

‘Veniamo da Lontano e Andiamo Lontano’: The Italian Left and the Problem of Transition

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***Abstract:** A key challenge for the Italian Left is the problematic of ‘transition’: the enduring perception that Italy has not yet attained a state of democratic normality. The Left has suffered a series of setbacks and crises since the formation of the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD) in 2007, thanks in large part to the adoption by PD leader Walter Veltroni of a novelty-oriented strategy which failed to address the ‘transition’ agenda. Veltroni’s successor, Pierluigi Bersani, has mobilised a formidable nationwide coalition of support for a more conservative approach, cutting across the ideological divisions which persist within the PD. However, Veltroni’s strategy has created enduring problems for his party, including the effective delegitimation of the far Left; only when this is remedied will a revival of the broader Left, and a successful engagement with the problems of transition, become possible.*

Keywords: Italian politics, Democratic Party, transition, democratic consolidation, Second Republic, post-Communist parties.

Introduction

2009 was a disastrous year for the Italian Left, within and outside the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD). In this paper I relate the difficulties faced by the Italian Left to the short-term effects of Walter Veltroni’s leadership of the PD, and to the longer-term perspective of a ‘transition’ from the First Republic to a state of democratic normality – a perspective closely connected with the prospects for the PD. I argue, firstly, that Veltroni’s strategy as leader was dangerously mistaken, causing long-term damage to the prospects of the Left and the PD itself. I then discuss the Franceschini interregnum and the leadership elections which followed, analysing variations in voting patterns between the two stages of voting and between different regions, but stressing the solidity of the vote for Pierluigi Bersani. In the third section I discuss the base from which Bersani campaigned and won, comparing Bersani’s caution and conservatism with Franceschini’s ‘*nuovismo*’, and highlighting Bersani’s capacity to mobilise

ideological as well as organisational resources from across the highly diversified internal landscape of the PD. I then review the state of the radical Left, still suffering from the electoral wipeout made inevitable by Veltroni's strategy for the PD. Lastly, I review the prospects for the PD under Bersani within the broad 'transition' perspective. I suggest that overcoming the exclusion of the Left was and remains fundamental to the 'transition' agenda; while the PD itself may have the resources to recover from its current predicament, this recovery will only be partial for as long as the party has no potential allies to its Left.

The wreck of the Partito Democratico

The crisis which engulfed the Italian Left in 2009 had both short- and long-term causes. In June 2007 Walter Veltroni put himself forward as leadership candidate for the newly-formed PD. This move set in train a series of disasters for the PD and the Left. Veltroni's vision of the PD was of a party with a 'majoritarian vocation' (Veltroni, 2007). Once the party had been launched in November 2008, it was entirely consistent with this position for Veltroni to announce that the PD would not seek to recreate Romano Prodi's broad centre-left alliance, but would run alone at the next election with a view to winning alone and governing alone. This announcement altered the balance of political opportunities for Prodi's allies, leading to the collapse of the Prodi government (Newell, 2009b: 12). The PD's decision to run alone was accompanied by a challenge to Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia to do likewise; however, given the progress which had already been made towards the unification of Forza Italia with its ally Alleanza Nazionale (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2009), the PD's crushing electoral defeat of April 2008 was all too predictable. In turn, Silvio Berlusconi's third electoral victory led predictably to a conspicuous failure by the PD either to establish a constructive working relationship with the government or to launch an effective fightback against it; this failure necessitated Veltroni's resignation in February 2009, leaving both the PD and the broader Left in uncharted waters.

In a longer perspective, the crisis of the Left also demands to be understood in the context of the continuing Italian transition, from the First Republic to a still-undefined future settlement. I argue that the 'transition' has explanatory force, not only as an analytical concept, but as the umbrella term for a set of goals and values which are widely seen as forming a coherent agenda, together with the sense that this agenda needs to be pursued if Italy is ever to achieve political normality. The concerns associated with the transition agenda have consistently played a prominent role in the cleavages which dominate the Italian political system. The agenda has three principal aspects, mirroring the most salient defects of the First Republic: unchallenged alternation in government between two major

parties; an end to the denial of political legitimacy to the Left; and the reassertion of the primacy of politics over corporate interests or corrupt exchanges. The PD has emerged as the standard-bearer of transition; the fortunes of the party and the transition project are closely connected.

While the formal consolidation of the PD was a major advance in the perspective of the transition project, under Veltroni's guidance it had the ironic side-effect of accelerating the fall of the Prodi government. Although the 2008 election was held under a proportional electoral system, it was contested by individual parties rather than broad coalitions, essentially as a result of Veltroni's unilateral decision to 'run alone'. This represented a major change of emphasis within the overall logic of the transition, shared by Veltroni with Prodi. Veltroni gave absolute priority to the construction of a party which would be eligible to alternate in power with the Right; ethical themes were downgraded as far as possible, and the exclusion of the Left taken as read. The PD was to be a new kind of party, built on the basis of charismatic leadership, credible policy offerings and an orientation to voters outside the PD's traditional base. As such, the party's appeal was to be built not on ideological loyalty but on prospective policy commitments, offering modernising reforms and technocratic efficiency. Consequently, Veltroni's 2008 election campaign was conducted without any major ideological clashes, and on the basis of a policy agenda very largely shared with Berlusconi (Campus, 2009). The model of the party itself borrowed heavily from the party's American namesake and from Forza Italia (Paolucci, 2006). Initial plans were for the PD to be a party with supporters' circles but no formal membership, like Forza Italia; the party eventually emerged with a complex and multi-tiered membership model, including a category of PD 'electors' akin to the US model of 'registered voters' (Bordandini et al., 2008).

The ethical dimension of the Italian transition agenda was downplayed but not ultimately neglected: the PD's initial commitment to 'run alone' was modified to the extent of running a joint ticket with Antonio Di Pietro's Italy of Principles (Italia dei Valori, IdV) and adopting some Radical Party candidates on the PD list. The significance of the reformist agenda is captured by the frustration expressed in 2009 by the up-and-coming PD activist Debora Serracchiani: she lamented that many members of the PD's natural constituency had voted for Di Pietro, leader of a party having 'nothing to do with the centre-left', because the PD had 'left it up to him alone to provide opposition on issues which should be ours, like the conflict of interests and the moral question' (Serracchiani, 2009). Both of these issues – the use of political power in the service of politicians' own business interests and the occupation of high office by people suspected of serious crimes – were endemic to the First Republic; the goal of resolving them is definitive of the Italian transition.

It is striking that the two parties with which Veltroni's PD was prepared to ally itself were precisely those two 'reformist' parties which lacked any connection to the Left. The new party was to be built without any concessions to the radical Left, or many references to the Left in any form. In the speech in which Veltroni set out his vision for the PD, the word '*nuovo*' is used 46 times, while '*moderno*' and '*aperto*' each appear eight times. The word '*sinistra*' is used ten times, but five of these usages are critical: like New Labour, the PD was to be at once a new Left party and a break with the Left (Veltroni, 2007). Veltroni's refusal of allies on the Left made this break a reality, implicitly defining any party to the Left of the PD as 'extreme Left'. This area was now considerably broader than it had been. The Democratic Left (*Sinistra Democratica*, SD), a party founded by a social-democratic group within the ex-Communist Left Democrats (*Democratici di Sinistra*, DS), which had left the DS rather than join the PD, now found itself out among the extremists. For voters who identified with any party in this area the options were unpalatable: either maintain their principles with the risk delivering Italy to Berlusconi, or hold their noses to cast a *voto utile* for the PD.

The result was an electoral wipe-out for parties to the Left of the PD, most of which banded together for the election in the short-lived Rainbow Left (*Sinistra Arcobaleno*, SA). Speaking after the election, Veltroni described the disappearance of the Left as 'an electoral tragedy' (*la Repubblica*, 18 April 2008); while we can agree with this statement, it has to be acknowledged that the tragedy was precipitated by Veltroni's own actions. Moreover, the PD was a major beneficiary of the tragedy, on more than one level. The *voto utile* bolstered its vote; the effects of proportional over-representation gained the party about 20 seats, relative to the under-representation which a losing party could otherwise have expected; and after the election, the absence of a challenger to its Left validated the PD's claim to be the only opposition to Berlusconi.

More broadly, Veltroni had no doubt that his strategy had been correct: 'Prodi paid – and we all paid – for the atmosphere of permanent conflict within the coalition, which was paralysed by the culture of negativity. This is why all the old parties of Prodi's *Unione* alliance got such bad results. Or rather, all except one: the PD. This is why I can say now that our decision to make a break with the past was the right one: our courage has been rewarded.' The Left had brought its problems on itself: 'They suffered for not understanding that tough decisions needed to be made, and that the culture of negativity would lead us to disaster' (*la Repubblica*, 18 April 2008). Veltroni's curiously triumphalist tone was echoed by journalist Edmondo Berselli, who hailed 'Walter Veltroni's Copernican revolution'. By refusing to form a broad coalition, Veltroni had forced the Left to 'put the quality of its political programme to the test ... in the cruel sport of the electoral arena', whereupon '[t]he idea of living in a

playground of radicalism [had] been torn apart by the violence of reality' (Berselli, 2008). On one hand, reality and the need to make tough decisions; on the other, a playground of radicalism and a culture of negativity. Veltroni and Berselli condemn the Left not as a political rival or even an antagonist, but as a disruptive irrelevance, an outsider to the political system. In effect, the exclusion of the Left which had been a constant feature of the First Republic, to the great detriment of the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI), was now being re-enacted by the PCI's main successor – and its chief victims were precisely those parties which had retained the title 'Communist'.

Veltroni's PD was to be first and foremost a new, modern and open party, capable of offering united and responsible opposition to Berlusconi's government. Its engagement with the ethical challenge offered by Berlusconi was genuine but low-key and equivocal; the party's arm's-length relationship with Di Pietro was emblematic. Its attitude to the Left was openly dismissive. If we exclude the remote possibility of the PD winning the 2008 election outright, Veltroni's goal seems to have been to create a party, free from the taint of Communism and unburdened by disruption from the Left, that could be legitimated as a 'loyal opposition' to Berlusconi's fourth government; this government would graciously permit the PD to mitigate its worst excesses, before ceding power to it at a subsequent election. The establishment of a 'shadow Cabinet' (an experiment attempted only once before in Italy, by Achille Occhetto's Democratic Party of the Left) is in line with this logic, although its effectiveness in practice has been questioned (Russo and Verzichelli, 2009: 223). In other words, Veltroni was working on the assumption that, the PD once built, Italy had achieved political 'normality': a political system characterised by alternation between left- and right-wing parties which acknowledge each other as legitimate, rather than by the exclusion of the Left and the periodic eruption of system-threatening ethical crises. In this perspective, Prodi's fractious 2006-8 coalition could be seen as simply another chapter in the transition from First to Second Republic; the consolidation of the PD as the unchallenged second party in the country had brought the transition to a close.

This assumption, of course, was mistaken. The PD had succeeded in abandoning any commitment to the inclusion of the Left (or at least shut the door behind itself), but the ethical element of the 'transition' agenda could not be set aside so easily. Only two months after the election, what were initially cordial relations between government and opposition were broken off, on the basis of an issue relating to 'the conflict of interests and the moral question': specifically, a proposed piece of *ad personam* legislation which would have spared Berlusconi a pending court case on a charge of paying a bribe to the British lawyer David Mills (since found guilty of

receiving a bribe from Berlusconi). More in sorrow than in anger, Veltroni announced in June 2008 that dialogue was no longer possible: 'In the last few months my party and I have tried to release Italy from the past, but evidently there are some who want to keep the country firmly attached to the past' (*la Repubblica*, 17 June 2008) Berlusconi's reply was blunter: 'It's hard to believe that [Veltroni] is putting himself forward as a political leader' (*la Repubblica*, 20 June 2008). Three months later it was Berlusconi who spoke of his rival in tones of affected regret: 'Veltroni? He began well, but these days he's basically non-existent ... Let's forget any hope of being able to conduct a dialogue with [the PD]. That will have to wait another generation – all they have to offer now is envy and class hatred' (*Corriere della Sera*, 17 September 2008).

Crawling from the wreckage: the PD from Franceschini to Bersani

Berlusconi's brief legitimisation of the PD as a *de facto* official opposition had conferred credibility on the new party. When this recognition was withdrawn, the party's popularity slumped – at the end of 2008 polls were giving the PD around 22 per cent. Following Veltroni's resignation, his deputy Dario Franceschini was elected secretary by the PD's governing Assembly. His only challenger, Prodi's ally Arturo Parisi, called for a relaunch of the party 'under the sign of the Ulivo', turning away from the model associated with Franceschini as well as Veltroni: 'I do not believe – with the greatest respect for the people concerned – that we can continue to entrust our collective political destiny to those who led us into this swamp' (*Corriere della Sera*, 21 February 2009). Franceschini defeated Parisi by 1,047 votes to 92, with 119 abstentions, to become leader of the PD until the party's congress in October 2009.

After the 2008 election defeat, former Christian Democrat Marco Follini commented, 'Now we need to talk about the identity of the PD. If it's a party of the left, even the social-democratic left, well, count me out' (*la Repubblica* 29 April 2008). However, after the disasters it suffered under Veltroni's leadership, the PD collectively lacked the stomach for Left/Right faction-fighting; while Franceschini's own roots were Christian Democrat, his interim leadership was generally seen as an opportunity for consolidation rather than score-settling. This impression was encouraged by the PD's vote at the 2009 European elections: at 26.1 per cent, the result was poor but far from catastrophic. The critical voice which most effectively caught the party's collective imagination in the early part of 2009 was that of Serracchiani, who came to national prominence with her intervention at the March 2009 national meeting of PD circles. Serracchiani called for clear and definite opposition from the PD across a range of policy areas – including, as noted above, the ethical issues which IdV had been allowed to make its own – and for greater commitment at leadership level

to the PD as a party in its own right: 'I've had the clear impression that the ordinary membership has much more of a sense of belonging to the new party than the leaders'. Serracchiani's own Web page carries the slogan '*Semplicemente democratica*' ('Simply democratic').

Above all, Serracchiani called for unity: in the PD's attempts to talk to its own electorate there was 'never a clear word, never a definite policy and above all never a single policy'. However, this was not a call for party policy to be imposed from above. The party should unite around agreed policies, even if they were ultimately agreed by majority vote: 'I call on our party to learn to take votes, to learn to adopt decisions – majority decisions if necessary, leaving some people behind if necessary'. More effective leadership was needed, but 'leadership understood as a means of achieving a political synthesis ... even after the broadest possible debate and the most extensive efforts to find a middle ground, which is necessary in a big party like ours, in the end you need to reach a synthesis'. The failure to do so, Serracchiani implied, was one of the PD's weaknesses in comparison both to its opponents and to rivals like IdV: 'there are many different voices in our party and we always begin our speeches with "I" – they begin theirs in one of two ways, either "Berlusconi said" or "Italia dei Valori says". Clearly that's a huge difference' (Serracchiani, 2009).

Veltroni's leadership of the PD was characterised not so much by the new brand of politics to which he aspired, as by a reluctance to engage in what he saw as the old politics: reluctance to treat Berlusconi as an adversary, reluctance to be seen as positioning the party on the Left, and reluctance to engage with ethical issues, which were effectively delegated to Di Pietro (whose party gained hugely as a result). Veltroni's main positive contribution was organisational: a kind of top-down populism, in which policy is made by the leadership and party members are mobilised in its support. Serracchiani's intervention outlined a coherent alternative to Veltroni's failed strategy, engaging with all the key elements of the transition agenda: Berlusconi's openly confrontational approach to politics would be met with a clear oppositional stand on both ethical and left/right issues; party members would no longer be biddable supporters of a charismatic leader but active contributors to debate over policies, with the leader taking responsibility for bringing that debate to an end and voicing agreed conclusions. The PD would then be not only a party capable of alternating in power but a party committed to the ethical renovation of Italian politics and the inclusion of the Left.

In the short to medium term, the future of the PD was determined by the 2009 leadership election. The PD elected its third leader between September and November 2009, using a complex three-stage process designed first to give a voice to party members, then to let the party's broader base of supporters and sympathisers decide through open

primaries, with the final decision referred back to the party if no candidate gained 50 per cent of the vote in the primaries. After some initial debate, including an attempt at a stunt candidacy by the anti-political populist Beppe Grillo, three candidates were registered: Franceschini, the centre-leftist Pierluigi Bersani and Ignazio Marino, a leading transplant surgeon standing on a socially liberal platform, centred on the issue of a 'lay' identity for the PD. Marino's candidacy was adopted by a group of younger PD activists known as the '*piombini*' (after an initial meeting in Piombino), who had agitated for Bersani and Franceschini to be challenged by a candidate from below; names canvassed included Serracchiani, who disappointed the group by opting to support Franceschini.

Just under 75,000 party members voted in the first stage (a notional turnout of 58.6 per cent); 55.6 per cent of the national vote went to Bersani and 36.5 per cent to Franceschini. Franceschini led Bersani in five regions out of twenty; only in one, Friuli Venezia Giulia, did his margin over Bersani exceed 10 per cent. By contrast, Bersani's margin over Franceschini was between 20 and 40 percent in seven regions out of fifteen, and over 40 per cent in another four: in Sardinia Bersani took 67 per cent of the vote, while his vote in Abruzzo, Calabria and Puglia reached levels of 70 per cent and above. Marino took just under 8 per cent of the vote nationally, most of it in the North and centre of the country; his highest and lowest votes were in Piemonte (17.6 per cent) and Sicily (0.9 per cent) respectively. The figures showed a strong negative correlation between Bersani's and Franceschini's shares of the vote ($r=-0.91$); there was a less significant negative correlation between Bersani's vote share and Marino's ($r=-0.53$) and no significant correlation between Franceschini's and Marino's ($r=0.13$).

The strength of Bersani's vote caused some surprise and consternation; the other two candidates called for the vote in Calabria, in particular, to be annulled, on the grounds that the 5,371 votes cast exceeded the number of party members in the region (*la Repubblica*, 22 September 2009). Moreover, Bersani's first-round victory, combined with the mechanics of the voting system, opened up a 'nightmare scenario' for the PD (Hanretty and Wilson, 2010). If Franceschini were to gain a majority of the primary vote without clearing the 50 per cent threshold, the result would be decided neither by the primary voters nor by the party members who had voted in the first round. Instead, the process would continue to its third stage: a special party congress, which would inevitably be dominated by horse-trading between the other two candidates and Marino. In other words, each of the three stages would give a different candidate his turn in the spotlight, while the ultimate result would effectively be decided by the three of them among themselves: a grotesquely inappropriate echo of First Republic backstairs politics. With this in mind, Eugenio Scalfari of *la Repubblica* proposed that the party should ignore the 50 per cent criterion if necessary, giving full sovereignty to the primaries. The '*lodo Scalfari*' was

rejected by Marino but endorsed by both the leading candidates, each of whom had pragmatic as well as principled reasons for disowning a mechanism which might have let him win from second place (*la Repubblica*, 15 October 2009).

Table 1: PD leadership candidates' share of party circles' vote, by region

Region	Bersani	Franceschini	Marino
Abruzzo	70.8%	24.7%	4.5%
Basilicata	62.1%	35.6%	2.3%
Calabria	73.5%	24.8%	1.7%
Campania	59.5%	35.9%	4.5%
Emilia Romagna	61.8%	30.5%	7.7%
Friuli Venezia Giulia	36.3%	51.5%	12.3%
Lazio	43.1%	45.3%	11.6%
Liguria	55.1%	36.2%	8.7%
Lombardia	53.9%	33.4%	12.7%
Marche	43.2%	46.1%	10.7%
Molise	59.6%	38.3%	2.1%
Piemonte	56.7%	25.7%	17.6%
Puglia	72.7%	23.9%	3.4%
Sardinia	67.0%	23.6%	9.4%
Sicily	45.3%	53.8%	0.9%
Toscana	51.0%	38.8%	10.1%
Trentino	51.3%	36.2%	12.5%
Umbria	58.3%	33.1%	8.6%
Val D'Aosta	40.0%	48.0%	12.0%
Veneto	46.4%	41.7%	11.9%
All regions	55.6%	36.5%	8.0%

Source: Partito Democratico 2009a. Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding. Percentages are calculated on the basis of valid votes cast. Figures for Trentino are calculated from the published figures for party circles in Trento and Bolzano.

The possibility remained that Bersani's victory would be reversed in the primaries. As interim party leader and Veltroni's former deputy, Franceschini was better known than Bersani to voters at large; primary voters were also thought less likely than party members to be repelled by Franceschini's association with Veltroni, or to be swayed by Bersani's connections among ex-DS networks. As well as enjoying Veltroni's unobtrusive backing, Franceschini's campaign was bolstered by the support of Serracchiani – who had addressed her original critique of the PD to Franceschini – as well as the veteran *ulivista* Parisi. In short,

Franceschini's campaign made a multi-faceted (and potentially self-contradictory) appeal to the idea of a 'new' politics, whether the 'new' was represented by building the Ulivo, building the PD or reforming the PD. The secularist Marino for his part made a concerted (and rather more coherent) appeal to new forms of politics, associating himself with issues around gender and sexuality and with advocacy of electronic democracy. The one candidate who made no effort to disown 'old' politics was Bersani: he seemed to represent the persistence of social democracy within the Italian Left, and the persistence of the DS within the PD. A Bersani victory thus seemed doubly unlikely: his ex-DS base might predominate numerically among party members but would surely be swamped among the *'popolo delle primarie'*; nor would his politics have a wide appeal, tending to evoke the DS or even the PCI rather than the PD.

Table 2: PD leadership candidates' share of primary vote, by region

	Bersani	Franceschini	Marino
Abruzzo	50.3%	36.7%	13.1%
Basilicata	56.8%	35.7%	7.6%
Calabria	71.5%	23.8%	4.6%
Campania	60.5%	32.7%	6.8%
Emilia Romagna	53.5%	34.5%	12.0%
Friuli Venezia Giulia	45.4%	39.1%	15.5%
Lazio	46.3%	35.6%	18.1%
Liguria	51.3%	32.5%	16.2%
Lombardia	54.0%	30.0%	16.0%
Marche	50.7%	35.5%	13.8%
Molise	66.3%	33.7%	0.0%
Piemonte	53.6%	29.2%	17.3%
Puglia	55.2%	36.9%	8.0%
Sardinia	58.7%	29.7%	11.6%
Sicily	47.7%	43.7%	8.5%
Toscana	46.7%	39.8%	13.5%
Trentino	61.7%	21.9%	16.4%
Umbria	51.8%	38.1%	10.1%
Val D'Aosta	49.0%	34.2%	16.8%
Veneto	51.9%	32.4%	15.7%
All regions	53.3%	34.2%	12.5%
Italians abroad	45.3%	39.1%	15.6%
Overall total	53.2%	34.3%	12.5%

Source: Partito Democratico (2009b). Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

In the event, the *popolo delle primarie* endorsed the choice of party members: Bersani was elected with 53.3 per cent of the national vote and 53.2 per cent of the total vote, including the votes cast by Italians abroad. (This last figure is included in Table 2 for completeness but is not referred to in the analysis, as it has no counterpart in the first-round vote.)

Bersani's share of the national vote was thus down 2.3 per cent with respect to the first-round vote. At 34.2 per cent, Franceschini's share of the vote was down by a similar margin in comparison to his share of the first-round vote; Marino gained in vote share, taking 12.5 per cent of the national vote. Marino's primary vote was substantially higher nationally than his first-round vote, with increases in every region but two: one of these was his home region Piemonte, where his primary vote was 0.3 per cent lower than the party vote had been; the other was Molise, where Marino's list was not on the ballot. Excluding Molise, Marino's vote share ranged from 18.1 per cent in Lazio down to 4.6 per cent in Calabria. The regional patterning of the vote was also much less clear: in the first round Marino's highest vote had been 17.6 per cent in Piemonte, with votes in the 10-13 per cent range in eight other northern and central regions. By contrast, the primaries gave Marino 10-15 per cent of the vote in six regions and over 15 per cent in a further eight, including 16.2 per cent in the southern region of Liguria. The negative correlation between Bersani's vote and Marino's was significantly stronger in the primary stage than in the first round ($r=-0.66$); correspondingly, the negative correlation between Bersani's vote share and Franceschini's was slightly weaker ($r=-0.70$). Both candidates were in effect taking votes from Bersani rather than from each other. Once again, there was no discernible correlation between Marino's vote and Franceschini's ($r=-0.08$).

The comparison between Bersani's primary vote and Franceschini's is instructive on two levels. Firstly, it is striking that Bersani won a plurality in every region, and a majority in fifteen out of twenty; his lowest share of the vote, 45.4 per cent in Friuli Venezia Giulia, was higher than Franceschini's highest, 43.7 per cent in Sicily. Sicily was in fact the only region in which Franceschini's vote share was above 40 per cent. Secondly, the votes for both candidates showed less pronounced regional variations. There is a striking negative correlation ($r=-0.953$) between the changes in vote shares at regional level for the two leading candidates. This cuts both ways: in eight regions, mostly in the North and centre, Bersani's share of the primary vote was higher and Franceschini's lower than their respective shares of the first-round vote had been; in ten, most of them in the South, Bersani's primary vote share was lower than at the first stage and Franceschini's higher. (In two regions, Campania and Liguria, both Bersani

and Franceschini lost ground with respect to the first round.) Particularly strong shifts in Bersani's favour were registered in Trentino and Friuli Venezia Giulia; equally strong shifts in Franceschini's favour were seen in Puglia and Abruzzo.

Table 3: Differences in vote shares between first and second round, by region

	Bersani	Franceschini	Marino
Abruzzo	-20.5%	12.0%	8.6%
Basilicata	-5.3%	0.1%	5.2%
Calabria	-1.9%	-1.0%	2.9%
Campania	0.9%	-3.2%	2.3%
Emilia Romagna	-8.3%	4.0%	4.3%
Friuli Venezia Giulia	9.1%	-12.4%	3.2%
Lazio	3.2%	-9.7%	6.4%
Liguria	-3.7%	-3.7%	7.4%
Lombardia	0.1%	-3.4%	3.3%
Marche	7.5%	-10.7%	3.1%
Molise	6.8%	-4.6%	-2.1%
Piemonte	-3.2%	3.5%	-0.3%
Puglia	-17.6%	13.0%	4.6%
Sardinia	-8.3%	6.1%	2.2%
Sicily	2.5%	-10.1%	7.6%
Toscana	-4.3%	1.0%	3.3%
Trentino	10.4%	-14.3%	3.9%
Umbria	-6.5%	5.0%	1.5%
Val D'Aosta	9.0%	-13.8%	4.8%
Veneto	5.5%	-9.3%	3.8%
All regions	-2.3%	-2.3%	4.5%

Source: Partito Democratico (2009a, 2009b) (author's elaboration). Figures may not add up to 0% due to rounding.

These divergences suggest that the *popolo delle primarie* is considerably less susceptible than party members to the efforts of local notables to get the vote out for their favoured candidate. However, it should also be noted that these changes are compatible with pluralities for Bersani in every region: this suggests that the huge first-stage margins which Bersani registered in several regions had done no more than paint an already impressive lily. Interestingly, Calabria stood out from the general trend, registering a 73.5 per cent vote for Bersani in the first stage and a scarcely less 'Bulgarian' 71.5 per cent in the primaries. Whether this result dispels the suspicions which the first stage vote had attracted is another question.

A party with transversal tendencies

To understand Bersani's sweeping victory, and the position in which it leaves the PD, we need to consider both the main issues which divide the party and the main tendencies currently operating within it. Three inter-related dividing lines have cut across the party ever since it was founded as the merger of the ex-Communist DS and the ex-Christian Democrat Margherita. The party is divided ideologically between left and right, and between secular and Catholic; these ideological divisions have a rough organisational counterpart in the split between ex-DS and ex-Margherita. A third and less overt ideological dividing line opposes those for whom the PD represents an entirely new form of politics to those who see it as the latest vehicle for the broad Italian centre-left. This split too has an organisational counterpart in the division between 'old' and 'new' politicians, represented most vividly by the PD leadership's attempts to impose a top-down structure of regional representation on a pre-existing and uncompliant localised power base (Hanretty and Wilson, 2010).

Bersani's victory suggests that the balance of power within the PD runs in favour of the (numerically dominant) former DS members and against the ex-Margherita component; in favour of the secular Left of the PD and against its Catholic Right; in favour of treating the PD as a new generation of centre-left party and against the more millennial aims of the *ulivisti*; and, not least, in favour of dealing with established regional *notabili*, rather than sending in the new brooms. However, to locate Bersani's election on these different axes is not to explain how it came about. To be on the Left of the PD is not necessarily to be ex-DS or to be anti-clerical; links between positions on these axes and the 'old'/'new' divide are even more tenuous. The PD has inherited many of the plural, cross-cutting divisions of both its predecessor parties. As in the PCI and the Christian Democrats (Democrazia Cristiana, DC) these different polarisations should be seen not as the defining characteristics of factions within the party but as symbolic resources which can be mobilised by factional entrepreneurs, in complex and sometimes contingent ways.

Franceschini was the rightmost of the three candidates and the only one strongly associated with Christian Democracy. As such, Franceschini needed to mobilise support beyond his ex-Margherita base, and did so – the weight of former DS members within the PD is considerably higher than Bersani's first-round 55.6 per cent, let alone his primary vote. However, he did so by appealing not to the positive values of Christian Democracy (still highly esteemed on the Italian Left) or to the experience of the Ulivo, but to a politics of the 'new' reminiscent of New Labour; in Hanretty and Wilson's words, his manifesto was 'more like that of a former Blairite than a former democristiano' (Hanretty and Wilson, 2010).

Paradoxically, the breadth of Franceschini's campaign underscored

its fragility. Bersani's own manifesto denounced 'the short-cut of a political cult of the new [*nuovismo politico*]' (Bersani, 2009); the reference is to Veltroni, but the criticism is still more applicable to the different approach adopted by his deputy. Veltroni's *nuovismo* denoted a turn away from ideological politics, which would be replaced by charismatic leadership, image-led campaigning and appeals to technocratic competence, exemplified by entrepreneurial figures such as Renato Soru and Massimo Ciletti. Elitist and anti-political though this project might be, it had a certain basic coherence. By contrast, Franceschini attempted to combine Veltronian *nuovismo* with appeals to the 'new' politics symbolised by the Ulivo itself (founded by time-served political operators) and by Serracchiani – whose youthful appearance and lack of national profile belie years of local activism. The resultant hybrid fell between two stools, communicating neither the principled enthusiasm of Serracchiani nor the marketing-led novelty of Veltroni's project. The possibility of a Franceschini campaign based on Christian democratic values, and building outwards from a base among Margherita veterans, was discarded untried.

Bersani's campaign was at once more coherent, more conservative and more intelligently opportunistic. Veltroni's *nuovismo* had – almost by definition – had no real ideological base in the PD, making it a poor base from which to make broader alliances; Bersani therefore set his face against it. This in itself helped to gain him the support of important elements of the PD Right, including no less a survivor of Christian Democracy than Follini. At the same time, Bersani made no secret of his roots in the DS and in social democracy. Bersani's appeal to the Left was fairly understated, but it was sufficient to position him as the left-most candidate; as such he gained the support of left-wingers including Gavino Angius, a founder member of SD who had since returned to the PD fold. In a separate appeal to older approaches to politics, Bersani exploited the widespread unease regarding the prominence which Veltroni's tactics had accorded to Di Pietro: he argued that IdV's negative approach was a dead end and suggested that 'the Di Pietro phenomenon' was a symptom of the youth and weakness of the PD, which the party would no longer have to put up with when it had come into its own (*Corriere della Sera*, 19 August 2009). This ostentatious distancing of the PD from IdV is not likely to have any practical result – the PD needs IdV's support, while an alliance between IdV and any other party is hard to conceive. However, it served to differentiate Bersani from Franceschini – who responded, ideally for Bersani's purposes, by insisting that the enemy was Berlusconi and not Di Pietro, thus associating his *nuovismo* with the *giustizialismo* still feared by many survivors of the First Republic.

What made Bersani's campaign more than an exercise in opportunism was an alliance with two distinct groups. On one hand, Bersani is associated with Massimo D'Alema and a member of the non-

party 'Red' group ('Riformisti e democratici'), launched by D'Alema shortly after the 2008 election. While Red is generally seen as a Left current, its strategy (and D'Alema's) cannot simply be identified with the Left: for D'Alema, strengthening the Left within the PD is less an aim in itself than a means to the longer-term end of remaking the Italian political system around a clearer and more principled left/right cleavage, hence making Italy 'a normal country' (Gilbert, 1998). Red for its part pursues dialogue with the centre and the Right, aiming to develop the political and intellectual resources for a return to post-Berlusconi normality.

D'Alema is viewed with suspicion by many *ulivisti*, who charge him with having an elitist and retrograde conception of politics (Parisi, 2009a). Nevertheless, his long-term perspectives, his high-minded goals and his orientation towards the 'caste' of professional politicians give him more in common with the *ulivista* area than with either the Veltronian centre-right or with what remains of the social-democratic Left. This perhaps makes it less surprising that Bersani's campaign was also supported by prominent Margherita veterans, including Rosy Bindi and Enrico Letta. Bindi and Letta had been Veltroni's only significant challengers in the 2007 primary elections for leadership of the nascent PD, Bindi receiving 13 per cent and Letta 11 per cent of the vote. The *bindiani* and *lettiani* represent major ideological components of the Margherita, drawing on Catholic social thinking and liberal Catholicism respectively. The two groups differ accordingly in the stress they place on alliance policy: Letta has consistently argued for rapprochement with the Catholic centre, whereas Bindi stresses the need to build a broad and plural PD which would itself represent centre-Left Catholic voters. Both have also been strongly associated with the Ulivo project; Bindi has spoken of her vision of the PD as 'the realisation of the Ulivo: a plural party, which can nevertheless achieve a synthesis' (*Corriere della Sera*, 26 January 2009). For Bersani to gain the endorsement of both Bindi and Letta effectively signalled that, despite his association with D'Alema, his candidacy was the one which carried the hopes of the Ulivo. Significantly, none of Bersani's opponents has been prepared to pick up the banner of the Ulivo; Parisi greeted Bersani's election by saying that the Ulivo project was now history, pointedly reserving judgment on whether the PD under Bersani represented the realisation of this project or its definitive failure (Parisi, 2009b).

While Bersani's election suggests a definite shift away from the apolitical *nuovismo* of Veltroni, it is hard to represent it as a shift to the left, still less as the adoption of a leftist identity for the PD. Some PD right-wingers did draw this conclusion, including the newly-recruited Calero ('if someone walks out without even looking at the menu, they may just have gone to the wrong restaurant' commented Bersani's ally Filippo Penati (*la Repubblica*, 5 November 2009)). The defection of Francesco Rutelli

to form the centrist Alliance for Italy (Alleanza per l'Italia, ApI) was a more serious blow to the PD. However, the ApI has taken with it only a handful of parliamentarians: Bersani's PD will be spared the nightmare scenario of being identified definitively with the DS by a resurrected Margherita (which is still in receipt of substantial government funding (Pacini, 2009)). This is due in part to the genuine breadth of Bersani's project for the PD and in part to the relative lack of political drawing power exerted by Rutelli, a serial political *trasfuga* without roots in either the Catholic or the Communist political subculture. The enduring strength of Catholic centre-left politics within the PD has left Rutelli's project with few distinctive political selling-points, other than the prospect of forming part of a future centre party following an eventual merger with the Union of the Centre (Unione di Centro, UdC).

Bersani's takeover of the PD has thus been relatively uncontested and relatively trouble-free. Elections for the party's remaining major offices, held at the party's 7 November national conference, struck a delicate balance between reconciliation and rewarding the victors. Bindi was elected to the post of President, originally created for Prodi and left vacant since he resigned at the time of the 2008 elections. The new post of Vice-President is jointly occupied by Marina Sereni, an ex-DS Franceschini supporter, and Ivan Scalfarotto, *piombino* and Marino supporter. Letta was elected to Franceschini's old post of Vice-Secretary. The only significant current left unrepresented at this level is that of the Popolari - Margherita veterans with Christian Democrat roots, towards the right of the PD and associated with Franceschini. Calls for a second Vice-Secretary post, which would be reserved for a member of this area, subsided after Franceschini dissociated himself from them (*la Repubblica*, 7 November 2009). Under Bersani the PD has taken a decisive step away from Veltroni's attempt to remodel the party along technocratic, charismatic and ultimately apolitical lines; however, this has been accomplished without attaching the party exclusively to any particular political line, and without any major dissent or recrimination.

Crawling through the wreckage: the radical Left after 2008

The radical Left is currently in much worse shape than the PD. Its disarray has long historical roots, going back to the divisions within the Italian Communist Left. The PCI had a traditionalist, pro-Soviet tendency, heavily committed to party unity and loyalty to the leadership, and historically well-rooted in the PCI's membership in the 'Red Belt': as late as 1983, at least one PCI federation met beneath a portrait of Stalin (alongside those of Lenin and Togliatti), despite pressure from above to remove it (Shore, 1990: 119). There was also an outward-looking, social movement-friendly Left, represented in the 1960s by Pietro Ingrao and in the 1970s by the group

around *il Manifesto*; leftists of this tendency were also active outside the PCI, in a variety of small socialist parties, whether by choice or necessity.

At its formation in 1991, Communist Refoundation (Partito della Rifondazione Comunista, PRC) gave a home to both Lefts. The 1998 split which created the Party of Italian Communists (Partito dei Comunisti Italiani, PdCI) can be read as a split between the two: after the split, PdCI was led by the former leader of the PCI's pro-Soviet wing, Armando Cossutta, PRC by the former Socialist, Fausto Bertinotti. However, it was far from being a clean break. PRC's side of the split represented maximalist intransigence as well as ideological heterodoxy; the formation of PdCI represented a commitment to political realism and close relations with the DS, as well as discipline and party unity. The 2008 election defeat of SA, followed by the retirement of Bertinotti, allowed the contradictions within both parties to explode. Oliviero Diliberto, leader of PdCI, reacted to the defeat by launching an appeal for a regrouping of all political forces upholding the title of 'Communist'; PdCI had lost as much as 11 per cent of its 2006 support to the tiny Workers' Communist Party (Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori) (*la Repubblica*, 17 April 2008). PRC's 2008 congress saw a similar resolve to 'take a left turn out of this defeat', in the words of the newly-elected secretary Paolo Ferrero (*la Repubblica* 26 July 2008); this represented a break with the project of a broad Left alliance, associated with Bertinotti. However, within PRC the return to communist fundamentals was contested to a much greater extent. Ferrero was elected secretary with 50.5 per cent of the vote; his rival, the '*Bertinottiano*' Nichi Vendola, took 47.4 per cent. Vendola refused any party office for himself or his associates, committing the newly-formed '*Rifondazione per la Sinistra*' group to play the role of an internal opposition (*la Repubblica* 27 July 2008). Six months later, the majority of Vendola's group left PRC to organise under the name of Movement for the Left (Movimento per la Sinistra, MpS).

Vendola poses a challenge to the established far Left in terms of style as well as substance. He stands out amid the heavily-coded exchanges of Italian politics both by his vivid use of language and by his frank disrespect for opponents and rivals – even for Bertinotti, whom one might have expected to be treated as an *éminence grise* of Vendola's group. In November 2008 Bertinotti published a 4,000-word essay which carefully, even laboriously, laid out the preconditions for 'the construction of a united but plural Left political force, as is now possible, bringing together and uniting the forces and individuals who are keenly aware of the need for such a force, in a project which it is for all to build together' (Bertinotti, 2008). Vendola's response came quickly, in an 800-word piece which mentions Bertinotti only once and contains no direct references to his essay. After appearing to commend Bertinotti's call for an 'open and courageous confrontation' within the Left, Vendola warned that this approach was a

dangerous irrelevance: to follow Bertinotti's advice would be to risk 'cutting ourselves off from the world', becoming deaf to 'the sound and the sense of that process of change which is once again warming its engines'. Vendola paints a vivid picture of a world ruled by 'finance capitalism, with its oil-mills grinding the devil's flour (money and war)', which confronts the Left with 'a strange paradox: we preach change, but change doesn't recognise us – in fact it passes us by'. He warns an imaginary leftist, 'People don't know who you are; the productive forces don't know you're defending them; and, what's more, young people think you smell of mothballs'. The Left must start again from first principles, and 'give a real meaning to the secular trinity of liberty, equality and fraternity' (Vendola, 2008).

The immediate result of the Vendolian wind of change was the reorganisation of the parties of the failed SA alliance, in advance of the 2009 European elections, into not one alliance but two: the Anti-Capitalist List (Lista Anticapitalista) and the Left and Freedom (Sinistra e Libertà), each of which included two of the four former components of SA. In effect, the regrouping of communists promoted by Diliberto had been answered by a regrouping of the non-communist Left, led by Vendola. PRC, shorn of Vendola's group and committed to a 'left turn', joined the PdCI in the Anti-Capitalist List; the list also included Socialismo 2000, a left-wing current within SD which had left the party in October 2008 rather than join in the proposed regrouping of the Left. The Left and Freedom for its part centred on Vendola's MpS, together with SD and the Greens. The list also included Enrico Boselli's Socialist Party (a last regrouping of Italian Socialist Party survivors and sympathisers, which had achieved just under 1 per cent of the national vote in 2008) and Unire la Sinistra ('Unite the Left') (a group led by the Italian astronaut Umberto Guidoni, which had left the PdCI in July 2008 rather than join the proposed regrouping of communists).

This reshuffling of the factional cards had the merit of ideological clarity: once the music had stopped, the components of the two lists could reasonably claim to be where they were for political reasons, and not merely as a means to the end of achieving more than 4 per cent of the vote. That said, achieving more than 4 per cent of the vote was – in 2009 as in 2008 – the main object of the regrouping exercise. The two groups between them gained 6.5 per cent, a significant improvement on the total of 4.1 per cent obtained by the SA and Boselli's Socialists in 2008; however, neither crossed the 4 per cent threshold, the Anti-Capitalist List taking 3.4 per cent of the vote and the Left and Freedom 3.1 per cent. The entire spectrum to the left of the PD is now unrepresented in the European Parliament as well as the Italian national parliament. Vendola was unmoved by the inevitable recriminations: 'With our 3.1 per cent we have opened the workshop of the new Italian Left. We shall not be the ones to close it' (Vendola, 2009). Claudio Fava of SD went so far as to hail the result as a success: 'Anything

over 3 per cent is a big result – an extraordinary result, in fact' (*la Repubblica*, 8 June 2009). Vendola's reaction suggests that he believed that his courage had been rewarded; it is not clear that his grounds for believing this were any better than Veltroni's.

In the second half of 2009 the fortunes of the two regroupings diverged. The Anti-Capitalist List has taken more durable form in the Federation of the Alternative Left (*Federazione della Sinistra Alternativa*); the constituent parties remain in operation, but will run joint candidates in the 2010 regional elections. The more heterogeneous grouping, the Left and Freedom, has fared less well; the Greens withdrew in October 2009 (*Federazione dei Verdi*, 2009), followed in November by the Socialists (*Partito Socialista Italiano*, 2009). The loss of the two components of the Left and Freedom which had had an enduring existence as parties left the alliance as little more than an assemblage of exiled factions. MpS, SD and 'Unite the Left', together with a splinter group from the Greens, have now regrouped as the Left, Ecology and Freedom (*Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà*), with a view to forming a new party. At the time of writing the new organisation has yet to hold its founding conference.

The Italian transition: to be continued

Italian politics since 1994 has been dominated (or at best overshadowed) by Berlusconi; the history of the Italian Left in that period has been dominated by successive attempts to build an alliance both broad enough and united enough to defeat Berlusconi. Those alliances, the most fully realised of which governed Italy between 2006 and 2008, have been predicated on what I have identified as the three themes of the Italian transition: alternation in government; an end to the exclusion of the Left; the primacy of democratic politics over special interests and corrupt exchange. Prodi's 2006 government was hampered and ultimately destroyed by its internal contradictions, traceable in most cases to different interpretations of the transition agenda: Di Pietro's primary commitment was to the ethical agenda, Bertinotti's to the inclusion of the Left, while Clemente Mastella was committed to neither.

The PD as envisaged by Veltroni represented a brave but quixotic attempt to cut the knot of the *Unione* by giving absolute priority to the construction of a centre-left party capable of alternating in power, downplaying the ethical dimension of the transition agenda and abandoning any commitment to the inclusion of the Left. The results of the 2008 election, and the experience of opposition under Berlusconi, tested this project to destruction. As the acclaim given to Serracchiani's intervention demonstrates, there is now widespread awareness within the PD that the party must be built as an organisation as well as a marketing proposition;

that it should make the ethical dimension of the transition agenda its own; and that it needs to present itself as a Left opposition to Berlusconi. The transition, in short, continues.

In comparison with Veltroni, Bersani's approach on all three fronts can be characterised as cautious, conservative, even backward-looking. This is not necessarily a bad thing for the PD. In his manifesto Bersani evoked the Ulivo: 'the project which inspires us is not complete: the encounter between progressive political cultures and experiences, divided even now, remains a live issue'; the PD was 'the common home of reformists, for reformists to build together' (Bersani, 2009). First and foremost, Bersani's PD is not a marketing proposition aimed at the Italian public, but an organisation with its own inner life: 'the question ... is not whether to be an "old" party or a "new" party, but whether or not to be truly a party' (Bersani, 2009). The party in this sense has already been a key theme of Bersani's leadership; he has cultivated good relations both with regional *notabili* and with the aspirant caste of thirty- and forty-something activists who identify with Serracchiani and Scalfarotto.

Bersani's approach to the ethical question – and the related but distinct question of the PD's relations with IdV – is more cautious than that of either Veltroni or Franceschini. This can be related to Bersani's 'party-minded' approach. Veltroni's approach of effectively farming out the ethical question to Di Pietro might have been intended to add IdV's support to the PD's; in practice it enabled IdV to contrast itself with the PD and attract PD voters away from the party. To judge from Bersani's critical remarks on IdV, Bersani intends to adopt the approach I have characterised as a 'constructive engagement' (Edwards, 2009: 46), combining hostility to a troublesome external group with the appropriation of the group's agenda (or a manageable subset of it). The PD, in other words, will not go back to offering Di Pietro any kind of endorsement, but is likely to steal his ethical clothes.

In both these areas Bersani has the means and the opportunity to improve on Veltroni's approach. However, Veltroni's electoral coup has put a question mark over the third element of the agenda: the exclusion of the Left. The non-representation of the radical Left in Parliament is 'an electoral tragedy', drastically narrowing the range of institutionally legitimate political opinion. It also creates a massive disadvantage for the PD, despite its short-term benefit to the party. Until there is some political representation of forces to the left of the PD, electoral mathematics alone suggests that the party will tend to engage in centripetal competition with the parties to its right. However, this is an approach which cannot realistically gain a centre-left party much support, given the number of parties contending for the centre ground – an area made still more crowded by Rutelli's defection. On the other hand, moving right may still lose the PD support on the left – if only to demobilisation and abstention. Moreover,

it is highly debatable whether the PD, alone or with IdV, can exceed the 37.2 per cent of the vote obtained in 2001 by the PD's predecessors together with Di Pietro and the Radicals – the high-water mark of the centre-left bloc which fought the 2008 election. If the long-dreamt-of alternation in power is to be achieved, the PD will have to find allies on the left once again as well as on the right.

To echo the old PCI slogan, the PD has come a long way and has a long way yet to go. Veltroni's 'short-cut', aimed at bringing the transition to a close and restoring political normality, has instead made it likely that the anomalies and distortions which the transition agenda was intended to resolve will persist for years to come.

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