

The Italian Particracy: Beyond President and Parliament

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Comparisons between presidential and parliamentary systems are a baffling topic for political science, both in method and substance. Substantial results are scanty, in spite of recurring systematic attempts to chart differences on various grounds. Disappointment, yet, is even greater if one considers the method being commonly used, which is legalistic in its basic premises. Again, in looking at the higher echelons of the governmental process, political science takes too much notice of its formalistic antecedents.

This is not to say that presidentialism and parliamentarism should be considered as empty shells. Several useful analytical distinctions can be made and a few, albeit tentative, conclusions have been drawn.¹ Yet, they all share one major limitation: in spite of tremendous changes brought about by the rise of democratic government over the last fifty years, the distinction between presidential and parliamentary systems

¹ Juan J. Linz and A. Valenzuela, "Presidential or Parliamentary: Does It Make a Difference?" in Linz and Valenzuela, eds., *The Failure of Presidential Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), vol. 1, 3-87; Matthew S. Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Kent R. Weaver and Bert A. Rockman, eds., *Do Institutions Matter? Comparing Government Capabilities in the U.S. and Abroad* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1993); Thomas A. Baylis, *Governing by Committee: Collegial Leadership in Advanced Societies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); G. Bingham Powell, *Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability, and Violence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

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remains firmly grounded in the nineteenth-century constitutional tradition. Legal formalism is aggravated by an historicist bias.

Both presidentialism and parliamentarism reflect a stage in political development when the organization and the legitimation of government concerned a restricted number of people. This made the rules of the game simpler and to a large extent more predictable. The form of government as laid down in the constitution could be expected to bear close resemblance to the actual governmental process. Constitutional principles concerning the organization of powers were not abstract norms but real working procedures for the very reason that they could be much more easily enforced; or, if you prefer, it was a good deal harder to violate them. In the age of mass politics, the relationship between the constitution — be it presidential or parliamentary — and its working has become much more controversial.

Mass politics has brought new actors into the governmental arena, with their own specific connection to the process of legitimation and executive organization. Yet an old name — parties — has been used to designate these new actors and this has created some confusion at least on constitutional grounds, where parties have continued to be perceived as a divisive force in respect of the governmental unity that the constitution had to preserve. Thus, while the novelty and relevance of parties have been widely accepted by modern political science, to the point of considering government by parties as an equivalent for democratic government, the role of parties has barely entered constitutional theory, let alone written constitutions, where they have found at best a very marginal place.² How then can political scientists deal with the influence of parties upon the whole governmental process if one accepts as the criterion for classifying political regimes the orthodox constitutional law distinction between parliamentarism and presidentialism?

For all these reasons, I feel compelled to move somewhat beyond strict allegiance to the conference's title. In analyzing the first Italian Republic, I shall disregard the conventional classification of Italy as a parliamentary regime and introduce a third type of governmental system that in my view can best account for the main achievements and shortcomings of the post-World War II period. The name of the third type is one that has appeared in thousands of newspaper headlines and myriad public debates. Italy is neither a presidential nor a parlia-

² Vernon Bogdanor, ed., *Constitutions in Democratic Politics* (Aldershot, England: Gower, 1988).

mentary regime: Italy is a partocracy, a term that, much as it might appear self-evident, calls for some specification.³

Indeed, while the use of the term is so widespread to make it an obligatory choice, its meaning remains very approximate. Literally, partocracy stands for government by party, that is "a form of government in which the political parties are the primary basis of rule. Thus, if democracy refers to a form of government in which the 'people' rule, and aristocracy refers to a form of government in which governing power resides in an upper class, then party government should be called partocracy. In brief, party government is a form of government in which one or more parties hold a monopoly of access to government personnel, government resources, and government policies."⁴ Does this mean that we can then use partocracy and party government as equivalent terms in political science as well?

The answer is no, for the simple reason that the doctrine of party government is a mere evolutionary step within the parliamentary tradition. If partocracy has to be conceived of as a form of government in its own right, we cannot just rely on a conceptual framework where party government is little more than perfected parliamentary government. Over a century after Walter Bagehot's seminal definition, party government's rationale is still that legislatures, by means of cohesive parties, are able to exercise their governmental functions in an orderly manner. The role of parties remains the limited, albeit crucial one of eventually transforming parliamentary government from an oxymoron into a working institutional setting. Indeed, in the British tradition, party government and parliamentary government are considered synonyms. Does anyone dare to apply to Westminster the stigma of partocracy?

This points to a second specification as to the use of partocracy in this article. In common parlance, partocracy has a strong derogatory connotation, in a vein quite similar to that which in the past portrayed democracy as the government by the *demos*. Partocracy thus implies that parties are bad governmental actors. In laying out my definition of partocracy as a form of government, I'll do my best to stay off

³ The natural translation for the Italian neologism, *partitocrazia*, would be partitocracy. Both Percy Allum and Joseph LaPalombara objected to this form of ethnocentrism and proposed partyocracy. Giovanni Sartori noted that it sounded right but wasn't right. I eventually agreed on his purist proposal: partocracy. Readers are welcome to propose their own variants.

⁴ Theodore J. Lowi. "Governo di partito e regime presidenziale" in Mauro Calise, ed., *Come cambiano i partiti* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992).

what I consider improper grounds. Not that prescriptive considerations should be avoided: just as presidentialism is often condemned for fear of the concentration of executive power in the hands of one individual and parliamentarism can be dismissed for fear it turns into assembly government, particracy, as we shall see, has its own pitfalls. These should not however be confused with the antiparty feeling on which most biased definitions of particracy are based.

Last but not least, in making a case for particracy I am not just making the Italian case. Italy may well stand out as an ideal type for particracy, but only in the sense that the United States and Great Britain remain unmatched precedents for presidential and parliamentary governments. After all, most comparative models are "single country extrapolations."⁵ My intent here is to present a more general argument that, while suited to the Italian republic, should also allow for a broader insight into the relationship between particracy and presidential or parliamentary government.

PARTICRACY DEFINED

Particracy is a form of government where a party holds monopolistic control over the governmental process, just as presidents and parliaments are supposed to do within their own regimes. How governmental control is gained and exercised are then the questions that need to be addressed. In answering these questions, I'll abide by some of the main criteria commonly used in classifying presidential and parliamentary governments.⁶ This will allow a closer analysis of both departures and commonalties. However, I shall also introduce new criteria that are seldom considered in orthodox constitutional law and yet appear to be crucial when describing particracy. As one would expect, parties brought some new wine to their government.

One first distinction between presidentialism and parliamentarism relates to the means of popular legitimation of the chief executive officer, which is by direct election in the case of the president and indirect election through the legislature in the case of the parliamentary cabinet. Distinction between direct and indirect election is important,

⁵ Hans Daalder, "The Comparative Study of European Parties and Party Systems: An Overview" in Hans Daalder and Peter Mair, eds., *Western European Party Systems: Continuity and Change* (London: Sage, 1983).

⁶ Aarendt Lijphart, ed., *Parliamentary versus Presidential Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

because it pertains to a classic dichotomy of democratic theory and also has some relevant implications in view of the plebiscitarian tendencies of electoral politics in the era of mass communications. How does participatory fare in this respect?

In a participatory regime, selection of the head of government is to a large extent an extra-electoral affair. While electoral competition remains crucial to qualify participatory on democratic grounds, it does not necessarily bear a close incidence – either direct or indirect – upon the choice of the chief executive. The head of government is selected through intraparty procedures that reflect intraparty organizational concerns. Thus, the person who eventually leads the government may well be, electorally speaking, the most popular one in the country. In the actual governmental process, party designation makes that person no more than a high ranking politician in a party hierarchy where the secretary occupies the top position.

Yet, direct or indirect election of the head of government is in the case of presidential and parliamentary regimes not just a matter of selection procedures but also one of popular legitimation. Indeed, by making the selection process coincident with the ballot, both regimes acquire popular legitimacy at the very and only time when they acquire electoral votes. How does a participatory government acquire its own legitimacy if the electoral channel only offers limited indications? The answer is through party channels. It is the party organization that reaches out into society and conveys to the governmental officers the main inputs for their action. Extra-electoral legitimation for the participatory government works in two respects: it concerns the selection procedures, which do not coincide with the ballot; and it also regards the timing of the relationship between the government and its electorate, which is not a winner-take-all event but a continuous party-mediated interaction.

A second basic distinction between presidentialism and parliamentarism concerns the relationship between the executive and the legislative branches. Indeed, direct popular election of the president is all the more important, because it is for a fixed term and there is no way that a legislature under normal circumstances can force a president to resign. With parliamentarism, the head of government is responsible to the legislature that elects him and can be dismissed by a vote of no confidence. There is one major implication arising out of this distinction: executive stability, which is a postulate in presidential regimes, is a much more uncertain achievement in the case of parliamentary

government. Yet stability has its own reverse side in the fact that it may entail rigidity: a president secure in his office might be less willing to cooperate with the legislative branch. This is all the more likely if one considers that in presidential regimes, separate election—and legitimation—is a strong incentive for presidents and parliaments to become two separate branches, or to remain what they were supposed to be according to eighteenth-century constitutional theory.

Particracy has its own solution to the problem of engendering stability without rigidity and institutional deadlock: fusion of powers. In a particratic regime, both the legislative and the executive branch are dependent on party organization for their electoral support, as well as for recruitment of the political class. This means that the people sitting in both governmental branches are party people in the first place, and legislative or executive officers only as a result of their party's choice. Party is, therefore, the place where the fusion of legislative and executive power takes place. Of course, stability will only result from the fusion of powers process if the party is stable in its power—that is, if on both electoral and organizational grounds it is able to transfer to the governmental branches a firm political direction.

I am singling out the fusion of powers as a criterion for particracy, though I am perfectly aware that its practice is often indicated as a distinctive feature of parliamentarism. Indeed, this is the point where the doctrine of parliamentary party government comes closest to particracy. Party cohesion can eventually transform a once loose and undisciplined assembly into an orderly majority with both the right and the capacity to master the executive branch. At this point, the formal institutional distinction between executive and legislative branches gives way to a political continuum. Why should the party in cabinet behave in a different manner from the party on the assembly benches?

While particratic fusion of powers can well find its parliamentary rationale, it also has a presidential version. Indeed, the only way to come to terms with institutional deadlock in presidential regimes is to have the same party's firm grip on both governmental branches. In this case, in spite of a formal institutional separation reinforced by different electoral channels, we find an informal network of party people and party routines bridging the gap between the executive and the legislative. Presidencies, too, can be particratic in regard to the fusion of powers criterion. While fusion of powers through parties is not specific to either presidential or parliamentary regimes, it only represents a viable solution if the party is strong enough to master

both institutions. We might conclude that presidentialism and parliamentarism both tend to verge on participatory when it comes to the relationship between the legislative and the executive branches.

Finally, a third widely used comparative criterion is the distinction between monocratic and collegial executives. Against presidential, one-person government stands the collective decision-making process of parliamentary cabinet government. Indeed, this distinction is much clearer if we look at the presidential side of the dichotomy, where the president enjoys indisputable leadership over a cabinet that he has appointed and that lacks electoral legitimacy. In the case of cabinet government, the degree of collegiality varies considerably according to the prerogatives and personality of the chief officer. Chancellor, prime minister, president of the council of ministers are all different definitions for different power positions from first above unequals to first among equals, which represent a continuum from more to less monocratic leadership within parliamentary government itself.⁷ On the whole, monocratic leadership appears a substantial feature of parliamentary government as well, although we do find here some place for collegiality that is lacking in presidential regimes.

Participatory, instead, is straight collegial leadership. Individual leadership, as well as individual responsibility, is seen as a threat to party cohesion. Indeed collective decision making within the cabinet also stems from the special relationship between the prime minister and his party, which is one of subordination. By downplaying any personal role within the cabinet, more room is left for behind-the-doors decision making with party influence becoming the determinant factor. The extreme case for participatory collegiality is when institutionalized summits are regularly held among party leaders and the cabinet's most prominent officers to decide governmental affairs.⁸ In this case, party authority and cabinet authority are merged into a new collective body, the true site of participatory decision-making.

After considering participatory in the light of the three most widely used criteria in the comparison between presidentialism and parliamentarism, I shall now move on to the innovative attributes of participatory as a form of government. This is not to say that they cannot be found in presidential and parliamentary regimes. As with most

⁷ Giovanni Sartori, "Neither Presidentialism nor Parliamentarism" in Linz and Valenzuela, eds., *The Failure*.

⁸ Annarita Crisciello, "In-and-out of Government Decision Making: The Majority Summits in Italy, 1970-1990," *West European Politics* 16 (1993).

attributes of the two older types that cut across each other's boundaries more often than classificatory logic would suggest, also partocratic specificities can hardly be considered prerogatives. However, scale and degree should be sufficient for a preliminary interpretation.

Partocracy is strongly associated with an unrestricted spoils system. Here I know I am not breaking new grounds, for this is indeed unanimously regarded as a distinguishing—if not distinguished—trait of partocratic regimes. Yet what is really new about the practice of the spoils system in the exercise of governmental authority? We all know how patronage has long characterized the state building process on both sides of the channel, and clientelism and nepotism are still today considered the inevitable compromise for any effective administrative establishment. The difference with the partocratic spoils system is that it is no minor spillover, but one of the major pillars of the whole governmental system. In fact, the spoils system can be considered the true rationale of a partocratic form of government, as it brings together the electorate, the party organization, and the executive branch in the name of democratic theory.

While in the past a partisan use (and misuse) of governmental resources would be considered a private interference into public affairs, a partocratic spoils system can be presented as a way—if not necessarily the best one—to make sure that the democratic game is respected: to the victors belong the spoils. Besides, democracy is in this case a substantial rather than a formal business. By means of an unrestricted spoils system, partocracy brings to the fore its own idea of a democratic state—one where the bureaucrats as well as the domain of state intervention must be as close as possible to the electorate. Andrew Jackson's doctrine of simplicity may sound a bit naive as a manifesto for partocracy's present achievements, yet its principles are still there: it is not just for the people but by the people in the first place that the spoils system is perpetrated.

We thus find another attribute of partocratic regimes that marks discontinuity with the past: the move from responsible to responsive government, "a government which is required to yield to demands."⁹ One should add: *any* kind of demands. Democratic party government contains little discriminating power when it comes to the imperative of satisfying growing popular demands. The spoils system that was

⁹ Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 22.

originally conceived as a premium for a handful of office-seekers can thus be transformed into a gigantic political machinery. The place of the Leviathan is occupied by a benign monster with no other aim than the welfare of its citizens, under the one and only condition that the citizens do actually know what their welfare looks like.

Indeed, the partocratic spoils system is unrestricted except by its own responsiveness. Responsibility is an exogenous issue, much as one might consider it absolutely necessary. There have been several attempts to combine both principles, the most noted being the “doctrine of responsible party government.”¹⁰ According to this doctrine, parties in power will behave responsibly because they fear the judgment of the electorate, which will punish irresponsible behavior. Yet, if the judgment of the electorate is a sound one in the first place, why worry about unresponsiveness? Indeed, the principle of responsibility presupposes a certain degree of political autonomy on the part of decision makers, which is at odds with the partocratic ideal that government responds to the people, at their best as well as at their worst.¹¹

One last attribute of partocracy needs at this point to be mentioned — illegality. I am not stating that partocracy is illegal by definition: it just has fewer incentives toward legally confined behaviors; even more, it is continuously urged to move beyond the legal threshold. Partly this is a consequence of some attributes indicated above. Take extra-electoral legitimacy, which subtracts political pressure from the limelight of electoral day and creates new channels for transforming private demands into public goods. Or take the fusion of powers between the legislative and the executive branches, which replaces the checks and balances of self-steering institutions with a decision-making continuum, where it becomes increasingly difficult to set limits on party power. Finally, consider the spoils system: not just a means for violating existing codes of behavior — a sin of all political regimes — but a rationale for making the democratic dream turn into its own nightmare.

However, I am not making here a prescriptive point. Much as one should consider legality an important resource, it remains one among many others. From a systemic perspective, legality is a moving boundary: it is vital for system maintenance only as long as it is not transformed into a fixed, self-referential barrier against political change. After all,

¹⁰ A. Ranney, *The Doctrine of Responsible Party Government* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962).

¹¹ A. H. Birch, *Representative and Responsible Government* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964).

one might be prone to view the special relationship between participatory and illegality as an outgrowth of the tremendous impact of mass politics on the constitutional heritage. Should we be surprised that the governmental incorporation of the masses by means of a participatory regime would imply some kind of imbalance between human desire and its constraints? It's time to move from classification to description and on to questions of evaluation.

PARTICIPACY, ITALIAN STYLE¹²

To what extent does Italian participatory fit the model I have just exposed? How do the attributes of the model relate to the most stringent questions on the welfare of democracy today? By looking at the guidelines for remarks we have been given by the conference's organizers, we get the uneasy feeling that this winter of discontent isn't just an Italian malaise. Dissatisfaction with one's own form of government is verging everywhere on common sense, as the same outcry can be heard over and over: shouldn't democracy be more democratic? Indeed, there is one main difference with the Italian first republic. While criticism of governmental performance of presidential and parliamentary regimes still is, in so many different countries, a concern for intellectual circles with a limited — albeit qualified — following in public opinion, the process with Italian participatory has gone a good deal further. Italy, we have been told these days, is in the middle of a revolution, which has allegedly already achieved its main purpose: the dissolution of the participatory regime. Maybe in the end we'll be left again with the good old choice to go either parliamentary or presidential. Yet, as my analysis in this paragraph needs to be confined to available data, I'll mostly deal with the past forty-five years, leaving speculations about the future to the concluding remarks.

¹² Along with a growing number of case studies, several recent books available in English offer a general introduction to and interpretation of Italian republican politics. See F. Spotts and T. Wieser, *Italy: A Difficult Democracy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1986); David Hine, *Governing Italy? The Politics of Bargained Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); Joseph LaPalombara, *Democracy, Italian Style* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) bears a strong influence on the argument of this paragraph. The most up to date introduction to the Italian studies on the different aspects of the Italian political system is Leonardo Morlino, ed., *Scienza Politica: Guida agli studi* (Torino: Edizioni della Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1989).

Let's start with extra-electoral legitimacy for the top executive post: who chooses the prime minister in the first Italian republic? The formal constitutional answer says that the president of the Republic designates a prime minister, who forms his own government that then goes to the Parliament for a vote of confidence. Reality is indeed quite different: designation is a party affair. It is the party that picks the prime minister's name as well as the names of the ministers in his cabinet. The president of the Republic is little more than a spokesperson for a decision that is taken somewhere else. However, this doesn't mean that designation is a simple process. One first major complication of Italian partocracy is the fact that Italian governments have always been, with the partial exception of a few minority governments, coalition rather than one-party governments. Other than the result of an intra-party selection, the prime minister's designation is to a large extent the result of interparty bargaining. Without an unequivocal party mandate, the prime minister is thus forced to rely upon an unstable alliance among several parties. While the partocratic model would require a strong vertical relationship through the party organization between government and society to substitute for the absence of a direct electoral investiture, coalition governments create an autonomous horizontal dimension of political maneuvering that often becomes the true site of executive building.

We may then distinguish two phases in the process of selection and legitimation of Italian governments, depending on the strength of the major party on both organizational and coalitional grounds. All through the late 1970s, the Christian Democrats (DC) proved able to master their coalitions, with the exception of short-lived transition crises from one alliance to another. The party's relationship with its electorate remained stable both in numbers and identification. Moreover, while no direct electoral connection existed between the cabinet as a whole and the electorate, the number of personal preference votes was carefully used as a mean to assess individual ministers' popularity; and it bore a very strong relationship to their governmental careers.¹³ During the last decade things changed as a weaker DC had to face a much more aggressive socialist partner, once a less polarized party system offered the Italian Socialist party (PSI) a choice to switch alli-

¹³ Mauro Calise e Renato Mannheimer, *Governanti in Italia. Un trentennio repubblicano, 1946-1976* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1982).

ances toward the left. At last, in 1981, a non-Catholic president of the Council of the Ministers marked the end of the DC monopoly over the premiership: a relevant change on both cultural and political grounds, yet one that placed the task of governmental leadership on the tiny shoulders of a party amounting to less than 5 percent of the electorate and with hardly any organization at all. Departure from the previous pattern became all the more striking with Bettino Craxi's arrival at Palazzo Chigi, when a special emphasis was laid on the personal and direct relationship between the new premier and the electorate at the very time that whatever was left of the original Socialist party organization was being rapidly dismantled across the country.

Indeed, the rise of personal politics in an attempt to create a more direct relationship between the government and its electorate was also bound to strongly affect the participative tradition of collegial decision making. Perhaps no change of comparable magnitude has occurred in Italian politics in the 1980s. In place of what had been, all through the late 1970s, a highly disciplined and cohesive system of party responsibility, a new political style, if not yet a new political class, emphasized personal differences as well as individual choices. Whereas in the past, party congresses and party committee meetings had set the main guidelines for governmental activity, the political debate has recently become more and more personality centered. A few politicians now dominate both the party and the governmental scene, making for the first time executive leadership — if not responsibility — a more personal affair. Visibility has become the relevant issue in political communication, with Italy eventually joining the lonely crowd of videopolitics.¹⁴

One shouldn't, of course, exaggerate the degree to which collegiality characterized for the first thirty years the life of Italian participatory government. Party factions were very influential in dividing governmental action, and Italy may well have appeared in the end to have a fragmented government.¹⁵ Collectiveness, yet, need not be confused with unity. Indeed, the best resource for a monolithic decision still remains a monocratic executive. The rationale for collegial decision making is, on the contrary, that differences are there and will most likely persist. Yet, differences notwithstanding, an agreement can be reached, since

¹⁴ Giovanni Sartori, "Video-Power," *Government and Opposition* 24 (1989).

¹⁵ Maurizio Cotta, "Italy: A Fragmented Government" in Jean Blondel and Ferdinand Müller-Rommel, eds, *Cabinets in Western Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

the collegial body will subsume full responsibility thus allowing particularistic discrepancies to persist as long as they do not challenge the sovereignty of the collective authority. The Christian Democrats' hold over the republican government remained based on the fact that in spite of fierce factional competition the party proved always to be able to restore collective control. Splitting the party, to the left as well as to the right, remained the impossible dream for all the opponents of Italian partocracy until the advent of highly individualistic and mostly electoral politics.

This brings us to the third discriminating criterion among governmental regimes — the relationship between the executive and the legislative branches. We have seen that partocracy means fusion of powers, and yet this is a feature that can be extensively found in both presidential and parliamentary regimes whenever some form of political continuity is established to cope with the institutional gap. Indeed, with the arrival of democratic politics, the separation of powers has lost its functional rationale: there is no need for dividing institutions once difference of opinions is allowed. In this respect, there is no doubt that the American founding fathers took Montesquieu too seriously and too late. The same should be said about the tedious quarrel, so typical of the highly legalistic Italian public culture, about whether parliament was curtailing executive prerogatives or vice versa, while the truth simply was that party was curtailing both — and rightly so, at least on democratic grounds. The real problem with Italian partocracy never was having too strong a parliament or, if you prefer, too weak an executive. It was the absence of a true opposition, which turned the fusion of powers from a viable institutional arrangement into intolerable political monopoly.

Let's now turn to the second set of attributes, the more innovative if not necessarily exclusive attributes of partocracy: spoils system, responsiveness, and illegality. That the spoils system is the basic ingredient of Italian partocracy is so widely an accepted statement that one still finds no systematic, empirical analysis of the phenomenon. To what extent and in what respect the spoils system in Italy is a more widespread practice than, say, in the German *Parteienstaat* or in the British *quango* (quasi national government) administration is a question where there are several certainties but few numbers.¹⁶ I must then

¹⁶ Franco Cazzola, *L'amministrazione e i partiti in Italia* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1988); Angelo Panebianco, *L'amministrazione e i partiti nei paesi industriali avanzati* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1988).

take numbers for granted and concentrate on two qualitative aspects that seem to me to characterize the Italian spoils system: clientelism and the public economy.

By clientelism I am not just referring to the fact that governmental resources are assigned on the basis of a personal relationship: this is indeed a quite common feature of spoils systems in general. For Italy, clientelism means that privileges are granted regardless of social condition: indeed, they are mostly granted to people at the bottom of the social scale, rather than remaining within the restricted circle of the governmental elite. Social-minded clientelism, of course, does not exclude elite clientelism; yet, it does make the latter more legitimate in the eyes of the electorate. This is all the more true if the relationship between clientelistic government and the electorate can be expressly assessed through the vote, as has been the case with the multiple preference electoral system of the first Italian republic.

Clientelism thus becomes a major indicator of responsiveness, though not the only one. Responsiveness shouldn't be reduced to its particularistic aspects. Party responsiveness has also a lot to do with redistributive issues that affect large social groups. In the case of Italian participatory, the stereotype is one that links spoils system to individualistic clientelism; yet a more substantial share of the governmental spoils may have been given out in response to group pressures, if not class demands.¹⁷

One needs only look at the public sector of the economy, by far the most important on both financial and strategic grounds of all the governmental spoils. The irony of Italian participatory is that the socialization of the means of production — if we take this obsolete definition for the modern reality of state-owned industry — was a program of the left that the right turned into reality and the center was quick to manage. Thanks to Communist ideology, Fascist technocracy, and Christian Democratic pragmatism, the public sector of the economy became a catch-all mechanism for making the economic, as well as the political, government of the country responsive to a very large part of the electorate. However, that so few were left out of the game did not mean that the game was right.

Indeed the game was to a large extent illegal. This is an easy conclu-

¹⁷ Peter Lange and Marino Regini, eds., *Stato e regolazione sociale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1987).

sion to draw with so large a part of the Italian governmental elite today under investigation for fraud and corruption. Yet assessment of illegality becomes somewhat more elusive when top managers of major industrial corporations are involved: “the discovery that business corrupts politics”¹⁸ isn’t peculiar to the present state of Italian affairs. Legal contours become even more blurred in moving from the top to the bottom of the social structure: the way social security has been administered in the South or the way fiscal regulation has not been enforced in the North may well make several millions citizens the candidates for law-abiding jailing. In a political system, the charge of illegality is a tremendous weapon to use against one’s own enemy unless that enemy is the whole country.

However, a judicial crisis might easily acquire moral overtones and evolve into a political crisis whenever there is an economic breakdown to polarize attitudes and solutions. Indeed, 1992’s financial crisis has been interpreted and used by many as an indicator that the whole partitocratic regime of postwar republican Italy had gone bankrupt. Yet, only a few years ago Italy had at last gained a new international reputation for its economic achievements. Whether the country’s GNP was number five or six in the world, its rating was extraordinary compared to forty years earlier, when the country had come out of a lost war a bitterly divided and backward society. Deciding which perception is the right one is not a task to be undertaken here, even though the true state of the country’s economy might be expected to bear relevant effects on the political crisis. After all, we can always be confident that, as with most economic interpretations, new figures will soon be available. My assessment of partitocracy will then be confined to the ground that we have covered so far—the institutional ground.

THE LAST HURRAH?

A form of government can be classified and described, possibly on comparative grounds. Yet for it to undergo evaluation, we need to find its prescriptive bias, the reasons—both historical and moral—why a government works the way it does. After all, while governments are complex systems that need to be broken down into their separate

¹⁸ Richard L. McCormick, “The Discovery that Business Corrupts Politics: A Reappraisal of the Origins of Progressivism,” *American Historical Review* (1981).

parts for a full understanding of their functioning, one cannot forget that all regimes have a simple root in their names. Parliamentarism, presidentialism, participatory: shouldn't we mention what they are about in the first place?

The rationale for parliamentary government is the belief that there needs to be a compromise between the expression of the popular will and its political consequences. The compromise is representative democracy, and it is a viable compromise as long as it finds the right place to be worked out. That place, needless to say, is the parliament. In order for parliamentary government to be successful, at least two conditions need to be met: a strong belief in the virtues of representation and a strong institution where those virtues can be nurtured. As to which condition comes first, there is a widespread belief that representative democracy produces per se, sooner or later, a working legislative assembly. Personally, I am more prone to emphasize the role of historical legacy in the establishing of successful parliaments. This might help to explain why, in spite of so many attempts to import parliaments from Great Britain, the Westminster model has remained peculiar to English speaking countries.¹⁹ However, representation remains vital for the life of a parliament: which is not the case of presidential government.

Presidentialism goes as close as possible to the ideal of large-scale direct democracy. By establishing a personal link between the executive and the electorate, a presidential system of government creates the best conditions for representation to be confined to a marginal, if not residual, role. I am not thinking here of the original intentions of the American Founding Fathers; I am looking at present developments.²⁰

For presidentialism to come about, its working principle needed the right environment: no direct democracy could ever be fulfilled in the wilderness of postcolonial America, where government at its best could just be "at a distance and out of sight." Only with the advent of mass communication technology, large scale direct democracy—the utopia of eighteenth-century enlightenment—became a concrete alternative to the constraints of representation. Thanks to polling and television, each individual citizen could eventually see his own choice become governmentalized: the personal president was not just the appropria-

¹⁹ Arendt Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-one Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

²⁰ Richard Pious, *The American Presidency* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

tion of government by one man at the top.²¹ It also allowed for every man in the country to appropriate for himself the president.

Particracy cannot be qualified by representative versus direct democracy. To particracy this is a formal distinction that impinges very little on the real stakes of the political game. Particracy is based on the assumption that society is divided into hard to reconcile parts. Whether through direct or indirect channels, the party must achieve its goal: to put one part of society above the other. For particracy to be a working regime, divisions within society must be deep and polarized, and parties must be available to organize and institutionalize them.

In this respect, one might view particracy as a by-product of a stage of political development when party systems were closely dependent on the existence of societal cleavages. That few party systems ever gained constitutional status in the form of a particracy may thus be related to the fact that most cleavages withered away before they could reach the threshold of governmental incorporation. Yet, one should also remember that the route to particracy has never been a downhill promenade. There has been widespread and fierce resistance, often verging into outright opposition, to the idea of one part of society becoming government in its own right. The governmental incorporation of substantial divisions in society has remained for the democratic polity its most sacred premise that could yet much too easily be turned into its own demise.

In looking backward at Italian particracy, one acknowledgment should be made: it allowed the democratic game to be played with hardly any restraints, either formal or substantial, in spite of very deep social cleavages. Or, one might add with some irony, thanks to them. The fact that Italy has so long remained a frontier democracy is mostly related to the external challenge of Soviet-led communism being internalized through the Italian Communist party. Yet, in retrospect, we might view Italy as a frontier democracy in a wider and more general sense, as the Communist challenge pushed the whole governmental system to a degree of social responsiveness that can hardly be found elsewhere.

Of course, social responsiveness can become in the long run irresponsible. This is indeed one major criticism that is levied today against the Italian particratic democracy: in order to fight the communist

²¹ Theodore J. Lowi, *The Personal President: Power Invested, Promise Unfulfilled* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

threat, it conceded too much to too many. At any rate, now that the threat from communism is over, the time has come to bring the country back from responsive to responsible government. Is the country ready for the change?

Yes, if we look at the extraordinary majority that the movement for institutional reform gained at the April 1993 referenda. While the eight referenda concerned a wide variety of issues ranging from the abolition of three ministries to a more liberal law for drug consumers and from cutting down public funds for political parties to a new electoral law for the Senate, the political interpretation of both the battle and the result is unanimous: this was a plebiscitarian vote for a change of the political system. A large majority of the electorate had voted against partocracy and laid the door open to reform.

Reformers, according to their manifesto, had two basic goals and a main road to achieve them. The first goal was that the will of the people should prevail over professional politicians. There should exist no longer between citizens and their government a cadre of party nomenclature to rule in its own interest as opposed to that of the general public. The second goal of reform was the fixing of responsibility. Almost half a century of coalition government made it more and more difficult for the Italian voters to fix responsibility for successful or unsuccessful governmental policies. The main road to achieve both goals was a new electoral law, substituting a majoritarian system for the proportional representation regulating the national ballot.

With the April referenda, the main road has at last been entered by millions and millions of voters. Italy now has a majoritarian electoral law for the Senate, and a similar one is expected to follow shortly for the Chamber of Deputies. Does this mean that a responsible government will soon replace partocratic abuses? Indeed, strong doubts should be cast as to the proper relationship between the main road to reform and its outcome. While in describing the goals of reformers I have most carefully reproduced their own manifesto, for the wording I took the liberty of using this conference's guidelines for remarks, which are based on the American situation. In short, West and East of the Atlantic reform goals are just identical; yet in the case of the United States, a majoritarian system is already there! This leads us to two consequences, on logical as well as on empirical grounds.

First, as these are goals of reform common to different regimes, one should infer that neither presidentialism nor partocracy bears a specific relationship to uncertain fixing of responsibility and nomen-

stand for a social issue — as with other important referenda in the past, like the ones on divorce or abortion — but for a highly politicized battle. With an unprecedented numbness of theme, which the media helped a great deal to amplify, the referendum campaign was presented as a vote against partocracy. “Yes” had little to do with the complex and technical questions that the voter was facing on the ballot: “yes” meant to change the system, to get rid of partocracy. Italy, we must admit, has already gone through its first majoritarian electoral campaign. Let's then give it a closer look.

Two aspects of this campaign are most relevant to our discussion: this was a campaign with more media and less party mobilization than ever before in the history of the first Republic. The role of the media

forums on constitutional reform will look like once the issue should eventually become a matter of a political campaign, Italy offers a magnificent and horrifying precedent.

Yet I am not putting the blame on media. Media played their game, the one and only way they are apt to play it once they are left alone on the field: that is, whenever there is no other agency to inform and instruct people in a less simplistic and superficial way than media language and cognitive structure inevitably will do. So the question becomes: why were parties not out there, why were they not fighting their struggle for the survival of *particracy*, why did they give up the chance to speak out loud and clear their last hurrah?

As with all major problems, I have two conflicting explanations. The first is that parties didn't fight for survival because they were already dead. *Particracy* had long ceased to be the form of government of the Italian republic. With the once dreadful Leninist phalanx born anew into a progressive federation and with the all-embracing Catholic political machine reduced to a financial broker for self-interested elites, parties had indeed lost the rationale to be a governing actor. Since the Italian parties were no more political organizations encapsulating civil society, how could they afford to organize the government? Indeed, whatever was left of parties in the government had little to do with *particracy*: it was no more one part of society being governmentalized but a self-reproducing clique that would soon be terminated by a democratic upheaval.

The second explanation takes the first one for granted, except for its conclusion. As with most successful movies, it stars *Particracy Two* as a follow-up to the first republic. After all, were not all the parties unanimously arrayed on the right and winning side when the referendum proposed to change the system and create a new one? "Yes," said the former Communists along with the Christian Democrats; "yes" said the wrecking Socialist party and the brand new Northern League. True, parties may have lost their autonomous organizations to reach out into society, but after all are not the media a great invention to make political communication less tiring and more rewarding? *Particracy Two* might not be starring the good ol' guys, self-made grassroots parties proud of having climbed all the way to the top of the state. Old characters sure look more beautiful in their new dress as a media party.²³ *Particracy* is dead, long live *particracy*.

²³ Mauro Calise, *The Media Party: Recasting (and Broadcasting) the Italian Republic* (Madrid: ECPR, 1994).