Citizens and Bureaucrats in the United States and Italy: A Modest Proposal

by Spencer M. Di Scala

In his famous essay "A Modest Proposal," Jonathan Swift suggests a novel solution to overpopulation, Ireland's most pressing problem in the 18th Century. He advocates raising babies for their culinary value, thus resolving, in one great sweep, all the questions afflicting that nation.

The bureaucratic issue has become the Italian question of the day, perceived as such not only in Italy but in foreign countries. Several years ago, for example, Rome's Il Messaggero published an elaborate chart detailing the steps high-level government retirees must follow in order to receive a pension. It would have been an excellent illustration of Italy's bureaucratic praxis to have reproduced and commented upon that description, but the pages are few and the task beyond the author's ken. At any rate, the purpose of this essay is not simply to give examples of the complexity and snail's pace of the Italian bureaucracy (the famous "lungaggine" of the "lentocrazia") but to make readers understand that bureaucracy in Italy is not just "bureaucracy" as Americans comprehend that term, but a complex philosophy of life which has a deep significance for society in general.

American politicians from Barry Goldwater to Ronald Reagan to Newt Gingrich have run for office arguing that there is too much bureaucracy in the United States. Americans believe that "getting the government of their backs" will make them more efficient and happier. Since the Italians are well known to be a happy-go-lucky people, given to playing the mandolin, basking in the sun, and otherwise enjoying themselves while inexplicably becoming the world's fifth economic power (or the fourth, if you believe some statistics), one might conclude that if Italy had a population as large as the United States and a territory as rich in natural resources, they would have established an economic domination destined to last for centuries.

A few years ago, when Americans were in the throes of enormous soul-searching to explain and reverse an apparently drastic economic decline, they should have considered all models for possible importation, not just the Japanese system which most American observers mistakenly proposed. After all, is Japan's success so stupifying? The Japanese are well organized, work too hard for too many hours, refuse to take vacations, live simply, and cannot afford their own products. If Bangladesh followed that prescription, it would also become a world economic power. Since that time, the United States has recovered through such barbarian methods as downsizing, cutting social services, and losing what little job security they had. Americans just don't get it; what is worse, the world admires American, and so there is a danger to world civilization that

some Europeans recognize but not enough. The real questions should be how to work short hours, enjoy extremely long vacations, and live lavishly while at the same time jealously guarding your right to disorganization and maintaining your economic prowess, not the opposite.

For this unique combination of advantages, the world offers only one successful model: the Italian system. Is it too modest a proposal that the United States seriously consider adopting it?

Philosophies

In considering whether the Italian style of life **should** be transplanted into the United States, it might be prudent to begin with the different philosophies, or "springs" (Montesquieu's term), which drive the systems of both countries.

Here it is best to begin with the underlying philosophy of Americans, since it is simple and clear. Indeed, this characteristic is one of the problems with the United States as compared to Italy, fostering an inflexible mentality in both citizenry and officialdom and ultimately making Americans ill-suited to adapt to changing world economic conditions. Dedication to consistency produces that air of naivetee and simple-mindedness for which American foreign policy and tourists are justly renowned the world over. Of course, these

qualities contrast with the imperialist, capitalist, warmonger image which Americans also enjoy among leftists, but American inability to reconcile the two is further proof of the simple-mindedness which a change of philosophy would remedy.

Ironically, it was an Italian historian, Gaetano Salvemini, who best defined the underlying premise of the American philosophy. Salvemini was admirably suited to this task, being not only an Italian but a southern Italian uncontaminated--at least as a youth--by Milan or Turin. Hailing from Molfetta, a suburb of Bari on the Adriatic Sea, poor and from a very large family, Salvemini fit all the American stereotypes of an Italian (although it is unrecorded whether he basked in the sun and played the mandolin), but he had the advantage of combining a long and active career as an acute observer of the Italian social scene with a rigid "American" mentality. Otherwise he could not have managed to become one of the earliest exiles from Fascist Italy or to be hired by Harvard University. As might be expected, Salvemini ardently admired the United States, or, more accurately, Cambridge, Massachusetts, but was critical enough to note that the ingenuousness inculcated by the American High School presented a real danger to the American system, an amazingly prescient observation.

In his Memorie di un fuoruscito ("Memoirs of An Exile"), Salvemini wrote: "The first impulse of the American (or Englishman) is to judge you as a man of good faith and to believe you; but if you let yourself be caught only once being inaccurate or disloyal, you may as well disappear."

This attitude has implications for the entire life style of the United States. If you go before an official to have something done, you say who you are and are believed; at most, you might have to request a birth certificate, which you can easily get by telephone or through the mails.

The idea that Americans accept a person on his or her word has never ceased to fascinate Italians. As is well known, the first word Italian policemen say to you is "documenti." And if you left them home, you can be held in jail until you produce them because the police will not believe you are who you say you are but a dangerous criminal. A folk song of the last century tells of the miraculous appearance the Virgin Mary on behalf of a person wrongfully accused of murder. The policeman on the scene says: "documenti"! When she cannot produce them, he arrests her; his superior lets her go and chews him out; there are a multitude of murderers running around free out there, he says, but you did something worse than letting a murderer go--you got us into hot water with the Church! This incident might serve as an excellent illustration of the differences in mentality between Italians and Americans. Americans do not have to carry documents, but if they did, the Virgin Mary would still be in jail.

If the suggestion is made that a citizen's word be accepted without documentary proof, or that documents be made easy to get, Italians will quickly point to the fraud that occasionally occurs in the United States with regard to persons being accepted on their word or being able to obtain documents readily and will give your the standard putdown: "What if everybody did that"? Salvemini himself asked the same question when he arrived in the United States and asked a friend why American libraries allowed students to take books home; he received the standard American answer that the overwhelming majority should not suffer for the actions of a few, but Italians still find "What if everybody did that?" so attractive that they will also invoke this saying even if something is perfectly legal.

From this suspicious attitude emerges the plethora of "certificati" which Italians are required to obtain. These certificates must be large and imposing, have many stamps, must be different ways of proving the same thing, must not be older than three months, and must take a long time to obtain. It has been argued that the high rate of absenteeism from work is due to the need of Italian citizens to obtain the many certificates they need for ordinary life and to the desire of bureaucrats to keep those documents from them by such subterfuges as: short working hours, coffee breaks, never giving you anything the first time you go to an office, and putting up a "closed" sign on a window after you have spent several hours on line. This last is a particularly deadly technique because a savvy Italian

will never choose a short line when he can get on a long one, knowing full well that the line is short because nothing can be accomplished at that window.

Thus, for example, a person must obtain a certificate of Italian nationality in order to renew a passport, even though he or she already possesses a passport certifying his or her Italian nationality; if a divorced person has children, he or she cannot get a passport without the consent of the ex-spouse, on the premise that the person <u>might</u> flee the country; if your wife is Italian, and you have children, she cannot get an Italian passport without your permission, even if you are not an Italian citizen. If you wish to turn on the electricity, you must produce the fundamental "residence certificate," necessary, along with the "stato di famiglia" (a list persons who live in your household) for practically everything; depending upon personal circumstances, this explains why so many Italian electric services and telephones are still in the names of long-deceased grandparents and other relatives--which complicates the process of cashing refund checks issued in the names of the deceased. If you receive a pension, a "certificate of existence in life" is periodically required to prove you are alive. If you conduct any kind of business with the state (and all businesses do), for every piece of business you must go to the police station and get a certificate proving you are not part of the mafia, a time-consuming exploit--unless you are a mafia member.

If you are an American living in Italy, it usually helps little to ask the consulate for the documents demanded by Italian officials and which usually do not exist in the United States. Italians working at the consulate can save you a lot of time, since they will refuse flat out, but if you insist the American officials will usually accommodate you--after chewing you out, telling you that the US has no equivalent of the "stato di famiglia," for example, pointing out that the notarized piece of paper they will give you has no legal value, and complaining that by doing you a favor they are only making more work for themselves by encouraging Italian officials to send more people to them chasing after worthless documents which do not exist in the United States. In cases like these, Italian bureaucrats will accept the useless documents only if they are truly worthless, but if they are legitimate they will reject them on the grounds that the Americans will give everything provided you show them your passport. "Troppo facile!" ["Too Easy!"] is the refrain. In those cases, they will insist that you obtain the certificate in the United States. Sometimes, however, you can get Italians to accept documents if you can somehow shift onto them the responsibility for some drastic consequence which will occur as a result of their refusal; this technique works very well in getting hold of medicines sent from home, for example.

The key word here is responsibility. It is wise to remember that the raison d'etre for and the primary concern of the bureaucracy in Italy is to avoid responsibility. Italian

officials can be tried and jailed if they make an error, and, even if they do not, there is probably some law against what you, and they, are doing; this situation is complicated by the tendency not to repeal old laws when new ones are passed, and/or to enforce old laws even when they are repealed--just in case. For example, the government has tried to streamline the process of obtaining documents by establishing "autocertificazione," swearing that what you are certifying is true, but no officer in his right mind will accept such a certificate, and you can do nothing because, despite a law to the contrary, he will not be wearing a nametag, or it will be microscopic, and will refuse to identify himself. We can confidently adapt Newton's third law to the case by stating: for every law, there is an equal and opposite regulation.

These concepts carry over into all phases of life. An analysis of the many dramatic political crimes in Italy over the past thirty-five years will reveal that no one is responsible. For example, in the 1969 Piazza Fontana bombing, first leftists were accused, then rightists, then secret services, then government, then all of them together--and we still do not know who was responsible. On 27 June 1980, an Itavia DC-9 carrying 81 passengers crashed near the island of Ustica. In eleven years, the American navy, the French air force, the Italian air force, Ghedaffi, and the secret services from several nations have been accused; a French company was hired to retrieve pieces of the airliner to determine if it had been shot down by a missile; the conclusion was inconclusive,

but later the company was "discovered" to have French secret services connections, whereupon another company was hired. The result: nothing definite. In 1982, Roberto Calvi, "God's banker" tied to the Vatican, was found hanging from Blackfriars Bridge in London. The British conclusion: a suicide. The Italian response: A suicide? Never, because involved with Calvi were: the Vatican, the Mafia, Solidarnosc, the military government of Argentina, a Czechoslovak prelate close to the Pope, and others. In the meantime, the Milanese newspaper Il Giornale headlined on 28 June 1991 (p. 6), "Magistrates split on Calvi case. 'No proof that it was murder.'"

In short, every time a spectacularly dramatic and high level crime occurs, officials and the press will blame everyone alleging the most disparate and mutually contradictory justifications for the suspects' acts, while the legal system will grind on for decades and come to no conclusion. Luckily, sooner or later everyone remotely connected to a case will be jailed for a significant length of time under the preventive detention laws, thus ensuring, under the laws of statistical probability, that all guilty parties will have served some time. The innocent, on the other hand, are protected by the absence of the death penalty. This is the system the magistrates used to bring down the old ruling elite. Thus, while Italians are prone to interpret scandals and spectacular crimes in conspiratorial terms, it is likely that the official modus operandi is simply an extension of the bureaucratic mentality and an attempt to irritate Cesare Beccaria's shade

for the purpose of discrediting that writer as the symbol of Mediterranean rationalism and efficiency in the western world.

Practice

At this point, Americans reading this essay may be asking themselves what advantages they stand to gain if they adopted the Italian method of doing things. After all, at first blush, it certainly seems like a lot more work. Instead, the advantages are myriad.

Most obviously, life would become much more exciting. The well-documented ennui of American life would disappear overnight. Instead of reading in The Boston Globe that "Youth killed in Suburb," readers would find: "BROOKLINE BRUTE STRIKES AGAIN." Furthermore, the police would ensure that that the "brute" would not remain an abstraction by immediately arresting a suspect not on the basis of evidence but of gossip and because he indeed resembles a brute. In this manner not just journalists but ordinary people could hotly dispute the irrelevancies of the case while unquestionably believing in the subject's guilt.

And this brings us to another advantage: the long-lost art of conversation would enjoy a vigorous renaissance. The hours spent watching television would most certainly diminish, since the "boob tube" would be unable to match the color of real life. This development would be no minor contribution to the revival of humanistic values in this country.

Consider the implications of the bureaucratic philosophy and practice described above. As in Italy, everyone would spend a great proportion of his or her waking hours planning how to obtain documents. Since the system is absurd, the first thing one has to do is to know people, or to know people who know people who can help you get what you want without following the rules which everyone knows to be ridiculous. This method works beyond obtaining <u>certificati</u> and extends into all areas of life, such as getting a job for your child or obtaining good and rapid medical care despite the fact that you belong to the government-run health plan or an HMO. These necessities of daily life compel you to make friends, so an importation of the Italian system would not only stimulate conversation but spur Americans to develop profound friendships.

So much has already been written on the lost art of friendship in the United States that a full discussion would be superfluous here, but in addition to the obvious aspects, one truly momentous advantage might be cited. Given the above-mentioned fundamental motivation for friendships, it is clear that the process produces not general friendliness but close friendships. In fact, while the mythical "friendly Italian"

may be friendly to foreigners, he is generally hostile to other Italians he does not know. This phenomenon is the opposite of the United States, where Americans are friendly to people they do not know ("Have a nice day!") but unfriendly to those they do know. Furthermore, in the United States many different cultures, ethnic groups, and races coexist and the government has made discrimination illegal; in Italy, at least until very recently, there were hardly any of these differences, forcing Italians to practice discrimination successfully only upon their fellow-citizens from the south, even though the government has encouraged other forms of discrimination, for example, by condoning the practice of setting age limits for hiring employees. In his 1986 best seller, The Closing of the American Mind, Allan Bloom proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the American habit of making openness a "moral virtue" has had an overwhelmingly deleterious effect on higher education and the nation as a whole. Importing the Italian mentality would eliminate that openness and restore American greatness.

Clearly, the Italian method of doing things produces results. Since everyone has many colorful bureaucratic horror stories to recount, the increased interaction among people not only stimulates lively conversation but arouses sympathy in persons who have had similar experiences and know the problems well. This comprehension leads them to suggest means of resolving an impossible situation, usually by naming a friend who can help. This process enables Italians to widen enormously their circle of friends. True, these new

acquaintances at first are only useful, and you must repay their favor with another favor; but that is not enough because you will be perceived as merely repaying a favor with a favor, thereby cutting a _brutta figura_. How do you resolve the dilemma and make a _bella figura_? Invite them them to dinner. That will force them to invite you back in order also to cut a _bella figura_, and the friendship takes off.

In order to understand how these complex procedures work in practice, we might take a simple example--renewing a passport. An American has pictures taken, goes to a post office, fills out a form, and pays his money. Printed on the form is the information that the passport will arrive in ten days, but, inexplicably and before you have an opportunity to complain, it arrives in only four. In case of emergencies, you can do it in two days. No fuss, no bother, no complaints, no human contact, no conversation, no friends. In the Italian case, you need about 150 documents, involving several offices in disparate parts of the city, some of which will certainly be closed for reasons you cannot even imagine, then a trip to the police station, which, according to the iron law of Italian bureaucracy, cannot give you what you want the first time. What happens then, when you discover the morning you are set to fly to the United States that your passport has expired? In the United States, you postpone your trip; in Italy, if you have successfully followed the precepts outlined above, you call a friend and pick up the new passport on the way to the

airport. Don't rush, if your friend of a friend is important enough, they'll hold the plane.

Obviously, this true example illustrates how the fabled Italian inefficiency is only apparent. In fact, it is difficult to comprehend how a people who brought modern organization to crime and the Catholic Church have been made the butt of jokes about being poor organizers. At any rate, we might consider some of the organizational forms of Italian society and see how they may benefit the United States.

In the United States, stores are open long hours, until 9:00 or 10:00 P.M., many even twenty-four hours--and without closing! When Italians hear about these hours, all Italians are surprised, most are aghast, and some would prohibit them by law and jail the offenders.

American tourists, on the contrary, are miffed when they visit Italy and find shops closed during the lunch "hour," but they do not understand that they are only observing part of a complex and beautiful operation. Store hours vary from city to city, and from category to category; these hours hold just long enough for an ordinary person to get to know them, after which they change, depending on the season, which, of course, depends on the city. Thus, for example, in Rome shops are closed Monday mornings, thereby eliminating one of humanity's greatest banes; but food stores open, magnanimously conceding that families may have run out of food on the weekend; but on Thursday afternoons, they close, thus getting revenge on the other shopkeepers who took off Monday morning.

When summer begins and it is more advantageous to have a longer weekend, however, food stores will suddenly remain open on Thursday afternoons but close on Saturday afternoons. The other shops will now open on Monday mornings, but also close on Saturday afternoons, just in case people might suspect that they are doing the opposite of what the food shops are doing. For good measure, in case the consumer has understood what is going on, all shops will vary their opening and closing times by one-half hour. Restaurants will complicate the situation by closing one day a week for "rest time" ("turno di riposo"), or for no reason at all. For Americans unused to Italian ways, it might be emphasized here that all categories of shops are open or closed at the same time, not only some. Thus Rome will take on a deserted air in the summer beginning Saturday afternoons and lasting through Sunday. In addition, everything will be closed on what we might call the "surprise" saint's day. This is a holiday of a particular saint which is celebrated in a single city on some day which a visitor will never suspect. For example, if you visit Milan on December 7, Florence on June 24, or Rome on June 29, everything will be closed. In this manner, every consumer is guaranteed to be seriously inconvenienced at least several times a year.

If Americans believe that Italians are poor organizers, they might experiment to see how long they can keep their economy running while forcing potential customers to overcome so many obstacles, but, no matter what the appearance, the purposes behind the Italian system are noble: to preserve the

family, to protect family enterprises, to deliver quality at high prices, and to stimulate savings. In the United States, large anonymous companies have driven small stores out of business in all sectors of the economy. They can stay open long hours only by paying higher wages to workers who wish to work odd hours and by taking advantage of economy of scale to offer lower prices. All this practice succeeds in doing is to make more money for the company while forcing employees to pay more taxes and limiting the time they have to enjoy themselves.

In Italy, however, the economic system has achieved all the goals it set itself--and more. The shopkeepers' association (Confesercenti) works with the government to pass measures which will force all shops to open and close at the same time. Since most businesses are family-owned, the underlying assumption behind this policy is that a family should have time together; thus, neither the small enterprise nor the large company should obtain an unfair advantage by being allowed longer hours of operation. Everyone knows the fate of the family in America and lauds the closeness of the Italian family: restricting rather than enlarging the hours of business operation would help Americans achieve the same goal. Another result is a very large number of small operations, which keep prices high under the guise of enhancing the Italian penchant for style.

Finally, cash transactions make it difficult for the government to collect taxes, contributing to a massive deficit; luckily, the shopkeepers and other citizens save such enormous

sums by not paying their taxes that they are in an excellent position to lend the government huge amounts to help it out of its difficulty. That they do so at high rates of interest (untaxed until recently) is another benefit for the country because it permits them to spend more, thus continually stimulating the economy. When Italian inflation was high, it was not really a problem because of the automatic cost of living increases. In this manner the puzzle of how Italy combined a high inflation rate with one of the highest savings rates in the world, if not the highest, and a vibrant economy is resolved. The real mystery is how the United States achieved a massive deficit without any of the advantages the Italians derive from their public indebtedness and why Americans persist in the stubbornness of their errors when Italy has shown the way.

Even in the labor arena Italians have much to teach Americans. As a result of the simple-minded philosophy described at the beginning of this essay, Americans work for a salary; when they want a higher salary, they strike, but if they are successful, employers simply raise prices, forcing them to ask for higher wages, and so on. This method appears to work well until the economy goes sour, which leads to layoffs, which makes strikes less likely because of the reduced success rate, which allows employers to cut wages, which forces workers to start the cycle all over again. Even in the best of times, American workers use a substantial percentage of their higher income to pay taxes, which the government spends in

frivolous things like arms on the ground that, in that manner, large corporations will get richer and workers will get only the crumbs ("trickle-down theory of economics"). As a result of their acquiescence in this scheme, American workers get two weeks vacation a year, and pay part of their medical insurance; women who have babies must take vacation time and their jobs are not guaranteed if they take regular work time off; finally, when workers are laid off, they get nothing from the employer and only a pittance from unemployment insurance for a brief period ranging to six months.

In Italy workers would have long ago strung up union leaders who produced such results. Italian unions did not go for higher wages immediately, but instead emphasized job security. They pioneered new methods of striking which have become legendary. When it became impossible to fire workers, they struck out after higher salaries and benefits. As a result, Italian workers have six weeks vacation, not counting other holidays or the numerous "bridges" (ranging from a simple "ponte," in which you take Friday off when a holiday falls on a Thursday, to magnificent structures with several "spans"; for example, Italians have a day off on April 25, the Liberation, and one day off on May 1, Workers' day--making it is possible to construct a ten day "bridge"). At the same time, many workers get extra monthly paychecks at Christmas, when it is handiest; full health and pension benefits paid by the employer; practically full salary when they are laid off; and a liquidazione equivalent to a month's salary for every year they

have worked at a job. This system is particularly helpful to the economy; for example, many workers who left their jobs during the economic crisis of the 1970s took their liquidazione and set up their own firms; usually small, highly efficient, and based on high tech, they are on the cutting edge of modern business technique. Women do not have to take vacation or sick days to have babies but get five months' leave at full pay and can get time off during the next three years if their children take ill. If businesses go bad, they are simply taken over and reorganized by government agencies, helping both owners and their employees; the government simply runs up its deficit, which is handled in the excellent manner already explained.

Shoring up this imaginative and efficient economy is a worthy banking system specializing in blocking financial operations and irritating clients. For example, customers of a Rome branch of the Banco di Santo Spirito (named for the entity which allows this institution to survive) are greeted with this notice prominently displayed at the entrance: "NOTICE: With relation to the current contractual regulation of working hours, we wish to point out to our eminent clientele the opportunity to refrain from using our teller services in the proximity of closing hours, in order to avoid waiting which could result, in addition to unpleasantness, useless." The valued "eminent clientele" will search in vain for posted closing times. These are only some methods Italian banks employ to drive away clients attempting to use services during their brief opening hours. Others include intimidation (if you

seem unconfident), coffee breaks, pretending to do something else, and closing the branch without explanation.

The Bank of Rome has elevated such practices to an art. Agency 9's Automatic Teller Machine is always "temporarily" out of order, and when it is not, the bank will change your Personal Identification Number without notification. Several years ago, for inexplicable reasons, a disorderly crowd always surrounded a counter at the branch's entrance demanding service, while the tellers smoked and relaxed; with a change of Director, the chaos suddenly invested the tellers, while the employees around the counter smoke and do nothing. Despite laws to the contrary, you can never figure out what the interest rates are and you may bargain for higher rates. One teller at the Banca d'America e d'Italia (don't be fooled by the name) will get angry at the Director if he authorizes cashing one of the bank's own checks for you. At any of these banks, it will take five times as long for funds sent across Rome to be credited to your account than it will if it is sent from across the Atlantic Ocean.

Once again, the moral is obvious. The efficient and bloodless banks in the United States do not lend themselves to a mythopoeic mentality, which eliminates the spice from life. Economic efficiency also means that people have no excuse not to pay their bills punctually, while in Italy no one will cut off your electricity until a bill has remained unpaid for several years; indeed, those who pay on time are much more

likely to have their power interrupted by mistake and without notification--poetic punishment for subversives.

In fact, the major threat to this novel system comes from those Italians who go abroad to learn efficiency at institutions such as the Harvard and MIT business schools, or from judges such as the one who filed away a charge of defamation which a telephone company employee brought against a client trying to subvert the system; the customer not only invaded a private room reserved for staff just because he and hundreds of other customers had been kept waiting several hours but had the gall to insult the employees just because they were chatting all that time (La Repubblica, 4 May 1991, p. 7).

The European Union is another insidious threat. Powered by the misguided myth of German efficiency, it decreed that the deficit be no more than 3 percent of the budget. The Germans hoped in that manner to keep the Italians out of Europe believing that they could never reach such a goal. When they were proved wrong, they insisted that the Italians be kept out anyway. Actually, that position shows some hope for the Germans, as did Chancellor Kohl's sleight-of-hand in proposing to revalue Germany's gold reserve in order to have Germany qualify when it seemed that the Germans themselves might not make the goal. That attempt to out-Italian the Italians was a heroic gesture for the Germans, but the Bundesbank pulled the plug. While observers such as me appreciate Kohl's conversion to the Italian style of living, they belive that he should relax; once Italy is a full-fledged and respected member of the

EU, history will probably win out. After all, in the long run the culture of Ancient Rome conquered the German tribes, the Italian-run medieval Church vanquished the Holy Roman Empire, and the Renaissance taught the Germans a thing or two about art and living. No, the problem remains US influence.

Under assault by a misunderstanding world, the Italians threaten to change their ways. They have miracously lowered their deficit, done away with automatic cost of living increases, and threaten to reform their social services sytem. After decades of discussion, evidence crops up here and there that even the people may altering their mentality--especially in Lombardy, the region which continues to suffer from the execrable effects of past Germanic efficiency-- and that the threat to conform with philsophically bankupt ideas may be made good. Milan's Il Giornale, for example, printed the following letter from a Maria Theresa Coppola from Bergamo: "On 19 June I requested a telephone installation from the Sip [the company which holds the government concession to run the telephone system]. In less than 24 hours, workmen installed and activated the system. All of this occurred without the least solicitation. Still in a state of shock, I wish to congratulate Sip publicly for the efficiency of its collaborators." Now, unfortunately, Italia telecom has taken over and the telephones run on time.

It is this blind reverence which keeps people from understanding that, in the end, efficiency inevitably culminates in cultural isolation, social injustice, stress,

taxes, downsizing, economic misery, Republicans, and, in cuisine, McDonald's. If a nation of the prestige and power of the United States would adopt the Italian system of confronting modernity, in all its magisterial subtlety, sophistication, and complexity, a great empire would be saved.

We are still in time.