ELITE UNIFICATION AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN ITALY: AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW[1]

Maurizio Cotta
(Università di Siena)

Italian political history provides rich materials for investigating the relationship between elites and democracy. For most of its 130 years as a nation state, Italy has been beset with elite and mass conflicts. The absence of a consolidated democratic regime has been marked, and it has frequently been attributed to continuing elite disunity, not only by historians and political scientists, but also, and often with acuteness, by contemporary actors. Efforts to unify Italian elites have been recurrent, and the persistence of these efforts testifies to the difficulty of achieving (and preserving) a consensually unified national elite (Burton and Higley 1987) and a consolidated democracy. The Italian case thus affords opportunities to discuss specific requirements for elite unifications and democratic consolidations. Questions to be answered are: Is an overall interpretation of Italian political history that stresses elite disunity as the main source of regime instability valid? What attempts at elite unification took place over this long period? Why did those attempts prove to be unsuccessful, at least until fairly recently? In sum, why has the creation of a consensually unified national elite in Italy been such a difficult and lengthy process?

Before attempting to answer these questions, or at least suggest the direction in which answers may be found, some general observations are necessary. One is that while we can say a posteriori that the problem of elite disunity was never really solved until our own time, this does not mean that disunity was uniformly extreme throughout Italy's first century as a nation state. In fact, there were several points at which elite unity seemed to have been achieved or at least very nearly achieved. The four most im-

portant were: (1) the "trasformismo" period after the government shift from the Right to the Left in 1876; (2) the high point of socialist moderation and willingness to accept parliamentary government just before World War I, combined with the Liberal/Catholic electoral alliance of that period; (3) the anti-fascist alliance of virtually all elites at the end of World War II; and perhaps (4) the early 1960s when the center-left alliance was expected to solve the "communist question" by marginalizing the Communist Party.

Assessing the nature of these putative elite unifications is difficult. Were they simply failed attempts, or were they successful unifications that subsequently broke down? Merely noting that each was followed rather quickly by a serious political crisis involving renewed political instability (and even a democratic breakdown after 1922) does not settle the question, because the reasoning becomes circular: Elite unity was not achieved and this caused the subsequent crises and instability which demonstrated that elite unity was not achieved. In order to avoid such circular reasoning, it is necessary to examine the internal characteristics of the apparent unifications as well as the circumstances in which they occurred, and then to compare them with the theses about elite settlements and elite convergences set forth in Chapter 1 .

There is a further methodological problem. It concerns the extent to which we should rely on our own "objective" assessments based on post facto observations of these processes, rather than on the contemporary perceptions and evaluations of the elites who were involved in them. At first glance, our assessments appear to be less prejudiced than those of the actors who were involved because we have no stakes in the political games they played, and because we know what happened as a result of those games. We are therefore better placed to judge whether an elite transformation from disunity to unity, via a settlement, a convergence, or some other process (see chapter 1 of this book and Burton and Higley 1987), actually occurred. But are our a posteriori assessments so superior? Is there not the risk of mistaking temporal sequences for causal ones? Interpreting a given period or process from the point of view of what happened afterwards may distort what actually took place. Thus the recurrence of elite disunity and conflict after an apparent elite unification might have resulted from new factors that were independent of the unification, making the unification no less real simply because it did not last.

Taking the perceptions and judgements of contemporary actors about the occurrence or non-occurrence of elite unifications into account recognizes that their assessments affected elite actions in important ways, perhaps along the lines of self-fulfilling prophecies. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that contemporary actors are often strongly influenced by their experiences and thus blind to emerging trends. Because of bitter memories of past conflicts, for example, they may exaggerate the extent to which one or another elite group remains untrustworthy or disallegiant, and they may likewise underestimate the dangers that some emerging elite poses.

No entirely satisfactory solutions to these dilemmas are possible . It is best to adopt a balanced strategy, trying to combine the perceptions of contemporary actors with our various "objective" post facto knowledge of what took place. Trying to take these problems into account, I will chart in the following pages the long and troubled path from elite disunity to elite unity in Italy. I will focus on the four historical moments in which elite unifications may have occurred, looking for their peculiarities, assessing their effects on political regimes, and explaining why elite unity was so elusive.

1. *Trasformismo*: A Unification of Liberal Elites?

The first important change in Italian inter-elite relations occurred in the years following 1876 when previously conflicting elites fused to create a dominant new political force. The question is whether this amounted to an elite unification based on a strong consensus about rules-of-the-game and established institutions, thus laying the basis for democratic consolidation.

From a political point of view, 1876 was indeed an extraordinary year. The only full alternation of governmental majorities in Italian parliamentary history took place when the government of the "Right" was defeated in a parliamentary vote and was replaced by a cabinet dominated by leaders of the "Left". [2] The Right had led the process of national unification, and it dominated political life after the nation state was created in 1861. But in 1876, it gave way peacefully to the opposition. It is important to note that this alternation (a "revolution" as many contemporaries were quick to call it) unfolded strictly within the parliamentary and executive arena. Only subsequently was it sanctioned by an election in which the Left won a popu-

lar majority -- or more precisely, a majority among the 8.5 percent of adult males who alone had voting rights at the time (Ballini 1988, p. 79). The alternation of 1876 was therefore very much an elite affair, and it was made possible by the building of a parliamentary coalition between the Left opposition and some splinter groups in the Right. What is interesting from our point of view, however, is the political developments that followed.

With the so-called "trasformismo" that took place between 1883 and 1886, elites of the Right and Left amalgamated to produce what came to be called the "constitutional party" (Capone 1981). This "party" dominated parliamentary life for the next quarter of a century. It was, of course, not a party in the sense that we use the word today, but rather it was a relatively unitary parliamentary elite whose factions and members shared a basic consensus on the existing institutional order. Many different groupings persisted within this "party," but their boundaries were blurred and fluid.

If we look at these events from the point of view of the role played by the political elites who operated what amounted to a limited stable democracy after 1876, we can easily find some of the elements in this volume's theoretical framework. We find, first, a peaceful, accepted alternation in executive power among competing elites, the Right and the Left. This has often been considered an important (though some would question whether it is also a necessary) (Di Palma 1990, p. 36) measure of democratic stability, particularly when the elites involved have previously been seriously divided over procedural aspects of the regime as well as over substantive issues.

Elite divisions in both respects had indeed been prominent features of Italian politics before 1876. First, the elites or Right and Left disagreed over the way in which national unification was achieved under the leadership of Cavour and the Piedmontese monarchy. This had involved a gradual incorporation "from above" of the many small Italian states by the kingdom of Piedmont and the extension to them of the constitutional or-

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2.   In this historical context the words "Right" (*Destra*) and "Left" (*Sinistra*) are used to translate the names commonly given at that time to the two major parliamentary groups during the period of limited suffrage. None of them was really an organized party but rather a loose coalition of parliamentarians. Within each group there were rather indipendent subgroups based on regional background, ideological proximity, etc. (Capone 1981). With the passing of time a new group, the "Extreme" (*Estrema*) or Extreme Left, made of Radicals, Republicans and Socialists, gained importance.

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der of the latter, whereas leaders of the Left thought that the process should have involved much more "popular" mobilization, by which they meant a mobilization of the educated middle classes and intellectuals, not the working class and peasantry. Second, after 1861, the two elite camps continued to disagree about the role of the monarch in the constitutional order, with the Right maintaing a strong allegiance to the idea of monarchy (albeit a parliamentary one) while most leaders of the Left harboured republican ideals. Third, the Right espoused a liberalism bordering on conservatism, while the Left's liberalism had a strong democratic, sometimes even Jacobin, thrust. These procedural and substantive conflicts between Right and Left also had a sociological basis. A significant part of the Right elites came from aristocratic and high bourgeois families, whereas members of the Left came predominantly from less elevated bourgeois backgrounds and were often lawyers, academics, journalists, and sometimes businessmen (Farneti 1971).

The differences between the two elite camps had been especially pronounced during the process of national unification, when the Right inveighed against the Left's alleged "revolutionary" program to prevent it from playing a role in government. But this division gradually lost its intensity after the nation state was born and after Rome was conquered in 1870. Because of the important role played by the monarchy in promoting national unification, the Left became less militant in its republicanism, and over time many of its prominent leaders became supporters of the monarchy. Similarly, the Left also moderated its democratic orientation to the extent that, while extensions of the suffrage continued to be urged, many of its members were disinclined to push for universal suffrage because they feared that "clericals" and "reactionaries" might profit from the support of the uneducated masses. In view of these developments, the government alternation of 1876, far from constituting an unexpected "revolution," can be seen as the culmination of a gradual convergence among the two elite camps that took place in the parliamentary arena during the preceding ten years (Aquarone 1972).

The alternation of 1876 and the subsequent fusion of elites during the "Trasformismo" period thus led to a situation in which dissensions and divisions among the elites moved from the system level to the level of negotiable policy differences. The result was not only a wider elite consensus on the desirability of the regime, but also a greater integration of elites from markedly different social class origins and geographic regions. The

old entrenched elites of the Right were partly displaced by relatively new elites of the Left, but to the extent that they survived became part of the new resulting elite formation.

An important aspect of this process of elite circulation and re-integration after 1876 was that it was led by the previously dissident and challenging elites of the Left. The modus operandi can be seen either as a gradual evolution in elite composition and functioning or, perhaps more precisely, as a progressive de-radicalization of dissident elites. The process thus had several earmarks of an elite convergence, rather than an elite settlement. First, during the years immediately following national unification, there was an elite formation, the Right, that commanded a sufficient majority in parliament to maintain the upper hand, defending and consolidating the new constitutional monarchy against the Left's threats of a more radical regime change (and also against a possible authoritarian backlash). [3] Second, the dissident elites gradually moderated their positions in order to avoid permanent exclusion from executive power. Finally, the convergence led to the 1876 victory of the previously dissident elites, whereafter they governed in accordance with established institutions and procedures. Although one can also identify a number of explicit agreements of the sort that suggest an elite settlement, none was sufficiently comprehensive to qualify as a settlement. Instead, it was mainly the day-to-day interaction of elites in and around parliament that eventuated in the Trasformismo of the 1880s.

Given these indications of an elite convergence, two questions are immediately raised. First, did the process really produce a consensually unified national elite? Second, did it lay the basis for a consolidated democratic regime?

At first glance the process of elite unification appears to have been successful. If we look at political-parlamentary elites in the 1880s the great Left-Right divisions of the earlier period seem to have been overcome. In fact, many contemporary observers actually lamented the disappearance of "great, ideal" differences between the elite camps. In Parliament, conflicts now centered more on regional and personalistic issues and the defense of

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[3]   A more radical constitutional transformation as asked by the Left would have been theoretically more democratic but would have probably produced a direct confrontation (fateful at that time for representative institutions) between republicanism and an authoritarian defense of the monarchy.

special interests linked to the developing industrialization than on serious ideological questions. Governments were generally based on large majorities that encompassed both Left and Right. Only a small group on the extreme left (the so called "Estrema" made up of Republicans, Radicals and Socialists) remained at the margins of this substantial elite consensus.

Within another decade, however, the government was confronting serious popular discontent and disorders (in Sicily in 1893-94 and in Milan in 1898). In reacting to these events, strong differences of opinion emerged among the liberal political elites, with one side ready to embark on a severe repression of popular protests and the other side wishing to safeguard civil and political liberties. The Di Rudini' and Pelloux governments opted for repressive measures, and in Milan large-scale arrests of Socialist (but also Catholic) political and union leaders were made, and numerous dissident organizations were disbanded. The political tensions originating from this cycle of mass mobilizations and repression were soon reflected in a parliamentary crisis, the high point of which came in 1899 when strenuous filibustering by the extreme Left opposition blocked the latest repressive measures that had been introduced by the government of the day. Uneasy about the turn of events, moderate elements of the Left soon deserted the government and brought about its fall (see C. Seton-Watson 1967, pp. 183-95). Conflicting interpretations of the constitutional order were again at the center of elite debates, and the relative unity of the parliamentary elite appeared to be dissolving.

How should this sequence of events be interpreted? The first observation must be that the elite consensus and unity achieved in the 1870s and 1880s did not result in an increased elite ability to control and channel the popular mobilization of peasants and industrial workers, which proceeded apace during the 1880s and 1890s. A second observation is that the lack of any elite response to these mass mobilizations other than repression was bound to test the elite's still fragile consensus and unity severely. But it is worth asking if the political turbulence that Italy experienced during the 1890s originated at the elite level (and had to do with insufficient elite unity), or if it was primarily a problem of incorporating an awakening mass population into the political system. Throughout Europe in this period, the relationship between elites and masses was undergoing great change, and the question is which of the two levels of the political system played the role of independent variable so far as political outcomes were concerned.

Answering these questions is difficult. Undoubtedly mass mobilization had its own somewhat autonomous dynamics. The changing social and economic conditions linked with industrialization were bound to produce increased popular activism that challenged a still oligarchical social and political system, in Italy as elsewhere. In this sense mass mobilization can be seen as the independent variable. However, a closer analysis of elite relations during and after the Trasformismo period reveals that the elite unity that developed during those years was always very limited, and to this extent continuing elite disunity can be viewed also as an indipendent variable.

Within the parliamentary arena, as already noted, only relatively small elite groups located at the extreme left and extreme right had remained outside the great amalgamation of Right and Left elites during the 1870s and 1880s. But in view of what happened during the 1890s, it can be said ex post facto that the elite consensus that underlaid this amalgamation was always rather superficial. As soon as serious problems arose, the agreement on rules of the game was seen to be very shaky. We should also add that after the Trasformismo period no significant progress was made in the direction of a stronger organizational interconnectedness among the parliamentary elites. To some extent the ideological amalgamation of the 1880s even weakened existing linkages because the disappearance of the older distinct "parties" probably left parliament more fragmented and volatile than earlier, and this made elite consensus and unity all the more fragile.

The limited nature of the elite unity achieved in the Trasformismo years becomes even more apparent when we look beyond parliament to the larger political arena. There we find a number of old and new elites that played little or no part in the parliamentary game and that had not been part of the convergence process we have discussed. What is more, the unity achieved among parliamentary elites was often perceived both by themselves and by elites outside parliament as a barrier that had been raised "against" these other elites to prevent them from playing a significant role in the political system. For example, in passing the electoral reform act of 1882, which provided for a limited extension of the suffrage based on literacy qualifications, both the more democratic and the more conservative components of the parliamentary elite feared that further lowering the threshold for voting might open the way to the Socialists and Clericals (Romanelli 1988, pp. 151, 171).

It must be also stressed, and this brings us back to the theme of elite-mass relations, that the two most important excluded elites were those that were in the best position, at a time of increasing mass mobilization, to play a role in leading and channeling popular demands. On one side there was the Catholic elite (with its lay and clerical components), on the other was the still small but rapidly emerging socialist elite. Although for different reasons, both had little place in the parliamentary arena, the Socialists because of the still limited size of the organized working class and because of suffrage restrictions, the Catholics because of the order not to participate in electoral political life (the so-called non expedit) issued by the Pope after the Italian conquest of Rome. Due, however, to the increasingly successful mass organizations (unions, cooperatives, cultural and political associations, etc.) both elites were creating toward the end of the century, they possessed at least a significant negative power -- that of preventing the liberal elites from themselves gaining larger popular followings.

One might finally ask whether the timing of the convergence among liberal elites did not significantly limit its importance for the consolidation of a democratic regime. The amalgamation of liberal elites was probably accomplished "too late" in the sense that it came at an historical point at which, in view of the industrializing and other modernizing processes going on in the society at large, it meant only the solution of "old" issues (like the problem of the role of the monarchy) but was inadequate for facing new challenges, most particularly that of finding ways to incorporate the masses into democratic politics.

To summarize, we can say that Trasformismo amounted to something like an elite convergence among parliamentary elites. As to the effects of this convergence, interpretations will differ. A benign interpretation would point to the regime's ability to overcome the crisis of the 1890s without a permanent breach of the liberal constitution. A less benign interpretation would emphasize how a strong, but far from overwhelming, wave of popular discontent triggered a serious crisis within the established elite that brought the regime very near to breakdown. A balanced view would at least question whether the limited elite unification under Trasformismo was ever sufficient to lay the basis for the broadening and consolidation of democracy. The most serious weakness of the Italian political system at the turn of the century
was the continuing exclusion of emerging elites, coupled with the inability of the liberal elites to find consensual ways of incorporating those elites

and the increasingly mobilized mass population into the established political game. Elite and mass variables thus end up as tightly intertwined.

2. The Attempt To Incorporate Outsiders: 1900-1913

After the political and constitutional crisis at the end of the nineteenth century, new processes of elite unification got underway and continued down to the years preceding World War I. These processes directly involved the two most important elite groups - Socialists and Catholics - that had previously been largely outside parliamentary politics. Compared with the Trasformismo period in which a limited elite convergence involved an alternation in government power followed by a broad amalgamation of liberal elites, after 1900 elite unification involved attempts by the established liberal elites, led by Giolitti, to coopt Socialist and Catholic elites.[4] Cooptation of the Socialists took place mainly within the parliamentary arena, and it resembled a further process of convergence; cooptation of the Catholics unfolded primarily in the electoral arena, and it entailed a more explicit elite pact that resembled an elite settlement.

Parliamentary politics during the first decade of this century were marked by ongoing policy agreements between Liberal governments and Socialist parliamentary leaders. This process, which had its ups and downs, also involved leaders of the socialist trade unions and cooperative associations that were in those years gaining wider mass support. Liberal governments derived needed parliamentary support or, at least, benevolent abstentions on crucial votes from the Socialists, and this was useful because the Liberal majorities in parliament lacked much cohesion . For Socialist leaders, the main benefit of these agreements was Liberal acceptance of some of their policy proposals, which enabled them to deliver concrete results to their working-class followers.

In the autumn of 1903, Giolitti made the unprecedented offer of a cabinet post to one of the most prominent Socialist leaders, Turati (Bonomi 1944, p. 155). Although Turati rejected Giolitti's offer, it was a basis for improved relations between the Liberals and the Socialists. The failure of

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[4.] The Piedmontese politician Giovanni Giolitti was by far the dominant political figure from the beginning of the century to World War I. Either leading personally the government (1903-5; 1906-9; 1911-13) or exercising his influence from behind the scene he established what his enemies often called a "parliamentary dictatorship".

moderate Socialist leaders to control a national strike in 1904 was a setback in these relations, but two years later, in 1906, Socialist MPs supported the Sonnino cabinet (which was a strange coalition of conservative Liberals and the extreme Left). In a few months, however, they withdrew their support and stormed out of parliament to protest a bloody clash that had occurred between strikers and police. Despite these vicissitudes, attempts to coopt the Socialist elite continued, and the high point in the process was reached between 1908 and 1911. The Socialist party was at that time led by its reformist wing made up of MPs who had progressively abandoned their belief in a future revolution and had come to accept parliamentary institutions and even (though less openly) the monarchy. [5] Links within parliament between Liberal and Socialist MPs steadily strengthened, and in 1909 Andrea Costa, who had earlier been a flamboyant Socialist revolution but had since become a respected moderate, was elected to the position of Deputy Speaker in the Chamber of Deputies with Liberal support. Costa's election appeared to set the seal on the successful incorporation of the Socialist opposition into the parliamentary game.

In 1911, Socialist leaders in parliament were again asked by Giolitti to enter his cabinet as ministers, and a Socialist leader, Bissolati, even paid a visit to the King during the consultations that ensued. The question of the monarchy remained an extremely sensitive issue with the Socialists, one charged with much symbolism. To stress this, Bissolati deliberately refused to wear the top hat required by etiquette when visiting the King. In the end, the Socialist leaders remained outside the cabinet, but it was nevertheless clear that they had become accepted political partners.

The crucial conditions that made this rapprochement possible were the deradicalization of dominant Socialist ideology -- "Marx was being sent to the attic" as Giolitti could say -- and at the same time the greater readiness in part of the Liberal elite to view working-class demands as legitimate. And as happened in the Trasformismo period between leaders of the Right and the Left, numerous interactions between Liberal and Socialist MPs in the parliamentary setting did much to pacify their relations.

What is striking, however, is how quickly this process was reversed. In 1912 the moderate and reformist leadership lost control of the Socialist

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[5.] The best historical discussion of these events is that by Vigezzi (1976). But very insightful contributions to the understanding of the Liberal-Socialist relationship can be gained by the writings of the leaders of the two sides (Giolitti 1923 for the Liberal side; Turati & Kuliscioff 1977 for the Socialist side).

party and was replaced by a more intransigent and (at least verbally) revolutionary wing. In that year, when some Socialist parliamentarians joined other MPs in paying a visit to the King who was recovering from wounds incurred during an assassination attempt, this tribute to the symbol of the established order was used by the leaders of the majority in the Socialist party to justify expelling some of the most prominent moderate leaders. In fact the moderate leaders did not remain united; while some remained as a minority within the party, others left and, after creating a new socialist party that had little success in mobilizing mass support, became entirely integrated into the established elite. Moderate socialist leaders thus split into two groups and as a result they were never able to regain control of the main Socialist party (at least until the advent of fascism). For their part, the new and more radical Socialist leadership shifted the party's focus from parliamentary politics to mass mobilization, actively fomenting major demonstrations against the regime in 1912. They vehemently condemned cooperation with other political forces as treason against the proletariat, and they invoked the specter of a revolutionary overthrow of the existing social and political order. As is well-known, one of the principal figures in this radical Socialist leadership was Benito Mussolini, who eventually at the beginning of World War I left the party and spectacularly converted to a right-wing, ultra-nationalist position, founding then the Fascist party in 1919 (see De Felice ___).

A crucial event that contributed to this change in the Socialist camp was undoubtedly the colonial war launched by the Liberal government against Libya in 1912. For the traditionally pacifist Socialists, the war came as a shock, and it enabled the more militant wing of Socialists to accuse the party's moderate leaders of having been duped by their bourgeois colleagues. But the suddenness with which the Liberal-Socialist rapprochement was reversed also suggests that integration of the two elite groups in the parliamentary arena had created a gap between the Socialist top elites and cadres. Instead of the Socialist party as a whole being integrated into the existing political system, many of its leaders had been coopted as individuals. But the price of this elite convergence was the moderate Socialist elite's loss of its base of support in the party.

The attempt to incorporate Catholics elites took a quite different path . At the root of the problem was the Church-State conflict that had developed in Italy, as in many other European societies, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Rokkan, 1970). In Italy, the conflict had a special

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twist because of the state's annexation of territories that belonged to the Pope. Thus, the conquest of Rome in 1870 led to a papal order forbidding catholics from participating in electoral politics either as candidates or as voters. The political consequences of this order (the *non expedit*), and more in general of the conflict between Liberal and Catholic elites, became increasingly salient with subsequent extensions of the franchise. Given the Church's strong following among large sections of the rural population (but also among the middle and upper classes) Liberal elites were prevented from mobilizing mass support that would offset growing popular support for the Socialists.

With the passage of time, however, a thaw in the relations between the Catholic Church and the Liberal-dominated state began. Among the reasons for this thaw was the shared fear of revolutionary socialism, the longing of many Catholics to be seen as patriotic citizens, and the willingness of many Liberal politicians to abandon some of their anticlerical attitudes (see De Rosa 1966; Molony 1977). In the national elections of 1904 and 1909, thanks to a reinterpretation of the *non expedit* order, common candidates were negotiated in a few constituencies between Catholics and moderate Liberals. But the breakthrough came in 1913, just before the first elections with universal male suffrage were called, and just after the moderate Socialist leadership had been eclipsed by the party's more doctrinaire wing. The papal ban against Catholic participation was lifted for all practical purposes, and this plus the activism of some lay leaders of the Catholic movement enabled Liberal and Catholic elites to reach an agreement of national scope, the so-called Gentiloni Pact. Under this agreement, Liberal-Catholic electoral alliances were formed in a large number of constituencies, and more than 200 Deputies were elected with the support of Catholic voters, thus providing the Liberal government with a large parliamentary majority. But when the pact's existence was revealed after the election, the Liberals suffered political embarrassment, and the "real" terms of the agreement became the subject of wide speculation. Accused by the anti-clerical Left of having sold out to clerical interests, the Liberals tried to deny any do ut des ("give to get"), as well as any compromising of their Deputies' independence. Meanwhile, Catholic leaders eager to use their new political clout insisted that the pact meant that Deputies elected by Catholic votes would have to support certain policies, especially religious education in the schools and no change in the law governing marriage that forbade divorce (Dalla Torre 1962).

Ambiguities and unresolved issues in the pact were soon evident. The Liberal elite believed that political leadership was to remain in its hands, but the Catholic elite saw the alliance which the pact sanctioned as an instrument for achieving its policy goals. Nonetheless, the overall result was that some Catholic leaders now played their first role in Italy's national politics. During World War I, a Catholic parliamentarian, Filippo Meda, served as cabinet minister. But to conclude that strong consensus and stable unity were achieved between Liberal and Catholic elites would be unwarranted. Indeed, no further agreement building on the Gentiloni Pact was attempted in the next years, and a fate not unlike that of the moderate Socialist leaders in 1912 befell the Catholic leaders who negotiated the 1913 Pact. Only six years after the Pact, new catholic leaders who had played little or no role in negotiating it, and who argued that the Pact entailed subordination of Catholic voters to Liberal hegemony, created the Italian Popular Party (PPI). This new party competed openly and often bitterly with the Liberals, and it emerged from its first electoral outing, in November 1919, as the second largest party in the country (behind the Socialists).

Although in theory the Liberals taken together remained the largest force in parliament, they were split into many often conflicting factions and lost the control of the political game they had enjoyed before the war (Farneti 1978).

It is plausible to see the Gentiloni Pact of 1913 as the first step in a convergence between Catholic and Liberal elites that, had it continued, would have created a dominant center-right electoral coalition in Italian politics. But the sticking point was the Liberals' insistence that the Catholics be incorporated in a subordinate position. The moderate Catholic leaders who negotiated the Pact were probably ready to accept this subordination once they gained Liberal concessions on the policies most important to them. But other important factions within the Catholic elite were unwilling to participate in such an alliance over the longer run because they saw in it the risk of losing many potential working-class supporters to the Socialists. In addition, the fact that the Liberals had not yet developed a modern party organization and still played by the old rules of personalistic parliamentary politics hampered the formation of an effective coalition. The failure of the Gentiloni Pact to create a durable mechanism for Catholic/Liberal cooperation meant that a more conflictual relationship between the two elites was likely in the difficult post-World War I years. As we know a posteriori, this difficult relationship and the obstacles it contained for stable

governments was an important reason for the breakdown of Italian democracy in the 1920s (Farneti 1978).

Looking back at these twin efforts by the entrenched Liberal elite to incorporate the emerging Socialist and Catholic elites (and their mass followings), it is not hard to find a common thread: both were undertaken for the purpose of ensuring Liberal hegemony. The Liberals sought to trade important policy concessions to the interests of Socialists and Catholics in return for parliamentary or electoral support. But the exchanges were not conducive to paritarian elite relationships: the Liberals intended to maintain their traditional grip on government process and their overall control of the political system. They wanted only to coopt the new elite in subordinate positions, not to share power with them in any full way.

More dramatically with the Socialists, but also to some extent with the Catholics, this attempted Liberal cooptation backfired. Moderate leaders disposed toward compromise were overthrown in the Socialist camp and outflanked in the Catholic camp. Power and mass support was garnered by more militant leaders in both camps. Morover, to the extent that it exploited the mutual antagonisms and fears between Socialists and Catholics, the Liberal strategy of cooptation had an intrinsic potential for enflaming these deep divisions in Italian society.

The international and domestic upheavals of World War I dealt the Liberal strategy a death blow, in any event. For the war destroyed the very basis of the strategy: Liberal dominance. It divided the Liberal elite deeply between intransigent nationalists and less bellicose internationalists, and it triggered processes of mass mobilization that were entirely foreign to the Liberals' old elitist ways of conducting politics. After the war, consequently, there was neither space nor opportunity for resuming the pre-way efforts at incorporating emerging elites. A clear indication of these changed circumstances was the utter inability of the Liberals' most prominent leader, Giolitti, to play a role after the war anything like he had played before it.

The failure of elite incorporation via subordinate cooptation meant that after 1919 the three elite camps (Liberals, Catholics and Socialists) had to find more equitable patterns of inter-elite cooperation. Not only did they have to surmount their traditional policy differences made sharper in the postwar conditions of social and economic crisis, but they had to build a common consensus on the fundamental values, institutions and rules of the democratic process strong enough to weather the challenges of the

new situation of mass democracy. This would have required de-fusing the mutual elite suspicions and distrust that had reached dangerous proportions by the time of World War I, while re-asserting moderate control and checking the centrifugal tendencies in all three camps. With the upsurge of new and avowedly anti-democratic elites and movements after the war -- Nationalists and Fascists on the right, Communists on the left -- these tasks were even more difficult, probably impossible. As we know, in spite of some attempts, Liberal, Socialist and Catholic elites were not able to surmount their policy differences and mutual suspicions in time to build a political coalition capable of blocking the rise of the strongest new anti-democratic movement, fascism. Once it was clear that no such coalition could be built, the Liberals, supported by the monarchy and a part of the Catholic elite, tried their old strategy of elite cooptation one last time. But the coopted elite -- Mussolini and his associates -- proved to be stronger than the coopting elite(s), and the unconsolidated democratic regime soon collapsed. Ironically, for a while the fascist regime that followed succeeded in producing a broader elite unity than had existed at any time since national unification. But it was a unity built around submissiveness to Mussolini's project of an authoritarian state, rather than around voluntary consensus on democratic institutions and values.

3. From Temporary Unity to Confrontation: The Anti-Fascist Grand Coalition of 1943-1947

A crucial reason why earlier attempts at elite unification failed in Italy was their lack of inclusiveness. On each occasion, one or more important elite groups remained outside the unification process. But in the year after the fall of Mussolini and the fascist regime in July 1943, an unprecedentedly broad agreement among elites was achieved. As we will see, this too proved to be temporary. But the ways in which it approximated an elite settlement and the importance of its legacy for Italian politics in succeeding decades require discussion.

A grand coalition of anti-fascist forces was built during 1943 and 1944 (Morlino 1981). The first step was an agreement between all the parties that had been reconstituted by the time of Mussolini's fall to form a Committee for National Liberation (CLN) that would coordinate their actions during the last phase of World War II and the transition to a new democratic regime. Only the small Republican Party (PRI) refused to participate.

From left to right, the committee contained leaders of the Communist Party (PCI), the Socialist Party (at that time the PSIUP), the Action Party (PdA) a Liberal-Socialist group made essentially of intellectuals, the Christian Democracy Party (DC), the Labour Democracy (DdL), and the Liberal Party (PLI) (see Bonomi 1947). This was the first time that leaders of the "new" mass parties (PCI, PSIUP, DC) had entered into a national agreement on other than a bilateral basis and in other than a subordinate position vis-a-vis entrenched elites. The CLN functioned according to collegial and paritarian principles. Each party had a vote, although most decisions were based on unanimity. From the start, however, it was clear that leaders of the three largest mass parties -- the PCI, PSIUP, and DC -- would play the dominant roles.

The CLN was formed under the pressure of continuing German occupation of Northern and Central Italy and of the reconstitution of a Fascist regime in that area; in agreeing to participate in it all the parties renounced any actions that might undercut each other. This required putting aside strong ideological and programmatic differences, as well as overlooking the long history of inter-party conflict and distrust. That these unprecedented steps could be taken at all was due to the common opposition that the fascist regime and occupying Germany forces inspired, and to the pressing need to subordinate narrow partisan interests to the goal of freeing the country. Another factor that favored the coming together of the parties was the monarchy's efforts in the first months after the Mussolini's fall to relegate the parties to the sidelines and control the transition process with the support of the state apparatus (Gambino, 1978, p. 6). A unified front was needed if the parties were to retain their centrality.

Partisan calculations also played a role, of course. For example, if the moderate parties excluded the Communists they would have been in a weaker position in the armed struggle against German occupation because the PCI had developed an extensive clandestine organizational network and a strong military force. Conversely, if the Communists took a more intransigent position vis-a-vis the moderate parties, which indeed some of its leaders in northern and central Italy preferred and could have adopted, they would have risked isolating their party in southern Italy that was under Allied (British and American) occupation (Ellwood 1985). More generally, all parts of the resistance movement needed the support of the Allies for weapons and supplies. The Communists' strong connections with one of the Allied Powers, the Soviet Union, was another reason for not exclu-

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ding them, and those connections further disposed the Communists to co-operate. Once the PCI's leader, Togliatti, returned to Italy from the Soviet Union in the spring of 1944 and convinced his party to put aside its anti-monarchical stance, at least for the time being, the basis for Communist participation was thus set (see Pasquino 1986, pp. 52-4). It can be said therefore that both internal and external factors facilitated the anti-fascist elite alliance.

A central point of the CLN agreement was the decision to elect, after the war's end, a constituent assembly that would write a new constitution to replace the old pre-fascist one (the *Statuto Albertino* which had not been abolished by the fascist regime and was still in force theoretically). Apart from symbolizing a deliberate break with the fascist state as well as with the pre-fascist democratic regime that had so obviously failed to work, this decision was important because it showed the intention of all anti-fascist parties to take control of the regime transition themselves and to prevent the monarchy and its state bureaucratic allies from leading the process.

A crucial step in cementing the anti-fascist coalition was the agreement reached in the spring of 1944 between the parties and the monarchy to postpone any decision on the "institutional issue" of whether Italy should be a monarchy or a republic until after the war, and to join forces in spite of monarchy's past collusions with fascism and of the strong republican desires of some of the parties. An external factor also helped to facilitate this agreement: although most of the parties (or at least their leaders) favored a republic, one of the occupying powers, Britain, strongly supported the monarchy and made it clear that it would not readily accept a unilateral decision by the party leaders on this question.

The 1944 agreement to cooperate with the monarchy led directly to governments in which all anti-fascist forces participated. [6] But the effects of this pact lasted only until June 1946 when a popular referendum settled the institutional issue in favor of a republic. It is interesting to note that after a long debate in the CLN the parties agreed to decide this issue through a referendum, rather than have the Constitutent Assembly try to resolve it. The party elites thereby skirted a divisive issue on which no unanimity would have been possible, and in particular, leaders of the centrist parties,

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[6] The second Badoglio cabinet (April-June 1944) was still led by a non-politician and a man of the King but it included representatives of the parties. The next government, the Bonomi cabinet, had as prime minister one of the party leaders.

especially the Christian Democrats, avoided having to take a position that would only alienate one or another segment of their supporters.

With minor exceptions, cooperation in forming governmental coalitions, in drafting the new constitution and electoral laws, and in taking some of the critical decisions regarding economic matters persisted among the party elites until 1947. [7] To complete the picture, we should add the June 1944 agreement reached among labor union leaders with different political allegiances (mainly Communists, Socialists and Catholics) that sought to overcome past hostilities between them and to create a united labor organization. This agreement among trade union elites was followed in November 1945 by a compromise between leaders of the new union federation (CGIL) and leaders of the employers federation (Confindustria) that made solutions to some of the dramatic problems of the post-war economy possible.

The long and sometimes confused process of drafting the constitution and other important laws, such as the electoral law, that unfolded between the elections of June 1946 and December 1947 also manifested significant elite unity. Agreements could not of course be reached on all disputed points by all the significant groups, and the writing of the new constitution involved shifting and unexpected alliances between Communists, Socialists, Christian Democrats, and other parties on the Left and the Right (Cotta 1990). For instance, a crucial decision to uphold the historic Lateran Pacts of 1929 between the Catholic Church and the State was reached thanks to an agreement between the Communists and the Christian Democrats, but against the opposition of the Socialists and some Liberals. But the overall result of this sometimes byzantine process was that no elite could claim full victory, while none could claim that it systematically lost either. Not surprisingly, the new constitution was almost unanimously accepted, by a vote of 453 to 63, in the Constituent Assembly. It is worth recalling that in France in the same period the first draft of the constitution for the Fourth Republic was resoundingly defeated in a popular referendum, while the second draft was approved by a bare majority. In Italy, however, no major political force, even during the tense polarization that began in 1948, publicly rejected the constitutional text, and the largest op-

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[7.] The cooperation among parties was not allways easy. During the second Bonomi cabinet (December 1944 - June 1945) the Socialists and the Action Party refused to take part in the government; and later in 1946 the Liberal Party did not enter in the second De Gasperi cabinet (Piscitelli 1975).

position party, the PCI, has consistently proclaimed its allegiance to the constitution ever since. Indeed, with a paradoxical but understandable exchange of positions the PCI, once confined to a permanent exclusion from government became the most determined supporter of the constitutional text, even of some aspects it had originally opposed. On the contrary some of the governing parties preferred to delay the implementation of some parts of the constitution (e.g., on regional autonomy, a constitutional court) that they originally favored once they perceived that they could strengthen the opposition and weaken the government. Finally, although the referendum majority that chose a republican rather than a monarchical form of government was not overwhelming in its size, no large- scale rejection of the new republic's institutions ensued (a small monarchist party existed until the 1970s but it was never a serious political factor).

If we look back at the inter-elite processes that unfolded during the 1943-47 period, their fit with the concept of an elite settlement is significant although not perfect. It is true that the processes were not always controlled by few top leaders. And while some of the agreements were reached in secret, others were negotiated in more public settings. But consensus among all major political and social elites concerning the institutional features of the new democratic regime and its fundamental rules of the game was in fact achieved. As well, compromises were hammered out on some important substantive matters. The question is, then, whether a transformation to a consensually unified national elite via what amounted to an elite settlement took place. And if it did take place, why did it not last? For the pattern of elite cooperation and consensus did not persist much beyond 1947 when the two largest parties of the left, the PCI and the PSI (the new label for the Socialists), were ousted from the government. With the elections of 1948, a climate of harsh left-right confrontation emerged. The major consequence was the long-term disqualification of the Communists, the largest opposition party, and the shorter-term disqualification of the Socialists as acceptable and trustworthy governing partners. What is worse, this breakdown of cooperation among the parties in governing quickly became a conflict over the very nature of the political and social order itself.

The international and domestic reasons for this breakdown are frequently discussed. The cleavage between East and West that rapidly crystallized after the end of World War II was mirrored in Italian politics by the two largest parties, the DC and the PCI, which aligned themselves (each with

smaller allied parties) with the opposing Cold War camps internationally. Since the two camps were not only opposed international alliances but stood also for radically conflicting visions of the political and social order -- the West for pluralist democracy and a market economy, the East for one-party totalitarianism and a centralized economy -- the polar commitments of the Italian elites made consensus among them impossible.

But one should not overlook the fact that also various internal dynamics fueled elite conflicts. Among them needs to be mentioned the way in which the end of the peculiar wartime climate of cooperation interacted with the beginning of competitive politics in a dense sequence of elections: spring 1946 -- elections for the Constituent Assembly; spring and fall 1946 -- local elections; spring 1948 -- elections for the first regular parliament. As already noted, the special needs of the war years induced the parties to play down their ideological and policy differences and to reach compromises that more often than not amounted to postponing rather than solving divisive questions. With the end of the war, the moment to take many decisions on which deep disagreements were likely had come, however. The original inter-party agreements had taken place in a situation of non-competitive politics in which the parties were not yet fighting for votes, mass mobilization was extremely low, and in which each party had an equal vote in the CLN's deliberations. But with the start of an intense electoral season in 1946, incentives to emphasize party differences were strong. This was particularly so because electoral competition unfolded now not only among the parties that had been part of the CLN, but also between them and new parties that were burgeoning outside the anti-fascist alliance. Especially troublesome appeared the emergence of two right-wing parties (Uomo Qualunque and the Monarchists) that seemed able to bid for significant popular following as well as for the support of some economic and religious elites. Their challenge was highly salient to the one party of the anti-fascist alliance that, because of its political position between center and right, stood to lose most from their success -- the Christian Democrats. When in the local elections of autumn 1946, the new right-wing parties made sizeable inroads into the DC's electorate and gained endorsement by sections of the Catholic Church through attacks on the DC-PCI alliance, in self-defense, important Christian Democratic leaders began to demand that the party distance itself from the left.

The 1947 breakdown of governmental cooperation between the DC and PCI (together with the PSI) was a response not only to the internatio-

nal situation but also to this electoral struggle and to increasing difficulties in agreeing on economic policies. The new alignment of the parties and the highly polarized electoral campaign of 1948 effectively stifled the rise of right-wing parties whose democratic loyalty was at best dubious, and the Christian Democrats emerged as the dominant party for the next forty years. On the other side, the Communists became the "permanent" opposition party, a situation from which they have still not entirely recovered.

Whether under more favorable conditions a continuation of governmental cooperation between the three large anti-fascist parties (DC, PCI, and PSI) or, more likely, a less traumatic shift from grand coalition to majority governments could have transformed the elite cooperation dictated by wartime needs and the transition to a postwar regime into a less comprehensive, but nonetheless durable, elite consensus on institutions and rules of the game is open to speculation. A crucial question would have been in any case the direction in which the party most ideologically remote from the tradition of pluralist democracy, the PCI, would have evolved. What is certain is that in the international and domestic circumstances that in fact occurred, a continuation of the anti-fascist alliance increasingly came to be perceived by leaders of the centrist and moderate left and right parties as a serious threat to their political prospects, as well as a danger for the democratic regime itself. During those years, one had only to notice the demise of Eastern European democratic regimes, in which similar broad alliances with communist parties had been tried, to make this last view credible.

Two lessons can be learned from this episode. First, the passage from a situation of limited elite competition and mass mobilization to one of full competition and intensive mobilization constitutes an acid test for the persistence of an elite settlement. Second, international conditions and forces that are beyond the control of the elites who fashion a settlement can dramatically reduce the prospects that it will last.

4. Elite Convergence After 1948: A Long-Term Process and its Stages

The confrontation between governmental parties and the leftist opposition that developed after 1947 has colored Italian politics deeply during the past 40 years. It has produced distinctive patterns of non-alternation in government (because of the disqualification of the largest opposition

party, the Communists) and of "stable instability" (unstable cabinets but within a political setting firmly defined by a large centrist party, the Christian Democrats, able to build the alliances necessary for parliamentary majorities). [8] The perception of the largest opposition party as a threat to pluralist democracy should it ever control government executive power has been shared for a long time (and mutually reinforced) by a majority of elites and a majority of the mass public. Thus Christian Democratic leaders have regularly and successfully invoked the Communist threat in election campaigns, but they have also been constrained by mass perceptions of this threat they have fueled in their electorate. And indeed when left-leaning DC leaders tried to promote a rapprochement (or "historic compromise") with the Communists in the mid-1970s they had to face a significant resistance by an important section of DC voters which in the 1976 election made use of the preference vote allowed by the Italian electoral system to support the more anti-communist candidates in the Christian Democratic slates.

These distinctive patterns have had somewhat contradictory political effects. On the one hand, the Italian democratic regime has existed - probably until some point in the 1970s -- under a widely perceived risk of collapse and under the constraints deriving from this situation. Although by as early as the end of 1948 it became sufficiently clear that some kind of revolutionary insurrection was not an option for the Communist party, and although the party itself repudiated that option, its strong links with a non-democratic regime, the Soviet Union, and its regular claims about the superiority of Soviet-type regimes over bourgeois democracies regularly fueled suspicions about the PCI's "real" intentions among its opponents. It was not until the 1970s that these suspicions began to abate in any serious way. On the other hand, it must be said that fear of the Communists has helped to stabilize support for the moderate democratic parties, insulating them to a great extent from performance-related judgements, and it has thus contributed to the survival of the democratic regime. As a result, the post-fascist regime has been very different from the pre-fascist one. In the pre-fascist regime, pro-democratic elites were extremely fragmented

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[8]   The crucial stone of this complex equilibrium, the Christian Democracy party, was until the seventies very clearly the largest party but never reached alone the majority required in the two chambers of parliament to form a government. Only in 1948 the Dc won a majority in the lower chamber, but even then it did not have it in the Senate. Coalition or minority cabinets have therefore been the rule (Cotta 1988).

and lacked strong organizational ties to the masses, which made them easy prey for anti-democratic elites on the right and left. But in the post-fascist regime, since 1948, the democratic parties, especially the DC, have constituted a very powerful political force with strong links both with crucial social elites and at the mass level, able to dominate electoral politics and thus to ensure the country's governability. While it is true that the DC leadership has always been highly factionalized, the fact that no significant party split has ever occurred suggests that the unity of DC leaders is greater than is sometimes thought.

If polarization and lack of democratic consensus at the elite and mass levels was a constitutive, highly visible feature of Italian politics (especially in the electoral arena) from 1947 until well into the 1970s (Sartori 1976 and 1984), this politics had another face that should not be overlooked. This was an ongoing process of integrating left-wing elites and parties into the political mainstream, a process that was partial and uncertain at first, but with the passing of time one that became more significant. As we will see the visibility, forms and success of this integrative process have varied. We should also mention that a parallel process of integrating extremist right-wing elites and parties into the mainstream has also occurred, but because right-wing groups have been smaller and less important, this second process will not be discussed here.

The process of integrating the left can be said to have originated in the failure of the governing parties to reap the benefits of the electoral reform they pushed through parliament before the 1953 election. This reform would have given a large parliamentary majority to the party or party coalition that received 50 percent of the votes. In the 1953 election, however, the center-right coalition led by the Christian Democrats failed to reach that threshold and the reform therefore had no effect. It was rescinded a little while later. It should be remembered that the electoral system was not defined by the constitution of 1947 but only by parliamentary legislation. However, a proportional representation system had been part of the original agreement of the anti-fascist coalition, and in this political sense it has been an unquestioned, quasi-constitutional rule of the Italian political game ever since. In any event, after the 1953 attempt to alter the electoral processes and the workings of the institutional system in a more "majoritarian" direction (Lijphart 1984) -- an attempt which coincided with the most critical moment in postwar parliamentary politics because of the fierce battle waged by the opposition to block the electoral law's passage -- a

purely exclusionary strategy vis a vis the opposition was not tried again by the dominant elites. Instead, a more complicated game involving both integration and exclusion developed. To some extent, this game was a conscious elite strategy, but in part it developed in a less controlled and more spontaneous way according to changing political and institutional constraints and opportunities.

The first important episode was an attempt to divide the leftist opposition by opening the "governmental area" to the more moderate but relatively weak Socialist Party. Here it should be remembered that after 1946 the Socialists were closely allied with the Communists, fighting the 1948 elections under the same Popular Front label and siding clearly with the Soviet Union in the emerging Cold War. Because of these positions, the Socialists were expelled from the International Organization of Socialist Parties.

Starting in 1963, Socialist leaders became pivotal partners in the game of forming government coalitions. But from the standpoint of integrating the opposition into the mainstream, this "opening to the left" was only a half-success. First, it soon brought about a split in the Socialist elite, in which part of the leadership broke with the party and formed a new PSIUP (1964) which closely allied itself to the PCI. Second, it did not produce an expected weakening in voter support for the parts of the left that remained excluded. On the contrary, the PCI gained a larger electoral following at the expense of the Socialists, increasing its vote from 22 percent (1958) before the "opening to the left" to 28 percent (1972) after its high point, while the Socialist vote declined from 14.5 percent to 11 percent during the same period. Moreover, after an initial period of fairly stable governments (by Italian standards) the center-left alliance became increasingly fractious, and the average life of governments decreased from 15 months in the years 1963-68 to 8-9 months in the years 1968-76. Once again it was demonstrated that incorporating (or coopting) a previously excluded elite can seriously weaken that elite and strengthen those left outside.

After this attempt to solve the problems of a highly polarized political system coopting the more moderate Socialists while continuing to exclude the more extreme Communists failed, a still more intricate process involving precisely the Communists began. Initially, this took place mainly in the parliamentary arena and had little visibility for the outside public. In the public electoral arena government and opposition forces continued to attack each other frontally, and it was not until the 1983 election that the Christian Democrats abandoned their "risk of communism" campaign

theme. But inside the walls of parliament, some measure of cooperation between the two camps gradually developed.

The law-making process thanks to a combination of institutional and political incentives was the most important field (see Di Palma 1978). First, the parliamentary setting provided numerous opportunities for an opposition, particularly for a large and cohesive party like the PCI, to make its weight felt in the cumbersome legislative process. Second, the political heterogeneity of the DCs and their various coalition partners on many issues often made it imperative that they gain some degree of tolerance from the opposition in order to get their initiatives approved. Third, it was also the case that factions within the governing coalition could find opposition support to defeat initiatives that they were unhappy with. The opposition could thus become very involved in the parliamentary process even though it was widely depicted in the more visible electoral arena as a menace for democracy .

Other important occasions for interactions between the two elite camps were elections to a number of public offices that the constitution and other laws assigned to parliament (often requiring very high majorities) . Examples are elections of parliamentary officials such as the speakers and deputy speakers of the two parliamentary chambers and of such extra-parliamentary officials as the president of the republic and the judges of the constitutional court. Over time, leaders of the PCI played increasingly important roles in negotiating the candidates and parliamentary votes for these positions (Cotta 1990).

The extent of cooperation between the two camps was apparent by 1971 when parliament's standing orders were reformed with the support of all the major parties. An important aspect of the new standing orders was that they rejected the privileged position of the government and of its majority in the legislative process, putting all parliamentary groups on the same footing in drawing up the parliamentary agenda. The new rules thus sanctioned and further stimulated the interactions that had developed between governing and opposition elites.

In one sense, the culmination of this parliamentary integration of the opposition elite was the agreement in 1976 that included the Communist party in the parliamentary majority (but not in the cabinet) supporting the Christian Democratic government of the time. Covering the Communists, Socialists, Social Democrats, Republicans, Christian Democrats, and Liberals this agreement excluded only minor parties of the extreme right and

left. Its consequence was the assignment of a number of parliamentary offices to the Communists from which they had previously been excluded (e.g., speaker of the chamber of deputies and the presidencies of some legislative committees). The agreement also involved an elaborate exchange of policy concessions in economic and foreign affairs, a particularly crucial concession being the PCI's acceptance of Italy's membership in NATO.

It would be wrong to see this 1976 agreement as just another step in the integrative process at the parliamentary level we have been describing. For the first time, executive power came under the direct (though not sole) influence of the PCI, and in this respect the agreement embodied a much more visible and dramatic mutual elite acceptance. Effectively, the major anti-communist elites acknowledged the democratic reliability of the largest opposition party. In more abstract terms, the 1976 agreement amounted to a shift from gradual and limited elite convergence to a broad settlement of most long-standing suspicions and hostilities between the major elite camps.

Why did this dramatic change occur at that stage? An answer requires us to take a complex balance of factors into account, and to some extent these factors can support two different interpretations. One of these is a more deterministic interpretation that stresses the "inevitability" of elite convergence as a result of the incremental integration of elites "condemned" to coexistence by conditions then prevailing in Italy. The other is an interpretation that places more weight on contingent crises that occurred in the mid-1970s and that, although not devoid of risks for the stability of democracy, proved in the end propitious for elite unification.

There are indeed some signs that suggest that elite convergence had reached an advanced stage by the 1970s. We have already mentioned the increasingly intimate relations between parliamentary elites that undoubtedly accustomed them to bargaining rather than hurling brickbats at each other. There was also a gradual process of change in the PCI's ideological positions, especially its prudent but steady distancing from the Soviet Union as a political model, with PCI condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 being a turning point. More generally, the PCI increasingly elaborated a less dogmatic version of Marxism.

It must be said, however, that the idea of a linear process of political depolarization and elite convergence is not entirely convincing. At some levels, in fact, Italian society appeared to be more acutely polarized during the 1970s than in the 1960s. After 1968, for example, the ideologization of

cultural and political life increased dramatically, and industrial relations (strictly connected in Italy with political life) became more, not less, conflictual and strike-prone. This new climate was a fertile breeding ground for terrorists who launched an onslaught against the established order in the late 1970s, and the increased polarization seems, with other factors, responsible for weakening the governmental parties, which lost votes under the impact of successful competition from the opposition and became less able to find common ground.

The final years of the Fifth Parliament (1972-76) and the elections of 1976 were the culmination of these difficulties [9]. The coalition of political elites that had been dominant for nearly 30 years appeared to be breaking down. Indeed, the dissolution of the Fifth Parliament showed the increased difficulty of creating a coalition with a majority from among the traditional governing parties. In particular, the Socialists would no longer agree to support a government that excluded the PCI. Thus, the 1976 election was held under widespread expectations that the PCI would replace the DC as the biggest party (the so called "sorpasso"), and that the left as a whole would gain a majority in parliament (Parisi and Pasquino 1977, p. 15).

How things would have evolved if this had come to pass is difficult to say. Since 1973, when they were shocked by the violent overthrow of the Allende's socialist regime in Chile, the PCI leadership had adhered to the "historical compromise" line, asking not for a government of the left alone but for a broad coalition including the "catholic world" and the DC. However, there were strong forces in the left, particularly among intellectuals and middle-level elites, that opposed an alliance with the DC and pushed instead for breaking the Christian Democratic hegemony. A clear victory by the left would probably have increased their influence. It is difficult to say whether this could have produced a development more along the lines of Chile's Unidad Popular. But the chances are that Italian politics would have followed a different path than the one it actually took (see Sartori 1978 for an exercise in scenario's building). In any case, the result of the 1976 elections, contrary to most expectations, produced a tie instead of a clear victory for either side. The PCI indeed had a resounding success,

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[9]   Looking at electoral results we see the extreme left (PCI and other smaller leftist parties) increase its share of votes from 25 to 36 percent between 1963 and 1976, while the so called "governmental area" (i.e. Socialists, Christian Democrats plus other smaller centrist parties) shrinks from 67 to 56 percent (Farneti 1985).

but the Christian Democrats could hold their ground and they retained the psychologically important advantage of being largest party. Moreover, the left as a whole failed to win a majority in parliament. The upshot was a balance, with the old elites being unable to govern alone and the communist elite no longer excluded, but with the DC core of the old elites showing unexpected resilience. These conditions were probably the most favorable for pushing in the direction of an agreement between the two camps, since for each of them any other course would have been more risky.

Going back to the explanations of how long-term elite disunity can be overcome, we are confronted with a choice between an interpretation that attributes greater importance to the gradual development of value consensus and organizational interconnectedness among elites in the form of a convergence, and an interpretation that emphasizes the importance of crises or other (sometimes external) contingent conditions that dispose elites toward a settlement (Rustow 1970). The two interpretations should not be seen as entirely incompatible, and evidence for both is available in the Italian case. If we hypothesize that cooperative elite behavior may be induced by a crisis only when a certain level of consensus has already been reached, or, alternatively, that a slow and gradual convergence can sometimes be accelerated by a crisis, then we can reconcile the two interpretations.

To the above review of elite unification during the 1960s and 1970s must be added the observation that unification occurred principally at the parliamentary level of party politics, but it did not extend fully to the governmental level. Full PCI participation in cabinets, which the Communists eventually began to demand after more than a year of external support to Christian Democratic minority cabinets, did not materialize. This final step, which from a symbolic point of view would powerfully mark the achievement of full elite consensus and unity, was not taken then and has yet to be reached. Why, after three years of intense cooperation at the elite level (that among other things made possible a common front for successfully combatting the spread of terrorism), the DC-PCI coalition broke apart and sent the Communists back to what has again seemed like a permanent opposition status is a matter of some dispute. There is some reason to believe that a major factor behind the increasing intransigence of the two largest coalition partners (DC and PCI) over policy issues such as acceptance of the European Monetary Agreement, which provided the occasion for terminating the coalition, was the fear of both partners that they

would lose ground to competitors (both electoral and non electoral) on their respective flanks.

From our point of view, however, the fact that the grand coalition experiment of the late 1970s has not yet opened the way yet to an alternation in government (analogous to those that occurred in the Austrian and German cases) may not be so relevant. In fact, the legacies of that period for a deeper consolidation of the democratic regime have been significant. Thus, depolarization of the political system at both elite and mass levels has advanced greatly. The acceptance of all political actors as legitimate competitors has become more widespread, suggesting that, even when policy positions differ, an elite consensus on institutions and procedural rules has been reached. And there are also signs of a much greater structural integration of the elites. Just to mention one sign, small but symbolically significant, it has become common for representatives of all the major parties to be invited to each other's national conventions and even to deliver speeches at those conventions. Similarly, various institutional positions inside and outside parliament are routinely distributed among all the major parties, with a communist continuing to hold the speaker's position in the Chamber of Deputies.

The conclusion may therefore be that the breakup of the DC-PCI coalition at the government level has not meant a setback of elite unification. Unlike all earlier experiences in Italian history, the failure of this specific inter-elite agreement has not this time resulted in a significant increase in elite radicalization and disunity. In fact, the end of the coalition experiment coincided also with the end of the PCI's electoral growth and with the onset of a steady decline in its support, as well as with the renewed ability of leaders of the traditional governing parties to reach the agreements required for sustaining governments. These changes have become in turn strong reasons for the Communist elite to push even harder for its own transformation, to the point where changing the very name the PCI in order to symbolize its break with its own past as clearly as possible is now a central item on the party agenda. Finally no significant political force has appeared at the extreme left to capitalize from the increasing moderation of the PCI. In short, the consolidation of Italian democracy has on balance proceeded apace during the 10 years since the end of the DC-PCI coalition.

5. Less Than A Conclusion

After this rather schematic discussion of a series of historical episodes involving the changing relationships among Italian elites, a full-fledged conclusion with a satisfactory explanation of the conditions responsible for these changes and for their consequences (whether they were failures or successes) is perhaps not possible. There is space, however, for some less than systematic remarks that may offer suggestions for further research and discussion.

A first consideration is that for building a theory that explains how elite transformations from disunity to consensual unity take place, the conditions that favor them, and how these transformations are related to democratic consolidation, not only successes but also failures can provide useful insights. It should not be forgotten that failed elite transformations are unquestionably more numerous than sucessful transformations, and they therefore constitute rich empirical grounds for testing relevant hypotheses. The Italian case alone shows that out of four or five attempted transformations (depending on how one counts the "opening to the left" in the early 1960s) only one succeeded .

In terms of the forms that transformations from elite disunity to elite consensus and unity take, Italian history provides diverse examples. Some of the attempted transformations approximated the form of an elite settlement, while others more closely resembled an elite convergence. Italian history suggests, moreover, that there can be some amount of contamination between these two kinds of elite transformation. Indeed, elite pacts (which are most directly related to the processes of elite settlements) sometimes punctuate elite convergences. And elite settlements may be preceded (and made possible) by a process of elite convergence. The Italian experience also teaches that a crucial factor that shapes the kind of transformation elites go through are their reciprocal power positions at any given point. If their positions are far from paritarian, it is likely that only a "cooptative" transformation will occur, whereas if their positions are more balanced, then a settlement or more gradual convergence is possible.

The Italian experiences also suggest that elite unifications do not not necessarily develop in a linear fashion. Although it can happen that past attempts at unification have some legacies that can serve as the basis for future developments in the direction of unity, the process is seldom or never simply a sequence of steps where each new step amounts to a clear in-

crease in elite unity. There may also be steps backward and even wholesale reversals of trends toward unity. This was certainly the case in Italy's crisis of the 1920s after a long trend that, despite occasional setbacks, seemed to be moving towards steadily greater unity.

A major question that emerges from our review of the Italian episodes concerns the duration and effects of elite transformations over time. In a nutshell, why do short-term successes (or that at least appear as such) become longer-term failures? In the search for answers an obvious candidate would seem to be the ability of the elites involved to extend the reach of the unification process to all relevant groups and to incorporate new elites that subsequently emerge. In some of the episodes we have examined, longer-term failure appears to have been rather clearly linked to the continuing exclusion of some relevant elites. It may indeed be the case that elite unifications are deliberately exclusionary in the first instance. Past enmities between elites that unify are overcome because other groups are perceived at the moment as more dangerous and in order to exclude them. But the lack of inclusiveness may result also less deliberately because under certain conditions the process of unification itself produces splits within the groups involved between compromise-oriented and intransigent elite members with the latter becoming alienated and hostile. Especially fateful for the achievement of elite consensus and unity is a situation in which the intransigent group commands a larger mass following than the compromisers, thus leaving the latter without much power.

In some cases, failure also seems related to the nature of the organizational instruments adopted when attempting an elite transformation. If these instruments do not establish and sustain sufficiently institutionalized inter-elite linkages, the chances that elite unity will last are poor. This suggests that the nature and working of different integrative institutions and the settings they create for elite interactions is an important subject for further research.

The Italian experience also contains much evidence about the importance of mass behavior for the success or failure of elite transformations. The ability of the elites to control and incorporate their mass followings into newly cooperative patterns seems crucial for the longer-term success of elite agreements. How elite-mass linkages are structured (and this refers very much to parties, but also to other forms of organization) is therefore a vital area of investigation.

Finally, while some of the factors mentioned are to a certain extent within the control of elites, we must also remember that others, for instance international conditions, may be much less so. Whether such contingent conditions are favorable or unfavorable may do much to explain why partial and tentative transformations blossom into full successes or unravel into complete failures.

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