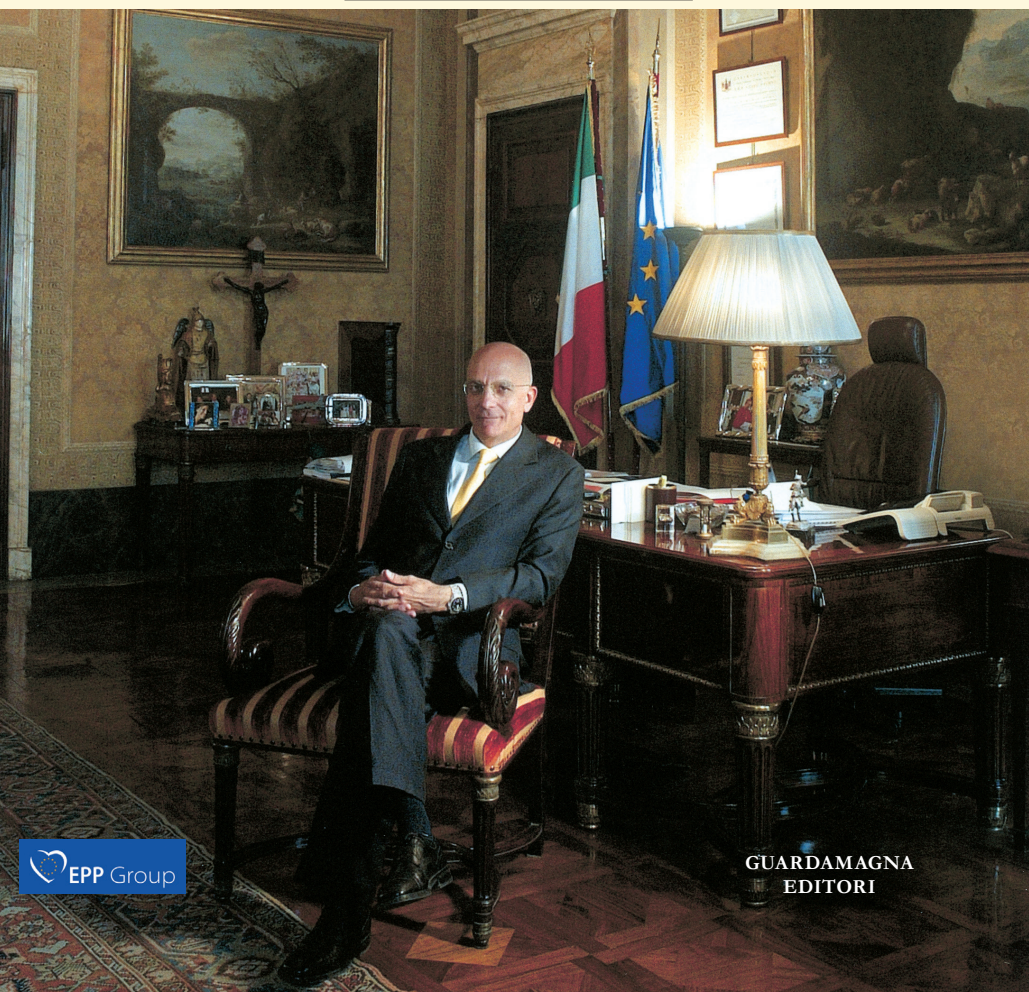


Gabriele Albertini  
with Carlo Maria Lomartire

# IN THE MAYOR'S ROOM

Nine years at the helm of a changing metropolis

P O L I T I C A



## IN THE MAYOR'S ROOM



Gabriele Albertini  
with Carlo Maria Lomartire

# IN THE MAYOR'S ROOM

Nine years at the helm of a changing metropolis

*Guardamagna Editori*



Translated by Dalia Habib  
on behalf of Language Consulting Congressi, Milan

Printed by Guardamagna Corrado e Luigi tipografi in Varzi

The photographs reproduced herein belong to the Archive  
of the Municipality of Milan, except where otherwise indicated.

First Italian edition 2006  
© 2006 Arnoldo Mondadori Editore

English edition  
© 2011 Guardamagna Editori - Varzi (Pv)





## Preface

This book is the result of a series of conversations with Gabriele Albertini, mayor of Milan, which took place during the final months of his second term of office, between December 2005 and May 2006.

The intention here is not to provide an overview, even less an assessment of Albertini's intense, controversial and unique administrative tenure, begun in 1997 and concluded during the recording of the interviews contained in this book.

Instead, I hope to be able to capture and recount the anomalous nature of his mayoralty; to describe the discontinuity in the city's history represented by its first 'non-political' mayor – that is to say, one who did not come from the organized structures of a political party.

I also intend to examine an unusual and highly significant period of the so-called Second Republic, which might shed some light on certain issues that extend beyond the confines of Milan and are generally neglected by the mainstream political narrative – that of the major newspapers, which tend to focus on the vicissitudes of the parties and the government, and that of the political insiders and commentators who attempt to interpret them.

Albertini's tenure as mayor is important for explaining the political anomalousness of a city/laboratory like Milan,

decisive for determining the destiny of the country and difficult to govern. Since the tempest of Tangentopoli, or 'Bribe City', which devastated the city and profoundly affected the character of Milanese public life, not a single professional politician, not a single person from the political party system has run for the office of Palazzo Marino, neither from the center-right or the center-left. Nothing like this has ever happened in any other major city.

Consequently, following the decimation of the political class caused by Tangentopoli, Milanese society set about reconstructing it, drawing directly from the vast wealth of skilled business people, professionals and intellectuals that a vital and hard-working city can offer – I deliberately avoid the hackneyed expression 'civil society' here, a rhetorical expedient totally devoid of real meaning and which is too often used toward partisan ends.

Flying in the face of certain clichés and convenient schematizations, Milanese society has always been keenly interested in politics, and has always had a political class of the first order. It is a tradition that dates back to the fervent years of the Enlightenment, or perhaps even back to the opulence of the Renaissance under the Sforza.

Clearly this interest is unique, yet also typical, characterized by the culture, the tradition and the demands of Milanese society; by its "diversity" and its particular attention to concreteness, to getting things done; by that underlying constant of reformist initiative which, here in Milan and in Lombardy, cannot be generically located on the left without falling into superficiality – just as it is misleading to define the Milanese right as simply conservative.

This is one of the reasons why Milanese politics has long been a sort of laboratory that often anticipates the demands, needs and prospects of Italian society as a whole.

The mayoralty of Albertini, then, belongs to this context,

and constitutes an especially critical transitional phase following the years of Tangentopoli and the confused interruption of the Formentini administration. Rarely in its recent history has Milan suffered such an extended period of administrative inertia and apathy.

The Albertini administration represents Milan's reawakening from this long phase, at first tumultuous and later inconclusive, taking recourse once again in its active and industrious people, reestablishing that prolific flow of exchange between politics and the working classes, which has given good results in the past for the city and the country as a whole.

Moreover, this role of "ferryman" has been acknowledged even by some of those career politicians who would have more reason than anyone to contest it, if only to rebut his criticisms of them. Among these is Giampiero Borghini, a figure from the Milanese reformist left who had the thankless task of serving as mayor during the most tragic months of Tangentopoli. For him, "Albertini was able to push Milan along, unifying the most diverse souls, and he is leaving us with a city in the process of growth".

As such, it seemed to me opportune to recount this experience while it is still fresh, and from the viewpoint of its main protagonist.

A measured and comprehensive evaluation of these years is another thing entirely, and history, with time, will be the judge.

I owe a special thanks to Emanuela Rossi di Marignano for her valuable and intelligent collaboration.

*Carlo Maria Lomartire*



## Berlusconi, politics and me

*Mayor Albertini, what could have possibly motivated you to get tangled up in this mess, to embark on this adventure? Being the mayor of Milan is rightly considered more difficult and demanding than most, perhaps all of the Ministry positions – and more prestigious as well. But you were an entrepreneur, an industrialist, secure in your family's manufacturing operation, socially engaged through your position in Confindustria, directing its most powerful business organization, Federmeccanica.*

*In other words, you had a lot going on, and good reason to be satisfied. So what did you do? You gave it up for one of the thorniest, least comfortable positions in all of Italy.*

To tell the truth, it had never even crossed my mind – and I'm not talking about being the mayor of Milan, which I've always understood to be an enormous job – but even of ever entering politics at all. Though it should be said that I do, naturally, have my political views, rigorously liberal, and I consider the administration of a city, particularly a major metropolis like Milan, to be closer to business management than to politics.



*So, what changed your mind?*

It's all Silvio Berlusconi's fault, really. He was the one who suggested it, then insisted that I accept. And he had to insist quite a lot. I never would have imagined that one of the richest and most powerful men in the world could be interested in a *sciur Brambilla* (average Joe ndt) like me.

*You could have refused.*

I did, repeatedly and insistently, even overstepping the limits of courtesy, something I would normally never do with a man like Berlusconi. There are documents to prove it.

I responded to the leader of Forza Italia with two letters. In the first, of February 1997, I thank him naturally for the offer – which, while stunning me to the point of consternation, also gave me great satisfaction, I won't deny. I then address the real issue of my refusal, explaining the profound reasons, which at the time seemed to me incontrovertible, why I was compelled to turn down the president and founder of Forza Italia, then leader of the opposition and future candidate for the premiership.

These reasons were rooted in my nature, in my family upbringing and professional career as an entrepreneur – a small businessman, to be precise; the classic average Joe. I explained that I was a man who, for genetic, indeed anthropological reasons, was not naturally forthcoming, with an ingrained attitude entirely inappropriate to the compromise and continuous negotiating required of a politician; a man concerned above all with concrete results rather than appearance, accustomed to acting with coherency and determination, as is normal for an entrepreneur. In short, the exact opposite of the deft prudence and flexibility of the politician.

I explained to Berlusconi that I would surely have been disastrous. I tried to demonstrate what seemed obvious to me – that is, my well-known inability to do the job I'd been asked

to take. This was followed by a phone call, equally exhausting and embarrassing. I thought I'd gotten out of it, but I should have known that it isn't easy to say no to Silvio Berlusconi.

*You mentioned two letters.*

The second did not concern the request to run for mayor. I wrote it much later, almost at the end of my first term in Palazzo Marino, during a moment of serious crisis. It was the spring of 2000, at the height of the nasty battle with the president of the city council, Massimo De Carolis, who eventually resigned after being indicted for corruption in the 'dirty water' scandal, then sentenced to 20 months in prison.

Though the letter was written long after the first, it was nonetheless a consequence of it, even a sort of continuation. I sent it to Berlusconi, and cc'd Indro Montanelli<sup>1</sup>, who was up on all the details of the affair. I remember writing to Berlusconi that the letter "will remain between us, with only one exception", knowing that he, fully aware of my relationship with Indro, would have immediately understood who the exception was.

As I said, the second letter was directly tied to the first, though longer and more detailed, insofar as it was informed by my first three years as mayor, but like the first it addressed the need to choose clearly and unambiguously the style of political conduct, of managing a public institution.

And that choice was between the *modus operandi* of the entrepreneur working in politics – as Berlusconi also considered himself – attentive to the effectiveness of one's actions and the results they engendered, and the methods of the tra-

---

<sup>1</sup> Indro Montanelli (1909-2001); hard-line anti-Communist, enlightened conservative, Montanelli was a right-leaning Italian journalist fiercely proud of his own independence. Though once an adherent of Fascism, he left after having fought the Italian campaign in Abyssinia.

ditional career politician, characterized by compromises and machinations; today a firefighter and tomorrow an arsonist; someone who officially takes a position while officiously bargaining with it; who exhausts his ability to actually govern by wasting energy on committees and assemblies; who patiently cultivates resentments and rivalries... essentially someone who has all the technical skills and instincts of the political animal, who may even be a master of his trade. I don't necessarily judge all of this negatively, it's just not me.

*So in the second letter, you articulated this irreconcilable difference in approach.*

The problem I was attempting to solve, by deciding unequivocally between these two methods, or styles if you wish, was getting De Carolis to resign, which was indispensable for me in order to remain in my position and do my job.

I had already indirectly stated that I would resign, respecting a motion from the city council presented by opposition which was calling for De Carolis' resignation. Clearly, voting for a motion from the opposition, I would have been obligated to resign on the spot.

What I told Berlusconi was that, in order to avoid creating undue political embarrassment for him, I would have formally resigned for health reasons, after which I would have definitively left politics behind, thereby sidestepping any suspicion of opportunism, or worse, betrayal. It was an act of loyalty and fairness that I owed to the man who had wanted me in Palazzo Marino and who had always shown himself to be generous and loyal.

This episode is exemplary of both my political and existential situation at the time. In that letter, I described the contrast between the two everyday conditions of living and being. On the one hand, that of someone, like me, who had been plucked from the trenches of work by the arguments

and motivations used to induce me to become mayor. On the other, the vision of politics, society and perhaps even of life that I attributed to De Carolis. Two clearly antithetical and absolutely irreconcilable positions.

At that point, De Carolis and I represented two alternative models, even though we were on the same team and had voted for each other.

*Don't you think you may have been a bit rigid, moralistic even? As on other occasions, mightn't you have pushed your intransigence and rigor a little far?*

No, not at all. Although I was aware, then as in other similar circumstances, that my attitude could have been interpreted that way, which I found regrettable.

But for me it was very simple: I had to remain true to the reasons for which I was asked to do the job. So in a certain sense, I wanted to remain faithful to Berlusconi, to honor his request. In fact, he could have offered me certain political advice at the time: accept this difference because it's part of the system; find a middle ground; learn to compromise because this is the chessboard of power, where you can't afford to lose a pawn nor a rook and must always move with foresight and patience.

I was fully aware of the profoundly 'unpolitic' nature of my choice (in the sense of political hackism), and of the enormous risk it entailed – that of losing my position and putting the mayoralty of Milan at risk of losing future consensus.

*So what happened in the end?*

Just what the newspapers reported – Berlusconi convinced the city council president to resign his post.

These two episodes are already sufficiently indicative of my relationship to politics. But I will add a third, which fits quite well with the other two.

One of the first painful events that I had to share with my fellow citizens as mayor was a particularly tragic one: the death of eleven people in the hyperbaric chamber dreadful fire at Galeazzi hospital on October 31st, 1997, just four months after my election.

We were in a Council meeting when I received a note from the communication office, which had just learned of the fire from a news agency. I cut short the meeting and went to the hospital. There was a large crowd, including relatives of the victims. I hurried through the corridors the site of the fire, where I was met with the tear-stained faces of the staff, rescue crews and hospital administrators. The atmosphere was both charged and tragic.

Then, without warning, someone suddenly opened the door of the room containing that damned hyperbaric chamber. I remember that police commissioner Carnimeo practically blocked my entry, advising me with his eyes to prepare myself for a horrific sight. And in fact, what I saw was unspeakable. After greeting public prosecutor Francesco Prete quickly, I entered the room and caught a powerful whiff of burnt flesh, hair and bone. It may be irreverent to say so, but it reminded me of the odor of slaughtered chickens being passed over a flame to singe off the remaining feathers. That was it, the odor of burnt keratin, acrid and sharp.

It was as if those bodies had been saponified, but in natural poses, like dark green mannequins. Their faces no longer possessed any of the attributes that constitute a face – their noses, ears and lips were gone, leaving only a smooth, unrecognizable surface. I remember hoping that the tragedy had been sudden and quick, that they hadn't suffered or even realized what was happening. I wished this for them with an intensity that caused me an almost physical pain.

The funeral of the eleven victims was the first such event that I attended in my official capacity as mayor. It was an en-

tirely unexpected experience for me, one that I hadn't considered when I accepted the job, and one that unfortunately I would experience on other occasions. I hadn't thought it was possible that mourning the deaths of people I didn't even know could touch me so deeply.

*You were also emotionally invested in your role as mayor.*

I realized, almost with a sense of wonderment, that the position I held conferred upon me an identification with the suffering of those who had elected me to represent them, to provide for their needs, not only material but spiritual. I felt called upon to take part in their suffering.

And I'm not especially tenderhearted; I am not easily moved. If anything I come across, perhaps rightly, as a rather cold person. Yet I remember truly suffering during that funeral ceremony, experiencing the mourning authentically. I remember being sincerely moved, and may have even cried. Almost without realizing it, I found myself there in the midst of the victims' families, sharing their grief.

When the ceremony ended and the coffins were lifted to be carried outside, the so-called 'authorities' had discreetly gathered at a distance from the relatives and friends of the victims, who were assembled around the altar. I was late in taking my appointed place, for I was still offering condolences, embracing who were crying and who, without knowing me, rested their heads on my shoulder. Their faces belied their need for comfort from a friend, a relative, someone dear to them, whereas I was just a stranger wearing an official banner who had just recently been elected mayor of the city.

When the coffins arrived in the churchyard, I was still in the middle of the victims' families, while the other 'authorities' were somewhere else entirely. At that point, I could no longer join them because the funeral procession was coming out of the church and I would have had to interrupt it.

*So you were surrounded by the people and not with your fellow 'authorities'? The scene has the air of demagoguery, of populism.*

It's more a question of that painful ceremony, with its unforeseen twists, being in some way a sign, or if you prefer a representation of a different, anomalous and completely unexpected sensibility. It's like an *imprinting* that somehow defines a regular citizen who, through a combination of chance, luck and incomprehensible circumstances, finds himself the mayor of a major city.

Like a raffle drawing. Yes, that describes it. I had the feeling of having had my name plucked blindly from a bucket. Why me? How many Albertinis might Berlusconi have otherwise found? It really was all just a series of chance circumstances: I was an entrepreneur like him, and the candidate from the center-left, Aldo Fumagalli, was also an entrepreneur. Both of us were involved in regional associations, Assolombarda and Confindustria. Both were Milanese, with mutual acquaintances, Cesare Romiti and Fedele Confalonieri<sup>2</sup>, who had given my name to Berlusconi. The offer had already been turned down by, among others, Letizia Moratti (that's right, as far back as then!), her husband Gian Marco Moratti<sup>3</sup> and Carlo Sangalli.

I was clearly not the first choice. In fact, I was seventh on the list of potential candidates from the center-right. So there you have it: pure chance, like a raffle drawing. And it was in this very randomness that I found confirmation that I was a citizen like

<sup>2</sup> Cesare Romiti (1923); Corporate leader who ran some of Italy's largest companies, such as Alitalia, the RCS Group and Fiat, where he was general director, CEO and president. He is currently president of the Italy-China Foundation.

Fedele Confalonieri (1937); President of Mediaset, he sits on the Board of Directors of publisher Arnoldo Mondadori and the newspaper *Il Giornale*.

<sup>3</sup> Gian Marco Moratti (1936); Italian businessman, son of Angelo, he was president of the Unione Petrolifera and has supported the drug rehabilitation community of San Patrignano since its founding. He is currently president of Saras Raffinerie Sarde S.p.a. and vice president of Angelo Moratti S.p.a.

everyone else, the average Milanese. Perhaps it was because of this normality, this averageness, that I ended up in the middle of the people mourning this tragic event, remaining with them rather than being sucked back into the ranks of the 'authorities'. In other words, I wasn't reabsorbed by the 'system'.

*But couldn't it have just been a matter of chance that you ended up with the mourners and not the authorities?*

It's possible, I suppose. But it nevertheless indicates an unconscious choice, a vocation, or if you prefer to avoid weighted words, at the very least an attitude.

And when I go back to that moment, I'm still unable to remember it serenely, because I feel as if I'm reliving it. And also because, unfortunately, I found myself experiencing equally intense and painful emotions in similar, even more dramatic circumstances, such as the terrible accident at Linate on October 8, 2001, also just four months from the beginning of my term, in this case the second one. One hundred and eighteen people died that day.

Again, I felt the horror of that tragedy deeply and acutely. I don't know, perhaps I'm more fragile than I'd like to believe. Or perhaps it's something else, something objective: believers speak of a 'grace of state' such that when someone is charged with certain responsibilities, there is something greater, even transcendent that helps you feel their gravity and to bear them, that ensure you are up to the task, even if you're not suited for it or haven't wanted or sought it; even if you don't have the necessary character or experience, if you realize you can never measure up to what is required to overcome the difficulties you face, to manage the complexity and delicacy of the problems you are called upon to resolve.

And also for the many souls you must try to understand, within and outside of yourself, because society is complex and its requests are contradictory – from the defenders of



the poor who demand an immediate response to their needs, to the multinational corporation who expect that the territory be receptive to their development plans and capable of satisfying its needs.

*Going back to your candidacy, how did Berlusconi convince you to run? What arguments did he use, which motivations?*

I'm getting there. So I fax that letter to Berlusconi's home in Arcore – by which I mean the first letter – and the phone immediately rings. It's Berlusconi, and he goes straight to the heart of the matter, touching the only subject that could have persuaded me.

*Which was?*

Not the prestige of the position, although it is significant. According to a study by *Il Sole 24 Ore*, the mayor of Milan is one of the seven institutional figures in the country with the greatest purchasing power, which in the end is where power lies. Then there's fact that we all hope to be remembered for having done something positive and important for the benefit of others as well as for a justifiable personal gratification: as mayor of Milan, one has the opportunity to realize this legitimate, even praiseworthy ambition. And let's not forget the satisfaction of having achieved an important goal, or the opportunities for new contacts and relationships... In short, there is no shortage of excellent reasons why one might appreciate the chance for such a job.

But Berlusconi made no mention whatsoever of any of these things. Perhaps he had already figured me out.

*So? What did he say?*

Only the following two things: one, "You are an entrepreneur, like me" (despite the enormous difference in scale be-

tween his business and mine, mentioning them in the same breath revealed his well-known seduction skills, but was also a signal of great cordiality); and two, “You are involved in business associations, which means you believe that business has a social role, and you don’t accept that our category be considered a group of profiteers and exploiters. Well, for once you have the chance not only to preach, to suggest or represent that category, but to embody, as an entrepreneur, the interests of the people. You can finally transform the city into a big service provider, a business, de-bureaucratizing it, making it efficient and functional”.

He even accused me, literally, with a very clever and slightly blackmailing strategy of moral pressure, of criminal negligence, of ‘failure to provide emergency assistance’! “Imagine”, he said to me, “you’re leaving your house in the morning, a full day of appointments ahead, and you see someone in need of help lying on the sidewalk. Now, you can either go on your way and let someone else worry about it, or say to hell with your business commitments and personally help the stranger. You see, I am that stranger in need of help, the help that you are refusing to give me. The political left, with its long tradition of hostility towards enterprise, is putting up an entrepreneur as their candidate, while I, an entrepreneur, will be paradoxically forced to put up a bureaucrat or professional politician because I can’t find even one person who believes, as I do, in the values of business, who believes that the spirit of enterprise is not only a way to accumulate wealth but a means of improving society”.

*That is some serious pressing, to use the football language so dear to Berlusconi. Difficult to resist.*

Oh, it was almost unbearable. At that point, I thought back to 1982 when, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of my family’s business, founded on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1932, I had prepared

a brochure containing a citation from Henry Ford's autobiography, *My Life and Work*.

Ford writes, "Power and machinery, money and goods, are useful only as they set us free to live. They are but means to an end. For instance, I do not consider the machines which bear my name simply as machines. If that was all there was to it I would do something else. I take them as concrete evidence of the working out of a theory of business which I hope is something more than a theory of business – a theory that looks toward making this world a better place in which to live" .

To this quote my brother Carlo and I added our own reflection on the civic role of the entrepreneur, on that which we were convinced both then and now to be the social function of the industrialist. "The industrialist", we wrote, "is a practical man, and his vocation is to concretely realize them. He thinks in terms of processes and procedures, and as such ideologies are extraneous to him. His professional commitment requires no other motivation from him than the constant drive towards the goal of maximum efficiency in coordinating the factors of production".

"There does not exist a true ideology of business", we continued, "and for this reason the entrepreneur may not be aware of the social utility of his work, while others might deliberately ignore it. But it is undeniable that society as a whole reaps benefits from what he does, if he does it well, and those benefits come in the form of job opportunities, the diffusion of prosperity and social and material progress that few others produce as dynamically. It is this tangible certainty that allows us to commemorate here today fifty years of activity, with legitimate pride in having done our part 'in making this world a better place in which to live'". We concluded by echoing, intentionally and immodestly, Henry Ford.

Forgive me for quoting myself, I wanted only to reiterate my deep conviction that industrial civilization of the past

three hundred years has profoundly changed the world and people's lives for the better, and it has done so more quickly than Christianity or the invention of print or any of the great revolutions in history that we remember as milestones that sparked great transformations.

The life of a European, in the thousand years between the time of Caesar to that of Dante, changed to be sure. But not nearly as much as it has changed from Watt's invention of the steam engine to today, in these 250 years of industrial civilization. Knowledge, once confined to the academies, is now available everywhere. The artisan's handmade wares are now produced on a mass scale, and by extension access to goods and to prosperity also exists on a mass scale, though accompanied by all the undesired effects and distortions that we well know (and that the enemies of industry love to emphasize).

But it is undeniable that the spread of wealth and the doubling of the average human life expectancy are due to the industrialization of agriculture, where the famines that once 'weeded out' the weakest sectors of the population are now practically non-existent. Not to mention the epidemics that are kept in check today thanks to better sanitary conditions, a better and regular diet, the development of the pharmaceutical industry, the widespread availability of medicines, the research activities...

*We're wandering a bit off topic here. Let's get back to Berlusconi and the telephone call.*

But this is about the phone call. This is what I was thinking while Berlusconi spoke, with increasing passion, his voice sometimes cracking with emotion, even desperation. "What can I do?" he asked me. "If I can't find even one man with a clean face, with the modesty and prudence that you are showing me that you possess, without greed or hunger for power, as I believe our ideal candidate should be... if I can't

convince someone like you to agree to get involved, why should I continue to do it myself?

"I could have done what I was advised to do by my closest collaborators", he told me in increasingly bitter tones, "and even some friends" (the allusion to Fedele Confalonieri was clear). "All I had to do was give one network to the Left – Rete 4 or Italia 1<sup>4</sup> – and everything would have been settled. They would have left me in peace, even all the trials would have been resolved..."

*He may not have been entirely wrong.*

In fact he continued to insist, pushing inexorably, striking ever more sensitive cords. Meanwhile I had begun to vacillate, thinking 'Hm, if such an important man as Berlusconi, one of the richest in the world, whose wealth was created and not inherited; a man destined in any case for the history books for being a great entrepreneur who succeeded in putting together a major political party, creating a coalition, winning the majority and becoming Prime Minister in just three months; one who would be remembered for the next five hundred years even if he'd abandoned politics back in '94, which he fortunately didn't... in sum if this man is here, imploring a nobody like me to help him, I can't leave him alone. I can't not take what he is saying seriously'.

*This sounds like the point where you caved in and accepted the candidacy.*

He had me pinned to the wall. I had no choice but to tell him 'Alright, I accept. I will do it for you, out of the respect and admiration I have for you, and because you have made a good

---

<sup>4</sup> Rete 4. Private television network of the Mediaset group, founded in 1982.

Italia 1. Private television network founded in 1982, originally owned by publisher Edilio Rusconi and now part of Mediaset.

argument about things that are too important not be taken into consideration. But mark my words: you, who have thus far in life made all the right choices, have made a mistake this time, because I will lose this election. You have built cities like Milano 2 and Milano 3<sup>5</sup>; you brought commercial television to Italy; you've won every possible title with A.C. Milan, you founded Italy's largest political party... suffice it to say, you have always aimed extremely high, and you've always won. However', I continued in one last, futile attempt to dissuade him, 'with me you're making a blunder. I am the worst possible sort of person to run for the mayor's office. First and foremost, I am not able to accept the compromises required by this job, and I will cause you problems because I am ornery and accustomed to obeying only my own conscience, so I will also be quite intractable. In short, I'm telling you honestly: you are making a mistake that you will surely regret'.

*Not exactly very courteous. Did Berlusconi ever reproach you for this, for having forced him to insist so long and hard, to almost beg you to accept? Did he ever appear to have regretted his choice?*

Absolutely not. Never. In fact I only recounted this episode because I'm certain that there is no risk whatsoever that it will be taken as a lack of respect or discretion. Nor would I have recounted it if Berlusconi hadn't already done so himself.

*Really? When?*

Once at Arcore, in the theater hall in the basement of his Villa San Martino. The 1997 administrative campaign was in full swing, and the entire pantheon of the Italian business

---

<sup>5</sup> Milano 2 (1979); model neighbourhood "on a human scale", with particular attention to children's safety, with pedestrian bridges that keep them far from traffic. Built in Segrate, just outside Milan, by Silvio Berlusconi's Edilnord. Milano 3 (1990); model residential quarter erected in Basiglio, just outside Milan, by Silvio Berlusconi's Edilnord.

world was there, two hundred of the most powerful figures in finance, industry, consumer goods and publishing.

I was at Berlusconi's side, a dutiful little shrimp of industry by comparison to these men, intimidated, embarrassed and slightly irritated by their unfamiliar world and the spectacular, almost theatrical scene they constituted, none of which I was accustomed to. And Berlusconi explaining why he'd chosen me, even recounting the episode I've just described, which could have been embarrassing for him. 'To think that I had to plead with him!', he said. 'He didn't want to accept, and this does him honor...'. And so forth.

In other words, he was openly announcing how he had nearly humiliated himself to convince me to accept his offer, and he did so by striking just the right tone. This episode, this demonstration of friendship is something that I will remember for the rest of my life.

There would be many things in the future that made us feel far apart, or that we even had contrasting interests. But the loyalty and generosity that Berlusconi showed me at that moment, and of which there were many confirmations in other circumstances, are a testament to the value of our relationship and, I must say, of the man himself.

*Looking back after all this time, weren't there any previous signals that perhaps you missed of a possible interest in your future political cooptation in the files of the center-right?*

In hindsight, perhaps there were signs. I remember a dinner at Assolombarda, for example, with then president Ennio Presutti and a handful of other entrepreneurs, not more than fifteen or so. The guest of honor was the President of the Italian Republic Francesco Cossiga. Also seated at that table was the center-right's possible – at that point probable candidate for mayor of Milan, Letizia Moratti. It wasn't yet official, but the press was treating it as inevitable.

President Cossiga, brilliant and disarming as always, began musing about the figure of the mayor of a large city, Milan specifically. He spoke a lot about the difficulty of the job and the problems, both public and private, that it entailed. The fact that the mayor is elected directly by the people, he said, adding a very perspicacious observation, could be a positive factor for certain aspects of the job, but also meant particularly intense exposure, with all the accompanying difficulties, responsibilities and risks.

*In what capacity were you attending this dinner?*

I was president of Federmeccanica<sup>6</sup> back then. Out of nowhere, Cossiga told me he'd seen me on a public broadcaster television program hosted by the Italian journalist Gad Lerner, talking about the manufacturing workers' union contract. It was the same day that the Federmeccanica executive committee had officially rejected the government's proposals to conclude the national labor negotiations of the manufacturing workers, having in the meantime ratified a choice of mine as president during the Christmas holidays. The proposals were absolutely incompatible with the levels of programmed inflation that we had all decided to adopt as a basic parameter for the contract renewal. Even Antonio Fazio, governor of the Bank of Italy, agreed with us.

Naturally we found ourselves rather isolated, having the government and the parliamentary majority against us. Even a faction of industrialists from the North-East of Italy was veering away from us, determined to settle as soon as possible if only to put an end to the conflict.

During that broadcast, I explained with great calm and determination our responsibilities as industrialists, which cannot be restricted to those of the civil code whereby com-

---

<sup>6</sup> Federmeccanica (1971); Italian Federation of Metalworking Industries.



panies going through hard times can bring their books to court and file for bankruptcy, allowing all the wealth they produced to disappear into the void.

I reminded viewers that we also have a responsibility towards our employees, who would only have enjoyed a wage increase for a moment at most, after which they would have to absorb the effects of a no longer manageable international competition that would place at risk a million three-hundred thousand manufacturing workers in Italy, equivalent to the population of Milan.

*The kind of reasoning you're accustomed to.*

Well, my reasoning and the tone in which I delivered it had apparently been much appreciated by Cossiga, who in his unmistakable voice and delightful Sardinian accent – in which the double consonant is the norm – declared openly during the dinner, “Dear Albertini, you have a future as a constant guest on all the talk shows”.

I was taken aback, for it seemed to me that I'd said nothing particularly brilliant, and in any case I've never considered myself as having any great talent as a polemicist. So I thought – and still think today – that perhaps Cossiga's effusive praise was the result of excessive kindness, simple as that.

Though naturally, in that context, with all the attention concentrated on Mrs. Moratti, Cossiga's appreciation made quite an impression, and pleased me as well. But I certainly didn't interpret it as a signal of political attention, a notion which I couldn't even have imagined at the time...

*As fate would have it, Cossiga had an excellent relationship with both Cesare Romiti, one of the key sponsors of your candidacy, and with Berlusconi.*

That's true. I remember having followed, though only marginally, as a Milanese interested in the life of his own city,

the various candidacies that were gradually hypothesized, perhaps simply launched as *ballons d'essai*. There was the prefect Achille Serra, the first name that circulated among the center-right, and initially the most accredited, though who knows how Berlusconi felt about that.

Even before that, they had formalized the candidacy of another businessman, but for the Ulivo coalition, Aldo Fumagalli, former president of the young industrialists of Confindustria.

It seemed paradoxical that the center-left would put up an entrepreneur for the mayoral race of the nation's economic and industrial capital, while the center-right – that is, the liberal coalition, which presumed to represent the values of business, was unable to find an analogous candidate.

*Did your ears start to burn?*

Not even remotely. Nothing could have been further from my mind than the idea that someone might consider me for Palazzo Marino. But let me tell you a funny story in this regard, again from the irrepressible President Cossiga in an interview he gave a few days after my candidacy was announced to the late journalist Daniele Vimercati on Telelombardia.

Comparing the two businessman candidates for the opposing sides of the mayoral race, he predicted my victory with very kind words about me, and compared Aldo Fumagalli to Philippe Égalité, prince of Orléans, cousin of King Louis XVI, who sided with the revolutionaries during the French Revolution, but was beheaded by them in the end because he was anomalous, out of place. His presence among them would have turned out to be inappropriate.

*So when exactly did you first catch wind of Berlusconi's proposal to nominate you?*

I first learned of it from the press.

*You mean to say you read it in the newspaper?*

That's right. But let's go back a moment to that long parade of candidacies. There was another Moratti, Massimo<sup>7</sup>. There was Carlo Sangalli, president of the Milan Chamber of Commerce and of the Milan accountants' union, Ennio Presutti, former chief of IBM Italia and outgoing president of Assolombarda, the dean of the Politecnico Adriano De Maio, former director of *Il Sole 24 Ore* Salvatore Carrubba, who would become Councillor for Culture during my two terms (resigning polemically during the second, in 2005, with a year to go), and another famous journalist or two.

Then one day I happened to glimpse a headline in the *Corriere della Sera*. "Berlusconi proposes Albertini as a candidate", it read. And for an instant, before moving on to read the summary, I thought 'Wow, what a bizarre and courageous choice – nominating a footballer from A.C. Milan, Demetrio Albertini. Great midfielder, a 'senator' from the 'invincibili' era, certainly popular and well-known'. It struck me as a reckless choice, but as a fan of Milan, I wasn't complaining.

Then I read the summary and saw "The president of Federmeccanica...". I rubbed my eyes and looked again. It was still there. 'Well', I thought, dumbfounded, 'since I won't be here anymore, at least as far as I know, the other Albertini can be president of Federmeccanica...'.

A few moments later I ran into my brother Carlo, who worked with me in the family business and we took the car to go find some lunch. Carlo picked up the newspaper, saw the headline and asked me in a tone of mixed wonder and perplexity, "So you're going to run for mayor of Milan?!"

---

<sup>7</sup> Massimo Moratti (1945); Italian businessman, brother of Gian Marco. CEO of Saras Raffinerie Sarde S.p.a. and owner of Sarlux, a company that extracts electrical energy from the heavy oils resulting from the refining process; president of Inter football club.

I replied, embarrassed and almost stuttering, that I knew nothing about it. "I think it's just one of those jokes that circulate around press rooms. The journalists know they're looking for a Milanese entrepreneur, they know that I have a good relationship with Confalonieri because we're on the Confindustria executive board together, and that I have an excellent relationship with Romiti... Someone must have put two and two together and come up with a name. I, however, know nothing about it".

*How much time was left till the election?*

Very little, because all this took place in January of '97. Naturally I was instantly assailed by phone calls, mostly from journalists. I couldn't pretend nothing had happened, I had to clarify that I had no knowledge of that story. I did an interview with the *Corriere*, which was published with the explicit title, "Refused again".

I explained to the interviewer, an excellent journalist named Venanzio Postiglione, the reasons why I was declining Berlusconi's invitation, which by the way had still not been either formally or informally made to me personally: one, my disinclination toward politics, and two, the commitment I had made to my business colleagues to conclude the collective labor contract negotiations and to finish my term as president.

The interview came out the next day, and sometime around 8 am, my office phone rang and I heard my secretary announce, with a tone somewhere between incredulousness and consternation of someone who doesn't believe their ears, "It's... it's Berlusconi!" She passed me the phone, and after the usual pleasantries I said to him, "I'm sorry, I had to give an interview. I knew nothing and was being inundated by questions. I had to say something...". And he replied, polite as can be, "Naturally, you found out about it from the

newspaper and responded through the newspaper, what else could you do?».

*Did you already know each other?*

We had met just once before, on a semi-official occasion in '94 during his first term as Prime Minister, a lunch with the executive board of Assolombarda. There were perhaps twenty of us at the table, the usual questions, answers, jokes, chit-chat.

I remember that Berlusconi had made a strong impression on me, fascinated me almost. But frankly I don't think he even noticed me at that lunch, and if he did the only reason he would have to remember me is that I asked for an autograph on behalf of a friend, a huge fan of A.C. Milan. I handed him a pen and a card, telling him my friend's name, Giorgio Longhi aka Pepe, with whom my brother and I still today occasionally go to the stadium to see Milan play.

Anyway, that morning phone call marked the beginning of the development of our relationship which led to that first letter I told you about, and to the reasons for my initial reluctance, and then to my acceptance of the candidacy on February 28 1997 and my election as mayor of Milan.

*A quick word about the campaign?*

It was, I believe, one of the least expensive in the history of the city. We spent less than seven hundred million lire, or 350 thousand euros, all from fund raising – that is, small bills donated by friends and supporters.

But it was also one of the most exhausting periods of my life. If we succeeded in the end, a good part of the credit goes to the hard work of my old friend Aldo Scarselli, who coordinated the campaign. He then remained by my side throughout my entire time in Palazzo Marino, as Chief of Staff during my first term and Director of Communication during the second.

## My friend Indro

*Your election benefited in no small way from the explicit endorsement of Indro Montanelli. Your relationship with him was odd, in that he had broken with Berlusconi back in '93 and left the newspaper he had founded, Il Giornale. Yet he backed Berlusconi's candidate for Palazzo Marino, and from this there grew a great friendship between you.*

My relationship with Montanelli was a unique experience on several levels – human, existential and cultural. This is why, I admit it, I did everything possible to ensure that his memorial monument, a beautiful statue by Vito Tongiani placed at the entrance to the Via Palestro Gardens (already dedicated to him) just a few meters from where he was wounded by the Red Brigades, was inaugurated before the end of my first term.

Montanelli's friendship marked me and changed me. Not only because of the powerful influence that the personality of the great journalist exerted on me – and he was surely the greatest of the 20th century in Italy, not to mention a master of unparalleled wisdom and substance – but also because, when I compare the way things were when Indro was still alive to the period following his passing, I realize the extraordinary role he played as both a trusted advisor and promoter of my image and my work during those years.

Not just in direct form – that is, through what he wrote about me – but also through the moral and intellectual influence that he exerted on a large part of public opinion, on the world of information and culture, and even on politics and government; a sort of ‘super-director’, the unrivaled doyen of all newspaper editors.

Which leaves us to wonder why Montanelli would have chosen to cultivate, or better, adopt someone like me – I prefer ‘adopt’ because I like to consider myself his spiritual and moral progeny, and I feel justified in doing so, having spoken openly with him about this ‘auto-adoption’, which he approved.

*One does wonder why an ornery fellow like Montanelli chose you, of all people. Perhaps it's because you're ornery as well?*

Perhaps. I think the reasons become clearer if we consider the whole history of our relationship. We first met in the *Corriere della Sera* headquarters in Via Solferino for one of the three interviews he was doing with the three mayoral candidates – Formentini, the incumbent from the Lega Nord<sup>1</sup>, Aldo Fumagalli of the Ulivo<sup>2</sup>, and myself, the center-right candidate.

What surprised me most was his silence. He studied me attentively, as though he wished to understand not just what I was saying but what I may have been communicating with my eye movements and facial expressions. This behavior unsettled me, and in a certain sense embarrassed me, for I had understood him to be, as a good Tuscan, a man of concise,

<sup>1</sup> Lega Nord (“Northern League”, 1989); political party combining a number of autonomist movements, prevalently from the north of Italy, with incidental instances of adhesion from central Italy. The main issues on the Lega’s agenda are the constitution of a federal State, the preservation of local cultures, the redistribution of political power toward the regions of the north and away from Rome.

<sup>2</sup> 1995; coalition of several left- and center-leaning parties conceived by Romano Prodi, which constituted the parliamentary majority from 1996 to 2001.

sometimes caustic, but always effective words. Instead he let me speak the entire time, asking few questions, offering fewer comments, mostly just listening to me.

I recall that each of the three candidates were summarily and pitilessly portrayed by his pungent, dazzling prose. For Formentini, he used an expression at once peremptory and dismissive, a sort of “Radames, justify yourself!”. “If, after these first four years,” wrote Montanelli, “you wish to finally know the Formentini who until now you have never known or even seen, vote for him again”. He basically branded the incumbent mayor as a lay-about, a petit bourgeois who pumped himself up with the title without actually accomplishing anything.

The portrait was dead-on, and is confirmed by the amusing yet disconcerting account, told to me by a person who was present, of his taking possession of the mayor’s office immediately after his election. When he sat for the first time at the desk of Milan’s ‘first citizen’, in the office overlooking Piazza San Fedele, he leaned back in the chair, grabbed the armrests firmly and said, “I feel like Pancho Villa”.

It is significant that as soon as he sat in the mayor’s chair, the first thing that came to mind was to compare himself to a Mexican revolutionary populist who had finally conquered the palace of power, betraying a basic nature and a vision of the job completely different, for example, than mine.

*What was the first thing that came to your mind when you first sat in that chair?*

That it was terribly uncomfortable, and that I would not be able to work in it. In fact, I remember that the first impression I had upon sitting at my lovely mayor’s desk in an 18th-century armchair was intolerable discomfort. I thought, there is no way that I’m going to spend hours each day talking, reading, telephoning and signing truckloads of documents in this terrible chair”.



I spoke with my friend Michele Perini, who later became president of Assolombarda, Fiera Milano and the Museum of Science and Technology, then owner of a company that manufactured excellent office furniture. With his usual hasty Milanese politeness and punctuality, Michele immediately had an ergonomic chair sent to my office, certainly less noble and charged with history than the original, but infinitely more comfortable, where one could work for hours without destroying one's spine.

Naturally, what seemed to me a personal, practical and otherwise irrelevant furnishing decision, particularly from the political standpoint, immediately become the subject of polemical debate, instigated by the city council minority, and at that point I instantly understood the kind of opposition they intended to practice.

Basilio Rizzo, perhaps the most ferociously and vainly moralistic overzealous city councilman, a man from the faction of the extreme left made up of those who had taken part in the events of 1968, called for an investigation to determine if my chair had been purchased with city funds, which for him would have evidently represented misuse.

Needless to say, even if it had been purchased with public funds, it wasn't wasteful, as the people of Milan had given me the mandate to spend four years seated at that desk. In any case, I had no trouble proving, with all the proper documentation, that I had simply received a gift.

In my view, this 'revolutionary violence' perpetrated with the instruments of political debate and bureaucratic procedure is not much different from what Rizzo and his comrades were doing thirty years earlier, when, with a little more hair and little less belly, they instigated acts of intolerance, at times physical, against those who didn't think like them. The assassins of Sergio Ramelli belonged to the *Avanguardia*

Operaia and came from the Faculty of Physics, and this gentleman was an exponent of that same organization.

Their current moralism, that of continually pointing an accusatory finger and shouting ‘thieves’, when considered alongside the violence they preached and practiced in ’68, strongly recalls the bloody ‘morality’ of the Jacobins, the Red Guards of Mao and Pol Pot.

*Weren't we talking about Montanelli?*

Of course, let's get back to that. He didn't like the candidate from the center-left, Fumagalli, either. He described him as a “teacher's pet”, and considered him a vain man who was drawn to power and prestige, whether out of ambition or narcissism.

I'm not sure which of these two motivations is more dangerous, but both of them are a far cry from the only true reason why anyone should assume certain responsibilities and run certain risks, and that is, like it or not, a willingness to commit oneself to the greater good.

As usual, I must agree with Montanelli. While personal ambition leads a man to think mostly, if not exclusively in terms of his own benefit and success – a narcissistic motivation for sure, but which can nevertheless produce good things – a man driven solely by vanity cannot possibly do this job well. And I can say this after having done this job for all these years, knowing the weight of responsibility, effort and worry that comes with it. The fear of making a mistake, of failing to do the right thing. Perhaps in good faith, if one is honest.

*And you are honest?*

Yes, frankly I am. And I say so neither presumptuously nor immodestly. It's not like claiming to be brilliant or handsome or fascinating, and in fact I would never claim to be any of those things. Honesty is not a gift of nature to be

flaunted, nor to deflect with coquetry, but a specific act of will, a choice one makes from moment to moment. It is a conscious behavior, of which we are fully in control.

In sum, you know if you're honest no matter what happens. Just as the dishonest man, in the bottom of his heart, and perhaps not even so far down, knows that he's dishonest.

Even Renato Vallanzasca<sup>3</sup>, the most famous Milanese gangster of the 1970s, referring to himself, sustains that the delinquent knows perfectly well that he's a delinquent, and that no one is forcing him into it. This is why "bel René", as the chroniclers of the time called him, has always rejected any form of sociological or psychological justification for his acts with impatient sarcasm. I remember when a journalist asked him if he considered himself a victim of society, to which Vallanzasca scornfully replied, "Don't give me that bullshit!".

However, honesty is not enough. Going back to our point, Fumagalli, who is surely an honest man, was unable to win over Montanelli, who saw him as a vain know-it-all, more invested in external appearance than in the concreteness of responsibility, who wished to come across as intelligent and capable rather than simply wanting to do the job well. Indro didn't like this, in part because vanity has no place in his Calvinist views, in part because it offended his sense of good taste, his innate preference for understatement.

*So he was left to root for you.*

In fact, after he had completed all three interviews, I was the one who seemed to him least interested in being mayor.

---

<sup>3</sup> Renato Vallanzasca (1950); his criminal curriculum opens with his imprisonment in juvenile detention at the ripe old age of eight, followed by a turbulent career as thief and kidnapper at the helm of the Banda della Comasina, culminating in multiple homicide. His good looks, to which many women were not entirely insensitive, earned him the nickname of 'il Bel René' [Handsome René].

He observed that I had come to Via Solferino with humility, modesty, even a bit of reverence upon entering the site of the most prestigious Italian newspaper, and with a touch of annoyance at being compelled to talk about myself and my views.

“I believe”, I’ll paraphrase him here, “that if Albertini were to be elected” – he had already made his choice, even his prediction – “the people of Milan will find him invariably at his desk, working with commitment and determination on their behalf, yet always prepared to leave that desk because he really never wanted to sit there in the first place, for he had already intuited that he might end up liking it too much”. Then he drew a comparison that I still appreciate, and in this case I admit to being a bit narcissistic myself.

“Of the three ‘horses’ running for Palazzo Marino”, he wrote, “Albertini seems to me Ribot, whom no one at first glance would finger as a winner, not having the look of a great racer; who, when brought to the paddock to be shown to the cheering public, was clearly annoyed by all the clamor and attention. Ribot seemed almost lackadaisical, never showing the slightest interest in this exhibition. Then he would come out of the gate, run as he pleased, win by three lengths and then return to the stables even more annoyed than before by the acclamation of the crowd”.

I won’t deny that I’m still very proud of this equine analogy, of being compared to Ribot, the greatest Italian flat racer of all time. And during the election campaign for my second term, in April 2001, just a few months before passing away, Indro wrote me a ‘living’ epitaph – we often joked about who would write the other’s epitaph, so in order to ensure that he’d win, he wrote mine while we were both still alive. Anyway, the point is that it was basically a description of my character and my way of doing things that echoed the comparison to Ribot.

In the weeks before the election, he often wrote that, while not voting for the Casa delle Libertà, he would vote for me as mayor, and explicitly invited his readers to do the same.

To sum up, Montanelli's appreciation of me, clearly expressed in his interviews and in his "Stanze"<sup>4</sup>, was: this Albertini who doesn't want to talk about himself, who doesn't appear on the TV talk shows, for which he is criticized and perhaps even disliked, holds on to his honesty, and above all to having done what he has done honestly, for it is easy enough to be honest without accomplishing anything. What is difficult is being an honest mayor who actually gets things done.

*Why did Montanelli give you so much credit? He liked your character and your attitude toward the electoral process, ok. He believed in your honesty, fine. But why did he back you so strongly, putting himself on the line for you? Have you ever wondered about this?*

Of course I have. Indro gave a lot for me. He intervened on my behalf in the toughest and riskiest battles. He put himself on the line in the most difficult moments. In my long dispute with the traffic police corps, for example, he wrote sharp criticisms of their position which resulted in something like 500 lawsuits being filed by the *ghisa* (a Milanese word for "traffic officer",) against him. Why did he do it? I often wondered. Then I finally opted for the simplest solution: ask him directly.

At that point we were past traditional formalities, so our relationship was rather far along. In fact we had continued to use the third-person form of address for quite a while: I never would have dared to even think of taking the initia-

---

<sup>4</sup> "La Stanza di Montanelli" was a column in the *Corriere della Sera* that featured letters from readers on current events, which started out in the 1950s as "Montanelli pensa così" – 'Thus Thinks Montanelli' – and which maintained until his death, *translator's note*.

tive to move toward the more familiar form. I always called him ‘Director’, and rigorously used the third person. Then one day, during one of our lunches at his home or mine – he never liked coming to Palazzo Marino – it was he who asked me to use the familiar ‘tu’ form. “After all this time”, he said, “we can cut with the formality and start treating each other like friends”. I was so moved that I could barely reply to thank him.

*Let’s go back to when you asked Montanelli why he was so supportive of you.*

“Indro”, I decided to ask him one day, “you never said or wrote such things even about De Gasperi, and otherwise you’ve only said or written them about the dead. I’m still alive and you gratify me with this unlimited credit – you describe me as honest, capable and determined; you acknowledge my moral rigor and support me unconditionally in the most difficult circumstances, in the battles against the corporations...”.

He didn’t let me finish. “The brain”, he said, “may be wrong, but the fingertips never are”. What he meant was that he trusted his ‘epidermic’ sensibility, to use the Italian expression for his instinct about people. And apparently his fingertips told him good things about me. The same fingertips with which he hammered out his articles and essays on an Olivetti Lettera 22, his legendary typewriter which he left to me in his will, and which I conserve in a showcase in my office beneath his photograph, like a reliquary on an altar.

His fingertips told him that I was a man un beholden to power, that I wouldn’t have become overwhelmed by those psychological dynamics that are almost inevitably generated in people who suddenly find themselves inundated with both honors and responsibilities after having been torn from their known universe, their natural environment – perhaps

the petit bourgeoisie, as in the case of Formentini, who gave the impression of having allowed power to go to his head.

Montanelli liked the fact that I had my resignation letter always ready in my drawer, a sign for him of my detachment from power as an end in itself as well as my respect for the institution: I resign not because I'm angry or because I have a thorny character or because I'm cyclothymic, because it's raining or I'm depressed... No, I resign because the majority no longer respects the electoral pact. This was the reason for which I was always prepared to use that resignation letter that Montanelli liked so much. In the last 'stanza' that he dedicated to the subject in April 2001, three months before his death, he wrote the 'living' epitaph I mentioned earlier, which reads, "This apparently reticent, even humble man, who would never raise his voice or pound his fist on the table, possessed of an almost boyish naïveté – remember when he did the Valentino runway show in his underwear? – is in truth a tough man, who can be broken but does not fold, and most assuredly does not engage".

*Did the tactic of keeping the resignation letter in your drawer work?*

It's certainly not a method for governing or maintaining a litigious, even riotous majority. It's simply a way of interpreting one's own institutional role. To put a limit, a preventive barrier against the inevitable compromises.

Even though, I should say, during my first four-year term I governed with city councilors who were like soldiers, loyal and disciplined in everything they did, starting with the appointments to positions in the municipally owned companies, which are usually handled by political parties, unleashing voracious appetites and furious power struggles within the majority.

I, on the other hand, was able to make those appointments with rigorously business-based criteria, with the support of

Berlusconi, I should add. And the results of this method completely changed the scenario: already in 1998, all, and I repeat all of the municipalized companies were profitable for the first time in the history of Milan. During my second term, things went a bit differently: the relationship with the majority wasn't always fluid and easy. But that may have been due to the fact that the overall political situation, both locally and nationally, was very different.

Indro liked the fact that I responded to the institutions rather than to the parties.

And he also liked my breed of candor, of political naïveté that can sometimes seem a deliberate style, like the false modesty of the coquette, but which in my case is substantially authentic, in the sense that everyone is what they are and can't pretend to be something else for long. Montanelli wrote that, fortunately, I hadn't become 'clever'.

Moreover, one of the first pieces of advice that Berlusconi gave me was, "Try to be yourself, even at the cost of making gaffes, because that means you're sincere, and people can see sincerity. This gives value and effectiveness to what you say and do".

*Did you follow his advice?*

Without even trying, because I wouldn't have been able to act differently than what I am. To be convincing, you need to be convinced, though there are people who really know how to lie, perhaps toward good ends and with the best intentions. I am not among them. I can't even try to lie, even if the occasional fib might be in my best interest. I am not sincere by choice, but because of my absolute inability to lie. And in these terms, this isn't necessarily a virtue, particularly in politics.

But I think Indro saw in this a message of a political nature – that is, the political value of honesty and admin-



istrative transparency, particularly after the devastation of Tangentopoli, the various fiascos of the Lega Nord and innumerable other conflicts.

Have a look at this newspaper clipping that I've been carrying around since '97. It's a survey published in the *Corriere* column 'The City Asks' on the eve of the election that brought me to Palazzo Marino. "What in your view is the single most important characteristic that the next mayor must have?", the survey asks. The responses: Don't know, 1%; Experience in politics, 1.1%; Simplicity, 1.6%; Charisma, 1%, etcetera, and upward to Determination, 7.2%; Enthusiasm, desire to get things done, 10%; Reliability, 13.4%; Managerial skill, 14.3%; Concreteness, 18.6%... and lastly Honesty, 31.8%.

That's why I was elected. And that's why I was reelected. 317,000 votes in the first round of the first election, which then went to a runoff, and 497,000 for my second term, after the Milanese had 'test-driven' me for four years. It's very interesting to note that the votes garnered by the coalition that supported me in the second election were just 354,000. In other words, according to the calculations of a respected analyst of election flows, Stefano Draghi, whose own political leanings are toward the left, thanks to the write-in vote – that is, the option to vote for the mayoral candidate of one coalition and the slate of another – approximately 120,000 people, almost a third of my voters, had otherwise voted for the left.

So you see, the consensus was in large part personal, a recognition of the work I'd done in the first four years. Just as Montanelli said.

*Every friendship goes through a crisis now and then. Did that ever happen with Montanelli?*

Yes, it did. Though more a disagreement than a crisis, it happened when I, former president of Federmeccanica,

the most important industrial labor union, unofficially appointed myself as a sort of unionist for mayors and local administrators to promote an initiative aimed at raising their compensation to a level of dignity and decency.

At the time of my first election, the monthly salary of the mayor of Milan, the so-called occupational allowance, came to less than 2,000 euros before taxes, and didn't even cover reimbursement of expenses.

A negligible compensation for the head of a holding company with 40,000 employees like the City of Milan, with its municipalized companies and subsidiaries. Think about how much the president of a major corporation with 40,000 employees makes, not to mention the banking industry.

So, when I undertook this initiative, Montanelli wrote one of his 'stanzas', wherein he basically tells me, "Alright Albertini, I agree with you: it is absolutely inappropriate that the mayor of a metropolis earns less than a cook, with all due respect to cooks. But I must draw your attention to one point: it seems to me questionable and somewhat inelegant that you, a mayor, should undertake an initiative on behalf of mayors, of the very category to which you belong. An initiative from which you will benefit".

I replied that, precisely to avoid being accused of having done all this for personal gain when in fact I was trying to resolve a serious and objective problem, I would donate the increase in salary I would have received over the course of my mandate (1997-2001) to charity. Montanelli published my reply, commenting that at this point he no longer had any objections. But he seemed cold, not entirely convinced. He was waiting to see how things turned out.

The years passed, and naturally everyone forgot both his objections and my promise. Then the law which I had been instrumental in promoting was finally passed, effectively doubling the salaries of local administrators. I maintained

my promise to Indro and gave the resulting additional earnings to charity.

But at this point no one remembered the meaning behind my dealing, not even my collaborators, whom I'd asked to prepare an open letter to Montanelli testifying to the maintained promise, complete with receipts, which of course I'd procured in order to obtain the relative tax reimbursements.

I wrote to him, "Do you remember, dear Indro...?", diligently including a full accounting of the operation and all my neat little receipts.

He responded, as usual in the pages of the *Corriere della Sera*, saying that finally, in a world of people who invent truths, spin lies, conveniently forget or deflect scrutiny with a joke, this Albertini is a man who keeps his word. "I wasn't wrong", he wrote, "Albertini is not very likeable". He had said as much several times previously: "I chose Albertini because he's unlikeable" – that is, someone who goes against the popular sentiment, against the model of the glad-hander who wants to be liked by everyone at all costs because he's worried primarily about consensus rather than the collective good, and for this reason will tell you what you want to hear and then go back to protecting his own interests.

*Can I ask to whom you donated your salary increase?*

To tell that story, I must bring up a tragic human drama, one of the most heartbreaking experiences I had as mayor. It's the terrible story of a suicide, a man whose name I shall obviously withhold, who wrote to me before taking his own life.

The episode contains a whole set of values and symbols, of emotions and even strong political significance, in the noblest sense of the term – that is, the profound respect and trust that a citizen can have for a political institution in such a tragic moment.

This desperate man didn't know me personally, but I was

the mayor of his city, and I had given him the impression of being fair and honest, someone he could trust and to whom he could turn, perhaps in part as a result of the accreditation I received from the moral dignity of Montanelli and others.

Anyway, in the moment this man had decided to kill himself, he thought of his wife and a total stranger, an evident projection of his need as a citizen, as a social individual. He turned to me first of all to recount, with the sincerity that comes to us in certain extraordinary moments, the unfortunate series of events that had led him to this point, and to entrust me with his family, who were deep in debt and without any source of income.

My promise to Indro thus enabled me to respond at least in part to the extreme request of a desperate citizen of Milan who had shown faith in me, his mayor.

*Quite frankly, this doesn't seem to me a real crisis in your friendship with Montanelli. Were there other, more difficult moments?*

Perhaps the most delicate and critical moment in my relationship with Indro was when, just before the 2001 elections, there emerged the problem of admitting the Lega Nord to the majority coalition, even though the Lega had been with the opposition during my first term. I wanted to go to the polls without the party of Umberto Bossi<sup>5</sup>, eventually incorporating it into the majority afterwards. Berlusconi, on the other hand, concerned about the alliances for the political elections, wanted the Lega in the coalition for the administrative elections in Milan. This was a very turbulent situation for me, a difficult choice. After lengthy consideration, I decided to accommodate the CdL party line.

---

<sup>5</sup> Umberto Bossi (1941); founding leader of the Northern League, currently Minister of Federal Reform.

At this point, Montanelli, who was relying on me to resist, was deeply disappointed by my decision. To make sure I understood how much, he wrote certain things that hurt me terribly.

You see, Indro had never considered me to be an exponent of the Casa delle Libertà party. In his view, as he wrote in one of his 'stanzas', I could have been a candidate from the left or the right, and as such was 'ecumenical'. Because while it's true, he explained, that Albertini's name appears on the posters and ballots of the center-right, his moral uprightness, integrity, honesty and thoroughness make him a good candidate for the other side as well. He wrote that he had even invited "some of his friends from the center-left to vote for Albertini, in order to make his independence from partisan politics all the more evident and assured".

In other words, he was expecting me to 'disobey' Berlusconi. But from my perspective, as we shall perhaps see further on, it wasn't such a black and white distinction. The situation was more complicated than that. And I think that Indro knew this, but he chose to focus on whether I would or wouldn't make a grand gesture of rebellion and pride – perhaps in part because he didn't want to have to contradict the image that he had of me, and had painted to his readers.

Montanelli was also convinced that the voters of the center-right were victims of a sort of spell cast by Berlusconi, that they overestimated his abilities enormously, and that letting him govern would be enough to cure them. "Let the Italians try him out as their leader. Once they get to know him, once they have seen how he operates, they will be immunized forever".

As we know, that's not exactly how things turned out. The Berlusconi phenomenon, if we can define it as such, is far more complex, and there does exist a so-called 'moderate' electorate, independently of this phenomenon.

The fact is that Indro's judgment at the time was highly susceptible to personal issues, particularly those concerning the fate of his *Giornale*<sup>6</sup>. As for the reasons why the relationship between Montanelli and Berlusconi, for a long time excellent, took a turn for the worse, perhaps we can discuss that further on.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Il Giornale* daily newspaper based in Milan and founded in 1974 by Indro Montanelli, who was its editor-in-chief for twenty years, now in the hands of the Berlusconi family.



### 3

## Vox populi

*Perhaps the real point is this: perhaps Montanelli's reaction to your decision regarding the participation of the Lega in the coalition was his way of explaining the apparent contradiction between the esteem he had for you and his antipathy for Berlusconi, despite your both belonging to the same center-right party.*

That may be, but Montanelli embraced paradox. He loved breaking paradigms, contradicting the rules, which is typical of personalities that tend toward anarchy. Actually, I would define him as unquestionably anarchistic.

But, going back to what was perhaps our only real clash, the contested re-entry of the Lega in the majority manifested itself – in fact, it was publically opened by me – with the explicit objections made clear in my concluding remarks at the Estates General of the City of Milan of January 2001, a major conference that took stock of the first four years and paved the road for the second term.

Let me take this opportunity to open a brief parenthesis concerning that event, which I consider very significant in describing by experience as mayor of Milan.

We called the first Estates General of the city of Milan in 1998, from June 11-13, which was fourteen months into my first term. Our expressed intention was to gather input



and indications from all the current forces of the city to help guide my mandate and the work of the city councilors.

Even that first time, I met with resistance from certain councilors and several of my collaborators, who were understandably wary that the event would be exploited, that it was basically a golden opportunity for the opposition to attack us. And this resistance was much stronger when I proposed a second Estates General in 2001, at the end of my first term.

If for some the '98 conference was a form of political self-flagellation, in 2001 there were those who spoke of 'Tafazzism', evoking the famous television gag by Aldo, Giovanni and Giacomo wherein a character named Tafazzi pummels himself in the groin with a bottle.

*If I recall correctly, that's not how it went. You didn't come off as Tafazzi at all.*

Your memory is good, it went very well. This was due in part to the fact that the conference had been well prepared, preceded by two seminars behind closed doors, one a municipality meeting, the other with the majority, in Luino and Chiaravalle. But mostly it was because this was an unprecedented event that not only sparked the public's curiosity but engaged them, as well as catching the attention of the mass media and blindsiding both the official party opposition and the more surreptitious opposition of the hostile press. So, it was a great mediatic and political success.

Participants included the most authoritative institutional figures from politics, culture, the Church, academia, business and finance – from Berlusconi, then head of the opposition, to Romano Prodi, then Prime Minister; from Cardinal Martini, who opened the proceedings at the Piccolo Teatro in Largo Greppi, to Cesare Romiti; from Alberto Arbasino, Vittorio Messori and Marco Tronchetti Provera to Indro

Montanelli, Gianfranco Ravasi and Adriano De Maio<sup>1</sup> to name but a few. For there were also the directors of all major newspapers, the mayors of other Italian and foreign cities both large and small, diplomats, representatives of the most important associations and many, many others.

For the opening ceremony, we received more than 6,000 requests for the 900 places available. During those three days, 7,500 citizens attended some part of the event.

The success, if I may say so, was deserved. With that event, we sent a clear signal of our diversity, of the administrative model we intended to adopt, involving not only the institutions, big business and famous personalities, but opening the doors to the citizenry as well.

*And what was the response of Milanese public opinion?*

During his talk, the famous pollster Renato Mannheimer said that in that moment I enjoyed “an incredible popularity”, which brought with it, however, the peril of “incredible expectations”. I replied that I accepted the challenge.

*At that point you didn't really have a choice.*

True. Anyway, even though it was no longer a novelty, the Estates General of 2001 was a far more important and demanding event than the first one in '98, and it had an extraordinary resonance in the media. The most significant and innovative reason for this, in my view, as that we had prepared a massive public survey, sending out a detailed questionnaire to every Milanese citizen of voting age, 1,106,160 in all. With 23 questions, we openly asked the citizens to collaborate with us by providing an evaluation of the work

---

<sup>1</sup> Adriano De Maio (1941); engineer who was a professor, then dean at both the Politecnico di Milano and the LUISS; he is currently delegate for Advanced Training, Research and Innovation for the Region of Lombardy.

we'd done. Moreover, the questionnaire left space for proposals, ideas and personal criticisms on any issue, independent from the questions themselves.

This is another reason why the event was so severely contested by the greater part of the councillors and the advisors from the majority. Indeed, the questionnaire was the issue they contested most hotly, the one that provoked the aforementioned accusation of 'Tafazzism'. They were convinced we would receive only negative and hostile replies. "The only people who respond are those who disagree, who are prejudicially aligned with the opposition", they warned me.

Unlike in '98, the dissent from several of my collaborators was open, oftentimes bitter. I sensed our rapport could break. But in the end, once again I was vindicated, proving concretely that I'd been right to hold my ground. I could not renounce to establish contact with the citizens who hadn't voted for me, to attempt a dialogue and look for a common path toward goals which, if not necessarily shared, could at least be discussed and negotiated. In a way, however, that would enable me to decide.

The survey yielded results beyond all expectations, both for the astounding quantity of response – almost 200 thousand, as opposed to the maximum of 23 thousand predicated by the agency experts – and for the positive tone of the evaluations, truly beyond anything we could have hoped for.

This enormous mass of paper, which represented the well-known desire of the Milanese to participate in public life, independently of political alignments, was presented at the Estates General in a big Plexiglas cube, two meters each side, displayed at the entrance like a sort of totem of the people's opinions.

In addition, we received about fifteen hundred phone calls at the call center we set up, and a thousand emails. They were proposals and suggestions as well as criticisms and complaints, naturally. But sheer quantity of responses demonstrated above

all that Milan's citizens, when stimulated and invited to participate, do so on a scale beyond all expectations, putting aside a certain habitual cynicism and political apathy.

*What did they say? What did they ask for? Give us some examples.*

Everyone gave the impression of being pleased, even amazed at having their views taken into consideration by their mayor, a figure who in Milan has always been a reference point of civic life, even for national issues. One person sent a very articulate email with a number of criticisms, but he opened by thanking us for the questionnaire, adding, "For the first time, I feel like a citizen of Milan".

Then of course there were many who wanted to respond immediately to what they considered a gratifying and unprecedented initiative – and it really was –, emphasizing the method of communication between citizen and mayor, particularly since the latter accepted the risk of being criticized. But these people were applauding more the demagogic aspect of the operation more than the practical one.

Taking a random example, a Mr. Claudio M. thanked me for my "willingness to field questions from a regular citizen", while Angelo A. wrote, "I would like to assure you, dear Mayor, that even though my wife and I are inclined toward the political left, we will vote for you in the next election, because what matters is the person and what he does, not the flag he flies". Federico P. felt that it was "a good way to make citizens feel closer to the institutions". Andrea S.: "You have shown yourself to be a good administrator rather than a good politician (...). If I may say so, we are building something great and wonderful together. I am proud to be Milanese". Marco V.: "For the first time, I'm hopeful about the future of Milan". Patrizia R.: "I write to you to thank you for having restored dignity to public life (...) You are one of us". Rosanna C.: "Thanks to you, many aspects of the city have improved". And so forth.

*You're not telling me that you received only messages of praise and consensus. Someone must have taken the opportunity to express disagreement.*

Naturally. But I assure you, they were a small minority. Perhaps because for many the positive value of the initiative, of our invitation for them to voice their concerns, was prevalent.

But the majority of responses to the specific questions in the survey were also favorable regarding the work I'd done during my first term. The responses to the first question, the most general and therefore the most comprehensive – “Compared to four years ago, in general, the city of Milan in your view is...” – were as follows: Better 69.1%, Worse 13.3%, Unchanged 17.6%. The other responses were substantially in line with these. To call that a positive result would be such an understatement as to qualify as false modesty.

With this initiative, we directly involved all the citizens in the evaluation of our administrative performance and the state of the city. We asked them to tell us what they thought about Milan in detail, not simply checking off a ‘yes’ or ‘no’, leaving space to express their personal considerations in absolute freedom. An option that everyone took full advantage of, pushing their ideas outside the margins, along the sides of the page, in every available space.

With this initiative, we openly and concretely announced that ours was not the politics of the lobbies and interest groups and insiders, but the politics of the people. Not in a vainly rhetorical way, but concretely, asking them specific questions and taking their responses into consideration. It was a means of asking their assessment of our work, but also of committing ourselves publically to goals and programs.

We chose the most transparent and visible model possible to cultivate a politics of the people.

## The Northern League and me

*Earlier we talked about how your relationship with Montanelli was compromised by the inclusion of the Lega Nord in the majority at Palazzo Marino.*

As I said, while the system of alliances laid out by Berlusconi for the political elections of 2001 entailed an understanding with Bossi, I continued to insist that I wanted to go to the polls without the Lega, leaving it outside the majority and then eventually including it after the election and integrating it into the majority, which would in any case be constituted without the ‘Carroccio’ (Ed. nickname for the party, referring to a medieval war cart).

*It’s clear that your aim was to not rely on the votes of the Lega so as to avoid being continually extorted.*

Exactly. In fact, this is what I said, among other things, in my closing remarks at the Estates General of 2001, directly and publically addressing Berlusconi, who was in the audience. “There is one final consideration I must make, in keeping with what I said four years ago to the voters. In the spirit of service, I asked for the vote of the Milanese people in order to realize a program. Today, my campaign for a sec-

ond term can only resume from that same program, from the point it has reached as of today, in order to then bring it to conclusion in a defined and adequate timeframe.

"This is why", I concluded, "I believe that if shall be this mayor to once again ask the voters for their trust, it must also be the same majority to support him. The contribution of the Lega, I am certain, will be a positive reinforcement".

"Not only do I hope so, but I will also work hard to make it so. But this will be better and more concretely achieved after the election, with the direct involvement in the city administration of all the political forces that wish to share in the program of good government for the next five years".

Clear, no? In Milan, I observed, we won in '97 as the Polo and we governed – well, I think, given the results of the survey – as the Polo<sup>1</sup>, without the Lega Nord. Now, the political landscape has changed, things are changing for the governing majority, the Lega has realigned with Berlusconi at the national level, and the Polo has become the Casa delle Libertà. Which is all fine. However, we in Milan will proceed with our program and with the majority that has brought us to this point. The Lega can eventually join us after the elections. We are not refusing or rejecting the Lega, we are simply saying that if, till now, the Lega has always opposed our program, so it makes no sense to join up with us for the elections. It will be welcome afterwards, spontaneously and unconditionally, to join our project. The subtext, of course, is that we want to be able to do without their votes.

This position of mine, voiced publically at such an important event as the Estates General and in the presence of Berlusconi, naturally provoked an intense reaction of ferocious polemics, accusations, threats of secession – all of this thanks in part to the many journalists who were rubbing fistfuls of salt into the wound.

---

<sup>1</sup> Polo (1994); the Polo delle Libertà was a center-right coalition created to support Silvio Berlusconi in the 1994 elections.

The objective of the ‘guardians of the gate’ of the *Corriere della Sera* and other newspapers...

*The ‘guardians of the gate’?*

The journalists, the keepers of the Fourth Estate, those who guard and regulate access to information and decide what should be known and what shouldn’t, and by which terms. Sometimes with the complicity of their editors, sometimes operating autonomously on the basis of ideological and political prejudices, or of the labor union dynamics of their own newsroom. So yes, the ‘guardians of the gate’.

The case of the *Corriere della Sera* is at once paradigmatic and, in a certain sense, extreme. Exploiting its traditional reputation as a newspaper with an ‘Anglophone’ rigor, as the solemnly bombastic mouthpiece of the enlightened Lombardian ruling class, it manages to insinuate content and messages into this decisive demographic that in reality are foreign, indeed hostile to the traditions and values of the bourgeoisie.

Those ‘guardians of the gate’ had openly supported me during my first term, perhaps because they objectively recognized my merit, certainly because of the strong moral influence of Montanelli.

But above all because they wanted to use me as a wedge, or a skeleton key within the Polo. “This Albertini is a friend of Borrelli<sup>2</sup>, he’s on the side of the magistrates, so we can use him against Berlusconi. He attacks De Carolis who’s on his own team; he makes appointments to the privatizations with absolute autonomy, thereby making enemies within the parties of his majority, etc. If we exploit him well, he can create problems for the center-right”.

---

<sup>2</sup> Francesco Saverio Borrelli (1930); former magistrate, worked in Milan for the entirety of his 40-year career. He was head of the pool of magistrates involved in the ‘Clean Hands’ inquest, which sought to uncover the system of corruption and illegal party financing that came to light in the 1990s.



For them, I was a sort of splitting force in the center-right. Many thought (and wrote), for example, that in order to run for a second term I could organized a civil list outside the Polo. In sum, for certain “professional revolutionaries” – according to the Leninist and Gramscian definition – of the Milanese newsrooms, I could have served as their unwitting instrument, “objectively allied”, to say it in Togliattian terms, a “useful idiot”, oblivious to the mess he was making.

“We’ll pump him up”, they reasoned, “to make him grow so that he proceeds along this path until, like the frog in the fable who swells up to the point of bursting, but with such thundering violence as to do as much damage as possible to his friends”. Montanelli himself warned me: “They’ll prop you up as long as you serve their purposes, after which they’ll drop you and let you go”. Though perhaps Indro was referring to certain ‘friends’ of the center-right.

*How does this tie into your desire to go to the 2001 election for your second term without the Lega?*

Well, it was precisely then that it became clear how my positions were exploited by the ‘guardians of the gate’ to create problems in the coalition.

I remember an article by Francesco Merlo from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, on the front page of the *Corriere della Sera* no less, entitled *Il sindaco che non Lega* (Ed. A clever pun that conflates *Lega*, as in the Northern League, with the verb *legare*, to bind), where I was praised for my autonomy, my foresight and my political lucidity because I allegedly understood that a modern, cosmopolitan city like Milan couldn’t stoop to the localistic mentality of Lega strongholds like Clusone, Comerio, the province of Bergamo or Varese.

In short, a manipulative and frankly off-target expression of support that could have caused me embarrassment if my conscience hadn’t been completely clear.

It was in that situation, in that climate, that the most serious crisis in my relationship with Montanelli arose, even though he had actively participated in the Estates General with a speech that was generous, affectionate and even flattering with regard to me. A speech in which, to underscore a presumed ‘anomaly’ of mine, he went so far as to invite me to practice civil disobedience if necessary, to follow the example of Gandhi. To which his crusty Tuscan nature compelled him to add, “You even look quite a lot like him”.

But when in the end, obligated to consider the general political conditions and my loyalty to Berlusconi, I struck an agreement with him and Bossi, which I’ll talk about later, Indro wrote one of his ‘stanzas’ in the harshest of tones, wherein he strongly reprimanded me for having compromised and taken sides – for having acted like a slick politician, essentially – and he invited me to resign.

*So that was the crisis.*

Yes, and a very painful one for me. But I didn’t respond. I couldn’t bring myself to polemicize with Indro. What’s more, before he wrote that angry article, I had phoned him to explain the sense of the agreement with Bossi and Berlusconi, but he replied with conspicuous coldness, with the tone of someone who feels deeply disappointed, even betrayed. So I was prepared for the blow.

There was however a response published in the *Corriere*, a letter from Stefano Parisi, who had been the General Director of the Municipality of Milan for the greater part of my first term and was then summoned by Antonio D’Amato, then president of Confindustria, to be the general director there, so at that point he was out of the Palazzo Marino loop.

It was a good letter, wherein Parisi essentially recounted his experience governing with us as being characterized by fairness, coherency and modernity, as well as realism and

rational thinking. He explained that we were not moralistic or idealistic crusaders, but concrete, determined and lucid administrators who wanted to do things right, always willing to put everything completely on the line, starting with the permanence of our political positions.

The great Indro replied with what quite frankly seemed to me a back flip, giving the impression of having stumbled into some sort of distortion, perhaps the fruit of misunderstandings or of fraudulent advice from the usual 'guardians of the gate' – which is the hypothesis that seems most likely to me. Perhaps because of an excess of the non-conformism that defined his contradictory character, or perhaps simply because he couldn't wait to cut himself loose from a relationship which, though it endured at the level of friendship and mutual esteem, had perhaps begun to cause him political discomfort, above all because of his hostility towards Berlusconi.

*How did you repair your relationship with Montanelli, who was so important to you and – let's face it – useful as well, and with that demographic of demanding and intransigent readers/voters that he represented?*

With a governing program of mine called 'Pact With the Milanese People', a copy of which I sent to Indro, complete with the signatures of Bossi and Berlusconi and relative documentation. Both the leader of the coalition and the chief of the Lega accepted and undersigned my program, independently of alliances.

At that point, how could Montanelli have continued to maintain that I had abandoned that hard line of Calvinist rigor and uncompromising coherency? How could he still suspect that I, too, bent to compromise, that I made 'unnatural' alliances with those who didn't think like me only for my own gain, that I sacrificed my principles in the struggle for power, that I prioritized political appearances over

substance? The genesis of that document was very tortuous. Before obtaining the signatures for the Pact With the Milanese People', I was no longer technically a candidate.

I snubbed Berlusconi, who continued trying to get in touch. I wrote him letters instead to explain my position – bordering, quite frankly, on rudeness – telling him several times that I would pack my bags if Bossi in particular failed to sign the document by a certain date. Berlusconi's signature, I assumed, was a given.

I later asked the individual city council candidates from every party to sign as well.

The Pact was completely in order, right down to authenticated signatures of the councilors and the formal signing before a notary.

Faced with this, Montanelli had no choice but to finally restore to me his trust. Needless to say, I was very happy.

*So your Pact With the Milanese People came before the Contract With Italy with which Berlusconi won the national election shortly thereafter. Was it you who gave him the idea?*

I don't know. I consider Berlusconi the most brilliant communicator of our time, but I like to think that it was I who gave him the idea of undersigning a pact with the voters. An idea which must have impressed him, given that he then signed his own Contract With the Italian People.



*Given the importance for you of your friendship with Montanelli, how did you resolve the notorious problem of the relationship between the journalist, Berlusconi and Il Giornale. The altercation, the public polemics, the founder-director's abandonment of his beloved creation, his subsequent founding of the short-lived and ferociously anti-Berlusconi Voce... Wasn't that awkward for you, given your relationships with both of them?*

Berlusconi let me read the minutes of the editorial assembly to which he'd been invited – it's not true, as some alleged, that he showed up of his own accord. Nor is it true that he ever 'blackmailed' Montanelli by threatening to deny him the funding for the technological upgrading of the newspaper, the renewal of the press, the restructuring of the building, etc. if he refused to give Berlusconi his support.

Anyway, there is nothing of the sort contained in those minutes. If anything, they exude a great respect for the "immense Indro", who Berlusconi considered "a second father". Those are his words.

*In fact, as far as I know it was Montanelli himself who opposed the technological upgrading of his newspaper. And I'm also quite sure that he had been thinking about founding a*

*new daily paper since at least 1990. In '91 he started a series of reserved meetings with his most trusted editors, including several from the union-based editorial committee, and he had also begun to make discreet offers to outsiders. I know, because he made an offer to me.*

I was unaware of this aspect. Why was Montanelli planning to start up another newspaper?

*The fact is that Montanelli knew perfectly well that his Giornale was selling less and less. He had his loyal readers who loved him personally and bought the paper just to read his editorials, but he wasn't winning any new readers. There was a cruel joke circulating among Milanese journalists to explain the situation: they said that the drop in sales of Il Giornale was due to "natural causes" – that is, the steady extinction of its largely elderly readership.*

*Montanelli also knew that the financial situation was at risk. So perhaps he wanted to close down for a positive and prestigious reason before disaster struck so as to lose neither face nor his directorship. Maybe he was looking for a noble pretext, in other words.*

I remember that an editor who had an excellent personal rapport with Montanelli, knowing my devotion to 'the master', sent me the documentation of a lawsuit that the editorial staff who – as she herself had done – had left the paper to follow their director was filing against the publisher.

The objective was compensation for dismissal for just cause, which the journalists' contract stipulates when a publication completely changes its political stance. They were preparing for the brief adventure of *La Voce*, a daily that was violently hostile to the first Berlusconi government of 1994, but which would only survive for a few weeks.

The premise of their position was that Berlusconi had entered politics to protect his own interests, and that Montanelli had abandoned *Il Giornale* because he did not

share this choice and feared that his creation would become an instrument of the politics of the paper's publisher, thus losing his independence.

Today I have the impression that the crisis of my relationship with Montanelli – *La Voce* had already folded and Indro had gone back to 'his' *Corriere* – over the expansion of the center-right majority to include the Lega Nord, as Berlusconi wanted, was in some way sparked and then fed by certain collaborators of his that had his ear; by those who, for reasons of the affection and esteem that is generated over years of working together, had a lot of credibility, some of whom had followed him to *La Voce*.

Indro was certainly not easily influenced, but like all highly intelligent individuals, he listened to the people he trusted. And in fact he demonstrated his complete intellectual autonomy when, after we signed the 'Pact With the Milanese People', he acknowledged that "Albertini is not a politician like the others", he doesn't play the political games whereby they invent situations of consensus or conflict, they argue and pose as adversaries but then, when it comes time to divide up the power, to exploit the opportunities resulting from the game, they find an accord.

In fact, the Pact signed by Bossi was such a rigorous and binding commitment that it justified accepting as allies even people who had shown themselves in the past to be treacherous. That signature made it possible to give them credit until they proved they didn't deserve it. So much so that Berlusconi then signed the famous Contract With the Italian People, signing it on television during an unforgettable broadcast of Bruno Vespa's<sup>1</sup> *Porta a Porta* in front of millions of viewers, enlisting the same majority.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bruno Vespa (1944); Italian journalist, author and television host. Director of TG1 in the early '90s, then creator and emcee of *Porta a Porta* since 1996.



*To your credit, if in fact we're dealing with credit?*

I'm not saying that, but it's important to recall that the first 'pact', or 'contract' with voters that Berlusconi sponsored was with the people of Milan, who had to vote for him as well, since he was at the top of the slate for the city council. And allow me to also recall that he did so only after the pressure I put on him and the firm stance I took during that episode, as demonstrated by the correspondence between Berlusconi and myself at the time. In short, he did it on my 'instigation'.

All this to say that perhaps Indro saw in that situation my stubborn coherency, expressed through the determination and perhaps even the recklessness of opposing the highest power in the land, the man who had in a certain sense 'invented' me as the mayor of Milan, and to whom I'd always been very loyal. So coherent to have been prepared to leave my prestigious post at Palazzo Marino<sup>2</sup>. Montanelli eventually acknowledged this extreme coherency, and I think he was happy to do so.

Moreover, my behavior, at once obstinate and realistic, was none other than a manifestation, an aspect of the principles of business applied to governing, which Berlusconi himself had encouraged me to do, in the sense of prioritizing programs and getting things done over the arcane alchemy of partisan politics.

It is the opposite of the situation in which public officials, once elected – from *ex-ligo*, i.e., "mustered", "called up" – think they can invent a reality that doesn't exist; that they can dupe their fellow citizens; that they can be so deft and clever as to make people think they're on board with their program while avoiding the tiring and often bumpy path, lined on all sides with dissent, both specific and general, that one must walk when one has to make a decision.

---

<sup>2</sup> Palazzo Marino (1557-1563); designed by Galeazzo Alessi, it was the residence of the wealthy Marino banking family. Since 1861 it has been the governmental seat of the Municipality of Milan.

Public governance means making choices, and no matter which choice you make, it inevitably generates losses, sacrifices and pain – in fact, ‘decide’ derives from a Latin verb that means ‘to cut’, ‘to separate’, and as such means blood and tears. Trying to satisfy every interest by keeping them together on the same plane, without choosing, without deciding, is the very definition of non-action. The concept of ‘mediation’ also has a telling Latin root – it is a middle road, neither here nor there, half of what is necessary.

In order for an engine to be efficient, it must produce motion in spite of its inherent attrition. The engine becomes inefficient when attrition absorbs the greater part of the energy required to produce motion. Obviously, one must accept a certain degree of attrition because it is an incontrovertible law of physics (and, in this analogy, of politics). But there is a moment, when the attrition is absorbing most of the energy produced, that the engine overheats and eventually breaks. You can’t beat attrition without producing significantly greater motion. The same applies to public governance, where you can’t spend all your energy regulating conflicts and contradictions without producing significant concrete results that are useful and beneficial to the citizens. This is one of the main responsibilities of those who govern.

*But attrition and conflict are in the very nature of things, whether mechanical or political. Don’t be such an extremist, a Calvinist...*

I am by no means an extremist. I know perfectly well that a certain degree of attrition and conflict are inevitable. It’s a question of quantity. You have to set limits, to be defined on a case-by-case basis. You accept the attrition up to that point, after which you don’t. These are choices that must be made by combining common sense and coherency.

My decision to live my political life with my resignation letter always within reach is an idea I came up with along with Indro, who repeatedly told me, “You are not bound to that throne of power because you never wanted to sit there, and it’s uncomfortable. However, as long as you’re here, if you want to do something useful, then put yourself on the line”. And I did put myself on the line. I always saw myself as ready to leave at any moment.

I like to tell a story about frog behavior, because I see myself in that frog and have often wondered at which temperature I would jump out of the water – or, going back to the analogy of the engine, if the attrition wouldn’t already be absorbing all the energy. Up to what point would I still be reasonable? Until when would it still be useful to invest in reducing the attrition, and at which point should I start worrying because the attrition is already blocking the motion and therefore recognize that it’s time to stop the engine and replace it – pulling my resignation letter out of the drawer – rather than continuing to oil the gears or tighten the drive belts.

*So tell us the frog story.*

If a frog jumps into a pot of boiling water, he immediately jumps back out and survives. But apparently if you put the poor creature in a pot of cold water and then place it over a low flame, the frog doesn’t perceive the gradual increase in temperature. When he finally does feel it, he finds it pleasant at first and remains there, certain that it will become cold again, cold being the only water temperature he’s ever known in his natural state. So he waits. The heat begins to make him uncomfortable, but in the meantime has lulled him into a torpor.

Confused and weakened, the frog hopes emptily that the water will be cold again, but the temperature rises, and with it dizziness, then genuine pain, but at this point he no longer has the strength to jump out of the pot. Needless to say,

the frog is boiled to death, which is very similar to what happens in politics when you accept the premise of continuous compromise, day after day. It may be pleasant initially, like the frog's early sensation of warmth, because it so closely resembles success. It gives you the feeling of resolving problems while avoiding making too many enemies...

*Until you end up poached.*

Exactly. This is what often happens in the final phase of a political or administrative mandate, when – as Freud said with regard to the stages of regression – everyone retreats back to the territory they know best, and can best control. Each returns to his *particolare* (his own little domain: *particolare* is a word used by Francesco Guicciardini in his *Ricordi*, no. 28, meaning “self interest”) thinking only of his political legacy, scraping the barrel of consensus by listening to the demands and protests of individuals and groups even when they run counter to his own political and administrative actions. Disagreement becomes potentially transformable into consensus, and he attempts to appropriate it, thus reinforcing it.

If this behavior is generalized and repeated, clearly the government is no longer governing in the end, and there was a risk of precisely this in certain moments of my second term. I had to ask the government for the powers of special commissioner for traffic and environmental emergencies because in such a complex and conflicted situation, it proved to be ungovernable.

It's the classic situation where everyone is an armchair coach, in this case traffic experts. Everyone wants their car parked, possibly for free, in front of their house, but then cry foul when a tree is cut down to build underground parking. Everyone wants free parking in front of the grocery store or their workplace – excluding, of course, everyone else's cars, which are considered bothersome, intrusive and illegitimate.

*It's true. Everyone wants to circulate and park freely, yet they are irritated by everyone else, even hostile – 'Get off the road, you're using up my space!'.*

It's the taxi driver syndrome, where each wants the roads, indeed the entire city for himself alone, so as to be able to circulate without traffic. In these conditions, I requested and obtained commissarial powers, basically an elective dictatorship: a half million votes and special authority over two extremely important sectors, traffic and the environment.

In the moments when one fears a reduction of consensus, these protests, neither latent nor widespread but nonetheless acute, each one minor perhaps, but when added up they create panic and paralysis in the career politician. Particularly when emphasized by the print media, the instrument of reference for all professional politicians. It is no accident, nor a vice, that they all walk around with those enormous stacks of newspapers under their arm. Unfortunately they don't have the time to watch all the television news programs, which would require their exclusive attention. And in any case, you can't carry around a television under your arm; otherwise they would.

So they live in a constant state of *interna corporis* – that is, 'amongst ourselves' – politicians and journalists, writing and being written about, declaring and quoting, responding and commenting, insinuating and denying. 'Did you read my interview?', 'I read your statements', 'How did you like my article?', and so on. All taking place within this small clique of just a few thousand people, everyone for or against this or that, it really doesn't matter much.

It's clear that one must listen to everyone and make an effort to satisfy everyone – it can be useful in that it relieves the tension of expectations. But it's impossible. We're in the phase where the frog thinks the water will cool back down, even because all the information collected by listening to

everyone often leads to the deluded belief that political/administrative action can be reasonably correct.

But it's not true, at least not always. For the same reason that the cumulative knowledge of ten thousand ignoramuses doesn't add up to wisdom, the sum of personal interests does not constitute the collective interest.

There are situations where we know we must change certain legitimate but damaging habits, like quitting smoking or going on a diet. We suffer in the process, but accept that it is for a greater and more advantageous result. Or, if you prefer, it's an investment: I deprive myself of something today so I will have more tomorrow. This is how a good politician should think: I renounce an assumed micro-consensus today for the greater good tomorrow.

Instead, in certain phases – let's say at the end of a term –, these fibrillations are unleashed and politicians suddenly give their full attention and maximum credit to their electorate, even to their single, perhaps imagined voters. They make a show of being sensitive to individual cases, which are perhaps irrelevant but which can spark serious tension. Obviously, this ends up breaking down the entire system.

Returning for a moment to regression, in order to explain this type of neurosis, Freud uses the example of the Roman Empire, which had expanded as far as Brittany, Mesopotamia, the Black Sea, the Atlantic Ocean. Then it began to feel the pressure of the barbarians (the equivalent in the case of the individual of a traumatic event like serious bafflement, divorce, dismissal, the death of a child). Responding to this pressure, the Roman armies (i.e. the individual psyche) gradually retreated to establish more secure positions until the Empire dissolved and Rome was reduced to its original geographic proportions. Without the powerful vital force that had made it great, it folded back upon itself. Thus does man regress to infancy until the psychotic

limit of closing himself off in the maternal womb, spending all day in bed in the fetal position.

Likewise, in the final end-of-term phase, full of excitement, regressive behavior pushes the politician towards his origins, but not the origins of his political program, his enthusiasm and his creative drift. No, it brings him back to that originary feeble spark of consensus, which he seeks in order to hoard it along with others, as if it were a free and neutral resource. But it's not, because an excess of attention to the diversified protest of the electorate leads to the failure of the program he was elected to implement, and consequently to the total and definitive punishment by his voters.

*Are you referring to the infighting of the majority coalition, your majority?*

The litigiousness of governing coalitions is despicable and unacceptable, but perhaps inevitable. In any case, it must be resolved from within. Not necessarily because one shouldn't air one's dirty laundry, but because conflict should not be exploited by exposing it in order to gain consensus. Once they're made public, internal conflicts will be exacerbated, fueled by the actions of vested third parties, and go unresolved.

The political leadership, in whatever form it takes, including a governing majority, must convey an idea of solidity, cohesion, and security.

It is the opposition that can and must attack from all sides, using all possible arguments, including contradictory and incoherent ones, even to the point of creating internal rifts if necessary. In a democracy, the opposition has this privilege – and a privilege it is indeed, in the sense that it is the more comfortable position –, whereas the main duty of those who govern is to realize their program, honor their commitments and achieve their established goals. And to do this, internal cohesion is indispensable.

## From Martini to Giuliani

*We've talked about your friendship with Montanelli, but you also had other close friendships with great men, often men with difficult personalities. Let's talk, for example, about your relationship with Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini<sup>1</sup>.*

My relationship with the Archbishop of Milan began as that of a student of the Jesuits and his teacher.

*Right, you attended the most illustrious Catholic school in Milan, if not Italy, the famous Leone XIII, run by the Jesuits, known by its influential alumni association and by the Milanese in general as 'il Leone', one of the most prestigious breeding grounds of the city's executive class.*

It's true, I studied at the Leone for twelve years. The Society of Jesus has always dedicated special attention to the education of young people. "Give me the child until he is seven and I care not who has him thereafter" is the motto attributed to them by others, which, apart from its cynical edge,

---

<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini (1927); Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, Bible scholar, journalist and author, honorary professor of the Papal Academy of Sciences, he was Archbishop of Milan from 1980 to 2002, the year he received the Grand Gold Medal of the City of Milan.



essentially corresponds to their educational philosophy. As a matter of fact they are well aware that the power of their educational approach, imparted in early childhood, can define a person for the rest of his life.

But let's get back to Martini. "Eminence", I said to him the first time we met when, having just been elected mayor of Milan, I went to pay homage to the archbishop of the world's largest diocese, "I am sincerely disconcerted to find myself here before you as a result of my new and unexpected responsibility".

I spoke to him immediately, within just a few hours of moving into Palazzo Marino, of my perplexity, my worries and my doubts regarding the difficult coexistence of my personal ethical convictions and my new political responsibilities.

Cardinal Martini, thanks to his Jesuit imprinting – similarly to the start of my relationship with Montanelli, thanks to his imprinting as a great journalist – rather than distancing himself or maintaining his bearing of hieratic authority – which he certainly possesses, but less so than may appear from a distance – he spoke to me with affection and a penetrating, participating sensitivity, comparing his own experience in these matters with my unfamiliar and unexpected ethical dilemma.

He responded by quoting from memory a passage in Latin from St. Augustine's *De civitate Dei*; fortunately, he was kind enough to then translate it into Italian. He explained that this passage had been of great help to him in certain moments when he found himself wondering what sense there was in having been torn away from his life as a scholar, from the silence of meditation and the hermeneutic study of the Bible; a man of science catapulted into a position based entirely on relationships and public responsibility, which he would end up having to occupy for twenty-two years. Those words, he said, had shown him that his new duties were a call to charity.

Several days later – as I'll talk about later on – he sent me a most cordial letter in which he thanked me for my visit,

accompanied by that same text, in Latin and Italian, which he had procured for me as soon as our meeting had ended, “with the hope that these words by Augustine will be of help to you in your daily endeavors”.

*And was it helpful to you as well?*

Very much so. Here, judge for yourself – this is the passage cited by Cardinal Martini: “The love of truth seeks for a holy leisure; the calls of charity compel us to undertake the labors of justice. If no one lays on us this burden, then must we devote our leisure to the search after and the study of the truth. But if such a burden be imposed upon us, we must shoulder it at the call of charity. Yet withal we must not wholly abandon the delights of the truth, lest while the latter’s sweetness is withdrawn from us, the burden we have taken up overwhelm us”.

I felt a great sense of sharing and also of relief. The greatest and most genuine attention you can give to someone else is to connect them to your thoughts and feelings, the ones that are most intimately ‘yours’. So here were, the great Cardinal Martini and me, a *sciur Brambilla* named Albertini who had become the mayor of Milan; he the successor of St. Ambrose, me plucked by chance from a raffle drum among any number of average citizens like myself and now burdened with all this responsibility... I felt at once heartened and dismayed.

*It’s interesting that you should cite Ambrose, for he was also chosen by chance to become the bishop of Milan. He was a good magistrate, not even baptized, and was proclaimed bishop by the Milanese simply because he did his job well.*

It’s true. There is a passage where he says: “I was carried off from the judgment seat and the garb of office to enter the priesthood, and began to teach you what I myself had not yet learnt”. Though I don’t presume to merit comparison with Ambrose, it is an account that I can relate to. It cap-

tures well the situation in which I have found myself for the nearly nine years since I became mayor, and inexplicably still manage to survive.

So, as we were saying, that first meeting with Martini lasted almost an hour, and our discussion ranged from spiritual and sentimental questions to concerns and motivations. The cardinal previewed a concept to which he would return later. "Now", he told me, "everyone is happy. You've just been elected by a wide majority, there's enthusiasm and hope. But you will see that there will be moments where the gratifications will decrease while the contrasts, criticisms and frustrations increase, and you will feel the true weight of responsibility, asking yourself why you ever took on certain commitments. Moments", he added, "that may come sooner rather than later".

And that is just how it went. Those moments came, almost on a daily basis. And now, in the final months of my term, I experience them even more intensely, because the power I have is considered to be waning as the battle for succession approaches.

In fact, just a few days after that meeting, in just one such moment of doubt and despondency, perhaps hoping to find a bit of extra strength, I remembered Cardinal Martini's prophecy and immediately telephoned his secretary to ask for a copy of the text from which he had taken that quote.

My request was received by Don Gregorio, the Cardinal's chief of staff, with an odd, prolonged silence. I feared I had committed a gaffe, since I wasn't yet very adept at ceremonial etiquette and never have been. So I asked him, vaguely embarrassed, the reason for his unexpected reaction. Don Gregorio replied with amusement that his silence was due to his having been taken aback by the fact that my request had come literally moments after Martini had already fulfilled it of his own accord.

“I just came back from the Cardinal’s office after picking up that text”, he told me, “along with an accompanying letter. The package is already on its way”. This was either an extraordinary coincidence or a singular form of improper telepathy. At that point I simply had to talk directly with the Cardinal, whom I hadn’t originally intended to disturb, and I told him what had just happened – that is, he had already responded to a wish of mine that I had only felt but not yet expressed.

I even went so far as to tell him that in this coincidence, which is evidently all it was, I nevertheless saw a sign that he would be close to me and my master as I sought to handle my responsibilities, like the Jesuit fathers I had known as a boy.

This singular episode was followed by many concrete ones, occasions when I turned directly to him to ask advice as to how I should conduct myself in certain matters, in certain particularly complex political impasses with certain collaborators and councilors – and I refer here, naturally, to the general situation and not to specific facts or names.

For example, I asked him how should one handle a case like this with a collaborator – protect the person because he’s competent, or at least hasn’t done anything wrong, but by doing so compromise a broader objective that we had established?

I had just done a minor reshuffle at the joint level, having changed two councilors. I should have changed a third, and the board of directors of AMSA<sup>2</sup> had just been replaced, so there was a general redistribution of positions.

Or, I asked, should I put aside my own legitimate personal intuitions and aspirations to ensure the achievement of the goal? And if so, how does one strike the right balance? Even though it was already clear to me that the answer always lay in reconciliation, in accommodating the various needs. But in what proportions?

---

<sup>2</sup> AMSA (Azienda Milanese Servizi Ambientali – i.e. Milan Environmental Services Corporation).

*Perhaps your questions were a bit too stringent. In any case, did Martini offer solutions to the situation you described?*

Of course he didn't resolve – nor did I ask him to – the specific problem, which he knew only in abstract general terms. It wasn't up to him to resolve. Unfortunately it was up to me. However, he did provide suggestions that were extremely valuable in terms of method and values. He reminded me of the priorities, which I would call ethical, for making a decision that is both just and opportune.

*According to a typically Jesuit technique, refined over the centuries, with which you should have a certain familiarity.*

Speaking of my experience with the Jesuits, there is an episode I'd like to recount which I consider representative and which prefigures the identification of the citizen with the city's highest authority. "You, student, are like me, father rector". Just as "you, ordinary citizen, chosen almost by chance to become mayor, think like me, the successor of St. Ambrose", who could also have been pope.

The episode is this. When I was fourteen I used to write articles for the school newspaper. I had written one, already taking inspiration back then from Montanelli, entitled "The Troublemaker's Room", which argued against compulsory mass. At the time, students at the Leone were obligated to go to mass every day at 8 am, which was considered the first period of the day's lessons.

So I had written this article, clearly a rather reckless act for a Catholic school student, wherein I contested this obligation by using the very teachings of the school. Since it was imposed and not a free choice, I reasoned, it could not be considered an 'act of piety', which is defined as a devotional choice. If it was then placed on the same level as an hour of mathematics or history, it was completely stripped of the religiosity that should accompany participation in the ritual

of mass. The only way to conserve its religious value was to make attendance elective, I concluded.

I submitted the article to the newspaper, aware that content was provocative, waiting anxiously over the subsequent Easter vacation to find out whether it would be accepted. Frankly, I was convinced I'd be rejected. Then suddenly, as if lightning had struck, the Father Rector, the school's highest authority, telephoned me at home. His name was Mario Merlin, son of a Christian Democrat senator (not of the Socialist senator who authored the historic legislation on the abolition of brothels in Italy)<sup>3</sup>. He was calling me, one of the twelve hundred students of the Leone! I could hardly believe it.

I responded incredulously, the phone trembling in my hand, but his affability put me immediately at ease. He was very generous, telling me that my article was excellent, written in perfect Italian and so on, piling on the praise until I was certain that I was about to be chastised – I was barely fourteen, but had already figured out a bit of how life works, thanks in part to the teachings of the Jesuits. And in fact, the inevitable 'however' arrived.

*That was the same technique used by the PCUS (Communist Party of the Soviet Union, translator's note) and PCI (Italian Communist Party, translator's note) in their opposition statements: "I share the excellent and exhaustive view articulated by the comrade Secretary", and then after further praise there came the 'however...' followed by all the arguments to the contrary. Some say that the Communists learned much from the Jesuits.*

And as a matter of fact, "However", Father Merlin told me, "we cannot publish it". I eventually broke the ensuing silence and asked, "But why? Everything is fine but we can't publish it?"

---

<sup>3</sup> Referring to Lina Merlin (1887-1979), noted anti-Fascist, the first woman elected to the Senate.

His response: "You are not supposed to know why we cannot publish it, but I'll tell you anyway. You see, we have already decided to make daily mass optional starting next October". It was April, I remember. "This year will proceed as usual, then as of next year mass will no longer be compulsory – for the very reasons that you argued so well in your article. As such, if we published it, it would appear that a decision we have already made had been instead spurred by your article. You understand, no?"

I understood, but the reasoning seemed to me a bit abstruse. Father Merlin went on: "Because, you see, at some point in your life you will have responsibilities. Your father is an industrialist, so perhaps you will have to run the family business, or you may have responsibilities of another kind. At that point, you will have to evaluate whether a decision, independently of its merits, will be properly interpreted by others, or whether a misunderstanding or a malicious or distorted interpretation might not create unforeseen damage".

So, despite my narcissistic frustration at not having my article published, that phone call left me with a great sense of satisfaction and pride, for the explanation that Father Merlin had given parted from what was for me an unimaginable premise – that is, you are like me. You, insignificant 14-year-old student, are capable not only of understanding but of being brought into the loop of responsibility, of the *instrumentum regni*.

And all this was conveyed to me with frankness and sincerity, with nary a trace of manipulation. I remember thinking, "If the Father Rector, the school's highest authority, calls me personally, one of twelve hundred other students, I must be important for him". And I was hardly a model student. I was neither particularly gifted, nor had I ever done anything worthy of note. Nothing significantly specific could be attributed to me except the fact that I'd written an article.

To which Father Merlin paid attention, and in which he invested himself.

I speak of attention and investment because, as you see, even forty years later I still recall that episode with a profound sense of gratitude for the Father Rector's attitude, for how he treated me, what he taught me, and how. He helped me understand much about the relationship between power, consensus and responsibility. In these past years as mayor I have often thought back to this, in part because of my relationship with Cardinal Martini.

*A relationship which, as far as I know, continued even after the Cardinal left Milan.*

That's correct. For me, it was too important a relationship to allow to dissolve with the Cardinal's departure for Jerusalem, where he retired to study and pray after leaving the diocese of Milan. We wrote to each other and phoned each other. And of course he came back a few times to Milan, with which he maintained very close ties, and I went to Jerusalem.

Specifically, during my last trip to the Middle East as mayor of Milan in the first half of last March, I went to visit him in his home in that unique and extraordinary city, sacred to all three great monotheistic religions. The schedule was terribly intense, but nothing in the world would have prevented me from visiting Cardinal Martini.

And indeed it turned out to be an unforgettable encounter. We spoke for more than an hour. From our respective positions as ex (he) and nearly ex (I), we were able to communicate with even greater freedom, if that were possible, from caution and prudence. This remains for me one of the most enriching experiences of my life. From that conversation, which I like to compare to a shared prayer, in the profound mystical suggestiveness of that holy city, I drew a quantity of strength and spiritual stimuli such as I never had



before in such a short time. However, it really is too personal for me to be able to, or even want to explain it.

*Alright then, let's change the subject, though continuing with the theme of your friendships, of the people that you have modeled yourself upon. Some would place among them – and we're in a wholly different territory now compared to Cardinal Martini – the former mayor of New York City, Rudolph Giuliani, particularly because of his attention to the security of the citizens and his famous 'zero tolerance' with regard to criminality, be it macro or micro.*

Let's steer clear of slogans, which are always misleading, particularly when translated. In English, 'tolerance' doesn't have the exclusively positive meaning that it does in Italian, but can also mean 'indulgence' and 'permissiveness', in a more negative sense. As such, Giuliani's 'zero tolerance' simply meant respect for the law. The crude and superficial translation favored by a certain strain of journalism as 'intolerance' sounded terrible, naturally, to our ears.

Rather than a friendship, I would characterize my relationship with the former mayor of New York as a strong mutual sympathy, born and cultivated in an exchange of visits to our respective cities – I started it off in '98, just after my first election, with a trip to New York, and it culminated in Giuliani's visit to Milan, when I awarded him honorary citizenship on October 21, 2004.

On that occasion I repeated a prophecy that I had made the first time we met.

Bidding him farewell, in the presence of the prefect, I predicted a great future for him: "Mayor Giuliani, *semel primus, semper primus*", I told him, or something of that nature, a Latin motto which I then translated into English as "always mayor", by which I meant "You will always be the Mayor".

*Are your prophecies usually accurate?*

My friend Bruno Ferrante, then prefect of Milan, can testify to my foresee a great future, when there is one, for the people I admire. Unfortunately, Ferrante himself is the exception to the rule, insofar as I had predicted that he would become Chief of Police. A few months earlier, his appointment was all but signed and sealed, but it was blocked at the last moment as the result of a regrettable incident: a malicious and remarkably well-timed interception of a phone conversation with a journalist from *la Repubblica*, during which, speaking freely and off the cuff, he offered a number of rather playful but absolutely harmless observations regarding the government and the majority coalition.

In my view, rather than expressing serious political judgments – even though Ferrante leaned more to the center-left than the center-right, he was nonetheless a loyal civil servant with a strong sense of the State, and would have made an excellent Chief of Police – he was cracking jokes of the sort that one shares on the phone with a friend, without necessarily believing or giving much weight to what is said, no different than if you were to refer to me in conversation with a friend as “that pain in the neck Albertini”.

In any case, he was overlooked for the post. But in every other case, my forecasts have been dead on, from Ciampi as President of the Republic to Schroeder as German Chancellor, from Fernando De la Rúa as President of Argentina to Luciano Gottardo Commander General of the Carabinieri. All of them can confirm that I foresaw their future.

*Let's get back to Giuliani.*

So, as I bade him farewell, I actually presented a range of four predictions to him: the directorships of the CIA, FBI and Department of Justice, and the presidency of the

United States. "Choose among these four jobs, because the next time we see each other you will have one of them – in which case I'll be expecting a phone call!"

Rudy Giuliani's visit to Milan gave me great satisfaction. Our guest showed a genuine interest in the city and great courtesy. The tour started at La Scala, which was then still under restoration. I was radiant with the generosity of judgment, the appreciation and esteem that my former colleague from New York expressed for the work I had done in Milan, for the changes in public order and the fight against crime that he saw compared to his visit twelve years prior.

Here was the ex-D.A. of the Big Apple, who became mayor on the merits of his fight against crime and urban decay, the inventor of 'zero tolerance', appreciating our work and admiring the numbers I showed him, seconded by Ferrante. I reciprocated by telling him, "I came to visit you, I learned a lot, and then we got down to work, reducing the number of crimes in Milan from 105,000 to 69,000 per year...". I meant what I said, and wished only to show him my respect rather than boast about our results.

The visit was a big event, even if it was all but ignored by the press, unlike a few days earlier when Robert De Niro, another great Italian-American, committed an unheard-of act of rudeness to me, but above all to the city of Milan. We had decided to award him with the Ambrogino d'Oro, the highest Milanese honor. But incredibly, De Niro failed to show up for the ceremony. After an hour of futile waiting, aware that I represented a city that could not accept such an affront, I left. The headlines shouted "De Niro snubs Albertini", and my reaction was presented as angry, even hysterical, as if I had busted a gasket.

But this was not, in this case as in others, a misunderstanding. It is a way for certain 'gatekeepers' to cultivate the image of an unstable, untrustworthy personality who is therefore unsuited to assume great responsibility. But perhaps the

game is both too sophisticated and ingenuous at once, such that the people fortunately don't fall for it, as I verified a few days later while participating in Fabio Fazio's television show *Che tempo che fa*: referring to the episode, I called De Niro "rude and ill-mannered", and was immediately inundated with intense applause from the studio audience.

When the folks from the satirical new show *Striscia la notizia* wanted to award me with the famous Golden Tapir, which is given to public figures who have in some way humiliated themselves, I proposed an alternative script: have the legendary Rudy Giuliani, friend to Milan, give the award not to me, but to the man who should be ashamed, De Niro. But nothing was done in the end.

In short, two Italian-Americans in Milan – on the one hand De Niro, who plays Mafiosi and is therefore severely criticized by the influential National Italian-American Foundation for damaging the image of American citizens of Italian origin; on the other Giuliani, who conducts a fierce battle against crime and is thus elected mayor of New York (perhaps the greatest ever, after Fiorello La Guardia, another Italian-American), the man who just weeks before the end of his term handled the terrible crisis of September 11 with strength, courage and efficiency.

The first behaved rudely by snubbing the highest honor of the city that hosted him, while the second showed our city the respect and appreciation it deserves, and did his best to express his authentic pride in becoming an honorary citizen. Such a difference in class, intelligence and basic humanity! A difference that the 'gatekeepers' preferred not to remark, practically hiding Giuliani's visit while giving maximum attention, bordering on the ridiculous, to De Niro's insult.



## The “Gatekeepers”

*Here we go again with these “gatekeepers”. It seems that when dealing with journalists you act just like any other politician, precisely like the professional politicians you consider to be so different from you, always attributing excessive importance to what gets written in the newspapers while also manifesting excessive hostility toward them.*

I would not make such a trite and blanket analysis. The fact is that in relations with the political sphere, newspapers represent a clear case of powers wanting to switch places. In my two terms in office, we did what the citizens asked us to do – or in any case, what we promised we would do. Among the various powers, we have the media – extremely powerful – whose representatives and operators are not elected by the people and do not have to risk their faces or reputations in public as do those elected to office. They write articles or broadcast televised reports and talk about what others are doing, protected by their iron-clad contracts and substantial incensurability. They can hide behind the journalists’ code of ethics and professional standards while playing, in effect, a political role, attacking the institutions when these are represented by people whose alignments they don’t like.

To do this, they avail themselves of tendentious, partial or incomplete information, absolutely subjective criteria in ascribing a sliding scale of values and weights to the news. They entrench behind pseudo-technical alibis such as the famous “space constraints” (or “time constraints” on radio and television) or the “need for brevity” in the headlines.

In my early period in office I had the impression that things were different. I seemed to notice that the media had a positive if not benevolent attitude toward me. Now I realize that part of the reason I was spared initially, apart from Montanelli's influence, is that at the time *something* needed to be saved. Everything was falling apart; there had been the far-reaching impact of Tangentopoli<sup>1</sup> and then four years of Marco Formentini's<sup>2</sup> doctrine of immobility. The city wanted something and someone to trust and to rely on.

On the other hand, there were reasons why someone might want to give me some credit, to trust me and my administration. To begin with, I represented a novelty, an anomaly. And precisely by leveraging this diversity – as I already said – they could use me later, after initially supporting me, to break up the Berlusconi camp, perhaps by means of an unaffiliated, local party or some other brainstorm to undermine the center-right coalition starting in Milan, and then to make way for “them” after a chaotic interval.

### *And instead?*

Instead – and for “them” it must have burned – things were exactly the opposite: because yours truly, who some thought could be used as a tool, used as a “convenient idiot”, won

---

<sup>1</sup> Tangentopoli (1992); name given to a system of corruption and illegal financing of the political parties, brought to light after a series of investigations conducted throughout Italy in the economic, political and institutional spheres.

<sup>2</sup> Marco Formentini (1930); Italian socialist politician who later joined the Northern League; elected mayor of Milan in 1993.

120,000 crossover votes from the left in the second election in 2001.

And so for "them" it was a bona fide and stinging slap in the face, all the more unbearable because it came from a guy they never would have expected it from, from someone who might even have been likable because, when all was said and done, he was a good guy.

And what's more, it could not be said – and "they" would have really liked to say it – that he wasn't honest, or even rather interesting for some of his quirks. But in substance, he was someone who did not know how to maneuver, who knew little of the world and politics, who didn't frequent the salons... And yet this insignificant guy took 120,000 votes away from the left.

And so from day one after this clamorous upset, the tune changed completely. No more chumminess or winks, zero tolerance from the "gatekeepers", whose message was "now we will destroy you. Just as we created you we will crush you, because you no longer serve our purposes".

And perhaps to some extent they succeeded, perhaps partially thanks to the many points of discord and conflict within the majority coalition caused by these pointless fights over neighborhoods, parking lots or 'environmental islands'. And also thanks to a number of people on the city council who were granted maximum visibility as long as they caused problems for the mayor... they even started competing among themselves in this respect.

However, after all this ado, the results of the European Parliamentary elections proved just the opposite. And in any case, the majority approved all the measures that my administration proposed to the city council.

Anyway, they wanted to get their hands back on the controls, go back to professional politics against the politics of the people. So what exactly was our anomaly? It was that



we represented anti-politics, but in the positive sense of the word: we were against a government by politicians, against professional politics, and in favor of that by the people.

*Now you are falling into the most banal demagoguery...*

What demagoguery?! I don't talk about people, I do not advocate distrust in government or political apathy. I am talking about a method, a choice of collaborators, an overall conduct which actually ends up being more genuinely political than traditional professional politics.

Very simply, this politics of the citizens that I am talking about is (although there's more to it than this) the politics of my years in Palazzo Marino precisely because I was an outsider, as were most of the people working with me. We were extrinsic to any oligarchy or corporation or lobby of the major economic or cultural powers, to the salons and the newsrooms, to any class or elitist microcosm. Of course, that does not mean that we didn't have our own political ideas and that we didn't evaluate projects, programs and people in relation to these ideas.

We were average citizen in government. And naturally, average does not mean mediocre – if anything, quite the opposite, according to a paradigm of democracy that is almost populist rather than popular. It's true, this term "populist" is often used with a negative connotation, especially against Berlusconi, who is, in the end, the model I refer to. But if we mean it as government by the average citizen and government of clear and simple ideas, the meaning changes completely... in a positive sense.

*At the beginning of your term in office, perhaps with a somewhat snobbish excess of understatement, you described your way of interpreting the role of mayor using an expression that later was broadly used against you: you defined yourself as "an administrator of a condominium".*

I meant to say – and I thought it was clear – that I felt like I was the manager of shared property, that my main duty was to conserve, enhance and expand this collective asset.

I will admit that there was a bit of false humility in that formula, but certainly no underestimation of the role of mayor. Yet it was used as propaganda to claim that I had an accountant's conception of the role and that that wasn't at all what Milan needed, that I was lacking a "big plan", a "grand idea", a "great dream" for the city.

Well, I think that the "big plan" and "grand idea" were always there. In the end they took form in having realized the Passante railway with ten kilometers of track and seven stations after more than twenty years of impasse; the wastewater treatment plants after thirty years of delay; the waste-to-energy plant that transforms a portion of Milan's wastes into heat and energy; five new subway stations and the initiation of projects to build two more lines; the retrofitting and restoration of La Scala in just thirty months; the new and grandiose fairgrounds built in just two years in collaboration with the Region; and having finally initiated colossal urban redevelopment in the Santa Giulia neighborhood, the Portello and old city fairgrounds area, the Garibaldi-Repubblica area...

In any case, I don't want to rattle off a shopping list – after all, these things were actually bought. I simply would like to say that there was a "great dream" and it was to bring the city's structure and services onto a par with Milan's stature and prestige in the world, to adapt them to the city's strong thrust toward growth and innovation.

But this does not correspond to the paradigms imposed by the prevailing culture of political communication and news by the "gatekeepers", which was based instead prevalently on declamation and announcements rather than on accomplishment.

I repeat it for the  $n^{\text{th}}$  time: ours is the “politics of action”. Perhaps the criticisms to which you referred were inspired by the “politics of talk”, of empty proclamation.

*One of the defining characteristics of this “politics of action”, as you like to call it, right from the election platform, was the privatization process.*

The issue of privatizations was one of the most complex, exhausting, tormented and often frustrating experiences in my nine years in Palazzo Marino. But it was also one of the most illuminating.

I learned, for example, that to govern as liberals it is not enough to simply call yourselves liberals – as all the components of the majority and even some from the opposition have always done. Above all, you have to sincerely “feel” you are liberals and act accordingly, even if there are political costs to be paid, in terms of short-term approval ratings, for example.

So precisely: privatizations of the economy as opposed to or as an alternative to the privatization of politics.

We had to face some of the harshest conflict when we began to deal with the privatization of the former municipally owned companies. And it was not just with the opposition, as was obvious and normal, but also, and almost constantly, within our own majority, something that was somewhat less expected.

This happened when we set about privatizing – something that was always a struggle but always successful in the end – the municipal pharmacies and the Centrale del Latte (the central dairy), 49% of AEM (the Milan electric company, since 2008 A2A SpA, *translator's note*), and 33% of SEA (the company that manages the Linate and Malpensa airports).

*Can we go deeply into some of these cases?*

I will mention some relatively significant examples. Regarding the municipal pharmacies, the political parties and groups in the majority wanted to favor their constituencies, their potential electorate, when choosing prospective buyers.

That is, the pharmacists. Or better, the eighty-four pharmacists who would have bought them if we had sold off the eighty-four municipal pharmacies individually. So we are talking about a moderate electorate, medium to high socioeconomic class, educated and with entrepreneurial mindsets and thus presumably having an influence on the electoral level and probably tending toward the center-right.

The same held for the Centrale del Latte: as the majority parties saw it, the principal potential buyers were the milk producers.

Actually, during the campaign I had said that the municipal pharmacies would have been privatized not by lumping them all together but by selling to the individual pharmacists, favoring the current operators. But at that time I still had not learned exactly how matters actually stood and so this was the only contradiction that I had to account for in terms of my campaign platform, and I explained it quite frankly to the representatives of the pharmacists. For this reason, this was one of the most arduous conflicts within my majority coalition, who quite understandably asked me to uphold my election promises.

The fact is, if we had sold off the pharmacies one by one, the management company would have remained in place with all its personnel, its service structure and its costs, but deprived of its operational units, i.e., the individual pharmacies. This would have produced serious difficulties, also regarding unions, and the costs of liquidating it.

Additionally, we would have had to deal with another heavy and probably unwinnable dispute with the unions

initiated by the staff of the individual pharmacies who, leaving a company with 250 employees, would end up in a small family business with fewer than fifteen employees and would thus lose some of the protections referred to in the famous Article 18 of the Workers Statute.

Furthermore, given the offers we had already received, there was a clear advantage to a lumped sale, entailing added earnings of some 85 billion lire.

So what should yours truly, poor *sciur Brambilla*, have done? He's the one who appoints the president of the management company, who has the electoral support – presumed and frankly modest – of the eighty-four pharmacists. But on the other hand, he has the chance to make the sale in one block with added earnings of almost 85 billion lire and fewer negative consequences in terms of unions and contracts. Selling to the pharmacists was tantamount to giving each of them more than a billion lire.

I put the question in these terms even to the president of the Association of Pharmacists, who quite frankly admitted that I had a point. But the parties in the majority absolutely would not hear it. For them the priority was not the certain economic benefit for the City but their presumed political and electoral benefits.

And so on that occasion as well, I was forced to put my letter of resignation on the table. And then things were further complicated by the various levels of the administrative justice system and the efforts of the powerful pharmacists lobby who took the affair all the way to the Constitutional Court and the European Court.

These various judicial arenas are increasingly becoming alternatives to politics, overriding the democratic decisions of elected assemblies. It is the politics of legal writs that our opposition, and the center-left in general, is so fond of.

*Another example?*

There was another case that was similar in many ways: the privatization of the Centrale del Latte. The intention was to sell to dairy farmers at a highly discounted price, and we stipulated in the sales conditions that milk produced in Lombardy would be the product of reference so that they would not have been disadvantaged.

Hence buying shares in the Centrale del Latte wouldn't have given them any advantages in terms of production but only financially, and they were also coaxed and prodded along these lines by political figures outside of the Milanese arena, prevalently from the Lega Nord. And so here again we had electoral interests and the patronage system (not clearly defined) on the one side against the general interest: a typical paradigm in the realm of privatizations.

Taxi drivers, pharmacists, dairy farmers... we could come up with a very long list of the large and small corporations interested exclusively in defending their minute privileges, their exclusive territories and thus hostile to the creation of a true market (let me be clear: only as far as their direct interests are concerned. For everything else their rule is a totally unbridled free market). On the other hand, something of the sort had also been seen on the national level, with certain privatizations that mainly benefited the centers of power rather than the citizen-consumer-user.

And in that regard, strong economic or power interests came into play in Milan too.

*When? In what cases?*

For example, I remember that a group directed by Yomo got into the game for the Centrale del Latte... precisely the Yomo that soon afterwards would find itself belly up, but that had strong support among the upper political echelons.

I remember meeting the representatives of that group in

Assolombarda<sup>3</sup>. Benito Benedini, the president at the time, was in attendance along with future prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, who was there as a notary, of course, but suggested that I carefully evaluate the offer.

And someone, then and also later, and in other contexts, played naïve, advising me to introduce limitations and rules into the bidding process that would have ended up favoring Yomo.

It's an old trick. Someone else pointed out that Granarolo was not a Lombard company but from Emilia, close to the 'red' cooperatives and thus to the DS<sup>4</sup>. Of course I knew that perfectly well, but at that juncture I did not particularly care.

Actually I would have quite willingly supported a company from Lombardy that was closer to me politically, but there was the hard fact that Granarolo's offer was unquestionably more advantageous, both financially and in terms of the industrial plan. It was more advantageous for the city.

In the end, time proved me right because that company allowed the Centrale to survive and grow without any layoffs, respecting all agreements to the letter.

*But weren't you thinking of your political future, of elections, when you made these choices? In the end, politics also means choosing certain interests over others... naturally with the benefit of the public sphere always in mind.*

It is clear that privatizing public assets by favoring a clientele or narrowly defined political or economic interest groups means, perhaps, going along with a few who are super-represented but not concerned with the general good, which

---

<sup>3</sup> Assolombarda (Industrial Association of the Province of Milan).

<sup>4</sup> 'Red' Cooperatives (cooperative companies aligned with the Italian Communist Party. DS (Democratici di Sinistra, or 'Leftist Democrats', a reformist evolution of the Italian Communist Party, sanctioned by the States General of the Left, convened by Massimo D'Alema in 1998).

instead requires focusing on the maximum value enhancement of the asset and especially on the destination of the earnings: what shall I do with the money from the sale, how shall I invest it in the interests of the city? In this lies the collective good, also for the pharmacists and the customers of the pharmacy, the milk producers and the consumers of the final product, the employee and the shareholder – in short, for the entire system.

Hence, if we also speak of elections, this method is the most opportune, at least in the medium-long term. But I realize that for the individual city councilperson or commissioner or parliamentarian, what holds is the famous quip by the great economist John Maynard Keynes when he was asked to state the long-term effects of a certain economic policy: "In the long run we are all dead".

The same thing can be said for another case, the so-called "Affittopoli" [Rental-gate, *translator's note*], that is, the small scandal that surfaces periodically regarding lodgings owned by the city rented out in the past at ridiculously low rents to privileged people of various categories. We are talking about public capital, belonging to all citizens, that is not improved or put to good use, but even left to decay, and given as a perk to someone: a friendly journalist, a relative of the mayor, a former city employee or a functionary still in a role of power.

We may change the object and the context, but the form of the concept is no different, the structure is analogous: I, politician, instead of addressing the needs of the collectivity, defer to the special interests of corporations, power groups, protected categories, or simple citizens who have a special connection to me or my party and who, in any case, I can manage, and I give them something, naturally leading the collectivity that elected me to believe that I am responding to the broadest interests possible.



*And you, you and your administration, did you really never stoop to such behaviors?*

They are the exact opposite of what we did and always sought to do, even in the choice of selling off minority shares – something that encountered strong opposition – first of AEM and then of SEA, considered to be the most brilliant jewels among the former municipally owned companies of Milan, and thus the object of particular attention and hunger.

In the case of the company that manages the Milan airports, for example, we had to reckon with strong opposition also within the majority coalition, with the Lega. In substance, they wanted SEA to be entrusted to an entrepreneur from Padania<sup>5</sup>, or better yet, from the Province of Varese, cradle of the Lega and the location of Malpensa airport. They wanted, in substance, to ensure themselves a position of privilege in the management of that company so they could influence appointments, seats, hirings, etc.

Instead, we had always had in mind for this company, as for the other former municipally owned companies, a mission different from the one – quite craven frankly – where someone in particular gets favored. We wanted a future of growth, development and efficiency, not only because it is in the interests of the overall system, helping it work better, but also from the ethical point of view, in the interests of our fellow citizens who, through the city, are the owners, perhaps without knowing it, of the majority share of “their” airports.

*If I remember correctly, the administrative justice system got in the way here as well.*

You remember well. In this country, someone who wants to

---

<sup>5</sup> Padania (name used by the Northern League to define northern Italy, both geographically and administratively).

block a political decision can turn to the TAR<sup>6</sup> and have a good chance of success.

In the case of SEA, the government also got into it by introducing a measure, with the idea of giving a perhaps useless shot of oxygen to an Alitalia in its death throes, reducing the fees that the airline companies (note well, all companies, hence also Alitalia competitors) have to pay to the airports. This measure obviously affected SEA's projected earnings, making the company less appetizing. And this happened, unfortunately, after we had already set the base auction price of our 33% of the company (about 600 million euros).

And here again the choice was made to account for the particular interests of a company like Alitalia (and its highly unionized, highly aggressive and highly politically sponsored personnel) that was clearly not competitive and could not stand its own in the market instead of looking to the general interests of the Milanese and the SEA shareholders. As regards the Alitalia shareholders, they had already lost practically everything they could lose.

*And it was precisely these disagreements about SEA that prompted the Lega to leave the administration, and Commissioner Giancarlo Pagliarini gave up leadership of the City Property Office, an important seat. But the history of the relations between you and the Lega, which was not part of your first coalition, has always been stormy.*

I already mentioned the article titled *Il sindaco che non Lega*<sup>7</sup> and written by Francesco Merlo, still working for *Corriere della Sera* at the time, on January 22, 2001, in the midst of the pre-election frenzy for the Milan city council.

<sup>6</sup> TAR (Tribunale Amministrativo Regionale, or Regional Administrative Court).

<sup>7</sup> An effective play on words, insofar as '*Lega*' refers to the Northern League, but it is also a verb, '*legare*', that means 'to bind, or bring together'.

The title emphasized my opposition, starting from my electoral platform, to having the party of Bossi in the center-right coalition. And so I was forced to work out some agreements before the elections, that is, before we counted our numbers and assessed and deployed our respective forces. I repeat, I was of the opinion that, if anything, the Lega Nord could have joined the majority and the administration after the vote, after its real electoral power in Milan had been assessed.

That article, brilliant as usual, was actually published as the leading article on the front page. I found it very gratifying, I don't deny it, and it would be interesting to read it again in light of what happened afterwards and the development of relations with the Lega.

Merlo, in substance, explained the difficulties of linking an agitationist, "man-the-barricades", localist and distrust-of-government party like the Lega, alien to the nature of a modern metropolis, to what we were calling the "Milan Model".

And that is the definition attached to the experience of my first term. And it was considered by the Casa delle Libertà to be a true model: an entrepreneurial, managerial style; financial and ethical rigor; consistent behavior; and the creative capacity embodied in the excellent work done by an extraordinarily brilliant administration, the administration of the "smart councillors", as the newspapers had christened it, that of Paolo Del Debbio, Sergio Scalpelli, Maurizio Lupi, Luigi Casero, etc. Not that the Lega was a party tainted by corruption, certainly not. And some of their positions of hostility toward the old-guard bureaucratic centralism could certainly be shared, or at least understood. But from the viewpoint of the politics they practice there can be no doubt that they moved, and still move, with overblown self-confidence. And it was precisely during that dispute, of that "in or out", that Montanelli's criticisms and Stefano Parisi's reply, which I mentioned previously, hit the press.

*We've already talked about all of this.*

Yes, but I wanted to mention Merlo's laudatory and flattering article once more, certainly not out of narcissism but because it provides an interesting vantage point on the development of the line taken by a major newspaper, as I mentioned previously: in the initial phase, when my autonomous behavior, my status as a presumed "anomaly", could be used as a lever to create weakness, fractures and ruptures within the Berlusconi camp, we began to see articles like Merlo's.

When my re-election made it clear that I could not be used for that purpose, and particularly not during the final years of my second term, the music changed completely. At this point, exalting the image of the accomplishments, underscoring the consistency, rigor and honesty of Albertini meant paving the way for a later candidate from the Casa delle Libertà and doing a favor for Berlusconi.

And so began the spate of instrumentalizing criticism, attacks and malicious interpretations.

They clearly feared they would be giving a boost to a candidate sporting the same colors if they kept on saying right to end that the Albertini administration had behaved well: completing public works like no one before him, works that had been on hold for decades; not sullied by charges of corruption and shunning questionably situations even if they involved people in the same coalition – take the De Carolis and then the Colli-Cocchiario cases, the changing of the guard at SEA with Giuseppe Bonomi<sup>8</sup> of the Lega leaving the presidency after the Argentina affair; the signing of the "integrity pacts" with the collaboration of the Milan District Attorney's office to ensure transparency and adherence to the rules in contracting public works; denouncing

---

<sup>8</sup> Giuseppe Bonomi was involved in the scandal known as 'AA2000', named for Aeroportos Argentina 2000 S.A., a consortium created in 1998 to manage 33 airports and later indicted for suspected fraudulent accounting.

and excluding from consideration for public projects the cartel of firms that for decades had divided public works among themselves; promoting the investigations into our school lunchrooms, parks and public security services...

The list could go on, but I wanted to say that it was clear that they could not go on recognizing the good work done if the plan was to change the political color of Palazzo Marino. Indeed, a few years later during the final phase of my second term, in a pure power ploy the same points and the same arguments were interpreted and described in exactly the opposite way.

As a matter of fact, in those final years, my clashes with the Lega were no longer interpreted positively as the right and proper reaction of Merlo's "mayor that does not bond with the Lega", but simply as signs of the weakness and litigiousness of the center-right majority.

## Professionals and Amateurs

A career politician perhaps would have behaved differently right from the start: he wouldn't have appeared so autonomous, he wouldn't have opposed the Lega joining the majority coalition... in short, he would have been more concerned with the "good of the party" and not have been the object of the media's "disappointment".

It wasn't a disappointment but rather a very instructive experience.

In any case, I continue not to consider myself a career politician. At the most I will admit that I ended up in politics unexpectedly and at a relatively advanced age. It wasn't a life plan. And I have never adopted the classic, traditional, or, if you prefer, conventional, codes of behavior.

Political professionalism – the choice of politics as one's permanent career, even if there is a strong motivation or sense of vocation behind it, even if one is sincerely dedicated to working exclusively for the public good – entails the need to accumulate a supporting consensus, a fundamental and indispensable asset in such a pursuit.

You need votes to stay where you are, to continue to act as a politician and stay with your chosen career. And consensus is gained and maintained through the exercise of power,

which thus becomes a means for continuing in your role.

And this, let it be clear, is not necessarily bad: it depends on the intentions and motivations driving the politician.

Nevertheless, for these reasons, the concrete objective achieved, the completed work, the thing done, the plan followed could be overshadowed by something that should be a means but actually becomes an end: holding onto one's seat, one's role.

In the final analysis, the career politician, by paradox or by approximation, might also end up being completely useless and immobile. That is, he might end up accomplishing nothing, fail to be beneficial in any way to the citizenry, to the collective, if he can still manage to preserve a constituency that allows him to stay where he is.

The response to this type of conduct is mistrust of government: "you are all thieves, all incompetent, you never accomplish anything positive." It is an unwarranted reaction, especially in its blanket application, but it is one that is provoked, induced by real factors.

This schema has produced a certain attitude of complicity on the part of certain components of the Casa delle Libertà, a practice of cooptation, of patting one another on the back, in the sense that it inclines me, in essence, to behave precisely like a career politician, like a "man of the world", it demands "common sense" and "understanding" – and this gets us back to our point – of certain demands by the Lega, which perhaps get labeled as "legitimate expectations".

*And perhaps they really are more or less legitimate expectations.*

But having certain components in the majority coalition that sometimes act as if they were in the opposition just for the sake of a possible advantage at election time, to gain visibility and perhaps boost their popularity in accordance with the rationale of career politicians that we were just talking

about, means risking deadlock and an inability to continue governing.

On the other hand, if we had made great concessions to the Lega we would also have had to make them to the others within the majority who acted as spokespersons for sectorial or corporative micro-interests.

And so partially for this reason I was often asked to be “reasonable” and to show a certain type of “common sense”. But frankly speaking, I have always acted with a great deal of common sense, because if I had meant only to keep strict account of the principles of good government I wouldn’t have done many of the things that I did – at times making the wrong choices.

Believe me, I too accepted compromises and mediation to avoid deadlock and total collapse of government, to carry forward the work begun and keep things from getting stalled. Partially in keeping with a certain piece of Milanese popular wisdom, according to which “the best is the enemy of good”, we settle for doing things a little less well rather than risk having everything fall apart and not accomplish anything because of the pretense, the wishful thinking, of doing them in the best conceivable way.

*When it comes right down to it, that too is good government.*

You may be right, but the problem is: where to stop, at what point do you settle, how much do you compromise, how far do you go with mediation? To what extent are you willing to prejudice an entrepreneurial, managerial line based on concrete results, on achieved objectives? How legitimate is it to water down our program in order to save at least a part of it?

In the case of the privatization of AEM and SEA, for example, perhaps we allowed a lot of room, too much – and it was really exhausting – mainly for conflicts within the co-



alition, dragging things out interminably, passing from one concession to another.

I hope I won't sound presumptuous if I say that my experience, accounting for the differences of proportions, has something in common with the ten years of Margaret Thatcher's government in

Great Britain: privatizations, liberalizations, financial rigor, clashes with unions, protected categories and corporations. The very popular nail-tough miners against Thatcher: the traffic police and taxi drivers against Albertini.

I say this because, in her autobiography, the "iron lady" was constantly wondering about the solidity of her coalition, about where the breaking point lay, beyond which it was not worth pushing, given the risk of having her efforts fail to produce a concrete result.

So here, this is an essential structural condition for a politics based on the achievement of goals and not on the conservation of power.

*But perhaps the alternative is not so cut and dried, so Manichean. Perhaps one can endure, and even improve one's standings, by obtaining consensus also through a focus on results.*

That's true. And I would like to tell you a story in this regard.

Having won the battle, which I still consider to have been of minimal scope, to issue a mere 288 new taxi licenses, having won this meager and disappointing result after excessive compromise, I thought I had earned myself the eternal hatred of the Milanese taxi drivers.

A few months later, my driver Mario was spotted at the wheel of the service official car by a couple of these "enemies" of mine. Naturally he feared the worst, expecting, because of me, to have a mountain of abuse heaped upon him.

Instead, things took a completely unexpected turn. The sense of the taxi drivers' surprising declaration was: "Albertini

was right, there are no problems with the new licenses. Our work hasn't slacked off and actually is going to increase with the opening of the new Rho-Pero fairgrounds. And even the sale value of our licenses, which we feared would decline, after the brief period of the introduction of the new ones, has remained practically unchanged... actually, it continues to grow. Albertini's got a good head on his shoulders, he's someone who gets things done. The Milanese will remember him..." and on with praise that I frankly found at times embarrassing.

I don't know how many of these two gentlemen's colleagues see things the way they do, perhaps none. But, apart from the great narcissistic gratification, this episode encloses the essence of your observation, and that is, that the politics of results does not necessarily exclude a politics that can last. One can endure also when focusing on results.

*This way you eliminate the underlying 'just vs. opportune' dichotomy that has always animated the political debate. You claim that even when doing the right thing, one can still be "opportunist" in the positive sense of the word, that is, achieving personal political success.*

Not only that. I also consider unacceptable the alternative, as it is expressed today, between "career politicians" and those emerging from so-called "civil society", which in some ways corresponds to the dichotomy to which you refer.

I'll go further: I find this expression to be a soppy rhetorical device, clearly used for politically instrumental purposes. The "civil society" formula – which certainly does not correspond to public opinion, an expression bandied about in the media, nor much less to the public will, which in a democracy is expressed exclusively at the polls – came into use in the late Eighties. It was created to serve as a foil for another, equally schematic and arbitrary expression: the "political

class", as it was called back then, as if it were a separate and distinct entity, removed from the social body.

The adjective "civil" derives from the Latin *civis*, "citizen". So we have the citizens, the governed on one side and the governors, the politicians on the other. This was the meaning of it.

In those years in Milan groups were even formed that called themselves "civil society" or something along those lines. I remember one founded by Nando Dalla Chiesa.

This formula emerged together with the political and demagogical use of the word "people" (at times written ironically in leftist papers as if spoken with a Roman accent), invented in certain soapbox television programs that were passed off as objective news analysis but often leftward leaning, tendentious and propagandistic, such as Michele Santoro's<sup>1</sup> famous *Samarcanda*.

Except that the term "people" was used to mean something along the lines of "populace", a somewhat outmoded term, something vaguely indistinct and amorphous. But when one spoke of "civil society", the reference was to an entity that was more clearly politically defined and qualified, to citizens who were informed and aware, to an electorate with well developed critical faculties, to readers of the so-called "progressive" press, to a category widely used – even now – by demographers and media analysts, going so far as to consider it, quite arbitrarily, to represent the majority.

So, in those years, in a process of schematization and banalization, "civil society" and "people" came to represent the *good* that struggled against politics, which was considered *evil*. This was a position of opposition that would be derogatorily referred to up to the Seventies as "*qualunquista*" (man of the street, distrustful of government).

---

<sup>1</sup> Michele Santoro (1951); Italian journalist and television host, vocal supporter of freedom of information.

Then Tangentopoli hit, spelling the end of the *Prima Repubblica*<sup>2</sup> it seemed to be the victory of “civil society” and “anti-politics”. However, quite unexpectedly and upsetting all the convenient ideological schemas, it produced something that the salon political scientists were totally unprepared for: the phenomenon of Berlusconi as a political leader.

At that point the interpretive models that had been ventured were quickly and progressively sundered. What before had been “attention to the concerns of society” became populism, and, slowly but surely, we got back to calling for the “return of politics” and “professional politicians”, even in the persons of those who during the twilight of the First Republic had been pointed at as exponents of the then execrated “political class”.

But in certain salons and editors’ offices, for some time the word had been that there was a great desire out there to return to professional politics. “There’s a desire for politics” they would say, alluding precisely to the traditional, corporative, caste mechanisms of politics: continual mediation, compromise, the watering-down of ideas and programs, cooptation, etc. They were calling for the same conduct that up until a few years prior had been held to blame and pilloried, even accused of being one of the causes of the corruption of politics that had led to Tangentopoli.

But then this theory, highly emphasized especially by a left with its older and stronger tradition in the formation of the political class, was blatantly contradicted in practice. The left-wing candidates for mayor of Milan and president of the Regione Lombardia were always businessmen, trade unionists, functionaries of the state – all people who were not from the parties.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Prima Repubblica* (First Republic: an expression used in Italy to indicate the period between 1946 and 1994, the year of the dissolution of the existing political structure as a consequence of the “Clean Hands” investigation, which brought to light the system of bribery that involved practically every political party).

Now, aside from the fact that, fortunately, there is no distinct separation between politicians and society – it would mean the end of democracy, in a sound democratic system the former must be the direct expression, or better, the product, of the latter – if by “career politician” we mean one who has been bred and groomed within the party sections, who has lived no other life than that of politics and his party, who is thus obviously concerned with his own political survival more than with achieving results, partially because he has no alternative, well, I would contrast this model, if anything, with that of the “professional politician”.

*Sorry, but you seem to be playing with words here.*

Not at all, it's not a play on words. When I talk about a “professional politician” I am referring to someone from the working world, from that famous “civil society” that up until recently was much liked by those who are now calling for a “return of politics”, someone who for love of the ‘thing of the people’ (*res publica*) and work done well, is concerned mainly with results.

To my mind, this is a “good politician”, one who looks to the concrete benefit he brings to the public arena and who measures his success in relation to this.

*The only problem is that the benefits from the politics of action, the politics of results you speak of, are seen later, perhaps after its champions have gone through a long period of unpopularity and dissent.*

Quite so. This criterion often conflicts with the legitimate pursuit of consensus and popularity, and I admit it, a politician needs them, if only to continue his work. Here I would cite again the example of the two taxi drivers who, in effect, confess: “We only understood later.” But I can cite another case: school lunches.

People were hugely scandalized, there was heated conflict and accusations of “bureaucratic persecution” when we asked that the socioeconomic status be assessed of the families who used the service. We wanted to prevent low or even discounted rates, the difference being covered by public funds, from being granted to people who could easily afford full rates, people who may have fraudulently feigned need because they evade taxes and thus don’t declare their real income.

So this was good government. And it was no coincidence that most of the protest against us came from the central areas of the city, which you can be sure is not where the poorest and most disadvantaged users live.

You have to suffer initial unpopularity to get to the result, which in any case, is always a political result. The school lunch program was losing a lot of money for the city administration. So we created a joint stock company, Milano Ristorazione SpA. Being a joint stock company, it had to respect all the rules of shareholder-owned companies while fulfilling its social mission: it had to produce a profit by providing a service that appealed to the users at controlled rates, the members of the board are responsible for the balance sheet, if it loses two-thirds of its capital it has to be restructured, etc.

We turned management of the school lunch program over to the company and had to cope with a terribly difficult startup period. Indeed, precisely during the testing and startup phase – a particularly complex phase with the inevitable difficulties associated with fine tuning and adjustments – we were submerged by all sorts of furious, unrelenting criticism from almost all the media, starting with *Corriere della Sera*. Every day there were articles about worms in the lettuce, cold meals, or children with dysentery. Naturally, the parents were up in arms. It was, in short, the epitome of a catastrophe.

*And instead?*

Instead things went as quickly as we had hoped. Even faster. And now, five years later, Milano Ristorazione provides a much approved service and has improved its balance sheets and redeveloped its production facilities – kitchens, laboratories, storage facilities, control systems, etc. – (and continues to do so, with enormous investments) to the point that it is highly requested on the market both for its services and as a form of productive investment.

I mean that companies in the sector would like to purchase minority shares because they believe that a company that serves 75,000 lunches a day, even at controlled prices, enjoys such an economy of scale that it is able to provide services to other private concerns, other communities, other municipalities.

So Milano Ristorazione is an example of what I mean by good government.

*Is it an isolated example?*

Not at all, it is one of many. Another illuminating case is the city-owned lodgings on Piazzale Dateo: 157 apartments in an elegant, semi-central part of the city, all vacant. The first, banally demagogic but actually counterproductive idea cultivated by many was to assign the dwellings to 157 families who had been evicted from their former dwellings.

However, if, in the interests of everyone, we look at this from an entrepreneurial instead of an electoral perspective, we realize that by redeveloping the property, which has enormous reappraisal potentials, we can obtain a sum of money that would allow us to undertake a public housing project to build much more than 157 units, actually a multiple of that number, which could then be assigned to people who have lost their homes.

And so, we had to put up with heated opposition, even within our coalition. There were even dissenters within our

own administration who made it hard to get this proposal through. And I must say quite frankly that its reasonability seems crystal clear to me.

Otherwise, beyond appearances, you end up carrying out a piece of shoddy government. If you open the place up to the 157 homeless families, they become 157 privileged families, but you certainly have not resolved the structural problem of the lack of sufficient public housing and controlled rents. We would instead find ourselves in another “Rental-gate”, another situation – of the type reported often and with great indignation in the newspapers – of prestigious but publicly owned dwellings rented out, perhaps because of an emergency situation such as, in the case in question, someone who has lost their home, at rates that are so advantageous that the emergency rapidly transforms into a situation of absolute and unacceptable privilege.

But even in the case of the dwellings on Piazzale Dateo, there is fear of publicity, of what the newspapers will say, the occupation of the dwellings by the homeless, the consequent and inevitable political battle and, again, the resonance it will have in the press. And since it is thought that protests, especially during the election season, make a lot more noise and have a lot more weight than good government, here’s a situation where you don’t think about the best solution for the community but instead about one that is the easiest and theoretically most popular.

This is also because they don’t admit that the citizen, sooner or later, might understand which choice was best. But I am convinced that the opposite is true: the citizen knows perfectly well which choice is best, if things are adequately explained. But this does not always occur. We ourselves often didn’t know how or were not able to do it.

So here I have given you two examples that I consider emblematic, because they show that even good decisions by



the government have to go through moments when, as happens in the relationship between doctor and patient, it is necessary to administer a bitter medicine or cause some suffering. And at that moment, the patient is not thinking about when he or she will be cured, but only about the pain or discomfort, perceiving only the negative side.

And so I believe that in politics as in life it is best to remain faithful to the principle that, when in doubt, tell the truth and do the right thing, even if people may not understand immediately.

*That seems to me a position that is more Calvinist than liberal.*

Let's forget about labels and definitions. I consider it simply to be a realistic position.

*Realistic?*

Certainly, because it makes it possible to achieve concrete results, to produce something "real". This is realism. And it is also a profoundly and concretely political position, because the best way to get good results for the community is through politics. Those who accuse us of being anti-political perhaps consider politics to be a question of ideas, theories, words and that's all. I have a strong and lofty conception of politics, I consider it to be a set of instruments, theoretical and practical, for promoting the public interest. And political divisions should comprise differences in opinion as to what has to be done and how, as to objectives and what means can be used to achieve them.

*But if that's the way things are, you should no longer say that you consider yourself a businessman on loan to politics or an average Milanese called upon to be the mayor, as you keep saying.*

*Instead, now you are describing yourself as an anomalous politician, different from the traditional models. And the same*

*thing could be said for the many other “technicians” or businessmen or professors or “representatives of civil society” who – especially after the tempest of Tangentopoli, which killed off half the political class of the time, and then after Berlusconi got into the fray – got their start in politics, whether as parliamentarians or ministers, mayors or councillors.*

*We have already posed the question: after one has practiced politics for a long time, is it still right to go on claiming not to be a part of it, to consider oneself different from the career politicians? This applies to you but of course also to others.*

To many others, starting with Berlusconi, Berlusconi at his best, the one that most faithfully embodies his deepest convictions and his loftiest conceptions of himself and of politics. The one that is generally defined as Berlusconi of '94, not the one that, a bit by choice but mainly out of necessity, finds himself battling with his past and the instrumentalized aggression that emanates from various sectors. And also not the one who is a bit too often pushed into compromise and mediation by a certain Roman entourage.

As far as I am concerned, as an average citizen on loan to politics, I have always considered myself – no, I have always considered my case to be a significant representation of the deep sense of democracy. “A guy like me in the White House”: I am not saying that, my narcissism doesn't go that far, Americans say it to express what they mean by democracy.

But this phrase should perhaps be joined to another, again by an American, a great American, President Harry Truman, who – and I am repeating this from memory – said, in substance: my aunt Betty is the most honest person in the world, but she can't be the president of the United States for the simple reason that she is not equal to the task.

*OK, so it takes more than honesty to govern well. And yet they describe you as a moralist and even a bit of a justice freak.*

I will answer, if you please, with a third quote, this time from the Gospels. Jesus says: "be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves". So, moral rigor, competence, technical capacity, shrewdness, ability to move: all this is necessary to be in politics, to govern. If one of them is missing sooner or later the system will seize up or explode.

This is a bona fide political line, a political choice. But it is understood only to a certain point both by the media and by that portion of public opinion attached to the traditional methods of the parties, to "party rule" as some would say, especially in the phase of shifting from the old to the new, after two terrible slaps in the face.

The first, the slap to our city was represented by Tangentopoli, with everything it had meant in terms of the elimination of an entire municipal and national leadership, in terms of struggle against an intrinsically corrupt system and the consequent conferral of superpower status on institutional organs that rose to assume a political role. They chose to strike, to eliminate an adversary or, if you prefer, a political element. They entered the political fray without having been elected by the people, without the investiture of the popular vote, without having had to respond to the voters.

The second slap to Milan came from the Lega and their conquest of Palazzo Marino with Formentini-Pancho Villa. The Lega in government here was disastrous even though it actually only governed one year. Immediately afterwards it broke up and was forced into a position of non-government by the left, having to negotiate with the opposition every day on each individual measure. The result: four years of immobility, of postponements, of lack of decision.

*This way they end up mired for the entire duration of their term in office.*

And in effect, the Lega concluded without having accom-

plished anything, politically or administratively. It failed to realize even a minimum part of its electoral platform. It was another burning disappointment and humiliation for the city.

*And then you arrived on the scene after these two “slaps”.*

We were truly “the new” with a huge burden of hopes for concreteness and the politics of action. I already mentioned that survey by *Corriere della Sera* in the column “La città domanda” (“The City Asks”, *translator’s note*). In 1997, the Milanese expressed their vision of the ideal mayor: top of the list with 31.8% was honesty, followed by concreteness (18.6%), managerial capacity (14.3%), seriousness (13.4%), enthusiasm and a desire to get things done (10%), and determination (7.2%). These results represented most, no, almost the totality of the “demand” of the Milanese for good government in their city. And they are, if you please, the characteristics that they attribute to me, which I claim as my specific approach to governing.

I am not Truman’s Aunt Betty: not just honest, which is a primary value, but also concrete, managerial capacity, etc. etc. precisely as recommended by Aunt Betty’s nephew.

In that opinion poll, the desires for traditional political qualities were way down on the list: political experience rated a mere 1.1%, charm or charisma, 1%, etc. As you see, these are totally negligible quantities.

*We draw from this a conclusion that is the exact opposite of what is claimed by those who now see a demand for a “return of politics”, in other words, a sort of nostalgia for the professionals of politics and the traditional parties.*

*If that survey were repeated today, do you think it would produce radically different results, perhaps even to the point of being the opposite of those in ’97, and thus confirm the trend*

*the newspapers, as well as some traditional and career politicians, are talking about?*

I don't know. I suspect that the continual, insistent declamation of this so-called "return of politics" is a sort of promotional campaign, a sort of self referentiality: "Up until today we have allowed the amateurs to amuse themselves with politics, but they are parvenus, there by chance; the time has come for us professionals to return, we true practitioners of the craft. We are much better, let us work, don't disturb us again".

A number of years have passed since that survey, but frankly speaking, I do not believe that things have changed much. I do not believe that the Milanese citizen, the Milanese voter, has ever seen things much differently. Sure, the answer to the survey can be influenced by the current situation, by contingent circumstances, but in substance I don't believe they make much difference.

*Well, citing the title of an old horror film, sometimes they come back.*

The fact is that part of the old political and party class – especially on the left but also the centrists, who for ten or twelve years remained in the background, together with a part of the corporation of journalists traditionally aligned with them who, let us not forget, contributed to their removal or marginalization – are now engaged in an operation of self-promotion with the aim of getting back to center stage.

"We will return," they continue to repeat, "because you need us", confounding hopes with reality but working to make the prophecy come true.

But things aren't necessarily going to go that way: the seed of a different style and different models of conduct has been sown, starting with bipolarism. The contamination and genetic modification of the political system has already

taken place. And then, in any case, in that system, in that circuit, heterogeneous and anomalous figures and new energies have been introduced which have done much to modify the behaviors and language of politics.

It's true, sometimes they come back, but – responding to the title of a movie with a slogan – you can't go back. It's a lesson that they should know well, especially those on the left, seeing how they continually repeat it to others.

But I repeat: our administrative experience in Milan was decidedly more political than that of the professionals of politics. Concrete proof, for example, is the fact that I won almost 120,000 crossover votes in the election for my second term.

As mayor, that is, I received votes from people whose party-line votes otherwise went to parties not associated with my name. And this has been determined by an analysis performed by serious and reliable researchers on the left, such as Stefano Draghi, director of the DS and one of the most highly accredited analysts of voting behavior.

So what is this if not politics, a more open, permeable and, in brief, more democratic politics?

*Be that as it may, getting back to that 1997 survey that you have mentioned several times, it almost seems that you play off a lofty part of the ratings, which indicates the characteristics of the average citizen on loan to politics, as you define yourself, with a lowly part (strongly disregarded by people expressing their choices), which are typical, on the other hand, of the professionals of politics.*

In these terms the question is presented in an excessively radical and even banal way. At any rate, when they say “you didn't live up to politics, you did not behave like a politician”, in reality oftentimes they mean “you were too rigorous, too intransigent, too moralistic”. That is, you didn't know how to find an agreement in some way, you refused to

compromise. And they say it accompanying the words with a slick manipulating hand gesture.

By “politics” in this case they mean only a cunning capacity to maneuver things, to say one thing and do another, to soft-soap someone. Don’t get me wrong, I have a very lofty conception of politics and so I certainly don’t mean to say that that’s everything, but those who call for the return of professionals to politics often have this in mind.

## Embedded Powers

*Albertini, let's talk about the so-called "embedded powers", which traditionally have always been engaged in dialogue with professional politics, often influencing and conditioning it.*

*You cannot consider yourself so distant from this: your candidacy was also promoted by a champion of the "embedded powers" of the day, Cesare Romiti.*

The expression "embedded powers" ["poteri forti"], like all journalistic inventions, is suggestive but vague and misleading, at least in its current use.

What actually are the "embedded powers"? Is it just the power of industry and finance? And why not also the bureaucracies, the trade unions, the information and communications apparatus? I will tell you a very meaningful episode regarding the behavior of these so-called "embedded powers".

I had recently been elected president of Federmeccanica, and so it seemed that the appropriate thing to do was to meet with the principal members of the Federation, not just because they had been important supporters but also because they were the sector's most representative entrepreneurs. And so I asked if I could meet with Cesare Romiti, Carlo De Benedetti and Gian Mario Rossignolo, then president of the Electrolux Zanussi Group. I tried to stick to this



order for rather clear reasons of formality, which are very important within Confindustria in spite of the continual calls for substance rather than form.

Romiti set up the appointment in the Milanese offices of Fiat in Piazza Sant'Ambrogio at 6 p.m. on a certain day. That morning, his secretary called me to ask if we could postpone the appointment by fifteen minutes, from 6:00 to 6:15, because Romiti was returning from Rome by air and couldn't guarantee punctuality.

I was amazed by this almost maniacal precision, even though I myself am one who gets anxious if I think I am going to be five minutes late to an appointment. But I took it for granted that an "academic quarter hour" could certainly be conceded to the man who was at the time president of Italy's largest industrial firm. So I was surprised but could not help being impressed.

And so I arrived for the appointment on my Vespa. I was shown in to a large and very austere meeting room with dark paneling, seats upholstered in green velvet and a long narrow table made of dark wood.

At 6:13 I heard sounds in the adjacent room and at 6:15, with a punctuality that is almost embarrassing, Romiti entered the room.

I greeted him, "Good evening, President".

"In truth, it is you who are the president", he responded, "given that Fiat is a member of Federmeccanica and not vice versa".

It may have just been a formality or perhaps it was his courteous manner, but it made quite an impression. "Auspicious beginnings", I thought to myself.

He went on to tell me that the fact that he had been the first one I had asked to speak with after my election meant that I gave some importance to Fiat as a member (which, given the fact that the Turinese group provided 25% of the

Federation's funds, was both legitimate and opportune, if not obligatory). He continued by explaining that his company would have continued to pursue its own interests autonomously, but it participated with conviction in Confindustria, unconditionally recognizing the value and role of the organization, which he went so far as to call an "institution".

Hence, as president, I could count on the support of Fiat. This was partially due to the fact that they were happy that I was a small industrialist and not, as often happens, a manager – that is, I was someone who hailed from the frontier of enterprise and personal risk in its purest and most original form.

After this massive dose of gratification, I left the appointment nearly walking on air. "What wonderful people these captains of industry are, these men of the embedded powers", I thought. "Even if they didn't go to the Jesuits' school like me, they all have the ability of the cardinals in the wise and discreet management of power and strength. Very deft, this Romiti, to show such generous support for a small industrialist who is much younger than he is (I was 46 at the time) and unreservedly legitimizing him as his representative".

However, I also tried to restrain myself, to be realistic, to keep this rush of narcissism under control. And I thought to myself, "Surely the time will come when each will want to assert his own weight, moments when I will have to prove that I can hold my own even with the most powerful... that I have balls, to say it in locker-room jargon".

*And did those moments come?*

The months passed and the battle began for the national labor contract for the metalworkers union. Federmeccanica held a firm line. The negotiations became tense with some rather harsh conflicts now and then, even with acts of aggression in certain factories, and there were many demonstrations on the street. In the final phase, close to Christmas, the government

at the time, the first Prodi<sup>1</sup> government with Tiziano Treu as Minister of Labor, joined the negotiations with a sort of arbitrated decision that actually accepted the union demands while almost completely ignoring our positions.

The fact that it was a holiday period prevented me from calling a meeting of the Federation board of directors, and certainly made it impossible to organize a general assembly. I made a number of telephone calls and the decision was taken to reject the government's proposal.

And so we found ourselves – no, I found myself – strongly isolated: against us were the government, the majority in parliament, most of the press, and public opinion showing signs of alarm for the conflictual nature of the negotiations, with the responsibility laid entirely in the laps of us industrialists. The only voice in our favor was that of the director of the Banca d'Italia Antonio Fazio, who stated that the union demands and thus the Prodi-Treu proposal, had a strong inflationary potential and were thus in clear contradiction with the government's economic policy objectives.

*If I remember well, you industrialists were no longer exactly in unanimous agreement.*

Indeed, rifts had begun to appear in the business front. In the northeast, for example, Riello<sup>2</sup> was leading a rebellion of small-to-medium manufacturers who accused us of excessive rigidity and threatened, even publicly, to sign separate contracts as individual companies.

And also within Fiat management, Fiat being the most strongly unionized group and thus the one that most strongly felt the pressure, similar ideas began to circulate. And,

---

<sup>1</sup> Romano Prodi (1939); professor of economics and industrial policy, he was president of the IRI, president of the Council of Ministers for two terms – 1996-1998 and 2006-2008 – and president of the European Commission.

<sup>2</sup> Riello (Italian company that designs and builds refrigeration and heating systems).

wouldn't you know, the famous "junk-your-car" [*rottamazione*] law had just been passed to boost new automobile sales and thus also to soften the auto industry's stance with regard to the government's positions and proposals. Perfect! All the pieces were there to prepare for our – for my – failure. If Fiat had also abandoned the field, the jig was up.

Desperately hanging on were businesses in the south, starting with those in Naples. After Europe required the abolition of payroll tax reductions, which were deemed a form of state assistance, they lost the only competitive advantage they had had for years. While for us the contract seemed harmful, for them it would have been out-and-out disastrous.

Now even those who were closest to me began to vacillate. The game seemed to be over, lost, when I received a call from the Fiat CEO, Paolo Cantarella.

I picked up the telephone thinking, "The CEO and not the President, bad sign". I was ready for the worst, ready for the *coup de grâce*. And even more so when Cantarella started out with praises and acknowledgements. "They always begin that way when they want to put you up against the wall", I thought.

And indeed: "My compliments, president. We knew you were a man of rigor, precision and tenacity, but it takes a lot of grit to stand up to such a situation. Bravo! Of course there are moments of difficulty. A leader has to be capable of waging war and making peace. As you know, in the Seventies and Eighties and even more recently, Fiat has had to deal with extremely harsh disputes resulting in significant economic losses. But we have plants all over the world and we have obtained the thing we wanted: the "junk-your-car" bill. When all is said and done, we could absorb some increase in labor costs in Italy. And then there are the difficulties of holding the whole system together, the northeast that wants to shut down..."

*Indeed, almost an announcement of withdrawal. And you?*

Now resigned to defeat, I watched this logical itinerary unfold, which I saw leading to one inevitable conclusion: Call it quits, Albertini, accept the government's proposal and get the contract signed, otherwise we'll send you packing.

And instead, suddenly things were turned on their head: "However..." – and this time that "however" announced a positive change – "I have called you to say that you are our president, that you have a great and broad responsibility that regards many thousand companies that find themselves in conditions quite different from those experienced by Fiat... In short, while from our perspective we might say, let's stop here, we want you to know, taking into consideration the complexity of the system and of your responsibilities, we will stand by you and your choices as far as you want to go with them. You can count on Fiat's support".

*Goodness, what a bolt from the blue! How did you react?*

There were tears in my eyes, real tears, hot tears of joy. And right then I remembered the episode of the appointment moved back from 6:00 to 6:15. A small manifestation of good manners, of respect for the other, a manifestation that set the stage for another: this one, which was much more important, consequential and also costly. Certainly not a formality like the first.

One is punctual out of respect for the person waiting and not just as a form of "good manners". On the other hand, good manners are a formal manifestation, at times hypocritical, but also an ethical discipline, a manifestation of respect for the other, as I said.

If one is truly and deeply polite, one has been raised and educated to have the greatest consideration for the other. And one adheres to the same code of conduct in both small things and large.

In that moment, Fiat the “embedded power” had respected something, certainly not my power, which was irrelevant compared to theirs, but rather ethical consistency and loyalty to principle. And above all, they respected the positions and needs of the thousands of smaller Federmeccanica members.

*So how did it end up?*

Negotiations continued for a number of months yet, until January 15, 1997 (and just a month and a half later I was to receive Berlusconi’s request to throw my hat in the ring as candidate for mayor of Milan), when we held an extraordinary Federmeccanica assembly. The agenda essentially was: “What are we going to do? Go on or give up?” To tell the truth, no one but me wanted to have this assembly, not even the Fiat people, because we didn’t know how it would turn out.

There were at least five hundred delegates. My introductory speech included, as well as many figures and tables, the image of a postcard I had written to the general manager of the Federation, Michele Figurati, a former industrial relations director for Fiat and an invaluable collaborator.

To wish him a productive experience [*“buon lavoro”*], I remember that I had given him, just after he had been appointed, a nice edition of *Murder in the Cathedral* by Eliot with a dedication alluding to the plot of the tragedy, the message being: you were a friend of the “king”, Fiat, but now you are becoming “bishop” and thus must serve the Church and not the King; in short, you have to be faithful to Federmeccanica and not to Fiat; thank you, let’s work together.

During the Assembly I exhibited a postcard I had sent him shortly before, during a brief vacation in Tuscany, when the contract dispute was already underway. It was a postcard that Figurati always kept on his desk: it was the image of a Medieval castle illuminated at night, with two lines written by me. They

said, in substance: "We too are in a fortress under siege illuminated only by our good reasoning and our responsibilities".

Hence, in my introductory speech to the Assembly, by projecting that postcard on the screen, I had made reference precisely to the theme of responsibility: responsibility to the civil code, to our families, to our capital, to our fellow members, to the shareholders of our companies and to our employees, who may indeed gain some immediate and illusory benefit from an irresponsible wage policy, but would later be crushed by it along with our companies and end up paying the highest price of all.

And then, of course, I discussed the economic motives that induced us to refuse the contract proposed by the government. And I added that it was perfectly understandable that some of us, in different productive conditions and looking at the immediate situation, preferred to close the affair just for the sake of moving on.

I concluded: "At this point I will present the contract I propose and tell you where our breakeven point is. If you do not agree, I and the four vice presidents will have no choice but to tender our resignations". The result would have been that the contract could not be finalized anyway because there was no one authorized to sign it, and it would have taken at least another couple of months to elect a new president.

The ensuing debate was opened by the representative of Fiat who, as promised by Cantarella, strongly supported my line. At that point the subsequent speeches were almost inevitably of the same tenor, although there were some subtle distinctions. The fact of the matter is that when it came to a vote my line was unanimously approved.

And thus tough negotiations were reopened. And I was unable to participate in the final stretch – occurring, as usual, at night – because I was in bed with the flu. But the president of Confindustria, Giorgio Fossa, kept me in touch by telephone.

The contract that we signed was acceptable, and at that point it was my turn to act the moderate with those who, buoyed by the enthusiasm of a rediscovered unity, wanted to go all the way to the cancellation of the national contract.

*But we were talking about “embedded powers”...*

Exactly. I went on this long digression, starting from that appointment with Romiti, to explain who the “embedded powers” are and how they behave.

Precisely because they are strong, they prefer to deal with people that they feel merit respect. They may mount harsh opposition if they feel these people go against their interests, but at times they may also promote them. Additionally, they know that they owe their power to the wisdom and balance, and perhaps even the opportunism, of certain situations or choices made by people. If anything, the problem is to succeed in being strong with them. But it is a question of character and ethics.

In short, the “embedded powers” are not characterized by pure arrogance, high-handedness or a show of muscle. One who behaves this way will not remain strong for long and does not remain in power. And for this reason, they can also be particularly insidious. It is also true that the “embedded powers” almost never represent a homogeneous, compact and solidary unity with shared objectives and strategies. They are often in conflict among themselves, as is normal in the power echelons generally, and this takes the edge off their power to some extent. The important thing, in any case, is not to underestimate their role: this is a fatal error that ends up making them extremely powerful.

*And instead this name and characterization, this clichéd origin, created by journalists, as usual, is the one that seems to hold sway.*



But as I said, the definition of “embedded powers” is vague and ambiguous. So much so that, for example, certain organisms, bureaucratic structures, and social groups endowed with great capacities for exerting pressure, blackmailing, or obstructing the process also behave as if they were embedded powers.

I will give you a list, certainly incomplete, of situations in which I had to deal with diverse and apparently contradictory forms and modes of these powers, in chronological order starting from my election: the preschool teachers, the municipal police, the taxi drivers, the SEA case with the intervention of Mediobanca, Cesare Romiti and Gemina, or Caltagirone, Tronchetti Provera and other groups, the orchestra, the choirs and corps de ballet of La Scala, the large real estate groups, Salvatore Ligresti, Luigi Zunino and others. The list is just partial, but all of these counted on their ability to exert pressure, on their power.

What criterion did we adopt in managing these relations? Some time ago, Cardinal Tettamanzi (Dionigi Tettamanzi, 1934; Archbishop of Milan,) pointed out a model of conduct for a public administrator that we may sum up as follows: be strong with the strong and weak with the weak, have your heart in your hand for the needy and a hard head on your shoulders when confronting power.

*Is this a model you feel you have adhered to?*

Let me give you a few examples. One is the case of the first major union dispute I had to handle as mayor of Milan: this was with the teachers at the preschools. They had a very favorable contract, which gave them great privileges in terms of working conditions and salary. One example was compensation for work in July, after the school year had ended but when most families, who are not yet on vacation, still need the service. It was like an abnormal period of overtime,

a whole month of overtime with a very high cost for the administration and, what's more, seriously unfair to other categories of municipal employees.

But the micro-corporation of the preschool teachers had an enormous power to blackmail and obstruct. Just think: leaving the children at home and causing difficulties for thousands of families, parents who have to work in July, without even counting all the emotive values associated with the figure of the child. We had to bring the issue back to terms of normalcy, but at the time those teachers were objectively an "embedded power", while the children and their families were "the weak ones", according to Tettamanzi's definition.

And so I called a meeting of the parents in Palazzo Marino, in the Sala Alessi. I explained the problem to more or less two hundred of their representatives and proposed my solutions, explaining quite frankly the difficulties that the conflict with the union might have caused.

The response of the parents was: Mr. Mayor, you do what is right in terms of economic compatibility, because it is not acceptable that a powerful category, for the role it has to fulfill, uses this power to their own advantage and to the detriment of the community.

This is one episode, but I could cite others, which those who accuse me of not knowing how to dialogue with the city, with the social groups, would do well to remember.

*Did things go the same way with the ghisà, the municipal police?*

It was much tougher with the municipal police. I was dealing with a very strong category, if not an "embedded power". They were like a military corps, in uniform, armed and strongly unionized, who over the years had accumulated habits, methods of duty, and openly parasitic privileges all oriented toward inefficiency.

I had to undertake a very harsh and prolonged battle to stand up to this situation in the interests of the city, clashing with the power to blackmail and obstruct of a very cohesive corporation.

Depending on the moments, the phases of the battle, they issued tickets, either too many or none at all. The amount of effort they put into directing traffic varied. When they decided to go on strike this caused a bit of difficulty, given that this was a police force assigned to ensuring the functioning and security of the city in all its activities: traffic, urban space, commerce, municipal offices, schools, etc.

*We have already said that Montanelli put forth a great deal of effort on your behalf on that occasion. I remember him calling the municipal police "deserters".*

Indro did not get into it for my sake, but for the battle that he considered sacrosanct for the city, and he received something like five hundred complaints from the police. But he certainly galvanized public opinion in favor of a rigorous line and efficiency, which was decisive for the final victory.

It was partial, but nevertheless still a victory, given that now that corps has once again become a municipal police force. It could certainly still be improved, and is no longer the municipal police greatly loved and respected by the Milanese up to the 1970s, but it still constitutes a police force. Prior to this it was a rabble of people without command or responsibility that took refuge in a thicket of absurd privileges that had been accumulated over the years, administration after administration.

Let me give you an example. If I had hired ten thousand eighteen-year-old police officers, after twelve years every one of those ten thousand thirty-year-olds would have become a clerk glued to a desk, having acquired the right to remain closed in an office.

And again. After five years, service on the street was conditioned to the point that it was almost voluntary. The result was that two thirds of the personnel stayed in the office doing administrative work, at times wholly invented, and only a third could be used out in the field.

These are only a few examples but they illustrate an absurd situation which would quite apparently soon have led to the complete ineffectiveness of the force.

*And even more clamorous was the battle against the taxi drivers.*

I was not and am still not completely satisfied with the outcome. And while I cannot call it a defeat, it was certainly not a victory against a corporation that was even stronger and politically more protected even than the municipal police.

I was able to wrest from them a barely symbolic number of new licenses: 288 including those in the municipalities serving the Milan airports; 270 in Milan alone out of 4,571 already existing. It was barely 6% more. Too few to appreciably improve service and influence fares, among the highest in the world, as the Milanese and visitors to our city well know.

My objective was to bring things down to the average of the other European metropolises. Taking into consideration the territory in which and the population to whom they would offer their services, we should have issued 1,938 new licenses and not 288. We only asked for 500, just over a quarter of what would have been ideal because, realizing the critical nature of the operation and the shock it would have caused, we formulated the minimum request necessary to have some effect on the service. And the request was precisely for those 500 that every day go from Milan to the Malpensa airport since it became an intercontinental hub.

It was a minimum request. With 1,938 new licenses, that is, with at least a 35% increase, we would have induced mechanisms of shifts and working hours, differentiated tar-

iffs, passes, perhaps prepaid tickets, etc., without touching the basic fare. It would have been an operation that was advantageous first and foremost to the citizen-user, to the clientele, which would have grown to provide every taxi with the same income, and with overall service that would have been decidedly improved. Even the taxi drivers would have benefited from the reform. But they didn't let me do it.

As you can see, moderation does not always pay or bring positive results, as held by the theorists of mediation, of dialogue and compromise always and regardless. On the other hand, in other cities, starting with Rome, they didn't even manage to achieve this much.

The truth is that the service should be liberalized by law. End of the story. But to get there you have to be ready to face a very tough clash with a very aggressive and united corporation who are capable of paralyzing the city for weeks. What government, what majority coalition is so strong and determined to take on a crisis of this nature? Naturally, the same thing goes for other corporations, other pressure groups with analogous obstructionist power.

### *And the SEA affair?*

This is another very interesting case that illustrates the dynamics between the "embedded powers", this time understood in what we might call the traditional sense of the term. Seeking control of the company that manages our airports were two powerful contending groups, whose representatives came to talk with me in 2000 and 2001. The first group was Caltagirone, Benetton and Tronchetti Provera (a consortium of three major Italian industrial groups). They came to me together to talk about entering a partnership with the City of Milan to manage SEA, with the ultimate intention of running the entire Italian airport system, connecting to the analogous and parallel situation for the Aeroporti di Roma (AdR),

which was undergoing privatization. We called this proposal the “Poseidon Plan” after the Greek god of the sea – drawing on the English meaning of the acronym SEA – to indicate the plan that attributed a central role to the Milanese company.

*I imagine that this erudite and bizarre play on words was your idea: I seem to recognize a bit of your playfulness.*

OK, I admit it, it was my invention. But it was an apt name to distinguish this plan from the other one – and here we have the second group – the “Hermes Plan”, after another Greek divinity, the god of thieves, of the clever, of merchants as well as the messenger of the gods, equivalent of the Roman Mercury.

This second plan was centered on Rome, with a privatized AdR at the head of the operation together with other businesses in the capital.

I remember on that occasion that, although acting with great grace and sensitivity, without showing the slightest trace of arrogance or pressure, the components of this second group clearly had a certain expectation to be favored at least in their approach and overall vision for the project.

This was partially because it was illustrated and promoted by Cesare Romiti accompanied by Vincenzo Maranghi, managing director of Mediobanca. And in that phase, Romiti, with Gemina, was guiding the privatization of AdR together with Carlo De Benedetti and other businesspeople. And with Romiti, as I said before, I had an excellent relationship since my days in Confindustria, and was also somewhat obliged to him.

And yet, even then and in spite of this relationship, I was very clear: we too wanted to create a single company for the management of the entire Italian airport system, but we intended to build it around SEA, with a central role held by the Milanese shareholder, the City of Milan.

And so, I explained, in the phase of selling off the controlling shares of the two companies it would have been necessary to deal with the broadest possible group of national businesspeople, thus, with Romiti, De Benedetti and many others (and we were thinking of those in the Poseidon Plan) and we could not make a choice that favored some while excluding others.

Let it be clear, this all happened before September 11, when the attack on the Twin Towers shook up the tourism market and the world aeronautical and airport system, which had been growing strongly up to then.

*If I have understood, you are talking about a case of the “embedded powers” mounting an attack on the Italian airport system. But I don’t see anything improper about it: they were completely licit business propositions, manifested, moreover, in a completely transparent manner.*

No doubt about it, in both cases there was nothing that was not proper and legitimate, given that economic interest, if pursued correctly has nothing illicit in it. Indeed, it is the engine of affluence.

I am just trying to represent a more complete, less trite, and less conformist range of “embedded powers”: extending from the categories and corporations that have noteworthy capacities to engage society and the media to the large financial groups that are able to exert a great deal of pressure.

*The preschool teachers and taxi drivers on a par with Romiti and De Benedetti?*

Beyond the paradox – actually only partial, since each of these subjects has their own specific instruments of pressure – I want to say that in all cases, in spite of the great differences between them, my response was always the same: I did what I thought was in the best interests of the city. A

response from a “political amateur” but one that was professionally rigorous. A career politician would have moved in another way, conceding something, seeking to please someone or at least would have sought to give this impression, perhaps negotiating merely the positional advantage deriving from his role as card dealer.

I have to add though that it is practically impossible to keep all these pressure groups under control, all these micro- or macro-corporations. Those who try always end up in a big mess. In politics as in company management, you have to make choices, it’s inevitable.

Indeed, if you make Group A happy you risk making Group B unhappy. If you recognize the reasoning of, for example, the taxi drivers you will certainly meet with disapproval from the consumer organizations and all those who would like to reduce traffic by strengthening the public transportation system. Or if you support the committees who are against the construction of individual underground parking garages you damage those who have already reserved one or would like to do so. But you have to decide.

The fact remains that in every initiative, you hear only the protests of those who are against it. Those who are in favor do not demonstrate and do not shout slogans on the street.

It is the principle – discovered by De Gaulle and then often used to excess, especially by the right – of the silent majority against the noisy minority who, as a result, are more visible. Furthermore, as I said earlier, it seems that the newspapers are more interested in protest than consent: they are convinced they will sell more copies. I have my doubts about that. I believe that a correct and complete analysis and description of reality will sell even more newspapers. At any rate, it provides the reader and the citizen with a better service.





## Me, Wheeler Dealer? No Thank You!

*And the big real estate operations?*

Like few others before us, we favored relations with international real estate investors – actually global investors – without giving preference to domestic players. The idea here was not only to expand the market as broadly as possible but also to avoid suspicions of collusion. And we did so without suffering any psychological complexes or feelings of guilt for economic activity that creates value and employment, even though certain “old-guard” elements of the left continue to call it “building speculation” (only when others do it, never when leftist cooperatives or friendly companies are involved). This way we avoided some very bothersome problems.

I remember that the plans for the Montecity Rogoredo area were some of the first I saw as candidate for mayor in 1997. They were shown to me when I went to visit Enrico Bondi, then managing director of Montedison and later the savior of Parmalat<sup>1</sup>. He talked to me about this large area, which at the time they didn’t know how to develop to get the most out of it. Now they are building the Santa Giulia

---

<sup>1</sup> Parmalat (Parmalat, which made its fortune as a producer of long-life milk, was involved in 2003 in a grave financial crisis that led to its bankruptcy).

neighborhood, Foster's beautiful project: a city of 60,000 people with convention centers, cinemas, a theater, shopping streets, grand boulevards, etc.

And the same thing is happening in Portello, where the historical Alfa Romeo plant used to be before production was transferred to Arese. I am particularly attached to that zone, not just for what it represents in Milan's industrial history but also for personal reasons. For years I passed by the gates of the Alfa Portello plant on my way to school. To me it was like a temple of labor and industry. Then there was the Hot Autumn, the Protests of 1968, the Years of Lead<sup>2</sup> and the Red Brigades. And then the plant moved to Arese and the industrial area on the northwest outskirts of Milan was left to long abandonment.

And then Bovisa, Garibaldi-Repubblica, the city fairgrounds in record time, in just two years, including connections, of the grandiose external fairgrounds in Rho-Pero, the largest exhibition center in the world.

And all this was done with the same criteria: we never dealt from the bottom of the deck, never gave unfair advantages to anyone, never made any choices that were not based on objective assessments. Economic interest, I repeat, is appreciated and even urged because it is a social value, and an attractive city draws it in. Just like the astrophysicist's black hole: the more mass there is concentrated in one point the more is pulled into it. The more active and endowed the market the more resources it draws in and develops. And in effect the value of real estate in Milan has grown very much, especially in recent years. For some even too much. A doubling of the prices of real estate in Milan is a great benefit for

---

<sup>2</sup> The Years of Lead ('anni di piombo'), an expression drawn from the eponymous title of a film by German director Margarethe Von Trotta, which describes the evolution and implementation during the '70s and '80s of armed protest and terrorism by extremist political groups).

the owners (the majority, almost 85% of the Milanese, live in self-owned apartments), who see the value of their assets greatly increased, but it is certainly a problem for those who are looking to buy. Although, at the same time, mortgages have become much easier to get and less expensive because of the falling cost of money, so that the real estate market has been very active for years, with growing sales volumes.

*With this gigantic mass of interests in play, are you sure that nothing illicit occurred within the administration, perhaps without you knowing about it?*

Well, I certainly cannot exclude, if only by statistical necessity, that among the thousands of building deeds and authorizations and permits someone was not in some way favored by some office: the ways of bureaucracy, as we know, are infinite and labyrinthine. But never, absolutely never was there an intervention of this nature in our administration. Of this I am certain.

We always did everything we could to thwart even the mere intention to move along those lines, resorting at times to pedantry. The proposal that wins is the one that is most competitive, not one where the authorizing party gives an advantage to his interlocutor in exchange for one for himself.

This way we overturned the typical model of what is considered, with unjustified nostalgia, professional politics. We acted completely unlike any traditional politician, who instead would have chosen to – no, would have needed to – exchange someone else's power with his own (in the sense of mutual exchange) to strengthen his position in terms of political consensus.

Indeed, my relation with power is weak, volatile, evanescent: it comprises only those half million votes animated by many different consciences, at times by unconscious, contingent, fluctuating and changeable sentiments influenced

by many uncontrollable and unpredictable facts, events, situations and stimuli.

*What exactly are you talking about?*

What I mean to say is that, if, for example, every day the newspapers exaggerate the negative aspects of life in the city, from parking fines to air quality, or they print screamers like “Neighborhoods up in arms against personal garages!” or “The Central Station is an open-air dump”... Well, by dint of repetition they will manage to erode a bit of my support. And also seeing the same face year after year can get tiring. Like in marriages, the defects of your partner are amplified by the daily repetition and by time until they start to seem unbearable.

In short, my power, that deriving from the vote, the power vested in me by the citizenry – and always with strong reservations – is a perishable good, like some foods that have to be kept in the refrigerator but may still go bad, or like some stocks that are highly subject to fluctuations even of an emotional nature, independently of the fundamentals of society.

In my case, as mayor, I stake my bets on this sole form of legitimization, always with my letter of resignation at the ready.

*And has it always worked?*

Recently, as is natural, it has worked less and less. But for most of my term it worked very well and I frankly believe that, looking back, this criterion *à la* Montanelli – that is, being strongly and stubbornly ethical first and foremost and only then political – produced important political results: both in terms of the results of our administrative actions and consensus at the polls.

One example is the 2004 European parliamentary elections, where Berlusconi wanted me as leading candidate for

the northwest district. In Milan, where I was obviously better known and it was easier for me to make it known that I was a candidate, I won the largest share of votes in the history of the city after Berlusconi. None of the other Milanese leaders or mayors – Craxi, Tognoli, Pillitteri – ever won a higher percentage of the Milanese vote.

*You dwell a great deal on the contrast between professional politics and your political dilettantism. You have often referred to it in public speeches, arousing some reaction.*

I do this because for some time now, as I said before, I hear people talking and I read in the newspapers of “a certain nostalgia for political professionals”, while the positions and behaviors of the “non professionals” are labeled a bit negatively as “antipolitics” and taken to be something quite similar to a man-on-the-street distrust in government.

The first one to talk to me about it explicitly, in private, was Paolo Mieli in January 2005, just after he had resumed the position of editor-in-chief of *Corriere della Sera*.

Mieli is probably the most intelligent, acute and influential among contemporary newspaper editors. He always senses the wind and sees the trajectory before the others. At the time he held the status, according to a journalistic definition, of a “third party” – that is, equidistant from two political camps, although his leftward tendencies are well known. And indeed, in the latest political elections he openly aligned the *Corriere* behind the center-left slate in a famous editorial, an endorsement, in keeping with the normal and perfectly acceptable practice in English-language newspapers.

On the other hand, during his first stint as editor of *Corriere della Sera*, he played a decisive role in the fall of the first Berlusconi government in 1994. His newspaper published a notice of investigation, “blasting” it right there on the front page, the day before the Milan district attorney

served it to the prime minister during a very important international summit in Naples. It was just a notice of investigation and at the end Berlusconi was fully cleared of all charges, but his government fell as a result of the combined action of the district attorney's office and the newspaper.

It was an action that a few years later Mieli said he regretted: who knows, maybe a few years from now he will say he regrets his endorsement of Prodi.

Anyway, I had invited him over to Palazzo Marino for a courtesy luncheon after he returned as editor-in-chief of *Corriere*, as is tradition for the mayor of Milan with new directors of the Milanese papers, even though in his case it was a "Mieli 2", a unique event for Via Solferino.

On that occasion he told me that he interpreted, for example, the recent election of Filippo Penati as president of the Province of Milan as a signal of "nostalgia for professional politics". "Penati won", said Mieli and then, as often happens, others repeated "partially because he is a political professional facing off against the 'amateur' Ombretta Colli". And for the same reason he was the first to hypothesize Penati's candidacy for mayor of Milan in 2006, a candidacy which was shelved perhaps partially because of the murky aspects involved with the acquisition of the majority share in the Serravalle autostrada by the Province of Milan.

Now, aside from the fact that the amateur-professional distinction, as I have attempted to explain, is not so clear and evident, Colli was in the Italian parliament, the European parliament, a Milan city commissioner, five years president of Italy's most important province... how long does it take, how much and what sort of experience does one have to have before one is entitled no longer to be considered an amateur? Are Berlusconi, Letizia Moratti or Gianni Letta still amateurs? Is it absolutely necessary to have grown up in a party section to be considered able professionals in politics?

Aside from all this, I was saying, why didn't they choose the "democratically" simplest explanation for Colli's loss, and that would be that the voters punished her, after having elected her five years earlier with a very narrow edge, principally for her mistakes?

*What is your answer?*

My answer is that the famous "embedded powers", of all kinds, have long been trying to relaunch a presumed primacy of the "political professionals" – and to a great extent they have succeeded – simply because with these in office it is generally easier to make deals, come to understandings, adjust things and make accommodations. Not necessarily in an illicit manner – don't get me wrong – but oftentimes not giving first priority to the collective interest.





## The Bureaucratic Revolution

*Regarding the relationship between power and the political apparatus, let's talk about your attitude toward bureaucracy. Formentini, for example, attributed his lack of success, his immobility as mayor of Milan, to a sort of boycott by the administrative structures of Palazzo Marino, which were considered all to be of traditional communist and socialist extraction. You, on the other hand, who also do not hail from traditional or – precisely as we've been saying – “professional” politics and have no relationship with the political apparatus, do not seem to have had problems of this kind. How is this?*

It is quite clear now that Formentini owes his lack of success to many factors both internal and external to his administration. I will mention just one, and it is of prime importance: after just one year he lost his majority on city council, and so for the next three years he had to seek out his votes one by one. As far as his poor relationship with the administrative machine is concerned, the responsibility is wholly and solely his.

He arrived here saying, in substance: you are a bunch of incompetent thieves, sluggards and *terrone*<sup>1</sup>; you are Milan

---

<sup>1</sup> Terrone (a derogatory term for southerners).

bureaucrats but you reason with a mentality based on the state and centralized power. And he got the inevitable response that any bureaucracy capable of mustering the leverage of office would give: they stuck exactly to the description Formentini had provided of them. They thus gave him a Pirandellian response: "We are exactly the way you would have us be".

*And you, on the other hand?*

My commissioners, my first city manager, Stefano Parisi, and I found drawers full of projects, proposals and ideas, and also – generally and at the various levels – a group of directors, functionaries and clerks of good quality whom it was easy to motivate and bring up to the necessary level of efficiency. Sure, we also found ourselves confronted with apparatuses with their own corporative nuclei, but we took a tough line and recovered much of them.

But the Parisi Reform was a bona fide revolution in the largest Milanese services company: the city administration. It introduced a rewards program and the so-called "divisionalization", a structural overhaul that eliminated the commissions and created central thematically-oriented divisions, since the best results are achieved not by hermetically isolated units but by a joint, cross-sectorial effort.

The main objective was to regenerate motivation, the zest for work well done by the 'technostructure' and nourished by results, objectives realized, not an approach that seeks conformity to procedure, which is the refuge and alibi of the traditional bureaucrat.

Oftentimes the bureaucrat, secure in his office, feels he has fulfilled his obligations when he has closed a file according to procedure, almost regardless of the result.

It's somewhat like – and we keeping going back to the same point – the way a career politician feels at peace with

his conscience when he has communicated his message and not when he has accomplished something; when he is to be believed: what counts is the announcement and its listenership, not the actual realization of what is announced. The outcome of his action is the consensus that he gets from an idea, a project, an intention, a consensus acquired on the basis of a concept and not on an effective result, because the result costs a great deal: building something is very tiring and also very risky, and once it has been built, everyone tends either to denigrate it or to sign on – we see this every day.

And so what we might call, a bit emphatically, “the reform of the Milanese bureaucracy” was a goal that we achieved. And it was also a moment of great participation of the administrative structures in our program, to the point that they were able to autonomously launch and realize their own projects.

*These statements need to be backed up by facts and figures.*

Here are your facts and figures. In our first five years we built public works amounting to 3.162 billion euros as opposed to the 182 million euros in Formentini’s four years, almost twenty times more. And one of the most important effects was that 137,000 additional workers from dozens of countries were used on the public works projects, and this is not including the colossal wiring project that has made our city the most densely wired city in Europe.

More facts and figures regard the updating and streamlining of rules and procedures. This included, for example, the first section of the building code, a reform that reduced the time needed to obtain a permit from an average of five hundred days to two or three weeks. And the offices, the bureaucracy, of Palazzo Marino were the driving force behind all this.

We were the *pasdaran* of the Bassanini Reform, applying it to the local public authorities according to its inspiring

principles: guidance and control by politicians and management by bureaucrats. We wanted to keep the interference of politics – that is, of the city government elected by the people – in management to a minimum, practically inexistent: no “recommended” person, no more fast-track vs. slow-lane paperwork to favor one person and damage another.

Hence it was a move that greatly increased responsibility among the municipal bureaucracy and provided a strong stimulus.

At the annual public administration forum of 2005 – which not incidentally took place for the first time in 1998 at Palazzo Marino – I was reminded by an instructor at the Bocconi that my first meeting as a mayor had been with Milanese municipal staff who had just completed a course at the Bocconi on the refinement of managerial technique in public government.

And so if there is a meaning in what we did for the municipal machine it is precisely this: we instilled an entrepreneurial relationship between the city and the public administration. And it was no coincidence that we chose as general manager “one of them who thinks like us”. This was how, in a conversation with Letizia Moratti, we described Stefano Parisi, who was a high-placed bureaucrat but one who had a businessman’s outlook, a managerial interpretation of his job.

*Were there no reactions from the unions regarding this meritocratic and efficiency-oriented line, given that this is something which is generally not appreciated by the unions, especially in public administration?*

There were very strong reactions, especially in the circles we described before, those of the small internal corporations: resistance due partially to competition between party and union organizations, between extremist hyper-corporative groups and those with a view we might call *erga omnes*, that

is, of service to all, to the general interests of the different categories.

The confederated unions, especially UIL (Unione Italiana del Lavoro: Italian Workers Union) and CISL (Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori: Italian confederation of trade unions), often played a moderating role, counseling realism and common sense, while the CGIL (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro: left-wing confederation of Italian trade unions) not infrequently entrenched in more radical positions, perhaps fearing competition from the COBAS (Confederazione dei Comitati di Base; Confederation of Base Committee). This was seen in Marco Biagi's<sup>2</sup> labor pact, which we had been testing since 2000 before proposing it on the national level with the famous Pact With the Milanese People which the CGIL declined to sign. But within the municipal machine there was more dialogue than conflict.

The internal unions had understood that our structural overhaul represented an overall advantage for the workers. Especially for the executives, but not only for them. What they lost in terms of some more or less licit "convenience", as it were, in the management of work relations, they gained in quality of service, acquired professionalism and motivation.

Oftentimes the advantage was also economic, but it can be said at the least that there were no disadvantages. It was a rather broadly agreed upon reform, as well as an effective one.

*In effect, in Palazzo Marino one does not have the typical feeling that bureaucratic structures usually give, at least not in the typical clichéd terms: people entrenched in their own roles, apparent indolence, lethargy, procedural intricacy, a general dust-mantled weariness and untidiness.*

---

<sup>2</sup> Marco Biagi (1950-2002; labor law theorist who equated development with the flexibility of work).

*Those who frequented these corridors had – with the inevitable exceptions – an impression of general helpfulness and even efficiency. It was more like being in a large private company than in a public administration. This, at least, according to the images commonly attributed to these two settings.*

We have to make a distinction. The Milan city administration has nearly 20,000 employees distributed among dozens of buildings. Palazzo Marino is a special case. Those working here know that they are in the heart of the structure, in the center of power, in the yolk of the egg, so to speak. As a consequence, on the average these people are more gratified and thus more strongly motivated.

Then, generally speaking, those who work for a public body may have an extra motivation if they have a sufficiently well developed civic sensibility: the sensation of working for the collectivity, for the public, a motivation that works wonders with certain personalities.

On the other hand, one has the security of keeping one's job and one's role and there is less oversight over results, and thus a lower risk of penalties. All this adds up to a lower salary: you risk less, you earn less. We introduced disequalization criteria into a context traditionally characterized by equalization, into an entropic system where everything is lukewarm, nothing is hot or cold.

But in truth I fear that, in spite of the Parisi Reform, we actually managed to alter little of this widespread mediumness. There was some development, some shock to the general climate, but in substance it has remained roughly what it was. Its roots run too deep and its precedents are too ancient to be amenable to change over the course of a few years.

But I must say, to close this topic, that the Milan public administration, in general and in spite of everything, still enjoys a reputation of above-average efficiency on the national level. And I think this reputation is well deserved.

*And politics, in the sense of conflict, how much does it affect relations with bureaucracy, how much does it affect its efficiency?*

Very much. Perhaps the fundamental difference with respect to private firms is that a public administration finds itself in a situation where its leadership, which is political, is called into question not just every five years but practically every day.

Who does the City of Milan belong to? To the Milanese, to all the Milanese, and not just the voters: it is the most diffuse and generalized, and thus also the most substantially indeterminate ownership one can imagine. Not even the largest American public company finds itself in these conditions.

Every day there is someone, be it the official opposition or someone else, working to a deadline that is considered imminent, that of the next election, of the changing or renewal of the political guidelines, which may be accompanied by a change of executive staff. We are talking about the spoil system provided for by the Bassanini Reform. The deadline is more or less remote but is addressed on a day-to-day basis as if people were going to the polls tomorrow.

This is partially because the highly volatile thing we call consensus, as I said before, can be depreciated at any time by means of instruments such as information, communication and the creation of an image perhaps via administrative acts being assessed not in accordance with objective criteria but on the basis of political positioning.

This competition, always extreme and calculated, never regarding the decisions and choices actually made, makes governing the public 'thing' (*res publica*) much more difficult. That is, unless one is willing to do as was done during the First Republic and as is done somewhat still today: attenuate, mediate and distribute power so as to manage to conserve at least a portion of it as long as possible. But the price is inefficiency in management, of administrative action.



*A price you are not willing to pay?*

In reality, that way of acting, that style of management (or of non-management) is not in my genes, I am not capable of it. We preferred a line that – keeping with these Latin citations – I would call *aut Caesar aut nullus*. In other words: either let us govern or we'll leave. And in effect, the method worked for a long time, although toward the end its effectiveness began to wane.

The weight of the elected representatives, the city council and the parties – including the majority parties – on our decision-making was never excessive, let alone paralyzing, as it generally and inevitably tends to become.

*Actually, many accuse you of not having held the city council in any consideration.*

The elected representatives, who quite rightly think they represent all the citizens, always have as a consequence the impression of not weighing heavily enough on the decisions of the administration. Actually, deep down they are convinced that power should rightly be in their hands, that they should be the ones governing, and not the councillors who were not elected by the people. But they forget that the councillors all work under the mayor, who is elected directly by the people to govern the city while the city council is there to provide guidance and oversight.

Continuing our comparison with a private company, the councillors are like the members of the board of directors, while the city council is the shareholders' meeting.

I believe that the Bassanini Reform was inspired precisely by this model to give efficiency and continuity to administrative operations, which during the First Republic were overly subject to the moods, conflicts, and dynamics imposed by the parties in the city council.

*A model that still struggles to be accepted by those who have nostalgia for the party rationales you often mention.*

Let me give you the example of a momentous battle in the early period of my term. It regarded the figure and role of the city manager. According to the president of the city council at the time, Massimo De Carolis, the city manager had to answer to the council, whereas to my mind, he had to answer to the mayor and be appointed directly by him. Otherwise, insisting a bit on my comparison here, it would be as if the general manager of a company answered to the shareholders' assembly instead of to the CEO.

*And how did it end?*

It ended well because it was one of those cases, perhaps the first, when I already had my letter of resignation ready. And, frankly speaking, at the time it was not just a pressure tactic on my part: how could I actually have governed without direct control over the principal management body?

But this is just one example, there were other analogous cases with other conflicts. I mean to say that our management model was certainly not accepted without a fight. Another example with De Carolis was when he insisted that I appoint Gino Colombo as president of the Milan Public Transportation Authority (ATM). At the time, Colombo was Secretary General of Fiera Milano and more immersed in politics than in business management, which is what would be required for such a complex company oriented toward the global market.

It was a very clear indication that characterized and irremediably marked the gulf between our respective conceptions of a model city administration.

In a certain sense, De Carolis wanted to elevate the president of the city council to a sort of super-mayor status, perhaps thinking of how things worked prior to the Bassanini

Reform, when the mayor was elected by the council (that is, by the parties) and was also its president. De Carolis sought to bring back to the council a total power of control and also veto over the decisions of the mayor, who would thus have been reduced to a subaltern of the council and its president.

In short, I would have had to negotiate every decision with the president of the city council, something unthinkable, unacceptable.

*Once, even before the disappearance of large industry, the city administration was the largest Milanese municipal "company", that is, it was the one with the highest number of employees.*

And this is certainly still true. Counting the municipally owned or co-owned firms, the administration employs some 40,000 people. During our term, the municipal employees, in the strict sense, were reduced by approximately 15%. This was mainly the result of so-called "externalizations".

*A horrible word...*

I agree with you. It's a term from company jargon that means we managed to transfer some of the administration's operations to external structures, thus reducing the fixed costs of the administrative apparatus and rendering the externalized structures more efficient, functional and even more profitable.

This "externalizations" were accomplished generally by creating foundations or joint-stock companies external to the municipal administration. Hence from 21,000 municipal employees we were able to reduce the rolls to just under 19,000, although some sectors have actually added personnel. For example, we fought to get 1,500 more municipal police officers.

But as I said, then there are the municipally owned or co-owned companies: there are the 9,000 ATM employees, 3,000 AMSA employees, 5,000 SEA employees, etc.

Frankly, we would have liked to externalize even more. For example, we created the *Fondazione scuole civiche* (City Schools Foundation, *translator's note*), which alone reduced the administration workforce by 1,500, but we were not able to create the Museums Foundation for questions of its coherence with our business plan, but also conceptual and philosophical questions regarding the idea, unquestionably perilous, of assigning a market value to culture.

We externalized the waterworks, which was transferred to MM SpA. We created Milano Ristorazione SpA, taking over the former municipal school lunch service. This was a great success, as I said before: a company that produces 75,000 meals a day and earns a significant profit without problems associated with quality of service or protests about the cost to users.

But on the other hand, we had loads of problems as a result of it, precisely regarding the heart of the initiative. This was mainly thanks to the prejudice and hostility of the information media, which demagogically nourished negative attitudes in a good portion of the personnel and led them to reject the idea of leaving the security of a guaranteed public job for one in a private company.

During that period, as I have already recounted, every day there was an article in the newspaper about “mushy rice”, “lunches served cold”, or “worms in the salad” with the inevitable subheadings “mothers up in arms”. It was a tough time, but we knew we were on the right side.

Perhaps, looking back on it now, the battle for Milano Ristorazione was the most psychologically difficult battle, but precisely for this reason, at the end it was the most rewarding and meaningful in our program of rationalization and modernization of the city services system.





Gabriele Albertini and Silvio Berlusconi in Milan during the inal rally of the campaign that would result in the former's first election to the mayor-  
 alty, in May 1997.



In his office at the Corriere della Sera, Indro Montanelli interviews candidate Albertini before the first election in April 1997.  
 (Agenzia Photogramma)



April 2006: the inaugu-  
 ration of the monument  
 to Indro Montanelli,  
 sculpted by Vito Tongi-  
 ani (*pictured on the left*).



With Jiang Zemin, President of the People's Republic of China,  
during an official visit to Italy in March 1999.

In Palazzo Marino with Vladimir Putin and the Mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov  
(*on the right*), June 2000.







Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, President of the Republic, with Albertini in his office in Palazzo Marino, October 1999. (Photo Comune Milano /Alice Mantovani)

Beijing, 24 novembre 2005: visiting the Chinese capital to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Milan's sistership with Shanghai, Albertini meets Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing.



Caught up in the festive crowd during the official visit of Queen Elizabeth to Milan in October 2000.







With Ehud Olmert, then Mayor of Jerusalem, during a visit to Milan in November 2002. (Photo Comune di Milano/Andrea Scurrati)

An exchange of gifts at Ramallah between Gabriele Albertini and the President of the Palestinian Authority, Abu Mazen, March 2006.



Tel Aviv, March 2006: Gabriele Albertini plants a tree in memory of Eugenio Colorni in Milano Square.



At Yad Vashem, Jerusalem's Museum of the Holocaust, March 2006.

Albertini meeting the Israeli Vice-Prime Minister and Nobel Peace Prize winner Shimon Peres in Jerusalem, 10 March 2006, at which time he was awarded honorary citizenship of Milan.



In Amman, visiting Queen Rania and King Abdullah II of Jordan, March 2006.



With Pope John Paul II, June 1997. (© L'Osservatore Romano)

With Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, November 2000. (© L'Osservatore Romano)





Milan, March 2002: the Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivan bestows the Order of Friendship (formerly the Order of Lenin) to Gabriele Albertini. Also pictured are Giovanni Marra, President of the City Council (*left*) and Rosario Alessandrello, President of the Italy-Russia Association (*right*).

The first session of the newly elected European Parliament member, 20 July 2004, Strasbourg.



New York, October 2005: in front of the headquarters of NASDAQ, which pays a warm tribute to the Mayor of Milan.





April 2006: visiting the International Red Cross hospital in Kabul, run by Alberto Cairo, to whom Albertini would later bestow the Ambrogino d'Oro.



December 2005: Gabriele Albertini visits the Italian soldiers of the ISAF stationed in Afghanistan. *From the left*, Italian Ambassador Ettore Sequi, General Mauro Del Vecchio and the Mayor of Kabul, Ghulam Sakhi Noorzad.



At the World Business Forum, held in Milan in October 2004, Gabriele Albertini conferred honorary citizenship to Rudolph Giuliani, former Mayor of New York.



20 April 2006, Palazzo Marino: the unveiling of the bust of Mayor Aldo Aniasi, by the sculptor Vittorio Gentile. (Photo Comune di Milano/Alice Mantovani)



Accompanying a mounted patrol of the municipal police, August 2002.



The scale model of the new La Scala theater, presented in London in 2004. *From the left:* Ambassador Giancarlo Aragona, Franco Malgrande, Elisabetta Fabbri, Gabriele Albertini, Mario Botta, Superintendent Carlo Fontana, Councilor Salvatore Carrubba and Andrea Vento.

Moscow, June 2000: with the La Scala Philharmonic, along with Mikhail Gorbachev and Maestro Riccardo Muti.

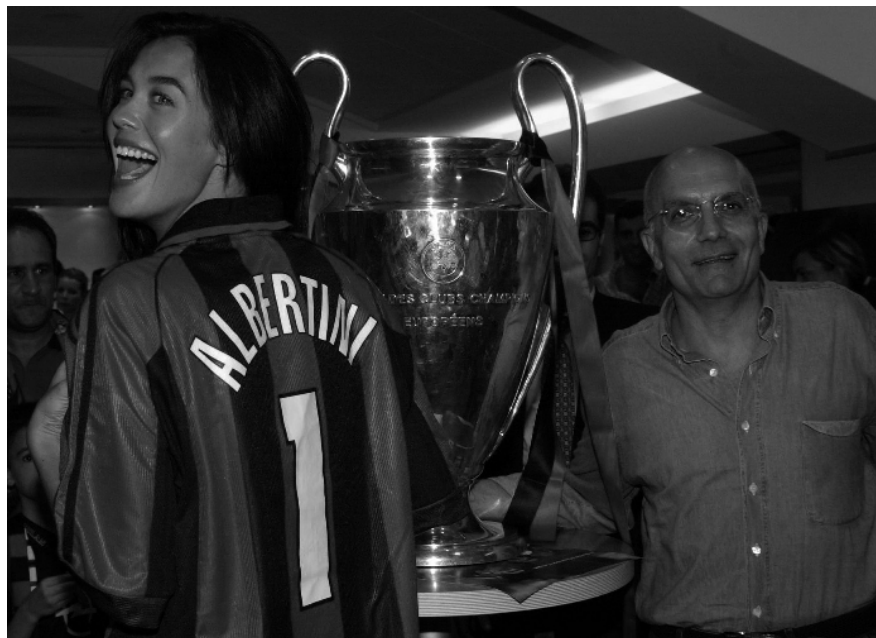




The triumphant return from Manchester of AC Milan, winner of the Champions League (May 2003), with Adriano Galliani, Carlo Ancelotti and Paolo Maldini.

Tel Aviv, March 2006: Gabriele Albertini is welcomed by the Italo-Israeli actress Moran Attias and Mayor Ron Huldai.





After winning its sixth Champions League title, AC Milan pays homage to fan Albertini with an honorary jersey, worn here by Megan Gale.

A Ferrari evening at La Scala in October 2001, with Michael Schumacher, Jean Todt and Luca Cordero di Montezemolo. (Photo Comune di Milano/Andrea Scuratti)







Gabriele Albertini with a document attesting that on 21 March 2006, he broke the sound barrier with Lt. Col. Mauro Gabetta in an F-16 of the Italian Air Force.



With Giorgio Armani and Gianmaria Buccellati.

*What you just described was certainly not the only, nor the most demanding case of resistance to the so-called “externalizations” and privatizations.*

Anything but. We all know about the war without quarter waged by the opposition, as well as by certain sectors of the majority, against all our privatization efforts, from the municipal pharmacies to AEM and SEA.

Obstructionism in the chambers, rallying the masses, instigation of the employees of the companies in question to protest, appeals to the Regional Court (TAR) and the District Attorney’s office: they did all this and more to prevent us from obtaining the resources we needed to realize projects that would have been very important for the city and also for the prestige of our administration.

The gradual privatization of AEM, for example, that historical, exquisitely Milanese, formerly municipally-owned electric company in which the City still maintains control via a majority on the Board of Directors, was represented as the selling off of the most precious and beloved family jewel. And instead it allowed the agreement with the French colossus EDF for control of Edison, another historic emblem of Milanese industry.

That privatization led to a new international rank for AEM, the creation of a large electric company providing an alternative to the former ENEL monopoly, and the beginning of real competition in the Italian electricity market, which, among the European countries, is the one that charges its customers the most and imports electricity from none other than France, thanks in part to the impetuous abandonment of nuclear power imposed by the left in the 1980s.

### *And SEA?*

The privatization of SEA, albeit partial, was opposed by a party within the majority coalition, the Lega Nord, and they did so before and more vehemently than anyone else. But as I said before, it was just a question, couched in localistic terms, of power and seats, calculated in terms of the party's particular territorial rootedness.

SEA's business prevalently regards, as we all know, Malpensa airport in the Province of Varese, land of Umberto Bossi, cradle of the Lega and the area of its highest density. So the Leghisti considered Malpensa, and thus SEA, as their rightful property, as a source of power and seats. And so they could not tolerate it being put on the market, not even a part of it.

But the story of the privatization of SEA speaks volumes about the definition of the "embedded powers", according to the broadest meaning of the term we discussed earlier.

*Sorry, but what have the "embedded powers" got to do with this story?*

I'll say it again. I am referring to the broadest definition of the term, which I have already explained. You be the judge.

When we finally managed, after much fighting, to decide on auctioning off 34% of the shares in SEA (later becoming 33% to prevent shareholders' agreements, which even

certain members of the majority coalition did not want in spite of the fact that the City would remain the majority shareholder), there was extremely strong resistance from the opposition, who wanted to discuss this sale of a minority share in city council, thus greatly prolonging the process.

To get around this instance of obvious obstructionism, the majority coalition had already modified the city statute. The opposition unleashed the usual judiciary battle over this, even though it was simply a case of administrative justice, the usual politics by official documents: recourse first to the Regional Courts (TAR) and then to the Council of State, which in the end ruled against us.

In the meantime, between one round of administrative justice and the next, the months passed and in the end we were forced to take the question into the council chamber.

Here we encountered other problems, even in the form of an overly fastidious know-it-all in the majority who took exception to the price and to the possibility of shareholder agreements with the potential buyer (which were inevitable with a future minority shareholder who has more than one third of the company).

That busybody probably hadn't a clue what he was talking about and may have been, shall we say, poorly advised from outside. The fact of the matter is that I had another confirmation of the low level of *laissez-faire* liberalism of certain exponents of the majority coalition who proclaim themselves liberals, obviously abusing the term.

Someone else who was much more competent, Bruno Tabacci of the UDC<sup>1</sup> said we should go through the stock exchange. That would have meant losing at least another year and the operation would not have reached its conclusion before the end of my term.

---

<sup>1</sup> Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e di Centro; a Christian Democratic Party founded in Italy in 2002, led by Pier Ferdinando Casini.

But the astounding thing is that an almost identical case, for the same plan to auction off a similar share of Gesac SpA, the company that manages the Naples Capodichino airport, was pronounced acceptable by the same section of the Council of State. And they invoked precisely that exclusive purview of the city council just for the constitution or elimination of public service companies or other companies and not for the selling off of minority shares, which would instead fall within the jurisdiction of the mayoral committee.

Hence, something that was licit in Naples with a left-ist mayor, Antonio Bassolino, was not licit in Milan with a center-right mayor. Incredible? Not quite as much when you consider that one of the three magistrates who judged both cases – which, I repeat, were identical – was an excellent friend and close collaborator of the Finance Minister Vincenzo Visco in the previous center-left governments. So we are talking about a double standard, depending on the political flag of the person in question.

In conclusion, rereading all the different parts in the play: who are the “embedded powers” in this case? Or at any rate, who acted as such?

*And as it turned out, nothing came of it.*

The death blow to the auctioning off of 33% of the company – as I mentioned before – was a governmental measure. In order to save Alitalia from bankruptcy, and especially given the pressure from Alleanza Nazionale<sup>2</sup>, with state subsidies no longer possible after being forbidden by the European Union, the airport fees were reduced, thus reducing Alitalia's costs. However, by doing so, they also gave an advantage to competitors, both national and foreign, while damaging

---

<sup>2</sup> Political party founded in 1994 after the Movimento Sociale Italiano–Destra Nazionale joined forces – initially to favor their hopes in the upcoming election – with fringe groups having Christian-Democrat or conservative leanings.

only the airport management companies like SEA, who saw a sudden reduction in projected revenues. It was a flabbergasting decision: in order to save Alitalia (probably unsuccessfully), they did enormous damage to other vital enterprises for the national air transport system.

The fact is that the attractiveness of investing in SEA was now reduced, or no longer clearly assessable, whereas we had already set bidding to start at 600 million euros.

The future will show – no, it's already showing – that SEA remains a very attractive company even under these conditions. But at the time, and with an ongoing crisis in the air transport system, the auction could only be abandoned. All of this occurred as a result of delays and obstacles generated by resistance and friction, and by the wedges and wrenches thrown into the works by the opposition and by a part of the majority coalition.

*This is reminiscent of the crisis at La Scala – that nasty episode which led to the elimination of superintendant Carlo Fontana and ended with the resignation of Maestro Riccardo Muti after a long and public conflict between the two – some newspapers spoke about the arrogance of the “embedded powers” that prevented a solution to the crisis, siding with Muti against Fontana.*

And that time as well they got carried away in talking about it. They referred negatively to the principal private members of the Fondazione Scala, a private foundation whose president by law is the mayor of Milan: Telecom, Mediaset, ENI. Actually, these should be seen as great benefactors, because with their enormous financial contributions, even in the crucial period of the crisis, they made it possible for the world's greatest opera house to remain, in spite of everything, up to the level of its prestige. Even if, perhaps, they did make some errors in assessment during the crisis, errors that made the solution harder to achieve and more costly.

*Could you explain, please?*

It's a complicated and rather contorted situation and it has left me very embittered, because in part it ruined the prestige and good image of the restoration, restructuring and technological upgrading that has made the world's most famous opera house also its most modern.

The unseemly instrumentalization wreaked by the opposition had all the markings of a revanchist ploy: throughout the duration of the work, they had attempted to obstruct progress with every means at their disposal, appealing to superintendants, ministries and the courts, with the usual pretext of trying to save the historical and artistic value of Piermarini's<sup>3</sup> great opera house – which the work was actually exalting! – exposing the city to the risk of blocking everything for years, causing irreparable damage to Milan and its image, as well as to Italian culture in general. But all they cared about was impeding a major initiative by the mayoral committee.

Despite all this, we accomplished a historical project, a colossal project, and we did it within the established timeline, just thirty months. It was a very tight deadline, which many saw as impossible. But instead we stuck to it thanks to perfect organization and three work shifts per day. And we also stayed within the limits of the budget. Right on time, on December 7, 2004, we returned the theater to the city, to Italy and to the world with a triumphant opening night.

*And in the meantime, La Scala had moved to the Teatro degli Arcimboldi.*

A splendid, extremely modern theater, this too built in record time, just two years, in the new Bicocca district. And in

---

<sup>3</sup> Giuseppe Piermarini (1734-1808); Italian architect who designed the Teatro alla Scala.

this regard, let me remind you that no Milan administration had ever spent more on the La Scala system (Piermarini's theater, the Arcimboldi, the Ansaldo scenery workshops, the museum, et cetera) since the days of Maria Theresa of Austria when the theater was first built. In the end it amounted to 180 million euros.

This is not the time or place for me to go back over the entire bitter affair originating in the harsh conflict between Fontana and Muti, but it is appropriate that we recall that its origins were very distant in time.

The musical director had accused the superintendent for years of being responsible for the "slow and inexorable decline" of the theater. He spoke to me about it on different occasions and with an increasingly heartfelt tone until the summer of 2003, when he formalized his complaint in a long and very bitter letter he sent me from the Salzburg Festival, where he was a guest conductor. In the letter, he asked me to "intervene *with force* and *with no delay* to resolve this distressing and harmful situation, for both the theater and the city" (emphasis his), declaring that "otherwise I am *completely prepared* to leave". In short: Fontana or Muti.

Soon thereafter, in Tokyo, during a triumphant tour, the orchestra members approved a document that they delivered to me on September 5, where they stated that "since the mid-1990s, the orchestra has more than once reported the progressive artistic and organizational deterioration", imploring me to "ask maestro Muti to withdraw any offers of resignation".

And yet these orchestra members – whose privileges and salaries have been written about, and which I prefer to overlook for the moment – are the same ones who in early 2005 went on strike and undermined the prestige of the theater, with the support of the unions, to drive Muti out.

And do you know why? Simply because they had not liked the organizational solutions and the managers that



Muti had proposed to the Fondazione after Fontana's exit, starting with the new superintendent Mauro Meli from the lyric theater of Cagliari. And especially because they felt the risk that their privileges, protections, power relationships and preferential treatment might be called into question. In short, for merely corporative reasons. It was in clear, incredible and overly shameless contradiction with the document they faxed to me from Tokyo.

But on that earlier occasion, relying on what was actually an inexistent solidarity between the orchestra and Muti, the private members of the Fondazione, great supporters of the maestro, asked me to oppose the union demands, thus forcing me into a long and tormented resistance. And one that in the end turned out to be totally pointless and even damaging because we were obliged to accept the resignation that Meli responsibly submitted in order not to compromise the theater's image. And this resignation was followed, inevitably and as expected, by that of Muti. So, goodbye Fontana, goodbye Muti.

This is the error of assessment of which I accuse the private founders, a rather serious error for which we have paid dearly. After having sided with Muti in the conflict with Fontana, agreed to insisted on all the maestro's indications regarding how to run the theater, counting on his presumed influence over the orchestra, in the end we had to bid adieu to him as well. And the whole story certainly damaged the prestige of the theater.

So in the end, the corporations of the orchestra members and the other theater workers, with the support of the unions, were victorious. And so I ask the same question for the *n*<sup>th</sup> time: who truly are the "embedded powers", and whose side are they on?

## Caught with my trousers down

*Sorry, Albertini, but I'm the one asking the questions. Also because some of the episodes you talk about seem to justify one of the criticisms most frequently leveled at you, especially by friends and allies. They chide you for being off-putting as a communicator, of not knowing how to bring out the best in your image. An advertising agent would say you don't sell yourself well.*

*I don't know if that's an accurate description. Actually I have some doubt. I suspect, for example, that you play a bit at being stand-offish, even a bit coyly.*

*One thing is certain in any case, and that is that your image will remain indelibly linked to the imitation that Teo Teocoli<sup>1</sup> did of you. You have to admit that the portrayal of that famous episode when you offered to wear a pair of Valentino cashmere underwear is irresistible. It was the early stages of your term and that was a great PR stunt. Was it intentional?*

Well, the first thing I have to say is that the “communicational” use of underwear was not a new thing to me. I have already mentioned the national metalworkers demonstration in Turin for the renewal of their contract when I was president of Federmeccanica. Leading the parade was an enormous pair

---

<sup>1</sup> Teo Teocoli. Italian comic actor.

of boxer shorts suspended in the air with great clusters of balloons while the crowd chanted the slogan: "Albertini you won't leave us in our shorts" or something along those lines.

That mass satire referred to a position I took when I made a distinction between a national contract and a company contract. They criticized me for having bestowed a merit award on the employees of my company when the dispute over the national contract was raging.

I had replied that, given its configuration, the national contract was the equivalent of the underwear in a person's clothing. It was the basic, indispensable garment, covering only the inflationary buying power. Everything else should be the responsibility of the individual company. It can provide jeans and a T-shirt as opposed to a tuxedo, depending on its specific conditions. If a company is profitable it gives bonuses, if it is in the red it limits itself to covering the cost of inflation.

Now there are parts of the union that are not so scandalized by this hypothesis, but at the time it gave rise to what was called the "underwear strike". However, aside from the object, this episode has nothing to do with the one immortalized by Teo Teocoli, which has its origins in a much more banal occurrence.

*Please, tell us.*

One Sunday morning in July 1998, during one of the many fashion events in Milan, I had been invited to a Dolce & Gabbana show. I had been mayor of Milan for just a few months and I wanted to pay a lot of attention to the fashion sector, which I considered, and still consider, to be strategic for Milan's economy.

At a certain point, Domenico Dolce asked me to try on a pair of bath slippers. I agreed out of courtesy, but I must confess, with a bit of unease: I took off my shoes and socks and tried the slippers.

From that moment on, the journalists, photographers and audience had eyes for nothing but my feet. They were crazed, to the point where I noticed in shock that even the gorgeous Isabella Rossellini, guest of honor for the event, was almost overlooked.

It was truly embarrassing, especially for someone like me, an average Joe who had become mayor of Milan just a few months earlier and was thus more accustomed to the dimensions of a little factory and not yet ready for the bizarre world of the fashion set.

The next day, Monday afternoon, again invited as the newly elected mayor, I went to a Valentino show. Maurizio Romiti greeted me politely at the door. He was son of Cesare and CEO of Hdp, a finance company then belonging to the Valentino brand. Immediately after exchanging greetings, both Romiti and Valentino, kidding but not too much, scolded me for having “publicized the competitors”, alluding to the episode of the Dolce & Gabbana slippers.

To show I was equal to the joke I incautiously and ingenuously replied, “Well, if you also have a pair of slippers or sandals I could wear, I am only too willing...”

“We don’t have anything of the kind,” they responded. “We do have a bathing suit however”.

At that point, a bit caught in my own trap thanks to my imprudent statement, I accepted, mainly so as not to give the impression of partiality.

Certainly, for a moment I also thought about the polemics and sarcasm that might be stirred up by the image of the mayor of a large city posing in a swimsuit. But just for an instant, then I chose to ignore that aspect of the affair. I was on the dance floor so I had no choice but to move my feet.

In any case, before I had time to reconsider, they brought me a basket full of underwear. I chose, almost letting chance be my guide, a pair of shorts made of a particular type of

elasticized cashmere, which turned out to be underwear and not boxer shorts: it is unthinkable to take a bath in cashmere, the consequences would be devastating. And what's more, at the time it looked like a more serious garment than the others in its austere gray: it seemed to be the lesser of several evils.

As I was changing I was seized by a series of doubts as to the appropriateness of the action. I began to think that someone might take exception to it. But it was too late now. So I put myself in underwear, albeit cashmere, and accompanied by Valentino I went, fearless to the point of being foolhardy, to offer myself up to the photographers and television cameramen. What happened then is indescribable.

Nevertheless, while blinded by the flashes, deafened by the shouts of the photographers, pulled this way and that by the television directors, there was no way I could imagine that this would end up as far away as in American newspapers.

The following day I was in Rome for a meeting and people stopped me on the street to compliment me on my... "enterprise". I was amused, flattered and embarrassed all at once.

*In any case it turned out well, because in the favorable climate of your early days as mayor, during your "honeymoon" with the press and public opinion, when they were thinking of using you as a lever for Berlusconi – as you say – that episode was very well received, it was a great coup for your image.*

*If you had done something similar during your second term it would have been a scandal, they would have massacred you.*

For that matter, for a person with my face, my personal history and my evidently ugly personality, someone who is a bit wooden, picky, tetchy, very little inclined to narcissism and spectacle, for someone like me, that anomaly, that discon-

tinuity gave a certain tone of unpredictability, eccentricity and self-mockery to my image.

In addition to lending a useful degree of likability, that episode also gave a touch of creative madness to my image which, sincerely and without false modesty, I believe to be true.

The meaning of that moment of foolhardiness in terms of communication was really made clear to me by Teocoli when he explained to me, with words that were even a bit alarming, why he had decided to use it as a centerpiece in his repertoire: "From someone with your face who lets himself be photographed in underwear one has no idea what to expect". And perhaps he was right.



## The Fastweb Paradigm

*Let's get back to serious things. If you had to choose among the various actions that characterized your years in Palazzo Marino, which would you consider the most meaningful, which was the most representative of your administrative approach? This may of course be a needless question. After everything you've told me I expect you'll respond by citing the restoration of La Scala or the new Fairgrounds.*

Instead I am going to choose the creation of Fastweb<sup>1</sup> which made Milan the most densely wired city in Europe. But it is certainly not just for this reason that I consider this to be such an important and significant operation. The truth is that it was an extraordinary enterprise, truly the work of a tight-knit and innovative team. It was the intrinsic result, starting right from the promoters and operators, of a combination of talents and abilities from civil society and the business community, a convergence of the real needs of the city, governmental action and overall coordination. It was the result of a mysterious but concrete and intelligently managed alchemy of powers and needs, and I am speaking mainly of my collaborators. And lastly, it seems to be the

---

<sup>1</sup> Italian broadband telecommunications company founded in 1999 and based in Milan.



most meaningful example of what I mean by entrepreneurship in government, in the ontological sense.

*Help me understand...*

What happened simply was that a company controlled by the City of Milan, our AEM, had some networks and a plan for wiring the metropolitan area through its subsidiary Citytel, which later became Metroweb. On the other hand, a private company, e.Biscom, belonging to Silvio Scaglia and Francesco Micheli, had very audacious and innovative plans and ideas for the telecommunications field, and the AEM networks made these ideas possible. In short, by means of a fiber-optic cable, the citizen-user was to have unlimited interactive television, Internet and telephone service via land-line all at the same time.

*Tell me how this adventure started.*

One day, Silvio Scaglia came to visit us. It was a memorable meeting. The relationship was not immediately fluid and positive, quite the contrary. At the time, Scaglia was 40 years old, the CEO of Omnitel with a prestigious curriculum vitae and a reputation as a brilliant manager. But most importantly, he had an idea, and at the time it may have been the most innovative idea in the sphere of telecommunications: he wanted to create a network that was independent of Telecom Italia, entirely based on the Internet Protocol (IP) and built of fiber-optic cables reaching into people's homes. It would not only carry telephone and Internet, but also television. The idea originated then, in Palazzo Marino and not in the aseptic meeting rooms of Merrill Lynch or Goldman Sachs or in the AT&T skyscrapers in New York, of creating the first new-generation telecommunications service provider. And it would be born in Italy.

We thus had on the table a grand idea and Silvio Scaglia's

highly reputable CV united with the experience and financial abilities of Francesco Micheli, who was the first to be convinced of the validity of the project and Scaglia's capabilities, and thus enthusiastically supported it. And that was already an auspicious beginning.

*But was it something the city needed?*

The metropolis clearly needed advanced and competitive communications structures. The situation could be metaphorically described as follows: an aqueduct supplying the city was in place, there was widespread demand to drink well and quickly; what was missing was water. We, the City of Milan, together with AEM installed the pipes. An agreement between e.Biscom and its shareholder AEM, which owned a more than significant share of 37.7%, brought Fastweb into existence, and e.Biscom later merged with it.

Today Metroweb, fully owned by AEM, provides the hardware for the service, an entire fiber-optic network. But AEM was already able to make a part of the network available right from the start. This is part of the reason it quintupled its initial modest investment. Before the agreement with e.Biscom, AEM shares sold for 1.6 to 1.9 euros. Afterwards they shot up to over 7 euros. Then the crisis of the new economy, or net economy, hit and the values changed, but for everyone.

*They accused you of having chosen e.Biscom without having considered other possible partners.*

That was one of many accusations, all more or less ignominious and always groundless, leveled by the opposition to disqualify this operation. We actually had evaluated many other possibilities. AEM had negotiated for four months with Albacom. It then made contacts and in some cases negotiated with other companies: Level 3, IXC, Global

Telesystem, Q West and Swisscom. This last company is now caught up in a very serious crisis. Nothing ever came of these negotiations because we were never able to obtain assurance of an adequate industrial plan and business development prospects for AEM and the Milanese usership.

*So, once the agreement was in place, you began digging.*

For two years we disturbed the city dwellers, rupturing their eardrums by digging in every corner of the city. And naturally there was no lack of protest. But in the end we achieved an important and concrete result: a company that employs 3,000 people in Italy, two-thirds of whom work in Milan. And this was new work that is real, that wasn't there before, and it is both well paid and highly professional.

All of this was done with private capital, without a single euro charged to the public administration. Actually, the municipality ended up with double earnings. First from charges for laying the fiber-optic cables in the ducts, and secondly when AEM quintupled its investment. And lastly, and perhaps the most shining accomplishment: we are now Europe's most densely wired metropolis. And this does not only mean assets for the city and opportunities for the Milanese and businesses, but it also increased the value of real estate and thus of the citizens' assets.

There's an anecdote I like to relate that seems to me very significant in this regard. Exactly one hundred years before the day the company was inaugurated, a sales announcement was published in *Corriere della Sera* for an apartment on Via Torino<sup>2</sup> "with running water". Evidently, having running water in one's house in the center of Milan one hundred years ago was a great advantage, an added value to be emphasized.

---

<sup>2</sup> One of the most important shopping streets, going from Piazza del Duomo to the Navigli.

That was one hundred years ago. Today information is the equivalent of water – I realize this is the second time I use this simile – both in terms of need and consumption. And indeed the magazine *Scenari immobiliari* has estimated that the simple fact of being wired increases the value of a condominium in Milan by some 10%. On the other hand, exactly as occurred one century ago for running water in an apartment on Via Torino, today the real estate ads explicitly state “Fastweb connection”, clearly considering it to be a factor that enhances value.

In conclusion: major public resources (not necessarily financial) and private capital, innovative ideas, teamwork and intelligent coordination. This is the paradigm I was talking about and why I say that the Fastweb operation is perhaps the most meaningful example of our way of working for the city.

*And AEM, the old, beloved, glorious and romantic supplier of electricity to Milanese homes from the hydroelectric plants in Valtellina, was never the same afterwards.*

This operation initiated an extraordinary metamorphosis and far-reaching modernization of AEM, allowing it to expand, thanks to the surplus from the investment, first by buying the Enel plants and especially, in 2005, acquiring Edison, a historical Milanese firm, in concert with the French firm EDF. And I might interject here that this is a sort of historical retribution: Edison was the power behind the creation, in 1905, of AEM, which was set up by the City of Milan to fight the private monopoly in the electricity market.

In short, following the Fastweb operation, AEM's industrial prospects changed completely: the company became a fully fledged competitor on the European electricity market. It was the beginning of a whole new story.

*But this wasn't an idea that had occurred only to your group. In Rome, at the same time as AEM-Fastweb, the ACEA-Atlanet project was getting underway in collaboration with Fiat and the Spanish company Telefónica. And the opposition presented this operation to Palazzo Marino as an example of how you should have done things.*

In those years, 1998-99, the idea of multi-utilities – that is, the idea of having electrical, water and gas companies also supply telecommunications services – was very much in vogue. Everyone was leaning toward this type of solution, which appeared financially advantageous and industrially efficient. In Europe just about everyone – France, Germany, Spain – was opting for the formula of alliances with specialized private partners to compete effectively against the telephone monopolies.

Naturally, the City of Milan also received many proposals of this type, often from banks associated with companies in the sector, many of them foreign. As I said before, these proposals led to various negotiations that ended up leading nowhere.

In particular, regarding the ACEA-Atlanet project, let me point out that it was disastrous and came to a bad end. ACEA ended up being a tiny stump attached to Fiat and supplied by Atlanet. Fiat finally sold it to the British BT Albacom for 100 million euros. If you want to know how to respond to the attacks by the opposition back then, indicating precisely the Roman model as the ideal approach, all you have to do is go see how much ACEA lost in that operation.

Whereas today, according to certain appraisals in the market, Fastweb may be the world's most advanced telecommunications operator. Some time ago, for example, the president and CEO of France Télécom, Didier Lombard, explicitly stated: "We have to invest to create a network like Fastweb". Could anything be clearer... or more flattering?

*Are you saying that you blazed a trail that others then followed?*

All I am saying is that all the operators are moving in the direction of networks analogous to ours, which represents a solution that works for everyone. It is the Next Generation Network (NGN), which we built with Fastweb a whopping six years ahead of the game thanks to the intuition and the determination we had at the time.

*Perhaps in times of privatizations that are much criticized for the way they are carried out and because later they do not lead to real free markets, this operation can also be taken as a model for public-private collaboration.*

Certainly. We are used to a schema which, in the best of cases, regards ownership, and it is the one of state ownership of shares, while in the worst of cases, it is represented by a flood of incentives in whatever form they may take. It is a question of doping a company – either by capital account incentives or improving operating expenses – but it is still financial doping any way you look at it.

In our case, on the other hand, we proceeded by sharing risk, because naturally there was some risk involved. And the City of Milan did not offer Fastweb fast-track privileges. The task then was to wire the whole city, to install cables throughout the entire metropolitan area: it was the first case of its kind in Italy. And so we drew up a map of the Milanese subsurface and informed all the operators of the sector: “Starting now, we are installing cables”. And so we developed the first guidelines for underground telecommunications cable installation in Italy. And in order to minimize the negative impact and inconvenience for the city dwellers we gave explicit orders: “anyone who digs a hole must make it available to everyone”. The idea was that other operators would have been able to pass their cables through the same

hole. At the time there were eight operators working to install fiber-optic cables under the streets of Milan, from Colt to WorldCom, and they were all called in to coordination meetings in Palazzo Marino. It was an extraordinary opportunity for all. Nevertheless, the only one of those operators remaining today is Fastweb. On the other hand, we must keep in mind that the Italian telecommunications market had only recently been opened up and there were over two hundred licenses issued to land-line telephone operators. Today there are only six left.

And so there was no reserved lane for private operators in joint ventures with AEM. The administration's attitude was radically liberal and open to competition. We carried out the operation in a completely transparent manner that also allowed us to inform the Milanese that something very big and very useful for all was about to happen.

If anything, the question is another: it is the willingness of certain political groupings to comprehend operations such as this. Allow me to quote myself, just a few words from a long speech I made at a city council meeting in response to criticism from the center-left: "The truth that this political opposition refuses to recognize is that, thanks to AEM, to this administration and to this alliance, the city is realizing a project at the worldwide cutting edge, fully for the benefit of its citizens". The facts today prove that I was right.

*You talk about a liberal attitude and openness to the market. However, there might also have been some temptation to direct things on your part, of the City of Milan, in that it was the majority shareholder in AEM.*

The management of the joint ventures was left entirely in the hands of AEM without any influence of the shareholder in determining shares, rules and governance. It was AEM alone, for example, with Scaglia and Micheli, that proposed

to the City a company structure and governance plan with AEM as the majority shareholder in Metroweb, the company controlling the network, while e.Biscom – that is, Scaglia and Micheli – held the majority shares in the service company, that is, Fastweb.

In the meantime, in other parts of the country like Liguria, Emilia and elsewhere, cables are being installed using public money, making public networks, which are generally rather economically inefficient, thus generating small monsters that someone somewhere in Italy is going to have to buy.

Thanks instead to our experience in Milan, Fastweb has brought our business model to 130 Italian cities, creating a network of over 25,000 kilometers of fiber-optic cables, bringing in revenues now of over one billion euros per year, with 3 billion euros of traded stocks, almost a million clients, 3,000 people working in the company, and at least 6,000 external personnel working full time for Fastweb in sales, technological services and network maintenance.

But what is even more interesting is that in Milan, where the company was born, the market share of the telephone division is actually higher than that of Telecom Italia for broadband communications. So let me say it: thanks to that paradigm we talked about before, a jewel was born in Milan.

*What about finances? Did the operation not leave a trail of debts?*

Quite the opposite. The financial advantage of AEM is clear: selling off its share of Fastweb in slices, AEM brought in an overall surplus of more than 400 million euros. And now, auctioning off Metroweb, it will earn a sum that will easily pay for the costs of wiring Milan with a great deal left over. In related cases, such as ACEA, which we talked about before, the result was significant losses.



*Perhaps the success of the operation is also due to the circumstance that everything took place during the most vibrant phase of the new economy.*

Certainly. And just think that there was actually a phase when Fastweb had no profits, it barely had any earnings. And then it went public and the market assessed it at something like 1.5 billion euros. Some said that it was shameful, but during those months everything was like that, except that some came out better from that phase – the more serious and concrete operations such as ours – and others not so well. Just remember Tiscali: at the time it was worth more than Fastweb, now it is worth less than half. At that time AEM had a higher value on the stock market than Fiat and was, among the listed companies, Italy's number one industrial firm.

There is an episode, an image, that captures the state of things at the time: the lunch during the Consob<sup>3</sup> meeting in Palazzo Marino on April 12, 2000. As master of the house I was seated next to Gianni Agnelli, then authoritative doyen and “prince” of the Italian business community and the publicly traded companies. However the problem came up of how to seat the other guests. Given the occasion I gave directions that they be seated according to their stock market capitalization. And hence, seated on Agnelli's other side was the president of AEM, Giuliano Zuccoli: so we had a municipally owned company next to the maximum Italian industrial multinational. It was inevitable: AEM was then capitalized to the tune of 13.5 billion euros and Fiat one half of that. It goes without saying that we picked up the tab for that lunch.

---

<sup>3</sup> Commissione Nazionale per le Società e la Borsa: Italian Securities and Exchange Commission.

*But if that's the way things are, it does not seem to me that the operation and its outcomes have had sufficient visibility, that enough has been said about them in the national press, for example.*

Allow me to respond a bit maliciously: perhaps because it was an operation carried out by a center-right administration. And also – a second bit of malice – because of the influence some of Fastweb's competitors have over the national press.

In particular, regarding the political aspect, I believe I can say that the center-left didn't understand a thing of this operation. They did not grasp the terms, the economic and financial prospects or the potentials for the city. They were convinced, in substance, that I had let private concerns make a fool of me, that Fastweb should have been listed on the stock exchange and not e.Biscom (they later merged, in any case). But since they failed to fully understand the true nature of the operation at the time, they did not yet realize – as became clear later, toward the end of 2001 – that the value lay in the infrastructure (control of which rested firmly in the hands of AEM) and in the services that were made available through it. In addition to Fastweb and Metroweb, e.Biscom included content providers such as e.BisMedia. We must not forget that, in the final analysis, e.Biscom could have created its own "Fastweb" to handle broadband telecommunications services without AEM, renting other available networks.

The left in Milan did not want to see these things, and in its moralistic-judicialistic guise – *à la* Basilio Rizzo<sup>4</sup>, if you know what I mean – the writ-addled left that sees corruption and the corrupted everywhere it looks was convinced that there was something shady going on. And naturally there was the usual statement made to the Public Prosecutor's Office

---

<sup>4</sup> Basilio Rizzo, city councilman, diehard opponent of the center-right.

followed by an investigation led by Gerardo D'Ambrosio. The investigation of course led nowhere, but nevertheless the idea was nourished that favors were done for two private individuals, Scaglia and Micheli.

Over the course of a year and a half, when it was realized that the operation was now a broadly acclaimed success, even someone on the left got the idea of imitating us. Walter Veltroni, for example, recently elected mayor of Rome, openly embraced the initiative and the model. We went to the capital and were given the red carpet treatment. Veltroni was frankly sorry that he hadn't done it in Rome, that he was no longer in the condition to replicate it, given that the ACEA-Atlanet operation, as I said before, had now assumed a completely different aspect, one that was even antithetical to ours.

*You talk about the judicialist left, but there is a certain “judicialism” that we might note among your own anomalies: a great sensitivity to legality, including its formal aspects, and some would say even a certain moralism, characteristics generally considered unusual in the center-right.*

*And then there is your friendship, truly anomalous, with the former head prosecutor and district attorney of Milan, Francesco Saverio Borrelli, the grand inquisitor of Berlusconi.*

I don't know if it is correct to define my friendship with Borrelli as “anomalous”, but it is certainly a difficult one. However, I think it is appropriate that I set right a certain commonplace notion that you have just expressed: I have met many – no, most – of the people politically involved in the center-right camp, and they are all very concerned with issues of ethics, morality and legality. They sincerely care about justice that is fair, about laws that are truly the same for everyone. Believe me, if it were otherwise, I would not have remained long on this side of the fence.

In a certain sense it is true that I am a “judicialist”, if we must use this clumsy neologism, but not in the sense that the newspapers and politicians commonly give to the term. My judicialism tends more toward the meaning associated with

efficiency: I am convinced that the *res publica* works best if we respect the rules of proper administration and legality. It is, once again, one of the features of good governance.

And I cannot hide the fact that the experience of these years, with the opposition's frequent recourse to the courts as the favored milieu for their political battles – what I call “politics by writ” – has aroused many doubts in me about the equanimity and sincere impartiality of certain magistrates.

At times I have had the disagreeable sensation of a certain overzealousness. A targeted zeal we might call *ad personam* (I don't want to speak of hounding). One example of its application is the case of the so-called “blank amendments”, something much discussed in the newspapers at the time. In truth, they were actually “skittle amendments”, used to undo amendments crafted by the minority. It is a well-worn technical ploy, but on the particular occasion in which I was involved – about which I actually knew nothing – it resulted in an indictment. And it arrived after an investigation conducted with a zeal and an expenditure of energy frankly worthy of bigger causes, and indeed it was based on very weak judicial arguments.

So I don't know if I deserve the reputation of judicialist. On the other hand, after graduating from the university and before I decided to involve myself in the family business, I wanted to be a magistrate.

*You don't say...*

Yes, I was very determined. I had gathered information about a famous school in Naples that prepared students for the state magistrates' exam. It was run by a certain Capozzi. But then, partially for family reasons, I made a much more bourgeois and convenient choice, opting for the position reserved for me in the family business. But in any case, I

have always harbored that aspiration: not so much to punish the guilty or persecute reprobates but rather to right wrongs and reestablish conditions of justice and legality. The law, applied to the real world to give good and evil their due, is a subject that has always fascinated me.

Then I suddenly and unexpectedly found myself immersed in my new responsibilities as mayor, with the still recent, burning memory of a dramatic and bitter chapter for the city, for the entire country and for its institutions: I am talking about Tangentopoli. Learning by disconcertingly crude, hard facts that the whole system was held together by enormous added costs, costs that were considered inevitable, the so-called “costs of democracy” – that is, the under-the-table financing of the parties and their members... learning this all so suddenly left me shocked and appalled, just as it had millions of other Italians. In particular, as a Milanese it caused me terrible frustration, accustomed as I was to thinking of my city as being more rigorous and ethically more upstanding than others.

*OK, let's put it this way: Gabriele Albertini, businessman, arrives in Palazzo Marino as mayor of Milan with a positive feeling toward the fight against corruption and toward the magistrates who had undertaken it.*

Very positive, to the point that I succeeded in imposing the condition that people with pending legal proceedings could not be appointed commissioner. Just between you and me, this rule would now exclude me from the role of commissioner given that I have had to deal with an opposition always ready to turn to the courts whenever remotely possible instead of engaging in direct political battle. The result is that I have pending legal proceedings hanging over me. But let it be perfectly clear: none of them regard accusations of corruption.

*Let me see, although you were nominated by Berlusconi – the main target, after Craxi, of the Milan District Attorney's Office – you found yourself paradoxically aligned with the actions of those magistrates.*

With whom, furthermore, I enjoy a cordial and harmonious relationship, if not exactly a friendship. So much so, in fact, that based on a proposal by Gherardo Colombo, we created a collaborative unit to work with the Milan district attorney to propose procedures and methods to reduce the possibility of corruption within the public administration.

We reached the point of signing the so-called “integrity pacts”, a new and different formulation with respect to the traditional system of assigning contracts for public works. The pacts obliged the bidders to abide by the truth in their declarations and assume full responsibility for any falsehoods. Furthermore, they made it possible for the public administration to refuse to renew contracts for companies that had broken an integrity pact, whereas normal administrative law allowed firms previously excluded from the bidding process for proven unreliability to participate in new bidding contests.

The effect of the integrity pacts, an unprecedented experience for Italian municipalities, was to break up company cartels that had colluded to lower the value of the bids and divide up public works projects in Milan. It is no coincidence that the Formentini administration invested only 182 million euros in four years and had a commissioner convicted of corruption charges, while we in nine years invested 6 billion euros with no convicted commissioners. There were merely two indictments that were dismissed immediately during the preliminary hearings.

But beyond my aforementioned vocation or inclination, my good rapport with the Milan District Attorney's Office was basically due to this: we completed thirty times the amount of public works achieved by others without a sin-

gle case of corruption. You would have to reach all the way back to Pietro Bucalossi's administration (1964-67) to find something analogous, to find good governance, not only in functional terms but also in the ethical sense.

*OK, but let's talk about Borrelli.*

My relationship with Borrelli was immediately very cordial and still continues, in spite of an unpleasant incident along the way. When he left his post he came to visit me, reiterating his esteem and affection and actually requesting a farewell embrace. It was then that he told me that he had voted for me on a split ticket: a left party ticket and Albertini for mayor. I confessed that I was quite amazed. There was also an occasion, a curious case that was much talked about in the newspapers, when there was only one thing that Borrelli and Berlusconi agreed on: they both had a good opinion of me.

Conversely, I was in the position, and I am proud of it, to be able to speak well both of Berlusconi and of Borrelli: at the time that would have been unimaginable for anyone else. But I did it with a serene conscience and an honest mind, with no reservations, no inhibition, no second thoughts or the minimum intention to favor anyone. I did it exclusively on the basis of my personal experience, providing a truthful representation of something I felt quite sure about.

Borrelli, on his part, recognized my experience as completely credible and even appreciated my conduct in this regard.

*But given your unique vantage point of having good relations simultaneously with both Berlusconi and Borrelli, did you ever have the impression that their relationship was conditioned by their roles, in the sense that each one of them found himself forced to continue on his own warpath, to hold the line against the other?*



That's a question I like, because I myself posed it to Borrelli. And I was very frank, perhaps too much so. It's true, I told him in substance, that the investigating magistrate is obliged to undertake judicial action and thus cannot choose which cases to pursue. Nevertheless it cannot be doubted that in certain cases, those involving Berlusconi for example, circumstances make it appear that choices are being made, that a well-defined line is being taken, resulting in a concentration of inquiries oriented toward a single group or a single person while others are ignored or protected. Whatever the intentions may have been, this was the result; this is the impression that was created.

*Yes, perhaps that time you were a bit too frank.*

And I sought to come up with an explanation on my own, presuming that this alleged choice was the outcome of a particular scale of values. I did this on another occasion, in a conversation with Pier Camillo Davigo, another magistrate in the "Mani Pulite" unit, a close collaborator of Borrelli's but someone with a completely different political orientation. While Borrelli is openly sympathetic to the left, Davigo's allegiance to the right is well known.

Perhaps, I conjectured, a different value is attributed to corruption involving self-enrichment by pocketing public resources from that aimed at procuring funds for a party, thus robbing energy from society to further a certain political design. Perhaps the latter is considered less serious because it is inspired by an ideal and not by personal gain.

And I also talked with him about the time, at the height of the Tangentopoli storm, when I personally heard Mino Martinazzoli – then secretary of the moribund Christian Democrats, which he was about to dissolve after the buffeting it had suffered – pronounce the following phrase comparing the investigated Christian Democrats to their Communist

counterparts: “The difference between my ‘inquisitees’ (at the time the accused were called ‘inquisitees’ and not ‘investigatees’, as if we were dealing with the Spanish Inquisition) and those of Occhetto (secretary of the PCI, which became PDS after the fall of the Soviet empire) is this: his stole for the party but told the magistrates they were stealing for themselves; mine were stealing for themselves but told the magistrates they were stealing for the party”.

There was no doubt, I ventured to Davigo, that it was a question of different situations, of behaviors with different motivations, which thus called forth a different condemnatory action.

*And how did Davigo reply, that justice is equal for all?*

He responded in a way I found surprising and not entirely convincing. He said that this was not the reason and went on to explain that from the viewpoint of the alteration of the rules of democracy, of the collective values in question, it is more serious to steal for the purposes of gaining power, altering and distorting relations with the voters and public opinion through the illicit funding of organizational and propagandistic instruments, than it is to pad out one’s bank account or buy oneself a seaside villa.

In the former case, institutional balances are compromised; in the latter, the damage is limited to one person enriching himself at the community’s expense. Of these two types of behavior, claimed “Doctor Subtilis” – as Davigo was fittingly nicknamed for the subtlety of his argument, epitomized here – the first one cuts much deeper, is much more distorting and harmful.

He explained that there was another, much more banal reason that the investigations of the “Mani Pulite” unit appeared to be oriented with particular insistence toward Christian Democrats and Socialists while seeking to spare

the Communists. He said that for a number of reasons (though he did not explain them to me) they had been able to gain much more useful information from those – probably less motivated by ideals, not having to protect a historical design or a political project – who were not willing to sacrifice themselves and hence confessed everything, spilled the beans, named names to keep themselves out of prison.

As Davigo saw it, the behavior of the ‘inquisitees’ of the PCI was very different. They were filled with a cogent ideology that almost obliged them, in keeping with one of their questionable ethical principles, to protect the party above all.

*The case of Primo Greganti was quite noteworthy. Nicknamed “Compagno G” (Comrade G.), he stayed in prison for months but never gave any names; he took all the responsibility onto himself.*

That name sprang to my mind too. Anyway, at that point I wondered if behavior dictated by a sort of “ideological code of silence” that places the party above justice was not more serious and execrable than conduct dictated by fear of imprisonment, which in the final analysis is much more human. But I kept this doubt to myself and did not share it with “Doctor Subtilis”.

Borrelli, in turn, explained things to me using a mushroom metaphor: “You go into the woods looking for mushrooms. You find one. Next to it you immediately find another. As you pick it, you get a strong whiff of others and you continue to find more. When do you stop? How and according to what criteria do you determine when to stop? Why ignore the mushrooms that are still waiting there to be picked?”

“In other words,” Borrelli went on, abandoning his metaphor, “if we go into a company and find something amiss that leads us to something else that is illicit and so on, at

what point is it morally legitimate for us to stop? When can we pretend we have run out of things to find?"

*The fact is that oftentimes the "Mani Pulite" magistrates have given the impression of having preselected objectives for their searches, bending over backwards to come up with evidence, instead of moving on the basis of a notitia criminis [notice of alleged crime, translator's note] as imposed by law. Such is the case of the over five hundred searches by the Guardia di Finanza in the Fininvest-Mediaset companies. There was a distinct sensation that they did not know what they were looking for, as if they had said: let's go there and see if we can find anything, anything at all.*

Naturally, in my conversations with Borrelli I never put things openly in those terms. However, I did receive a second explanation, somewhat indirectly, of the particular amount of attention given to Berlusconi. It came from Davigo and I might summarize it from memory as follows: Berlusconi deserved a special effort not for any prejudicial overzealousness but because he undermined the function of the magistrates, accusing them of acting for political ends, even based on political orders or instructions, of being enlisted to serve the purposes of a preordained plan.

The magistrates had to prove that these accusations were false and deviously purposeful and the only way to do it, as Davigo saw it, was to demonstrate that the allegations were not mere hypotheses, in other words, prove that the accused were guilty. Hence the special efforts with regard to Berlusconi.

*It's an explanation which, frankly speaking, borders on a theoretical justification of judicial reprisal.*

At any rate, my relationship with the Milanese magistrature has been very rewarding because it has provided me with external encouragement, in addition to that from my own

sphere and staff, in my efforts to ensure legality and proper behavior in the city administration. In fighting weeds, the eye of the gardener may benefit greatly from the attention and experience of a botanist who is able to recognize them much more quickly.

I am reminded of the situation with the Province. The City of Milan – with all its contracts, public works projects, shares held in many large companies and others controlled directly by Palazzo Marino – did not have any judicial problems or official accusations of administrative misconduct while I was in office. The Province of Milan under Ombretta Colli, which practically had no other shareholdings other than those in the Milan-Serravalle autostrada, succeeded in getting into trouble, and even ended up fighting with me.

Why do such things happen? Oftentimes it is not out of bad faith, much less dishonesty. It is simply because the gardener is looking somewhere else while the weeds are growing and at his side there is no botanist, kindly or churlish, who will help him find them and pull them up in time. And let it be clear: regardless of political allegiance.

*Speaking of your friendship with Borrelli, you mentioned an incident that happened along the way.*

Yes, it was a very unpleasant, bitter episode. It was something else that happened during the meeting of the Estates General in January 2001, which I spoke of earlier. In my opening speech, I had said that I considered the previous years' work done by the magistrature in Milan to be very positive, with "beneficial effects" for life in the city.

The reasoning behind this, of course, was much more complex and multilayered than may have appeared. During his speech, Silvio Berlusconi wanted to highlight the fact that this work had involved and overwhelmed some parties and not others.

For that matter, I myself had mentioned, in direct conversations with magistrates and elsewhere, the sensation of “orientation” I spoke about before suggested by the actions of the Milan District Attorney’s Office. But, most importantly, in my speech I had talked about “a phase that was also a political battle”. It seemed right to return to that point, which had been ignored by journalists, partially so that I would not seem to be avoiding it, perhaps out of cowardice. And so I did it, albeit very cautiously, precisely in my concluding speech at the meeting of the Estates General on January 20, 2001.

Borrelli’s reaction was immediate and extremely harsh. The following day, immediately after reading the summary of my speech in the newspapers, he wrote me a letter. It was rather unpolished and hasty, two pages in his difficult handwriting, where he avoided getting into the question itself but expressed all his vexation and disappointment, and brusquely cancelled the lunch date we had for the next day, January 22.

The accusation in his letter that left me most embittered was that of duplicity, of “speaking with a forked tongue” as the Indians say in westerns. It was the accusation of expressing myself in a certain way and with certain ideas and concepts when I am with Borrelli and in the exact opposite way in public, on politically relevant occasions and especially in the presence of Berlusconi.

I responded immediately with a letter of my own. Polite but firm, I rebutted especially this latter accusation. I reminded him that I had also said the things that so strongly offended him on other occasions, also to magistrates and not only in front of Berlusconi. Among other things I wrote: “My emphasis that only certain parties and certain individuals were judicially implicated is virtually a matter of chronicle”. And I added: “Only those who attribute this lack of

criminal proceedings to the partisanship and – yes – connivance of certain magistrates should feel scandalized. I have never done this in public or in private”.

In my speech I had made reference to Socrates. “Almost in conclusion to this letter”, I wrote to Borrelli “and recalling my years in high school, allow me to defend the validity and congruity of the episode recounted by Plato. Commending himself to hemlock and not to flight, as his friend Crito had counseled, Socrates meant to show that he had chosen his conscience and the laws of his city as the highest reference as opposed to the voice of the people” – which we would now call public opinion. “This is what I so softly and with great respect sought, from the stage of the Estates General, to ask the magistrates, whom – I confirm – I continue to look upon as ‘priests’, silent interpreters of the laws of the State and keepers of their scrupulous knowledge”.

Along with the letter I sent an edition of Plato’s dialogue *The Crito*, in which I had highlighted the excerpt I had cited in the speech that had so displeased Borrelli.

*How did things end up? Was your relationship with Borrelli ever the same again?*

Even though I believe we cleared up that misunderstanding, I have always had the impression that some shadow has lingered between us, as if there is something unsaid or unresolved. Perhaps it is just due to the diversity of our respective roles.

A magistrate, especially if he has the specific training and sensitivity of a public prosecutor, of an accuser, like Borrelli, will never manage to put himself in the shoes of a public administrator, to fully understand the tensions experienced by someone who must be accountable to his electors for his deeds.

A mayor, on the other hand, as close as he may be to the mentality of the magistrates, as I am, is unlikely to succeed

in sharing the same sensitivity, the exclusive and formal attention to norms, unless he were to change his role.

*To conclude: Albertini, if you could go back would you do it again? Would you still accept the candidacy for mayor of Milan?*

These years in Palazzo Marino have been stressful, exhausting and not infrequently frustrating. But I have never felt so useful to the community. I have never had such a strong and gratifying sensation of being in the service of my city. This is the sole reason that today, near the end of my term, I am happy to have accepted that candidacy, to have yielded to Berlusconi's insistence.

I am happy to have been able to do something for Milan.





## Index of names

- Agnelli Gianni 184  
Albertini Carlo 22, 30  
Albertini Demetrio 30  
Arbasino Alberto 52  
Bassolino Antonio 164  
Benedini Benito 98  
Berlusconi Silvio 12-15, 18, 20-21, 23-25, 25n, 26, 28-33, 43, 47-49, 51-52, 57-58, 58n, 59, 61-63, 65-68, 90, 92, 98, 103, 111, 117, 129, 144-146, 172, 187, 190-192, 195-197, 199  
Biagi Marco 153, 153n  
Bondi Enrico 141  
Bonomi Giuseppe 103, 103n  
Borghini Giampiero 9  
Borrelli Francesco Saverio 59, 59n, 187, 191-192, 194-198  
Bossi Umberto 47, 47n, 57, 61-63, 67, 102, 162  
Bucalossi Pietro 191  
Cantarella Paolo 127, 130  
Carnimeo Marcello 16  
Carrubba Salvatore 30  
Casero Luigi 102  
Ciampi Carlo Azeglio 85  
Colli Ombretta 103, 146-147, 196  
Colombo Gherardo 190  
Colombo Gino 157  
Confalonieri Fedele 18, 18n, 24, 31  
Cossiga Francesco 26-29  
Craxi Bettino 145, 190  
D'Amato Antonio 61  
D'Ambrosio Gerardo 186  
Dalla Chiesa Nando 110  
Davigo Pier Camillo 192-195  
De Benedetti Carlo 123, 137-138  
De Carolis Massimo 13-15, 59, 103, 157-158  
De Gasperi Alcide 41  
De la Rúa Fernando 85  
De Maio Adriano 30, 53, 53n

- De Niro Robert 86-87  
 Del Debbio Paolo 102  
 Dolce Domenico 170  
 Draghi Stefano 44, 121  
 Fazio Antonio 27, 126  
 Fazio Fabio 87  
 Ferrante Bruno 85-86  
 Figurati Michele 129  
 Fontana Carlo 165, 167-168  
 Formentini Marco 9, 34-35, 42, 90, 90n, 118, 149-151, 190  
 Fossa Giorgio 130  
 Fumagalli Aldo 18, 29, 34, 37-38  
 Giuliani Rudolph 84-87  
 Gottardo Luciano 85  
 Greganti Primo 194  
 Guicciardini Francesco 71  
 Keynes John Maynard 99  
 La Guardia Fiorello 87  
 Lerner Gad 27  
 Letta Gianni 146  
 Ligresti Salvatore 132  
 Lombard Didier 180  
 Longhi Giorgio 32  
 Lupi Maurizio 102  
 Mannheimer Renato 53  
 Maranghi Vincenzo 137  
 Martinazzoli Mino 192  
 Martini Carlo Maria, Cardinal 52, 75, 75n, 76-78, 80, 83-84  
 Meli Mauro 168  
 Merlin Mario 81-83  
 Merlo Francesco 60, 101-104  
 Messori Vittorio 52  
 Micheli Francesco 176-177, 182-183, 186  
 Mieli Paolo 145-146  
 Montanelli Indro 13, 13n, 33-35, 37-40, 40n, 41-49, 49n, 51, 53, 57, 59-63, 65-68, 75-76, 80, 90, 102, 134, 144  
 Moratti Gian Marco 18, 18n  
 Moratti Letizia 18, 26, 28, 146, 152  
 Moratti Massimo 30, 30n  
 Muti Riccardo 165, 167-168  
 Occhetto Achille 193  
 Pagliarini Giancarlo 101  
 Parisi Stefano 61, 102, 150, 152, 154  
 Penati Filippo 146  
 Perini Michele 36  
 Pillitteri Paolo 145  
 Postiglione Venanzio 31  
 Presutti Ennio 26, 30  
 Prete Francesco 16  
 Prodi Romano 34n, 52, 126, 126n, 146  
 Ravasi Gianfranco 53  
 Rizzo Basilio 36, 185, 185n  
 Romiti Cesare 18, 18n, 28, 31, 52, 123-125, 131-132, 137-138  
 Romiti Maurizio 171  
 Rossellini Isabella 171

- Rossignolo Gian Mario 123  
Sangalli Carlo 18, 30  
Santoro Michele 110, 110n  
Scaglia Silvio 176-177, 182-183, 186  
Scalpelli Sergio 102  
Scarselli Aldo 32  
Schroeder Gerhard 85  
Serra Achille 29  
Tabacci Bruno 163  
Teocoli Teo 169, 170, 173  
Tettamanzi Dionigi 132-133  
Thatcher Margaret 108  
Tognoli Carlo 145  
Tongiani Vito 33  
Treu Tiziano 126  
Tronchetti Provera Marco 52  
Truman Harry 117  
Valentino 42, 169, 171-172  
Vallanzasca Renato 38, 38n  
Veltroni Walter 186  
Vespa Bruno 67, 67n  
Vimercati Daniele 29  
Visco Vincenzo 164  
Zuccoli Giuliano 184  
Zunino Luigi 132



# Table of Contents

7		Preface
11	1	Berlusconi, politics and me
33	2	My friend Indro
51	3	Vox populi
57	4	The Northern League and me
65	5	Between Indro and Silvio
75	6	From Martini to Giuliani
89	7	The “Gatekeepers”
105	8	Professionals and Amateurs
123	9	Embedded Powers
141	10	Me, Wheeler Dealer? No Thank You!
149	11	The Bureaucratic Revolution
161	12	Aem, Sea, La Scala...
169	13	Caught with my trousers down
175	14	The Fastweb Paradigm
187	15	Between Berlusconi and Borrelli
201		Index of names



Carlo Maria Lomartire takes us into the office of the Mayor of Milan and through a long conversation with Gabriele Albertini at the end of his second term to help us understand what it meant to be the leader of a metropolis for nine years, seated on “one of the most uncomfortable seats in the land”. Albertini reviews the salient moments of his tenure at the city’s helm: from the agonized decision to run for office to the privatization of the municipally owned agencies, from bureaucratic reform to the crisis of La Scala, and many others. Nine years that witnessed tragedies such as the Linate plane crash, struggles with the embedded economic, political, judicial and media powers, and an intense and fertile interchange with the city dwellers. Years marked by friendships with luminaries such as Indro Montanelli, Carlo Maria Martini, Rudolph Giuliani and Francesco Saverio Borrelli and characterized by steadfast management of both routine and emergencies with the moral rigor and profound honesty that even his political adversaries had to acknowledge.

This is an original interview in book form, conducted with the events still fresh in mind. It gives us the perspectives of the protagonist of one of the city’s most significant political and administrative periods, the experience of a “non-politician” in the highly challenging city-workshop that is Milan, a place of decisive importance for the fate of Italy.

Gabriele Albertini (born 1950) was mayor of Milan from 1997 to 2006. He has been a member of the European Parliament since 2004. He was vice-president of the Committee for Transport and Tourism and, in 2009, he was elected president of the Committee for Foreign Affairs. Together with his brother Carlo Alberto, he ran the family business. Until 1997 he was president of the federation of Italian mechanical industrial entrepreneurs (Federmeccanica). He has also published *Mayor Without Borders* (2008).

Carlo Maria Lomartire, journalist, has long dedicated his efforts to economic and political issues. His assignments have included such roles as special correspondent for *Il Giorno*. He has managed economic and financial reports for RAI newscasts from the Milan studios. He was editor-in-chief for economics reporting for Tg5, assistant editor of “Studio Aperto”, and content manager for Mediavideo. He is currently assistant editor for VideoNews, the Mediaset journalism unit. With Mondadori, he has published a biography of Enrico Mattei and the book *Insurrezione*, a historical reconstruction of the attempted assassination of Palmiro Togliatti and the ensuing uprisings.