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PAPER D. McDONNELL

A tale of Unanticipated Consequences? Local Politics in Genoa since 1993

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1. The New Law

Of the many institutional and electoral reforms introduced in Italy over the past twenty years, the 81/1993 law reforming local government and creating directly-elected mayors and provincial presidents has widely been hailed as one of the most successful (Dente, 1997; Baldini and Legnante, 2000; Ginsborg, 2003; Newell, 2008). As Ilvo Diamanti has observed, these newly-empowered, independent and dynamic mayors became the symbol of a changing Italy in which it was hoped that the reform of local government would promote stability, accountability and legality, renovating ‘from below’ a country and political system in deep crisis (Diamanti, 2002). Accompanying the increased personalisation of institutional office was a declared intention to reduce the power of the parties and establish a direct link between the people and their local leaders. In particular, given the exposure of widespread corruption among party elites during the early 1990s, the fact that the discredited ‘political class’ would no longer be responsible for nominating the mayors in city council chambers represented not only a radical break with the past, but one which was extremely popular in the strongly anti-party climate of 1990s Italy. Moreover, given the prevailing view of local government as slow, inefficient and highly unstable, the moves to rectify this by bolstering the position of the mayor and his/her executive were almost universally welcome. In sum, the reform aimed to deliver

greater stability and governability, greater autonomy of the mayors and executives from the parties and the council chambers, greater legitimacy, greater openness to civil society, greater local autonomy and greater clarity of political responsibility.

In specific terms, the most important innovations of the 81/1993 law were that (a) it made the position of mayor in municipalities containing more than 15,000 inhabitants directly elected by the public in a double-ballot majority system. If no candidate gained over 50 per cent of the votes in the first round, the two highest-placed candidates would proceed to a run-off ballot; (b) if the mayor gained over 50 per cent of the votes in the first round, a *premio di maggioranza* (majority prize) was triggered, giving the parties supporting him/her a 60 per cent majority in the council chamber (in the event that they too had secured over 50 per cent, but less than 60). If no list secured over 50 per cent of seats in the first round and the mayoral election went to a run-off ballot, the list supporting the winning candidate would receive 60 per cent of the seats; (c) the mayor was given sole power to appoint and dismiss *assessori*, who could no longer serve contemporaneously in the council chamber. He/she would also be responsible for appointing all representatives of the municipality to other institutions, boards etc. In theory, at least, this would give the mayor much greater autonomy from party control over the distribution of such positions; (d) the number of *assessori* was to be limited according to population size. For example, in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants it was set at eight (although this would be increased several times in later years); (e) mayors and *assessori* could not serve more than two consecutive terms; (f) according to the formula of *simul stabunt simul cadent*, although the council chamber could still pass a motion of no-confidence in the mayor, his/her removal would also provoke the dissolution of the chamber and hence new elections for all (Di Virgilio 2005: 11).

This paper will argue, however, that, in the case of the centre-left in Genoa, both the introduction of the new law in 1993 and that of electoral primaries in 2007, have had a series of effects which have been undesirable not only for the parties of the centre-left, but also for representative party democracy. As we will see, if the much-acclaimed prize won has been stability and a supposedly closer relationship between citizens and political

leaders, this has come at a heavy price for other key pillars of local democracy such as turnout and the role of the parties. Due to the pressures of space, we will examine these ideas in the cases of the first centre-left mayor elected under the new system, Adriano Sansa, and the most recent centre-left mayor, Marta Vincenzi.

2. The 1993 Election and the case of Adriano Sansa

The first set of elections held under the new system took place between June and December 1993. As Marco Tarchi (2003: 161) says, in the lead-up to the campaigns, in many cities there began ‘a hunt for new faces to present as candidates, in place of the old party men’ and the result of this was that more than a third of those eventually elected either as mayors or councillors did not have prior party political experience (Segatori, 2003: 138-139). Moreover, for 20 per cent of Italian mayors in office in 1994, the top local job was their first in any public institution or party, a situation which had applied to just 2.9 per cent of their predecessors in 1992 (Recchi, 2002). Indeed, the contrast is startling when we consider that the average mayor in Italy in 1992 had accumulated 30 years in political office, half of which were in positions inside the political parties (Bettin and Magnier, 1995).

One of these new mayors was the former *pretore d’assalto* (‘campaigning magistrate’), Adriano Sansa, in Genoa. Sansa ticked all the boxes for the local centre-left in its search for the right candidate. First, he had never been a member of a political party. He had, however, been strongly involved for decades in various civil society associations, including Amnesty International and other voluntary organisations involved in social work. Second, his reputation was built on his activities as an anti-corruption magistrate, at a time when his counterparts in Milan such as Antonio di Pietro were becoming national heroes. As Carlo Baccetti (1998: 207) comments, Sansa was ‘well known and admired by large sectors of the electorate, not just on the left, for his actions as a judge committed to fighting the abuses of the politically and economically powerful’. Given the scandal which had brought the previous PDS mayor Claudio Burlando’s term to an end, this was an especially welcome quality for the PDS in order to signal a break with the past. Third, although Sansa’s prime sponsor was the main party of the Left, he could also

appeal to voters of the DC, given his strong Catholic identity: he had been president of the FUCI (Federazione Universitari Cattolici Italiani – Federation of Italian Catholic University Students) in Savona and had written opinion columns (generally on legal matters) for *Famiglia Cristiana* from 1976 to 1992.

Sansa's 1993 manifesto stressed the need to 'reduce the intrusion of the parties and to appoint administrators faithful to the community' (Monteverde, 1999: 82). He was to be true to his word once in office and, partly as a result, four years later he would become the only one of the big city centre-left mayors in Italy not to be supported for re-election by the parties which had endorsed them in 1993. To understand why, we need to examine the relationship between Sansa and the main party of the centre-left in Genoa, the PDS.

Unlike those of his predecessor Romano Merlo (PDSI) in the 1990 election (who had received 2,671 votes in the Council Chamber election), Sansa's votes in the first and second rounds in November and December 1993 could be counted in hundreds of thousands (he won the run-off election with 247,547 votes – a share of 59.2%). The new mayor thus felt he had a strong electoral and constitutional mandate to govern independently. His view of the role of the parties which had supported him was that they should be consulted, and agreement reached on the major strategic and administrative decisions facing the city, but, he stressed, only 'the "major decisions", not matters of daily administration' (Sansa and Galletta, 1997: 47). As Sansa would later tell this author, however, once he took office, he found 'there was still a tendency of the party secretaries to seek total control over administration' (Interview with Sansa). In fact, while they tended not to disagree openly with him about his ideas, 'where the real disagreements occurred from around the halfway point in my time in office, and this is a particularly sad aspect, was every time I had to make appointments' (Interview with Sansa).

Among those choices which Sansa believed were solely within his remit was that of the *assessori* for his cabinet and this would become one of the key points of contention with the PDS. Sansa claims that the party first asked him 'to change one *assessore*, then two, then three, four, five. I refused because I thought my *assessori* were competent' (Sansa

and Galletta, 1997: 74). Indeed, the pressure became so insistent that ‘sometimes in meetings with the party secretaries, all that was said was “are you going to change that *assessore* for me or not?”’ (Sansa and Galletta, 1997: 76).

From their point of view, what was frustrating for the parties was that Sansa had little time for what he saw as a relic of the ‘old’ system: the long-standing culture of *mediazione* (mediation) in Italian political decision-making. The impression of Sansa therefore among the political class was that, as Marco Nesci, a RC councillor at the time, puts it: ‘he was closed within his own system and impervious to politics, to political mediation’ (Interview with Nesci). Likewise, Alessandro Repetto, who served in parliament for the Popolari from 1996 and would later be elected President of the Province of Genoa in 2002 and 2007, says that Sansa’s time in office ‘was spent in perfect isolation, interacting almost exclusively with his own movement’ (Interview with Repetto). As Franco Manzitti, editor of the local edition of *La Repubblica*, comments, Sansa ‘had neither the capacity nor the physiology for mediation’ (Interview with Manzitti). When asked by this author about Sansa’s difficulties in office and whether this reflected the desire of the parties to retain control, the main PDS figure in Genoa over the last two decades, Claudio Burlando, responded that ‘it’s not so much a case of parties wanting to control, but, how can I put it...the need to create a political fabric’ (Interview with Burlando). This raises a crucial aspect in appreciating why Sansa’s time in office would prove so troubled: despite the formal independence and greater decision-making powers of the new mayors, the capacity to understand and interact with important networks of power (parties, trade unions, employers associations etc.) in cities is essential to achieving results. As Carlo Trigilia argues in his conclusions to *Comuni Nuovi*, the various new actors in city governance need to be more aware that ‘the chances of them responding more efficiently to collective problems depends on their capacity to cooperate in complex and often tiring decision-making processes, for which there exist no easy shortcuts in democratic societies’ (Trigilia, 2002: 602).

Given this relationship, it perhaps not surprising that, even by the end of his first year in office, Sansa says he felt his presence ‘was considered transitory...I found myself being

asked by the party secretaries: “what are you planning to do afterwards? Do you fancy a place on the *Consiglio Superiore della Magistratura* (‘Magistrates Governing Council’ – CSM)?” (Interview with Sansa). In addition to their clashes over appointments to the giunta and other public/semi-public bodies, the parties also sought to make life difficult for the mayor in the council chamber. Of course, if the PDS and the other parties of the centre-left had wanted to get rid of Sansa at any stage, they could have brought him down immediately with a no-confidence motion in the council chamber. However, apart from provoking new elections for the chamber and mayoralty which nobody wanted - following a logic of turkeys being unlikely to vote for Christmas - such an outcome would not have looked good at all for the parties and would have likely disadvantaged them in an eventual new election. This therefore represents an important change compared to the past: unlike the old system, under which a mayor could be replaced at any time by a no-confidence vote, the parties found that they *now* had to bide their time before they could change the mayor, however uncooperative (or incapable) he/she proved to be. So, while they can make life uncomfortable for the mayor and try to create the conditions by which it would be politically acceptable not to support his/her re-candidature, episodes of a mayor’s own majority voting him/her (and thus also themselves) out of office have been rare. Whether, of course, the fact that councillors do not seek to dismiss mayors whom they profoundly disagree with is something to be welcomed in a parliamentary democracy is another issue entirely. What we might say here is that, before praising the greater stability which the new system has undoubtedly brought to municipal administrations, it might be prudent also to consider (a) *why* this has happened – i.e. is it because the councillors are respectful of the direct mandate given to the mayor by the public or simply because they do not want to face new elections?; (b) whether this represents a virtuous gain for Italian democracy. After all, even in the United States, the President can be impeached and forced to resign without the members of Congress having to worry that they too will face new elections as a result.

On 11 July 1997, four months before the end of Sansa’s term and new elections, Ubaldo Benvenuti led a delegation from the PDS, the Popolari, the Greens and the minor parties of the centre-left majority into the mayor’s office to tell him that they would not support

his re-candidature (Chiara, 1997). This decision was subsequently announced publicly in a note which said:

‘the work done over the last few years merits a positive verdict overall. However a new era is beginning both for the future of Genoa and for the whole country and the city government needs to reflect this in terms of its capabilities, representation, and consensus. These require ability for dialogue and representation which, so far, have not been sufficiently shown [by Sansa and his administration]’ (Chiara, 1997)

It is interesting to compare both the explanations of how and why support for Sansa’s tenure ended offered by the mayor and the parties at the time with that given in 2007 to this author by Ubaldo Benvenuti. While Sansa claims it was because he had upset a series of clienteles, Benvenuti says that, in reality, ‘we were not happy with his administrative skills. He somewhat opportunistically, used the accusation against us of “the parties want to re-take control”. But this was not the problem. Rather, the problem was that various initiatives had been revoked...for example, during Sansa’s time in office, the metro did not advance by a single metre. He had a culture of suspicion which led him to block administrative activity’ (Interview with Benvenuti). When asked about the fact that, at the time, they publicly claimed that the decision was taken due to Sansa’s lack of communication skills, Benvenuti replied:

“No, it was not an issue of communication. The problem is that when you change a candidate after one term, you are faced with a contradiction. I can only say now what I thought privately at the time. Then I could not. Because if you say publicly “you did not govern well...you have done nothing for the metro”, then that implies a criticism of everyone’s activities in government. And this would have given the opposition an opportunity to attack us. So we had to give a reason for changing him, but at the same time, we could not give the real reason’ (Ibid).

Irrespective of the differing accounts explaining the end of the new mayor’s tenure, the relationship between Sansa and the PDS failed because of each side’s conflicting visions of their respective roles and a lack of understanding of where the other side was coming from and how it would behave once the 1993 election had been won. As Claudio Montaldo put it, from the party perspective, ‘Adriano brought with him a particular type of rigidity that clashed with actors which in that moment were particularly weak, in crisis

and on the defensive' (Interview with Montaldo). To use a matrimonial metaphor, the PDS got married on the rebound in 1993 after a whirlwind courtship, neither spouse knew the other particularly well, both thought the other would listen to them when married, and, after the payoff of an 'amicable separation' which would have saved face for them in public was turned down, their divorce was bitter. For its part, the PDS did try to avoid this acrimonious outcome by soothing the blow of his non-candidature with the offer of a prestigious post elsewhere. As Sansa told this author, towards the end of his time in office:

I was sitting with some centre-left parliamentarians and one of them said to me 'we really didn't understand each other. Because you, as the mayor of a big city, could have become much more in politics, you could have had a career, even a national one. What would you say to running a bank? Or a place on the Consiglio Superiore della Magistratura?'...so I waited until he had finished and then replied: 'you're right, we really didn't understand each other...I didn't want anything other than to be a good mayor. And I don't want anything in exchange for leaving quietly. I mean, basically what you are saying is "get out, because we want to be in charge. But we're prepared to give you something big if you'll go without saying anything".' (Interview with Sansa).

This quote suggests that the PDS had indeed seen Sansa as a temporary solution to its problems in 1993, a new 'clean' face who could fill a gap during a difficult period, but who would then be dispensable if necessary. However, Sansa turned out to be neither a malleable mayor nor open to accepting a sweetener in exchange for accepting gracefully the end of his time in office. Rather, in the 1997 election would run unsuccessfully as an independent and based his campaign around the claim that he was the victim of the desire of the parties to re-assert their total control over the city government. As he told this author, he attributed his non re-candidature to the fact that:

'I upset the balance of things too much, for four years they could put up with me...but if I'd stayed for another term, I would have risked breaking up a political clientilistic network which refuses to be broken up. And they won. They didn't let it be broken up.' (Interview with Sansa).

We can say that, for decades before 1993, Genoa was characterised by such a subculture containing a thick network of interests and actors. Was it prudent (or right?) for Sansa therefore to ignore it in the manner he did while in office? Certainly, it was not sensible,

given that he would have to depend on it for re-election in 1997. Furthermore, unlike Sansa and much of the local and media in the summer of 1997, we should also ask: was it really so scandalous for the parties to decide not to support Sansa for re-election? Whatever their motives, do the parties not have the right to promote a candidate of their choosing for mayor, especially if they are not happy with the outgoing one? Especially if, as Montaldo, who says he personally got on well with Sansa, admits: ‘we were not able to find a form of active and positive collaboration [with Sansa]’ (Interview with Montaldo)? There is also some merit in Benvenuti’s observation that ‘if everyone tells you that want to make a change, either you are capable of a minimum of self-criticism or you presume it is a conspiracy against you. In Sansa’s case, it was more likely that he would think of a conspiracy’ (Interview with Benvenuti). This was because, in Benvenuti’s view, ‘Sansa was an excessive moraliser. Deep down, he always thought that we were no different to the others. He thought that we had a grassroots which was healthy, but that leading the party was a bunch of swindlers and rascals – perhaps better than some others, but swindlers and rascals all the same’ (Ibid).

3. The 2007 Primaries and the case of Marta Vincenzi

We might say that while the centre-left parties had taken some time to understand and turn to their advantage the effects of the 1993 reform, by the early years of this decade - at least in cities such as Genoa where they possessed a strong support base and considerable organizational resources – they had managed to redress some of the ‘unintended consequences’ which the new structures had produced at local level in the early years of direct elections. Seen from this point of view, the election of the long-standing DS powerbroker in the city, Claudio Burlando, as regional president in 2005 and the apparently likely future candidature of the former DS regional secretary Mario Margini as mayor in 2007 seemed to confirm the success of centre-left party agents in controlling the structures which they themselves had helped put in place at the beginning of the 1990s. If this was the case as we approached the end of 2005, however, their good work was soon to come undone in Genoa thanks to the introduction of a new structure into subnational politics, the primaries.

With his entry into Pericu's giunta in May 2005, Margini appeared to many both in the local media and political world as the probable centre-left mayoral candidate in 2007, thus continuing what seemed to be the return of DS leaders to local institutional leadership in Genoa following Burlando's election as regional president in 2005 (Alfonso, 2005). This likelihood was reflected in his characterisation both by the parties and the press as a 'superassessore', someone of great administrative ability and political weight who would make a key contribution during Pericu's final years in office (Manzitti, 2005). Moreover, having been a party functionary and representative for his whole career, but never in the limelight, his position as *assessore* and the media visibility he received during the period seemed to represent an important step leading to his eventual candidature. However, the selection process on the centre-left would turn out to be far from simple, in particular due to the decision, for the first time in Genoa, to use primary elections to decide the mayoral candidate. The result of this was to be in part continuity, in the sense that a DS member would become mayor, but also a major change since the party's candidate for the primaries would not be Mario Margini, but Marta Vincenzi, the former DS president of the province whom the local DS hierarchy had made sure did not get the centre-left candidature either for the 2000 regional elections or the 2002 mayoral election.

Writing of *zone rosse* such as Tuscany and Umbria, Carlo Marletti (2007: 46) observes that the main 'political struggle is moved from the moment of the actual election to that of the nomination process within the parties'. While Genoa cannot of course be considered a '*zona rossa*' in the same way as these areas, it is true that, all things being equal, to date the centre-left candidate has always been highly likely to win direct mayoral elections in the city. It is also the case that the issue of candidate selection can thus be a particularly contentious and divisive one for the centre-left and, in particular, its main party in Genoa, the DS. The spectre of such difficulties first arose with regard to the 2007 elections when, in an interview with the local television station 'Primocanale' on 20 May 2005, Vincenzi declared that she was interested in running for mayor. The timing of this revelation does not appear coincidental, given that it came in the same month as the

'*superassessore*' Margini joined Pericu's *giunta*. As she later told this author, she acted because she believed that the centre-left candidature seemed to be 'swinging in the direction of Mario Margini, in other words towards continuity. And I thought the time had come to express elements of discontinuity: strong elements of discontinuity' (Interview with Vincenzi). For the DS hierarchy, Vincenzi's announcement was something of an unwelcome surprise, especially since, according to a number of off-the-record comments by interviewees for this study, the majority of the local party leadership had been pleased to see her elected to the European Parliament in 2004 (with a huge personal vote of over 150,000), precisely because they believed this meant that she would not consider running for mayor after the end of Giuseppe Pericu's second term in office.

Of course, if the selection system had functioned as in the cases of Sansa and Pericu in 1993, 1997 and 2002, when mayoral candidates were chosen simply by the parties, Vincenzi's aspiration would most likely have remained unfulfilled, despite her apparently widespread popularity in the city. The party would have said 'no', put forward Margini and counted on the fact that, as a DS member, Vincenzi would not run as an independent, but remain in Brussels. However, by late 2005, the situation in Italy as regards candidate selection on the centre-left had changed considerably, first and foremost because the coalition had begun to use primaries to elect not only its national candidate for the forthcoming 2006 general election, Romano Prodi, but had also begun to employ them at subnational level to decide candidates when an incumbent local institutional leader was not standing for re-election. As we will see, the presence of this new structural element – the primaries – gave Vincenzi far greater agency possibilities. By contrast, it posed a number of problems for the local DS elite. First of all, as local party secretary Mario Tullo told this author, there was disagreement 'between those who still thought that the decision should be taken by the leadership and not by means of the primaries – this was Burlando's position for example' (Interview with Tullo). However, given the fact that the primaries were being regularly invoked at national level as essential for the construction of the future Partito Democratico and were to be used for the mayoral candidate selection in Milan, the regional candidate selection in Sicily and many other smaller cities in 2006, it was exceedingly difficult for the local centre-left in Genoa to sustain that they too

should not hold them. Secondly, given that the primaries were for the whole of the centre-left, including those parties not in the Ulivo, such as Rifondazione comunista, the DS had the second problem, given the presence of both Margini and Vincenzi, of deciding how it should approach the primaries. As Tullo says ‘there was a tortuous debate around the question: “can we put two DS candidates in the primaries?”’ (Interview with Tullo).

This debate within the DS was fomented during the period both by Vincenzi’s statements to the press and by the publication of local election surveys in the media. In an interview for the local edition of *La Repubblica* in October 2006, Vincenzi sent a clear message to her party’s leadership, both locally and nationally, by raising the possibility of her running against the parties if she were not put forward by the DS for the primaries. As she said:

‘I am not going to stand by and let the primaries be used as a cosmetic device to cover up everything and thus not disturb the balance. You can be sure that I will not step aside...there’s a risk that Genoa could end up like Venice, where Cacciari beat Casson, the official candidate of the Left...political battles can also be conducted by independents’ (Manzitti, 2006)

What Vincenzi was referring to was the victory of the former mayor, Massimo Cacciari, in the 2005 Venice mayoral elections when, supported by the Margherita and the UDEUR, he ran against Felice Casson (the official candidate of the DS and the remainder of the centre-left) and eventually defeated him in the second round. This had in fact represented the beginning of a new phase in the history of local government since the 1993 reform – that of mayors from the 1990s returning to challenge the parties which had previously supported them. Another such case, and cited to this author by Mario Tullo as one which was regularly used as an example in DS meetings in Genoa in late 2006, was that of Vincenzo De Luca in Salerno who, having served as PDS/DS mayor in the city during the 1990s, stood in 2006 as an independent and defeated Alfonso Andria, despite the fact that Andria was supported by *all* the parties of the centre-left. Given Vincenzi’s apparent popularity in the city, there was clearly the potential danger that either (a) she would win or (b) she would lose, but gain enough votes in the first round to force a run-off ballot in which the official centre-left candidate would be severely weakened.

There was also another potential scenario if the DS did not select Vincenzi as its candidate: that she would gather the necessary signatures and run *against* Margini in the centre-left primaries. Thus, rather than running as an independent in the election, as Sansa had done in 1997, thanks to the existence of the primaries, Vincenzi could still secure the *official* centre-left coalition nomination despite not having been selected by her own party. Whichever way they looked therefore, Margini's supporters found Vincenzi in their way – an entirely new situation compared to 2000 and 2002 when the DS hierarchy had been able to avert her candidature for the regional and mayoral elections. It was eventually decided therefore to conduct a pre-primary testing of opinion in the local DS branches, by which each section would declare for either Vincenzi or Margini. Vincenzi won the support of slightly over half (53 per cent) of the branches (Italia, Morini et al, 2007: 3). Nonetheless, as these were only consultations, and not binding, the final word still remained with the party leadership (Niri, 2006).

The question was finally resolved in November 2006 with the visit of the national DS secretary, Piero Fassino, to the city following the branch consultations. Vincenzi remained steadfast in her position that, in any case, she would run in the primaries whether as the official DS candidate or not. This clearly gave her considerable leverage. As she told this author, in the discussions with the local and national DS leaderships:

‘I made no secret of the fact that I would stand anyway in the primaries...and this probably made them reflect at national level that it would be better to avoid problems. After all, they had the surveys too. They knew that certain other candidatures were a bit weaker’ (Interview with Marta Vincenzi).

The intervention of Fassino proved to be crucial. Given the precarious position of the centre-left government at national level and the fact that Genoa was the largest city holding elections in 2007, the coalition could not risk losing such a high-profile contest in its stronghold to the centre-right. As Benvenuti, who was at the meeting with Fassino to decide the candidature, told this author: ‘when summing up, Fassino agreed with what some of us believed: it was better to choose Marta. Because otherwise we were running a risk. She was more popular [than Margini]’ (Interview with Benvenuti). Vincenzi

attributed her choice ‘to the intelligence of the leadership in understanding that this was a better solution than others. And they understood this in Rome earlier than the leadership in Genoa’ (Interview with Vincenzi). The strategy of Vincenzi in exploiting the new structural element of the primaries had thus proved successful and those in the DS leadership such as Burlando found themselves, for the first time under the new system, with a candidate who was not their preferred choice. As Benvenuti admits: ‘Marta played a strong hand by saying “I am going to stand anyway” and so the leadership was faced with this form of, let’s say, blackmail, with a strong risk’ (Interview with Benvenuti).

Once chosen as candidate, the primary became something of a formality for Vincenzi, echoing the outcomes of almost all other high-profile primary elections thus far. Consequently, in 2007, just as in the major 2006 primaries in Milan and Sicily when Bruno Ferrante and Rita Borsellino each won with two-thirds of the vote, the two main local primaries in 2007, in Genoa and Palermo, produced comfortable victories for Vincenzi and the former mayor Leoluca Orlando. As we can see from table 1 (below), three candidates stood in the primaries in Genoa held, as in other cities, on 4 February 2007. Vincenzi’s opponents were the former president of the local industrialists and former independent deputy, Stefano Zara, supported by a civic list, and the poet Edoardo Sanguinetti, backed by RC, Comunisti Italiani and ‘Unione a Sinistra’ (which contained various local members of the ‘correntone’, of which Vincenzi had previously been part). Without the support of the parties, Zara’s candidature was extremely weak, while that of Sanguinetti seemed to follow the model of the token candidature provided by Dario Fo in Milan the year before. The result was therefore never in doubt and Vincenzi took 60 per cent of the vote, with Zara a distant second on 25.7 per cent and Sanguinetti on 14.3 per cent.

Table 1: Results of the centre-left mayoral candidate primary elections in Genoa (4 February 2007)

Turnout: 35,424

Candidate	Votes (no.)	Votes (%)
Marta Vincenzi	21,185	60.0

Stefano Zara	9,063	25.7
Edoardo Sanguinetti	5,048	14.3
Total	35,296	100.0

Note: There were 51 blank votes (schede bianche) and 77 invalid votes (schede nulle), leaving a total number of 35,296 valid votes

Source: <http://www.dsgenova.it/php/news.php?id=1298>; Italia, Morini et al (2007)

While the primaries have been hailed as a new ‘democratic’ method which can bring citizens back to politics, in this author’s view it is questionable how long voters will continue to turn out for primaries which are uncompetitive, once the initial flurry of enthusiasm has worn off. In this respect it is interesting to note that 35,424 citizens participated in the primaries in Genoa, almost half the number which had done so in those held in the city in October 2005 when 61,706 voters had turned out in the aptly-dubbed ‘primaries for Prodi’ (Italia, Morini et al, 2007). Similarly, in Palermo, approximately 2,000 fewer citizens voted in February 2007 than had done so in the city for the primaries to select the 2006 regional candidate and almost 6,000 less than in the October 2005 national primaries (Cavallaro, 2007). It is possible, therefore, that we may already be seeing the first signs of what we might call ‘primary fatigue’. More generally, it may also be that there has been an excess of campaigns and elections in recent years. For example, it is striking to think that in less than two and a half years between 2005 and 2007, centre-left voters in Genoa were called to cast ballots on nine separate occasions: (1) the April 2005 regional election; (2) the June 2005 referendum on artificial insemination; (3) the October 2005 ‘primaries for Prodi’; (4) the April 2006 general election; (5) the June 2006 constitutional reform referendum; (6) the February 2007 mayoral primaries; (7) the May 2007 mayoral and provincial elections; (8) the June 2007 provincial election second round; (9) the October 2007 Democratic Party primaries. In other words, there were nine different ‘election days’ in the city in just 29 months, an average of almost one every 3 months.

As Melchionda (2005: 71-72) notes, in the United States, the introduction of primaries was facilitated by parties in the belief that it would reinforce their predominance in areas where they held a clear advantage over their rivals. However, the effect of this, more

often than not was ‘to exacerbate conflicts and differences between factions and key figures within the parties’ (Ibid.). As we have seen, this also appears to be the case in Genoa and it has continued with the difficult inter-institutional co-habitation between Burlando in the region and Vincenzi in the city council. In this sense, we can say that the introduction of direct democracy through first the 1993 reform and then the primaries (both favoured by the PDS/DS) and the consequent rise of candidate-centred and leader-centred politics may have served temporary needs of the party, but in the long run appear to work towards its detriment and impoverishment. If 2007 then suggests that this trend is part of the continuity of Second Republic politics, this of course represents a major historical change which, in this author’s view, is also to the detriment of representative democracy in Italy, as will now be discussed.

4. Conclusions or, rather, the Consequences

‘In Italy we are specialists at the pendulum...reforms never limit themselves just to correcting what is wrong. No. They have to revolutionise everything’
(Interview with Romano Merlo, PSDI mayor of Genoa, 1990-1992)

The 1993/81 law heralded the birth of direct democracy at local level in Italy. Before then, mayors were elected by the council chambers, often as a result of complex agreements between parties, which reflected a whole series of precarious national and local balances. This resulted, for example following a situation of ‘veti incrociati’ between the PCI and the PSI, in the election as mayor of Genoa in 1990 of the PSDI councillor Romano Merlo, who had received a mere 2,671 preference votes in the chamber elections. If we consider that, just three years later, Adriano Sansa was directly elected as mayor by the people with 189,997 votes, his successor Giuseppe Perìcu with 170,211 in 1997 and 210,541 in 2002, before finally, in May 2007, Marta Vincenzi was endorsed by 158,432 citizens, then the 1993 reform appears at first sight to represent a great leap forward for democracy in terms of the mayor reflecting voter preferences. Moreover, across Italy, mayors now tend to serve their full terms in office, unlike under the previous system when many city governments were plagued by instability. As a

result, the umbilical cord which previously often linked the fate of national governments and alliances with local administrations thus seems to have been broken.

It is perhaps not surprising therefore that many commentators have pointed to the virtues which direct elections and the greater powers of mayors have apparently brought to local politics in Italy. Paul Ginsborg (2003: 274), for example, says of the 1993 law that ‘this provision was to have a significant effect, for the better, on the relationship between voting and political responsibility at local level’, while James Newell argues that ‘today’s mayors are more well-known, more authoritative and more central figures in public political debate than they ever were before’, adding that this is ‘to Italian democracy’s clear benefit’ (Newell 2008, forthcoming). Baldini and Legnante (2000: 262) end their study of the changes at municipal level since 1993 on a similarly positive note by declaring: ‘today we can say, incontrovertibly, that the introduction of direct elections represents a sure step forward towards greater decisiveness in electoral choices and a clearer attribution of political responsibilities’.

This author, however, takes a more sceptical overall view than those cited above. While Ginsborg sees a better relationship between voting and political responsibility at local level, he neglects to mention that if this has been achieved, it has involved the removal from the front line of politics of the intermediary representative structures - parties and assemblies - which are the pillars of parliamentary democracies. While Newell sees well-known mayors who are more central to public debate, this reflects and reproduces the personalisation of politics which has characterised Italian politics over the last two decades and is not necessarily a positive development. Moreover, both Ginsborg and Newell might consider Mario Caciagli’s observation that ‘it is important to bear well in mind that the visibility of the person wielding power does not mean transparency’ (Caciagli 2005: 201). Similarly, while Baldini and Legnante are right to see greater decisiveness in electoral choices, it is also true that this has come at a price of more restricted choice and ever-fewer citizens wishing to make these choices.

In the case of Genoa and elsewhere, political competition at local level has changed from being party-centred to candidate-centred, turnout has dropped very significantly and the council chamber has become little more than an appendix in the body of municipal democracy. On this latter point, as Segatori (2003: 144) observes, councillors ‘find themselves in a redundant assembly, carrying out an almost irrelevant role’. Moreover, the exaltation of a direct relationship between ‘the leader’ and ‘the people’, unmediated by institutions and parties, along with the rhetoric in praise of all that was ‘new’ which surrounded the reform, have certainly helped prepare the ground for the new populist actors who have since been so successful in Italian politics (Calise, 2006).

The most striking feature of the last fifteen years at municipal level in Genoa in terms of electoral trends, however, has been turnout, which set new record lows in each election. As we can see from table 2 (below), electoral participation has steadily and consistently declined since the introduction of the new system at local level, from 78.9 per cent in 1993 to 61.7 per cent in 2007. Moreover, while turnout has also fallen over the same period for general elections in the city, it has done so at a far slower rate, as we can see clearly from figures 1 and 2 (below). In particular, the areas most hit by this decline have been those of the Left’s old heartland in the working-class districts of the city, while since 1997 in Genoa citizens in bourgeois areas vote in proportionally larger numbers in municipal elections than their working-class counterparts. More broadly, the conclusion that arises from the fall in turnout is that, if participation is declining, there may well be something amiss in the system of competition and choice.

Table 2: Turnout in the first rounds of municipal elections, 1971-2007 v Turnout in general elections (camera dei deputati) in Genoa, 1972-2006

Year	Municipal Turnout	Year	General Election Turnout
1971	90.2	1972	94.0
1976	94.0	1976	94.5
1981	83.1	1983	86.3
1985	86.2	1987	87.3

1990	82.4	1992	85.9
1993	78.9	1994	85.9
1997	69.9	1996	83.3
2002	67.3	2001	81.5
2007	61.7	2006	82.4

Source: Publication by the Statistics Office of the Comune di Genova, *Il Voto a Genova (1946-2001)*; Ministero dell'Interno

Figure 1: Turnout in first round of Genoa municipal elections, 1971-2007

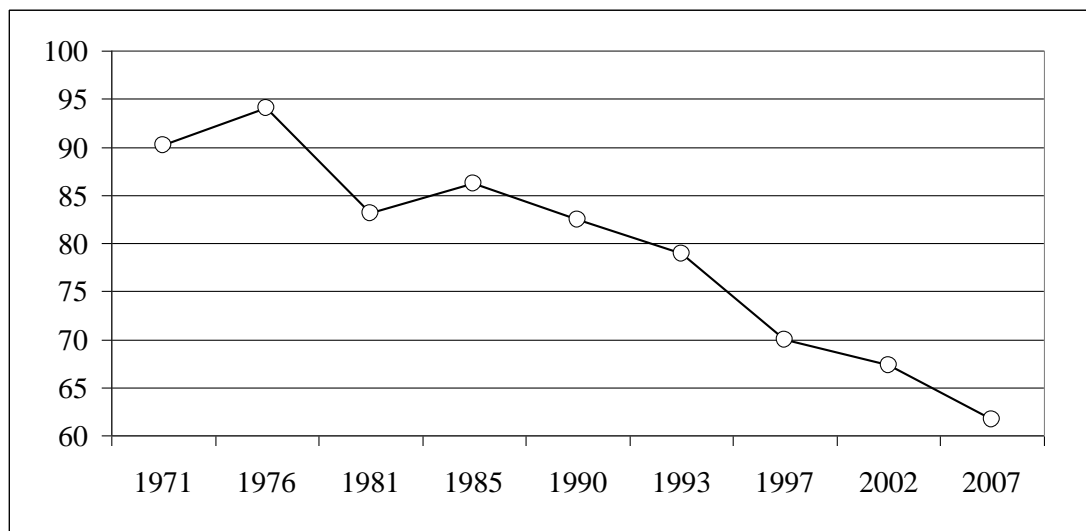
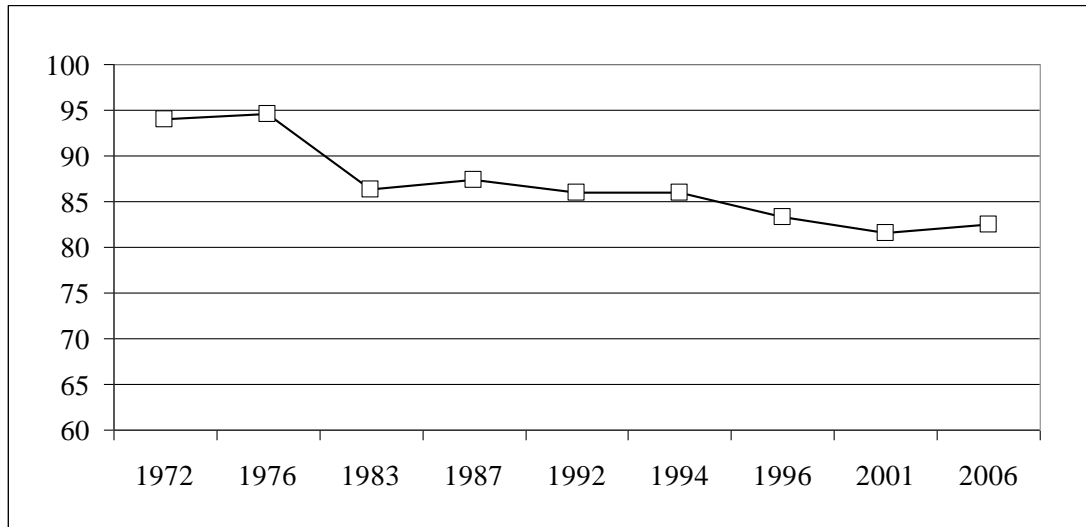


Figure 2: Turnout in general elections (chamber of deputies) in Genoa, 1972-2006



This brings us to perhaps the most serious development of the last fifteen years at local level: the withdrawal of the parties from spheres of engagement with citizens. Not only have Italian parties renounced their previous functions of socialisation and the active integration of groups and demands, but they have abandoned the front of the political stage in Italy's cities and regions, leaving elections to take place along binary lines with two leadership alternatives (Poguntke and Webb, 2005). Indeed, as Marta Vincenzi displayed in her 2007 mayoral campaign in Genoa, even candidates who have been members and representatives of parties for decades often seek to downplay their party identities. Nor is there much reason to believe that the introduction of the primaries will redress this or help bring citizens closer to parties and political life. Rather, in the cases of both direct elections for mayors and primaries for party leaders, one is inclined to echo the comments by Melchionda (1996: 13-14) on the proposed internal changes within the PDS over ten years ago that a move was being made from a 'representative' democracy into a 'delegated' one and, in this sense, Mastropaolo (2008: 46) is right to say that 'democracy nowadays treats citizens with indifference, as mere consumers of its offers of leadership'. It seems therefore that in Italy at local (and national) level we have moved ever closer towards the fulfillment of the possible future envisaged by Angelo Panebianco (1982: 500) when he spoke of 'a situation in which the parties completely lose their organizational identity and transform into flags of convenience for independent political entrepreneurs'.

If the decline in turnout and the dismantling of the intermediary structures (parties and assemblies) between the citizen and government have been among the effects of direct democracy and the new system at local level, what is interesting is that, for all the rhetoric of the centre-right about greater powers for leaders and presidentialisation, it has in fact been the centre-left and the PDS/DS in particular which have promoted the two most structurally important innovations favouring direct democracy: the 1993 reform and the primaries. That it has done so seems to stem in each case from the belief of the party leadership that it can 'manage' these new structures and turn them to its advantage. However, in Genoa at least, just as we saw in the case of direct mayoral elections with Sansa, so too has the selection of Vincenzi demonstrated that these mechanisms can behave in unexpected ways and deliver uncomfortable realities. As we have said, rather than revive participation and the parties, the primaries could serve to debilitate both even further than the 1993 reform has already done. On this point, and, given that we began these conclusions with a quote from Romano Merlo (whose election in 1990 seemed emblematic of the party domination of local politics), it seems appropriate to end with the following observation by Marta Vincenzi, who, after several months in office, told this author:

'I have to say that, at this moment, the parties do not exist. This is the problem we are faced with. And it is a problem of an absence of democracy' (Interview with Vincenzi).

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