

## Report from Italy by Renato Tosatto

### Oligarchs accused of capital flight

*Under scrutiny are noble families whose ancestors appeared 700 years ago in Dante's Inferno.*

Sixty-one representatives of leading noble families in Florence have been caught in criminal capital flight operations (the indictments are for "constituting currency reserves abroad" and "failure to cede foreign currency to the Italian Exchange Office") into Switzerland, according to an investigation being conducted by magistrate Michele Polvani, deputy prosecuting attorney of Florence. These individuals have been conduiting funds (some 12 billion liras, or \$7,140,000, and maybe more) into the Jean Leon Steinhauslin Bank in Florence, and thence into the Pictet Bank of Geneva, one of Switzerland's oldest, most prestigious private banks.

Back in the 14th and 15th centuries, it was common practice for noble families to commit the crime of usury—officially forbidden by the Church—through illicit profits on shady foreign-exchange dealings. The case which has just broken suggests that nothing has changed—not even the names.

The inquest originated by chance in early 1983, after an investigation into Steinhauslin shareholder Guido Niccolai, the former world champion of offshore dealings, who stole 20-40 billion liras (\$12-24,000,000) from the Steinhauslin Bank.

Magistrate Polvani, with the help of the Italian Tax Police discovered a sort of "private compensation" among the Steinhauslin and the Pictet banks. Under this system, at least 61 persons were able to illegally transfer capital into Switzerland, in 2,000 illegal transactions. The illegal transactions

were carried out by means of "cashier's passbooks" (bearer's passbooks) of the Steinhauslin Bank, where people deposited their money to be simply transferred into the Pictet Bank accounts of the Steinhauslin Bank. The "passbook" owners invented false names like "Pinco Pallino," "Monello," "Pinocchio," "Luna," "Stellina," "President," "Napoleon." Only in recent days have some of the real identities behind these phony names become known.

Among the 31-name list released, one finds descendants of the old Florentine families, connected with all the other, even older, oligarchical families of Italy, and Europe. Some of these families were put in the "Inferno" by Dante Alighieri in his *Divina Commedia* almost 700 years ago!

For example, the Steinhauslin inquest went into Wilfredo della Gherardesca, a descendant of the famous "Conte Ugolino" of Dante's *Commedia*.

The half of the list which has been made public, includes representatives of families like Colonna and Pignatelli, families that vaunt a genealogy going back before Christ, and more than 2,000 years of history. For example, the Princess Gloria Pignatelli d'Aragona Cortes, a representative of the so-called "black" nobility that predates the founding of modern Italy, and Count Riccardo Vivarelli Colonna received warrants.

The degeneration seems to also have hit families with a once-proud humanist history, such as the Piccolomini and Borgia who contributed

gloriously to the Renaissance period. Prince Stefano Piccolomini Clementini Adami, descendant of the family of Enea Silvio Piccolomini (Pope Pius II), turned out to be involved in the Steinhauslin affair. Also on the list were descendants of the Borgia family (of Pope Alexander VI and the famous Cesare Borgia), the brothers Gigliola and Fabio Borgia.

Other "VIPs" on the list are Count Cesare Puccinelli Sannini, Princess Lucrezia Corsini Miari Fulcis, Marchioness Ilaria Antinori in Marsichi Lenzi, Marchioness Carla Placidi di Mazzarosa, Maria Giovanna Bosio de' Peverelli Luschi, the industrialists Roberto Bini and Giuseppe Benelli, latifundist Carlo Capogquadri, lawyer Edison Giudice, Paolo Mario Leati, who heads "Lombardfin" finance company, and political scientist Giovanni Sartori.

Since 1805, the Pictet Bank of Geneva has reared the political banking intelligentsia for Switzerland and large parts of Europe. On its board also sits the de Saussure family, the family of the founder of modern linguistics. The partners of the Bank are, in New York, Brown Brothers Harriman & Co. and Chase Manhattan Bank.

Jean Leon Steinhauslin, descendant of the founder, former actor of the Comédie Française, has been in Switzerland since 1984 when a warrant was sworn out for his arrest. He is a Swiss citizen with an important role in the Swiss Chamber of Commerce in Italy, and also the honorary consul of Norway in Florence.

Professor Giovanni Sartori, who headed, in recent years, the Casa Italiana at Columbia University in New York, is a close friend of former U.S. ambassador to Italy Richard Gardner, a member of the Trilateral Commission, who is married to a member of the old and powerful Venetian Luzzato family.