# So Divided and Yet So United. Italy and the Italians: Society, the Economy, Politics and Voting

Gabriele Bracci
*University of Florence*

*Abstract: This article reports the proceedings of the round table organised by the Italian Society for Electoral Studies to mark the 150th anniversary of Italian Unification. In it, we seek to analyse, from the perspectives of a number of different disciplines, the issue of how united Italy is. The celebration of the anniversary was indeed an opportunity for detailed reflection on national identity and on national integration from both the political and the social points of view. In particular, it was asked whether the unity achieved with such difficulty in 1861 today has the capacity to withstand the (social, political, economic and cultural) changes that have taken place in Italian society and if these have somewhat modified the ways in which Italians coexist with each other. The answers, as we shall see, were not unequivocal and each raised specific issues for reflection.*

On 31 March 2011, in order to mark the 150th anniversary of Italy's Unification, the Italian Society for Electoral Studies (Società italiana di studi elettorali, SISE), organised in Florence a roundtable entitled, *Così divisi e così uniti. L'Italia e gli italiani: tra società, economia, politica e voto* ('So divided and yet so united. Italy and the Italians: Society, the economy, politics and voting'). The invited speakers – besides SISE President, Prof. Carlo Fusaro, who chaired the event – were Prof. Mario Caciagli of the University of Florence; Prof. Ilvo Diamanti, of the University of Urbino; Dr. Giuseppe De Rita, President of CENSIS (Centro Studi Investimenti Sociali: 'Centre for the Study of Social Investments'); Prof. Enzo Rullani of Venice International University, and Prof. Carlo Trigilia of the University of Florence.

The event's organisers had decided to take an explicitly interdisciplinary approach to the roundtable in order to enable the important question of Italians' unity to be analysed from a number of different points of view. The speakers, whose work covers a range of

perspectives can be regarded as among the most eminent scholars of the distinctions and contrasts to be found in Italy, which, in the following paragraphs, will therefore be analysed from a multiplicity of standpoints, political, sociological, economic and cultural.

The first contribution was that of Prof. Mario Caciagli who focussed on Italian electoral history, looking specifically at extensions of the franchise and voting behaviour, which he analysed in terms of their geographical and territorial implications among others. His account then made reference to the political systems of France and Germany, which were worth considering because in some respects they are similar to the Italian system.

Prof. Cacagli was keen to preface his remarks with a warning against the excessive emphasis generally given to Italian divisions, emphasis which, in his view is too often the fruit of exaggerated and unjustified pessimism. The essential point of departure of his account, in fact, was the idea that Italians, just like other populations, have always been divided, and despite the persistence of what are, in some cases, deep divisions, the unity that has now lasted for 150 years never seems to have broken down. Prof. Caciagli's account thus reviewed, from the point of view of voting behaviour, the major divisions that have run through the country since Unification itself, considering them the *conditio sine qua non* for an understanding of contemporary voting behaviour.

The first major division worth recalling is the class division, which meant that in the initial years after Unification, the right to vote was enjoyed only by certain privileged sectors of Italian society. The country's first electoral law,[1] in fact, gave the right to vote – aside from certain special categories – only to male citizens over 25 who were literate and paid taxes of 40 lire. Consequently, at the first elections in the Kingdom of Italy held on 27 January 1861[2] the electorate amounted to about 420,000,[3] equivalent to only 1.9 percent of the resident population.

The small size of this figure is even more apparent when we compare it with the high rates of participation in the plebiscites that had taken place a short time previously to bring about the annexation of the peninsula's individual states to the Kingdom of Sardinia and subsequently to the Kingdom of Italy. In these elections, in fact, in order to ensure that the vote went in favour of annexation, the landlords brought to the polls numerous peasants who would then have to wait about fifty years before they were again able to take part in an electoral competition. Concerning this issue, it is to be remembered that in the Tuscan plebiscite of 11 and 12 March 1860, those registered to vote in Tuscany along came to 534,000, that is, about 100,000 more than those who, in the entire Kingdom, could take part in the vote the following year.

In Italy, then, there was a regime which divided the population rigidly, on the basis of declared wealth, between a small minority with the

right to vote and a large majority to which this right was denied. Such a division came to be lessened with the subsequent electoral law of 1882[4] but disappeared altogether only in 1912, with the introduction of universal male suffrage.[5]

The property franchise was not, obviously, a peculiarity of the Italian political system, but as compared to other systems, in Italy there was something of a delay in extending the vote to all male citizens: in Germany, for example, Bismarck had already taken this step – though for instrumental reasons including the containment of the centrifugal forces of regionalism – following the war with Austria in 1866, and in France the Third Republic (1870) provided that the lower chamber would be elected precisely by all citizens of at least 21 years of age.

A second division, in some ways linked to the first, was that of gender. As is well known, women in Italy voted for the first time only in 1946, conspicuously later as compared to other European countries such as Germany (1919) and Spain (1931) for example. The reason for the delay, obviously, was the capture of power by the Fascists, confirmed by the fact that as early as 1920 a number of Socialist and People's Party deputies had presented a bill precisely to give the vote to women, a bill which, however failed to be approved in time to have any practical effect.

A very important division concerns the religious cleavage. In the analysis of voting behaviour in fact this fracture has always had significant implications, especially in Italy where Catholics, on the basis of the provisions of the *non expedit* were once debarred from participating in the political life of the country. That decision, asserted forcefully by Pope Pius IX from 1874, helped also to create a strong sense of antagonism on the part of Catholics who, besides refusing to exercise the right to vote, were tenaciously opposed to the Italian political system as a whole.[6]

Not infrequently, in fact, Catholics were accused of 'subversion' as much as were the anarchists and the socialists: in 1898, don Albertario was sentenced to three years imprisonment because he was held responsible for having provoked a riot. Catholic intransigence then began to lessen with the popes that came after Pius IX, and especially with the 1905 encyclical, *Il fermo proposito*, which, in easing significantly the terms of the *non expedit*, allowed the entry to Parliament – even though in a personal capacity – of some Catholic deputies following an agreement with the liberal followers of Giolitti. Further rapprochement with the liberals came in 1913 thanks to stipulation of the 'Gentiloni pact'. Finally, in 1919, Pope Benedict XV officially abolished the *non expedit* thus allowing don Luigi Sturzo to set up the Italian People's Party.

From 1946[7] a new geographical division began to emerge, a division which, with certain differences, still influences the electoral behaviour of Italians. This is the division between the 'white' regions and the 'red' regions. This division, based essentially on ideology and alternative world

views, permanently structures the vote in certain parts of the country: support for the parties of the left – the Communist Party and the Socialists – was to come especially from the regions of the Centre, while support for the Christian Democrats was to come mainly from the regions of the North (even though the party also enjoyed widespread support in the South).

Finally, this division has always existed alongside another territorial contrast in Italy, one that distinguishes the behaviour of voters in the North as compared to those in the South where there has always been a greater tendency for support to be based on clientelism.

The divisions just described thus lead to the conclusion that, despite its often deep contrasts, Italy has managed the preserve the unity it achieved with great effort 150 years ago – a unity whose preservation certainly requires an effort at least equal to that which brought it about in the first place but which does not place Italy in a situation that is any different to that of other countries.

In France, for example, there are as many divisions, some of which can be considered similar to those of Italy, most noteworthy among these being the inflexibility of voting choices in some parts of the country such as Vendée, where support for the right has remained unchanged for many years. Brittany is a region whose unusual features pose more than a few problems concerning its 'harmonisation' with the other regions of France.

Germany too, though apparently so united, is divided by historical differences such as those stemming from religion. In this country, in fact, religious identity explains voting choice more than does any other variable: in the North where the majority of the population is protestant, the largest share of the vote has always gone to the liberals and the socialists; while in the South, where the majority is Catholic, the largest share of the vote goes to the Christian Democratic Union. It should also be noted that Germany has been forced to deal with such separatist attempts as those that emerged when Bavaria sought to break away at the time of German reunification in 1990.

As we have seen, then, problems relating to national unity seem to be present in other countries too and it is this that led Prof. Caciagli to argue for the inappropriateness of giving excessive emphasis to Italy's divisions – a tendency which fails to acknowledge that many of the contrasts, including those concerning voting behaviour, have always divided Italy during the course of its history and that the country has remained united despite this.

The second intervention was made by Prof. Ilvo Diamanti who took a different position to the one articulated by Prof. Caciagli, while also adopting a different temporal perspective by focussing on the period of the Italian Republic. The aspect he sought to emphasise from the start was the conviction that in the present historical conjuncture, important political changes are taking place – changes which have the capacity to transform

potential divisions always present in Italy, into actual divisions. Certain potential divisions seem somehow to have brought the emergence of new 'subcultures', distinctly more divisive than the ones we have known hitherto, these having been specific cultures compatible with the larger culture within which they were contained.

That said, the most significant novelty as compared to the past appears to be the heightened significance of the territorial context and the idea of locality. Today, for the first time, this seems to have become an explicit point of reference in representations to the outside world and in the identities of political parties. After the birth of the Republic, indeed, the role of the locality in politics had always remained implicit and unspoken: in aggregating and interpreting demands, parties clearly represented specific areas and local interests, but they did so tacitly, on the basis of the support they enjoyed in a determinate area. The Christian Democrats, for example, combined representation of the local interests of the districts of the North with the locally based patronage politics of a part of the South – this by means of factional mediation within the party, which went on without reference being made to territory in any explicit way. The same can be said of the Communist Party (and other parties of the left) which always attached great importance to its local roots having always had, partly out of necessity, a political vocation with a strongly municipal or regional focus. However, in this too, references to locality were not explicit and the local context was never used as a theme on which to base political campaigns: it was very difficult, in fact, ever to find slogans used by the Communists which directly referred to Tuscany or Emilia-Romagna, the 'red' regions in which this political force enjoyed its highest levels of support.

Today, by contrast, the locality has become for all intents and purposes an explicit point of reference, and given the decline of reference points relating to identity, history and tradition, it has become a basic theme around which to build political campaigns. The locality therefore seems to have become more significant than other bases on which political representation has hitherto been expressed and interpreted: more important than ideology; more important than international points of reference; more important than religion even. The real novelty as compared to the past thus lies in the development of the factor of 'place' and its use as a symbol, as the hallmark of given claims, as a flag to be unfurled in the political struggle.

A manifest example of this is the Northern League which, thanks to explicit references to place, has succeeded in uniting what could not before have been considered as a single entity: the North. By constantly referring to the 'people of Padania' and using the concept of 'Padania' symbolically, the League has succeeded in uniting the North-east with the North-west, the 'Third Italy' with urban Italy. And it has succeeded in representing the

North of the country, in a highly imaginative way, as if it were a single, homogeneous area.

From this point of view it is interesting to note that even the Mezzogiorno – an area where electoral behaviour has traditionally been more unstable and volatile – is witnessing the creation of models of representation explicitly based on place. The disintegration of the traditional political forces in fact has had a double effect: on the one hand it has led to the re-emergence of old forms of representation of a 'notabilistic' and 'localistic' kind; on the other hand, it has contributed to the emergence of certain explicitly new political symbols and identities. Clear examples are Raffaele Lombardo's movement for autonomy and Gianfranco Miccichè's Party of the South, two political forces which make explicit reference to place in their very titles. In this connection it is important to note that the success of these parties, as well as the possible emergence of further parties like them will to a large extent depend on the continuing hold on voters of the People of Freedom which, unlike Forza Italia, is a party whose centre of gravity is located in the South. The People of Freedom, then, supported as it is by a significant proportion of southern voters, will have to confront and marginalise these kinds of forces at a time that is rendered difficult by the fact that in order to respond to the explicit territorial demands of the North, it has often been tempted to act in the same way in this part of the country too.

The central regions in contrast are in a different situation: although political demands explicitly driven by place are not in evidence, it is well known that the votes cast for the Democratic Party come principally from the central regions. This places the Democratic Party in a rather difficult position: having to defend itself from the parties of the North and the South – but also from the institutions of the centre, which are currently in the hands of its main political adversary – it risks becoming what Marc Lazar, at the end of the 1990s, had already referred to as the League of the Central Regions.

In a context like the one just described, the biggest problem has to do with the fact that politically, the difference between left and right today seems less significant than the place difference of North, Centre and South. This great novelty helps to reinforce the idea that place now defines not only differences between people, but something more. And even though they will probably not give rise to dramatic conflicts, what seems certain is that the demands of place will generate inevitable conflicts between the political parties. And this is especially likely given that in a situation of austerity and international economic crisis the bases for agreement between parties which make defence of their areas their political battle cries, cannot but be fragile.

In conclusion, then, it may be noted that a politics based on personality, of which Berlusconi is the archetypal representative, has been

joined by an explicitly local politics of place of which the League represents the perfect example. The other bases for political representation now seem un-influential and incapable of competing with these ones.

The third speaker was the President of CENSIS, Giuseppe De Rita, for whom understanding the present (as well as the immediate future) necessitates examining the social changes that have taken place in Italy over the past fifty years. From his point of view, the most significant political development of the period since the last twenty or thirty years of the First Republic has been the progressive 'molecularisation' of the social fabric. By that is meant the social phenomenon that De Rita also calls the 'cycle of individual subjectivity', which begins in 1962 with the conscientious objection of don Milani and has carried on to today notwithstanding clear signs that the trend is faltering. Let us explain, briefly, what is involved.

At the beginning of the 1960s it was already possible to discern the emergence of growing individualistic sentiments that would take firmer hold during the subsequent decade and which in this period would lead to important conquests, cultural as well as political: the victories in the referenda on divorce and abortion were conquests of precisely this kind in that they reflected an outlook which demanded that the individual should have a central place in the decisions that directly affected him or her, and which refused to accept that such decisions could be taken by others much less taken against his or her will.

In essence, what took root was what can be defined as an 'everything-is-mine' culture, based on demands for the freedom to make decisions according to one's own conscience (as in the case of conscientious objection); for control of one's own body (as in the case of abortion), and for freedom of decision-making in the area of the family (as in the case of divorce), one's children and one's employment. The series of changes are therefore ones that only need the legalisation of euthanasia in order to be made complete; for at that point, the individual would also be the master of decisions about his or her own life and death. These are all changes in the absence of which it would not be possible to understand the success at that time of the Radical Party, which made ideas founded on subjectivism and individualism the fundamental bases of its political campaigning.

What is most interesting, however, is that the cycle of subjectivity was not merely a socio-cultural and political phenomenon but one which also significantly affected the economy, often with positive consequences. In this connection it is enough to note that in 1971 there were about 490,000 industrial enterprises in Italy while only ten years later there were about a million. In only ten years, therefore, thanks to this subjective desire to set up on one's own, to work for oneself and to engage in small enterprise, it proved possible to double the 'stock' that it had taken the previous one hundred years to build up.

However, all this also brought about the 'molecularisation' and the de-structuring of the entire economic and commercial system. From the 1970s, in fact, the analyses of CENSIS revealed that the classic industrial districts and sub-systems were becoming increasingly fragmented, until a situation like that of the North-east currently was reached where there are a multitude of small enterprises no longer enjoying any obvious local cohesion. Not even the representative institutions have been left untouched by the process of 'molecularisation': the life of associations of the self-employed, of shop-keepers and of industrialists seems to have been dominated in recent years by the battles of their individual presidents rather than by a sense of solidarity of the kind needed to protect the interests of their members.

In order to understand the political developments of the present, it is therefore necessary to take account of all the implications of this fifty-year process of change. It is a process which, because of the significant atomising dimension to it, precludes thinking in terms of macro-regions like the North, the Centre and the South. But the most important consequence of the 'cycle of subjectivity' has been the emergence of a tendency for power to be managed in an increasingly top-down, vertical and personalised manner.

As early as the 1980s the view took hold that this 'molecularisation' of society required, as a response to it, a move towards a command structure shaped like a pyramid, one capable of promoting governance of a more decisive kind than had been the norm to that point. This idea, which had initially been taken forward by certain high-profile Socialist spokespersons, was inspired by a reading of American society – considered as a model of the way in which a very high degree of atomisation and individualism could be efficiently managed by centralising power in the hands of a single individual, namely, the President.[8]

Bettino Craxi, in fact, in the years immediately preceding his appointment as Prime Minister, emphasised precisely this point.[9] He was convinced that Italy's political system was excessively segmented and that it was essential to reaffirm the value of decisiveness precisely in order to keep at bay the possible onset of a process of atomising decomposition. In order to achieve this it was necessary that power be managed in a personalised, top-down, manner, supported by mass-media organisations capable of underpinning such an approach. Bettino Craxi was unsuccessful in this enterprise, however, precisely because he was unable to count on sufficient support in terms of means of communication. In spite of this, Craxi's conviction seemed to have become rooted in the outlooks of a majority of ordinary Italians who, in terms of their behaviour, appeared to exert pressure for change in this direction.

The success of Silvio Berlusconi must be interpreted against this background, that is, as an indicator of his ability to take over and exploit an

idea that was already present in Italian society a long time before be 'took to the field'. Obviously Berlusconi, unlike Craxi, could count on the support of the media, but the most interesting aspect of the Berlusconi phenomenon is that he brought to political competition a new ingredient, one with the power to accentuate the process of personalisation even more, namely, confrontation with his adversaries. Without taking account of this element it is difficult to understand the political strategy of the current prime minister. In fact, since 1994 and his first duel with Achille Occhetto, he has always sought direct confrontation with his adversaries because the first requirement of one who manages power in a personalised way is precisely that political tensions be kept at a high level. Without confrontation, it is unlikely that Berlusconi would have been as successful as he has been.

In essence, therefore, the political period dominated by Berlusconi has been part of a longer-lasting period of social change (based on the culture of 'subjectivity', the 'everything-is-mine' culture) which, as we have seen, emerged long before he appeared on the scene – a period of heightened salience of individual subjectivity and atomisation which, having lasted for half a century, now seems destined to come to an end. And its decline will inevitably have consequences for 'Berlusconism', the end of whose dominance will probably coincide with the end of the fifty-year period of subjectivity. The overlap will certainly not be perfect because the period of social change antedated the corresponding political era and so will outlast even the disappearance of Berlusconi; but nevertheless, Italian society seems headed in a direction that will take it beyond the individual values that sustained him.

Today, the single individual seems to have grown tired of always having to make decisions in solitude according to his or her own conscience, the more so in a globalised world as complex as the world is currently. Individualism, therefore, seems to have become more conducive to depression than to empowerment. Signs of this might be the rediscovery of activities of 'community welfare' or the increasingly felt need to be assisted, as manifested by the large numbers of domestic care workers employed to help the elderly.

The economy too seems to be characterised by a reversal of the earlier process of atomisation: representative bodies and professional associations are being driven more forcefully in the direction of unity than of division. The Italian Enterprise Network (Rete Imprese Italia), which brings together the five largest confederations of small enterprises, is the clearest example of this tendency, though not the only one: the tendency towards re-aggregation is also affecting the three large confederations of the cooperatives, the bodies representing banking and insurance, the professional associations (of surveyors, engineers, agriculturalists and so on).

Most important politically, however, will be to see to what extent the end of the period of subjectivity has electoral consequences. The only current indication of this is the small size of the support currently going to the Radicals, a political force that had made subjective individualism its own great battle cry. And the reason for this limited support can perhaps be traced precisely to a degree of weariness in connection with those values. Moreover it will be important from this point of view to see the reaction to this decline on the part of those who responded to atomisation by personalising the management of power.

Finally, it remains to be seen, as the period of individual subjectivity draws to a close, what new mechanism of aggregation will mark the coming years. It will probably be an anthropological mechanism of aggregation whose study and interpretation will be crucial for an understanding of the new changes that will come about in society. The future will therefore be better understood by taking into account the problematic behaviour of certain young people or other deviant individuals than by analysing the processes of decomposition and atomisation considered thus far.

The next intervention was that of Prof. Enzo Rullani of Venice International University. His talk, which was especially focused on the factors underlying nations' unity, began precisely with the preliminary distinction between nation and territory, in his view two very different things. In fact, in past epochs territory for long represented a natural factor of cohesion through which people were able to establish a sense of community among themselves. It was a natural cement, which established local communities as areas in which their inhabitants lived with relatives, neighbours and friends in a single location around which the economy too was centred (given the impossibility of changes of place).

The nation on the other hand, though from a geographical perspective seeming to be merely a larger territory, is something very different. It is an artificial construction within which most individuals are not known to many others. In fact its construction is not a response to individuals' needs to stay together (characteristic of the local community) but rather it is a response to the requirements of the use of force and the monopoly on the use of the latter. Consequently, national sentiments are stronger in the states that have had empires or that have had important military and therefore political roles. This feeling of unity, then, derives from an artificial construction which in has been weak in Italy precisely because the country has not been a major protagonist in the military field. The only exception concerns the *Risorgimento* which, besides bringing about the construction of unity on the basis of shared values, was able to produce national sentiments because among other things, Italy was for the first time capable of playing a role which was indeed political and military.

In any case, precisely because the nation rests on foundations that are not natural, in order to bring it to life it is important continuously to give it a role and a function in which people believe and with which they can identify. It does not live by itself but only thanks to a capacity continuously to revive the reasons for its existence which if possible must from time to time be new and linked to the future. The prospects for the future of Italian unity too, then, will be a function of the capacity to create identities that are not addressed to the past but which sustain an ability to look forward.

It is precisely for these reasons, in fact, that the functions of the nation state have undergone progressive modification in the course of history. Taking into consideration the 'Fordist' period (from 1900 to 1970),[10] we can see that during the course of about seventy years, the state's specific function changed: without its original military *raison d'être* being completely abandoned, its existence was principally justified in terms of welfare and its capacity to aggregate the interests of national capitalism. Once an instrument for military exploits, it now became an instrument for the delivery of welfare and for bringing uniformity to the entrepreneurial interests of each state.

These justifications however, were able to sustain sentiments of unity and identification only until the end of the 'Fordist' era; and precisely from the beginning of the 1970s, in fact, the functions began to show evident signs of exhaustion. In Italy, for example, it was precisely then that the heyday of the industrial districts began, with the growing significance of place and of all that atomised subjectivity spoken of in the preceding talk by Dr De Rita.

The change in the country's economic structure thus necessitated new points of reference with the potential to recreate the cohesion that had lost its force. And in this period – in which new individual subjectivities, both socio-cultural and economic, emerged – place came to be recognised as the factor of cohesion and from then on acquired the greatest significance. The period is one which, however, comes to an end in its turn round about the start of the new millennium with the progressive expansion of economic globalisation.

In the global economic context, in fact, the role of nation-states changes too. Their internal legitimisation requires that they pose as the defenders and representatives of national capitalism which, for obvious reasons, finds itself having to compete with the economic consortia of other countries. This role has to be performed in a positive way, however, giving an impression within the nation state of the existence of opportunities for growth through the progressive acquisition of market shares. Acting in this way the state is able to acquire legitimacy among its own citizens and thus to create a new justification for its existence. In contrast, those states that are unsuccessful in fulfilling this role (and they include the Italian state) are destined to be reduced to mere territorial entities, seen this time, however,

as fortresses to be defended against the threats of globalisation – seen, that is, from a perspective different from the one that characterised the beginning of the 1970s.

There has thus been a return to territory in a negative sense – not, that is, as the result of the development of a new function but on the contrary as the result of the state's faltering capacity to perform the earlier one. And though citizens may find convincing this tendency to take refuge in the territory, it has proved totally inadequate from the point of view of meeting the complex challenges of modernity which, as mentioned, are global. The people that live in defined locations and above all the enterprises that operate in those contexts have become used to thinking in terms that are not local, but rather supranational.

Consequently, the only possible means of successfully keeping alive territorial attachments is by evoking them through the construction of what we can call 'communities of sentiment' and 'driving ideas'. By the former we mean communities of individuals who, even though they may live far apart, are able, thanks to the new technologies, to share the same ideas and to attach to them the same meanings. In today's economies, communities of sentiment have a very important role precisely because more than half the value of most products is a function not of the physical contribution made to their manufacture, but of the meaning these products acquire. The fashion industry, for example, is today based on communities of sentiment. By the concept of 'driving ideas' on the other hand, we mean those ideas through which it is possible to create general assets including those of an economic kind. An example is the slow food movement, which is both a 'community of sentiment' and a 'driving idea' precisely because it has been able to create business opportunities around the leading idea of healthy eating.

If, therefore, appeals centred on territory are able to overcome their own barriers and to facilitate the building of trans-territorial networks and communities of sentiment able to advance and evoke the claims of territory at the international level as well, then they will have the potential to be successful. Otherwise, if they are interpreted only as attempts to construct territorial identities as ends in themselves, they will prove unable to meet the complex challenges of modernity. And equally, a political force seeking long-term success (and whose action is not therefore driven merely by short-term support) cannot but take note that to focus its activity on defence of the territory will prove insufficient – especially with regard to those who vote for it as they will be ever increasingly driven, as mentioned, by interests that are not local in nature.

The concluding intervention was that of Prof. Carlo Trigilia, who made an interesting comparison between the Italian and the Canadian political systems with a view to highlighting certain important aspects of and changes to Italy's party system. The main question he posed was

whether the politics of Italy was becoming more like that of Canada. Responding to this question will in fact help us to reflect on a further and important aspect of the divisions running through Italy. As also emphasised by Prof Caciagli in his intervention, Italians have been divided throughout their history, but the point on which we need to focus today is whether a period of transition has begun, one in which even the ways in which people are divided are different.

Prof. Trigilia took the Canadian system as an example because there political outlooks are based (and the tendency seems to be an increasing one) prevalently on attachments to place, and this is true both of Quebec where such outlooks are more marked and explicit, and of the western provinces. For our purposes, what interests us particularly, especially with a view to comparison with the Italian case, is that the tendency has come about also through the activities of parties that do not explicitly present themselves as parties of territorial defence.

An example of this is given by Canada's Conservative Party which, despite being for all intents and purposes, a national-level party, has an electoral base essentially located in the western provinces. It is therefore a party without a territorial focus formally speaking but which in fact mainly represents the areas where it has its highest levels of electoral support. And it represents them, we may note, by taking positions that explicitly favour these areas, in clearly stated contrast with the parties that represent the interests of the eastern provinces of Quebec and Ontario.

Thanks to the strong pressures brought to bear by these kinds of party, there appears to be a drive in Canada to recast the federal system in such a way as to reduce the role of the central state to an ever increasing extent, favouring the provinces, and reducing the centre (understood as the state) to the status of a clearing house for reconciling the claims of those who pay and those who receive. The situation is therefore one in which federalising drives are very strong and which in theory could undermine the very unity of the state. However, what we wish to emphasise is that, on the contrary, notwithstanding these drives, national unity does not appear to be threatened and this may already be an initial encouraging sign as far as Italy is concerned.

Going back to the Canadian system, we may note that with the passage of time there seems to have emerged a type of political system, as the political scientist C.B. Macpherson had already predicted in the 1950s in his *Democracy in Alberta* (1953), in which the actors are essentially parties of territorial defence. And in effect it is precisely this that has taken place in Canada. Its political system is therefore one with a preponderance of parties of territorial defence, some of which seek to represent territorial demands explicitly (as, for example, does the Parti Québécois in Quebec), while others press territorial claims to an equal extent despite being

formally identified as national parties (an example, as we have seen, being the Conservative Party).

One wonders, therefore, whether Italy too will have these characteristics at some stage in the future. What can be said immediately is that in Italy the claims of territory have acquired heightened significance, a feature that in recent years has been accentuated by two factors: the political campaigning of the Northern League and the more recent approval of fiscal federalism, which will drive the political actors to identify even more strongly with their territories of reference.

Moreover, it is important not to underestimate the significance of the fact that Italy's economic structure is marked by major territorial differences in terms of types of economic activity. This too has helped to drive political actors to give increasing emphasis to local concerns. The presence of industrial districts and the deep-rootedness in them of small enterprises has certainly played a significant part in this process. Certainly, as previously emphasised by Prof. Rullani in his intervention, gloablisation is now posing new challenges, and the economic landscape is progressively changing. However, this does not diminish the importance of the foregoing points.

Italian political actors thus seem also to be driven to give greater significance to the claims of territory and it is in part already possible to find important similarities with Canada especially with regard to the North, where the League is offering to give explicit representation to the local communities that are its points of reference. However, to see whether there will be a real convergence with the politics of Canada it is necessary to consider two further aspects, ones which concern the other two areas of Italy: the central and the southern regions. On the basis of what happens in these two macro-areas it will be possible to see whether, in the near future, Italy's party system is likely to become more or less like Canada's.

As far as the central regions are concerned, the essential question concerns the future development of the Democratic Party which, as is well known, has its support mainly concentrated in this part of the country. If in the future it gains strength by winning more support in the other macro-areas, the North and the South, then Italy cannot but grow further away from the Canadian situation. If on the other hand, it grows weaker and is left with supporters mainly resident in the central regions, then the situation will be very similar to that of Canada's Conservative Party, which is a national-level party but which represents the interests of specific regions.

The situation of the South on the other hand is more problematic in that there has almost never been here a sense of political identity that goes beyond identification with one's own personal interests or with family or small-group interests. And this, obviously, cannot but be an obstacle in the way of the emergence and growth of territorially based parties. Despite this

it is important to keep in mind that, precisely in reaction to the League's demands there are nevertheless emerging in this area such explicitly territorial organisations as the Party of the South led by Gianfranco Miccichè and the political forces led by the president of the Sicilian regional council, Raffaele Lombardo. It should also be noted that, as Prof. Diamanti mentioned, the People of Freedom has by now become a party whose centre of gravity, electorally, is heavily skewed towards the south of the country. If therefore this centre of gravity should shift even further, or if the aforementioned political forces should make significant electoral gains, then the direction of movement would be towards a much greater similarity with Canada; otherwise, Italy will remain very different, at least as far as this macro-area is concerned.

To conclude, we may note that aside from the possibility of growing similarity between Italy and Canada, issues of place nevertheless seem to be playing a major role in structuring political competition in the advanced countries. In fact, unlike what happened in the 'Fordist' era, today the territorial axis seems to be more important than the functional one, both with regard to the creation of political identities and with regard to the structuring of party systems.

*Translated by James L. Newell*

# **Notes**

[1] The electoral law no. 4513 of 17 December 1860, which extended the provisions of the Statuto Albertino to the annexed states, was based on a single-member plurality system with a run-off ballot.

[2] The Kingdom was officially proclaimed on 27 March of the same year.

[3] The precise number of electors was 420.580.

[4] Law no. 999 of 24 September 1882.

[5] This was brought about with the passage of law no. 666 of 20 June 1912. The first elections to take place in accordance with this law were those of 26 October 1913. It should be noted, finally, that there remained certain slight restrictions on the franchise, restrictions that were finally removed with the passage of law no. 986 of 16 December 1918.

[6] The areas in which Catholic opposition was especially strong (areas that would later play a part in the emergence of the so-called 'white' regions) were the Veneto region in particular and certain cities such as Lucca, Cuneo and Sondrio. Significant Catholic stirrings also made themselves felt in Caltagirone, a small southern area where the founder of the Italian People's Party, don Luigi Sturzo, was born.

[7] Even though certain signs of it were already apparent round about 1919-1920.

[8] In this connection it should be noted that the American political system is marked by an absence of strong ideological contrasts and strong trade unions and, equally, by the absence of strong associations of industrialists.

[9] Bettino Craxi was appointed Prime Minister on 4 August 1983.

[10] The 'Fordist' period in Italy began about twenty years late.

# References

McPherson, C.B. (1953), *Democracy in Alberta: Social Credit and the Party System*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.