

As Alleanza Nazionale ceased to be neo-fascist political party?

Undoubtedly, the Alleanza Nazionale (AN) has traveled a long way from its origins in the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) to its electoral triumph in March 1994, its incorporation into the Berlusconi government, and the stability it demonstrated in the European elections of June 1994. Its electoral victories and governmental participation brought a measure of political legitimization unknown to it in the past since the foundation of the MSI in 1946. But electoral victories and governmental participation are not sufficient to answer a basic question: Has the AN abandoned neo-fascism and become a liberal democratic party?

If the contemporary practical political experience of the AN is too scanty to suggest the nature of its ties with fascism, we will address the problem through a close examination of ideological changes as reflected in the political programs and declarations of AN leaders, and the circumstances in which these are generated. In this sense, we would agree with the main expert in Italian neo-fascism, political scientist Piero Ignazi who, in the last chapter of his book *Postfascisti?*, claims that in order to become an integral part of the liberal democratic political world neo-fascism must abandon its ideological combination of organic nationalism and anti-Marxist socialism which constitutes the core of fascist ideology.⁽¹⁾ Only by taking this

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step, can the AN leadership claim that it has abandoned an ideology in which the community — the nation, embodied in its juridical form the state - is anterior and superior to the individual and constitutes a sine qua non without which social and individual life are impossible. Here, Ignazi requires the AN rank and file to take a gigantic leap and accept that their traditional enemies, the inheritors of the political tradition of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, were right in proclaiming the individual the prime political subject.(2)

In order to clarify these issues we will focus on the political theses presented at the end of January 1995 to the XVIIth national congress of Movimento Sociale Italiano-Destra Nazionale (MSI-DN — hereafter MSI) that took place at Fiuggi. Gianfranco Fini and other leaders had planned that this would be the last congress of the MSI and that at it, the last vestiges of fascism would be abandoned in order to transform the AN into a political party that fully adhered to the basic principles of Italian democracy.(3) They did not present the “democratization” of the MSI as an abrupt turnabout but rather as a political transition, originating in the early fifties, and they accused the Christian Democrats of having blocked any possible right-wing coalition that included the MSI, a step that would have helped to democratize and legitimize the movement.(4)

In Italy and abroad, many journalistic and scientific articles have been written about Fini’s leadership — of his capacity to clearly define ideals and programs while avoiding populism

(2) Cf. Zeev Sternhell, Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Princeton: 1994), pp. 249-252.

(3) Cf. Raffaello Masci, “An annuncia la resa dei conti col fascismo,” *La Stampa*, 20.1.1995; Paolo Motta, “Fini porta a termine la lunga marcia,” *L’informazione*, 21.1.1995; Gianni Festa, “Buccia la fiamma del Msi, si accende An,” *Il Mattino*, 21.1.1995; Letizia Paolozzi, “‘Il fascismo? Oggi non esiste.’ Parla Fisichella, ispiratore di An,” *L’Unita*, 21.1.1995; Federico Guiglia, “Fini si toglie la camicia nera,” *Il Giornale*, 26.1.1995; Ezio Pasero, “Seppelliremo il vecchio Msi,” *Il Messaggero*, 21.1.1995 and many other articles in the daily and weekly press.

(4) Vincenzo Pacifici, “Alle origini del cambiamento. Una svolta sempre osteggiata dalla DC,” *Il Secolo d’Italia*, 29.1.1995.

and the attempt to please everybody, and his introduction of the concept of "social right" - meaning a right wing party - into the democratic arena.(5) The task of transforming the violent image of outcast fascism into a soft-spoken, democratic AN, would have seemed impossible without the ability of its leader, Gianfranco Fini, to project a semblance of political civility and good citizenship. He was actively supported by other individuals and groups within the party. The female section, for example, contributed its share by presenting itself as Catholic without bigotry, feminine but not feminist, anti-abortion but not to extremes, ecology-minded, and willing to fight for their ideals without resorting to violence.(6)

Besides this primary exercise in public relations, Fini's strategy rested on three elements. The first was a strong declaration of support for the principles of freedom and democracy within the framework of the Polo delle libertà e del buongoverno - Pole of Freedom and Good Government or the center right wing coalition in the Italian national political election of 1994 - led by Silvio Berlusconi. This was not only a tactical move for the purpose of facilitating participation, but was expressed as the strategic need of all the anti-communist forces in Italy, in order to rescue the country from its current crisis and prevent the formation of a left-wing government. The second element was a clear condemnation of racism and anti-Semitism as being characteristic of totalitarianism and foreign to Italian traditions. The third, and main point from an ideological point of view, was a change in the basic axioms of the old MSI, including an abandonment of the corporativist view of fascism, that is, the advancement of ideas of social market economics designed to combine economic efficiency with social solidarity and participation. Directly related to this issue and in order to overcome the deficiencies of what the AN perceived as Italy's formal but weak democracy, dominated by a corrupt *partitocrazia* - or *partycracy*, the classic definition of

(5) Massimiliano Mazzanti, "Protagonisti della nuova Italia," *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 29.1.1995.

(6) This is a summary of Vittorio Feltri's presentation of the issue in *Il Giornale*, op. cit.

a democracy absolutely dominated by the political parties and serving their interests - the new party also proposed a scheme to reform the political system. It was based on less representation, more direct democracy and the delegation of power to a government less dependent on parliament.(7)

The idea behind Fini's proposals was to transform the AN into a moderate right-wing political party similar to the French Gaullist or British Conservative parties. The political logic of this move was to try and attract the votes of those that in the past went to the Christian Democratic Party to the right wing electoral coalition led by Berlusconi. It must be mentioned here that the formation of multi-party electoral coalitions had become unavoidable due to the transformation of the electoral system into a majority one, in which single parties did not stand a chance to muster enough votes to have their representatives elected.

Within the context of postwar Italian political culture, this could be achieved only if democracy and liberty were accepted as basic values, central to the ethos of the majority, which for fifty years kept the communists as well as the fascists out of power. Here we must ask whether the AN's acceptance of the democratic system and the value of freedom has come as the result of an ideological debate or is a rhetoric exercise for the purpose of obtaining the needed political legitimacy to be part of the next governing coalition.

Much criticism has come from hard-core fascists in the MSI — Pino Rauti, Mirko Tremaglia, Teodoro Buontempo and others — who cannot accept the swift abandonment of the basic, long-held values of fascism. But the most interesting criticism comes from Marcello Veneziani, editor of *Italia settimanale* and a philosopher of the New Right, who was quoted by Fini at the congress. Veneziani claims that the cultural debate around the transformation of neo-fascism into a liberal democratic movement has been of a low standard and rather opportunistic. His

(7) "I Congresso AN. Il documento politico conclusivo. 'Come costruire il futuro.' Sfida all'insegna di liberta e democrazia," *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 30.1.1995.

view is that Fini has profited from favorable circumstances enabling him to introduce the radical right into mainstream Italian politics. (8)

This same line of criticism was expressed by Ignazi when he declared, prior to the March 1994 Italian national elections, that the AN was "a bluff, a mere set of initials for electoral purposes. No transformation has taken place because there has been no internal debate on the guiding ideas, and they remain those of the fascist tradition." (9)

The theses for the XVIIth congress of MSI-DN were prepared mainly under the guidance of Domenico Fisichella, ex-minister of cultural and national heritage in Berlusconi's government, a professor of political science at La Sapienza University in Rome and one of the initiators and founders of the AN. Although freedom is seen as a value superior to fascism, answers to social problems are being sought in values anterior to fascism — tradition, the nation, the people — which are recognized by the Right and rejected by the Left. (10) Reliance on the above-mentioned values, however, brings to the fore inherent authoritarian tendencies that preclude the existence of the minimum measure of pluralism necessary for liberal democracy to exist.

Thus, in their attempt to resolve the dichotomy between right-wing values, answering the political aspirations of its social base, and the need for cultural and political legitimization, the ideological path adopted by the AN leadership and approved by the congress rests on two components. Politically, the AN shows great loyalty to Silvio Berlusconi, the leader who was able to create a broad right-wing coalition that has already proved its capacity to win elections and govern. Berlusconi's

(8) Concita De Gregorio, "Comme sonno rampanti I colonnelli di An," *La Repubblica*, 31.1.1995.

(9) Chiara Valentini, "Movimento sociale? Presente!," *L'Espresso*, 25.3.1994.

(10) Declarations of Adolfo Urso, Fini's number two, during the Fiuggi congress. See Stefano Di Michele, "Fascismo e anti-Semitismo dividono la platea," *L'Unita*, 27.1.1995.

role is recognized as central in the first chapter of the AN theses, which is an historical interpretation of the disintegration of the First Italian Republic.(11) Ideologically, the AN leans strongly towards a conservative Roman Catholic vision of life, placing great emphasis on the role of intermediate structures of civil society and its traditional pillars — the family, private property, religion, and of course, the nation — as well as on social solidarity coupled with economic freedom.(12)

A strong condemnation of racism and anti-Semitism became AN official policy following the vote for the theses at the founding congress. In the second chapter, dealing with values and principles, an explicit condemnation of racism as a form of totalitarianism was proposed. The argument is based on the fact that totalitarianism does not respect the human dignity of the "other," the foreigner. Democracy, according to the AN, cannot exist without respect for individuals and peoples or through the use of coercion; thus, rejecting totalitarianism, the AN maintains, mean rejecting racism. However, if the definition of political fascism, by one of its main researchers, Emilio Gentile, as basically totalitarian and as placing politics above everything, is correct, the AN's rejection of nationalist-integralist principles and coercion, but not of the primacy of politics, places it in a peculiar position.(13)

This issue triggered reactions from both poles of the right-wing spectrum. Old-time fascists claimed that the fascist racial laws had to be understood in the context of Italy's alliance with Germany and the hostile attitude of the Jews towards fascism and Italy.(14) Others, while recognizing that the MSI had always had extremist anti-Semitic fringes, contended that the

(11) "Pensiamo l'Italia. Il domani c'è già. Valori, idee e progetti per l'AN. Tesi politiche per il XVII congresso nazionale del MSI-DN," s.p. , 1995, p. 5.

(12) Mario Sznajder, "Italy's right wing government: legitimacy and criticism," *International Affairs*, 71 (1) 1995, p. 92.

(13) "Pensiamo l'Italia...," p. 9. See Emilio Gentile, *La via italiana al totalitarismo* (Roma, 1995).

(14) Interview with Cesco Giulio Baghino, President of the Italian Union of Ex-servicemen of the Salo Republic and honorary president of the MSI. See Aldo De Luca, "Auschwitz? Un orrore, am anche Stalin...," *Il Messaggero*, 27.1.1995.

leadership and mainstream members were not anti-Semitic. Since the new statute of AN condemned racism and Fini had already avowed its horrors, even paying homage to its victims in the Fosse Ardeatine, a specific condemnation of anti-Semitism was seen as unnecessary.(15)

On the other hand, moderate AN elements, dissatisfied with the clauses on racism, proposed a motion at Fiuggi, which included a clearer condemnation of racism and anti-Semitism. It was presented - on the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz - by Vincenzo Palmisano, a journalist of the MSI newspaper *Il Secolo d'Italia*, Maurizio Gasparri, president of the motions commission of MSI-DN, and Franco Perlasca, an AN representative from Padova and son of Giorgio Perlasca. Perlasca's father, recognized by the State of Israel as one of the Righteous Gentiles of the World, saved hundreds of Jews from the concentration camps in Budapest in 1944, by impersonating a Spanish consul.(16) The fact that the proponents of the motion were moderate, respected figures and the large majority it obtained was intended to reinforce the political legitimacy of the AN in the international sphere, where neo-fascism is associated with racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism and a generally hostile attitude towards Israel.

(15) De Michele, "Fascismo e anti-Semitismismo..." op cit. Fosse Ardeatine is the place where at the end of March 1944, German occupation forces executed and buried 355 Italians - between them more than one hundred Jews - prisoners in Rome's Regina Coeli prison. This assassination was carried out in retaliation for a partisan action in Rome, where 32 German soldiers were killed. A memorial monument at the Fosse Ardeatine is one of the main sites where Gentile and Jewish victims of Nazism are remembered, in Italy.

(16) "Congresso MSI-DN: Conferenza stampa contro anti-Semitismismo," (1+2), ANSA (Roma), 27.1.1995. On this issue see also "Le leggi razziali: un errore che provoco un orrore," *Il Tempo*, 28.1.1995; "Anti-Semitismismo: condanna radicale," *Avvenire*, 28.1.1995; "An condanna l'anti-Semitismismo ma Gasparri zittisce gli antirazzisti," *L'Unita*, 28.1.1995; "An, dimenticare le leggi razziali," *Il Corriere della sera*, 27.1.1995 and "Papa, il msismo che salvo migliaia di ebrei," op cit.; "Abiura solenne dell'anti-Semitismismo," *La Voce*, 28.1.1995, where it is stated that the motion was approved with only five votes against; "No all'antisemitismo," *Il Mattino*, 28.1.1995; Nicolo Accame, "An condanna le leggi razziali. Approvato l'emendamento contro l'anti-Semitismismo," and "Perlasca: a mio padre Alleanza piacerebbe," *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 28.1.1995.

Although the condemnation of racism and anti-Semitism was generally perceived as a positive sign of democratization within the AN, it still raised doubts among some observers. Primarily, they saw it as a reaffirmation of the already existing strong revisionist trend in neo-fascism that divides the history of the movement and regime into two periods: 1) the period of "good" fascism until 1938, when many positive steps were taken to strengthen the Italian state and through it, the nation and, 2) the period of "bad" fascism when mistakes were committed, such as the alliance with Germany, enactment of the racial laws and entering the war. This explanation is used regularly by neo-fascists when referring to the racism and anti-Semitism of the past.(17)

The acceptance of the motion condemning racism and anti-Semitism led to internal contradictions in the newly adopted position of the AN, for instance, in the reverence shown by the its supporters for the memory of Giorgio Almirante, the deceased leader of MSI and political father of Gianfranco Fini. Mario Pirani, a political analyst, points to the fact that nobody seems to remember that Almirante was the editor of *La Difesa della Razza*, a strongly racist and anti-Semitic publication, and also chief of cabinet of the Ministry of Culture of the Salo Republic, who was responsible for the rabid anti-Semitic journalistic campaigns during the persecution of the Jews in Italy, between 1943 and 1945. Pirani recalls also that all the fascist leaders who opposed the racial laws — Federzoni, Balbo, De Bono and De Marsico — were condemned to death in absentia by the same regime which spawned most of the founders of the MSI.(18) Thus, while formally the condemnation of racism and anti-Semitism was incorporated into the statute of AN, no serious debate on the roots of fascist racism and anti-Semitism had taken place.

(17) See Alessandra Mussolini's declarations parallel to the debate on the above mentioned motion in, De Luca, "Auschwitz?...", op. cit.. There she states clearly: "I said it once and again. I condemn the horrors of the extermination camps and the racial laws instituted by my grandfather were a mistake. I am neither an anti-Semite nor a racist and I am tolerant towards all differences, I have even defended the gays..."

(18) Mario Pirani, "Plauso a Fini con riserva," *La Repubblica*, 30.1.1995.

According to Fini and other AN leaders, the main changes in the AN's ideology that indicate its novel democratic and liberal character and its final departure from fascism may be found in the draft theses submitted to the founding congress of AN and approved by the assembly, on January 1995. It begins with an historical analysis of the circumstances that brought down the power structure of the First Italian Republic. Chapter I examines the lessons of March 27 (1994) national election; chapter II discusses values and principle; chapter III, the institutional reform and re-foundation of the state; chapter IV, the role of Italy in Europe and in the world; and chapter V, economics and society and the AN as a political party for all Italians. We will concentrate on the first two chapters and refer briefly to chapters III and IV.

There is a clear attempt to present the AN as a new political force closely associated with the birth of a "Second Italian Republic." According to the authors of the program, the AN was formed on the basis of a new social bloc of productive forces, in reaction to the grip that "a parasitic bourgeoisie" had over the First Republic. This bourgeoisie, institutionally represented in the old political parties, the finance sector and the main syndical movements, operated in a consensual way of power distribution, through political clientelism and economic corruption. It had accumulated an enormous public debt and created "polluted markets," which were dependent and inefficient. In protest against this state of affairs, this bloc of productive forces manifested itself politically in the March 1994 elections, with the aim of founding a Second Republic that would eliminate the illnesses of the First Republic.⁽¹⁹⁾ Articulation of the various positive forces striving toward political and economic reform was enabled by Silvio Berlusconi who led the creation of an election coalition due that could not have merged without his efforts, due to both the ideological and interests contradictions between a Northern rooted federalism and a Southern rooted unitary view. By characterizing the former Italian democracy as a divided one in which neither

(19) "Pensiamo l'Italia...", p. 5.

the Right — because of anti-fascism — nor the Left — because of anti-communism — had access to power, the AN claims that since 1994 a better form of democracy is now functioning. This is one in which the gap between parliamentary representation and governmental participation has been eliminated through a combination of a mostly majority electoral system and the destruction of the old political center in the wake of the public disclosure of the extent of political corruption in February 1994, at Milan, called since then *tangentopoli* (city of bribes).⁽²⁰⁾

In the chapter on values and principles the AN dissociates itself from fascism and corporativism and condemns racism. It is on these declarations that it bases its claim to be a new political formation that has adopted liberty as its main value and democracy as the only valid political system. The past association with fascism is attributed to the period of “ideologies” in which the totalitarianism of the Left and of the Right were in confrontation with one another: “The political Right is not the daughter of fascism. The values of the Right existed before fascism, and have survived [after it]. The historical roots of the Right are to be found in Italian history, before, during and after the Ventennio [the twenty years of fascism].” ⁽²¹⁾ In this way the AN transforms fascism into an historical accident — or perhaps a “circumstantial need” — which came about in order to confront the danger of a communist revolution, thus relativising its importance in the best of revisionist traditions. Totalitarianism, according to the AN, did not begin with fascism but with the 1917 October Revolution. It survived fascism by many years, ending only with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. There is no further need for the postwar anti-fascist ethos, nor for the anti-communist one. Italian politics can then, finally get rid of the demons of this ideological clash. The authors recalled that the main bearers of the banner of anti-fascism were the communists, who used it to forward their own totalitarian ideology. Therefore, the value of anti-fascism becomes relative and highly contextual.

⁽²⁰⁾ Ibid., pp. 6-7 and Sznajder, “Italy’s right wing government...,” pp. 95-96.

⁽²¹⁾ “Pensiamo l’Italia...,” p. 8.

In the name of political realism the theses claims that a correct reading of Italian political history of the last half century shows how fascist state intervention — totalitarianism — was replaced by total “party intervention” in the partitocrazia, giving birth to clientelism and corruption. Thus, for the AN the formal freedom of the First Republic was ineffective. Real freedom, in their view, can be introduced into Italian political culture by introducing the ideas of the Right. Only by adopting and stressing de Maistre’s formula of authority and liberty as the foundations of Western democracy, can the profound anti-democratic undercurrent in his ideas be forgotten. Political realism is exemplified through the “circle of intellectuals” who guide the ways of the Right. Distinguished members of this circle quoted in the AN draft program include Ernst Junger, Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Robert Michels, the fathers of modern political sociology but also sound enemies of liberal democracy. Giovanni Gentile is mentioned because of its humanistic opening, while forgetting his ethical imperative and totalitarianism. Ugo Spirito is remembered for his “social suggestions” without reference to his state-corporativism. The extreme nationalists Giuseppe Prezzolini, Giovanni Papini, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Ardengo Soffici, Gabriele d’Annunzio and Julius Evola are all recalled without specifying their contribution to the Radical Right. Alfredo Rocco is quoted without mentioning that “the great jurist” was the author of various fascist, highly coercive, legal codes. Giuseppe Mazzini, Enrico Corradini and Benedetto Croce were all figures that influenced the formation of fascist ideology. To this list are added the names of Dante, Machiavelli, Rosmini, Gioberti, don Sturzo, Tilgher, Sennett and Gramsci, all of whom contributed to the intellectual heritage of Italy and therefore, the AN.(22)

(22) *Ibid.* pp., 8-10. Interesting is the reference to and inclusion of Antonio Gramsci in the “circle of intellectuals” since he was the main ideologue of Italian Communism. Fini explained this fact making a counterpoint with the attitudes of the Left. While the Italian Left refused to issue a stamp honoring Giovanni Gentile on the fifty anniversary of his death, An included the name of in the list of great Italian intellectuals, in spite of his political beliefs, to prove openness of mind. See, Alessandro Caprettini, *La nuova destra* (Palermo, 1995) p. 237.

As the draft program states: "The Alleanza Nazionale wants to be considered part of a great, libertarian, pacifist, conservative revolution." (24) An institutional reform based on the above-mentioned principles would entail a constitutional reform accomplished through the election of a 100-member constituent assembly, using the proportional system of the European elections. The result of its deliberations would be adopted only after approval is obtained through a referendum. This desire to transfer sovereignty back to the people led the AN to propose a separation between elections to a parliament whose main task would be legislation and control over the executive branch of government, and elections delegating sovereign powers to that executive. The AN proposes adopting a system of government similar to that of France in which the head of state is also the head of government — the president. The president would nominate a prime minister responsible to parliament. Therefore, a system would be instituted in which the citizen would decide directly who governed, by electing the government, and who would control and legislate, by electing the parliament. In contrast with the French system, however, the AN proposed rejecting the ballot system in favor of a one-round election, British-style, which would eliminate the need for pre-second round political negotiations and oblige the parties to present clear programs and governmental goals. (25) Federalism is rejected on the grounds that a strong presidential system would endow the executive with enough power to decentralize in order to ensure governability and efficiency. The same executive pattern is proposed for the different levels of government.

In addition, the authors propose strengthening the unity of the Italian state but at the same time reducing its size through the principle of subsidiarity and decentralization, that is, by delegating functions that could be performed more efficiently at the local, provincial or regional level.

(24) "Pensiamo l'Italia...", p. 10.

(25) *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

Civil society, according to this ideological vision, would play a central role by taking over from the state all the functions various voluntary associations - social, economic and cultural - could perform with greater efficiency than state bureaucracies. Thus, the principle of subsidiarity, pivotal to the Catholic social doctrine, is given a central place by the AN. Voluntary associations would, ideally, be given responsibility for the self-development of various aspects of life without forgetting social solidarity and support. These ideas evolve around the central role of the family as the basic social unit, within the framework of Catholic morality. Therefore, the AN proposes anti-abortion policies combined with programs to support families in need and incentives for families that care for elderly and handicapped members.

Although somewhat oddly included in the institutional and state reform chapter, another two points are worth mentioning. The first is what AN ideologues call the right to security, reviving the old themes of law and order. Security in Italy, according to them, is menaced by organized crime that controls, besides illegal businesses, prostitution and drug trafficking which are both related to illegal immigration. The AN claims that organized crime in Italy, is second in economic terms only to IRI - Istituto di Ricostruzione Industriale (Industrial Reconstruction Institute) created by Fascism in 1933 in order to save industries that were bankrupted as a result of the world economic crisis - and that its annual turnover is over 41 billion dollars. A strong-arm approach to it is suggested, including law enforcement and severe penalties, and a thorough "purging" of the investigation agencies, the bureaucracy and the courts. The use of all kind of drugs should be punished by law. As for illegal immigrants, those essential to the Italian economy should be assisted in regularizing their residence status; all the rest, including illegal immigrants already in jail, should be deported without further consideration.(26)

The second point is how to overcome the political impact of Tangentopoli. A political solution through legislative interven-

(26) Ibid., pp. 24-25.

tion is not favored but four suggestions are offered: 1) punishing all those found guilty by the courts; 2) recovering money illegally earned from the state; 3) rebuilding institutions that were damaged; and, 4) excluding technocrats who were involved in Tangentopoli kind of corruption and corruption in general from any future public responsibility in the country's political life.(27)

In the chapter dealing with Italy's place in the international arena, three points are worth mentioning. The first is the desire to extend Italian citizenship and voting rights to Italian emigrants and their descendants throughout the world, in accordance with the importance given to the "nation," its culture and the network of links and loyalties whose strengthening is of great importance to the AN.

The attitude toward the European Union (EU) is positive but the AN sees it as a confederation of independent, sovereign states: Europe of the Fatherlands. The AN is against centralizing the EEC economically and monetarily, areas where Germany would dominate and Italy would be relegated to a secondary role. On the other hand, the need to maintain cultural identity is stressed. This identity includes the Mediterranean "vocation" of Italy as a counterbalance to the Mitteleuropa of the Northern League.

In the area of defense, it is proposed that the professional armed forces be combined with the Helvetic model of periodic reserve training and readiness, and the importance of military service, professional as well as reservist, in the strengthening of patriotic duty and national feelings, is explained.(28)

The AN's economic vision is based on an international division of labor in which developed countries such as Italy would transfer labor intensive industries to less developed countries that generate migration, specifically, the countries of North

(27) Ibid., pp. 25-26.

(28) Ibid., pp. 32-34.

Africa. This approach would reduce immigratory pressure on Italy, allow for further economic development and modernization, enlarge the markets for Italian exports and investment and bring with it political influence. At the same time, Italy should import the wares produced in those less developed countries that enjoy these policies.(29)

Italian economic modernization will, according to the draft program/theses, be carried out through the reduction of state economic intervention, that is, through privatization. This will also assist in the financing of the huge debt and allow the development of an economic tutorial plan that will help the Mezzogiorno - the underdeveloped South of Italy and the islands - close the gap with the more developed areas of the country. In addition, economic measures introduced by the first Berlusconi government, such as the austerity plan and changing and simplifying the taxation system without creating further tax burdens, would be continued.

In order to tackle the huge problem of tax evasion - evaluated at 60 billion dollars per year - without hampering macroeconomic growth, the AN proposes taxing consumption and not personal income. These regressive policies conform with the neo-liberal side of the social market economy proclaimed here as the socio-economic panacea for Italian ills. Popular capitalism in the form of diffused share-holding and an increased role for pension funds in the stock market derive from the old neo-fascist hostility toward finance capitalism together with acceptance of the realities of efficient market economics. Separation between political parties and the syndical organizations should, according to the AN ideologues, provide transparency and soundness in the negotiations for a more balanced distribution of profits.(30)

(29) *Ibid.*, pp. 35-37. In the last years there have been some changes in AN's approach to immigration. More tolerance is shown towards those already living in Italy. From another angle, An would like to enforce policies of incentive to increase the rate of growth of Italy's native population - actually verging on 1,19 children per women, with a tendency to negative growth - by reducing levels of tax paid by young families. M. Sta. "Fini: "Meno tasse a chi fa figli," *Il Messaggero*, 22 June 2000, p. 9.

(30) *Ibid.*, pp. 41-44.

CONCLUSIONS.

Although the [political] draft program/theses prepared for the foundation of the AN — the self-proclaimed political party of all Italians and the party that wants to transform citizens from passive electors into political participants — rejects fascism and corporativism, the new organization cannot be considered liberal and democratic. The first reason lies in its ideological ancestry. People like Junger, Pareto, Mosca, Michels, Gentile, Rocco, Spirito, Corradini, Prezzolini, Papini, Marinetti, Soffici, d'Annunzio and Evola were declared enemies of liberal democracy. In it they saw decadence, corruption, political paralysis and the advancing of narrow party interests. Their theories and deeds — many of them became active fascists during the Salo Republic — can in no way serve as inspiration to a political formation that declares itself to be liberal and democratic.

Second, the equation of liberty and authority, as proposed by the AN, generally leads to a limited form of democracy. Although this equation seems to be politically neutral, it is generally favored by those interested in strengthening the authority of the state, in order to increase its efficiency in governing. If we add the institutional proposition to reduce the power of parliament over the executive, the authoritarian tendencies become clearer. A presidential system, in order to function, has to be built on the basis of a careful, constitutionally planned system of checks and balances, as in the USA. Moreover, preservation of the constitution and existing legality are absolutely fundamental.(31) Presidential systems that lack these characteristics, like those in Latin America, are dominated by the executive and function rather as delegative and polarized democracies than as liberal democracies, or as konkordanzdemokratie, a strategy of representation and agreed problem solving.(32)

(31) On this point see Angelo Bolaffi, "Il poplo contro I cittadini," *Micromega* 1 (1995), p. 36.

(32) On this issue see, Guillermo O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (1994) and Laurence Whitehead, "Alternatives to 'Liberal Democracy': A Latin American Perspective," *Political Studies* (special issue, 1992).

Third, the claim for a more direct democracy deriving from a majority system and the use of propositive referendums - a referendum containing proposals to be accepted or rejected by the voting population - favored by the AN, may easily degenerate into populism. Since political life is determined mainly by elections and referendums, the modern mass media

tend to play a larger role in politics. Sartori defined videocracy - democracy via TV - and *direttismo* - direct democracy - as a way of emptying politics of any substance by placing the power of direct decision making over fundamental issues in the hands of 'the people' an undefined entity, composed of isolate individuals, to which the issues and arguments are presented in a rather superficial way. To save democracy, concludes Sartori, representation must be saved.(33)

Fourth, the rejection of fascism and corporativism is a fine declaration but does not withstand deeper analysis. Fascism is treated in a revisionist way, as a deviation from the ideals of the Right dictated by the historical need to confront communism, without attacking its philosophical roots. State corporativism is rejected and the role of the state modeled according to modern political and economic criteria. But corporativism appears in a new guise of Catholic social corporativism through subsidiarity and the central role awarded to intermediate structures of society and voluntarism. Here we could claim that the rejection of totalitarianism leads to a change in the level and form of corporativism. The desire to cleanse syndical activities of politics is, perhaps, another legacy of the anti-parliamentarian vision of fascism.

Finally, the political and socio-economic models proposed by the AN have more in common with the models of limited democracy, adapted to the realities of developed Western Europe,

(33) Giovanni Sartori, "Una repubblica diaria fritta," *Micromega*, 1 (1995), pp. 48-50.

than the program of a liberal democratic party of the Right. The ideas and programs of Alleanza Nazionale are still under the influence of nationalism, the organic character of society, the primacy of authority as a pre-condition for the existence of liberty and the anti-decadent themes - inherent, in this kind of thought, to 'weak' liberal-democracy - that characterized Fascism. If ideology is an important criteria, the AN's draft program/theses - which to a certain sense replace basic ideological motivation - do not fulfill the requirements of liberal democracy. If ideology is not significant, it becomes clear that the presentation and approval of the program/theses were more a political propaganda exercise and a restructuring tactical step than anything else.(34)

(34) On this issue see, Marco Tarchi, *Dal MSI ad AN. Organizzazione e strategie* (Bologna, 1997) pp. 414-415. Tarchi's thesis is that the decline of ideology and the changes in the Italian political scene have brought about changes in the structure of AN. Although the political culture of neofascism would not support a replacement of central leadership and authority by party representation mechanisms, the 'ideological party' can be replaced by the 'program party' who, instead of relying on ideology, is based on a program promising clearly defined long range changes, adapting it to changing political circumstances with a flexibility which a strong ideological basis would not allow for. It must be pointed out that the Verona theses do not represent any change in the picture depicted above. See, *Alleanza Nazionale, Un progetto per l'Italia Duemila* (Verona: 27-28 February- 1 March 1998).