

**THE EXTREME RIGHT IN ITALY
FROM THE ITALIAN SOCIAL MOVEMENT
TO POST-FASCISM**

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From the end of the Second World War, social scientists concerned with the dynamics of continuity and discontinuity among the extreme right in 20th Century Europe have had -in the case of Italy- a very particular object for study. And the reasons for this widespread interest lie in events whose clarity is evident for all to see, often forcefully so. Although it may be the case -according to Zeev Sternhell's provocative and suggestive thesis¹- that the essential traits of fascist *culture* have their origin in the vicissitudes of the French 'revolutionary right' at the close of the 19th Century, the creation of fascism as a clear *political movement* took place in Italy. Unlike the events that occurred in Germany, Italian fascists did not come about exclusively as a block of reactionary forces, but rather they articulated their values along the lines of a complicated magma of situational subversion, in the shadow of combat 'mythology' from the Great War. The failure of the conversion of this formula into one of a mass movement, capable of establishing and maintaining political space for the middle classes, made it necessary to bring about changes to the discourse and organizational structure of the *antipartito*; this in turn created a skillful combination of elements arising, on the one hand, from the breakdown of the petite bourgeoisie's hopes and illusions, and on the other hand, from the alliance with the elitist parties of the liberal right. From 1922 onwards, fascism was converted into a powerful coalition, correcting the democratic revolution of the *dopoguerra*, and adapting political institutions to the inescapable intervention of the masses. It built up a delicate balance between consensus and repression; between the primacy of fascism and the survival of the old state apparatus; between the regime's charismatic authoritarianism and the legitimizing participation on the part of the citizens. All of this contributed in Europe, in the period between the two World Wars, to keep the longest-lasting fascist regime firmly in place. In 1943, with the fall of Mussolini, a Social Republic was set up which aimed at reinventing the earlier anti-bourgeois fascism, but which only succeeded in worsening Mussolini-scale nationalization by means of civil war and alliance with the German invaders. After the war, in a republic legitimized by the anti-fascist victory, the Italian Social Movement (M.S.I.) maintained its *polo escluso*, identifying itself in terms of its loyalty to the *ventennio* regime, able at all moments to hold its hegemony over the various parts of the multi-faceted culture of fascism. Following the dissolution of the republican parties, with the 1992-1994 crisis, M.S.I. set itself a post-fascist proposal, changing its name to National Alliance, with the clear aim of being *the* hegemonic force of an Italian right-wing movement adapted, at the dawning of the 21st Century, to the construction of bi-polarization within the party systems.

It is curious that such a density of motivations, forming a chain of continuity between classical fascism, neo-fascism and post-fascism, should not have brought about closer academic scrutiny of M.S.I.'s development². The first rigorous monograph of what is the most important of the European fascist movements did not appear until 1989³. The extra-territoriality of Italian fascism was, in this way, also extended to the attitudes and behavior of a negligent social science; it is only with the destruction of the first republic's party system that we observe modifications to this academic position⁴. This current work aims at highlighting the general lines of development that have been taken by Italian neo-fascism, in accordance with certain methodological considerations and a number of hypotheses that I think it right to mention at this point. It is not my intention to carry out an internal analysis of M.S.I., nor a study of the dynamics of its leadership, nor even of the origin of its party members, of their organization, etc. Rather, I am aiming at an understanding of its place in the correlation of political forces in the last fifty years. Although its progress has taken place within the framework of a bureaucratic party of the masses, this has

not excluded the presence of a powerful ideological authority whose forcefulness was fed by the exclusion to which it had been condemned by Italian political culture -a forcefulness that was also fed by the convictions of a militancy whose affections for the Mussolini regime was clearly expressed. Yet the effectiveness of its mechanisms of ideological adhesion were in no way an obstacle to the movement's singular ability to formulate proposals for its inclusion within the governing regime, that is, proposals for political normalization, which were strategically expressed in successive requests for pacts with the hegemonic party of the middle classes, Democrazia Cristiana. This duality on the part of M.S.I., a characteristic which allowed it to be both an alternative to and a part of the system at one and the same time, was not the result of the movement's metamorphosis at the hands of pure post-war necessity: fascism in the 1920's was also characterized by such duality, capable of sustaining the double façade of anti-systemic *squadristi* action, and electoral collaboration with the liberal right. For this reason, the frequent distinction between fascist 'movements' and fascist 'regimes' as a means of characterizing this double neo-fascist culture -at once conservative and discontinuous- does not seem to me to be sufficiently rigorous. Even in its most radical formulation, it wholly fails to explain the internal conflicts and break-ups suffered by M.S.I. from 1950 to 1960. Classical fascism and neo-fascism have *always* maintained the double condition of anti-systemic discourse and the practical politics of coalition.

What would lead to division would be, more accurately, M.S.I.'s character of 'inferior rank' in these strategic proposals and, above all, the constant failure to carry through its plans. The ease with which the activists and misino voters accepted *inserimento* in the 1990's, and the insignificance of those few who still wished to maintain the identity of fascism, using the language of 'rupture' -Pino Rauti's *Fiamma Tricolore*- is clear evidence of the consensus for strategy that the conditions of institutional change through the 90's have made favorable to the heirs of the two parties excluded from governing in the first republic: the Italian Communist Party (P.C.I.) and M.S.I. Talk of 'post-fascism' or of 'post-industrialist fascism' refers to the new political conditions prevalent in the Italian institutional landscape that have made a reassessment of the discourse, coming from the extreme right, particularly necessary. This does not imply a denial of the clear traits of continuity between the National Alliance and M.S.I., an aspect on which I coincide with Piero Ignazi. Nevertheless, I believe that an area as substantial as the *perception* of the party by Italian society, in the closing years of the 20th century, is a central factor for analysis as it allows for an understanding of the acceptance that has taken place in Italy, and -furthermore- for insight into the hegemony that the extreme right may yet achieve, given the strong delegitimization of the 'old politics'⁵.

FROM THE PARTY OF SALÓ TO THE PARTY OF THE VENTENNIO

The onset of the crisis for the collective view that favored Mussolini coincided with entry into the world war and, particularly, with the poor results that this path led to, culminating in the humiliation of the allied invasion. It is true that the rapid disintegration of the regime might well have been a consequence of the lack of an alternative class of leaders, a class that certain fascist theorists had argued in favor of during the *ventennio*. But beyond this, memories of the war that had been lost, and of the extreme cruelty experienced throughout the civil war in the north were already breaking down the prestige that the regime had enjoyed in the years of its greatest splendor. Curiously, what had been pure

fascism for the founders of M.S.I., free from the servitude of the right, was the very type of regime that was least able to win for itself the plurality of social sectors that had previously sustained the Mussolini system. And on the other hand, immediate post-war conditions displaced the political wishes of the middle classes towards the immense zone of cultural influence that belonged to Democrazia Cristiana. This group seemed to be converting itself into the great party of the bourgeoisie, absent in the decades previous to the fascist experience⁶.

At the outset of the 1950's, two situations that would condition M.S.I.'s changes of fortune (up to the time of its extinction) became particularly evident. The first of these was the ability to control the group of 'clientela' ideologically linked to the *ventennio*, thereby undermining the effectiveness of national-populist groups such as *l'Uomo Qualunque*, of small pockets of armed resistance and even of the pro-monarchy sections of the extreme right⁷. The second situation was the need to recover the Mussolinian culture of fascist-coalition, rejecting the exclusive demands of the Social Republic of 1943-1945, as well as the founding program of the *fasci di combattimento* of 1919. The strategy of *inserimento*, designed and carried out by Arturo Michelini throughout the long period of his leadership (1954-1969), was the most intelligent updating of the normalization strategy applied by Benito Mussolini to his movement from 1921 onwards. Bearing in mind this point of view, we can see that the sectors of opposition lacked both a viable alternative and serious historical legitimacy. Followers of Giorgio Almirante's 'socializing' leftist section, advocates of the application of the Verona constitution, interpreted fascism in a biased way, without considering who the basic elements of its consensus had been. On the other hand, Pino Rauti's 'spiritualists,' followers of the thinking of Julius Evola⁸, were essentially unable to reflect upon their own situation without fiercely criticizing the Mussolini regime, in the same ways as traditionalist philosophy had done. At the moment of truth, when both sectors had the option to rectify the strategy of *inserimento*, they were unable to construct an alternative that contained, at one and the same time, the ideological intransigence that was demanded, and the indispensable flexibility required to maintain an electorate that had understood -better than the critical leaders themselves- exactly what the character of fascism really was.

The general elections of 1948 and 1953 illustrated that M.S.I.'s 'hunting ground' lay between Rome and Sicily. Local elections in 1951 even resulted in political majorities in important southern provincial capitals⁹. Wherever fascism did not provoke memories of the civil war, or of the hard repression of 'republican fascism,' wrapped up in the socializing demagogy of the Verona constitution, M.S.I. received the discreet support of people far removed from the 'spaces of sociability' created by Democrazia Cristiana and P.C.I. in the center-north of the country. Such voters were in favor of a conservative, paternalist and amiable fascism, disposed towards collaborating with the monarchists. In this way, a party that had been founded to demand the just cause of the Social Republic against the traitors of 1943, ended up linking itself to those very 'traitors.' But we should emphasize that this was not a consequence of a resigned adaptation to the feelings that brought about the election results -though this indeed was its most visible factor- but rather an adequate response to an understanding of what had been, *in reality*, the Mussolinian movement and regime, over and beyond the exceptional situations of 1919 or 1943.

In 1953, M.S.I. had avoided the illegalization foreseen in the planning of the Scelba law thanks to the strength of its election results. The appointment, in the Viarregio congress of 1954, of the moderate Arturo Michelini as leader of the party, and his confirmation as party head in the Milan congress of 1956, outlined the profile that M.S.I. was to acquire throughout its existence, even though certain situations had been able to obscure this fact. Saló's old *reduci* circle had become a party of the masses which, though it maintained its veneration of the *ventennio*, no longer considered restoration a realistic possibility. The slogan '*ne rinnegare ne restaurare*' expressed two qualities that were indispensable in finding common ground with the right wing of Democrazia Cristiana, on the one hand, and also -on the other hand- to facilitating a national-conservative agreement between all anti-socialist forces.

THE FAILURE OF ONE PARTICULAR STRATEGY, AND THE ALTERNATIVE IN FAVOR OF A COUP

Michelini's leadership had set out the proposals for M.S.I.'s 'subordination' within a wide ranging front of right wing Italian parties. Economic growth in the 1950's, the overwhelming ability of Democrazia Cristiana to attract voters, the support given by the Vatican to this option, Italian political culture's drive towards the center and the lack of radicalization on the part of the middle classes made it simply unthinkable that relations with Democrazia Cristiana would represent anything other than a 'lay flank', reasonably nostalgic about the *ventennio*, in a broad alliance of the political right that would include liberals and monarchists. Within this alliance, any tendency to heighten M.S.I.'s particular identity was sacrificed in the name of the coalition; various Christian Democratic governments were supported, and criticism of the Catholic party was tuned down. From 1956, the separation from M.S.I. of a number of discontented groups -such as *Ordine Nuovo* or *Avanguardia Nazionale*- which had chosen not to follow the party line on coalition 'behavior', was qualitatively important, but effectively anecdotic in terms of its organizational and electoral consequences. Giorgio Almirante's leftist section remained within the party and even accepted the process of bureaucratization, a process that, years later would be used to advantage¹⁰. Almirante's understanding that things *had* to be this way, that there was no realistic alternative to be followed, is a clear example of strategic intelligence. Furthermore, he realized that his critical position *within* the party would not only help him become an alternative to Michelini, but also give strength to the multi-faceted cohesion of M.S.I.

The death of Pope Pius XII, the new papacy of John XXIII and the celebration of the Second Vatican Council were the basic elements that reinforced Democrazia Cristiana positions least favorable to a closer collaboration with the neo-fascists. After the election of Fernando Tambroni's government in 1960, with Christian Democrat and Misino votes, the convening of M.S.I.'s Fifth Congress in Genoa resulted in a severe mobilization of the left, in bloody conflict and in the prohibition of the congress itself. However, and this was of greater importance, the episode spelt the end to any hopes of the neofascists forming part of the government. Meanwhile, the leftist sections of Democrazia Cristiana had managed to open the way for the political left in general, preparing the ground for the entrance of the Socialist Party (P.S.I.) into the government, at the end of 1963. From Democrazia Cristiana's point of view, this was a tactical move of great intelligence as it disarmed the possibility of a socialist-communist alternative several years in advance of the time when social tensions (resulting from the *economic miracle*'s

secondary effects) would raise their head and bring problems in their wake. This is how the situation was understood by sectors of the socialist left, who would break away in 1964 to form the Partito Socialista Italiano d'Unità Proletaria (P.S.I.U.P.), whilst those on the right set out to reunite the social democratic family in a new Partito Socialista Unitario (P.S.U.)¹¹.

The qualitative change of situation in the new decade was watched with growing concern from within other sectors of the Italian right, linked to the business sector, to the state security forces and to M.S.I. splinter groups. The Cuban revolution, the defeat of the French army in Indo-China, Gaullism's 'soft' coup, the setting up of military dictatorships in Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina and Peru lay the basic foundations for what would later be referred to as the *strategy of tension*. Courses given by the Albert Pollio Institute in 1965 on anti-subversive warfare, the activities of the Italian Intelligence Service, the Gladio network, the repercussions in 1967 of the Colonels' coup in Greece... all of these have been considered as some of the bigger links in the chain of vigilance over the 'weak State' culminating in the explosion of terrorism that the following decade would bear witness to. What is clear is that the entry of the socialists into the government was preceded by a warning that obliged the M.S.I. to modify its more extreme attitudes, and by Democrazia Cristiana's need to convince both internal and external pressure groups that opening the door to the left would result in a socialist party that was on the path to domestication. Nevertheless, M.S.I.'s luck was in serious danger. An outright bet on *inserimento* had received such a negative response that it threatened to reduce the party to a position of diminished ideological 'resistance', to a simple pool of right wing identities with no options whatever to impose conditions on government or to modify it in any way, and -as a result- it risked becoming a body progressively abandoned by the pragmatism of the citizens' vote. In 1967, M.S.I. had lost almost a fifth of the activists that it had counted on in 1960. The 1968 election results brought in the party's lowest ever return of 4.5%.

THE PERIOD OF GIORGIO ALMIRANTE: BETWEEN THE "ALTERNATIVE" AND THE "DOPPIOPETTO", 1969-1987

The risk of stagnancy and progressive marginalization that M.S.I. was running required a series of events to occur in order both to undo the damage and to restore the illusion of a way out of the ghetto for the neofascist party. The crisis was intersected by international affairs that seemed to put western hegemony in danger, such as the invasion of the then Czechoslovakia or the Vietcong offensive, whilst internally there were the worker and student mobilizations that had taken place throughout the continent, but which, in Italy, lasted longer and were markedly more bitter. Within the scope of the party itself, Michellini died in 1969, and Giorgio Almirante was named as his successor, a position that he would hold until the Sorrento congress in 1987.

The arrival of Almirante to the position of Party Secretary implied a series of changes that were not only conditioned by the personality of the new leader, but also by the general political circumstances taking place in the country at the time. His very election indicated that M.S.I.'s leadership had understood the inadequacy of the *inserimento* carried out during Arturo Michellini's stewardship. Clearly the approach that had brought with it only strategic paralysis and a 'reductionist' ideology was now

exhausted, and Almirante proposed a skillful recovery of what was the double role traditionally played by fascism. Whilst the anti-systemic discourse was proclaimed as strongly as ever, reaffirming the movement's fascist identity, a redirection of Italian politics was proposed by the suggested creation of a great *Destra Nazionale*. The real intention behind this suggestion was the articulation of a *constituent of the right*, a grouping that aimed to count on the support of all the anti-communist forces in an attempt to redefine conservative political space. The term 'constituent of the right,' however, would end up referring to the sum of what remained of the monarchists, plus M.S.I. This position was nevertheless accompanied by the mobilization of youth groups linked to M.S.I. -particularly the university federation- in order to combat the social conditions that had led to the 1967-68 crisis. The greater part of all the groups that had broken away from the movement in the preceding years, such as the *Ordine Nuovo* sector, linked to Rauti, were successfully reincorporated, thereby assuring that their radical proposals would have a place in the multiple Misino strategy. A lead was taken in actions such as the populist mobilization in Reggio Calabria. But above all, the anti-systemic stance was aimed at expressing the movement's view that the crisis of the institutions would not give way to a communist 'solution' while M.S.I. was able to establish a *piazza di destra* to prevent it¹².

In this way, M.S.I. recovered the 'original' character of fascism, adapting it to the circumstances prevalent at the outset of the 1970's. An inflammatory discourse, used above all by student sectors, reproached the system for its incapacity to satisfy the needs of the sectors beneath its administration. The same discourse warned that only a strong party, with combative and young followers, would be able to prevent the "much deserved" disintegration of the system from paving the communists' way to power. The 'alternative' unrest carried out by the Misino youth, and the benevolent attitude with which the violence of the *Movimento Político Ordine Nuovo*, of *Avanguardia Nazionale* or of *Lotta di Popolo* was viewed, was counterbalanced by the conservative severity of M.S.I. leadership, which placed all of this anti-systemic discourse within the context of the defense of western order, and of the alliance with non-fascist right wing parties that needed to harden European political conditions in order to undermine the mobilization of the left.

Just when it had reached its lowest levels of electoral support and party following, M.S.I. recovered its visibility with the necessary force required of it from the Italian institutional spectrum, emerging with a clearly marked identity to occupy a very particular political space. It began to be seen as a factor capable of forcing a reorientation of the left-wing 'fickleness' within the Christian Democrats, as an instrument of a certain correction, after the *Grande peur* of 1967-1970. In the local elections of 1971, in the south of Italy, voters rewarded M.S.I. with generosity, although the response was somewhat more guarded the following year in the general election. M.S.I. moved from 4.5% to 8.7% of the vote, but this was below its expectations of becoming the country's third party, and thereby moving onto the threshold of power. As in 1960, M.S.I. had stumbled only yards from the finishing line. And, in the same ways as before, this resulted in electoral stagnancy, in the crisis of dissent and in ideological confusion, all of which would return the party to a position of political exclusion, setting it on the road to its virtual disappearance.

Clearly, the circumstances of the moment were unusual. The crisis had established a hitherto unseen situation not only within Italian political culture, but also within the extreme European Right as a

whole. The position of Giorgio Almirante's allegedly 'leftist' party ended up as a corporative proposal that had more aspects of working class control than the mythical National Working State. In reality, as is to be expected of orthodox fascism, this corporativism would appear as a refusal to accept the normality of social conflict, reducing it to a 'market pathology,' to be attenuated by coercive means. But on the other hand, Almirante avoided the risks of factionalism by accentuating the bureaucratization of the party -a process that Michelini had initiated but which under Almirante would especially affect the youth sectors, depriving them of their vitality. Bureaucratization, at a time when it was proving to be particularly difficult to establish an increase in election results and party supporters, heightened political and ideological immobility, and emphasized the problems that were experienced in capitalizing on the highly favorable conditions that had been prevalent at the beginning of the previous decade. In 1976, after the strong setback in the election -a result that foreshadowed both the effective demise of Almirante's 'duplicitous' and the end of the Italian political crisis- the most moderate sector of M.S.I., in favor of renouncing its fascist heritage, split away from the party (with a good number of members of parliament and senators) in order to form *Democrazia Nazionale*¹³. The abandonment of this wing of the party provoked a reaction -a crisis of identity- within the party that Piero Ignazi has accurately qualified as 'a fear of politics,' and which consisted of a paralyzing combination of rigidly nostalgic doctrinairism and of parliamentary opportunism.

As in other parts of Europe, a particular sector within M.S.I. had brought about the appearance of new ways of understanding politics, an understanding based on post-materialist positions, critical of consumerism, concerned with the rights of citizens against political institutions, with the use of free time, etc. This new class of political discourse was accompanied by ideological 'development' in an effort to construct a New Right, a movement whose maximum expression would be the Groupe de Recherche et Etudes Pour la Civilisation Européenne (GRECE), led by French philosopher Alain de Benoist. It was a current that did not set out to achieve immediate political goals, but was rather the reflection of a deeply felt need to purify neo-fascism and establish a political Right for the 21st century, a Right that would fundamentally oppose the myths of liberalism, including those which were conservative. The criticism of state nationalism, the defence of inequality in the scientific terms of 'biodiversity', the recuperation of a European pagan tradition plundered by Judeo-Christian rituals, the defense of the Third World and an attack on the Americanization of European culture were some of the points included in the modernization of a traditional political discourse. Concessions to neo-fascism were also criticized. What was aimed at was the construction of a common space for reflection for those 'alien to the system.' This was the line taken by Pino Rauti, and which should be differentiated from that of Almirante's fascist 'left', associating it more with experiences such as the transversality of the Hobbit camps in 1977, activity-based meeting points for the young, which set out and assessed cultural problems in a way that was radically different to the nostalgic doctrinairism of the neo-fascists in 1968.

The superposition of a crisis of identity was accompanied by important changes in the political system. At the same time that Almirante was proposing the unity of the right, strengthened by the supporting upsurge that the 1972 elections had resulted in, the coup d'état in Chile was causing the P.C.I. to undertake strategic measures that its General secretary, Enrico Berlinguer, would refer to as 'the historical compromise'. For Berlinguer, the events in Chile illustrated the impossibility of facing the challenges of social transformation without being able to count on the help of broad sectors of society.

And these sectors did not always correspond to the formal, mechanical divisions made along party lines. The leader of P.C.I. suggested an alliance of the two principal cultures within Italy, the Catholic and the Communist, thereby enabling the reunion of large parts of the population by breaking down the obstacles that had characterized their traditional ideology, in order to bring about the reunion within society of the bases of their support. The proposal was maintained throughout the 1970's, and allowed P.C.I. to obtain results that brought it dangerously close to the Christian Democrats in 1976. In fact, Democrazia Cristiana was only able to maintain its supremacy by decimating the electoral base of the small lay parties. The response to this situation articulated by NATO, the Department of State, sectors of Italian industry and the security services was unequivocal: such a state of affairs would seriously compromise the continuity of democratic institutions in Italy. Furthermore, this was happening within the framework of the transition to democracy in Portugal, Spain and Greece, a redirection that was carried out in spite of the adverse context of powerful political mobilization and an economic crisis that would continue throughout the decade. In the case of Italy, 'redirection' was to happen by means of the expansion of terrorism that has come to be known as 'armed spontaneity.' Black terrorism, led by *Costruire l'Azione, Terza Posizione* or *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari*, no longer recognized itself as being linked to M.S.I., and treated the movement as simply another element in the system. The terrorism of the *Brigate Rosse* complemented the exasperation of P.C.I.'s strategy referred to above. And with events as momentous as the assassination in 1978 of Aldo Moro, it was the end of all hopes for 'the historical compromise'¹⁴.

FROM THE PERIOD OF OPENING TO THE PERIOD OF TRANSFORMATION

The 1980's were marked by the ebbing of the tide of demands that had characterized the previous decade, by the prestige given to radical conservative liberalism (this decade was to mark the heyday of the Thatcher and Reagan administrations) and by the crisis that took hold in socialist run countries. Within Europe itself, the fall of the Gaullist right facilitated the rise of a phenomenon such as Le Pen, who would obtain his first successes in the second rounds of the 1983 and 1984 elections. And in Germany, meanwhile, there was the extreme right's 'third wave,' in the hands of Schönhuber's *Republikaner*.

It would seem that the conditions for M.S.I.'s 'normalization' had been established, at least, within the international arena. But they were also present, in fact, in certain aspects that were undergoing change within Italy. The sectors of the population that had lived through the experience of the *ventennio* were now on the wane, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to articulate the project in question within the terms of a now bygone period. The 'historicization' of fascism, initiated by the revisionism of Renzo De Felice, in the same way as had occurred with the German *Historikerstreik*, allowed for the abandonment of defensive and desperate positions. It offered, in its stead, a dignified way forward that would facilitate the reunion of those involved in the Italian political right, by having converted the *ventennio* into a pure and simple historical episode that in no way prejudged political alternatives for the future¹⁵. Nevertheless, neither the then current international situation nor the profound alteration of Italian political culture (which was to have such significant repercussions in the 1990's) was adequately evaluated by M.S.I., fearful that the loss of its signs of identity would bring with it the movement's dissolution. At the same time that the anti-communist alibi was breaking down, when the bases of the first

republic's legitimacy were crumbling, M.S.I. -the '*polo escluso*'- the movement best able to benefit from the situation, immobilized itself in a mystical 'self-referential', trusting in vain that the crisis would result in a flood of new members to swell its numbers. But the appearance on the political stage of new transversal proposals, ideas that broke with the older institutional scheme of things, made it all too evident that the population had grown tired of the 'old politics'. In its place, they were attracted to these new conceptions that confessed themselves to be 'surprised' at the traditional ways of categorizing society. Very different examples of a common disaffection are the *Partito Radicale* founded by Panella, or the various northern 'leagues' -those of Veneto, Piedmont and Lombardy- which would join together as the Northern League in the nineties.

Even when M.S.I. itself was lacking in charisma, its leaders had been in their positions for so long that they had acquired a certain aura, 'de facto'. Nevertheless, Almirante's succession through illness was able not only to avoid any loss of faith in the leadership but also to introduce the mechanisms of political renovation that eventually (though not at first) saved neo-fascism from liquidation. In 1987, Gianfranco Fini, in his thirties, educated in the political shadow of Almirante, was elected as Party Secretary. His was a leadership of continuity that tried to take advantage of the political success in other countries that was attributable to xenophobia; the approach was a failure. Although he was able to prevent the break up of M.S.I., he was unable to bring about the transformation needed to assimilate the crisis of the institutions. As expected, the leadership of Pino Rauti (1990-1991) set in process a renovation that caused only consternation among the party and electoral faithful. The old leader of *Ordine Nuovo* and, later, of the '*Línea futura*' and '*Andare oltre*' tendencies, aimed at re-qualifying the party along the lines of a great national-popular movement. It is true that there was still a certain value to be had in Rauti's ability to criticize the traditional parties operating in Italy at that time. But his perception of an alternative transversal discourse, the attempt to bring together fascism with the remains of the communist left in a 'rematch' of the past, made him lose both the support of his party and the prestige of the party's followers. In 1991, following the disaster of the administrative elections, with the southern vote -M.S.I.'s electoral stronghold- now reduced to half of what it had been, Pino Rauti returned leadership to Gianfranco Fini, who once again became the Party Secretary¹⁶.

The return of Almirante's *dauphin* took place in the context of internal and external political conditions that were considerably distinct from those of Fini's first mandate. By having undermined the prestige of Rauti's leftist alternative, the new Party Secretary became an indispensable element to the party's survival. His youth, his dynamism, his immense camera 'friendliness', all of this contributed to his being the leader who finally broke the mould of old Italian politics. He was the representation of a new generation anxious to separate itself from the cohesive mythology of the first republic. Within M.S.I., Fini was now no longer simply Almirante's *successor*: he had achieved his own political stature, benefiting from the experience of his earlier errors, and with a discerning vision of the space that was inexorably opening within the party -the opportunity for true renovation.

Nevertheless, the circumstances external to M.S.I. would, as ever, condition the party's fortunes. Legal action that was currently in progress against the leaders of the governmental parties had destroyed the Italians' faith in their institutions. Whilst the declarations of President Francesco Cossiga indicated the need for a constitutional break with the past, Fini took advantage of his position as leader of a marginal

party, excluded from the responsibility of government for the last fifty years, to give support to the revision of the 1946 pact, along the lines of reinforcing executive power and, above all, of reinforcing the authority of the President of the Republic. However, the realization of these proposals could have proved suicidal for a small party such as M.S.I., if the movement had been unable to convert itself into an indispensable element in the new distribution of political space for parties on the right. In the referendum on electoral reform in 1993, for example, M.S.I. voted against the revision of proportional representation, a system that had guaranteed the movement's parliamentary survival. Had Democrazia Cristiana remained intact, a majority system would have spelt the end for the neo-fascist group. But the old Catholic party, by virtue of having been the nucleus of the first republic, jointly with P.S.I., the party most accused of corruption, suffered a series of blows that relocated its political remnants at one or other extreme of the new bi-polarized institutional landscape.

The division of Democrazia Cristiana and the disappearance of the small parties that formed the 'constitutional spectrum' brought Italy's first republican experiment to an end. But in addition, it was also to establish a new situation, set over bases that were radically distinct. It was a situation that would not only refer to the characteristics of the electoral system, to the relations between legislative and executive power, to decentralization or to presidential powers, etc, but which would also see the appearance of a new political culture that went beyond these merely legal aspects. The principal trait of this new culture has been the establishment of a 'hegemonized' bi-polarization, precisely by those parties excluded from the first republic -a fact that is hardly to be wondered at, given the accelerated de-legitimization of the elements involved in that 'experiment'¹⁷.

On the left, the old P.C.I. split up into those seeking to renew the political scenario and those of a more orthodox disposition. This gave way to the *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (P.D.S.) and the *Partito della Rifundazione Comunista* (P.R.C.). The P.D.S. led at first by Achille Occhetto and, later on, by Massimo d'Alema aimed at building up a center-left block whose fundamental basis would be the former communists, even when -up to the crisis at the end of 1998- these members were prepared to support a governmental leader from the Christian Democratic left.

On the right, bi-polarization had no immediate need to act to the benefit of M.S.I., for various reasons. On the one hand, the old neo-fascist party had not undergone the process of political catharsis that P.C.I. had undertaken in 1989-1990. And on the other hand, the political space available to the right had helped give rise to a number of populist groups. The very novelty of these groups seemed likely to convert them into an axis for articulating a conservative front. Umberto Bossi had managed to bring together a project aimed at introducing the possibility of northern regionalism into the political arena, and emphasizing one of the key factors in contemporary Italian politics, that of the *Mezzogiorno*, thereby converting it into the new defining division between political adhesion and exclusion. Silvio Berlusconi built up *Forza Italia*, and presented himself as the very incarnation of the business executive, a champion in all senses of the free market, a kind of inverted *uomo qualunque*, whose popularity was based more on the emphasis given to managerial success than to the plight of the petite bourgeoisie. The imposition of Gianfranco Fini, and the survival of his political group would have to come from two complementary circumstances: a) a *visible* change within the party in order for it to be capable of connecting with the real concerns of a population immune to the old slogans of traditional anti-communism; and b) the acceptance

of an alliance, on the part of *Forza Italia*, the newest and most powerful electoral network for the political right.

Both circumstances came about. In January 1994, M.S.I. constituted the *Alleanza Nazionale* (A.N.), initially as a simple electoral reference-point for the then upcoming legislative elections. Following the results, however, which saw an increase in the party's electoral support that took it to 13.5% of the vote cast, the Misinos brought about what had eluded the movement throughout the fifty years of its existence: entrance into the government, presided by Berlusconi (1994-1996), with five ministries. What was now required was the surgical operation of dismantling M.S.I. in favor of creating A.N. as a party in its own right. M.S.I. celebrated its 17th and final congress at the beginning of 1995, followed immediately by the constituting congress of the *Alleanza Nazionale*. Even though the continuity of the members involved was perfectly clear to one and all, the party's ideological modifications were presented as an emphatic change of direction. The new party fully accepted a liberal regime, rejected any form of dictatorship or racism whatever, and consigned its former anti-capitalist gestures to the history books¹⁸. The lack of success that befell Pino Rauti and the defenders of M.S.I.'s continuity *per se*, who had brought about legal procedures in order to maintain the use of the party's initials, clearly illustrates the manner in which a continuation of the old M.S.I. within the new political situation was now wholly unfeasible.

The second condition for the survival of Fini's project was also met. The political right had banked on the non-exclusion of the Misino tradition in the administrative elections in 1993. Both Gianfranco Fini and Alessandra Mussolini benefited from the support given to their candidates by conservative sectors in Rome and Naples, achieving, in both cases, results that surpassed 40% of the vote cast. This was the first step towards the insertion of A.N. in the *Polo de Buongoverno* with *Forza Italia* in the general elections of 1994; at the same time, Berlusconi established the *Polo della Libertà* with Bossi's League in the North¹⁹.

But the 1996 elections were to banish A.N. -yet again- from government. And this was in spite of electoral results that passed the 15% mark, with almost six million voters. The triumph of the coalition drawn together by the P.D.S. was nevertheless based on a delicate balance of forces between former communist sectors and the originally Christian Democratic left, to which we have to add the uncertainty of the conditional (though indispensable) support of *Rifundazione Comunista*. The crisis of November 1998 -which avoided early elections only by mechanisms that were above all characteristic of the 'old politics,' taking advantage of the party swapping between Cossiga's Christian Democrats and Cossuta's communist left members- highlighted the fragility of the center-left alliance. But better things appear to be on the horizon for A.N. The party has benefited from the legal accusations made against Berlusconi, and from a waning of support for the northern regionalist movement. It is now able to offer a reconstruction of right wing nationalist-popular space, perfectly situated within acceptable ideological coordinates for the dawn of the 21st century. The 'cleansing' of its fascist heritage has, notwithstanding, been accompanied by the permanence of certain unyielding aspects of the new right's thinking. A combination of political authoritarianism and economic liberalism is not too far removed from Mussolini's 'Manchesterian' fascist discourse in 1922. Its preference for a minimization of the State's social character is in the context of a new anti-fiscal culture that connects with the hegemony of right

wing inequality discourse²⁰. With a political left that has yet to fully recover from the blows received to its identity from the 1980's onwards, Giofranco Fini may well lead the party of the liberal right -for the next decade and beyond- that, according to many, has been the great missing piece in the political dynamics of Italy throughout the 20th century.

NOTES

1. STERNHELL, Z.: *La droite révolutionnaire*. Paris, Seuil, 1978.
2. Some of the reasons for this lack of attention can be consulted in M. TARCHI: *Esuli in patria. I fascisti nell'Italia repubblicana*. Parma, Ugo Guanda, 1995, p. 5-8.
3. By this I am referring to the work by IGNAZI, P.: *Il polo escluso*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 1989. P. IGNAZI is one of the most lucid analysts of the M.S.I., and this work can be added to *Postfascisti? Dal Movimento sociale italiano ad Alleanza nazionale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1994. Marco TARCHI (q.v.) is the author of the other great monographic work on the M.S.I., *Dal MSI ad AN. Organizzazione e strategie*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997.
4. In addition to the works of Ignazi and Tarchi, the most important studies in this field have appeared in publications of comparative studies for the more recent forms of the extreme right, or in numerous 'special-focus' articles in the Political Science journals specialized in the area. In this respect, the following works have been consulted: BOTTI, A.: "El neofascismo italiano en la segunda posguerra y la derecha actual" in PÉREZ LEDESMA, M. (comp.): *Los riesgos para la democracia. Fascismo y neofascismo*. Madrid, Fundación Pablo Iglesias, 1997, p. 129-151; CACIAGLI, M.: "The Movimento Sociale Italiano-Destra Nazionale and Neofascism in Italy" in VON BEYME, K. (de): *Right-Wing Extremism in Western Europe*. London, Frank Cass, 1988, p. 19-33; CHIARINI, R.: "The Movimento Sociale Italiano. A Historical Profile" in CHELES, L. et al.: *Neofascism in Europe*. Essex, Longman, 1991, p. 19-42; FURLONG, P.: "The Extreme Right in Italy. Old Orders and Dangerous Novelties", *Parliamentary Affairs*, 45/1992, p. 345-356; IGNAZI, P.: "The Changing Profile of the Italian Social Movement" in PERKL, P.; WEINBERG, L. (eds.): *Encounters with the Contemporary Radical Right*. Boulder, Westview Press, 1993, p. 75-92; IGNAZI, P.; YSMAL, C.: "New and Old Extreme Right Parties. The French National Front and the Italian Movimento Sociale", *European Journal of Political Research*, 22/1992, p. 101-122; SIDOTI, F.: "The Extreme Right in Italy. Ideological Orphans and Countermobilization" in HAINSWORTH, P.: *The Extreme Right in Europe and USA*. Londres, Pinter, 1992, p. 151-174.
5. Given the existence of the great number of works that refer to a specific aspect, temporal or sectorial, of the M.S.I.'s history, I will only mention those books which have been essential to this present work, and will limit specific quotations to certain inevitable references. BOCCA, G.: *Il filo nero*. Milan, Mondadori, 1995; BRAMBILLA, M.: *Interrogatorio alle destre*. Milan, Rizzoli, 1995; CHIARINI, R.: *Destra italiana. Dall'Unità d'Italia a Alleanza Nazionale*. Venezia, Marsilio, 1995; DE CESARE, C.: *Il fascista del duemila. Le radici del camerata Gianfranco Fini*. Milan, Kaos, 1995; DE LUNA, G.; REVELLI, M.: *Fascismo, antifascismo. Le idee, le identità*. Florencia, La Nuova Italia, 1995; DI MICHELE, S.; GALIANI, A.: *Mal di destra. Fascisti e postfascisti, i protagonisti di ieri e di oggi si raccontano*. Milan, Sperling and Kupfer, 1995; FERRARA, O.: *Il mito negato. Da Giovane Europa ad Avanguardia di Popolo. La destra eretica negli anni settanta*. Sarno, Centro Studi I Dioscuri, 1996; FERRARESI, F.: *Minacce alla democrazia. La Destra radicale e la strategia della tensione in Italia nel dopoguerra*. Milan, Feltrinelli, 1995; GALLI DELLA LOGGIA, E.: *Intervista sulla destra*. Roma, Laterza, 1994; LOCATELLI, G.; MARTINI, D.: *Duce Addio. La biografia di Gianfranco Fini*. Milan, Longanesi, 1994; LO RE, C.: *La destra eversiva*. Chieti, Solfanelli, 1994; MANNHEIMER, R.: *La Lega lombarda*. Milan, Feltrinelli, 1991; RAVAGLIOLI, F.: "Italia mia...". *Un saggio sulla destra*. Roma, Seam, 1995; REVELLI, M.: *Le due destre*. Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 1996; REVELLI, M.: *La destra nazionale*. Milan, Il Saggiatore, 1996; ROSSI, G.: *Alternativa e doppiopetto. Il MSI dalla contestazione alla destra nazionale, 1968-1973*. Roma, Istituto di Studi Corporativi, 1992; SETTA, S.: *La destra nell'Italia del dopoguerra*. Roma, Laterza, 1995; TARCHI, M.: *Cinquant'anni di nostalgia. La destra italiana dopo il fascismo*. Milan, Rizzoli, 1995.
6. CHIARINI, R.: *Destra...*, p. 57 and ff.
7. The Uomo Qualunque front was an organization set up by journalist Guglielmo Giannini, which obtained a certain degree of acceptance in the south, winning more than 5% of the vote in 1948 (SETTA, S.: *L'Uomo Qualunque, 1944-1948*. Bari, Laterza, 1975). The activity of the clandestine groups may be consulted in IGNAZI, P.: *Il polo...*, p. 19-29. Monarchism, expressed through the Partito Nazionale Monarchico, following its separation from the Partito Popolare Monarchico and, later, through the Partito Democratico de Unità

Monarchica, had an considerable political presence until the mid 1960's, although without achieving the support of the royal vote in the 1946 plebiscite. It was finally incorporated into the Destra Nazionale advocated by Giorgio Almirante at the beginning of the 1970's.

8. On the influence of Evola, FERRARESI, F.: *Minacce...*, p. 85-106; LO RE, C.: *La destra...*, p. 17-24.
9. Specifically, in Bari, Naples, Lecce, Salerno, Benevento and Foggia.
10. With regard to the process of bureaucratization and, in general, the struggle of the various tendencies within the party, the most useful book is that by M. TARCHI: *Dal MSI...*
11. LEPPE, A.: *Storia della Prima Repubblica. L'Italia dal 1942 al 1992*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 1993, p. 201 and ff.; COLARIZI, S.: *Storia dei partiti nell'Italia repubblicana*. Roma, Laterza, 1994, p. 265 and ff.
12. The best analysis from within the M.S.I. is to be found in ROSSI, G.S.: *Alternativa e doppiopetto...*
13. With reference to the various positions in this sector, see the book by its principal leader, ROBERTI, G: *L'opposizione di destra in Italia, 1946-1976*. Napoles, Gallina, 1988.
14. The distinction between the black terrorism linked to the M.S.I. and that which was violently in opposition to it may be followed in FERRARESI, M.: *Minacce...*, p. 283 y ss. También, LO RE, C.: *La destra*, p. 37-67.
15. For a discussion of 'revisionism', see TRANFAGLIA, N.: *Un passato scomodo. Fascismo e postfascismo*. Roma, Laterza, 1996, particularly p. 65 and ff.
16. On the figure of P. Rauti, see the interview carried out by M BRAMBILLA in *Interrogatorio alle destre*, p. 13-40. On the figure of de Gianfranco Fini, in addition to the biographies of LOCATELLI, G.; D. MARTINI, D.: *Duce...*; and DE CESARE, C.: *Il fascista...*, see the work by S. DI MICHELLE y A. GALIANI in *Mal di destra...*, p. 49-70.
17. Conditions favoring the M.S.I. upsurge in IGNAZI, P.: *Potsfascisti...?* p. 105-108.
18. Chiarini, R.: *Destra...*, p. 156-162.
19. On the Alleanza Nazionale, see F. RAVAGLIOLI'S chronicle, "*Italia...*", followed by an interview with Fini. An analysis from the view-point of the New Right M. TARCHI, "Allenza Nazionale: Un punto di svolta per la destra italiana?" in *Trasgressioni*, XI, 1, 1996, p. 3-29. See also CARIOTI, A.: "From the Ghetto to Palazzo Chigi: The Ascent of the National Alliance" in KRATZ, Richard S.; IGNAZI, Piero: *Italian Politics. The Year of the Tycoon*. Boulder, Westview Press 1996, p. 57-78.
20. IGNAZI, P.: *Postfascisti?*, p. 80-89.