

and African studies; sabers and computers; the past and the future. Such contradictions seem under control at the moment, with convictions of various sorts enjoying respect, or at least tolerance.

But such is the modern obsession with safety and health that one can imagine a movement just to get rid of the old ways and old ideas. The feminization of A&M, like the feminization of the military, and of the church, and of a lot of other institutions, challenges every institution perceived as male, wholly or partly. (Do any wholly male institutions, come to think of it, remain, outside the Roman Catholic priesthood?)

The Aggie bonfire, conceived by males, built by males—though a woman student-worker died in the bonfire's collapse—exemplifies A&M's male past. I have the sense that the feminists, for sentimental or programmatic reasons, are coming after the bonfire, and that they may enjoy some success at smoothing down its rough places, making it perhaps, in time, just another event on the school calendar instead of a fiery link between A&M's past and its present. And then what? The Corps—even though it has a few women? The uniforms, the yells, the boots and spurs . . . the tradition?

It may or may not matter. There was a Texas before the old A&M; there will be a Texas if all the old fades away. But you hate to see it, and you hate to see it done for unbecoming reasons. Wordsworth had it about right, if you'll pardon the pre-P.C. lingo: "Men are we and must mourn when e'en the shade / Of that which once was great has passed away."

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Letter From Italy by Alberto Carosa

The European Kerensky?



"Prodi, the Italian Kerensky?" was the intriguing headline of a full-page ad by a Christian-inspired group, *Centro Culturale Lepanto* (CCL), in two major Italian dailies, *Il Giornale* and *Il Tempo*, on May

14, 1996. In that manifesto, CCL president Roberto de Mattei, professor of modern history at the University of Cassino and one of the most vibrant conservative leaders in Italy, argued that, just as Kerensky paved the way for Lenin, the newly elected Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi would perform the same function for the Italian Lenin, Massimo D'Alema.

Romano Prodi, an economist and former public-holding company executive, led the left-of-center Olive Tree Alliance to victory in the April 1996 elections. Unrepentant communist Massimo D'Alema (who later boasted, "I am not a post-communist, I have been a leader of the Italian Communist Party and I am proud of it") led the dominant stakeholder in the alliance, the PDS, now renamed simply the DS.

The Prodi victory was one of the perverse effects of an awkward electoral system which appears to have been conceived to make winners losers, and losers winners. In absolute terms, the opposition Freedom Front finished ahead of the Olive Tree, 16.48 million votes to 16.27 million. To control a majority in the lower house, Romano Prodi had to turn to the 35 MPs from the hard-line Marxist Communist Refoundation.

Prodi's Popular Party, the left rump of the defunct Christian Democrat party, won just 6.8 percent of the vote, but Prodi contributed crucially to the Olive Tree victory. His ever-smiling, reassuring, safe image as a moderate Catholic and regular churchgoer proved the ideal decoy for his communist allies. He perfectly embodied the "fellow traveler" and "useful innocent" (others would say "useful idiot") whose role is to provide communist-dominated coalitions with the necessary façade of moderation to attract support.

But at least Prodi had to pass an electoral test. His successor, D'Alema, resorted to a boardroom coup which pushed him to the premiership in October 1998 with the support—or connivance—of two other Catholics: then-state president Oscar Luigi Scalfaro and his former colleague Francesco Cossiga. While the former asked D'Alema to form a new government, the latter secured the indispensable support of his post-Christian Democrat Union for the Republic (UDR) party's 29 MPs, including a number of turncoats who were elected on center-right opposition Freedom Front slates but jumped on the UDR bandwagon, lured by possible ministerial posts.

Thus Massimo D'Alema's shortcut to power confirmed the old axiom that, in Western countries, communists would never ascend to government leadership through a normal electoral process.

So Roberto De Mattei's prediction came true. But what De Mattei did not envision was that Prodi might also go down in history as the European Kerensky! On September 15, 1999, after a long and at times stormy debate, the European Union Parliament voted Prodi and the 14 men and five women on his team into office.

Some analysts believe that the appointment of Prodi as head of the European Commission is an exemplary application of a *promoveatur ut amoveatur* strategy: namely, the removal of a stumbling block by its promotion. In this case, the stumbling block was Prodi's newly established "Donkey" party, the Democrats, who are in vengeful competition with D'Alema's DS party. This could be partly true, but it is by no means the complete picture. After all, Prodi's success in the role of the Italian Kerensky is his only real merit in the eyes of the international left. In all other respects, his two-year stint as Italy's prime minister was a damp squib. His legacy is a mammoth public debt, rising unemployment, tax hikes, expanding impoverishment, wild immigration, and rampant crime. According to the national statistics agency Istat, Italy's economy grew 1.4 percent in 1998, the slowest of any European country. Italy has the highest unemployment rate in the European Union; among youth under 25, it has reached a record 32.1 percent. Under Massimo D'Alema, the situation has been no better; does history offer any precedent of a communist head of government successfully healing the economic woes of his country?

Prodi was part of the old DC *nomenklatura*, which was swept away by anti-corruption investigations. Within this *nomenklatura*, he held top political and economic positions, appointments which were rewards for party affiliation and subservience.

Prodi's unanimous election—or unelected appointment—by the 15 E.U. governments, 13 of which are in socialist hands, was puzzling. A notable contrast to this chorus of approval was a series of investigative reports last year in the *Daily Telegraph* on Prodi's judicial misfortunes. The first was significantly entitled "Criminal enquiries that cast a cloud over the past of Europe's Mr. Clean." In

its editorial on May 4, the paper reported that Prodi had been the subject of two criminal investigations, both revolving around allegations of cronyism, abuse of office, and conflicts of interest, more or less the crimes that brought down the last E.U. Commission. "It is important to stress that Mr. Prodi has not been found guilty of breaking the law," the editorial said. "Yet, as we reveal today, the cases leave several unanswered questions that the Italian judiciary, mindful perhaps of Mr. Prodi's position, has been reluctant to probe. When Mr. Prodi was simply an Italian politician, this was none of our business; but now that he aspires to high European office, it is."

Prodi—Mr. Clean—responded to these attacks the following day by distributing copies of the Rome court judgment from 1996 that cleared him of the charges that he had acted unlawfully in the privatization of a business when he was head of the state holding company IRI (*Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale*). In an editorial on May 6, the *Daily Telegraph* insisted that Prodi's defense was not good enough "to lay the matter to rest." The paper then disclosed that Romano Prodi had been placed under investigation at least four times on different charges. (Not bad for somebody who promised "total honesty and transparency" in the running of the E.U. Commission!) He was acquitted every time, the *Telegraph* noted, and probably rightly so, but the paper recommended that the European Union set up its own commission of inquiry into his business past in order to reach an independent conclusion. After all, why should Europe be satisfied with verdicts handed down by Italian magistrates?

The *Telegraph* pointed out that "the criminal justice system has frequently been misused in Italy to settle political scores. But this does not appear to have been the case with Prodi." Massimo Pini, former head of privatization at IRI, was quoted in the conservative daily as saying: "He was never prosecuted with the same harshness as others."

The British paper is not alone in questioning the evenhandedness of the Italian judiciary with regard to the *Tangentopoli* anti-corruption crusade, which was spearheaded by a Milan-based team of magistrates referred to as the *Mani Pulite* ("Clean Hands") pool. U.S. foreign-policy expert Stanton Burnett wrote in his book, *The Italian Guillotine*, that the Clean Hands anti-corruption investiga-

tion was a political revolution which used the judiciary to get rid of moderate parties (the Christian Democrats first) in order to clear the way for a communist bloc to take over. (Incidentally, for having reported Burnett's opinion in an interview in Italy's major opposition paper *Il Giornale*, journalist Stefano Zurlo was sued by two judges who served in the *Mani Pulite*.) Burnett's book has been released in the United States, Great Britain, and Canada, but despite its subject, no Italian publisher will touch it.

If Burnett's thesis is mistaken, why have the communists and their left-wing Christian Democrat confreres opposed the establishment of a parliamentary commission of inquiry into the *Tangentopoli* investigations? *Il Giornale* speculates that such a commission would have unearthed the "omissions, violence and falsehoods of a great deal of probes which, for them to remain legitimate, had to be confined to the darkness of prosecutors' offices." More recently, *Il Giornale* reported the opinion of Russian dissident Vladimir Bukovsky, who believes that the Clean Hands investigation was a ploy masterminded by the Italian communists to divert public attention from disclosures of their funding by Moscow. "Clean Hands has helped the Italian communists . . . to ascend to power," he claimed.

If Bukovsky is correct, it would also explain why the present leader of the opposition in Italy's parliament, media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi, is enduring prosecutions (which smack of persecutions) on the grounds that, as head of his companies, "he was not in a position not to know" what his subordinates were doing—allegedly committing financial crimes to facilitate their business operations. But the same concept did not apply to Communist Party leaders and their allies, including Prodi, whose cases were dismissed for the opposite reason: Since they were unaware of what their subordinates were doing, they could not be held responsible. Prodi may well have been saved on purpose, in anticipation of his possible role as an Italian Kerensky in broad communist-dominated coalitions.

Lenin himself was the theorist of these coalitions, or "united fronts," as a basic element of the Marxist strategy for seizing power. Without an alliance with non-communists, he believed, communism cannot be built. Lenin did not disdain even the most fickle allies, however "temporary, vacillating, unstable, unreliable

and conditional" they might be. And this "applies equally to the period before and after the proletariat has won political power."

Be that as it may, Prodi appears to have embraced his new role with the utmost zeal, despite an unexpected hurdle: Following the European elections of June 13, 1999, the Christian-inspired center-right EPP (European People's Party) is, for the first time, in a dominant position, with 233 seats out of 626, compared to 180 seats for the ESP (the socialist party). This situation is not reflected in the new commission, which serves as the E.U. executive. In the words of veteran leftist MEP Glyn Ford, "it will be a red executive. For the first time, the left will have a majority." The EPP has already decried as a "myth" Romano Prodi's claim that his 20-person team is politically balanced: It contains only six members of the EPP's political family. Moreover, the EPP's German deputies were particularly irked by a generous concession to Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder: Germany's two commissioners both come from his socialist-led government, despite the unwritten rule that one candidate should be named by the opposition. This shortchanging is all the more glaring in the wake of what Schroeder himself termed the "massive election defeat" of his governing coalition in the recent European election. The German conservative opposition CDU-CSU won almost 50 percent of the European vote and is the major party in the E.U. parliament with 53 MEPs, but it has no say in the E.U. commission!

The EPP's British, Spanish, and Greek deputies are increasingly suspicious of Prodi. His leftist bias has become all too evident, to the point that his Donkey-Democrats party has joined the Liberal-Democrat caucus rather than the EPP's. No less disquieting are his political associates: mayors like Rome's Francesco Rutelli and Venice's Massimo Cacciari, and former anti-corruption prosecutor Antonio Di Pietro. Rutelli, a staunch supporter of free divorce, abortion, and drugs; Cacciari is an ultra-Marxist philosopher whose books promote a violence-fueled chaos as a means to "regenerate" society; and Di Pietro, whose sudden resignation from the judiciary was never fully clarified, is a former leader of the "Clean Hands" pool, who claims to be prepared to eradicate corruption under an E.U. mandate.

What these people have in common with Prodi's much-vaunted commitment to Christian values remains a mystery. No less of a mystery is how he hopes to "revive the Christian soul of Europe"—the basic message of his latest book—by playing into the hands of those whose primary object has always been to destroy it once and for all.

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Letter From Inner Israel

by Jacob Neusner

Since I'm Jewish, This Must Be Judaism



When religion becomes a matter of personal opinion, culture—which by definition is public and corporate—no longer defines what is eternally at stake in man's relationship to God. Ethics and morality give way to impulse and whim, and sentimentality rules. Private religion appeals to the feeling of the moment, and, under such conditions, learning and tradition no longer govern. What is gained in the attunement of religion to the moment is vastly outweighed by what is lost—the traditions of Western civilization.

With stress on a personal and acutely present-tense encounter with Jesus Christ, Protestant Christianity, particularly the left-wing of the Reformation churches, pioneered the privatization of religion but cannot be accused of its trivialization. The conviction that the "I" forms the criterion of all things is a grotesque misunderstanding of the Protestant conscience of Luther at Wittenberg. In the case of evangelical Christianity, religious individualism insists that Jesus Christ intervenes in each person's life. In the case of Reform Judaism, born in the heart of evangelical Christianity in Germany and responsive to the language and theology of Luther, there is a stress on what the individual finds personally meaningful in religious observance. So both evangelical Christianity and Reform Judaism secure a place for the radically isolated individual, for the integrity

of his conscience, and for individual rights in the encounter with God, all of which characterize the religious bias of Americans.

But in this country, with our cultural bias against history and tradition and our rejection of social authority in favor of individual autonomy, the acute trivialization of individualism has made a mockery of the courage of Luther and the bravery of the early reformers of Judaism who, in the 19th century, thought about Judaic matters in a way without precedent since Sinai, finding room for the "I" of the individual Israelite among the "we" of "all Israel," the corporate, holy people of God.

The practice of Judaism in contemporary America, which has carried to its logical extreme the conviction that everything begins with me, personally, this morning, here and now, has shown the grotesque possibilities of the privatization of religion. Indeed, it is the unique amalgam of the religious and the ethnic in the corporate life of Jewish Americans, who are Jewish and therefore regard themselves as primary data for the definition of Judaism, that embodies those possibilities. Stated simply, if "Judaism" is "the religion of the Jewish people," then whatever religion the Jewish people practice is "Judaism." And then . . . get out of the way, because here comes the do-it-yourself-Judaism that supersedes Reform, corrupts Conservative, and baffles Orthodox Judaism.

A concrete example of the ethnic definition—since I'm Jewish, what I do is Judaism *tout court*—comes from Clearwater, the Jerusalem of west-central Florida. A local synagogue, Temple B'nai Israel, has invented a new religious rite for itself. Thirty years ago, Rabbi Arthur Baseman started what he called "the chain of tradition." He gave silver ID bracelets to young people who were completing their religious education at the temple. They wore them. Then they linked them together and carried them to the altar; the bracelets were "blessed" and put into the ark, along with the scrolls of the Torah. There are now 571 bracelets linked together, reports Maureen Byrne in the *St. Petersburg Times*. Baseman explained, "It deepens my faith in the continuity of Judaism and the viability of the people. We speak of a chain of tradition in Judaism from generation to generation. We will pass on our tradition, one link at a time."

Rabbi Baseman invokes a key image of

Judaism: "a chain of tradition," which is represented as the teaching of Moses to Joshua, Joshua to the prophets, the prophets to the sages, and onward through time to "the oral Torah," the teachings of the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Midrash and the Talmud—and thence to us. But the tradition that is passed on in a chain from Sinai consists of religious teachings; for example, Hillel's famous saying, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" That is tradition: content.

I do not believe that, in the centuries since Sinai, anyone before Rabbi Baseman ever imagined that by "tradition" people could mean putting names on ID bracelets and making the bracelets into a chain.

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LIBERAL ARTS

THERE'S NO FUTURE IN THE PAST

"Unlike so much of Britain's image, which is reserved and full of history and dead monarchs, the [Millennium] Dome is 20 acres of brash modernity meant to celebrate British innovation. . . . The aim of the exhibitions, its promoters say, is to answer three questions: Who are we, where do we live, and what do we do? The Dome's defenders say its exhibitions reflect a multicultural, multiracial Britain that is not represented by its most famous institutions and tourist attractions.

"Most every place you go tells you what the UK used to be. The Dome experience is about where the UK is now, and to celebrate where we're going," said Adam Liversage, one of the two dozen twentysomething guides hired to explain to the press and the public what the Dome is. "People know about Shakespeare and Queen Victoria. But that's not what Britain is today, and it's not where we're going in the future."

—from the *Boston Globe*
(December 28, 1999)