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ITALY VS. THE UNITED STATES:
THE RISE AND FALL
OF SOCIALIST
PARTIES

BY

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ITALY

- PSI Italian Socialist Party (Partito socialista italiano). Name of the major Socialist Party of Italy 1892-1930 and 1947 to date (except for brief period in 1968).
- PS (SIIS) Socialist Party (Italian Section of the Socialist International) (Partito socialista [Sezione italiana dell'internazionale socialista]). Name of the exiled Socialist Party 1930-43.
- PSIUP Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (Partito socialista di unita proletaria) Name of the major Socialist Party after Liberation. Changed its name back to the PSI in 1945.
- PSDI Democratic Socialist Party (Partito socialista democratico italiano).
- DC Christian Democracy (Democrazia cristiana).
- PCI Communist Party (Partito comunista italiano)

UNITED STATES

- SP Socialist Party

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INTRODUCTION

The world-wide socialist movement is a strong and successful political force in the modern world. From the long-run historical point of view, it is a new movement which has risen from insignificance to worldwide influence in less than 150 years. But within this successful movement arises an exception: the United States. Elsewhere in Western civilizations, Socialist parties have retained their strength or become stronger; while the Socialist Party of the United States (SP) has deteriorated to nothing.

One such Western civilization where the Socialist party represents a successful political force is in Italy. Here the Socialist Party (PSI) has enjoyed a century as Italy's third, sometimes second, major political party (except during the country's fascist rule). Italy, as opposed to the other Western European countries, is most similar to the United States in being "geographically isolated" from external political influences. Also, this Western European country illustrates a Socialist Party, like that of the United States, which was more ideologically Marxist than other Western European parties during its early years. Thus, this thesis chose the Italian Socialist Party as the measure by which to analyze the reasons for a Socialist Party failure in the United States versus its victory in Italy. If both Socialist parties were founded on the same Marxist tenets and witnessed, in their histories, similar successes and upheavals, what were the factors dictating the rise of one and the fall of the other?

I. THE ITALIAN SOCIALIST PARTY

Unlike equivalent parties in the United Kingdom, West Germany, or Scandinavia, the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), is a great deal more "Marxist" than the SPD or the Labour Party at the level of ideology and party symbolism. This is due to the existence of the Communist Party (PCI) at the PSI's side in its early history. In general, the PSI has regarded the Communists as "misguided brethren", who share the same ideological purpose but who adopt mistaken and potentially dangerous means, rather than enemies which must be opposed.¹

The Socialist Party in Italy is based on actual membership and on a highly centralised structure. It has never matched the size or efficiency of the Communist Party² but by the mid-fifties it had re-established a national network of 500,000 predominantly working-class members, based in the North and the Red Belt regions of Italy. However, due to factionalization, the structure of the Party changed from one similar to the Communist Party (in working class character), to one of increasing resemblance to the Christian Democratic Party (i.e. social groups from the South: white collar groups, professional classes, small farmers, artisans and shop-keepers) by the late sixties.³

During the 1970's, the PSI had tried hard to rectify this image, and the reconciliation with the Communists formed part of an attempt to reassert traditional socialist values, in

particular, the class basis of the Party. The Party claimed to be going through a "process of self-examination in hopes to rediscover its vocation."⁴

The failure of the PSI to unite and to represent the radical and labor elements in Italian society has been a major negative factor in Italian politics of the twentieth century. This failure can be attributed primarily to the inability of the Socialists to agree whether to seek their ends by revolutionary or evolutionary means, or more precisely, whether to work within or against the system (the latter does not necessarily involve violence). As a consequence, the history of the Italian Socialist party has been that of continual expulsions, scissions, and reunifications.⁵

a.

This history dates back 100 years to the establishment of the revolutionary Paris Commune of 1871, which was supported by such members of the radical left as Giuseppe Garibaldi, Karl Marx, and Mikhail Bakunin, but dismissed by Giuseppe Mazzini, who was one of the Italian Socialist leaders most followed by those hopeful for social justice.⁶ When Mazzini died the following year, Bakunin took over the leadership among Italy's radical left, but this essentially traditional group did not agree with his violent words and deeds. In 1874, a general strike was crushed, and the moderates were able to

form a labor party (Partito operaio) in time to take part in the 1882 elections. This party, which disappeared a few years later, was replaced in 1892 by Italy's first Socialist party (Partito Socialista italiano, PSI). Its founder, Filippo Turati, like Mazzini, was more of an "evangelist" than a politician. He represented the extreme right of the labor movement in the sense that he distrusted violence and believed progress resulted from cooperation, compromise, and patient determination. His hatred of violence led him to take a pacifist stand in World War I, and his party was the major Socialist party in Europe to oppose the war consistently throughout its course.⁷

However, those advocating revolution caused the party many difficulties. In 1908, Arturo Labriola and his followers were expelled from the party for their revolutionary doctrines.⁸ Four years later, the right wing Socialists who supported Italy's colonial war against Turkey were in turn expelled, and the leader of this faction, Leonida Bissolati, then founded the Partito Socialista riformista (Reformed Socialist Party).⁹ One of those who advocated the expulsion of Bissolati was Benito Mussolini, who had himself just completed a prison term for acts of political violence. When the evolutionary Socialists (PSI) were again securely in power some left-wingers, including Mussolini, were expelled; others, such as the founders of the Communist party, in 1921, Antonio Gramsci, Palmiro Togliatti, and Amadeo Bardisa, left of their own

accord.¹⁰ During the elections of 1919, just after World War I, the Socialist Party received 2 million of the 5.5 million votes cast. However, by the mid-twenties, Mussolini began to rise to power.¹¹

When the Fascists came to power they were able to disband all the Marxist opposition groups from Italy (except the Communists, who remained and operated underground during the entire Fascist period).¹² In 1930, most of the Socialist factions except the Communists succeeded in reuniting in exile in France and in forming the PS (SIIS) Partito socialista [Sezione italiana dell' internazionale socialista] - Socialist Party [Italian Section of the Socialist International], which on reentering Italy after the Liberation became the PSIUP (Partito socialista italiano di unita proletaria - Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity) by fusing with Lelio Basso's Unita proletaria groups.¹³ The PSIUP changed its name back to the PSI in February.

b.

The PSI's postwar history has been one of a continuous search for a satisfactory relationship with the two major parties of the political system, which leaves it with a distinctive political identity of its own. As various alliances have been tried, so a particular wing of the party has broken away or more rarely, the conditions have been created for the

reconciliation and re-integration of a previously alienated group.¹⁴

Generally, the Socialist Party has experimented with three types of alliances. The first of these has been a leftward alliance with the Communist Party: a "socialist alternative" platform. Under the leadership of Nenni during the most "intense" years of the Cold War, from 1947 until the mid-1950's, such an alliance was pursued by the PSI (at a time when the French Socialist Party was extremely anti-Communist).¹⁵ It led to the breakaway of Giuseppe Saragat's Social Democrats - the PSDI - in 1947,¹⁶ and also to electoral defeat in the 1948 election.¹⁷ Much more recently the concept of the "socialist alternative" has again found a place in PSI thinking, but under very different conditions. With the Italian Left clearly on the rise, international circumstances less tense, and the Italian Communist Party (PCI) offering an entirely different public image, the PSI chose this "alternative" lobby as its official long-term policy aim at the March 1976 PSI Congress.¹⁸

The second type of alliance tried by the PSI has been in the opposite direction: an alliance towards the Centre with the Christian Democrats (DC) - the Centre-Left coalition. This policy, cautiously developed from 1955 onwards, (when the crisis in the international Communist movement provided the PSI with the justification it needed for breaking away from its former collaboration with the Communists)¹⁹ came to

fruition in 1963 with the entry of the PSI into Government with the DC. This alliance brought the merger of the PSI and the PSDI (Italian Social Democratic Party) in 1966, but this rupture of relations with the PCI led to the breakaway of the Socialist Party's left, which, in 1964, formed the PSIUP. Unfortunately, the Centre-Left coalition, in electoral terms, was not successful: in 1968, the combined PSI-PSDI vote was 5.4 percent down on the figure for the two parties running separately in 1963.²⁰

Disillusionment with such a performance led the Socialist Party, at the end of the 1960s, towards a third type of alliance strategy which can be referred to as 'consociational.'²¹ The PSI abandoned its hopes of creating a dominant Social Democratic movement which, by extending its appeal over a wider area of the Italian Left, would isolate the Communists. Instead, due to the increase in working-class unrest at the end of the decade, the PSI tried to re-establish its links with the PCI, while not actually rupturing those with the Christian Democrats. This approach resembled that of the "Grand Coalition" of the three major parties (PCI, PSI, and DC) which ruled Italy from the Liberation to 1947. It was based on "equilibri piu avanzati" ('more advanced balances'): the idea being that Communist support in parliament would push the Socialist/Christian Democratic coalition in a more advanced (i.e. more leftward) direction.²²

The first consequence, which has already been shown, of the PSI's change of strategy in the late 1960s was the alienation of the Social Democrat group, and, in 1969, the PSDI was re-established as a separate party. On the Left, there were few favorable gains; the reconciliation with the PCI failed to attract back to the Socialist Party those who, in 1964, had broken away to form the PSIUP. When the latter party finally broke up in 1972, the majority of its followers went to the PCI, and only a few returned to the Socialist Party.²³

As the June 1976 elections neared, the economic strength of the PCI put the Party in a powerful position: which in turn placed the PSI in a difficult position. If the Socialist Party pursued the "consociational" strategy, the logical conclusion was Communist participation in government, which would leave little room for the Socialist Party. But to have abandoned such a strategy in favour of a Socialist "alternative" alliance, with the Communists alone, was not possible either; the PSI was not ready to admit that the PCI was completely democratic, and many of its more moderate supporters did not agree with such a step. Plus, the PCI itself rejected the proposal.²⁴

The PSI's solution to this political dilemma was to try to walk a delicate tightrope between two different strategies, the 'alternative' and the 'consociational,' while committing itself to neither. Therefore, the PSI, accepted the former

strategy as its long-term goal, while pursuing a version of the latter strategy.

However, the results from the 1976 elections were not favorable. The PSI's vote remained at 9.6 per cent while that of the PCI increased to over 34 per cent.²⁵ The PSI's figure was identical with that of the 1922 elections. The problem the PSI encountered was that, they had convinced the electorate that the PCI had sufficiently changed to make it a respectable coalition partner. This accommodation with the Communists influenced many Italians to vote for the PCI since both parties were going to work closely together anyway.²⁶

c.

In April 1979, Parliament was dissolved, so new national elections were scheduled for June 3, 1979. The PSI was caught in between the Christian Democrats (DC) and the PCI, so it based its platform on the slogan: "The Socialists as a third force that will break the hegemony of DC-PCI." The Communist Party lost 4.0 percent of the votes it had won in 1976 while the Socialist Party gained 0.2 percent.²⁷ The Christian Democrats were still the majority party, yet, while they refused to allow the Communists in the government, they could not govern without Communist support, which Enrico Berlinguer (communist party boss) had begun to withhold. Two coalitions seemed feasible: 1) an alliance between the DC and the PSI;

or 2) an alliance with the PSI, PSDI, and the Republicans which would give the majority of 360 deputies against 270 for the Communists and all other parties combined. Hence, the five-party coalition was adopted.²⁸

In 1982, the PSI, although Italy's third major party, still had only 9.8 percent of the vote but held seven cabinet positions in the five-party coalition government, including finance and defense. Bettino Craxi wanted to form a government with the Communists that would have excluded the Christian Democrats, because he believed that the electorate was tired of the corruption and ineptness within the DCs.²⁹ Hence, the PSI began its coalition aggression. In August 1982, the seven Socialist cabinet members walked out, which forced the resignation of Giovanni Spadolini's (DC) thirteen-month-old government. The Socialist Party claimed that the "pullout" was due to the unexpected defeat, in the Chamber of Deputies, of a bill they had sponsored to prevent tax evasion. The measure was defeated by thirty Christian Democrats. The Socialist Party charged that the five-party coalition was not living up to its promises of "economic severity with justice." Actually, what the PSI really wanted was the office of prime minister. So, they risked a calling for an election because with the ban on government participation by the powerful Communists, the PSI held the political balance, so a majority could not have been formed without them.³⁰ Five months later, in 1983, the PSI

once again withdrew from a four-party coalition government which disintegrated the 43rd government since the Second World War. Once again the PSI claimed that the Christian Democrats had shifted to the right on social and political issues i.e. favoring centrist solutions.³¹

d.

Following the general elections in June 1983, which saw support for the Christian Democrats drop by 5.4 percent (an all-time low) and increase by 2.0 percent for the Socialist Party,³² Italy's President, Sandro Pertini, asked Bettino Craxi, the PSI leader, to form the 44th government. As Prime minister, with a coalition made up of the Socialists, the Christian Democrats, the Liberals, the Republicans, and the Social Democrats, Craxi led Italy's first Socialist government. To make the coalition viable, Craxi had to reconcile the PSI's expansionist economic policy with the "austerity" measures advocated by the right-wing Christian Democrats and Republicans. Also, the PSI, though not Craxi himself, was opposed to those who supported the NATO cruise missile deployment in Sicily. Hence, while Craxi may have attained his goal of becoming prime minister, Italy's political instability and economic recession needed to be solved.³³

The selection of a socialist for Italy's prime minister marked a move from conservatism to "Eurosocialism", where

communism is rejected. The PSI did not "believe in command economics, they felt that mass nationalizations were destructive of productive capacities, and they attempted to introduce a greater discipline into economic and social policies."³⁴

Unlike Francois Mitterand in France, who attempt to apply "doctrinaire" socialist methods to his nation's economy and then found himself turning towards "austerity" economics to cut economic and political losses, Craxi began by imposing discipline and experiment instead of radical techniques coming from "sacred" texts.³⁵

By November 1985, Craxi's Socialist government had held power longer than any other in postwar Italy. Inflation had been halved to eight percent, with the economy growing by 28 percent (the highest rate in Western Europe), and unemployment rates checked. Although problems did occur, for the first time over a foreign policy issue, Craxi resigned in October due to Italy's handling of the Achille Lauro hijacking. However, Craxi did return which allowed the same government with the same policies to continue.³⁶

Yet, on June 27, 1986, (PSI) Bettino Craxi once again resigned, until July 27, when the political crisis was ended with the five political parties of the previous coalition reaching a compromise to continue with a similar government.³⁷ Craxi had resigned when at least seventy parliamentarians belonging to the coalition helped defeat a local finance bill.

This happened in a "secret vote" following an open vote in which the "snipers" had stood up and "loyally" supported the piece of legislation the government had introduced.³⁸ The PSI was notified that the DCs would accept Craxi's continuing as prime minister under one of two conditions: a) He could remain until the next national elections, due in June 1988, if he committed the PSI to supporting a five-year DC prime ministership afterwards; or b) he could remain through Parliament's approval of the financial program for 1987, but not beyond December 31. His commitment had to be in "writing and unequivocal."³⁹

The PSI leader completely rejected these proposals made by the DCs. Therefore, President Cossiga asked Foreign Minister (DC) Giulio Andreotti to form a government. However, Andreotti opted to find a compromise that would allow Craxi to remain; and yet, enable the DCs to attain their goal of the prime ministership because without the PSI's support, Andreotti could not have formed a new government.⁴⁰ It was eventually agreed that Craxi would stay in office until March 1987. At that time, during the PSI national party congress, Craxi would be reelected as party secretary while supporting a DC successor as prime minister until the parliamentary elections in June 1988.⁴¹ Hence, the five-party coalition reached a compromise because no other majority seemed feasible.

II. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE ITALIAN AND UNITED STATES SOCIALIST PARTIES

Similar to that of the Italian Socialist Party, the Socialist Party of the United States (SP) advocated much of the same Marxian tenets and objectives, while experiencing an equal amount of compromises to be made and factional disputes. Both the PSI and the SP were founded around the same period, 1892 and 1901, respectively, to bring about social ownership and democratic management of the means of production, and to provide for better economic, social and political opportunities. In other words, the ideal-typical program of a socialist party was: nationalization of basic industries; a dominant public sector; equal income distribution; and central economic planning.⁴²

At the outset, both the PSI and SP emerged as two parties with a positive force enabling each to become major factors in the political arena. As with the PSI membership, the Socialist Party in the United States, under the leadership of Eugene Debs, saw an increase from less than ten thousand to 150,000 dues-paying members in its first twelve years. Plus, the SP's electoral strength increased from 95,000 to 900,000, while electing over two thousand of its members to public office in order to insure passage of hundreds of reforms.⁴³ So, as in Italy, the Socialist Party in the United States achieved some notable successes in the beginning of the

twentieth century. The year 1912 represented the high point for the SP, when Eugene Debs received six percent of the votes in the presidential campaign, which has never been equalled by any Socialist Party candidate since.⁴⁴ Both the PSI and SP managed to "successfully repulse" attempts to "revolutionize" the parties, which had caused the left of both the Italian and American parties to break off in the same year: 1919 to form Communist parties.

During World War I, however, the two Socialist parties diverged. The SP opposed the War, while their comrades in Italy supported the war effort. This support holds true for most of the Western European Socialist parties.⁴⁵ From then on, until 1917, membership in the United States Socialist Party declined, only to rise by twelve thousand in the first three months after war was declared by the United States.⁴⁶ For both the Italian and American Socialist Parties, the 1920's seemed to be the decade where each country's Socialist Party was on the verge of "extinction." When the Italian Fascists came to power in 1922, as noted before, all socialist parties were destroyed only to be reunited in France and to finally return to Italy after the Liberation. Also, in the United States, party membership fell more than 100,000 in 1919, to a figure below 7,000 by the end of the decade, which seemed to indicate certain collapse.⁴⁷ Only the Great Depression changed the Socialists' situation. With more than ten million workers

unemployed and bank failures, the Party began to grow rapidly with Norman Thomas at the head, while in Europe the PSI remained in exile. But, with the success of the New Deal within American labor, the party, by the 1936 election, showed a poorer percentage of national vote than in its first campaign in 1900.⁴⁸ From then on, the SP in the United States declined, until it abandoned electoral campaigning entirely after 1956.⁴⁹

III. THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ITALIAN AND UNITED STATES SOCIALIST PARTIES RESPECTIVELY

In the early years of the present century, both Socialist parties were viable political forces that demanded attention. They excited the hopes of many, and alarmed countless others. No matter how one felt about the Socialists, they could not be ignored. Why is it then, since mid-century in Italy, the Socialist Party gained back, retained, and strengthened its position on the political spectrum, while the Socialist Party in the United States (founded on the same premises) deteriorated to almost nothing? In fact, almost all the democratic nations of the Western world have a socialist party representing a significant political force. But, in the United States, an important country among the Western democracies, the Socialist Party disappeared. Hence, one needs to seek an explanation of this "death" of the Socialist Party in the United States in the mid-century, in contrast to the Italian Socialist Party's ascendancy, despite the fact that the courses of both parties have been susceptible to similar positive and negative influences. In other words, at this point one needs to be concerned with socialist politics, not socialist theory.

Internal Factors

Membership in a political party in Italy is a more serious affair than it is in the United States. Due to its procedure

and type of commitment it entails, membership in an Italian political party has been compared to membership in an American church. An Italian who wants to join the Socialist Party must have his name proposed and seconded by active party members. On admission he must profess his sympathy with the basic tenets of the party, agree to follow the party line and pay monthly and annual dues. Eighteen years old is the minimum age for admission. The Party organization is based on local units, called sections. In addition to the section, which is a territorial unit comprising a "commune," the PSI set up groups at the members' places of work which are called "nuclei." These sections elect their own officers and are united into provincial or regional bodies, with the sovereign body of the party being the National Congress. This type of system places local issues as high priority.⁵⁰

In contrast, the Socialist Party in the United States never fully decided whether it was a political party, a political pressure group, a revolutionary sect, or a political forum. It tried to play all these roles at the same time. Outside of a few places, most notably Milwaukee and Oklahoma, the Socialists failed to build strong local and state organizations. And it is at the local level that voting is done! Only in Milwaukee and Oklahoma and a few small cities did the Socialist Party have an organization in each precinct to distribute literature, get voters registered, get voters to the

polls, watch the count of the vote, and all other routine tasks of political party workers. Watching the count of the vote is a critical activity, especially critical to minor parties.⁵¹

Unlike the Italians, the American Socialists never saw the value of political organization. In fact, Debs claimed during his 1916 campaign: "Let it not be supposed for a moment that on the part of the Socialists this is going to be a vote-chasing campaign.... We shall explain socialism and make our appeal to the intelligence, the manhood and womanhood of the people and upon that...high plane, whatever the outcome, we are bound to win."⁵² Nor did the American Socialists generally concern themselves with local issues. Their interests were nearly altogether in national and international matters. Rarely did the Socialist Party run a full slate of local and state candidates.

Evidence of the success the Party might have enjoyed if it had been more concerned with local affairs can be seen by those parts of the party that did concern themselves with such matters.

The Milwaukee Socialists offered the voters a local program, and they became the city's dominant party.⁵³ Oklahoma Socialists became strong because of good organization and their concern with local matters. Lacking the money to finance a state socialist newspaper, Oklahoma Socialists arranged with

the publisher of the Socialist newspaper, Appeal to Reason, to have inserted a special "Oklahoma page" in each copy mailed to Oklahoma which dealt with state and local affairs.⁵⁴

Furthermore, the Socialist Party in the United States failed to communicate with the public. A majority of the American people simply did not, and still do not, understand Marxist jargon, so the party could have done better with more of the easily understood language found in the two socialist newspapers: Appeal to Reason and The National Rip Saw.

External Factors

But, despite all the shortcomings of the Socialist Party in the United States, its failure was not primarily its own fault. The failure of the Socialist Party in the United States was due less to its errors than to basic traditional and conditions in American society, which the Socialists could do little or nothing to change.⁵⁵ The Socialist Party in Italy has made mistakes, yet the United States still remains one of the few important Western democracies where the Socialist Party did not offer a significant, mid-century to present, socialist movement. In other words, the existence of Old World conditions in Italy represents one of the major factors more conducive to the growth of Socialism than those conditions which were in existence in the United States.

a.

In Italy, with its parliamentary type government, the essential role of the political party in the democratic process is recognized in the Italian republican Constitution, which states in Article 49: "All citizens have the right to associate freely in political parties in order to contribute through democratic procedure to the determination of national policy."⁵⁶ In fact, Italy's form of proportional representation used to elect both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate means that the vote will always be fragmented and that at least four political parties will be required to form a government.⁵⁷ In sharp contrast, there are many features of the American political system that hamper the development of any third party, whether socialist or not. The two-party system in the United States is so strong that no genuine third party has ever succeeded in becoming one of the major parties. Of course, there is one exception to this claim: the rise of the Republican Party in 1854. However, in the West, where this party first gained ground, party discipline and an effective political machine had not been securely developed. It can be said that the conditions were more favorable to the emergence of a third party at that time than after the Civil War and to the present day. The election laws of most states make it difficult for third parties to get on the ballot and stay on. Also, the large amounts of money necessary to finance an election

campaign handicap third parties.⁵⁸ The two-party system is very deeply ingrained in American voting habits. If all the people who had subscribed to the Appeal to Reason to read Deb's editorials, and who had paid their money to hear Debs speak, had voted for Debs, his percentage of the popular vote should have been much higher than it ever was. The same is true for Norman Thomas, whose measure of respect among the American people was considerably higher than the vote they had given him.⁵⁹ But, many voters are reluctant to vote for a candidate who does not have a good chance of winning i.e. reluctant to "throw away" votes. Yet these are difficulties of all third parties in America, which does not quite explain why the Socialist Party failed and why the Socialists never did as well as many other third parties.

b.

One reason that the American Socialist Party never developed the strength equal to their comrades in Italy was that, in the United States, there is considerably less class consciousness than there is in Italy or other Western nations. The Socialist parties of both countries directed their efforts to the "working class", "the proletariat," "the workers," but generally the members of this class in the United States, unlike Italy, failed to realize their class status. A lack of a feudal tradition, rapid economic expansion, early universal suffrage, and

class mobility helped to weaken and to prevent the development of class consciousness in the United States. When Debs during his war trial said, "While there is a lower class I am in it; while there is a criminal element, I am of it; while there is a soul in prison, I am not free,"⁶⁰ he expressed a noble sentiment, but few members of the "working class" recognized the statement as an expression of solidarity with themselves. This is not to say that there are no social classes in America nor that there have been none, nor even that there has been no recognition of social class. It is to say, that in the United States class consciousness, and solidarity have been considerably weaker than in Italy, or Western Europe for that matter.⁶¹

For example, late in the Great Depression, when millions were still unemployed, Elmo Roper made a study of public opinion about social class. His conclusions were discouraging for the United States Socialist Party. When asked, "What would you use to name the class in America you belong to?" 27.7 per cent of those polled replied they did not know, indicating if the sample were a fair one, that about one-fourth of the American people were not aware of social class. The answers to his questions were such that Roper concluded that 79.2 per cent of the population believed itself to be middle class. Of those whose incomes were so small that Roper considered them "poor," 70.3 per cent thought they were middle class.

Only 7.9 per cent of the total considered themselves of the "lower" class. Of the factory workers polled only about one-third thought their interests and those of their employers were opposed.⁶² Hence, in a society with such disregard of social class, a political movement based primarily upon class appeal will have a difficult time.

The lack of a feudal tradition in America, the result largely of a new civilization on a continent with a vast amount of inexpensive land, is a major factor in the American people's failure to develop a class consciousness comparable to that of the people in the "Florida-size" Italy. When a modern-capitalistic system of production developed in the United States, it did not displace a large and settled class of craftsmen, as happened in Italy. From the displaced artisans in Italy came movements which tended to create a sense of class solidarity among Italian workers. The absence of a need for unpropertied Americans to fight for the franchise and political representation tended to blur class lines. It was difficult for Italian workmen not to conclude that their states were for the advancement and protection of the propertied classes when they had to struggle so long and hard with these classes for the right to participate in politics.⁶³ The American worker, on the other hand, received the franchise relatively early and with comparative ease, leaving only social and economic lines between him and men of property, lines less definite than the political line had been.⁶⁴

Similarly, since there has never been a firmly established aristocracy based upon birth in the United States, the middle class has never had a great struggle to assert its superiority. The United States has had nothing comparable to the Italian Risorgimento of the nineteenth century or even the French Revolution in 1789. This is significant because when there has been sharp conflict between aristocracies and a middle class, radical and class-conscious ideas have gained circulation among the working class. But in the United States, there has been no middle-class revolt as in Italy.⁶⁵

However, the lack of a feudal heritage has perhaps not been as important a factor in the development of class attitudes in the United States as has the relative success of American capitalism. Italy, long, narrow, mountainous, lack of raw material, and on the periphery of the European market, represents an economically poor country. In sharp contrast, the United States' exceptionally rich natural resources, its self-sufficient industries, and its large domestic market have combined to produce a huge gross national product. The distribution of the product has been something less than equitable, but the total product has been such that the United States has enjoyed a better standard of living than Italy and most other European nations.⁶⁶ The American economy has also, for the most part, been an expanding economy. One effect of the expansion of the American economy has been that as the rich became richer the

poor did not, in the long run, become poorer. Of course, industrial capitalism widened the gap between the wealthiest families of the nation and the poorest, but the poor have generally been able, except during economic depressions, to look back upon their fathers' and grandfathers' status and conclude that their own material comfort is greater. And the widespread assumption that the future holds even greater material comforts reflects an optimism that is not conducive to the development of a Socialist Party.⁶⁷

The growth of the American economy has also made possible a relatively high degree of class mobility. It has been possible for many able and ambitious young people of working-class origins to escape from their class. And besides the actual degree of class fluidity there is the essence of the American Dream. A firm belief in the rags to riches is a part of American folklore.⁶⁸ Young "heroes" are a real part of American beliefs, whether or not they actually exist. The actuality and the dream have combined to produce an optimism about one's chances, or more importantly about one's children's chances to better their position in the social order, an optimism that has worked against the development of class consciousness. Americans have generally believed it easier and more desirable to rise from their class rather than with their class. For many, it would seem the belief proved justified. One can speculate what might have happened had the American

class structure been static (i.e. more similar to that of Italy), it seems reasonable that there would have been more class consciousness and conflict.⁶⁹

Still another factor in United States' history that tended to hamper the development of class consciousness was the ethnic heterogeneity of American workers. In Italy, obviously the Italian workers who make up the Italian Socialist Party are Italian. However, the American working class has been composed of many races and nations, and there has been a tendency for American workers to identify themselves with their racial or nationality group rather than with their class. The steady stream of immigrants to the United States made the organization of American workers more than usually difficult. Due to the influx of thirteen million immigrants from 1900 to 1914, the non-English speaking groups in the Socialist Party rose from 25 percent in 1908 to over half by 1919.⁷⁰ Most American workers were not so aware of class antagonisms as they were of religious, ethnic, and racial tensions. Also, the aspirations of immigrants and Negroes to become assimilated, presented a special problem for the Socialist Party in America. For the Negro it was enough of a burden to be balck without also being "red" while the immigrant who wanted to become an "American" realized that being a Socialist would be a handicap to his assimilation.⁷¹

c.

Although a major factor, the relative lack of class consciousness of Americans was only one of several basic conditions of American life that hampered the Socialists. Perhaps because of the Socialists inadequate explanation of their philosophy most Americans felt that Socialism would take away from their individualism. As seen in the statement by former Secretary of State James F. Byrnes: "Socialism is but a step toward communism," Americans have confused socialism with communism and have recoiled from the "monolithic" Soviet state.⁷² The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent strained relations between the Soviet Union and the United States were undoubtedly a factor in the decline of the Socialist Party even though the Socialists were among the earliest of anticommunists.⁷³

d.

Another American condition that worked against Socialist success is the American's pragmatic view of life that demands visible and practical results, and the "quicker the better. Most of the tenets of the Socialist Party were not attractive to those who held such views. This type of "needs-must-be-met immediately" syndrome is indicative of the United States whose history of two hundred years pales in comparison to that of Italy. In Italy, one can sense the ability for patience in

its people who have passed through thousands of years of history. Victor Berger, an American Socialist claimed: "Socialism is coming all the time. It may be another century or two before it is fully established." In the meantime, there was little to do but make the best of it and wait for a new day. "Another century or two" for a country which has witnessed the passing of 20 times that many does not seem too long to wait for social justice. But to a country which has only a "century or two" on which to base its history, this vague promise of the "millennium" was not as attractive as the prospect of achieving less, but achieving it soon through the major parties.⁷⁴

e.

The issue of governmental repression is yet another factor which inhibited the growth of the Socialist Party in America. In Italy, the Socialist Party witnessed governmental suppression during its Fascist Period; but this was true for all Italian political parties of that time. Ironically, in America, the "spokesman" for open societies, a long history of repressive acts against the Socialist Party, or, more generally, all radicals and Marxists can be traced especially during the World War era.⁷⁵ The Socialist Party had difficulty renting halls for their meetings, had their meetings broken up by local police, suffered physical violence from mob action and encountered

discrimination from anti-Socialist employers.⁷⁶ After the declaration of war, seven states passed acts abridging freedom of speech and press.⁷⁷ However, it was the federal laws which inhibited the Socialists the most. The Espionage Act, which became law on June 15, 1917, granted the federal government the power to censor newspapers and ban them from the mails, and made the obstruction of the draft or enlistment service punishable by fine of up to ten thousand dollars and twenty years' imprisonment. Additional powers of censorship were given in the Trading-with-the-Enemy Act of October 6, 1917, and the amendment to the Espionage Act of May 16, 1918, sometimes called the Sedition Act, which made even attempting to obstruct the draft a felony.⁷⁸ Prior to the war, over two million people subscribed to socialist publications.⁷⁹ Less than a month after the passage of the Espionage Act, Postmaster General Albert S. Burlison revoked the second class mailing privileges of the American Socialist of Chicago, the party's only official paper, for advertising a pamphlet which linked American participation in the war with House of Morgan Loans to the Allies. Before the war was over, nearly every Socialist newspaper and periodical were denied low-cost mailing rights. The Socialist Party not only had problems with the Post Office Department, but also with the Department of Justice.⁸⁰ All in all, over two thousand Socialists were indicted or convicted under the Espionage and Sedition Acts; such as; the Social leader Eugene

Debs and Socialist agitator, Kate Richards O'Hare.⁸¹

During the war, prosecutors and persecutors of the Socialists justified their actions on the grounds that the Socialist Party's opposition to the war endangered the nation. After the war no such justification on the ground of national self-interest existed, but there was no pause to stop the Socialist Movement. After November 1918, Socialists were being persecuted merely because they were Socialists: the antiradical hysteria increased rather than diminished after the war. Many state legislatures passed what were known as "criminal syndicalist laws", acts that outlawed agitation for revolution.⁸² The United States Commerce lobbied for a sedition act which would make it criminal to utter remarks that "tended" to incite violence.⁸³ When Congress met in a special session in April, 1919, the House of Representatives refused to seat Victor Berger of the Socialist Party, who had been elected by his district in Milwaukee. He was denied his seat because he was convicted of violating the Espionage Act. At the time he was out of prison waiting his appeal to the Supreme Court. A special election was held and Berger won again. But again the House refused to seat him.⁸⁴ In November, 1919, five state assembly districts in New York City elected Socialists to represent them at Albany. A special legislative committee was appointed to investigate the qualifications and eligibility of the five, which were in question only because they were members of the

Socialist Party. The special committee recommended that the five Socialists not be seated so the Assembly did not seat them.⁸⁵ The postwar "antiradical hysteria" decreased after 1920 but by this time the Socialist Party was no longer as potent of a political force challenging mainstream American politicians and businessmen as it had been in the beginning of the century.⁸⁶

These, then are some of the basic conditions and traditions of American society in contrast to those of Italy that prevented the success of the Socialist Party in the United States. Both parties were founded on the Marxist doctrine that contends that national ownership and operation of industry will end private profit and its inevitable by-products of unemployment and war. Both envisaged a system that would eventually give to every member of society an equal supply of goods and services, enough for all his needs, regardless of the kind or quantity of work he is able to contribute. Both experienced similar divisions and defections beyond the point of ever being susceptible to a working coalition with the Communists. Both showed political prosperity prior to World War I. Finally, both parties had to contend with the differences that divided Socialist from Socialist i.e. factionalism. However, in spite of similar successes, as well as losses, the Italian Socialist Party has managed to become the "indispensable" third major party in Italy, while the American Socialist Party, as such, no longer exists. In a manner of speaking, one can

say that it was American history that defeated the American Socialist Party and Old World history that promoted and promotes the Italian Socialist Party.

IV. CONCLUSIONS: FUTURE SPECULATIONS

So where does this leave the Italian Socialist Party today and is there a possibility of the Socialist Party's rebirth here in America? With respect of Italy as of March 3, 1987, Prime Minister Bettino Craxi resigned, ending Italy's longest-standing postwar government.⁸⁷ As mentioned before, Mr. Craxi's resignation was due to the accord reached last July among the five party coalition. But the Socialists no longer considered this pact binding. Hence, Parliament was faced with two choices: formation of a new coalition government of Christian Democrats, Socialists, Liberals, Republicans, and Social Democrats with a Christian Democrat as Prime Minister (most likely Mr. Giulio Andreotti) or, the call for new elections before 1988.⁸⁸ On March 11, 1987, President Cossiga "unofficially" called Andreotti to form a government⁸⁹ and by March 17, Prime Minister-designate Andreotti had drawn up a proposal to satisfy the leaders of the five-party coalition (especially Bettino Craxi) in order to "avert premature elections."⁹⁰

The Socialist Party of Italy has demonstrated their capacity to lead the nation out of the deep economic and political crisis in which Italy found itself in the 1980s. Due to the Socialist Party's stay in power i.e. as in the prime ministership, the minority parties or "laic pole" have increased their proportion of votes while the Christian Democrats and

Communists Parties percentages have continually declined. Plus, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) seems ready to dissolve itself and join the Socialist Party, while the "rival" Republicans have become more friendly. Radicals and liberals are joining the Socialists in attempt to cure Italy's troubled justice system.⁹¹ Following Craxi's resignation, La Stampa polled the Italian public concerning the success of the Socialist government. According to that poll, sixty-four percent of those polled felt that Craxi's government had been sufficient to outstanding. Only the government of De Gasperi in 1948 received a higher percentage.⁹²

For the elections, the PSI will run on Craxi's record and is expected to do well. In the electoral campaign, the PSI will push for several institutional reforms that should stabilize the country further. These include modifying the "secret vote" and direct election of the Italian president. Furthermore, the PSI propose two significant alterations in the parliamentary system, both from West Germany. By setting a minimum of five percent for representatives in Parliament and allowing decree laws to stand if Parliament does not specifically reject them within sixty days--as opposed to the present rule requiring acceptance within sixty days--Craxi with the PSI hope to unclog the legislative procedures in Italy's Parliament.⁹³

In sum, despite the fact that the party has only 11.4 per cent of the vote, the Socialist Party in Italy plays an

indispensable role in the coalition and will continue to do so because it is essential to the existence of the five-party coalition. As can be seen from the recent resignation of Prime Minister Andreotti (DC) only three weeks after Craxi's resignation--the Socialist Party is still a forceful party. Mr. Andreotti informed President Cossiga on March 27, 1987, that he was unable to resolve a dispute between his party (DC's) and the PSI.⁹⁴ In other words, no Socialist Party participation, no government. Therefore, the Italian Socialist Party is still the determined holder of the balance of power.

In sharp contrast, a rebirth of an American party under the Socialist Party title, is not probable. There are too many conditions and traditions working against its revival. However, there may exist a possibility to begin a new socialist party if one is able to remove as many as possible of the obstacles to its formation and functioning. The majority of voters in this country hesitate to select one of the existing socialist parties because that would label them with a certain radical character. Most feel that socialism has an "unsavory" past to live down either intellectually, politically, or morally. Furthermore, anything under the label of "socialism" promotes alien and foreign connotations in what one might define the "average American." To avoid the stigma of a century of "socialist negativness," a new title for the party omitting the term "Socialist" could prove to be effective

because the public's displeasure must not always be mistaken for an intellectual opposition. In a sense, an attempt should be made to create an entirely new party made up of as many as possible of the known members from each of the present socialist parties. Of course, some people will claim that deliberately avoiding the use of the word "Socialist," in the title, would be dishonest. But, if all the facts and principles are laid out before the persons who are interested in becoming party members, then this kind of political appeal is honest and would be a "certificate" of trust issued to the public. In conclusion, there can be no revival or survival for an American party under the stigma--Socialist; under another descriptive term--cooperative--perhaps.

NOTES

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