OECD average is 16 percent; the EU27, 15 percent; France, Germany and the UK



are around 10 percent. So again, what does it tell you? To me it's a sign of distress. It's not a sign of entrepreneurship or dynamism. It's a sign of people who cannot find decent jobs. Or they are forced to be self-employed because of the distortion of the labour market.

Another indicator [is] R&D: research and development. Again, Italy scores very low on that. So if you flip through these statistics you see that you have the OECD average and Italy's score is always on the lower side together with, in Europe, Greece, Portugal, not even Spain (despite the fact that we don't like the story that Spain is doing better than Italy although recently the crisis hit Spain pretty badly)... So in this area Italy has indicators comparable to those of an emerging market economy....

Interesting, again a sign of lack of confidence, [is] that Italy is behind all the three main European G7 in terms of being a recipient of FDI, foreign direct investment: investors do not trust Italy. But it scores very high in terms of outflow, capital outflow.... So Italy is basically not trusted: there is not much trust in Italy in terms of the rule of law by international investors (and the UK scores very high in this area)....

And finally, another sign of distress, which is...also a sign of this inward looking, [is that] Italy scores incredibly high in terms of perceived criminality – perceived, not [actual] criminality.... Italy and Japan are the highest countries: they have the highest rate of people feeling threatened by some sort of criminal behaviour. And it is interesting: in both countries a very high proportion of the population consists of old people; they have a population which is aging fast. Japan is, I think, one of the safest countries in the world; but they feel they have a lot of crime. And it's the same in Italy: there is this perception which has been used by the narrative of the current government even during the election to say, "Well, we are all here in the hands of criminals". But then you see the real statistics and it's not that bad after all.

**Geoff Andrews:** Thanks Paola. Can I at this point introduce Jim Newell, who is professor of politics at Salford University. Jim has written a lot about Berlusconi and the recent Berlusconi governments. His latest book is *The Italian General Election of 2008: Berlusconi Strikes Back*, and I was going to ask you – trying to look back at the other Berlusconi governments, but also trying to get a picture of what Italy was like – what Italy's been like under Berlusconi, what life has been like for Italians under Berlusconi.

**Jim Newell:** Before I respond to that, could I take up the question of Italian exceptionalism? It's something I feel quite strongly about. It seems to me, first of all – to make what I guess is an obvious point – that every country is exceptional in some respect or another. Secondly, I think that the notion of Italian exceptionalism has a very, very long history: it goes back at least as far as Almond and Verba's famous study in the 1960s, which I have a real

problem with because I think it is basically tautological: I mean it says, OK, Italy is not a very stable democracy because the civic culture is wrong; people don't have the right attitudes and so on – which I don't find very illuminating because isn't precisely what we mean by a stable democracy...? ....doesn't that have something to do with the attitudes of the inhabitants of the democracy concerned? And I think they actually got it wrong because, you know, they were saying all kinds of things like, "Well, you know, Communist supporters don't support the Constitution, they're anti-constitutional etcetera" – when in fact of course the Italian Communist Party was one of the main architects of the Constitution.

So I think it has a very long history, and I think that Italians tend to collude themselves in this image of Italian exceptionalism. I think that Italians secretly like the idea of Italian exceptionalism because in a perverse sort of way, if you convey the image that really the country is absolutely dreadful, and nothing works, and isn't life bad? – well, my goodness, you've got to be a pretty good kind of people if you can put up with that kind of stuff and still survive, you know: there really must be something quite special about you.

But I think that there is, to put it bluntly, a lot of help given to Italians in this by outsiders who like to look down their noses at Italy: one of the best ways of shoring up your own institutions is to point to institutions in another country and say, "They don't work and aren't we so much better?" I mean, I had an interesting kind of experience of this kind of thing when I was at a conference in Germany over the weekend. This was a conference on organised crime; and people who were otherwise in no sense anti-Italian, very sympathetic, were using the term, "Italian mafia" all the time and I said, "Well look actually this isn't correct: the Mafia really only has any kind of basis in three regions of the country: Sicily, Calabria and Campania. All of the local councils – virtually all of them – that have recently been dissolved for Mafia infiltration are all to be found there: there is virtually no other council anywhere else in the country that's been dissolved for infiltration. If you have a look at the international statistics for homicides per one-hundred thousand, Italy is one of the safest countries in Europe. So I think that needs to be said as well.

Two other things on the exceptionalism issue: its never really sort of emphasised, I think, what an extraordinary achievement needs to be registered in terms of the functioning of Italian democracy, when you think that we're looking at a country which, you know, for forty years, had the largest communist party in the West, whose domestic politics were a mirror reflection of the Cold War conflict, that was constantly under a situation of limited sovereignty because of the intervention of the United States in various sorts of open and less-open ways and, you know, managed to survive as a democracy. That strikes me as a sort of fairly large achievement.

And I think, finally, the parallels between the MPs' expenses scandal and Tangentopoli are very striking. I mean, there are all kinds of parallels. In both cases, here you have a scandal which really discredited an entire political class, led to a massive explosion of anti-political attitudes. [The expenses scandal is] a scandal in which we've seen the same kind of attitudes expressed on the part of the protagonists as we saw expressed by the protagonists of Tangentopoli – which were, basically: "Ok, this is very unfortunate, but actually, we were not breaking any rules. All right: the rules may have been lax, may have been very lax in terms of the way they were applied, but, you know, we weren't breaking any rules, certainly not doing anything illegal apart from one or two cases". And, you know, the...things...Craxi said, the sort of things that were said in the suicide note by Moroni, were very similar, which were, you know: "Ok, yes it was illegal, but this was known about by everybody, everybody did it, so why are you picking on *us*?" Now that may be difficult to defend in some kind of absolute or abstract sense, but it is understandable in the sense that we can imagine ourselves having the same kind of reaction if we were in their position. So I just think that those sorts of things are worth bearing in mind too.

**Geoff Andrews:** Thanks Jim. I agree with a lot of what you say about the stereotypical view of Italy, but one thing about the comparison between Tangentopoli and the recent parliamentary expenses scandal – well, we'll leave the fact that they were mostly *reported* in Britain, I mean in the British media – [is that] there have been quite a lot of resignations, whereas the common criticism of Italy is that the political class, you know, never leaves the stage. I mean it's there. But anyway I'll just leave that one.

**Daniele Albertazzi:** Can I just try to answer you by making a link between what Jim said and what Paul Furlong said? And also I thought there was a question there. I'm a great believer in British exceptionalism. It is a country that has been affected more than any other by the financial crisis – while in Italy we still have a manufacturing sector, and the banking system follows very different rules and we haven't been affected to the same extent. But I hear from British politicians that we – me as well having been here since 1997 – live in a broken society where children are able only to drink and knife each other; they are the least happy among all western European countries.

But more importantly, to link up with what Paul Furlong said – and I think this is a very serious point – this is the country where only 60 percent bother to vote in general elections and about 30 percent bother to turn up when European elections are on, and Italy is still a country where about 80 or 85 percent of people turn up. You could say that it's the political culture, that voting was compulsory. But if you also look at the extent to which

people take part in demonstrations, at how many people take to the streets when the unions call for a strike: if you look at a series of data about political participation, I think that to a large extent the democratic process works better in Italy than it does in the UK.

In the UK there is a very, very serious problem with the democratic system: the only two parties that ever get any space from the public-service broadcaster are the Conservatives and Labour, and I would argue that I understand why this happens: there is a very long, well-rooted culture of having a system whereby there are basically only two actors: "The third one? Well, let's forget about it!" And all the others of course – the Greens, the BNP and all the others – don't exist. But I think that from the point of view of an external observer, this is a huge problem in the democratic process. When do you ever hear about the proposals of, let us say, the Lib Dems? [They] still represent about 23 or 25 percent of the population so [are] not really insignificant.

To link up with the idea of Berlusconi, I believe that Berlusconi is more the tip of an iceberg. It is difficult to say there is nothing very anomalous about him, but he is the tip of an iceberg: in the UK the whole debate about immigration, asylum seekers and Europe has been led for many years by a couple of tabloids. In Italy you have somebody that obviously has very large media power, who doesn't just affect the political system, but has decided himself to run; so it *is* the tip of an iceberg, but it is happening all around, not just Europe, but all around the West. So to link up also the problem of the political parties being no longer what they were before, they no longer socialise people:...to some extent this is happening in the whole of the world, certainly in major western European countries. And the power of media tycoons in the last twenty years is something that needs to be discussed and is something that is quite worrying.

At the same time, the political parties as they were before disappear. And I think also in Italy there has been a tendency perhaps on the left to go down the path of believing the story that nowadays parties must be *liquidi*, flexible, virtual, not existent – except that the left was very-well rooted at the local level and the left does not control means of communication of the power that Berlusconi has.

What are the parties in Europe that have not bought into this idea? Well, for instance, the Lega Nord and the People's Party in Switzerland – so right-wing, radical, populist parties that are still telling their activists to go and stick posters on walls. The Lega Nord is a new Stalinist party in Italy: they organise meetings every week with their supporters; they have people coming from Rome, people coming from the regional parliament but also from Rome, talking to activists, and giving them some help in making sense of processes of change and globalisation that are very, very difficult to understand when you are in the middle of nowhere, somewhere in Veneto, and your village in a couple of years has been completely

transformed by the arrival people you don't understand, and also by the complete change in the economic structure. And they are there to give you an answer. So, this was to a large extent the function of the Communist Party, on the left in Italy.

**Geoff Andrews:** I was going to say: to what extent have they got into the old Communist Party's support the Lega Nord?

**Daniele Albertazzi:** I think what they have been very, very successful at doing is really to create a new subculture, which in some areas of Italy has replaced the Christian Democratic subculture, and they are also very successful in talking to working-class people. We may like or not what they say, but certainly they do provide an explanation for what's going on. I think that one of the problems of, certainly, the Partito Democratico if you read what they publish [is that] there are a lot of interesting things, but is this coming through? Is this coming through to people in terms of simple, convincing, messages that provide some sort of explanation about things like the financial crisis, immigration, globalisation, crime, and so on and so forth? The Lega Nord is effective in doing that.... At the moment it is in an alliance; but again, if you ask them whether they should keep all doors open or whether they feel they belong to the centre right, a great majority of activists will say, "No, we don't belong anywhere. We want to achieve freedom". And regarding federalism, it is very difficult to explain, but the simple idea that the North in general should have more autonomy from Rome is simple. Then ok, if you go down the path and say, "Can you explain to me the differences between devolution and federalism?" nobody can do that. But the simple message is: we want more freedom from this political class, from Rome, from centralisation. This is quite simple: when you want a new motorway in the Veneto region, you want more infrastructures, you want to be in control of your money, the message gets through.

**Geoff Andrews:** I'd like to come back to Jim and the previous Berlusconi governments: what's different this time round would you say?

**Jim Newell:** I think one can compare the governments probably in terms of four criteria, I would say: one would be stability; the other would be popularity; the third would be the government's legislative activity, and fourthly, the outcomes of those activities. And I think we can see comparisons and similarities in terms of all four of those criteria.

If we take stability first, then I think that the current government is actually much more stable than the other one. We have to remember that the other one was actually two governments: it was forced to resign and seek a new term of office after the European elections of 2005 as a result of

widespread disappointment that had been provoked by the inability of Berlusconi and his team to square the circle between the promises they'd made in 2001 in relation to massive increases in public spending having to do with the famous "Contract with the Italian People", on the one hand, and the tax cuts on the other. It was a four-party coalition each of whose members was indispensable for the survival of the government in office; so you had this situation of interlocking vetoes, because if they all wanted change, then they all wanted change going in somewhat different directions. Of course the fact that it was a larger coalition than the present one meant that its ideological span was that much greater – and so that much greater would be the likelihood that those interlocking vetoes would be a real obstacle in the way of effective action on the part of the Government. And so the Udc in 2005 was looking for a way of increasing its visibility and its own support in a context in which Berlusconi was obviously unpopular, and so insisted on this reshuffle and so on.

It's perhaps somewhat less likely that we will see such a scenario this time round. Of course the Northern League likewise has veto power because it too is indispensable numerically for the survival of the Government; but Berlusconi was, I think, rather shrewd when he set the Government up because what he did was to give the Lega Nord far more positions in Cabinet, and far more important positions, than its numbers would otherwise have warranted. So if the Lega is going to decide to break, it has to make a decision about whether it is better off breaking or whether it is better off sticking with a situation that gives it much more influence in Cabinet than, as I say, its numbers would otherwise allow it to have.

Another factor which makes the government more stable than the previous one is the fact that Berlusconi being a coalition maker, having unassailable power in his own party, having been elected as the head of a coalition that was directly seeking an absolute majority of seats in Parliament rather than a coalition that was cobbled together afterwards: [all this] means that the consequent greater cohesion of this government enables him to engage in permanent campaigning in a way that he wasn't able to last time round – that is, to use governing as a means of mobilising support, and [to mobilise] support as a means of governing effectively. And I think we can see that in the opinion polls: If you have a look at the opinion polls, not only are Berlusconi's ratings 18 months on much higher now at 48 percent than they were 18 months into the life of his last government (when they were down to 37 percent), but obviously they are much higher than those of Romano Prodi who had none of these possibilities of permanent campaigning.

**Geoff Andrews:** So this scandal that has been taking up a lot of space in the British media, Naomi Letizia and all those other issues that got attention in the foreign press has had no negative effect at all...

**Jim Newell:** I don't think they have any real effect because...

**Geoff Andrews:** ...despite the impression given by the British press which is of one crisis after the other, you know. Will he survive? This was the impression...

**Jim Newell:** Well yes, that's right. You see, I mean, I think, ok, as far as the sexual scandals are concerned, there has always been this very long tradition in Italian political culture that a politician's private life is...

**Geoff Andrews:** When the Constitutional Court made its ruling about his parliamentary immunity there seemed to be a crisis....

**Jim Newell:** Yes that's right because you see I think here anti-political attitudes are important. You know there's a secret admiration on the part of Berlusconi's supporters for a man who claims to be an outsider, to be able to come in and do things which these professional politicians can't and have never been able to. What is also important is this sort of diffidence in relation to public officials - this scepticism that we can really count on norms of due process being applied - and therefore this sort of secret admiration in Italian culture for somebody who manages to work the system to their own advantage. Precisely because we can't be sure that the system will act in accordance with norms of universalism means that there is this secret admiration for Berlusconi and what he's been able to achieve.

And you know what he has managed to do is to turn a lot of the discontent that we saw, and the outrage that we saw at the time of Tangentopoli, to his own advantage - because if that was based on anti-political attitudes, [then] so based on anti-political attitudes (or at least 'anti-institutional' attitudes) is this conflict that he has managed to generate and fuel between himself and the judiciary, saying, "Ok, here are people who are essentially driven by political motives and are trying to use their positions in the judiciary to attack me, given that they are unable to defeat me at the ballot box".

**Geoff Andrews:** ...even though Craxi, Bettino Craxi, was the most senior figure, ex-prime minister, implicated in the Tangentopoli/Mani Pulite episode: even though Craxi was, effectively, Berlusconi's patron. He was the one who... I mean, this contradiction has not been significant in the way it's been played out in Italy. Why is that, do you think?

**Jim Newell:** Well, I guess for two reasons, really. Memories are short, and I suspect that in the case of most people their attitudes are driven by most immediate and the most recent political events. And I would also guess

that it has to do with the fact that, ok, people like you and I are aware of the intimate connections between Berlusconi and Craxi but if we bear in mind the sociological profile of the typical Pdl voter, who in stereotypical terms is supposed to be a person who only gets their news from television, isn't very well informed, is likely to work at home and so on and so forth, well...

**Francesco Grillo:** Can I say something? Craxi has been rehabilitated recently: there are people who want to dedicate streets to Craxi etcetera. But there is a [ray] of hope in this picture that Jim was portraying in a very effective way. There is a weakness of Berlusconi, in the Berlusconi system, which also probably [suggests] that the system of Berlusconi, the Berlusconi club, is not so large, [namely], the fact that he is not creating, like other people in his position, heirs and lieutenants that are strong enough. [Consequently], he is also weak, like the centre-left leadership. Weak leaders, or at least [leaders who] for some reason [think they are] weak...find their lieutenants among their relatives, their very good friends. For instance, the next regional election, paradoxically, could [see] a good [result] for the Democratic Party, because the Democratic Party, so weak that it [has] not even manage[d] to have its own candidate, has [had] imposed [on it] candidates - for instance in Campania, Puglia and Lazio, [with] Bonino, Vendola and De Luca, up to a point - that are quite strong... Now talking a little bit in strategic terms, one weakness of Berlusconi is that...he's not fabricating his own heirs and lieutenants in a strong way.

**Paola Subacchi:** This is a point in which I am very interested because he says not only that Berlusconi appoints his friends, but...Italy is really unable to express a political elite which is not made by friends of the friends. And one of the points in the whole sexual scandal of Berlusconi [is that] there are some aspects which are institutional: it's not only a matter of what Berlusconi does in his private life. One point which I think was very important was the use of personal favours in exchange for political rewards. So there was a whole system...we discovered - even if we did not need that particular episode to find out something which was very clear to a lot of people: How do you recruit candidates for European elections, general elections, regional or local elections? How do you recruit them in this country (i.e. the UK)? How do you recruit them in Italy? And what transpires from this episode is that there is really a horse-trading system where friends of the friends were put on relevant lists; and depending on the favour you want to exchange you are put in a very safe constituency or in a less safe constituency. This is again, to me, a country which is not able to function properly if it cannot express a good, healthy...political class. So I don't know if you have an answer to that but it seems to me a very big problem in Italy and we haven't been able to solve it.



**Geoff Andrews:** Thanks Paola. You're talking about the systemic problem really and Bill has investigated for the *Economist* the 'Berlusconi empire', if you like, which is on-going with legal cases and everything else. But just supposing Berlusconi does leave for whatever reason, how easy is it going to be to reform Italy, Bill?

**Bill Emmott:** First of all I should say that the *Economist* investigated Berlusconi for me rather than the other way round. In other words, I didn't do that work. So I'm now developing an amateur interest in Italy subsequent to that.

**Geoff Andrews:** David Lane was also part of that, isn't that right?

**Bill Emmott:** David Lane was one of the two key people on it, yes. There was really a two-man team: one was David and one was a man called Tim Laxton, in London. And so I should have no credit for that. Of course it educated me a lot about Italy as well.

**Geoff Andrews:** You chose the title.

**Bill Emmott:** Yeah. Yes, that's right. The second point I'd like to make actually before answering your question is about how much attention we should give to the British press: let's leave the *Economist* to one side for the moment. I don't think we should care what the British press writes about Italy. One, newspapers tend to write about the exotic and entertaining; second, they certainly tend to do that when they are writing about foreign countries. Just as there's a disproportionate interest in the Italian press about the royal family in this country, with every damn country the foreign press writes misleading things, so I don't think we should be too exercised about that apart from the fact that that, obviously, is what we all read. Third: what is it that is important about this question that we're discussing - Berlusconi, the ailments of Italy and so forth? It's a question that I'm sort of struggling with really. From the data that Paola brought, what should we really care about? And by the way I should add, on that data, that from a British point of view we should acknowledge that we are now lower than Italy on GDP per head because of the 25 percent devaluation of sterling: not because we've been hit harder by the economic crisis - which we may be in the future, but we haven't been hit harder than Italy by the economic crisis yet - but because of exchange-rate issues.

**Daniele Albertazzi:** The banks in Italy haven't been kept open by the Government....

**Bill Emmott:** OK, I don't align 'bankers' and 'we'. So it is certainly true that British banks have been hit harder by it – although I'll come onto that from an Italian point of view. Actually, I think that Italian banks have possibly gone more in a negative direction as a result of this economic crisis than is the case with British banks in an important way.

So what is important? I think that I am most struck, with Italy, by how little it's been changed by globalisation, how little it's been affected by technological change over the past twenty years. We shouldn't evaluate another country according to some sort of ideal model about how it works: we should evaluate it in its own terms. Nevertheless we should observe the way in which it reacts to external forces compared to the way other countries react to them. And by the way, in this comparison, I think that France and Germany and Spain may be more instructive than Britain. I think that what's striking about Italy is how – and perhaps this is a rather generalised statement – in the 1990s – thanks in part to the Amato reforms on banks, and all sorts of other reforms that coincided with and to some extent related to Tangentopoli and the end of the Cold War and so forth – Italy was in a certain sense, converging in terms of the way in which the financial structure worked, the degree of openness even towards meritocracy to some extent. What we've seen in the last ten years has been a reversal of that, I think – while in France, Germany and Spain, we've seen some sort of [moderate, not necessarily dramatic] convergence on liberalism. ...in response to the forces of globalisation and of technology, those countries have generally moved in a more open, more liberal, more meritocratic direction.

I think that the thing we should focus on in Italy is the way in which, particularly in the last ten years, it has started to move in the opposite direction. I think that it is not an emerging market economy because the thing about emerging market economies is that they are emerging. So that I think one recent very enjoyable event in Italy was the famous open letter by Pier Luigi Celli, Director General of Luiss, in *la Repubblica* to his son published in November advising his son to leave the country. And I went to see Mr Celli or Dr Celli last Friday in Rome and asked him: Why did he do this, and what was it? And basically – apart from saying, you know, "I wanted to cause a stir, make a provocation and so forth" – it was because of this feeling of opportunity for younger people going in the wrong direction. And that seems to me the most worrying thing that's happening in Italy. Berlusconi and his sex scandals don't matter too much, I think. But I think that [thanks to] that sense both of a decline in meritocracy and open opportunity – which is linked to, I think, the re-capturing of the system really by the sort of Berlusconi-like forces, using new political techniques, but in effect in the service of an old desire – some of the previous characteristics – the previous ailments of the system – have become stronger again.

I think that the revival of Mediobanca is a significant phenomenon: the fact that the banking system, ok, didn't have toxic assets, had no idea what a credit default swap was, meant that it didn't go bust; but basically if you're Unicredit and Bancintesa now, you are more in the grip of, if you like, 'the black arts' of the Italian system than you were two years ago. And the tendency in the banking system to become more internationalised – to treat credit as something you allocate on relatively rational grounds rather than because of relationships, because of politics, because of vested interests and so forth – has gone in a reverse direction, I think. So while I suspect that the British banks in five years' time will be back – hopefully they won't be doing some of the crazy things they were doing, but one wouldn't say that the British banking system will have been devastated by this whole historical period – it could be that we see the Italian banking system brought back into a malign grip.

So, what's the positive side? I think it's the traditional answer to that – of movement from below; of reform at local level; of individual initiative; of civil society mobilising using new technological means, social networking and so forth; the 'B-day' phenomenon and so forth, producing some potential for an as-it-were post-Berlusconi new form of political mobilisation by someone or some entities – maybe we shouldn't be thinking of one person – that then starts to change the direction again. But I would agree very much with what I know is Francesco's view, which is that this word 'reform' – which implies a sheet of paper on which you have a ten-point plan that suddenly overnight you implement – is a terribly bad way to look at things. So one shouldn't look for, if you like, the big-bang sort of reform, but rather a sense that forces are starting to press in a more positive direction rather than a negative one.