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The Politics of Immigration: a new electoral dilemma for the right and the left?

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Abstract

The success of radical right, anti-immigrant political parties and the recent riots in France are only two of the more publicized examples of how volatile the issue of immigration has become across Western Europe. It is often believed that the dichotomy between racism and anti-racism is quite clear. Right-wing and center-right parties and their electoral constituencies are less accepting of immigrants, while center-left and left-wing political parties and their supporters are more accommodating. In this paper, however, I argue that this distinction is not as clear as it is often perceived. Using Italy as my case study, I outline the various ideological positions on the left and the right, and within the left and right, vis-à-vis immigration legislation and important related issues such as integration and multiculturalism.

In the second section, I then examine how these ideological positions respond to the realities of immigration and to new pressures from voters within civil society. The question is whether immigration has created a new electoral dilemma for both sides of the political spectrum. I examine whether: 1) left-wing parties are experiencing pressures from their traditional working class constituencies to be tougher on immigration and issues of law-and-order. How does this mesh with more liberal attitudes regarding policies that permit immigrants to enter, find work, and integrate into society? 2) The question is whether right-wing political forces are also experiencing an electoral dilemma between center-right voters who support less liberal immigrant legislation and their traditional business constituency who support center-right economic policy but also realize that they require immigrant labour.

In the conclusion, I, briefly, examine whether this new electoral dilemma experienced by the Italian left and right is consistent with other West European countries such as Germany, Austria, Denmark, the United Kingdom, and France.

Introduction

Immigration, and related issues such as integration, exclusion, and multiculturalism, dominates much of the current academic and journalistic discussions concerning European politics. The subject matter is often contentious and controversial: from violent attacks on ethnic minorities, to the arrival of illegal immigrants off the shores of Italy and Spain, to the electoral success of anti-immigrant radical right populist parties in Austria, Denmark, France, Italy, and Holland. Immigration to Europe and migration within Europe has a long history. The post 1945 economic boom was, in part, driven by internal migration and by the arrival of non-European labour. In the 1970s, when northern European countries such as Germany, Switzerland, and France stopped their active recruitment of foreign labour, discussions turned to issues of residency rights, citizenship, asylum, and family reunification.

Despite the long and often controversial nature of immigration, it was not until the 1980s, with the possible exception of Great Britain, that immigration has been politicized. Several economic and political developments opened up this contentious issue to public debate and controversy. First, in the 1970s stagnation, inflation, and declining growth and productivity restructured the post Second World War Fordist economies. The transformation of European economies into post-Fordist production systems altered the nature of labour-demand and migration patterns. Secondly, the de-alignment of party systems, and the rise of Green and radical right populist parties, diminished the ability of Christian Democratic and Social Democratic catch-all parties to control the political agenda. Scholars writing about post war immigration have noted both the degree to which the issue of immigration cut across the left-right divide and the

degree to which political elites demonstrated little desire to politicize the issue. This began to change as new left forces, especially Green parties, demanded more social and even political rights for immigrants, and as radical right forces demanded more restrictive immigration policies.

These economic transformations and the politicization of immigration set the agenda for an important research question: Does immigration pose an electoral dilemma for center-left and center-right parties? In order to address this question, I first outline a model for explaining the current politicization of immigration. I argue that the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism and the process of electoral de-alignment have created opportunity structures for new political forces, on both the left and right, to politicized immigration. Subsequently, I examine the potential tensions within the left and right vis-à-vis immigration. I question whether the politicization of immigration implies that the left is vulnerable to conflicts between supporters of policies that grant immigrants social and political rights and working class voters who fear that immigration precipitates crime and insecurity, creates unfair competition for employment, and overburdens the welfare state. I also point out that the right is not immune to its own electoral dilemma. It must deal with tensions among supporters of right-wing populist parties that want to limit immigration, public fears concerning immigration and crime, business leaders who recognize the need for immigrant labour, and center-right Christian democratic voters who supported more humanitarian treatment of new arrivals.

I then turn my attention to the evolution of Italian immigration policy in order to investigate whether the empirical evidence demonstrates that such an electoral dilemma exists. Since Italy's transition to an immigrant receiving country in the 1980s, it has

passed a series of immigration laws. I examine Italy's first immigration law in 1986 (Law 943), the Martelli Law (1990), the Turco-Napolitano Law (1998), and finally the controversial Bossi-Fini Law (2002) in order to scrutinize the degree to which the left and the right have faced internal divisions and contradictory pressures from within civil society while attempting to contend with the momentous social, political, and policy changes involved in the transition to an immigrant receiving society.

The Politics and the Political Economy of Immigration

Gary Freeman argued in 1995 that immigration policy in industrialized countries is expansionist (1995). Despite surges of anti-immigrant sentiments, immigrant receiving states have avoided anti-immigrant populist sentiments since immigration policy is drafted behind closed doors. He claims that immigration policy is driven by “organized interest groups, usually, ‘employers, ethnic advocacy groups, and civil and human rights organization.’ (Perlmutter, 375).” According to this argument, immigration policy has been immune from “irrational” populist forces within civil society intent on limiting immigration. Freeman refers to this as a theory of client politics (Perlmutter, 375, Freeman, 888).

While Freeman's “client” model of immigration policy accurately accounts for the immediate post war (1945-1973) era of immigration, this model is less valuable for the post 1973 era of immigration. Criticizing Freeman, Perlmutter, correctly, points out that this model is “most accurate for cases where the national leadership of mass parties control the political agenda. It is less accurate for party systems where this leadership has been challenged by other actors (1996, 376).” It is my argument that this is precisely

what has occurred in Europe since the 1980s. The “client” nature of immigration policy formation has been challenged, on both the left and the right, by political parties that have politicized immigration. This is not to imply that immigration policy is necessarily becoming more exclusionary, rather, the point is that the policy process is increasingly exposed to competing political forces, debate, and conflict.

Several political and economic developments have facilitated these changes. There has been a gradual de-alignment of the dominant post war Christian Democratic and Social Democratic catch-all parties. Smaller Green parties, on the left, and radical right parties, on the right, have challenged the ability of catch-all parties to control the political agenda (Kriesi, Kitschelt). Center-right parties are forced to respond to fears of radical right parties and their supporters concerning immigration and claims that new arrivals increase crime, unemployment, and threaten national identity. Green parties have also challenged the hegemony of Social Democratic parties on the left, by pushing for more inclusive immigration and citizenship policy.

The political economy of the post-Fordist era must also be taken into consideration. As Enrico Pugliese emphasizes, during the heyday of post war migration the Fordist model of production prevailed. Fordism accounted for the integration of the workers into the work force and into the working class: “As far as these migrations are concerned, industrial development in the core countries has been the motor of the labour demand and the migratory inflows. The labour demand in the manufacturing sector (besides mining and the construction industry) was the factor activating population movements. This does not mean of course that all immigrants everywhere entered industrial employment.” However, it does hold true that “for the majority of the intra-

European migrants, industrial employment was certainly the main destination (1993, 317).”

The crisis of the post war Fordist model has important implications for current migration patterns, labour demand, and for occupational and social structure. The demise of post war levels of demand, productivity, and growth are countered with the often precarious nature of employment, the heterogeneous origin of international migrants, and the predominance of employment in the secondary economy (Pugliese, 61).

The demise of post war levels of demand, productivity, and growth are countered with the often precarious nature of employment, the heterogeneous origin of international migrants, and the predominance of employment in the secondary economy. The volatility of this post-Fordist economic context is exacerbated by the declining hegemony of the catchall party, the emergence of radical right and Green political parties, and competing understandings of citizenship and belonging. It is within this post-Fordist socio-political climate that immigration policy has moved from the dark corridors of parliament committees to the often populist and emotionally charged public sphere.

Does an Electoral Dilemma Exist?

Although the potential for internal divisions within the left and the right existed vis-à-vis immigration under the post war model of immigration (Veugelers, 38), it was assumed that, Christian Democratic and Social Democratic catch-all political parties did their best not to politicize the issue. The rise of new social and political forces on both the left and the right marked the end of the post war immigration model, signaling the

potential for conflict to ensue within the left and with the right vis-à-vis immigration policy.

In an important analysis of inclusion and exclusion in Europe, Sniderman et al. conclude that “the fundamental cleavage over the value of order and authority is thus not between the left and the right, but within the left itself. (2000, 119).” The authors question whether the politicization of immigration has created an important rift within the left between those that favour policy that grants immigrants more social and political rights and those who fear that immigration is linked to crime, unemployment, and a risk to national identity. Sniderman et al. predict that “as the issue of immigration moves to the center of public argument, public debate . . . it will be framed in terms that advantage the political right, with considerations of order, tradition, and national integrity coming to the fore (2000, 119).”

What about the right? Does a potential electoral dilemma also exist for the right? According to Perlmutter, an important tension exists within the center-right between cultural conservatives who call for stricter immigration controls and employers who demand more immigrants (1996, 377). It is necessary to include, especially in countries with strong Christian democratic traditions, that center-right parties possess humanitarian wings that favour a more solidaristic position towards immigrants. The question becomes: to what degree is the center-right vulnerable to radical right populist forces, and to what degree does this affect the more humanitarian or the business interests within the coalition?

Policy and Politics: Towards an Immigration Electoral Dilemma.

Lingering Fordism and Cross-Party Consensus

As a consequence of the above analysis, I now turn to the evolution of Italian immigration policy. The actions of political parties and social movements, at both the state and civil society level, highlight the tensions between the left and the right, and within the left and the right. Before 1986, Italy did not possess an immigration law; immigration was treated as a law and order issue. However, in the 1980s it became strikingly apparent that Italy could no longer ignore that it had become an immigrant receiving country.¹ Italy's first immigration law was passed during the era of Christian Democratic (DC) hegemony, albeit a declining hegemony. This is significant in explaining why and how immigration was de-politicized at this early stage.

Since the end of the Second World War, the Christian Democratic Party governed Italy. Although, Italy is infamous for its numerous governments, it was also one of the most stable political systems in Western Europe. The Christian Democratic Party was able to maintain political power from 1945, working in coalitions with other political parties, until its demise in 1992. Giovanni Sartori has characterized the Italian political system as polarized pluralism. This refers to both the dominance of the Christian Democratic Party and to political reality that the strongest opposition party was the Italian Communist Party (PCI) (Sartori). Due to the Cold War and to the fear of Communism, the PCI was not perceived as a legitimate party of government even though it obtained between 18 and 34 percent of the national vote and it was the party of

¹ Space does not allow me to elaborate on Italy's transition to an immigrant receiving society. For an excellent discussion see: Russell King, "The Troubled Passage: migration and cultural encounters in southern Europe," in Russell King (ed.) *Mediterranean Passage: Migration and New Cultural Encounters in Southern Europe* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001).

government at the municipal and the regional level, especially in its strongholds in the so-called Red Zones in Emilia-Romagna and in Tuscany.

In the 1980s the DC, in part, due to its declining electoral support, was forced to form a coalition with four other parties: the Socialist Party, the Liberal Party, the Republican Party, and the Social Democratic Party. This period is referred to as the *Pentapartito*. It was within this political context in the mid-1980s that it became apparent that immigration policy needed to recognize the economic and social reality of immigration to the peninsula. The absence of an immigration law meant that there was no policy regarding the entry and residency of aliens, while social and civil rights were also insufficient. Since immigration was treated as a law and order issue, policy did not address immigrant flows, employment, housing, education, training, health, and family reunification (Veugelers, 35).

Several elements characterize the drafting of Law 943 (1986). The dominant Italian political parties still possessed a firm hold on the political process. Thus, the drafting and the passing of Law 943 fits Freeman's early claims concerning the depoliticization and the "client" nature of post war immigration policy. The lack of any well organized opposition is consistent with a low level of opposition to immigration in Italy in the 1980s (Veugelers 36, Perlmutter, 234). Finally, cross-party consensus was aided by general agreement between unions and Catholic associations concerning the need for progressive and comprehensive immigration policy.

In the Italian case, the left, and its union organizations, have not attempted to exploit immigration for the purpose of creating a nativist, exclusionary politics of self-defense, as occurred in several other European countries (Rydgren, Schain). Instead,

unions and left wing activists within civil society were instrumental in assisting immigrants with housing, employment, and education. This position stems from both ideology and from a general pragmatism. The Italian labour unions have always held a progressive position vis-à-vis the so-called Third World, while they also recognized that, due to a decline in industrial employment and an aging population, the future of unions will depend upon immigrant labour. The growing presence of immigrants in Italy is reflected in higher levels of unionization. The highest number of unionized immigrants can be found in the CGIL (Italian General Confederation of Labour) with over 100.000 members. The unions have responded with internal measures to coordinate immigrant labour at the regional and the provincial levels (Maciotti and Pugliese, 84). Catholic organizations such as Caritas were also essential in providing social services and shelter to immigrants. These organizations were especially important in the early stages of immigration to Italy. They provided help to immigrants before there was adequate legislation and they lobbied the government to increase the legal status and to grant social and civil rights to immigrants.

Improvement to Law 943: towards the Martelli Law

The murder of Jerry Esslan Masslo in August 1988, a political refugee from South Africa and an agricultural worker in a small southern Italian town, served as a catalyst for a more up to date immigration law. Although, the motive was ostensibly robbery, the tragic event galvanized support within society for the need to improve social and civil rights for immigrants. Contrary to other European countries, in Italy in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the general attitude towards immigrants was rather positive. A march in

response to Masslo's killing was organized in Rome by unions, voluntary, and religious organizations, drawing 200, 000 people (Perlmutter, 234).

Realizing that it was necessary to improve Italy's first immigration law, the prominent Socialist minister within the *Pentapartito* government, Claudio Martelli, exploited this public outrage over Masslo's murder to garner support for further legislation. Initially, there was general support for Martelli's initiatives, especially among the Christian Democratic and the Socialist representatives in government, and among the oppositional Communists members of parliament. In general, it was not feared that immigrants would take jobs from locals. It was acknowledged that Italy's wide-open borders meant that immigration was inevitable. Moreover, the Italian government did not seem particularly concerned with external demands made by the European Union regarding Schengen and the need to further regulate and control immigration (Perlmutter, 234). And finally, both Catholic and left-wing civil society associations continued to push for improvements to Italy's immigrant legislation. Thus, at this stage public opinion favoured Martelli's initiatives; initially, no political party or social movement successfully mobilized opposition to the new law.

Passing of Martelli: early signs of politicization

If, initially, early attempts at drafting the Martelli Law received cross-party support, opposition among political parties and within civil society did begin to take shape before the proposed legislation became law. The Republican Party, a small party and member of the governing *Pentapartito* coalition, objected to the early drafts of the Martelli Law. It claimed that, especially in relation to the planned amnesty, that the

proposed legislation was too lenient. It was argued that the leniency of the law would encourage further Third World immigration to Italy, and in the process, Italy would be excluded from the Schengen accord. In fact, in the municipal elections of May 1990, the Republican Party attempted to exploit immigration (Perlmutter, 235-6).

It is important to note that political opposition to the proposed immigration law coincided with the rise of the Lega Nord. The Lega Nord, under the leadership of Umberto Bossi, was an amalgamation of the smaller regional protest leagues that had become increasingly powerful in the late 1980s and the early 1990s in northern Italy. Although the early political message of the Lega emphasized regional devolution, criticizing Rome, the Italian State, and the southernization of the Italian state, early signs of anti-immigrant sentiments were already visible in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. In other words, political space for exclusionary, anti-immigrant politics was opening up.

However, despite these efforts by the Republican Party, the mainstream political parties, the Communist and the Catholic parties, avoided the issue. This was even the case for the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano. At this point in time, the Republican Party's attempt to politicize immigration failed. Eventually, with minor revisions, the Martelli Law was passed in 1990. In short, although these represented only initial steps, the law succeeded in granting asylum seekers legal rights. It broadened residence categories and permitted non-EU migrants to enter for reasons of tourism, education, health, and work. It established employment quotas in consultation with unions and employers. It clarified expulsion procedures. And it announced a second amnesty in order to attempt to legalize illegal workers (Calavita, 386, Veugelers, 42).

The Second Republic and the Politicization of Immigration

As our discussion to this point has emphasized, the first phase of immigration policy (Law 943 and the Martelli Law) can be characterized as largely consensual. As Italy evolved into an immigrant receiving country, it passed legislation that began to address issues of entry, residence, work, asylum, immigrant rights, and border controls. Although there were early signs of potential anti-immigrant mobilization, in general mainstream political parties sought a cross-party consensus.

However, unlike in the 1980s, in the 1990s social and political forces intent upon politicizing immigration increased. This was due to several domestic and international developments. 1) The Italian political crisis in 1992, and the demise of the party system that dominated the post war period, meant that smaller parties were, subsequently, able to politicize issues that were previously avoided by the Christian Democratic and the Communist parties. 2) During the 1990s, the number of immigrants arriving in Italy was on a steady increase. Maciotti and Pugliese point out that the number of immigrants from the so-called Third World tripled between 1992 and 2000: expanding from 474.000 to over 1.200.000 (2003, 35). It is important to note that these figures only take into account legal residents and not the large numbers of illegal arrivals (Reyneri).² 3) This dramatic increase in new arrivals was highlighted by several refugee crises. In 1991 and in 1997, large numbers of Albanian refugees arrived on the Italian shores. If initially, Italian public opinion was empathetic to the plight of the Albanians, public opinion soon turned to fear and apprehension (Woods, Sciortino). 4) The post-Fordist nature of immigration, i.e. its often illegal, precarious, and highly visible nature, coupled with the Albanian

² For an excellent discussion concerning illegal immigration and employment see: ² Emilio Reyneri, "Immigrants in a segmented and often undeclared labour market," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 9(1) 2004.

refugee crises and the dramatic arrival of illegal migrants off the Italian coastline is accompanied with the media's dramatization of these events. In the 1990s the media increasingly associated immigration with crime, insecurity, international organized crime (referring to the smuggling and trafficking of migrants), and to the "flood" of economic and political refugees from the Third World (Sciortino and Colombo, 2004).

The Political Actors: parties and civil society

The post war party system that dominated Italian politics since 1945 crumbled as, especially, the Christian Democratic Party and the Socialist Party were implicated in complex webs of corruption. Of equal importance, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, facilitated the transition of the Italian Communist Party into a social democratic party (they are currently referred to as the Left Democrats, DS).. The birth of the so-called Second Italian Republic in 1992 dramatically altered the Italian Party system. The left eventually evolved into a coalition that included the DS (ex-communists), the Margherita (ex-center left Christian Democrats), Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation Party), and Greens. These political parties joined forces to become the Olive Tree coalition (it currently uses the name: the Union).

In 1994 the center-right galvanized under the leadership of Silvio Berlusconi and his newly created Forza Italia. Forza Italia became the dominant center-right party under the strong tutelage of its founder and charismatic populist leader, the billionaire Silvio Berlusconi. Despite Berlusconi's strong hold on the party and "his penchant for populist appeal" the party consists of three wings: a liberal conservative steam, a Catholic-traditionalist wing, and a group of ex-Christian Democrats (Ignazi, 335). Of equal

importance was the transformation of Movimento Sociale into the post-Fascist Alleanza Nazionale, the birth of the regional populist anti-immigrant Lega Nord, and the small coalition of ex-center right Christian Democrats under the Union of Christian and Center Democrats (UDC).

In order to understand the evolution of Italian immigration policy, it is important to clarify how these new party dynamics influence party politics. In the 1980s the MSI did not exploit the immigration issue. It did not follow the path of other right-wing parties in Western Europe. MSI did link immigration to law and order by expressing its reluctance in supporting both the 1986 immigration law and the 1990 Martelli Law. This trend continued in the 1990s. For example, in 2000 a proposed law by Alleanza, the Landi-Fini bill, sought to criminalize illegal immigration with immediate incarceration (Zincone 2002, 62). Despite these initiatives, MSI, and its successor party Alleanza Nazionale, took a more moderate line vis-à-vis immigration than other European radical right parties. This was rather surprising given its fascist heritage and given that research has consistently demonstrated that its membership expresses deep concerns over immigration (Ignazi, 343). To be sure, the MSI, and later on AN, did not completely ignore immigration. During the 1990s there was a consistent attempt to link immigration with crime and with illegal immigration. AN officials and members have also participated in anti-immigrant protests at the local level. However, there is a general consensus among scholars that AN left considerable space for other political forces to exploit and politicize immigration.

There is little question that most successful attempts to politicize immigration came from the Lega Nord. Throughout the 1990s, but especially after 1996, the Lega

Nord's objections to immigration and the radicalization of its anti-immigrant discourse took advantage of the reluctance of Alleanza Nazionale to politicize immigration.³ Employing La Nouvelle Droite's "right to difference," the Lega defends what it perceives to be the right of cultures to protect themselves from external invasion. The party defends cultural identity, security, and the right of locals to prioritize their own needs such as work, housing, and access to social services over the needs of foreigners. The Martelli and the Turco-Napolitano immigration laws were target by the Lega for being too liberal and too lenient.

What about political forces within civil society? How have they reacted, and how did they assist in politicizing immigration? As mentioned earlier, in the 1980s most Italians were either indifferent or they demonstrated minimal fear of immigration. Pro-immigrant forces, such as the left-wing immigrant advocacy associations and Catholic organizations exerted their hegemony over immigration within civil society. However, beginning in the 1990s, fear and apprehension of immigrants began to increase. Della Porta points out that "Particularly after 1992, the public discourse on immigration came to be dominated by the links between immigration and crime." She emphasizes that, "In many large cities, above all in the center-north, committees of citizens mobilized around the theme of crime, connecting it to that of illegal immigration." Highlighting the potential for immigration to develop into a non-partisan and a cross class and cross party

³ Piero Ignazi, correctly, emphasizes that "Alleanza Nazionale is no longer the Italian exponent of right-wing extremism. In the last decade it has been moving with increasing speed over the last few years, towards moderate-conservative territory." He continues: "The void left by AN has been occupied by the Lega Nord. The Lega's more and more aggressive statements and demonstrations against foreigners and especially Muslim immigrants contrast with the soft attitude adopted by Alleanza Nazionale. Even if the two leaders have co-signed a new and quite restrictive law on immigration— but one not so different from other regulations recently enforced in Europe— Alleanza Nazionale did not play the race card." Piero Ignazi, "The Extreme Right: Legitimation and Evolution on the Italian Right Wing: Social and Ideological Repositioning of *Alleanza Nazionale* and the *Lega Nord*, *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 2 July 2005, 348.

issue, Della Porta emphasizes that these social protests were supported not only by the poor and the disenfranchised but by a wide-cross section of society (Della Porta, 121-4).

I have emphasized how the rise of the Lega Nord and the emergence of anti-immigrant protests within civil society contributed to the politicization of immigration. Immigration became a particularly volatile issue given the nature of employment and migration within the era of post Fordism. These developments are important for several reasons. Immigration became linked with crime and issues of law and order. Immigration emerged as a cross party issue. And finally, the successful politicization of immigration highlights the failure of legislation to regularize and legalize immigration. These developments become particularly poignant given the precarious, seasonal, and often illegal nature of current immigration flows.

A New Immigration Law for Italy: immigration, exclusion, and integration

There is no doubt that these growing concerns over immigration would prove vital for subsequent immigrant legislation. However, until 1998 these developments did not substantively influence governing attitudes towards immigration policy. Rather, it could be argued that immigration policy was becoming increasingly comprehensive and progressive. This appeared to be the case especially after the Olive Tree won the 1996 national elections. Although, the Martelli Law (1990) was a step forward from Law 943 (1986), it still did not adequately address work quotas and civil and social rights for immigrants. It became immediately apparent to the new government that it needed to update the Martelli Law.

In the initial process of drafting the immigration legislation, the unions, left-wing immigrant advocacy groups, and Catholic organizations were influential in pushing for a measure that would encourage legalization and integration of immigrants. However, as the drafting of the legislation progressed other forces began to exert and influence the policy process, demanding a more legalistic approach in order to control illegal immigration. External pressure from the European Union demanded more control of illegal immigration in order for Italy to comply with the Schengen accord. Domestically, local mayors— influenced by a growing fear of immigration and perceived links to crime— pushed for stronger law and order provisions. The center-left was caught in a dilemma: it needed to respond to coalition forces on the left of the Olive Tree, and left wing social movements, which can be characterized by a position of solidarity with immigrants. And it was also pressured by local and international pressures that focused on law and order (Zincone 2002 and Di Gregorio, 22-7).

The defeat of the left in the 1999 Bologna mayor elections demonstrated that the left's fear that more and more center-left voters were open to a center-right discourse of law and order were not completely unfounded. The city of Bologna, within the "red" region of Emilia-Romagna, was an infamous communist stronghold. Although immigration and crime were not the only election issue, the historic defeat of the left in the Bologna municipal elections can be attributed to public perceptions that the right was better at addressing issues such as immigration, crime, and law and order.⁴

⁴ Gianfranco Baldini and Guido Legnante, "The Municipal Elections of 1999 and the 'Defeat' of the left in Bologna," in Mark Gilbert and Gianfranco (eds.) *Pasquino Italian Politics: the faltering transition*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 76 Recent studies of attitudes towards immigrants by center-left voters, further demonstrate, that these fears were not completely unfounded. For example, Zanier, in a study of PDS and MSI voters in Bologna, argues that the left is *potentially* vulnerable to the discourse of the right, especially as it relates to immigration. Making an important distinction between explicit and implicit

The Turco-Napolitano immigration law was finally passed in 1998. The Turco-Napolitano law targeted better planning of entry flows. It increased measures against illegal immigrants and criminal exploitation of immigrants by human traffickers. And finally, it increased integration measures. The Law also has “a range of social measures, with better administrative coordination and more financial resources, covering health, education, assistance to minors, and to women (Hine, 187-8).”

Although it is necessary not to overestimate the influence that law and order issues and growing fear of immigration exerted on the new immigration law, there is no question that external pressure and the politicization of immigration played an important role in increasing penalties for trafficking and provisions that made it easier to expel illegal immigrants. The most important changes to the Martelli Law highlight the governments attempt to facilitate integration while not wanting to appear weak vis-à-vis illegal immigrants and law and order.

For the first time in the evolution of Italian immigration policy the decision process was influenced by deepening concerns over immigration, by the politicization of immigration by new social actors within civil society, and by radical right populist forces such as the Lega Nord. The 1998 immigration law must be viewed as an attempt to strike a compromise between the powerful lobby that supported the weak within society and the business associations that recognized the need for foreign workers and the demands of citizens, expressed in public opinion and local official, who called for more controls of illegal immigration (Zincone 2002 and Di Gregorio, 27). Two leading experts on Italian

racism, she points out that interviews with PDS and MSI voters confirms that right-wing voters, not surprisingly, were more fearful of immigrants, claiming that they threatened security, employment, and national identity. However, the author also, importantly, concludes that latent racism, especially among less educated and among non-party militants, was equally as prevalent on both the right and the left.⁴ This highlights the potential for an electoral dilemma for the left.

immigration proclaim that the new law was better able to address issues of integration, the rights of immigrants in Italy, while it also sets up more realistic quotas for granting work permits. However, not unlike recent trends in the rest of Western Europe, it also has strengthened provisions to control illegal immigration, simplifying the ability of the government to expel illegal residence (Colombo and Sciortino, 2003, 165).

The Center-Right Takes Power: a dilemma for the right

In 2001, the Center-right coalition consisting of Forza Italia, Alleanza Nazionale, the Lega Nord, and the Union of Christian and Center Democrats (UDC) won the national elections. They formed a coalition government (the coalition is referred to as the House of Liberties). Central to the center-right's electoral victory, and to its subsequent immigration policy, was Berlusconi's inclusion of the Lega Nord into the coalition government. Even though in the 2001 elections the Lega secured just under 4% of the vote, it proved to be an important and influential force within the coalition, due, in part, to its special relationship with Berlusconi. Previous to the inclusion of the Lega in the center-right coalition, leading up to the 2000 regional elections, immigration was not a central concern for either Forza Italia or its coalition partners Zincone, 2002, 57).

Once the House of Liberties formed the government, one of its first priorities was to change Italy's immigration law. However, this would not prove to be an easy task. On the right, the Lega called for zero immigration, linking immigration with a radical Islam and an unwanted multicultural society, which we have seen was not typical of all right of center parties. Alleanza Nazionale, positioned itself somewhere in the middle, linking immigration to crime, but also more aware that it was not possible to stop immigration.

Its position can be characterized as reluctant acceptance with an emphasis on integration (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 963). The other central actor was the coalition of center-right Christian democratic forces. The Christian democrats demanded an amnesty for domestic workers at a bare minimum, even though their ultimate goal was a general amnesty. This Christian democratic position was, in part, due to pressures from catholic organizations, while it was also part and parcel of its humanitarian philosophy vis-à-vis immigration.⁵

The other important political forces that the government had to take into consideration were the national and the regional employer associations. Entrepreneurial and employers associations were, of course, natural allies of the center-right. However, these associations often sharply disagreed with policy that would limit the ability to recruit and employ immigrant labour. For example, the influential Venetian entrepreneurs publicly voiced their objections to the Lega's proposed attempts to limit immigration, claiming that cuts to immigration would severely hamper their ability to conduct business. Rossi Luciani, the leader of the Venetian wing of *Confindustria* (the national employers association) proclaimed that "the lack of a serious open immigration policy that is not based on demagoguery puts at risk the very survival of the north-eastern economic system." In particular, he was critical of the rigidity of the law, especially provisions that required workers to leave the country after losing their jobs. Instead, he demanded an immigration policy that was more flexible and more suited for the current economic reality (Guolo, 891).

⁵ For good a discussion on Alleanza Nazionale and immigration see: John W.P. Veugelers and Roberto Chiarini, "The Far Right in France and Italy: Nativist Politics and Anti-Fascism," in *Shadows over Europe : the development and impact of the extreme right in Western Europe*, Martin Schain, Aristide Zolberg, and Patrick Hossay, (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) and Jessika Ter Wal, "The Discourse of the Extreme Right and its Ideological Implications: The Case of the Alleanza nazionale on Immigration," *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 34, No. 4, 2000.

In February 2002, the new Bossi-Fini Law was passed by the Senate. The law was then presented to the Parliament for discussion, finally becoming law on July 30, 2002. The Bossi-Fini law amended the Turco-Napolitano Law in several important ways. It is now possible to receive a work permit only if the applicant first secures a job and a place of residence, and if the employer can guarantee return passage if the new arrival does not have work. Non-EU citizens are no longer able to qualify for entrance visas in order to come to Italy to seek employment. Sponsoring a person without a pre-immigration job in Italy is also no longer possible. Instead, entry into Italy is only possible if an employer, through one of the newly created local immigration centers, puts in a specific request for a specific quantity of workers and/or a type of worker, or for a specific individual. As soon as the work permit runs out, the person, if he or she does not find a new job, must return home (Colombo and Sciortino, 204-10).

Much to the public disappointment of the Lega, a general amnesty was achieved. Here the Christian democrats achieved their goal. However, in exchange it was also declared that immigrants would be fingerprinted and that the navy would be used to patrol the coast for illegal immigrants. Exchanging the latter two amendments to the Bossi-Fini law for the general amnesty was as much about appearing tough on immigration as it was about tangible control of migration (Colombo and Sciortino, 211).

In the final analysis, the center-right coalition also needed to address a series of contradictory pressures exerted by political parties within the coalition and by political and social forces within civil society. The Bossi-Fini Law was a compromise between two political parties on opposite sides of the immigration issue: on the one side, the Lega pushed for stricter immigration controls, while, on the other, there were the Christian

democratic voices that demanded the legalization of illegal immigrants with permanent employment. To be sure, these political parties were not immune to pressures from civil society. Pressure was put on the House of Liberties by demonstrations demanding zero tolerance towards immigrants (often organized by the Lega Nord), by Catholic associations who supported the rights of immigrants, and by business associations that needed immigrant labour.

Immigration and Exclusion: towards an electoral dilemma?

Discussions concerning immigration, integration, exclusion, and multiculturalism have developed into a divisive election issue for political parties across Western Europe on both the left and the right. Political and economic transformations have precipitated changes from the previous “client” based model that dominated the post war Fordist era to a politicized post-Fordist model. As I have argued in this paper, in the case of Italy’s attempt to develop public policy to confront the challenges involved in becoming an immigrant receiving society, conflicting tensions exist within the left and right concerning immigration as it relates to law and order, integration, employment, and national identity. The 1998 Turco-Napolitano law and the 2002 Bossi-Fini law highlight the internal divisions and competing forces that have influenced immigration policy. However, to date, the center-left and the center-right coalitions have been able to hold together despite these internal tensions. Moreover, to date, it is also important to emphasize that left wing legislation remains more progressive towards issues of integration and cultural recognition, despite law and order pressures. Right-wing laws have emphasized law and order issues, despite demands and pressures by business and

catholic associations to accept more immigrants. Although competing forces within the left and the right have influenced immigration policy, these forces have not destroyed the unity of either side.

The larger question for European politics is whether similar tensions exist in other countries. Although further research is required to answer this question, a cursory examination does point to the potential for a similar electoral dilemma vis-à-vis immigration among parties of the left and the right across Western Europe. To be sure, currently in France the left is vulnerable to issues of immigration and law and order. The French Communist Party in the early 1980s anticipated these developments with the now infamous attempts by local Communist mayors to tear down housing meant for immigrant workers (Rydgren,163-172). These early attempts by the French Communists to exploit immigration have been superseded by the large numbers of working class voters that currently support Jean-Marie Le Pen and the National Front. Similar dilemmas exist in Austria where immigration has mobilized large working class constituencies to support the Austrian Freedom Party through out the late 1990s, leading up to the controversial 1999 elections when Jörg Haider's party was included in the governing coalition.

More comparative analysis is needed. However, it does appear that similar tensions exist within the left and the right in other European countries. The question is whether these tensions will be exploited. Western Europe is currently a prime landing destination for migrants. Issues of integration, exclusion, and multiculturalism challenge the very identity of Europe. The degree to which the left and the right will be able to

overcome its own internal contradictions on this issue will affect how the continent as a whole is able to confront these profound changes.

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