

# A long-term view on current Italian populism: Beppe Grillo's M5S (Five-Stars Movement) as the third wave of Italian populist upheaval.

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# A long-term view on current Italian populism: Beppe Grillo's M5S (Five-Stars Movements) as the third wave of Italian populist upheaval.

**Abstract:**

Most analysts of the Italian M5S ('Five-Stars Movement') created by the humourist and comedian Beppe Grillo underline its great novelty, mainly the fact that this party began with a blog (www.beppegrillo.it) before becoming a party with a grass-roots organization. To universal surprise, with no known previous organization (or even sponsoring organization) before the mid-2000's, the M5S, which presents itself as *" a citizen's movement"* managed to participate at the Italian general election of 2013 and to became, on the Italian soil, the most voted party. While knowing many difficulties typical of a new party, it remains in 2016 one of the main forces in the Italian political landscape.

Another conceptualization than 'novelty' seems necessary to better understand the impact of this new political actor: the M5S should be viewed as the main actor of a third wave of mobilization against established Italian parties since the 1970's. The first wave began with the Radical Party of Marco Panella, the electoral extreme left, and the early Italian Greens, but also with the northern Regional Leagues. The second wave in the late 1980's and the early 1990's saw as main protagonists, the 'Northern League' of Umberto Bossi, the Sicilian-born anti-mafia movement, the 'Rete' of Leoluca Orlando, and the 'referendum committees' of Mario Segni . Both previous waves of mobilizations gave way to a strong and winning answer from the established parties or elites, which 'changed everything to change nothing' mimicking the populist appeal of their challengers, and also managed to co-opt

most of their leadership. The same phenomenon seems to be on the way with the M5S: in fact the 'populist' answer given by the Democratic Party in charge of Italian government since 2014 under the leadership of Matteo Renzi seems able to limit the scope of the influence of the M5S and other opponents.

At the grassroots of this peculiar Italian situation lies the incapacity from the part of established parties since the mid-1970's to deliver long-awaited *consensual* public policies (fight against corruption, fight against mafias, improvement of the overall level of education, North/South question, capacity to respect European standards, etc.) even more than their incapacity to cope with day-to-day economic and social problems since 2007/08.

*Introduction.*

The Italian M5S ('Five-Stars Movement') created by Beppe Grillo, an humourist and comedian well-known in Italy since the 1970's, fits well in a Western European moment where the old political equilibrium of the long post-war era seems at risk. In many countries of Western Europe, political parties which used to dominate the political scene since 1945 are losing quickly popular consent, and both old and new challengers seems on the path to electoral pre-eminence. In fact, the M5S was only officially created in the autumn of 2009, and has managed to participate to its first national electoral contest in February 2013 only to win a plurality of vote in the 'Italian district'[1] for the low Chamber of the Italian Parliament. It was the very first time a party at its first electoral participation to such a contest was able to be the first party on most of the Italian soil with 25,1% of the votes cast. This astonishing result did not get unnoticed and, as a consequence to this electoral success, the M5S rise to the status of an object of interest for political science, and so publications tended to multiply on this

[1] The 'Italian District' for the Italian First Chamber of Parliament (*Camera dei deputati*) corresponds to all the voters with more than 18 years of age present on the Italian soil (with the exception of voters of the small French-speaking 'special region' Vallée d'Aoste). It is central in the overall electoral system adopted in 2005 since a plurality for a coalition or a party in this 'Italian District' (which excludes Italian voters not living on Italian soil or in Vallée d'Aoste) determines the 'majority premium' in the First Chamber. It is in the 'Italian District' that the young voters present in Italy are the most important. For the Second Chamber (*Senato*), one only has the right to vote after 25 years of age. In fact, the Democratic Party (*Partito democratico* – PD) had won a plurality on all Italian electors in Italy and abroad, and also among the older voters of the Second Chamber.

new hot topic. Most publications, be it in English[2] or in Italian[3], were prone to study the 'agency' of this new political force. One of the most salient aspect of the M5S was that it lacked entirely from any pre-existing organization(s) to explain its emergence. In fact, according to all the narrations of the early days of the M5S we dispose, *be it from its actors themselves or from its early academic students*, the M5S was organized around B. Grillo's blog (www.beppegrillo.it ) created in 2005, and nothing else.

Working as a humourist and an actor since the 1970's, B. Grillo[4] was prone to develop a sharp satire of the Italian political and economic establishment since the 1980's. It is well-known in Italy that he cannot go easily on air in television public and private programs since then[5], so he made his career mainly in theatres and more recently through his numerous DVD's and books. He was already known even before 2005 to intervene in Italian political and economic affairs, but only as a private person defending causes of public interest important to him, mostly on issues linked to ecology or moralization of political and economic life in Italy. No organisation around B. Grillo pre-exists the blog, and, according to their testimony[6], all the militants of the M5S joined the movement by attending a 'Meet-Up', a local public reunion organized for blog's audience. 'Meet-Up' are moments of physical encounter organized in different cities to give the occasion to the readers of the blog to interact in 'real life' through a special Internet site. This double specificity of the M5S – no sponsoring organization(s) or previous organization (s), and intensive use of Internet to mobilize grass-roots – make the M5S rather unique among all the parties which did try to emerge since the return to democracy after the Fascist

[2] Cf. for instance, F. Bordignon & C. Ceccarini, "Five Stars and a Cricket. Beppe Grillo Shakes Italian Politics". *South European Society and Politics*, 2013, , 18 : 4, 427-449 (published on line before 2013 elections), Maria Elisabetta Lanzone, "The "Post-Modern" Populism in Italy: The Case of the Five Star Movement", in Dwayne Woods & Barbara Wejnert (ed.), *The Many Faces of Populism: Current Perspectives* (Research in Political Sociology, Volume 22) Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2014, pp.53 – 78, M. E. Lanzone, & S. Rombi, "Who did participate in the online primary elections of the five star movement (M5S) in Italy? Causes, features and effects of the selection process", *Participation and Conflict*, 7(1), 2014, pp. 170–191.

[3] Most important publications in Italian language are: Giuliano Santoro, *Un Grillo qualunque. Il Movimento 5 Stelle e il populismo digitale nella crisi dei partiti italiani*, Rome : Castelvecchi, 2012 ; Piergiorgio Corbetta & Elisabetta Gualmini (dir.), *Il partito di Grillo*, Bologne : il Mulino, 2013 ; Roberto Biorcio & Paolo Natale, *Politica a 5 Stelle. Idee, storia e strategie del movimento di Grillo*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 2013, and *Comunicazione politica*, 1/2013, « Grillo e Il Movimento 5 Stelle. Analisi di un 'fenomeno' politico », under the direction of Ilvio Diamanti & Paolo Natale, publications made before the general elections of February 2013; and then after these elections: Maria Elisabetta Lanzone, *Il Movimento Cinque Stelle, Il popolo di Grillo dal web al Parlemento*, Novi Ligure : Edizione Epoké, 2015 ; R. Biorcio (dir.) *Gli attivisti del Movimento 5 Stelle*, Milan : FrancoAngeli, 2015 ; R. Biorcio, *Il populismo nelle politica italiana. Da Bossi a Berlusconi. Da Grillo a Renzi*, Mlian/Udine: Mimesis, 2015.

[4] B. Grillo is born in 1948 in Genova. In the 2000's, he is clearly a 'baby-boomer' at the end of a long and brilliant career.

[5] It seems that Bettino Craxi, the leader of the 'Italian Socialist Party' (*Partito socialista italiano* – PSI) at the time, did not appreciate much B. Grillo's allusions to PSI's general corruption, so he was ousted from any public channel, and, since B. Craxi was a close ally of S. Berlusconi the tycoon of private televisions, it means that B. Grillo did not have much hope to speak to private television audience.

[6] Cf. R. Biorcio (dir.), *op.cit.,* 2015.

era in the Italian political landscape[7]. The only element of comparison one could think of is the early version of *'Forza Italia'* (FI), the party created by Silvio Berlusconi. In 1993-94, FI's organization and political elite was a direct emanation of S. Berlusconi's economic conglomerate, Fininvest-Mediaset. The M5S shows the same entrepreneurial dominance: in fact, Beppe Grillo owns the M5S trademark and can authorize or not its use for electoral competition in Italy. The blog itself was created and maintained by a private society, *Casaleggio Associati*. Gianroberto Casaleggio (1954-2016), who died from an illness early this spring, has been working for years in the IT realm, but has founded his own firm only in 2004. He helped B. Grillo with all the technical aspects of the blog. The blog was from the beginning financed by advertisements, and rose very quickly rise to pre-eminence in the Italian Internet landscape. Till today, all the Internet technical aspects of the M5S remain under the supervision of this firm. Because of this maintained control on M5S's material infrastructure, G. Casaleggio was considered by some critics and opponents of the M5S as its real leader behind the scenery of B. Grillo leadership. In fact, it is well-known that G. Casaleggio developed his own brand of ideology. In a 'New Age' mood, he believed that tools which Internet gave to ordinary citizens could be the occasion to create a new kind of democracy, more responsive and accountable than today's representative democracy. Since, *Casalaggio Associati* remains in the 2010's a very small firm compared to Mediaset-Fininvest in the 1990's, and it cannot be considered as the sponsor organization of the M5S from the point of view of (economic) resources – quite the contrary in fact, it is the popular success of B. Grillo's blog since 2005 and then of the M5S after 2010 which gave rise to speculations about the economic interest of G. Casaleggio in the whole venture.

If many students underlined the specificities of M5S's 'agency', far less attention was given to the 'structural' aspects of its emergence and success. According to us, these contextual aspects explain both the kind of discourse the M5S specializes in - that it to say: its extreme refusal to any kind of involvement with other parties, its 'neither right neither left' discourse, its legalism, its choice of non-violence, its tendency to treat any political question separately from other questions giving way to a disarticulated political discourse -, and also the very success and the clear limitations of its appeal among the general electorate.

By 'structural aspects', we mean the political history of the last forty years in Italy which were characterized by a) two previous wave of 'populist' contestation of the dominant political parties and b) a socio-economic history where most economic decisions were prone to sacrifice the interests of the younger generations and where most public policies showed enduring deficiencies leading to a phase of enduring slow growth since 2000. Our conclusions are drown mainly from the fact that we

[7] For all parties, historians are able to find previous groups or organizations.

have being studying Italy since 1989[8]. We have so a deep impression of 'déjà-vu' and of already heard in the rise of the M5S that we will try here to convey to our audience. More fundamentally, we consider that the 'populism' of the M5S of the 2010's and its appeal to Italian voters is deeply rooted in a structural impasse of Italian politics, economy and society.

*A. The M5S. Building (without knowing it) on two previous wave of 'populist' mobilization and (knowing it) on the tendency of parties to limit people's veto power.*

As everyone familiar with the topic knows, one main point of M5S's political discourse is its deep hostility to say the less to established political parties and political class. Even before the M5S was created, B. Grillo leaded through his blog a mobilization to ensure that no condemned politician was able to return to Parliament. One of the early success of B. Grillo was a manifestation organized in 2007 in Bologna and other Italian cites called the 'V-Day' (*Vafanculo-Day*) when he asked to stop corrupt politicians to re-enter Parliament by a popular initiative law. He organized a second manifestation 'V2-Day" also with a great public success in 2008 on the same issue promoting refendum on the issue. The political program of the M5S for the general election of 2013 asked for a law preventing condemned politician to re-enter Parliament, the complete suppression of any kind of public finance for political parties, and the strong limitation of the level of pay to elected politicians at any level. As an organization, the M5S pretends itself to function at a minimal cost to the citizens using the tools of Internet to coordinate its actions[9].

Clearly, the M5S is a 'populist' force in this narrow definition: *being in the very name of Italian people against all the parties already present in Italy*. Although the M5S is obviously a party whose members participate since its creation to all possible elections which exists in Italy to choose representatives and which intends to be present thereafter through its own elected personal in the Italian institutions be it at the local or national level, it has a discourse according to which ordinary parties*, whatever their ideological orientations*, are detrimental to the very interests of the Italian people. According to the M5S, *all* other parties have confiscated people's power, and they are *all* using

[8] Having studied the emergence of the 'Northern League' in the late 1980's and early 1990's for our own PhD thesis, we have followed Italian political life since then. We have decided in the present text not to overload the reader with bibliographical references. Many books exist on recent Italian history and we are not here to make a choice among them.

[9] The M5S has not to this day organized no 'Congress', but only interregional meeting of members of local associations. It has no permanent intermediate organizations between the national level of the 'blog'' - and after 2013, the parliamentary groups- and the grass-roots of the local 'Meet-Up'. Officially, it has no legal headquarter other than the 'blog', which is technically managed by *Casaleggio Associati*.

any means at their disposal, including public financing, to maintain their grasp on the electorate and to guarantee the political careers of their members. The M5S pretends to *organize a direct intervention of ordinary citizens in political life*. The members of the M5S elected at any level should *be and stay non-professional politicians*, and they should take all important political decisions (for example a vote in Parliament on a sensitive issue) through an Internet consultation of M5S's grass-roots. B. Grillo is only supposed to be a) the 'loud-speaker' of the M5S and b) the 'protector' of the democratic rules of the M5S applying direct democracy and refusal of the vices of normal politicians. It is, of course, a contradictory discourse to pretend to be at the same time a 'non-party' with a 'non-status' and with a 'non-leader' and to operate in fact as any other party in representative democracy competition which needs a visible and appreciated leadership and an efficient organization to win votes and thrive politically.

This kind of 'anti-party' discourse, duly denounced by established parties and many scholars as populist, has very deep roots in Italy. It dates back in the 1950's when some thinkers of the 'liberal' tradition[10], defeated politically first by Fascism in the 1920's and then by mass parties of Communist, Socialist and Catholic obedience in the 1940's, began to scrutinize the new political 'Republican' regime established in 1946-48. They described it as a new kind of 'oligarchy' dominated by the leaders of the mass parties dominating the electoral scene. They coined the term of 'partitocracy' (*partitocrazia*) to summarize their analysis, which was at the same time a lamentation on the new social advantages given to ordinary Italians through mass parties' intervention in administrative and economic life under the aegis of 'clientelism' (*clientelismo*). According to these liberals, mass parties were dominating the Italian State, and they were using their political clout to promote their followers at the higher level of Italian society and economy or to defend irrational masses' special interests against the rational general will of the Italian people.

Although this 'liberal' denunciation of the parties colonizing the State was intellectually important during the 1950's and the 1960's at the very moment when the Italian State developed more thoroughly its role in the economy (be it through State's planification [*Programmazione*] for example or the early implementation of the 'Regions'), it had no political impact till the middle 1970's.

*1/ the first wave of 'populist'/'anti-party' mobilizations (1970's -1980's).*

[10] Cf. Gaetano Quagliarello, *La sconfitta del 'Moderno Principe'. La partitocrazia in Italia dale origini al crollo della Prima Repubblica*, Milan: Biblioteca dell'Imagine, 1993. At the time of the book a young academic, Gaetano Quagliarello was later on to become an important politician for the Italian centre-right specialized in institutional affairs.

In 1974, a law (*legge Piccoli*) was introduced to create a public financing of Italian political parties. The intention of the legislator was to moralize the financial aspects of party life, after some previous scandals. Most Italian parties, be it big or small, were costly hierarchical organizations present in every corner of the country, all organized on the model given to them by the Italian Communist Party (*Partito comunista italiano* – PCI). Parties, as elsewhere in Western Europe, were also discovering at the time the rising costs of modern political communication (that is to say commercial ads, opinion pools and political consulting). Two years after this moralization law, the so-called 'Lockheed scandal' showed to the Italian public that governing parties stole public money in great amount at the occasion of a military contract. It developed to such a level that it even lead to the demission of the President of the Republic, the Christian-democrat Giovanni Leone, in 1978, immediately replaced by a socialist, Sandro Pertini, considered honest and dedicated to the public good.

Seizing the occasion, a very small party, the 'Radical Party' (*Partito radicale* – PR), which has evolved since its creation in 1955 as a scission from the more institutional 'Liberal Party' (*Partito liberale italiano* – PLI)[11] to form a liberal/libertarian/anti-clerical elite party positioning itself as 'leftist', decided to promote a mobilization against this public financing of parties. It took advantage of the Italian constitutional law which authorizes a group of citizens (500.000 at the time) to ask the Parliament either to abrogate/modify a law or to organize on the topic a referendum to a abrogate it. The PR was all important here because it has developed during the 1960's a new conception of political life. The PR, under the leadership of Marco Panella, has decided not to develop as a classical Italian mass party intended to maximise its electoral share, but to operate mainly as an incubator of new social movements, so as to help through this 'voice' function, the 'modern' public opinion present in Italy to have new questions treated by the political system as a whole. He participated in local and national elections only to be able speak out in Parliament with a few deputies and senators – making use of the very open proportional electoral system used since 1946 in Italy. So the PR functioned sequentially by 'battles' to win – or to lose. He had already participated to the famous 'battle' of the referendum which legalized divorce in Italy in 1974. The use of the tool of the abrogative referendum, as in 1978 on public financing of parties, would be one which would characterized this party on the long run.

The 11/12th June of 1978, among the two referendum hold at the initiative of the PR[12], was one on the law of 1974 establishing the public financing of parties. The 'no' to the abrogation won with

[11] The PLI intended to regroup all rightist liberal politicians which agreed to economic and political liberalism in its Italian pre-1915 conception. It was very near to the *Confindustria*, the main Italian business organization. It generally operated as a small junior partner in Christian-Democrats dominated governments since 1948.
[12] The other one was asking the abolition of a fascist-era law on public order, the 'Legge Rocco'. The PR was also defeated on this referendum.

56,4% of the votes cast. Since, they were as much as 43,6% of the voters to accept the abrogation. This result, changing nothing to the law, was a total surprise at the time, since only three small parties were for the abrogation: the PR, the PLI, and the neo-fascist 'Italian Social Movement' (*Movimento sociale italiano* – MSI). At the previous general elections (1976), together these three parties had only won a 8,5% share of the valid votes (6,1% for the MSI, 1,3% for the PLI and 1,1% for the PR). The vote was interpreted as a proof of defiance from a vast area of the electorate against the two dominant party at the time, the 'Christian Democrats' (*Democrazia Cristiana* – DC) and the 'Communist Party' (*Partito communista italiano* – PCI), which had won in 1976 their best result ever measured by their cumulated overall share of the voting electorate (73,1%) and which were governing together under the so-called *'Historical compromise'* formula. The PR and its leadership were generally stigmatized at the time as dangerous 'populists', which were endangering the democratic political order built around the 'Constitutional parties' which had won together against Fascism and where fighting together again in this difficult years 'red' and 'black' terrorists and world economic crisis. The PR's 'liberal' filiation and PLI's help were not taken into account by its opponents.

Apart from promoting referendum and social movements, the PR has also inaugurated a new operating mode to penetrate public arena and attract attention. Since it was a very small organization, clearly against both the Communists and the Christian Democrats, which were dominating together most of the medias, it used all possible ways to create news around its messages. The leader of the party, Marco Panella, became known for example for his hunger strikes when he wanted to gain access to public opinion. He used also a new kind of speech, more direct, full of provocations and of common street language, in Parliamentary interventions. He was clearly a showman, in strong opposition of style to the more formal and serious style of most leaders of the parties at the time.

During this same years, new parties were created which had all in common to criticize the grasp of the old ones on the Italian state and the immobility of Italian politics (both elements what would be named after 1993 the *'First Republic'*). On the left side of the political spectrum, one could observe the creation of the 'Democraticproletarians' (*Demoproletari*-DP) which intended to regroup after 1975 the remnants of the legalist extreme Left of the 1960's and was known through its leader Mario Capanna, a former student leader of the 1960's. Italy saw also the creation of a Green organization after 1985. And far less visible at the national level, the early 1980's saw the creation of regional autonomist league in the northern part of Italy.

All this new actors had in common a sharp critique of the 'partitocracy', and all searched to differentiate themselves from the very name of party. All were officially repudiating the use of violence to defend their cause in an Italy where political violence remained an important element of political

identity for opposed extremisms on the left and on the right side of parliamentary arena. All had clearly some impact on the electorate, endangering the monopoly of the established parties. It must also be underlined that, in the early 1980's, electoral abstention begin to rise from its very low physiological level of the post-war era[13].

All these critics did not go unnoticed by the established parties. One leader would be the symbol of their early reaction: the socialist Bettino Craxi, at the head of the Italian Socialist Party (*Partito Socialista Italiano* – PSI) after 1976 became the first 'populist' leader of an established party. By 'populist' leader, we mean here both things: first of all, the old PSI (which was founded in 1892) identified itself with the very person of B. Craxi. Although B. Craxi was a classical leader of an Italian party at the time, with an internal majority to manage and a lot of local allies to co-opt and to satisfy so as to control the party on the ground, he appeared through the media as a strong leader and so there was a personalization of the image of the PSI around him. He even used himself a new word to underline the special qualities of his own leadership when he became Prime Minister after 1983: *'decisionismo'* (decisionism), the capacity to decide and so to reform Italy. Although B. Craxi was a party leader, he was defending in front of the public opinion that established parties and their old way to manage Italy through fine-tuned compromises in Parliament was deeply inefficient, and that more power should be given to the executive to decide necessary reforms. The rhetoric of Craxi was also quite different from the other leaders of the established parties. Like Marco Panella for the PR, B. Craxi began to offer to the Italian people a new kind of political scenery. Of course, in the context of the 1970's and 1980's in Italy, this personalization and decisionism associated to it was rapidly denounced by opponents as a return to Fascism, the rule of One person on the Masses. So the term of 'craxismo' was coined. It was the first time since the early 1950's that an Italian ruler had this dubious honour[14].

Another aspect of 'craxismo' was its openness to new issues: in fact, the PSI under the leadership of B. Craxi began to treat all the topics the other established parties were not considering. For instance, in the early days of B. Craxi's leadership in the 1970's, the PSI found inspirations in the libertarian PR's battles to limit law and order restrictions established, or maintained from Fascist era, to fight terrorism. Further on, the PSI showed interest at the end of the 1980's in a new wave of regionalization to counter the emergence of regional leagues. So B. Craxi's PSI was 'populist' in the sense that it gave dignity to questions which were of no interest to other established parties. It was in another terminology 'modern'. It must also be said that the PSI was to adopt since the early 1980's the

[13] At the time, voting was still an obligation for Italian citizens. The early rise of abstention from a physiological level was analysed as a sign of defiance by political scientist.

[14] Between 1948 and 1953, one could speak of *'de gasperismo'*, to describe the personal power of Christian-democrat Prime Minister, Alcide De Gasperi.

neo-liberal agenda which was so important elsewhere in the Western world at the time, and to appear as its main political entrepreneur when in charge of the Premiership (1983-1987)[15].

*2/ the second wave of 'populist'/'anti-party' mobilizations: the chaotic end of the 'First Republic' (1989-1993)*

At the very end of the 1980's began to develop itself a second wave of 'populist' mobilization against the established parties, the 'partitocracy' as it was really usual to say at the time. As for the previous one, corruption of political elites and their incapacity to solve Italy's problems were at the centre of the stage. The elites of the established parties denounced now their new opponents *as 'the protest'* (*la protesta*) or underlined their 'populist' character.

In fact, many forces did mobilized between 1989 and 1992 against the 'partitocracy'. In the northern part of the country, some regional leagues had merged in a unified movement from 1989 on ('Northern Alliance' [*Alleanza Nord*], then 'Northern League' [*Lega Nord* -LN] from 1991), under the leadership of Umberto Bossi, leader since 1982 of the small 'Lombard League' (*Lega Lombarda*). The 'Northern League' pretended to fight the inherent corruption of the established 'Roman' parties linked to the southern criminal mafias. LN inaugurated a very aggressive style of communication full of insults against political opponents, made use of a clear xenophobic tone against Italian southerners and non-European immigrants, and its leader used to behave and speak as a common man in a 'Bar Sport'. His communication craft was seen at the time as one of the main reason of its success: Umberto Bossi was in fact at the time a great actor.

In the southern part of the country, mainly in Sicily, a group of dissident Christian Democrats had gathered around the mayor of Palermo, Leoluca Orlando, during the 'Spring of Parlemo' (1989). These southerners were fighting against the same enemy that the LN: the alliance between criminal organizations and established parties. Ultimately, these Christian Democrats dissidents would create a new party, 'la Rete', able to confront the DC at the national election of 1992, both in Sicily and the north.

Also at margin of the DC, but on the right, Mario Segni, a Christian Democrat elected in Sardinia, son of a former President of the Republic of the 1960's, organized a 'referendum movement'. Having taken into account the incapacity of the Chambers to reform the country in a liberal sense, he decided to disarticulate the political system through the use of abrogative referendum. Although M. Segni, used a typical PR's tactic, and although he was a neo-liberal in economics matter, he was helped

[15] He even won 'Thatcher-style' in 1985 a referendum against the trade-unions.

to gather the signatures for referendums by the majority of the Communist party, which was transforming itself after the fall of the Berlin Wall in a 'Democratic Party of the Left' (*Partito democratico della Sinistra* – PDS) under the leadership of Achille Occhetto and wanted to join the 'Socialist International'. In June 1991, the referendum on one limited aspect of the electoral system was a complete success for all the opponents of the 'partitocracy'. B. Craxi asked the Italians to 'go to the sea' for the week-end, but most voters remained home to vote yes to the proposition heralded by Mario Segni.

In the spring of 1992, as most of the readers of this communication may know, an epochal scandal began in Milan. The judges of 'Milan's pool' discovered an all-encompassing system of corruption around the elected personal of Milan and Lombardy, leading directly to B. Craxi himself and other leaders of the centre-right established parties. The money was stolen from the public purse, both to finance party organizations and the aristocratic way of life of politicians. Soon the 'Clean Hands '(*Mani Pulite*) affair was to multiply itself in every corner of Italy, and was mainly destructive of the moderate parties. Every judge wanted to prove his own ability to fight corruption. The general election of 1992 saw a short victory of the centre-right established parties, but LN and the *'Rete'* won many votes and seats. Still a classical government was formed by the established parties under the leadership of Giuliano Amato, but, between the summer of 1992 and the spring of 1993, a whole political class was to finish under judicial inquiry.

In the spring of 1993, under the management of both the PR and Mario Segni's 'referendum committee' no less than eight referendums were organized on the same day. The result was a clear defiance of parties as they did exist at the time. The public finance of parties was abolished. A clear indication was given by the popular vote for the adoption of a new majoritarian election system, which was deemed more able to give future Italian government clear majorities to reform the country. In fact a new majoritarian law (*legge Mattarella*) was adopted by the Parliament elected in 1992. New elections were scheduled for the next year.

Logically these elections should have seen the success of the alliance of the left ('Progressives'), since its main parties appeared less corrupt than the parties of the centre-right and since the left was maintained in national opposition since 1979 (end of the *'Historical compromise'*) or, alternatively, since 1947 (beginning of the *'Cold War'*). The 'Clean Hands' affairs had had in fact far less impact on this side of the political spectrum[16], and the *'Rete'* had entered the alliance of the Left. Mario Segni,

[16] Of course, the moderate parties and their heirs in the 1990's-2010's would argue that this asymmetry was due to the fact that most judges were 'red judges', not fighting corruption but political foes. B. Grillo is not immune at all to this line of argument, and he would in the 2010's denounce the 'red mafia' of cooperative banks, cooperatives and so on.

who had left the DC in the spring of 1993 after one historical leader, Giulio Andreotti, had been accused of being a close ally of Sicilian mafia, tried to regroup his own followers of the 'referendum committees' with other renovated Christian Democrats, having rebranded the old DC as the *'Popular Party'* (*Partito popolare*) taking back the name of the catholic party in the 1910's-1920's. The LN of U. Bossi, although on the rise in the North according to opinion pools and local elections since the autumn of 1992, remained isolated. In the name of civil liberties and of the rule of law, the Marco Panella's PR had quite foolishly decided during 1992 to defend all corrupt politicians against judges and medias, and so it was already at the time a 'non-competitor' on the electoral market.

This possible victory of the left alliance led Silvio Berlusconi to create between the summer of 1993 and early days of 1994 its own party. S. Berlusconi, a media tycoon, was a close friend of B. Craxi. It was only with the constant political help of B. Craxi that he was able to build during the 1980's his three private national television networks (*Canale 5*, *Italia 1* and *Rete 4*) in total and clear infraction with the existing laws. With the possible victory whether of the progressive alliance or of Mario Segni's centrist alliance, S. Berlusconi was in great danger of losing everything. So, as he said at the time, he decided to 'enter the field' to save Italy – and himself. *Forza Italia* (FI), his party, was clearly seen by opponents as a 'populist' venture, since it capitalized on the experience of S. Berlusconi in the realm of private television, commercials, and marketing, to create and diffuse a political message perfectly akin to what the moderate Italian wanted to hear, for example a strong reduction of the income and inheritance taxes. FI was also populist in the obvious sense that it declared not to be a party in the depreciative meaning of the term at the time in Italy. S. Berlusconi managed to organize a geographically differentiated double alliance: in the north, with the Northern League of U. Bossi, and in the south, with the neo-fascist MSI of Gianfranco Fini and some rightist Christian democrats.

Since he was by far a better 'seller' than his leftist and centrist counterpart, controlled three national television networks and since he made so as to be identified by the electorate as the heir of the moderate Italy refusing 'Communism', he won to general surprise the general election of 1994. He lose power at the end of 1994 when the judges of Milan finally addressed his case. FI could have disappeared as a 'flash party', but S. Berlusconi managed to survive in opposition till the election of 2001.

During the 1990's and the 2000's this 'populist'/'anti-party' discourse was always present. A small party, called 'Italia of Values' (*Italia dei Valori* – IdV) was formed in the filiation of the 'Rete' around Antonio Di Pietro, the very judge who had begun the 'Clean Hands' affair in 1992 and who had put under inquiry S. Berlusconi at the end of 1994. IdV, a centre-left party, was supposed to be strongly opposed to corruption and mafias, and to operate for the rule of law and the defence of the judiciary.

IdV was of course a strong opponent of S. Berlusconi, and IdV wanted to recruit moderate voters sensible to legality (A. Di Pietro was before 1994 considered a rightist judge not far from having Fascist tendencies). Apart from the small IdV, on the left side of the political spectrum, they were successive mobilizations during the 1990's and 2000's to push the leaders of the established parties of the Centre-Left to be more resolute in their fight against S. Berlusconi and more coherent in their defence of the judiciary. Many activists of the intellectual left supposed that some form of collusion existed between their own leaders and S. Berlusconi.

It seems that, before M5S's creation, B. Grillo was interested by IdV's 'anti-party' approach. At the European election in June 2009 (so a few months before the creation of the M5S), he indicated that his followers should vote for some specific candidates on IdV's list, which were internal opponents to A. Di Pietro. In fact, IdV was at the time on the path of self-destruction, since A. Di Pietro himself appeared possibly corrupt, and also more and more unable to limit the corruption inside IdV (some of his own MP's even defected to S. Berlusconi).

It must be noted that the M5S never refers to these previous events. It might be that his militants and leaders, which are for the most part under 40 (with the exception of course of B. Grillo and G. Casaleggio), do not know well these events, it might be also that both previous episodes are not very encouraging for a renewal of Italian politics with the instrument of 'anti-party'/'populist' discourse. All this has been a total failure. Marco Panella has been for years now in an old politician with very little prestige left, so as are Umberto Bossi (which is diminished physically), Mario Segni, or Leoluca Orlando (even if he managed to return to some prominence in Sicily). But to us, it is important to make our reader understand that the M5S operates in a country where 'populist'/'anti-party' discourse has become 'commonplace' in reason of this two previous great waves of mobilization – in spite of its incapacity to have a positive impact on Italian reality.

*3/ an enduring tendency from established parties to obstruct people's veto power.*

It must also be underlined that popular decisions made by referendum were more and more systematically ignored by the new and old established parties in the last twenty years.

The most obvious example on the topic is the case of public financing of parties. Officially, it was abolished by an overwhelming popular vote on the 18th April of 1993. But, immediately, parliamentary parties decided to create a new way to finance themselves through public money: they decided to reimburse electoral campaigns. The trick was easily found. It was exactly the same

amounts, and even more! Through a succession of laws between 1993 and 2006, parties granted themselves more and more money through this channel, and without any serious control. PR and Mario Segni tried to use again the referendum tool to change the way parties behave. They tried again in 2000 to ask for a referendum to stop this treason of the 'populist' spirit of 1993, but their referendum did not obtain enough participation to be valid.

As a result of all this uncontrolled flows of public money, at the beginning of the 2010's, scandals duly multiplied around this public financing of parties. Many books were written and sold on the topic. It was so to become one the main 'battle' of B. Grillo and the M5S. A first limitation of public financing of parties was introduced by government Monti in 2012, a second one by government Letta in 2013, and Matteo Renzi pretends to abolish it fully in the near future. Some flow of public money will continue till 2017. So it is still a polemical argument between the M5S and the PD since the M5S has no confidence in M. Renzi's intentions.

More generally, established parties had understood how to counter an abrogative referendum. In fact, to be of any legal value, an abrogative referendum must pass the 50% threshold of popular participation (the 'quorum'), so the opponents to most propositions of abrogation have more and more decided to use this possibility to invalidate a referendum. Most of the time they succeeded: between 1997 and 2009, no referendum was able to pass the 50% threshold. In fact, the old PR's strategy to have 'modernity' enter in the Italian legislation in spite of established parties refusal to implement it do not function anymore.

And even if a referendum did pass the quorum, parties in Parliament showed a clear tendency not to obey to the spirit of the abrogation. In 2009, four referendums passed the threshold, with 55% participation. One was against the possibility to produce nuclear energy on Italian soil. Interestingly a similar referendum had already been organized in 1987 on the topic on a Green initiative and has stopped nuclear energy development in Italy. One was against an *'ad personam'* law ( about *legitimo impedimento*) designed by S. Berlusconi's majority to allow him to escape any judiciary process against him as long he was Prime Minister – or President of the Republic. Two other ones were asked so as to defend the public status of water distribution in Italy and were promoted by a referendum committee named 'Water for Common Good' (*Aqua per il Bene Comune*). Although the two referendum indicated a majoritarian will not to privatize public water services, successive governments have thereafter tried to ignore it. B. Grillo was a clear sympathizer to the four referendums, but played no direct role in the different referendum committee. In fact, after its creation during the autumn of 2009 following the surprising victory of these four referendums, the M5S has followed these lines of action approved by popular majorities, fighting in Parliament for example to be sure that S. Berlusconi as a definitively

condemned person would lose finally his seat at the Italian Senate. M5S had also in its own program, as one of the 'Five Stars' of its own symbol, the defence of water public provision.

So the hypothesis can be made that one of the structural aspect of the creation of the M5S, with its paradoxical insistence on direct democracy, is the clear growing impossibility for activists to impose through referendums to parliamentary parties the will of the majority.

A last observation must be made to have a clear definition of the political context in which the M5S would operate: since 1993-94, the many turmoil of Italian political system have open carrier paths to *every* politician-to-be *whatever his political and ideological affiliation*. By the miracle of large coalitions, all parties, even with a small number or members or supporters (even less than 1% of the voters), have had the possibility to win some kind of executive posts, at the local or at the national level. Neo-fascists and northern and southern regionalists on the right side, communists of all obedience, radicals and ecologists on the left side, not to speak of all the little parties of the centre heirs of the Christian Democrats, they had all since the end of the 'First Republic' (1946-1992) the possibility to hold an executive post[17], so the possibility of being corrupt when in charge, and most of them have shown to public opinion *that they very easily corrupted*. In fact, it is difficult to explain to persons not familiar with the details of Italian political corruption at which point *every* Italian ideology or established party had since 1994 its many examples of corruption among its followers[18]. No old or new ideology can pretend to guarantee a moral superiority to his followers in corruption matters. This last aspect explains why M5S would-be politician having a 'political past' of some importance in any party are not well accepted by most activists: it is by itself a proof of moral corruption. It means that only young persons, with no previous political career, can have a leading role in the organization with all the qualities and defects it implies. In fact, when B. Grillo in 2015 decided to limit his direct implication in M5S day-to-day life, a directorate of five young MP's was chosen by him, with no one having a previous political experience outside the M5S. This of course is both an asset and a limitation for the M5S, as one can see for example in the campaign for local elections this year, especially in Rome.

[17] In fact, the recent scandals on Regional Councils granting great amounts of money to any regional councillor or any political group inside the council proved that it was not even important to be part of the executive or the regional majority to steal money from public purse. In some council (like Lazio or Lombardy), it seems more rapid to name the rare honest councillor than the near unanimity of councillors under judicial inquiry.

[18] To my knowledge, Italy is the only European country where the term 'socialists' means for most people 'corrupt'. All great parties of the left have refused to use the term 'socialist' since 1993, and with due reason judging from the electoral results of maintained socialists in the 1990's, 2000's and 2010's. It is true that corruption problems of the PSI had begun to be known as early as mid-1960's.

So to summarize, since the 1970's, in Italy exist:

- An articulated critique of the 'partitocracy', which is accused of being corrupt and inefficient to reform Italy and to solve its many problems: the established parties so accused of incompetence tried to nullify this critique qualifying their opponents of 'populist';

- This critique is expressed in a style more and more radical the years go by: for instance, since 2007, after the publication of a book on the material advantages of the politicians[19], the old term of 'political class' has disappeared to be replaced by the term 'political caste' which intends to be even more depreciative; but the new forces expressing this old critique tend to ignore totally the tradition in which they operate, and present themselves as totally new; this ignorance may be strategic since former critiques of 'partitocracy' are itself now a part of it. The PR for example has shown for years to be one of the more disreputable part of it.

- all new political forces or renovation of old parties pretended to take this critique into account (what we call, insider 'outsider'), but they had all finished after a few years to show the same very defect than the previous established parties, and all kind of political ideology had shown that its leaders and militants can be deeply corrupt; the parties are also prone to refuse to accept the results of abrogative referendum and so tend to underline the importance of controlling executive power and even to reinforce it institutionally by some kind of constitution reform.

According to our line of analysis, these long term trends explain the M5S discourse: against all parties whatever their ideology, so 'neither left nor right'; against corruption and for meritocracy; and with a tendency to treat questions of public policy separately like in a referendum. In fact, for each great orientation of the M5S, it should be a vote through Internet among the militants to decide.

Fascism was the autobiography of the Italian nation. It seems to us that the M5S becomes another chapter of it.

*B. The M5S as a distress message from and to the younger generations. Consequence of Italy socio-economic woes since the 1980's.*

[19] Cf. Sergio Rizzo & Gian Antonio Stella, *La Casta. Così i politici italiani sono diventati intoccabili*, Milan : Rizzoli, 2007

Studying Italy since 1989 like ourselves, the ill-fate of the Italian youngster cannot but overwhelmed us. It was already clear at the time that the whole socio-economic and political system was not favourable in any sense to the younger generations. The low birth rate of Italy was already perceived as an indication that the young Italians did have problems to find a job fitting their aspirations and to create thereafter their own family. It has it an all-time low in 2015: since 1861, no other year had seen in Italy so few births.

In 2001, so even before the world economic crisis of 2007-08, one motto of S. Berlusconi campaign to return in charge of Italy was: *"A good job also for you".* The quality of work, be it its status or its level of remuneration, offered to younger generations was already at the time a problem around which a politician should try to campaign with some success. The governments led by S. Berlusconi between 2001 and 2006, and then between 2008 and 2011, did not change anything to the distress of younger generations. The technocratic governments (1994-96 and 2011-2013) and the governments of the Centre-Left (1996-2001 and 2006-2008) were also inefficient on this topic. In fact, all labour market reforms during the 1990's-2000's led to a strong deregulation, but limited it to the new workers entering the labour market. Apart from these reforms, one has also to take into account the tendency of most employers to make the most of these new regulations so leading to the development of a 'grey market' for labour (with the famous 'co.co.co' for example). The diminishing protection of rights of workers on the labour market, legal, barely legal and even totally illegal, created for ordinary members of younger generations a long span of time where no stable job could be find and where salaries or remunerations were very low. Before the world economic crisis of 2007-2008, many Italians complained about the "1000 euros-generation" referring to the fact that young university educated people could not find a job better paid more than 1000 euros. Some young Italian did not bother any more to search an occupation and preferred to stay at home under the help (and maybe supervision) of the older generation. This phenomenon of the 'NEET' (Not in employment, not in education, not in training) was already measured and subject to commentary in Italy before the world economic crisis.

It is not a surprise then that one of the first 'battle' of B. Grillo was to use his own blog to compose a compilation of testimonies of younger workers suffering from absurdly low paid and unstable jobs[20]. It must also be underlined that, in Italy, one is 'young' today for the labour market till the age of 40 or something. But, due to the world crisis, many of these people in their late thirties or early forties could not find a stable job in the last years, and they are now under the threat of concurrence from younger workers on the 'precariat' market. As far as we know (from opinion polls),

[20] Cf. B. Grillo, *Schiavi Moderni: Il precario nell'Italia delle meraviglie*, Milan: Casaleggio Associati, 2007.

these desperate 'old young' form in 2013-14 the bulk of the voters[21], militants and politicians of the M5S. These people are becoming too expensive to hire as they grew older and they saw that they will have many difficulties in old age since the jobs they had find till then were very low paid and mainly without any serious pension-scheme.

The fate of the young on the labour market is only one aspect of the many woes of Italian economy and society. We cannot here propose a full-description of Italy economic woes since 1980[22]. Suffice to say that according a team of economic historians the decade of 2000-2011 was one of the worst for growth in Italy since unification in 1861[23]. Some economists are even asking themselves if Italy has not entered since 1980 a new cycle of economic decline as it has known in past centuries[24].

We will not discuss here the reasons of this economic slow (or even negative) growth. But, since every established party wanted officially to promote Italian growth, they can be all held fully responsible by Italian public opinion for this disaster. It was already the case before the world crisis of 2007/2008, as even before it, Italy was in slow growth period. The majority of S. Berlusconi was divided as early as 2003 by an internal debate on the reasons of slow growth. It was even worse after 2011/2012 when all great parties voted for Mario Monti's emergency government sustained by European partners. The immediate results of M. Monti economic policy was to path the way to a strong second recession after the first one of 2008-09, a new recession by far the longest of the post-war era. It is only in fact only in 2015 that some very limited growth returned to Italy. The recession was far stronger in the South; it hit hard all the little commercial and artisanal enterprises so typical of Italy, and the industrial sector in general suffered a disaster (with -25% of industrial production at the lowest point).

At the time of Monti's government, the only established parties[25] to oppose the choices made so hastily under European pressure in the winter of 2011-12 to save Italy from a 'Greek-style

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[21] Cf. ITANES, Voto amaro. Disincanto e crisi economica nelle elezioni del 2013, Bologne : il Mulino, 2013, chap. 4, 'Le base sociali del voto', p. 57-70 ; Ipsos Public Affairs, Europee 2014. Analisi del voto europeo in Italia, http://www.ipsos.it/Voto%202014%20def.pdf.

[22] For an example of a journalistic book on the topic of Italian downgrading based on official statistics, cf. Antonio Galdo*, Ultimi. Cosi le statistique condannano l'Italia*, Turin: Einaudi, 2016.

[23] Cf. Gianni Toniolo (dir.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Italian Economy since Unification*, Oxford: OUP, 2013. According to G. Toniolo, *"The years of 2000-2011 were technically a lost decade, with total GDP in 2011 a mere 1.1 higher than it had been ten years earlier, and still 5 percent lower than it was in 2007 (in the previous major depression, the 1929 GDP level was reached again in 1935). For a country that was the second largest industrial producer in the euro area, especially serious was the weakness of the manufacturing sector, where output contracted by about 4 percent between 2000 and 2007."* (p. 27)

[24]Emanuele Felice and Giovanni Vecchi, "Italy's Modern Economic Growth, 1861–2011." *Enterprise & Society*, 16, 2, June 2015, pp. 225-248.

[25] The confederal trade-unions also opposed Monti's decisions, and organized some street protest without great success.

memorandum' was the LN of Umberto Bossi. Since 1999, the LN was against most European Union policies and it has always dedicated itself to the defence of the interest of the northern (industrial) workers which were strongly hit by Monti pension reform. From the start, LN did not sustain Monti's government, contrary to all other parties of centre-right and centre-left. But, at the time, this junior partner of three Berlusconi governments (1994, 2001-2006, and 2006-2008) was itself in total disarray due to a nepotism scandal around sons and second wife of U. Bossi and due to the inappropriate, to say the less, use of the (now well-known to the reader of this paper) public money supposed to finance electoral campaigns. On the left side, the many small parties of the extreme left and of the ecologists were unable to voice unambiguously their protest, since most of them were pro-European, and had difficulties to develop an extreme critique of 'Europe' as would have been needed at the time.

So the M5S of B. Grillo was the only party in the condition to articulate all the different protests of the many Italians hit by Monti's austerity and then implied economic recession. Discovering itself not very 'European', the M5S searched to attract traditional independents suffering from the modernization of the taxation system in the middle of an economic crisis (against the agency for the levy of the taxes), educated worker searching hopelessly a stable job, or southern Italians having lost hope to find a job (with its proposition of a universal minimum revenue).

Apart from this economic distress more pronounced in Italy after 2011 by any standards, it must be underlined that most important public policies in Italy are not very satisfying at the eye of most Italian observers- and also of most ordinary people. One could take a text-book from the 1980's and compare the woes of Italy as they were described at the time and the woes of Italy today[26]. We are quite sure of the result: all the old woes are still here (relative low level of education of the workforce, low level of R&D, inefficiency of the judicial system, North/South divide, underdevelopment of the stock market, etc.), and new ones are now to take into account (as for example immigration, emigration of high-skilled Italians or difficulties to create important enterprises in the Internet domain).

In fact, many consensual issues are not treated at all, or so ill-treated that it seems to many observers that nothing important has been done since the early 1980's. The clearest example of a consensual issue not solved at all is of course corruption, which was so important to the 'populist'/'anti-party' discourse as we have already said previously. Since the 1970's, the corruption of the political elites – the 'moral question' as Enrico Berlinguer, leader of Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano* - PCI), named it - is perceived by observers maybe as the greatest problem

[26] Cf. G. Tonolio (dir.), op.cit., 2013 which is also a synthesis of Italian enduring defects in matter of public policies (education, R&D, rule of law, etc.).

facing Italy also in economic terms. The 'Mani Pulite' period (1992-1994) was supposed to have renovated the political class and change its bad habits, and liberated the Italian economy from the pressure of politicians searching material advantages for themselves and their clients. Alas, both S. Berlusconi never ending story with the judicial system since 1994 and the many scandals of the last ten years linked to economic life (like for example the *'Parmalat'* scandal) have proven to everybody sensible to these aspects that nothing has changed. One can only note that now politicians are stealing for themselves and their clients and not anymore for the party, but the economic result are quite the same.

Same sad reflection on the role of the mafias. The world success of Roberto Saviano's books on Napoli's 'camorra' is only a remainder of the permanent situation in Italy. The only (bad) news is the 'nationalization' of most traditional regional mafias since the early 1990's. Same on environmental issues. Same on education (on the education gap between North and South, or on the underfinancing of Italian universities). Etc. Since the established parties are unable to tackle this consensual issues – and since they are also unable to explain publicly why these issues *should not be tackled*[27]-, there is a permanent popular demand on many of these points. The M5S take some of these consensual issues into its own program – with a predilection for issues specific for an ecologist party[28].

To give an example, in 2013, the M5S stated its will to give full application to the European 'Waste-Directive' of 1990. Apart from the problem of waste for the region of Napoli, treatment of waste remains a problem in many Italian towns. The first elected mayor for the M5S was gained in Parma in 2012 on a question of corruption and capitalizing on a popular mobilization against the construction of a *'termovalorizzatore'* to get rid of waste.

More generally, in their discourse to delegitimize all other parties, the M5S explains that most elected members of these parties do not respect *the laws already there* and that they use the State to serve first themselves or their clients. So the M5S is strongly legalist and meritocratic. Of course, in every country, the real limits of legality and the real borders between 'arbitrary promotions' and 'virtuous meritocracy' are more social and cultural phenomenon than blind mechanisms, but in Italy an extreme view on this topic has developed since the 1990's, mostly on the left side of the political spectrum by opposition to S. Berlusconi's views on the topic. As we have previously said, this 'justicialism' was also developed by a centre-left party, 'Italy of values' (*Italia dei valori* –IdV). More

[27] At some point, S. Berlusconi did try to explain why it was legitimate not to pay taxes, but it was not a very consensual point to be made. For the time being, no one dares to explain for example why internationalized Italian mafias should be seen in reality as an asset for Italian economy.

[28] The program and many 'battles' of the M5S are really similar to the demands of an ecologist party. But the term 'Green' has been itself vilified by Italian Greens since the 1990's. So the M5S declares a political identity which refuses absolutely to be assimilated to professional politicians of the Italian 'Greens'.

generally, M5S's discourse is rooted of an Italian tradition which characterized Italians as deeply unable to obey rule of law and to accept meritocracy, and so asking for a strong judiciary to castigate these bad mores. This discourse also pretends that, by itself[29], rule of law would imply more economic growth and well-being.

When in charge of public affairs as it is the case in very few places since 2012, the M5S wants to prove - with some ingenuity - that it is the only party on the electoral market whose elected administrators are fully compliant with the legal system already here. The administrators of the M5S are supposed to be under the permanent scrutiny of local members of the M5S, of the local and national public opinion and of the judiciary. But, in a legal system such as the Italian one, which is deemed not without reason incredibly complex and ambiguous[30], it is impossible to be always on line with regulations and far less so to appear a perfect law-abiding legislator. There always will be a judge who will investigate, for good and bad reasons, if you are respecting or no the law on some obscure and intricate point of legislation. Apart from question of personal antipathy inside the M5S, the recent internal fight around the fate of the mayor of Parma, Federico Pizzarotti, constitutes a good example of the political limits of such an obsession implies in the Italian context. As B. Grillo explained openly to F. Pizzarotti to justify his suspension from the movement, since respect of legality is our main political asset, any breach of it, even minor, can have a negative electoral impact[31].

To summarize, Italy experiences a *long-term slowdown of economic growth* – where the main victims are younger generations[32] - and many *public policies inefficiencies*, where all established parties had the occasion since 1994 to prove their inefficiency or their lack of real intention to solve the problems, and where all the parties had the occasion to show their high level of corruption. So, according to this context, something like the M5S had clearly a great possibility to emerge and develop. It would have been the task of a more traditional political force if, in Italy, all possible ideological formulas had not been exhausted before[33].

[29] This belief could be a heritage of the legalistic tradition which so important for the Italian state at the time of its Unification ('Napoli school').

[30] Historians of the Italian administration, like Sabine Cassese, have underlined this enduring complexity of the legal/administrative system, which in fact becomes rapidly evident to any student of contemporary Italian public policies.

[31] F. Pizzarroti was suspended on the 13th May 2016, with a letter reproduced on B. Grillo's blog, http://www.beppegrillo.it/2016/05/pizzarotti_sospeso_dal_movimento_5_stelle.html .

[32] Some member of this younger generations do inherit the wealth of the previous generations, but since the concentration of wealth is very pronounced in Italy, most young Italian inherits small amounts.

[33] In the years 2007-2011, no organized historical political group of some importance was exempt from the 'impurity' of a previous participation to public affairs. There were only fringe groups to remain 'pure', like the famous 'Casa Pound' at the extreme right and some self-styled 'Bolshevik' Marxist-Leninist sectarian

*Conclusion.*

We wanted to underline in the present communication that, although *agency* aspects are of course important, the *contextual* aspects are vital to understand the emergence and success of the M5S: the corruption of the established parties and their inefficiency to solve many consensual issues *ask for* a 'populist'/'anti-party' discourse akin to the one the M5S is producing today.

We wanted also to underline in conclusion to our communication that Matteo Renzi line of action - what is called 'renzismo' - is nothing else than a sum of strategic answers to the main problems which are thematised by the M5S, and might looks like a 'governing populism', as professor Marco Revelli among others has noted[34].

This internal 'outsider' – *'il rottomatore'* as he nicknamed himself– had first the strategic goal to get rid of old political elites of his own party, the PD, in the very name of his own efficiency compared to their collective incapacity to reform Italy. He has made it in 2013-14, taking first the direction of the PD in 2013, and then the direction of the government in 2014.

To succeed in this destruction of a whole political class, he used all the strategies of communication allowed by Internet. For example, he used massively Twitter and its hashtags to communicate his comments and decisions. Between him and B. Grillo developed true battles of twits. The young M. Renzi even proved that he was far better in face to face debate than the older B. Grillo.

Taking into account one the main point of M5S program, M. Renzi declared his will to end the public financing of parties. A law was voted in this sense by his parliamentary majority. Of course, the M5S says it is not ambitious enough, since parties will receive public money till 2017.

M. Renzi declared that he wanted to help the young to find a stable job. A law to change the parameter of the labour market – the 'Job Act'- was voted in the early days of 2015. Of course, the M5S says that the Job Act changes really nothing to the dire situation of employment in Italy, and might even worsen the situation of younger workers.

M. Renzi declared that he wanted a new policy mix in Europe, with far less austerity. He changed a little the parameters of the Italian budgetary policy since he is in charge of the Italian

organizations on the left. There were also no great economic tycoon able to replay Berlusconi's operation of 1993/94 (although some had temptations, but lacked rhetorical skills).

[34] C. Marco Revelli, *Dentro e Contro. Quando il populismo è di governo*, Bari: Laterza, 2015.

government. The M5S sees no change, and despises this slow moves to give a little more money to Italian consumers.

M. Renzi has decided to reform both the Italian electoral law of 2005 to guarantee in future general elections an unambiguous winner able to rule the country and the Italian Constitution of 1948 so as to abolish the direct election and veto-player role of the Second Chamber (*Senato*). Both changes should give future executive the power to reform Italy according to majoritarian will. Although the M5S insists on the necessity to reform Italy, the M5S defends against Renzi's reforms the 'Republican' spirit of 1948, and accuses M. Renzi of preparing an elective dictatorship for his party and himself[35].

So interestingly, most great political choices of M. Renzi are operating on the same lines that a 'populist' force opposing him fiercely. This last aspect is for us another indication that, in the Italian case, the concept of 'populism' is not very useful to qualify political forces. Here, in fact, 'populism' is more the name of an old liberal critique of the 'party' as such as anything else, which has overwhelmed every other articulated discourse. So it has more to do with M. Ostrogorski, R. Michels or G. Mosca, than with Peron's legacy or Le Pen's inventions.

To conclude, it is not difficult to see the parallel between the years 1991-1994 and the years 2011-2013. In both cases, the established parties were deemed corrupt and unable to reform Italy. In both cases, a strong 'populist' menace against the 'parties' was at the doors, and the stability of the whole political system was ultimately to be saved by the reaction of an insider pretending to an outsider, mimicking with success a 'populist' and 'decisionist' upheaval and making use of up-to-date communication tools to re-capture the electorate. S. Berlusconi was the counter-measure opposed to the 'Northern League' of U. Bossi, the 'referendum committees' of M. Segni and the 'Rete' of Leoluca Orlando. The takeover of the 'Democratic Party' (*Partito Democratico* – PD) by Matteo Renzi in 2013 and his rise to executive power in 2014 looks like an answer to a third wave of 'populist' /'anti-party' menace floated by the M5S. M. Renzi, the internal 'outsider', mimics with evident brio the revolutionary tone and propositions of the 'populist' opponents, and pretends to pass through Parliament long-due reforms. At this stage, one can only guess if M. Renzi will have the same enduring successes and failures than B. Craxi and S. Berlusconi. May be he will proves us wrong.

*Last version working version (19th May 2016)*

[35] This accusation is not completely false, as an old Christian-democrat politician (Paolo Cirino Pomicino) remarked drawing a parallel with the 'Acerbo electoral law' under Fascism and M. Renzi's electoral law.