

Italy's political crisis: Is Berlusconi the main threat for Italian democracy?

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On October 7th, the Italian Constitutional Court declared the so-called *Lodo Alfano* unconstitutional, a bill which the Berlusconi government had brought before the Parliament. It would have granted the four highest offices of the state (Prime Minister, President of the Republic and the leaders of the two Chambers of Parliament) total immunity whilst in office. While the Lodo Alfano was not admirable due to several court trials that Mr. Berlusconi is currently involved in, and the possibility that he could have stretched the terms until they would have ceased to be valid, the truth is that the public debate over this bill is a clear message to the current Premier that his political time is nearing the end.

The international press is literally destroying Berlusconi's already tottering reputation, the latest example being Newsweek's "Why Italy Should Dump Berlusconi." While it's flattering that the international community cares so much about Italy's destiny, many are inevitably starting to wonder about the real reasons behind this process. Certainly, the Italian premier's political origins are not very orthodox, as Mafia and P2 Masonic Lodge are heavily involved, but what's most striking in all the international coverage is the importance given to Berlusconi's wild parties in Sardinia, to the extent that Newsweek's Christopher Dickey feels compelled to mention Nero's, or the Borgias', "corruption" and "debauchery".

True, Berlusconi (and his coalition) is by no means the best example of an honest politician, with his obsession for controlling media, magistrates and the public mind, which inevitably reeks of totalitarianism. But the over-the-top tones of the usually moderate and professional English press (The Times has defined him as "sleazy" and "a clown") gives food for thought. Why has Berlusconi suddenly acquired so many enemies? Why are international media so concerned about Italy's future? It might be a coincidence, but there are many signs that Berlusconi's government is not adhering to generally accepted international behavior.

The much-praised rejection of the Lodo Alfano has only served to divert public attention from what might possibly be the underlying causes of international condemnation towards Berlusconi's latest policies. His increasingly close friendship with Putin's Russia, the Arab world and the Eastern markets in general, in a time when US relations with Iran are getting more and more difficult, is understandably not appreciated by the White House. Also, Berlusconi's invitation to reconsider a gradual withdrawal of Italian troops from Afghanistan, after six soldiers died in an attack in Kabul on September 17th, was not warmly welcomed by the United States, given Obama's intentions to increase the number of US and NATO troops in that devastated land.

Although the recent decision of the Constitutional Court to refuse to grant Berlusconi immunity from prosecution can have the effect of making politicians feel less protected in

corruption cases, it inevitably reminds us of the early 1990s maxi-case of *Mani Pulite* (Clean Hands) that was launched by Milan's court and resulted in the ousting of the old political class that had offered much support to CIA covert operations in Cold War times. However, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Italy's past political elite had become too old-fashioned and not open enough to the new interests of the new world. The thousands of trials of the 1990s ended with the official demise of the First Republic and the beginning of the Second Republic. In real terms this has meant that the old class was dismissed and new and recycled characters were introduced, with the result that nothing has changed in the political scene: government coalitions are still unstable and corruption levels are high.

While public attention was kept busy with the news of the Clean Hands court cases, behind the scenes something more important was happening that would greatly affected Italy's future. On June 2nd, 1992, in the English royal yacht *Britannia*, centre-left Italian leaders, together with the Italian financial elite, met the best men of the international financial scene. This was the beginning of what would bring Italy to the brink of collapse. Major enterprises and Italy's Central Bank (Bankitalia) were sold to Anglo-American banks for next to nothing. During that meeting it was decided that foreign financial institutes could control the 48 per cent of Italian enterprises, among which were Buitoni, Locatelli, Negroni, Ferrarelle, Perugia and Galbani. While debates over Clean Hands cases were raging all over the country, national and international financial elites were deciding how to replace the old political class with a new one, completely manipulated by the new owners. When Giuliano Amato became Premier in June 1992, he began the reckless privatization process, after consultation with the Wall Street flagships: Merrill Lynch, Goldman Sachs and Salomon Brothers. [1]

Under political and economic control, and militarily occupied, Italy has been a US colony since the end of World War II when, with the demise of the fascist regime, the OSS (forerunner of the CIA) reintroduced former fascist hierarchs that were supposed to be prosecuted. Instead, they were engaged to help the CIA in setting up Gladio, the Italian version of Stay-Behind armies present all over Western Europe, and creating the so-called *Anello della Repubblica*, a parallel secret service with collaborators in all major arms of the State. This organization was controlling and manipulating many aspects of life within the country, and organizing the terror attacks during the "strategy of tension," not least of which was the kidnapping and killing of former Prime Minister, Aldo Moro. [2]

In the aftermath of the rejection of the Lodo Alfano, Berlusconi has an even clearer idea that his political career is over but, unlike the leaders of the First Republic, he doesn't seem to give up. His past allies (such as Gianfranco Fini, former fascist and current speaker of the lower chamber of Parliament) have abandoned him and formed odd alliances with former rivals. His economic minister Giulio Tremonti, who seemed willing to protect political decisions from bank interests (especially against the subtle suggestions of Mario Draghi, current president of Italy's Central Bank and one of the main movers in the plots of the yacht *Britannia* in 1992), nonetheless set up a strategic meeting on October 8th (the very day after the Court's decision) within the Aspen Institute Italia, of which he is the President. Attendees included a wide range of important names: Massimo D'Alema, former Prime Minister of centre-left coalition; Ignazio Marino, current candidate to PD's secretary position (centre-left); Umberto Veronesi, former health minister of a centre-left government; Franco De Benedetti (brother of Carlo, the president of publishing group *L'Espresso*, owner of *La Repubblica*, mainstream newspaper, close to centre-left parties and among the harshest critics of Berlusconi's government); Renato Brunetta, current minister in Berlusconi's

administration; and Roberto Castelli, current vice-minister and member of the Northern League party in the current government coalition.

The purpose of such a meeting, according to the invitation letter, was to work for “a new leadership” able not only to “face the crisis, but rather to envision and build the «aftermath» [...] involving a renewed and strong responsibility, not only on the socio-economic level, but also on the political stage.” In a nutshell, a diverse group of the financial and political class is already planning the post-Berlusconi era, and the explosive mix that sees both coalitions’ members in business with the heads of the major corporations is far from being the “communist conspiracy” Berlusconi keeps talking about, but strongly looks like the “capitalist conspiracy” he thought he had full control of.

The new political class seems willing to further undermine Italy’s independence, still suffering from the sack of the early 1990s. Berlusconi’s foreign policies are threatening the strong ties Italy has always had with the United States. Berlusconi might be sleazy and in control of much of the Italian media, but the continuous assaults of the international press, hidden behind a fake “caring about Italian democracy”, are only responsible for further confusing public opinion and focusing people’s energies around secondary issues, diverting them from what is really threatening Italy’s well-being.

Notes

[1] Antonella Randazzo, *Come è stata svenduta l’Italia*, March 12th, 2007, http://www.disinformazione.it/svendita_italia2.htm

[2] Sergio Flamini, *Trame Atlantiche*, Kaos Edizioni, 2005; and Stefania Limiti, *L’Anello della Repubblica*, Chiarelettere, 2009

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