

Scalfaro, an honest man for Italy

by Leonardo Servadio

Oscar Luigi Scalfaro delivered his inaugural speech as President of the Republic of Italy before the Italian Parliament on May 29. He had been elected three days earlier with a two-thirds majority, in the 16th round of voting in the joint chambers of Parliament (Senate and House) with the participation of the "great electors" representing Italy's regions.

The election of Scalfaro, who had been elected president of the House only the month before, came after all the "official" candidates of Italy's various political parties had proven unable to muster enough votes for their own candidates. According to Italian law, the President must be elected with an absolute majority, and this requires cohesion among different parties—something sorely lacking in Italy's political scene today. Scalfaro was voted by his own party, the Christian Democracy (DC), along with the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS, formerly the Italian Communist Party), the Socialist Party (PSI), the Social Democratic Party (PSDI), the Liberal Party, the Green party, the Network party (a splinter group from the DC), and the Radical Party, the only party which had been advocating the election of Scalfaro from the beginning. Voting against Scalfaro were the Italian Social Movement (MSI, the party deriving from the Fascist movement); the Republican Party (PRI, led by Trilateral Commission member Giorgio LaMalfa); the Lombard League; and the neo-Stalinist Communist Refoundation Party.

Achille Occhetto, the leader of the PDS, commented afterward that Scalfaro had been elected because he was the only one who was able to openly oppose the policy of former President Francesco Cossiga, who had been working to replace Italy's parliamentary system with one which concentrates power in the hands of the President of the Republic. And in fact, the President Scalfaro is not only a passionate defender of the present Italian Constitution, which established the parliamentary system, but is one of its few surviving drafters.

There was one other important reason which moved so many parties to vote for Scalfaro: He is known by everyone to be an honest man.

Italy's chief difficulty at present is the widespread corruption of the administrative apparatus—a corruption which emerges in the perception that the power of organized crime

is growing day by day in the face of the impotence of a paralyzed state.

The paralysis became painfully evident to every Italian on May 23, when Judge Giovanni Falcone, his wife, and three members of his personal security detail were assassinated by a huge explosion in Palermo, Sicily. Falcone was the symbol of the fight against the Mafia, and had been responsible for the jailing of over 100 mafia operatives. (See *EIR*, June 5, p. 44.)

A way out of national paralysis

Judge Falcone's assassination came at a moment when not only the institutions of government had become particularly weak, since there was no President and no government, but also when the whole "system" was under a cloud of accusations: The Italian state was virtually bankrupt; former President Cossiga had launched a series of significant attacks against the parliamentary system; and most important, the widespread and growing corruption which had afflicted state institutions had begun to come out into the open.

Trust in government was badly shaken when a Judge Di Pietro in Milan exposed the system of kickbacks on which public works and services are based. His investigation began in March, with the arrest of Mr. Chiesa, an engineer, and the director of a hospice in Milan, the Pio Albergo Trivulzio, who used to collect kickbacks for all the services supplied to the hospice. In Chiesa's house were found some 1 billion liras in Italian banknotes. It was also discovered that Chiesa had donated 2 billion liras to the election campaign of Bobo Craxi, son of PSI leader Bettino Craxi, who was elected last year to the Milan City Council.

Some 60 politicians and administrators have already been arrested in connection with this investigation, including elements from all the major parties—PSI, DC, PDS, PSDI, and PRI—as well as executives in major construction firms. It became evident to the public that this system of kickbacks may in fact be the most significant source of money for Italy's party organizations.

Following the breaking of the Milan case, similar investigations were started up in Rome, Venice, l'Aquila, and elsewhere.

While some have argued that this wave of scandals will only further weaken Italy's international position, it is the case that Italy cannot be saved without the introduction of morality into its political life—a point underlined in recent statements by the Italian Bishops Conference. In a pastoral note issued in March 1990, the bishops forcefully asserted that corruption must be fought, since "the problem of legality involves not only the life of individuals . . . but the very conception of man," and since "the Christians engaged in politics are among those who bear the prime responsibility for the growth or the decline of our country." Having an honest man as President for once, might therefore represent a real revolution for Italy.