

Report from Italy by Liliana Gorini

The Prince of Wales and the doges

Charles and Diana's visit intersected anti-republican plots by the Venetian nobility and the Communists.

Far from being a fairy tale in modern times, as the Italian press portrayed it, the state visit of Charles and Diana to Italy repeatedly intersected a plot to rip up the Italian republican constitution. In Rome, the Prince of Wales met at length with the Communist head of the Chamber of Deputies, Nilde Iotti, who was the mistress of Communist Party chief Palmiro Togliatti after the Second World War, at the time of the national referendum in Italy on whether to keep the monarchy or build a republic. At that time, Togliatti's Communist Party was in favor of the monarchy.

When Charles asked Nilde Iotti, "How come Italy is a republic," she answered, embarrassed, "It's because we had a referendum in 1948, and 12 million Italians were for the republic and 10 million for the monarchy." "More than I thought" was the comment of the Prince of Wales, who continued his conversation with the Communist leader, asking more details on the policy of the Italian Communist Party, the second largest party in Italy, which recently demanded that it be permitted to form a government, should it overtake the Christian Democracy in the May 12 administrative elections. This eventuality, fortunately, did not occur.

The day of Charles's visit to Rome, another prominent monarchical figure arrived in Rome, Marina Doria, wife of Victor Emmanuel of Savoy, the son of former King Humbert of Savoy, who, after Humbert's death, is the

main pretender to the throne, if such a throne were reestablished. Albeit Marina Doria was not invited to the Roman nobility's reception for the Prince of Wales, at the Circolo della Caccia, the only "British" club in Italy, the Savoy family thought it could exploit the pro-monarchical atmosphere created by the "fairy-tale" couple to relaunch its internal disputes on whether Victor Emmanuel or the Duke of Aosta, the third in the succession line, is the real pretender to the Italian throne. Both sent messages to "the Italians," and Victor Emmanuel announced a message to the Italians on May 12, the day of the elections.

Even more dangerous for the Italian republic, however, was the visit to Venice, which concluded the official state visit of the Prince of Wales with a reception on the royal yacht *Britannia* on May 5. To this reception, the only one offered by the royal couple, only the most ancient oligarchical families of Venice were invited, from Countess Vendramina Marcello, chairwoman of the Venice section of the Italian Red Cross, to Countess Foscari, of the ecologist association *Italia Nostra*, to the Hapsburgs, to the Valmaranas, the Venetian family which offered its palace in Vicenza to make the movie "Don Giovanni."

Besides the ancient Venetian families, with their centuries-old heritage of doges and admirals, one of the star guests at the reception was Bruno Visentini, head of the Cini Foundation, the Venetian think tank promoting

Venice as the European capital between East and West, and candidate for mayor (or "doge" as everybody calls him) of Venice of the Republican Party. To understand the importance of this reception in Venice, one has to consider that Visentini is the finance minister in the Italian government in Rome. Why should a finance minister prefer to become mayor of a city with only 80,000 inhabitants? And how is it that Visentini, the top contender for mayor in Venice, proposed on May 8 the creation of a super-economic ministry able to impose "precise two-to-three year programs" to pay back Italy's debts to the International Monetary Fund?

We asked this question of a Venetian journalist, expert on Visentini, and he replied: "Visentini is not a politician, he's a technocrat, and he is first of all a Venetian, and the head of the Cini Foundation. He outlines policies that will be implemented by others, but he takes care of state matters only from time to time. His main concern is Venice. If he could be doge of Venice with full powers, he would prefer it to being superminister."

"In Venice," he continued, "three top candidates for mayor are ministers in the present government: Visentini, Health Minister Degan, top candidate of the Christian Democrats, and Ecology Minister Biondi, top candidate of the Liberal Party." These are the same "technocrats" who are behind a recent proposal to change the Italian constitution by adding an article which would set a limit to domestic spending and "provoke the toppling of a government if this limit is not respected." This is Visentini's policy, as it is the policy of the Venetian oligarchy controlling him, and these outdated figures are ready to impose it, with Visentini either as minister, or doge, or President of the Republic, as the Venetian journalist told us.