

Therefore, if a settlement with the Arabs was a precondition for the realisation of Zionism, the aims of the Zionists would have to be abandoned. The only way in which the Jewish majority could be achieved was by continued immigration and settlement against the wishes of the native population.

"Settlement", Jabotinsky believed, "can develop under the protection of a force which is not dependent on the local population, behind an iron wall which they will be powerless to break down." When the state was achieved,

"It is my hope and belief that we will then offer them guarantees which will satisfy them, and both peoples will live in peace as good neighbours. But the sole way to this agreement is through the iron wall, namely the establishment in Palestine of a force which will in no way be influenced by Arab pressure. In other words, the only way to achieve a settlement in the future is total avoidance of attempts to arrive at a settlement in the present."

UNFORTUNATELY, THE THEORY OF the "iron wall" has proved a better guide to the actual realities of the Jewish/Arab conflict than the more sanguine prognostications of liberals or

socialists. Such accommodation as Israel has been able to achieve with her Arab neighbours occurred only after the existence of the Jewish state had come to be seen as a basic and permanent fact. It was, after all, Menachem Begin with whom Egypt's Anwar Sadat negotiated a peace treaty—not Rabin or Peres. And it was not until the 1980s, a decade so far dominated by Likud, that there were signs that the Arab states, and even possibly Arafat's PLO, might be willing to recognise an Israel confined to her pre-1967 borders.

Whether that is something which Israel is now able to accept remains, at the time of writing, wholly unclear. For Israel faces what will probably be the most important general election in her history later this year, a general election at which very stark alternatives will be posed. Israelis will face a choice which can only be described as existential: on what terms can they live with their Arab neighbours? Can they now achieve that "settlement in the future" which Jabotinsky thought could only be obtained once the Jews were already in possession of a state of their own? All those who wish Israel well will hope that she will be able to answer these fundamental questions in the spirit of her founding fathers, so sensitively and carefully delineated by Yosef Gorny.

A Rejuvenated Nation?

Italy Observed—BY ROY PRYCE



"IT WOULD BE presumptuous for foreigners to describe the inner life and thought of another country, and this we have not tried to do." The words are those of Bolton King and Thomas Okey in the preface to their classic study *Italy Today*, published in 1901. Nowadays foreign observers are not so

modest. In his latest book, *Democracy, Italian Style*,¹ Joseph LaPalombara sets out to tear aside the successive veils, and reveal all.

In doing so, he challenges much of the received wisdom about how Italians conduct their affairs. Not a man for half measures, he does this by standing a good deal of it on its head, including many of his own previous conclusions. The words pour forth (as they do when he talks) in a great cascade: you can almost see him jumping up and down with glee.

All this is good fun. But it raises a number of questions—not just about whether or not he is right (I shall come to that later)—but about the process of observation by foreigners,

and the motives behind the images they create of other countries and cultures. "The foreigner starts with the advantage that he is, at all events, comparatively free from bias." So said the British authors in 1901. But over the last hundred years or so, both the British—and more recently, the Americans—have had a good deal of political capital invested in Italy. Investments of such importance cannot be treated with indifference. So, for the ruling élites of both countries, this has meant a nervous concern with Italy: high hopes for their protégé, accompanied by worries about whether the country of Machiavelli can be safely counted on the side of the angels.

In the 19th century, British liberals hoped that unification and nationhood would put the Pope back where he belonged and give birth to a sound liberal and parliamentary state. At the beginning of this century these hopes remained alive in spite of some disquieting evidence to the contrary. King and Okey remained optimistic:

"These pages will prove, we hope, to the English reader, first that the divisions in Italian life are neither as deep nor as permanent as they are often thought to be: next, that underneath the slough of misgovernment and corruption and political apathy there is a rejuvenated nation, instinct with the qualities that make a great people."

That soothing message is not dissimilar from what is now offered by LaPalombara—but with one big difference. The

¹ *Democracy, Italian Style*. By JOSEPH LAPALOMBARA. Yale University Press, \$25.00, £14.95.

nationalist overtones come through loud and clear. So it was not altogether surprising that, when in the early 1920s the liberal state went under, there were many like Churchill who accepted its demise without much ado. Mussolini promised a rejuvenated nation. Not only that, Italy was now a front-line state in the fight against Bolshevism. And when that job was done, there were a good number in Britain who also put their faith in *Il Duce* to curb Hitler's ambitions. On all these counts, considerations of *Realpolitik* overcame scruples about democracy. Not everyone in Britain agreed, of course. Those who sided with the anti-Fascists were equally vocal, and deeply concerned. So the messages fed back to the British public about what was going on in the country were discordant, and certainly not dispassionate.

IN THE YEARS immediately following World War II, Italy was back in the front line. The Communists looked more menacing than ever. In 1948 there were fears of imminent insurrection. This time, however, the country had a much more powerful and single-minded protector. The United States poured in money and threw its weight around to shore up the new Republic and those considered sound within it, without much consideration for the finer points of Italian politics. And American academics were encouraged to set to work to provide US policy-makers with the data they needed. What they came up with was not exactly encouraging: a picture of a society deeply divided, with most of its citizens highly suspicious of the state, and many of them alienated from its economic and political system. As a bastion of democracy, this did not seem a very good bet.

But here we are in the late 1980s, and it all looks very different. Everything is fine, says LaPalombara: democracy Italian-style is great. It may not work exactly according to classic Anglo-Saxon prescriptions, but it delivers. It may look ramshackle and precarious, and the Italians themselves are as critical as hell of their own political class. But don't pay too much attention to them, or the things they worry about, like the Mafia, and terrorism, and corruption and mismanagement, and governments which come and go. All that is part of the scene, but the Italians have learned to cope. And the rest is *spettacolo*.

So what has happened in the meantime? Something drastic has clearly happened to LaPalombara's own perceptions of Italy. Is it only that the scales have fallen from his eyes? Or must we seek other explanations?

Part of the change is no doubt due to the confidence of a man who has achieved eminence in his profession as a political scientist: he can afford to cock a snook at all and sundry. And there is no doubt about LaPalombara's knowledge of the Italian scene. But there is something more than that. His current views suggest—and no doubt in part reflect—a much more relaxed view about present-day Italy on the part of the United States and its policy-makers. The reason is that the country is no longer seen as a front-line state. So what hap-

pens there is not now so important as it used to be. Take it easy, the author is saying. It's time for a cool look at the scene. Let the Italians do their own thing in their own way.

FOR ITALY, this marks an historic change. Getting out of the front line has done the country a power of good. So, too, did its earlier abandonment of dreams of national grandeur. No doubt the attempt to realise these was an exhilarating experience for a while. There was plenty of support for Mussolini within the country as long as he was riding high. But the country paid a high price for entrusting so much power to one man and one party. Following *Il Duce* not only led to military and political disaster: it also gave reign to some of the murkier forces which have always been present in Italian society. The early Fascists were bands of thugs, and that element persisted throughout, culminating in their collaboration during the War with the German occupiers to hunt down the Jews. Although 85% of the Jewish community survived, the story of the 6,800 who perished—set out in chilling detail in a recent study by Susan Zuccotti—is a grim reminder of the horrors of that period.²

ITALIANS' REVULSION against that part of their country's past remains profound. And this explains the deep commitment on the part both of élites and the general public to the new pluralist and parliamentary democracy. LaPalombara is certainly right to draw attention to that—to the persistently high turn-out at elections, and the underlying political stability.

However, some of the other positive features he underlines are much more recent. The most important are due to precisely the same factors that account for the author's own change of perspective, in particular the change in Superpower relations which has relaxed tension between them, and, at the same time, taken the heat off Italy. The gradual liberation of the Italian Communist party from Moscow, and its evolution towards its present reformist position, has been at the centre of this, together with the regaining of independence by the Socialists. The area of democratic politics has been greatly enlarged. It has also strengthened in the face of the common threat of terrorism, still a danger as the Naples bomb attack in mid-April demonstrated.

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² *The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, Rescue and Survival*. By SUSAN ZUCCOTTI. Peter Halban, £14.95.

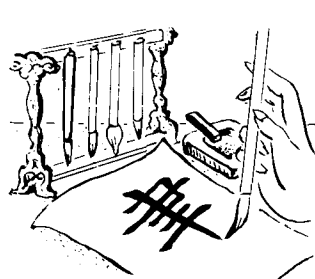
HAVING ACKNOWLEDGED all that, is everything in the garden really so rosy as LaPalombara claims? Here, sceptical Italians surely provide a more reliable guide. Governmental instability is a serious matter, even if the cast remains much the same, and the country has developed techniques to mitigate some of its inevitable consequences. Two examples illustrate the price the country is paying for the games its politicians love to play. One is the mass of public debt which has been accumulated over the years, now amounting to over 11% of the country's GDP—an enormous burden which, as the unhappy experience of the recent Goria government has shown, has now become a major political as well as financial problem. Another, though less dramatic, is the impact instability has had on Italy's role within the European Community. Membership of the Community is one of the Republic's major commitments, sustained by genuine conviction and enthusiasm. But its wobbly governments have rarely been able to make much of a showing in its councils. Apart from De Gasperi in its early days and Craxi more recently, the Italian contribution has depended more on indi-

vidual ministers and determined individuals outside the government—like Altiero Spinelli who fathered the Draft Treaty for European Union in the European Parliament—than sustained government initiatives.

It is also difficult to share LaPalombara's view that endemic public antipathy towards the country's political élites and leaders reinforces, rather than undermines, democratic structures and practices. *Spettacolo* is all very well, but all too often it makes a very poor show. Unlike the *Brigate Rosse*, the professional politicians have not yet bothered to learn how to exploit the new mass media. Their television performances in last year's general election, for instance, were quite appalling. Many of them paid for personal ads on the television: those I saw, sandwiched between plugs for more attractive products, go a long way to explain the success at the polls of a well-known strip-tease artiste. And the discussion programme in which LaPalombara himself took part was no better: a row of talking faces, droning on at inordinate length. Both on and off the screen, the Italians are right to want a better performance from their political élites.

The Perfect Gentleman

Poets of the Sung Dynasty—By JULIE LANDAU



A STAGGERING AMOUNT OF poetry was written in the Sung Dynasty (960-1279). Most of it has survived, retaining its freshness and appeal, even in English translation. In the tradition of much Chinese poetry that preceded it, it is striking for its vivid imagery, and intensely

personal tone. The images are precise, concrete; the emotion understated or simply evoked.

Visual images from poetry were so compelling that they found their way into not only Chinese painting, but Japanese and Korean as well. Those untranslatable into another medium—Yang Wan-li's "The sour after-taste of plums attacks my teeth", for instance—linger in the mind, echo in the literature.

Imagery, tied to a specific moment, a particular place, a season, a time of day, the experience of a particular person, appeared in the very earliest Chinese poetry. For the Sung Dynasty poets, one of the most important models was the 4th-century nature poet, T'ao Ch'ien, who, from the details of his life constructed a combination of landscape and self-portrait.

*I planted peas under South Mountain
Weeds flourish but the peas are scant
Mornings I rise to deal with the wilderness*

*The moon hangs from my hoe when I return
Long grass and shrubs narrow the path
Evening mists soak through my clothes—
But never mind about wet clothes—
If things work out. . . .*

"Returning to the Farm to Live", No. 3

Half photograph album, half diary, both the particular and the autobiographical elements are unmistakable.

But there was only one T'ao Ch'ien and there were hundreds of Sung poets, each ardently trying to express himself. Almost to a man, they were civil servants, as poets had always been in China. To put it more romantically, China was for thousands of years governed by the poets. In imperial China, the fusion of intellectual and political leadership was not only traditional, it was institutionalised through the examination system, a practice already ancient in the 10th century.

Entry into government was through exams, centred on the Confucian classics and emphasising literary ability, particularly poetry. In the Sung dynasty, the exams were open to any man who could afford the decades of preparation. A candidate would have known by heart thousands of poems, and would have been able to express himself with ease in all forms. As a result, there was a vast army of intellectuals whose primary concern was the paternalistic administration of a highly centralised empire: not philosophers, as Plato would have had them (though some were that too), but poets.