

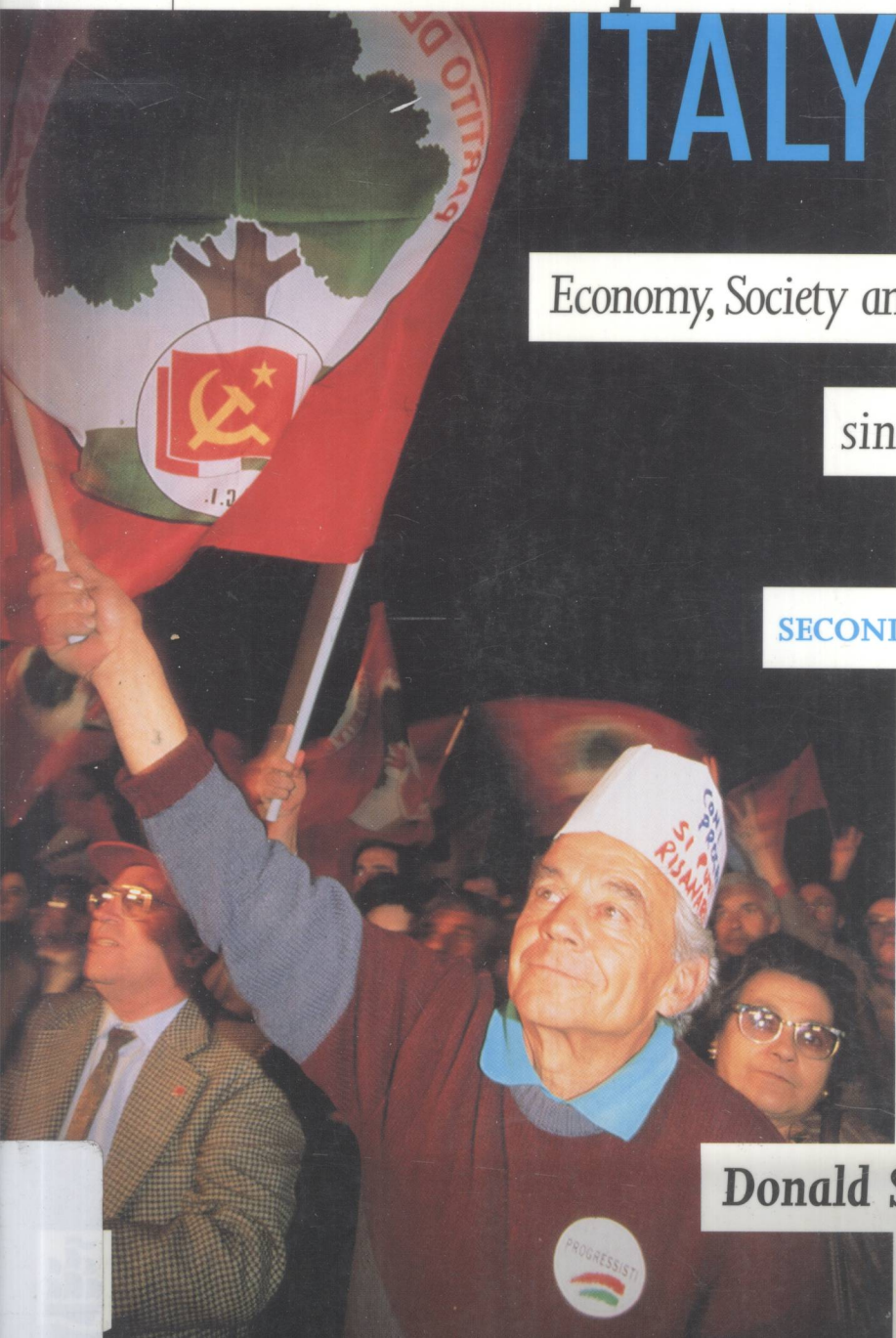
# Contemporary ITALY

Economy, Society and Politics

since 1945

SECOND EDITION

Donald Sassoon



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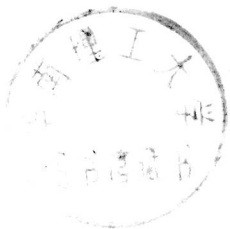
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# Contemporary Italy

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**Economy, Society and Politics since 1945**

Donald Sassoon



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## **Contemporary Italy**

To  
Philip Sassoon  
may he live a long life in a better Italy

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## List of abbreviations

<b>AC</b>	<i>Azione Cattolica</i>
<b>ACLI</b>	<i>Associazione Cristiana dei Lavoratori Italiani</i> (Association of Italian Christian Workers)
<b>AN</b>	<i>Alleanza Nazionale</i>
<b>ARCI</b>	<i>Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana</i>
<b>BOT</b>	<i>Buoni del Tesoro</i> (Treasury bonds)
<b>CA</b>	Constituent Assembly
<b>CAP</b>	Common Agricultural Policy
<b>CCD</b>	<i>Centro Cristiano Democratico</i> (Christian Democratic Centre)
<b>CGIL</b>	<i>Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro</i>
<b>CISL</b>	<i>Confederazione Italiana dei Sindacati dei Lavoratori</i>
<b>CISNAL</b>	<i>Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Nazionale dei Lavoratori</i>
<b>CPSU</b>	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
<b>DC</b>	<i>Democrazia Cristiana</i> (Christian Democratic Party)
<b>EEC</b>	European Economic Community
<b>EGAM</b>	Italian State Mining Company
<b>EMS</b>	European Monetary System
<b>ENEL</b>	<i>Ente Nazionale per l'Energia Electrica</i>
<b>ENI</b>	<i>Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi</i>
<b>ERM</b>	Exchange Rate Mechanism
<b>ERP</b>	European Recovery Programme
<b>FIM</b>	<i>Federazione Italiana Metallurgici</i> (Italian engineering union)
<b>FIOM</b>	<i>Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici</i> (Engineering union)
<b>IRI</b>	<i>Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale</i>
<b>ISTAT</b>	<i>Istituto Centrale di Statistica</i> (Italian State Statistical Office)
<b>MSI</b>	<i>Movimento Sociale Italiano</i> (Italian Social Movement)
<b>NAP</b>	Nuclei Armati Proletari
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>OPEC</b>	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
<b>PCI</b>	<i>Partito Comunista Italiano</i>

<b>PDS</b>	<i>Partito Democratico della Sinistra</i> (Democratic Party of the Left)
<b>PDUP</b>	<i>Partito di Unità Proletaria</i> (Party of Proletarian Unity)
<b>PLI</b>	<i>Partito Liberale Italiano</i> (Liberal Party)
<b>PPI</b>	<i>Partito Popolare Italiano</i> (Italian People's Party)
<b>PR</b>	Proportional representation
<b>PRI</b>	<i>Partito Repubblicano Italiano</i>
<b>PSI</b>	<i>Partito Socialista Italiano</i>
<b>PSDI</b>	<i>Partito Social Democratico Italiano</i>
<b>PSIUP</b>	<i>Partito Socialista di Unità Proletaria</i>
<b>PSU</b>	<i>Partito Socialista Unificato</i> (Unified Socialist Party)
<b>RAI</b>	<i>Radiotelevisione Italiana</i>
<b>RC</b>	<i>Rifondazione Comunista</i> (Communist Refoundation)
<b>SME</b>	Small and medium-sized enterprise
<b>STVP</b>	<i>Südtiroler Volkspartei</i> (South Tyrol People's Party)
<b>SVIMEZ</b>	<i>Associazione per lo Sviluppo Industriale del Mezzogiorno</i> (Association for Southern Industrial Development)
<b>UDI</b>	<i>Unione Donne Italiane</i> (Union of Italian Women)
<b>UIL</b>	<i>Unione Italiana del Lavoro</i> (Union of Italian Labour)
<b>UNRRA</b>	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

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## Preface to the Second Edition

This book is an introduction to one of the largest European democracies.

Italy was united relatively recently. It became a nation-state in 1861, but Rome became its capital only ten years later. As a 'geographical entity' (as Metternich called it) its history is more ancient and rich. Italy has given the world the poetry of Dante and the art of the Renaissance, the political theory of Machiavelli and the science of Galileo. It has produced the first international banking system, great explorers, famous composers.

Italy – under a constitutional monarchy after 1861 – gave the world also the first model of a modern authoritarian state, the fascist state. Since 1946 it has been a parliamentary republic. From 1946 to 1992–93 its politics was dominated a Christian democratic party (DC) which, although in power was opposed by a large and relatively successful communist party, always unable to come to power. I concluded the first edition – which appeared in 1986 – with these apparently pessimistic words: 'Thus with a governing party which no longer knows how to rule and an opposition which has never governed, and perhaps never will, Italy faces the future.'

Ten years later the governing party had not only ceased to govern but had disappeared altogether, leaving behind a trail of smaller parties dispersed across the political spectrum. Its allies, the socialists, the social democrats, the republicans and the liberals, had virtually disappeared by 1994. Before that had occurred, the opposition, that is the Italian Communist Party, had decided to metamorphose itself into a social democratic party, changed its name, its symbols and its entire organizational structure. A completely different party system began to emerge as new parties were formed or gained strength – such as the Northern League and *Forza Italia*, *Rifondazione Comunista* and *Alleanza Nazionale* – none of whom existed in their present form or name or importance prior to 1992.

There are many aspects of Italy which are widely admired outside: the glories of its culture, what is left of the natural beauty the country, its footballers, designers, car manufacturers. But the overall political picture is chaotic and confusing. The disintegration of the old political system, the rise and apparent fall of Berlusconi, the election of a government in which the post-communists play the leading role have added to the bewilderment. This is an area in which stereotypes abound to



the frustration of Italianists everywhere who attempt, not always successfully, to explain that the land of sunny beaches, pizzas and songs is one of the leading economies of the world. This book seeks to provide the interested reader as well as students of Italian society with a text which gives not just the general picture, but also an understanding of the changes which have affected the country.

Italians are their own worst critics. They incessantly complain of their political leaders and of the corruption which has for so long and – alas – still plagues their country. This, however, cannot be the whole story. I have tried to explain and map out the changes which have affected the country in its economic structure, in its people, in its political system. A nation cannot be judged solely by those who rule it.

The result of this endeavour has been a book which is neither political science, nor sociology, neither history nor economics. It straddles these fields yet it cannot claim to give an image of the whole of Italian society, not even in the sense in which such a task can be contemplated. Space and my own limitations have prevented me from examining Italian culture, the changes which have occurred in its language and everyday life. Even when it comes to topics which are usually covered by books such as these I am only too aware of what I have left out, and rather than bore the reader with explanation and justification of what is not there, let me explain what is in it and why.

The book is divided into three parts: Economy, Society and Politics. Part One amounts to an economic history of Italy since 1945 and has a dual purpose: first of all it seeks to explain the transformation of the Italian economy from the point of view of the political system. I have tried to examine the economic effects of government policies and the way in which economics has been shaped by politics. In so doing I have tried to examine the constraints which have limited the terrain of successive Italian governments. The second purpose is simpler: to tell the history of Italy since 1945. I have chosen to do so ‘through’ economic history because I felt the narrative would somewhat alleviate the dryness of much economics and because it gave me the opportunity of emphasizing the extent to which political actors are not free to do as they choose. In the very first pages I explain how the most important political choices made by the first Italian governments, namely free trade within the American sphere of influence, were extremely compelling and virtually unavoidable. This, of course, does not mean that all political and economic choices are predetermined and that no criticism can ever be made of what was Italy’s principal political party, the DC. It means, however, that the leading opposition, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and its successor party, the *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (PDS), has had gradually to realize how difficult it is to envisage major changes occurring in Italy or anywhere else on the basis of the nation-state and that, in the modern era, the requirements of the international market and of the international division of labour seriously limits the freedom of action of any national force. Thus any national force must become ‘international’, that is, it must seek to bear in mind constantly the international impact of national actions and the domestic impact of world events. This does not mean that I subscribe to the view that the international economy determines everything, because the international

economy is also politically determined. It means, simply, that in the second half of the twentieth century it is no longer possible (assuming it has ever been possible) to consider separately economics and politics. Hence one-third of the book consists of five rather dense economic history chapters.

Part Two (Society) describes Italian society first in terms of social stratification: classes, income groups, occupation, etc., the changes which have taken place and the reasons behind the changes as well as the consequences. Then I examine Italian society in terms of social groups which cannot be reduced to classes. I have chosen women and youth (as opposed to, say, the old) for two reasons: the first is that both groups (but especially the former) have given rise to a social presence which cannot be ignored. Thus women are important because as women their entry into the labour market, their role as citizens and consumers, their position in the family, etc., have accelerated many of the changes which have occurred in Italian society. They are also important because feminist women have also challenged the existing conception of politics and have forced other political forces to react – and this holds true of communists and Christian Democrats as well as the Church and the trade unions. Also in Part Two I examine institutions which are not overtly political, but which do have political effects: trade unions, firms, the Church and the media. These very different ‘institutions’ are not strictly speaking political in the sense that their main business is something else; in the case of the trade union this is the defence of the working conditions of their members and of their standard of living, in the case of enterprise this can be profits, or product range, or size, etc.; in the case of the Church the maintenance and diffusion of its beliefs and values; in the case of the media, information and entertainment. All four, however, are in the business of organizing people: trade unionists, workers and managers, the audience and the faithful, and all have important political effects. For this reason I would not claim to have given an account of the complexities of trade-union negotiations, or of the production problem of modern firms, or of theology or of mass communications. In all cases I have tried to relate these institutions to what have been and still are the principal forms of organization of the Italian political system: parties.

Part Three (Politics) is the more conventional one: it explains the Italian Constitution, the role of parliament, elections and governments, the regional system and the political parties. This part comes last because I wanted to establish the general setting – historical, economic and social – within which the political system must operate. It does not mean that politics comes last because I have tried to let politics have a high profile throughout the book whether what is being discussed is Italy’s export trade or the expansion of its universities.

The real protagonists of this book are in fact the political parties whose presence pervades the whole of Italian society in a way which is inconceivable in the UK or in the USA.

The post-war period begins with the political parties clearly in charge. They constituted the commanding forces of the Italian Resistance: the Committee of National Liberation was made up of a coalition of six parties. The partisan bands were organized on the basis of party affiliations. The trade-union movement was reorganized in 1944 on the basis of equal representation for the three leading parties:

Christian Democrats, communists and socialists. Pressure groups, civic organizations, the professions, etc., were directly connected to specific parties. The main competition was between the PCI and the DC. The latter could rely on the formidable organization of the Roman Catholic Church and, through this, establish a presence in virtually all sectors of society. This forced the PCI to compete at the same level. It was not possible to conceive of communist militancy in the traditional way: a tightly led group of reliable and committed members. The PCI had to be a mass party able to create and develop a whole range of organizations from sporting associations to cultural clubs so as to penetrate into civil society at all levels and challenge the DC.

It has been said that Italian political parties have 'colonized' Italian society. To some extent that was true and may still be so. The mere act of joining a trade union was always necessarily also a political act because the prospective member had also decided whether to join the communist-socialist trade union, the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (CGIL) or the Catholic union, *Confederazione Italiana dei Sindacati dei Lavoratori* (CISL) or the social-democrat/republican union, *Unione Italiana del Lavoro* (UIL). The mere act of joining a sporting club was similarly 'political': which sporting club? The one run by the mainly communist *Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana* (ARCI) or the Catholic one or the less well-established 'third force' club? Recent events may have decreased the degree of party strength, but not eliminated it.

The politicization of facets of civil life which in many countries would be outside politics also led to the politicization of economic life, particularly in the public sector: state enterprises, banks, credit institutions, newspapers, were systematically colonized by the government parties and in particular by the DC. This has not changed. When Silvio Berlusconi entered politics he used his media empire, Fininvest, to create a political party. In the past parties colonized the economy. Berlusconi did the reverse: he used the economy to colonize politics. The process may have been different. The result was an excessive interconnection between political and economic power.

It is, then, also because of this unusually high association between the political level and the socio-economic one that it would have been difficult to write a book on the Italian political system which did not emphasize economic and social factors.

This book has been written assuming no knowledge of Italy or of Italian politics and history. Of course the reader who has some acquaintance with the history of fascism or the development of Europe since the war will be at an advantage, as will the reader who has some grounding in economics.

A general book such as this has had to rely massively on other people's research. In many cases I have tried to give an idea of the kind of debates which surround a particular issue by examining different interpretations.

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