Newly Governing Parties In Italy:

Comparing the PDS-DS, Lega Nord and Forza Italia

Jonathan Hopkin*

London School of Economics and Political Science

&

Piero Ignazi

University of Bologna

* This chapter is jointly authored. The authors' names appear in alphabetical order.

Introduction

After a long period of relative stability in Western European party systems (Bartolini and Mair 1990), the 1990s have seen a dramatic increase in the presence of new political parties in national governments. Party system cartels (Katz and Mair 1995) have come under severe pressure, as new parties have forced their way into government coalitions (Mair 2002). This chapter examines this problem through the prism of an extreme case of new party penetration into the government structures: Italy since the early 1990s. The Italian case differs from all the other Western European cases in at least two respects. First, the emergence of new parties was in part a response to the spectacular collapse of the existing party system in 1992-3. Whereas in other West European countries new parties had to push hard to open a door which the establish parties had sought to keep locked, in Italy the door was left wide open and unattended, and the new parties found themselves in the unique position of having to govern themselves with little help from the previous governing elites. The second important difference is that, unlike in many other Western European cases where new parties were 'prophets' (to use Lucardie's [2000] terminology)¹ articulating new political demands unmet by the existing party system, in Italy the new parties had, at least in part, to represent a large constituency of voters who had little interest in 'new' issues and hankered after a degree of stability and continuity.

These differences may cause some problems in generalizing from the Italian experience, and it is not our intention here to present a grand theory of new parties in government. However, it may also be the case that the performance of new parties in government in rather exceptional circumstances brings out with particular clarity

some of the dynamics which are present in other cases. This paper will seek to illustrate the key features of the Italian case in terms which facilitate broader comparative enquiry.

Changes in Italian Party System: Crisis and Collapse 1992-94

In the early 1990s Italy experienced the total breakdown of a party system which had lasted in a relatively stable form since the immediate post-war period, leading to a complete redefinition of Italy's electoral dynamics between the 1992 and 1994 elections. Electoral volatility reached the unprecedented level of 36.8%, and the most voted party in the 1994 general election was one founded just a few months before. The turnover of parliamentary personnel in Italian lower chamber (the Chamber of Deputies) was an astonishing 71% (Bardi and Ignazi 1998, Ignazi 2002, Bardi 2002).

This is not the place for an extensive analysis of this remarkable transformation of the Italian party system (the curious reader can consult, amongst others, Bardi and Morlino 1994, Morlino 1995, Gundle and Parker 1996, Bufacchi and Burgess 2001). For our present purposes, it is sufficient to note that a range of pressures became irresistible for the Christian Democratic (DC)-dominated centrist coalition which, in a variety of forms, had governed Italy since 1948. These pressures included: the end of the cold war, which undermined the Christian Democrats' role as a bulwark against communism; the financial and currency crisis caused by years of loose fiscal policies and brought to a head by the Maastricht treaty and the crisis of the ERM; the emergence of the Northern League as a challenger to the DC in its Northern heartlands; and in the shorter term, the judicial campaign against corruption

launched in Milan on the one hand, and the successful campaign for a majoritarian electoral reform on the other. Between the 1992 and 1994 elections, dozens of Christian Democrat and Socialist parliamentarians were placed under judicial investigation for a range of misdemeanors relating to corruption and illicit party funding, whilst the reform of the electoral system left a discredited governing class uniquely exposed to the wrath of a dissatisfied electorate. A mafia bombing campaign added to the political turbulence.

Given the magnitude of the earthquake suffered by the Italian party system in the early 1990s many new parties were created and most of the oldest ones disappeared. Just to give an idea of the change no party in the 1994 general election had contested in the 1987 election : some were totally new others had new names or symbols as a result of, often traumatic, transformations. As a consequence, the governments after 1994 were mostly made by newcomers.

Therefore, the Italian case provides abundant material for the analysis of "new parties in government". In this chapter we adopt a parsiomonious strategy and to reduce the cases under consideration to three parties only: PDS/DS, *Lega Nord* and *Forza Italia* (FI). The PDS/DS is the direct heir of the former PCI and therefore it has a long political-ideological and organizational tradition. The other two are newly formed parties: *Forza Italia* is organizationally lightweight weak and flexible, whilst the *Lega* is somewhat more institutionalized, but still far less articulated than the PDS/DS.

Given the differences among the parties it would be somewhat difficult and even inconclusive to analyze them on the same ground, in the same aspects. Therefore the analysis which follows adopts a slightly different focus in each case in accordance with data availability and the peculiarities of the individual parties.

The Formation of New Parties in Contemporary Italy

The swift collapse of the dominant political parties after the 1992 elections made a change in governing coalitions appear inevitable, since the parties most threatened by the upheavals of 1992-3 had been the mainstays of governing coalitions for the previous decade and a half. This prospect of substantial turnover in the governing elites – a complete novelty in post-war Italy, where high levels of government instability masked a high degree of continuity in government personnel – accelerated the development of new political parties.

The main reason government turnover appeared traumatic was the presence of a dominant party of the left – the PDS - which represented a visible link with the Italian Communist Party (PCI), for decades the most powerful communist party in Western Europe. The PDS/DS was the offspring of the PCI : it was founded in January 1991 after a long process of renewal initiated immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall. While the PDS/DS has distanced itself from the PCI ideological legacy, its organizational roots (as in the case of the PPI) come from the former Communist party. The new party was founded with the clear intention to overcome the effective veto on the PCI's presence in Italy's national government in the post-war period. In 1993 the party was able to take a first step in this direction, by offering parliamentary support to Carlo Azeglio Ciampi's "caretaker" government (Cotta and Verzichelli 1998). The Ciampi government's precarious parliamentary position made an early election a near certainty. The governing credentials of the new PDS/DS, added to the collapse of the Christian Democrat and Socialist parties in the face of economic crisis and corruption allegations, made the election of a left-dominated government a clear possibility for the first time in over 40 years.

This scenario played a major role in the development of a completely new party, Forza Italia, which formed an electoral alliance with other parties of the centreright, including another newcomer: the Lega Nord. Media magnate Silvio Berlusconi used his financial clout and the organizational resources and nationwide presence of his own business empire (*Fininvest*) to build the new party, which recruited largely political novices to stand, under Berlusconi's leadership, as candidates in constituencies throughout Italy. Forza Italia became the pivot of a broad right electoral coalition which included both the Northern League and the post-Fascist party National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale – AN). This hastily formed coalition, called the 'Pole of Liberty and Good Government' (Polo delle Libertà e del Buongoverno)², which had the clear purpose of averting a left-dominated government, won the elections of March 1994. The fractious parliamentary majority it produced collapsed after only nine months, and after a further period of caretaker governments, the 1996 elections were wno by a centre-left coalition – the Olive Tree (Ulivo) - dominated by the PDS/DS. The centre-left governed from 1996-2001 before the centre-right, reconstituted as the House of Liberties [Casa delle Libertà]), won power and governed throughout the 2001-6 legislature. These governing experiences for the PDS/DS, *Forza Italia* and the *Lega* provide the empirical sample for this chapter.

Newly Governing Parties in Italy: The Centre-Left

The 1996 general elections offered the opportunity for the PDS/DS to enter the governing arena directly for the first time. The centre-left coalition (the Olive Tree)

led by Romano Prodi won a parliamentary majority which allowed the PDS/DS to remain in government for a full five-year legislature (1996-2001). As well as the PDS/DS, the largest party, the Olive Tree coalition also included the *Partito Popolare Italiano* (PPI - heir of the once powerful Christian Democrat party), the Green party and the centrist-moderate *Rinnovamento Italiano* (Italian Renewal, led by Lamberto Dini), plus some minor fringe parties. This section focuses solely on the PDS/DS's first experience at the heart of government, paying particular attention to how this experience affected the party's electoral performance, the party organization, and the party's ideological/programmatic profile.

The Electoral Impact

In terms of the PDS/DS's electoral position, there is some evidence that government experience had the effect of depressing electoral mobilization. This is one possible expected consequence of new parties taking on government roles, since opposition parties of all kinds face the difficulty of adapting their ambitious promises and commitments to the constraints of government. The "inexperience" of the political personnel in the ministerial positions and the difficulty in managing the government coalition could also have contributed to poor electoral performance. In the 2001 general elections, after five years in office, the DS suffered one of the worst defeats ever suffered by either new party or its predecessor the PCI, winning just 16.6 %, 4.5% less than in 1996.

This electoral failure was not caused by any change in the geographical spread of the party's vote. The PDS/DS maintained its traditional strongholds in the "red belt" in central Italy (Galli 1972 Diamanti 2003), collecting 27.2% of the vote compared to the 16.6% collected nationally. This result allowed the party to still dominate that area, notwithstanding significant losses there too (a drop of 7.2% since 1996, higher than the national average (Diamanti 2003: 88). In sum the geographical map of the DS is basically unaffected by the party's governmental participation, suggesting that the Ds did not implement policies aimed at privileging their traditional strongholds.

The same cannot be said of the party's relationship to its social constituency, which did change in this period. This question is inevitably intertwined with the changes in the party programme over the 1980s and 1990s which modified the party's identification with a specific social class (the working class). The PDS/DS underwent significant changes to its identification with the welfare state, in its attitude toward state intervention and the market economy, liberalization and globalization, and in its relationship with the trade unions. Its predecessor the PCI overwhelmingly represented the blue collar electorate (Galli 1963, Accornero et al. 1983). However the birth of two competing parties in the early 1990s such as the PDS's splinter party Rifondazione Comunista and the "populist" Lega Nord undermined the PDS/DS's privileged relationship with this social group. In 1996, at the eve of its entry into government, the working class was slightly over-represented in its electorate (cfr Bellucci et al 2000: 29). The PDS-DS was going to lose its social stronghold. The effects are even stronger regarding trade union support. While in 1985 the members of the communist-led trade union CGIL voted overwhelmingly for the PCI, in 2001 their loyalty towards the DS was limited: only 41% of CGIL members voted for the DS (Bellucci and Segatti 2002 : 912). The remainder largely voted for the minor parties of the left (above all *Rifondazione Comunista*) but also for the Lega which collected also, and especially, many non-unionized working class voters.

Socialists parties' declining support amongst the working class is a well known phenomenon all over Europe. The PDS-DS has followed the general trend. However, the PDS-DS acquired the governmental responsibilities much later than the comparable parties, which may have slowed the process of dealignment. Once in power, this process accelerated. The policies highlighted by its 1996 programme and the ones enforced during the legislature diverged quite substantially. In 1996 the PDS presented a manifesto which followed the final document elaborated in the 1995 "thematic" national conference (Gilbert 1995). That document diverged from the traditional pro-interventionist standings because it accepted the privatisation of the public companies and recognized the needs for a reform of the welfare state. The low profile accorded to this document helped the party maintain its core support in the 1996 elections. However, during the 1996-2001 legislature, the PDS (which took the name of DS in February 1998) moved along an unequivocal acceptance of the logics and constraints of the market economy abandoning any reference to "socialist" goals, and advocating a reform of the welfare state. The 1997 party conference represented the apogee of the leadership attempt to redefining the party's profile as a more pragmatic, "third way" party (Vignati 1998, Ignazi 1997) Opposition to this approach came, not by chance, from the CGIL leader (Sergio Cofferati) who invoked more attention to the traditional constituency. Cofferati's criticism was consistent with the progressive detachment of workers (especially in the northern regions) from the party and union. According to the Italian national elections survey, the DS won the votes of 24.2 % of the workers and clerks in the public sector against 25.3% collected by Forza Italia and a mere 16.6 % against 30.6% collected by Forza Italia in the private sector (Itanes 2001: 95).

In sum, access to power "forced" the PDS-DS to de-emphasise some traditional pro-state intervention and pro-welfare positions, but this shift caused discontent among the working class constituency, a discontent which was voiced quite blatantly by the CGIL leader, in contrast with the party leadership. The result of this conflict appeared quite clearly at the polls.

The Organizational Impact

In organizational terms, we would expect the "cartelization" or professionalization of parties wuld be reinforced by the access to power because the control of the resources which the parties acquire entering government would be concentrated in the hands of the leadership. Newly governing parties would strengthen the centralization and professionalization – two basic traits of the professional/new cadre/cartel/ party.

In this case, the process of organizational change was underway already in the mid-1980s, and rapidly accelerated in connection with the transformation from PCI into PDS. An important turning point is represented by the national conference of March 1989, when "democratic centralism" was formally ended, even if the prohibition of creating internal factions remained (Ignazi 1992). Only when the PDS was founded (January 1991) did the party finally acquire the organizational features of a "standard" European socialdemocratic party (Baccetti 1997). However, the earthquake of the party system in 1993/94 and the emergence of novel and successful political formations such as *Forza Italia* led to further redefinitions of its internal structure. The process reached its end only at the 2001 congress, after which, the debate over internal changes ended.

Notwithstanding this long process of change, the PDS/DS entry into government produced some effects. First, it deepened the gap between party

leadership and rank and file, secondly, it created a gap between the party leader and the national collective bodies (in particular the party executive), and thirdly, it produced a new division between government personnel on the one hand, and the parliamentary group and the party executive on the other. In general terms, in the first year of government participation the party accelerated the tendency towards centralization and personalization, although this tendency was halted by new rules introduced by the first DS congress held in January 2000.

The new process of leadership selection adopted by the congress involved more direct participation by the membership: the candidates present their candidature at the moment of the local congresses (at the branch level) and accompany their candidature with a political-programmatic document. In this way, candidates are tied to their own programme, enhancing accountability, at least in principle. The "candidate cum programme" is voted by the members at local level, thus the secretary is no longer elected by the delegates at the national congresses but by the members which participated in the selection processes in the local conferences. The national conference only ratifies the number of votes collected. This direct legitimation strengthens the secretary but its power is now counterbalanced by a more powerful national executive. The personalization is enforced but the centralization in his hands is tempered by a greater emphasis attributed to the national collective bodies and by the federalization of the party organization (see infra).

The other relevant innovation concerned the transformation of the organizational structure into a network model. The party became a federation of territorial unties (centered around the regional level), of extra-party associations able to affiliate with the party, and of the elected officials (MPs, regional and local councillors). Finally the party opened up to the participation of non-party-members in

its "thematic associations", and allowed the formation of internal tendencies which are allotted structures and funds and can be supported also by non-party-members. In fact, many of these innovations remained on paper, with only the leadership selection process enforced at the 2001 congress (after the electoral defeat). The other organizational reforms along the "network model" went unfulfilled but for a growing centrality of the regional structures which had increased their weight within the organization (even if this could be interpreted as the end-point of a long process initiated in 1991).

In conclusion, the access to power affected the PDS-DS organization: the parliamentary party (including the governing figures) acquired a greater role and tended to distance from, and free itself by, the extra-parliamentary party; the personalization of the leadership increased, especially when the party leader became prime minister, but it was countered either by the attempt at stimulating the membership involvement in the internal decision-making and leadership selection processes, and by the greater emphasis on the accountability and responsiveness of the leadership *vis-à-vis* the membership; the relationship with the traditional flanking organizations such as, above all, the trade union CGIL, relaxed, in favour of a party's broader appeal to different social categories.

A final point to be discussed here concerns the level of recruitment and internal participation. Apparently the party did not suffer from its entry into government, nor it was benefited: the recruitment remained more or less at the same level, over 600,000 members, with some uneven fluctuation (Bellucci et al 2000: 35). On the other hand, the internal participation followed a more precise pattern: it was quite low in 1997 (around 12% of the members participated in the local congresses) during a period of stability for the party (one year after its victory at the polls and its

entry into government), but much higher in 2000 (around 25% participated in the local congresses) when the party was in an even better situation, "crowned" by the party's premiership, and still higher in 2001 when, on the contrary, the party was defeated at the polls and out of government. The crucial variables to explain these different levels of participation are linked to the different degree of internal factionalism: non-existent in 1997, lively in 2000 and explosive in 2001. The declining percentage of members' voting for the party secretary is just a partial example of the different settings: 98.7% for D'Alema in 1997, 79.1%, for Veltroni in 2000, and 61.8% for Fassino in 2001. Moreover, a comparison of the middle-level elites perception of the intensity of the pre-congress debates in 1997 and 2000 is illuminating; while in 1997 12.7% declared that there were highly conflicting opinions in their local congress, 29.9 % declared so in 2000; and specularly, while 21.1% estimated that there was practically no debate in 1997, only 12.9% gave the same judgement in 2000 (Bellucci et al 2000: 107).

Factionalization increased with the passing of time in government. If a casual link between the two facts exists or not is a matter of speculation. Our answer is no: there is not a direct link. Participation in government might be acted as a facilitating factor of a longer process. In fact, participation in government enabled the PDS-DS to "normalize" its internal life, finally purging itself of the residue of the communist traditions of unanimity, deference to the leadership and democratic centralism. Already in 1994 the defenestration of Occhetto by the young turks D'Alema and Veltroni represented a *first attempt* at introducing some element of democratic rituals in the leadership selection; but many undemocratic barriers were still present at that time (see Gilbert 1995, Ignazi 2002). Only with the contested and confrontational congresses of 2000 and 2001 did a more transparent and open decision making

process emerge. In sum, PDS-DS participation in government did not depress internal democracy: internal participation increased and competition between internal factions emerged, whilst leadership accountability was also enforced, thanks to the 2001 party's internal rules.

Party De-Radicalization And Ideological Change

In terms of the effects of government participation on the party's ideological location, empirical data on the party's location demonstrate the abandonment of the more leftist leaning by the party middle-level elites. Compared to 1990, when more than 70% located themselves on the two left-most cases of the 1-10 left-right continuum, only 24.6% did so in 1997, and 19.9% in 2000. The abandonment of the more leftist positioning is compensated by the dramatic increase of the centre-left location which goes from a mere 25% at the time of the PCI (1990), to 68.1% and 73.6% respectively in 1997 and 2000 (Ignazi 1992, Bellucci et al. 2000: 116-118). The party's move toward the centre-left alliance in government has been metabolized by its middle-level elites. The party delegates attribute to their own party an even stronger identification with the centre-left (compared to their own) since 74.3% of the them rated the PDS in 1997, and 76.9% rated the DS in 2000, in the centre-left. A further indicator of de-radicalization is provided by the feeling of closeness or distance vis- \dot{a} -vis the other parties. Here the PDS-DS middle-level elites signal a higher closeness to the centre-located partner of the coalition such as the PPI rather than to the more leftist fringes (PCDI and Rifondazione Comunista)(Bellucci et al. 2000: 126-127).

The PDS-DS entered government with a program which still contained many aspects of the traditional socialist identity absorbed in the passage from PCI to PDS,

with some novelties inspired either by "third-waysm", and by the liberal-democratic tradition. However, the party did not dedicate as much intellectual energy to crafting a modern socialdemocratic identity as it had devoted to rationalizing its detachment form communism. One could argue that abandonment of the communist heritage had exhausted the party, leaving little energy left to build a new, well knit identity. It re-defined itself as a socialist party, part of the socialdemocratic family, and abandoned the Communist group in the European Parliament in 1990, joining the socialist eurogroup, the PSE , and the Socialist International where it was admitted in 1992. But the chaotic events in Italian politics since 1992/3, did not provide an appropriate environment for theoretical speculations, and the PDS entered the government with a patchwork-like ideological identity.

The "thematic" congress of 1995 and the II PDS Congress of 1997 did not enable the party to deepen and enlarge the debate which was instead sterilized into contingent problems. The so called "liberal revolution" that the party leadership intended to promote at the time was no more than a slogan, implying only the acceleration of the privatization of the gigantic state economy sector. Proposals to reform welfare were inadequately articulated. The party was still dwindling between traditional and new references, with the further handicap of an insufficient theoretical elaboration by the renovators. Evidence of this imbalance comes from the evaluation of the *democracy* by the party's middle-level elites interviewed at the national congresses. The four items of the question concerning the democracy are related to two different interpretations (Held 1984): the "procedural" or liberal one (freedom, rules and constitutional guarantees), and the "substantial" one (social justice and social rights). In the decade which goes from the last PCI congress (1990) to the last DS one (2001) an amazing stability in the middle-level elites preferences emerges. More than half of the middle-level elites *since 1990* (!) inclined to a liberal vision of democracy, and a sizeable minority indicated the substantial one, *but the ratio between the two did not change so much in ten years*. Once liberal-democratic principles had been accepted, the party did not move along further.

A correlate of the PDS-DS full acceptance of liberal-democracy concerns the adhesion to the market economy. While in 1990 the party documents still stigmatized the market and the private enterprise, the 1997 and 2000 party documents were quite unambiguous on their full acceptance. The 1997 party document stated in fact that "to free the capacity of individual entrepreneurlity, to favour the creativity of the entrepreneurs, to develop a social market for health-care and welfare (...) are the bases of a reform of the welfare state and of a new relationship between citizens and the State". Growth and development will be assured " by the passage form the welfare of guarantees to welfare of opportunities". Even more explicit and emphatic was the 2000 document in exalting the virtues of free market. The same goes for the final document at the 2001 congress.

As for the party's middle level elites, the reactions to this new profile are variegated. Again *since 1990*, the market has been valued positively; but only after the 2001 electoral defeat the middle-level elites abandoned almost completely any diffidence toward the market, (Table 2) so that 85.6% of the interviewed valued it in positive terms. But this "pro-market" shift is only part of the story. On the other hand, the traditional marxist interpretation of capitalism (exploitation of man by man) after a rapid decline in the consents, still gains the majority of the middle-level elites with 59.6% of positive answers. This can be seen as a reaction to harsher and tenser labour relationships, just as the growing concern about unemployment (the highest since 1990) suggests a reaction to particularly difficult conditions in the job market and

workers conditions (Table 2). However this discontent with the market economy does not revive a traditional socialist demand such as the wokers' participation in the firm's management: only 43.1% of the middle-level elites, almost half compared to 1990, still requires this goal. If we aggregate these items in two coherent set of attitudes – pro-market and anti-market – the former gets almost half of the respondents while the latter around 1/4 of them (the others represent mixed options) (Bellucci et al. 2000: 145) However, analysing the change of the attitudes over time, in the two time points when the PDS-DS was in government (1997 and 2000), it appears that the middlelevel elites have *de-emphasised* their pro-market convictions by 8 percentage points, whereas the anti-market group have increased by 4 points. This shift highlights a certain difficulty in promoting inside the party the ever closer pro-market standing of the leadership stated in the official manifestos.

A more coherent picture emerges from another set of questions concerning, broadly speaking, civil right issues. The question of citizens rights represented a cornerstone in the ideological evolution from the PCI to the PDS (Ignazi 1992). The emphasis attributed to individual rights constituted a radical break with the communist tradition of social rights and class strife. That novelty was welcomed immediately by the party at the time: the 1990 survey confirmed this quite surprising support from middle-level elites. (Ignazi 1992, 1993) In the years of the PDS-DS participation in government this set of attitudes has found a certain internal consistency. Two groups seem to emerge. The larger one could be defined "liberal-secular" since it defends the secular profile of the state and advocate the full acknowledgement of civil rights especially in the sexual and gender spheres. The other , smaller, group has a less definite profile: it combines more concern for "traditional" issues concerning family values, censorship of pornography, and stricter rules for abortion, with postmaterialist and pacifist attitudes. Comparing the 1997 and the 2000 surveys the trend displays a – rather limited - depression of the secular and liberal standings. It might be therefore argued that the participation in government has stimulated a more moderate set of attitudes within the party or even favoured the involvement of more "traditional" constituencies. Even if it is difficult to find official statements in this direction, the centripetal drive implied by the party in government might have favoured this shift.

Overview

In conclusion, at the end of this journey around the PDS-DS in government, we can state that:

- the party was not rewarded by the polls as it lost votes in the 2001 general elections especially in its traditional strongholds (the "red belt"); however its territorial distribution was not altered;

- the party lost its hold on the working class and also on the unionized working class; this decline was already in motion but it increased during the 1996-2001 legislature;

- the party reformed its internal organization along a network model which implied a federalization of its structure, the opening to non-party-members, the leader's selection process via the local congresses, the coming back of the national executive countervailing the secretary's power which had increased in the previous years. Basically, the party attempted to introduce new mechanisms to improve internal participation and leaders accountability; these mechanisms proved effective at the 2001 congress. The ongoing tendency toward professionalization and centralization was accelerated in the first part of the legislature especially with the premiership of Massimo D'Alema, but then it was soft-pedalled after D'Alema resignation. In

conclusion, the PDS-DS's participation in government had a mixed impact on the internal organization:

- the party de-radicalized its image since it redefined its location in the political spectrum as a centre-left party rather than a leftist party *tout court*;

- the party promoted some modifications in the party's ideological constellation especially concerning market economy and welfare; but this programmatic innovation promoted by the leadership and stated in the party manifestos were not completely absorbed by the party middle-level elites. They maintained the new set of values that the party had acquired during its transformation from PCI to PDS in 1990. After that radical change the party remained quite immune from further revisions. The experience in government did not push to further modify the party identity: on the contrary it seems having built up a dam against the recurring waves of change.

Newly Governing Parties of the Centre-Right

The League and *Forza Italia* (FI) are not as closely tied to previously existing organizations as in the case of the PDS/DS. Their leaderships (with a few exceptions in FI), and in good part their memberships, had not been formally affiliated with any of the established parties, although with their electoral successes they have subsequently acquired some of the personnel of those parties. Furthermore, they are both quite distinct from the parties they replaced in terms of ideology, discourse and organization, although they have both clearly inherited a substantial part of the electorate of the Christian Democrat-dominated governing coalitions. These two parties between them held just short of 35% of the seats in the Lower House , and the majority of ministerial posts, in the 2001-6 legislature. Though both on the right of the

political spectrum, and coalition partners in governments for almost six years, these two parties have very different origins, and their presence in government has had very different effects. This section focuses on the impact on these two parties of their period in office in 1994, and then in 2001-6. As in the previous case, we assess the consequences of office for electoral performance, party organization, and ideological/programmatic profile.

The Electoral Impact

The *Lega Nord* had been formally founded in 1991 through the federation of the various regional (northern) leagues that had flourished in between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s (Diamanti 1995, Biorcio 1997, Cento Bull 2002). The party won access to parliament with a resounding 8.6% of the votes in 1992 (although the party's focus on the northern regions only meant it won 17.3% of the vote in the North and almost zero in the centre-south). After 1994, Berlusconi and his coalition allies spent a period of over six years in opposition. Berlusconi I was replaced by a caretaker administration supported by the centre-left, and in the 1996 elections, the *Lega* stood alone, causing the defeat of the *Polo delle Libertà*. The *Lega* did extraordinarily well in these elections, winning 10.1% of the national vote (20.5% in the North), and the remaining centre-right parties also did well, but their divisions were heavily penalized by the electoral system and the election was lost. The two parties therefore struck a deal was struck for the regional elections of 2000, and in 2001 the *Lega* once again allied with *Forza Italia* and AN in the *Casa delle Libertà*.

The 2001 elections demonstrated the potential costs for the *Lega* of a strategy of government participation. Whilst in 1996 the party had approached the election with fiery rhetoric and a series of stunts designed to whip up support for the separatio

of the North from the Italian state, in 2001 the *Lega* had to adapt its message to fit in with the objective of the centre-right coalition to win a parliamentary majority and govern for a full legislature. In these circumstances the *Lega* clearly lost out to *Forza Italia*, winning just 3.9% of the vote, whilst Berlusconi's party increased its share significantly. It could be argued that the *Lega* paid the price of its office-seeking strategy in votes lost to FI; however the 2006 elections, held under a new electoral system based on proportional representation, gave the *Lega* a better performance, with 4.6%. On the whole though, the party's best electoral performances – in 1992 and 1996 – have come when it has presented itself as a protest party outside and against the existing political system. Involvement with government has had a substantial electoral cost, almost certainly related to the difficulties for the *Lega* of implementing its formal programmatic goals with a centre-right coalition committed to the unity of the Italian state.

Forza Italia has also seen fluctuations in its electoral support consistent with the hypothesis of government experience proving particularly costly for new parties. Entering the political stage with a spectacular 21% of the vote in the earthquake elections of 1994, FI polled a disappointing 20.8% two years later, after a chaotic and short-lived experience at the heart of government in 1994. Correspondingly, the party's best performance to date came in 2001, after over six years in opposition, when its 29.4% made it Italy's biggest party by some distance. After five years in government with the party leader as Prime Minister, this has fallen to just 23.7%. These results can be interpreted in terms of voter disappointment as the mismatch between the party's eloquent promises during election campaigns and the more prosaic reality of its achievements in government. However, *Forza Italia* remains unlike the *Lega*, a party with a clear governing vocation, which would lead us to expect the electoral costs of government incumbency to be lower.

The Organizational Impact

The nature of the two party organizations assessed here could hardly be more different. Whereas the Lega built a relatively strong and dynamic organization based on highly committed voluntary activists (Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001: 12-13), FI had no mass base at all to speak of when it won the 1994 elections. Instead FI was articulated by the territorial offices of Berlusconi's business empire, in particular, his TV advertising company Publitalia 80 (Farrell 1995). Regional Publitalia bosses screened and chose the party candidates and coordinated their election campaigns. Although a move was made to develop a kind of mass organization – in the form of the Forza Italia 'clubs' – this organization was kept formally separate from the party itself, and hastily abandoned after the 1994 elections. Although the party's disastrous showing in its first local elections convinced Berlusconi that some kind of mass organization was needed (Paolucci 1999), the mass membership has no formal capacity to influence central party policy, which remains in the hands of an unelected clique of Berlusconi's closest allies (for an account of the party statutes, Poli 2001 Ch.6). The party's political campaigning rests very heavily on the use of Fininvest resources, most importantly its TV stations, but also its marketing and advertising arms.

These characteristics have led to descriptions of FI as a *partito-azienda* 'business firm party' (Diamanti 1995, Hopkin and Paolucci 1999). In its initial phase, there was not a clear dividing line between *Forza Italia* the party and Fininvest the corporation. Regional managers of Publitalia become regional organizers of FI (some

of them remaining in position for several years); Fininvest TV channels faithfully broadcast the party's electoral propaganda even in the most unlikely formats (game shows etc.); and of course, the head of Fininvest was the undisputed leader of the party. Realization that some kind of more solid territorial presence was necessary has led to an attenuation of these characteristics over the decade of the party's existence. To a considerable extent, this has involved the 'recycling' of local elite groups previously to be found within the DC and PSI (Diamanti 2003); this is the case for areas such as Sicily (where a clientelistically mobilized 'captive' vote allowed the right alliance to win all 61 constituency seats in the 2001 elections) or Liguria. However in other areas where FI has a weaker electoral base (such as Emilia-Romagna) the party organization is almost non-existent. Given the weakness of the party apparatus, government power represents an opportunity to strengthen the party organization by attracting new members through patronage. Unlike the Lega, which has the option of reverting to anti-government protest from its Alpine heartlands, Forza Italia makes little sense as a protest party alone. This territorial presence has often drawn on the 'traditional' clientelistic practices of electoral mobilization, most obviously in Sicily. This suggests that the party could institutionalize along the lines of a modernized clientelist party model, distributing 'club goods' to identifiable electoral clienteles. A lengthy spell of government office is crucial to this kind of organizational strategy, suggesting that FI has benefited in these terms from its long period in government.

In the case of the *Lega*, the consequences of government participation are far less clear. Although there is relatively little secondary literature available on which to base the analysis, the *Lega* seems to come much closer than the other new parties to a traditional 'mass party' model, with an activist base capable of acting as a

transmission belt between the party and its electorate, at least in those areas where the *Lega* is well entrenched. Mass participation events (although on a smaller scale than the classic mass party), such as the annual festival at Pontida, and mock referenda for the independence of Padania organized by party members, give the *Lega* a stronger link with its core electorate than for many other Italian parties. However, the demagogic and extremist tone of many party activities also entrench the *Lega*'s image as a protest party, an image which creates immediate problems when the party enters the government. Ultimately, the tensions between participation in a coalition government and maintaining a party activist base committed to radical and probably unrealistic goals has tended to be resolved in favour of the latter.

Party De-Radicalization And Ideological Change

A reasonable expectation, apparently confirmed by the PDS/DS case, is that government participation is likely to curb ideological radicalism and instill a more pragmatic approach in new parties. The case of new parties on the Italian centre-right, however, does not lend strong support to this argument. Neither the *Lega* nor FI have taken clear steps towards more moderate policy proposals and discourses, although they accepted the need to compromise on policy whilst governing in coalition in the 2001-6 legislature.

The *Lega*, the most radical of the two, has its origin in several independent movements which expressed sentiments of cultural, linguistic and ethnoregional identity (see Diamanti 1993: Ch.3). Most prominent of these was the Liga Veneta, which built on a long tradition of Venetian historical and linguistic identity. As the movements grew, it was recognized that such particularist claims would be a brake on electoral growth, and under the leadership of Umberto Bossi of the Lombardy League, a process of unification took place leading to the formation of the Northern League.

This unification diluted the ethnic and linguistic identity of the Leagues, and replaced it with a much broader identification with the 'North'³ (later christened *Padania*) which made little sense in terms of any ethnic identity. As a result, the League cannot be considered a genuine 'peripheral nationalist' movement along the lines of the Basque or Catalan parties in Spain. However the lack of a coherent national identity has not prevented the party from regularly proposing the break-up of the Italian state and rejecting symbols of Italian unity, such as the tricolour flag.

In practice, this anti-Italian rhetoric has coexisted with the party's choice to participate in the state institutions in Rome and take part in government coalitions with parties based largely in the South (AN) and which identify themselves with the legacy of the DC (CCD-UDC, and indeed to an extent Forza Italia). There is also a degree of pragmatism in the way in which Northern grievances have addressed by the party, with regular changes of position from a 'tripartite' federalism, to outright secession, through to 'devolution'. The party's commitment to a greater fiscal decentralization through the devolution of powers over the education and healthcare systems to the Italian regions can be seen as a pragmatic strategy to maximize the advantage to its electoral heartlands within a coalition largely opposed to any fundamental territorial reform of the Italian state. This project emerged from an agreement with Berlusconi that the centre-right government would introduce decentralizing reforms to strengthen the North's fiscal autonomy (Loiero 2003: Ch.3). This agreement proved robust, with the League and Forza Italia establishing a very stable pattern of cooperation in 2001-6. The Lega's public attitude to government participation – sharing power with the 'Fascists' of AN and the corrupt, pro-South UDC - was that it is a necessary evil, the only way to achieve a federal reform which will give the North to power to govern itself (see Vandelli 2002: Ch. 2).

The *Lega* is rather more consistent about the social groups it aims to represent, and the broad political and economic grievances it expresses. The slogan Roma ladrona (thieving Rome) captures the essence of the League's message it its simplest. Rome, the capital city and seat of the national government, steals and wastes the money of ordinary hard-working citizens. The social groups the League seeks to represent are those most intolerant of the burden of taxation placed on productive activity in Italy: the owners and employees of small and medium sized businesses (which are disproportionately numerous in the North-East), and the self-employed. The League articulates the frustration felt by these sectors at what they perceived to be an onerous burden of taxation, and at the waste of public money, which had undeniably in part been used by political leaders – either through patronage and clientelism, or through outright corruption - to buy electoral support and sustain expensive electoral machines. The Lega has therefore emphasized lower taxes, a position shared by Berlusconi and Forza Italia, and indeed many mainstream centreright parties. Where the party parts company with mainstream conservatism is its demagogic approach to the international economy: whilst in the early 1990s the League mobilized support around the need to reform economic policy in order to help Italy meet the Maastricht criteria, once the Euro was actually adopted the League began to adopt a clearly Eurosceptic discourse, and more recently it has begun to advocate protectionist measures to safeguard Italian business against Chinese competition. So even though the League has an identifiable social base with reasonably coherent economic interests, this has not prevented frequent recourse to an essentially oppositional and demagogical political message, in part anti-statist in its appeal for lower taxes and less regulation, in part statist in its demands for protectionism.

The case of *Forza Italia* differs in that Berlusconi's party is not wedded to any clear ideological or programmatic goal, and certainly nothing so implausible as the dismantling of the Italian state. FI is a very different party from the League in a number of ways, although it shares with the League a strong populistic, even demagogical, tendency in its political discourse. Its origins and organization are very different and the governing experience presents FI with as many opportunities as constraints.

Whereas the League was the product of the growing dissatisfaction and anger with the existing political system amongst well defined social groups in Northern Italy, FI was only founded *after* the collapse of the DC-dominated party system. The formation of FI can be seen as an emergency response to the collapse of the DC-PSI governing arrangement. The prospect in 1992-3 of a left-wing government which alarmed many on the centre and right in Italy, and the effective disappearance of the DC and PSI left the conservative electorate without a strong anti-left alternative for which to vote. The prospect alarmed Silvio Berlusconi even more. His business interests were heavily dependent on the political backing of the DC and PSI elites, and their disappearance left him exposed at a particularly difficult juncture for his Fininvest corporation. Without the protection of these political sponsors, Berlusconi ran the risk that his political adversaries would pass an anti-trust law which would result in expropriation of some of his TV interests, which would have serious ramifications for Fininvest as a whole.

FI is therefore neither a 'mobilizer' nor a 'challenger' (Rochon 1985); instead it is in many respects a 'substitute' party for the DC and PSI, and access to government protection and patronage is a key part of the rationale for FI's creation. FI is therefore very much a party that seeks to govern, and does not suffer the temptation

to retreat to the opposition that can affect a movement such as the *Lega*. However being in government also poses difficulties. FI's political message to mobilize the vote has been dominated by a negative message – anti-communism – which is of little use in guiding government policy. To the extent that FI has had a positive message, it is a set of unrealistic promises on valence issues: a 'new Italian miracle' of economic progress. Such a message is much easier to sell in opposition than in government.

From the point of view of its ostensible political programme, *Forza Italia*'s performance in government is in large part typical of the difficulties faced by all populistic parties once they reach government. Its clear failure to deliver an economic 'miracle' – Italy's growth rate during the second Berlusconi government was even lower than under the centre-left - bears a close resemblance to the difficulties faced by populists such as Haider or the followers of Fortuyn when they won power: like them, FI promised a quick solution to a much broader, and therefore all the more intractable, problem.

There are two reasons why FI's programme was bound to disappoint. First, in order to ensure electoral success, it was hyperbolic in its promises. Instead of promising specific economic reforms which might help Italy to grow, Berlusconi committed himself explicitly to swingeing tax cuts which in the current European economic context cannot possibly be sustainable, and also (here more imprecisely) promised a transformation of Italy's economic performance analogous with the country's remarkable development in the immediate post-war period. In short, whilst in opposition FI garnered support by blaming all of Italy's many and well-entrenched problems on the ineptness of his political opponents and assuring voters that Berlusconi's managerial talent would succeed where others failed. Once in government, Berlusconi's inability to live up to these high expectations undermined

his credibility. FI's response to these difficulties in part revolved around a well-honed redistributive strategy aimed at shoring up support amongst the traditional support base of the Italian centre-right. One example of this is the second Berlusconi government's generous distribution of informal and ad hoc tax breaks to groups such as the self-employed, small business and small retailers⁴, a group which is much larger as a proportion of the working population in Italy than in other Western countries. Although this kind of strategy is increasingly difficult in an age of 'permanent austerity' (Pierson 1998) and external budgetary constraints, in combination with Berlusconi's media resources it offers FI a fallback position when the flamboyant rhetoric of election campaigns encounters the reality of Italy's deepseated economic and social problems. Although this suggests FI adapting pragmatically to the opportunities and constraints of government, there is relatively little evidence of any toning down of the oppositional rhetoric typical of new parties. After the centre-right's narrow defeat in the 2006 election, Berlusconi failed to acknowledge the official election results and set out to undermine the legitimacy of the new centre-left government, suggesting an attachment to aggressive and demagogical campaigning characteristic of new oppositional and protest parties.

Conclusions

In very different ways, the *Lega* and *Forza Italia* provide clear indications of the difficulties facing new parties in government. These difficulties, for the most part, stem from the essentially oppositional, and usually populistic, strategies for electoral mobilization that new parties adopt. Such messages play well in opposition, but are quickly exposed as unrealistic and impracticable once these parties are called to take up government responsibilities. As a result, 'success in opposition, failure in government' (Heinisch 2003) is a common pattern. The case of the PDS/DS suggests opposite conclusions: a party moulded from a more radical predecessor adapted to government by removing the most contentious elements of its ideological and programmatic identity and firmly establishing itself in the mainstream. All of these parties seem to have suffered electoral costs as a result of their government experience, suggesting that a return to 'outsider' politics could be a fruitful strategy. However the *Lega* is in a rather different situation to FI and PDS/DS, unwilling to abandon its 'protest party' status. Both FI and PDS/DS have taken on the role of articulating potential governing coalitions around them, with consequences for their electoral base – which has come under pressure after governing experiences – and their ideological identity, which has become more mainstream and pragmatic after periods in office (rather more in the case of the PDS/DS than in that of FI). As a tentative conclusion, it can be argued that involvement in government does not produce a predictable response, but it does force new parties to make a choice about whether to enter the mainstream of party politics, or whether to remain outside, shouting from the sidelines.

Notes

¹ Or, alternatively, most new parties in Western Europe have been 'mobilizers' rather than 'challengers' (Rochon 1985).

² To be more precise, FI and the League stood together in the North as the *Polo delle Libertà*, whilst FI and AN stood together in the Centre and South as the *Polo del Buongoverno*. The coalition also included other smaller parties, most notably a group of conservative Christian Democrats, the CCD. ³ The 'North' includes all the regions from the Po valley upwards: the original North-Eastern regions, plus the North-West (Val d'Aosta, Lombardy, Piedmont and Liguria), and the central-Northern region of Emilia-Romagna (where the League's support is minimal). At some points in its development the League also won a little support in Tuscany. However, the League's inability to penetrate Emilia-

Romagna and Tuscany implies that the 'North' stops more or less at the river Po itself. This vagueness over boundaries confirms that the League lacks a clear idea of the confines of its ethnic and territorial identity.

Bibliography

Accorsero, Aris et al. (1983) L'identità comunista. Milano:Feltrinelli.

Baccetti, Carlo (1997) Il Pds. Bologna: il Mulino

Barbacetto, Gianni, Peter Gomez and Marco Travaglio (2002). Mani pulite. La vera

storia. Rome: Editori Riuniti.

Bardi, Luciano and Morlino, Leonardo (1994). 'Italy: Tracing the Roots of the Great Transformation', in Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair (eds.), *How Parties Organize: Change and Adaptation in Party Organizations in Western Democracies*. London: Sage, pp.242-77.

Bartolini, Stefano and Peter Mair (1990). *Identity, Competition and Electoral Availability: The Stabilization of European Electorates 1885-1985*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bellucci Paolo and Segatti Paolo (2002) 'Le risorse di un leader della sinistra: il caso Cofferati', in *il Mulino*, n..403, pp. 911-915.

Bellucci Paolo et al. (2000) Pc, i Pd, s Ds. Milano: Donzelli.

Bellucci, Paolo (1995) ' All'origine delle identità politiche', in A.Parisi e H. Schadee (a cura di) *Sulla soglia del cambiamento*. Bologna: il Mulino pp. 185-226

Betz, Hans-Georg (1993) 'The New Politics of Resentment: Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe,' *Comparative Politics* 25:413-427.

Betz, Hans-Georg (1994). *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

⁴ Marcello De Cecco, 'L'economia italiana e la tempesta perfetta', *La Repubblica Affari e Finanza*, 22 March 2004, p.7.

Biorcio, Roberto (2002). '*Forza Italia* and the Parties of the Centre-Right', in James Newell (ed.), *The Italian General Election of 2001*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp.88-104.

Bufacchi, Vittorio and Burgess, Simon (2001). *Italy Since 1989. Events and Interpretations*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2nd edition.

Burnett, Stanton and Luca Mantovani (1998). *The Italian Guillotine. Operation Clean Hands and the Overthrow of Italy's First Republic.* Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield.

Cento Bull, Anna and Mark Gilbert (2001). *The Lega Nord and the Northern Question in Italian Politics*. London: Palgrave.

Chiaramonte, Alessandro (2002) 'Il voto proporzionale: verso la nazionalizzazione della competizione?' in R. D'Alimonte e S. Bartolini (a cura di) *Maggioritario finalmente*? Bologna: il Mulino pp. 165-198

Diamanti, Ilvo (1993). La Lega. Geografia, storia e sociologia di un nuovo soggetto politico. Rome: Donzelli.

Diamanti, Ilvo (1995). 'Partiti e modelli', Almanacco di Politica ed Economia January: 71-81.

Diamanti, Ilvo (2003) Bianco, rosso, verde... e azzurro. Bologna: il Mulino

Diamanti, Ilvo (2003). *Bianco, rosso, verde...e azzurro. Mappe e colori dell'Italia politica*. Bologna: Il Mulino (2003).

Farrell, Joseph (1995). 'Berlusconi and Forza Italia: New Force for Old?', *Modern Italy* 1: 40-52.

Galli, Giorgio (1966) *Il bipartitismo imperfetto*. Bologna: il Mulino.Galli, Giorgio (1972) *Il difficile governo*. Bologna : il Mulino.

Gilbert, Mark (1996) 'L'Ulivo e la Quercia' in M.Caciagli e D.I.Kertzer (a cura di) *Politica in Italia 96* Bologna: il Mulino pp 121-138

Gold, Thomas (2003). *The Lega Nord and Contemporary Politics in Italy*. New York: Palgrave.

Gundle, Stephen and Simon Parker (eds.) (1996). *The New Italian Republic. From the Fall of the Berlin Wall to Berlusconi*. London: Routledge.

Heinisch, R. (2003) 'Success in Opposition, Failure in Government: Explaining the Performance of Right-Wing Populist Parties in Public Office.' In *West European Politics*. Vol. 26: 91-130.

Held, David (1994) Modelli di democrazia. Bologna: il Mulino.

Hopkin, Jonathan (2003). 'Political Entrepreneurship or Predatory Rule? Party Formation and the Case of *Forza Italia*', paper presented at the annual meeting of the Società Italiana di Scienza Politica, University of Trento, 14-16 September.

Hopkin, Jonathan and Caterina Paolucci (1999). 'New Parties and the Business Firm Model of Party Organization: Cases from Spain and Italy', *European Journal of Political Research* 35: 307-39.

Ignazi, Piero (1992) Dal Pci ald Pds. Bologna: il Mulino

Ignazi, Piero (1997) 'Il Pds, l'Ulivo e il governo', in *il Mulino*, n.370, pp.252-260.

Ignazi, Piero (2002) Il potere dei partiti. La politica in Italia dagli anni Sessanta ad oggi. Roma-Bari: Laterza.

Itanes (2001) Perché ha vinto il centro-destra. Bologna: il Mulino

Katz, Richard and Peter Mair (1995) 'Changing Models of Party Organisation and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party', *Party Politics* 1: 5-28.

Kitschelt, Herbert (1988). 'Left-Libertarian Parties: Explaining Innovation in Competitive Systems', *World Politics* 15: 194-234.

Kitschelt, Herbert (1989). *The Logics of Party Formation*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Loiero, Agazio (2003). Il patto di ferro. Rome: Donzelli.

Lucardie, Paul (2000). 'Prophets, Purifiers and Prolocutors. Towards a Theory on the Emergence of New Parties', *Party Politics* 6: 175-85.

Mair, Peter (2002). 'In the Aggregate: Mass Electoral Behaviour in Western Europe, 1950-2000', in Hans Keman (ed.), *Comparative Democratic Politics*. London: Sage, pp.122-40.

Morlino, Leonardo (1996). 'Crisis of Parties and Change of the Party System in Italy', *Party Politics* 2: 5-30.

Newell, James (2000). Parties and Democracy in Italy. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Paolucci, Caterina (1999). 'Forza Italia a livello locale: Un marchio in franchising?' *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica* 29/3: 481-516.

Pierson, Paul (1998). 'Irresistible Forces, Immovable Objects: Post-Industrial Welfare States Confront Permanent Austerity', *Journal of European Public Policy* 5: 539-60.

Poli, Emmanuela (2001). Forza Italia. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Rochon, Thomas (1985). 'Mobilizers and Challengers: Towards a Theory of New Party Success', *International Political Science Review* 6: 419-39.

Sivini, Giordano (1971) Sociologia dei partiti politici Bologna: il Mulino.

Vandelli, Luciano (2002). Devolution e altre storie. Paradossi, ambiguità e rischi di un progetto politico. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Vespa, Bruno (2001). Scontro finale. Ultimo Atto. Milan: Mondadori.

Vignati, Rinaldo (1998) 'Il leader e il partito. Il Pds dopo il II congresso', in L.Bardi e M.Rhodes (a cura di) *Politica in Italia 98* Bologna: Il Mulino pp.87-108.

Willey, Joseph (1998). 'Institutional Arrangements and the Success of New Parties in Old Democracies', in Richard Hofferbert (ed.), *Parties and Democracy*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp.229-46.