CALIGULA AND INCITATUS?
PARTIES AND NEW MAYORS: THE CASE OF GENOA

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ABSTRACT

Taking Genoa as a case study, this paper discusses the 1993 reform of local government in terms of the ‘newness’ of the directly-elected mayors and their relationships with the main party supporting their candidatures, the PDS (now DS). In the case of a genuine newcomer, Adriano Sansa, his relationship with party elites quickly soured due to conflicting visions of their respective roles. In fact, across Italy, the most enduring ‘new’ subnational leaders have been those, like Giuseppe Pericu, with prior experience of the culture of ‘mediation’ between local parties and interest networks. Now, however, ‘civil society’ and ‘non-party’ candidates are increasingly likely to be used only where the centre-left cannot otherwise win. Although, the paper concludes, given the ‘anti-party’ and populist elements of the post-1993 era, the return to subnational office of ‘old professional party politicians’ like Claudio Burlando is not necessarily a bad thing for Italian democracy, locally and nationally.
‘You see that lorry driver over there? We could make him mayor if we wanted…’ – Ubaldo Benvenuti (Genoa Provincial Secretary of the PDS) to Adriano Sansa (Mayor of Genoa).

INTRODUCTION

Of the many institutional and electoral reforms introduced in Italy since 1990, the 81/1993 law reforming local government and creating directly-elected mayors and provincial presidents has widely been seen as one of the most successful (Dente 1997; Baldini and Legnante 2000; Ginsborg 2003; Newell 2007). 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). In particular, given the exposure of widespread corruption among party elites, 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. In fact, so successful was the 1993 law considered that in 1999 it was decided to reform the Regions along similar lines, thus making the leaders of all levels of subnational government directly-elected.

However, while Italian local (and national) politics may have moved from party-centred to candidate-centred campaigns and the new mayors and their executives were given strong formal independence, this did not mean that local party elites simply gave up the vast power and influence they had wielded during the First Republic. In fact, while the shift of power between the assembly and the executive at local level may be clear, the power relationship between the new subnational leaders and the parties which support their candidatures is not. This relationship has been the subject of much discussion among observers of Italian local politics. Luciano Vandelli (1997) and Giacomo Vaciago (1999) both argued that, during the second half of the 1990s, there had been a ‘return of the parties’ while Gianfranco Baldini and Guido Legnante wondered if the initial years after the 1993 reform had merely marked a ‘window of opportunity’ for new candidates which was inextricably linked to the very particular climate and circumstances of the Tangentopoli period and, as such, was not destined to remain open (Baldini and Legnante 2000, p.34).
Taking Genoa as a case-study, this paper discusses the relationships between parties and new mayors since the 1993 reform. Given that both new mayors to date in the city have been from the centre-left, the paper focuses on the relationship between the hegemonic party of the centre-left in Genoa, the Partito Democratico della Sinistra (PDS) - from 1998 called the Democratici di Sinistra (DS) - and those directly-elected municipal leaders it has supported. Put briefly, the main reasons for this hegemony are that (a) as the principal heirs to the strongest First Republic party in the city – the PCI – the PDS/DS have been able to maintain much of the capillary territorial network, organisational strength, experienced personnel and support base of its predecessor party, (b) by contrast, while once the Democrazia Cristiana (DC) ran the PCI very closely in the city (holding the mayor position almost uninterrupted from 1951 to 1975) and had a presence in every parish, the current main challengers on the centre-right, Forza Italia, have never had a high-profile and convincing leader in the city and seem unable to mobilise on any kind of territorial basis (for several years at the beginning this decade, they were even unable to organise a congress and still have just one office in the city); (c) the local leaderships of the other parties of the centre-left (and of Forza Italia) appear little more than a collection of local ex-DC and other First Republic elites and notables, content to take a back seat to the DS as long as they are remembered when the spoils are being divided.

The paper argues that, in the case of Genoa and nationally, it may be better to think not so much in terms of the decline of the PDS/DS at subnational level post-Tangentopoli as of their temporary strategic retreat. Indeed, immediately following the electoral reform, it appears that for the local hierarchy of the PDS, the new law was seen as providing a stage on which the new, personalised mayors would serve as little more than glamorous puppets, with local party elites pulling their strings behind the scenes when necessary. Or, as the title of this paper and Ubaldo Benvenuti’s comment to Adriano Sansa suggest, the main party in Genoa felt that it could behave like Caligula, the Roman Emperor who sought to make a mockery of public office and the Senate by claiming that he could even make his favourite horse, Incitatus, a Consul should he so choose.

However, while there may have been little ‘new’ about some local party elites in Genoa after the 1993 reform, we can also ask questions about the ‘newness’ of some of the directly-elected local government leaders. In fact, we can divide the new centre-left Mayors and Regional Presidents into four categories of ‘newness’, both in terms of substance and style.
These are, of course, broad and evolving categories and some new leaders may embody elements of more than one (in particular categories 3 and 4), but they might help establish some clarity for the purposes of our discussion here:

1. Those genuine newcomers who base their appeal on their lack of any prior involvement in party politics, their success in other fields, and their strong ‘outsider’, ‘civil society’ and, to smaller and greater degrees, ‘anti-party’ identities (e.g. Sansa in Genoa, Riccardo Illy in Trieste/Friuli-Venezia Giulia);

2. Those who present themselves primarily as ‘non-party’, ‘civil society’ figures, but who gained considerable political experience during the First Republic, dealing with local parties, institutions and interest networks (e.g. Giuseppe Pericu in Genoa, Massimo Cacciari in Venice);

3. Those lifelong party functionaries who, once in office, publicly distance themselves from their former identities and their parties by putting forward a super partes image based on their new institutional persona (e.g. Sergio Chiamparino in Turin, Walter Veltroni in Rome);

4. Those lifelong party functionaries who have retained their strong ‘party’ identity following election to subnational office and who have used their new role to strengthen their position within the party, be it locally or nationally (e.g. Claudio Burlando in Liguria and Pierluigi Bersani in Emilia-Romagna).

As this paper shows, the subnational leader belonging to the first category in Genoa quickly saw his relationship with the parties of his supporting coalition (particularly the PDS) turn sour as local party elites realised that they could not exert the kind of influence over ‘their’ mayor which they had envisaged. In fact, as we will see, across Italy, since 1997, the parties of the centre-left in particular will generally only support this type of candidate in areas where they are organisationally weak and very unlikely to win otherwise. A good example is the only ‘survivor’ of that first category of 1993 mayors: the former Mayor of Trieste and now President of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region, Riccardo Illy. Rather, the model for ‘new’ subnational leaders on the centre-left in the 1990s became those such as Pericu who, like Romano Prodi at national level, could present himself as ‘non-party’ rather than ‘anti-party’, and whose career to date had given him vast experience of the culture of mediazione (mediation) in Italian public life. As Baldini and Legnante (2003, p.89) put it, the profile of the average centre-left candidate tended to be that of the ‘Prodi-type’ figure who is
‘progressive, but Catholic, aware of the complexity of politics, but not a direct product of the parties and is someone who tries to “square the circle” of the demands of the many different parts of their coalition’. However, as this paper concludes, with the election of Burlando of the DS as Regional President of Liguria in 2005 and the candidature of Marta Vincenzi (a high-profile local figure in the DS) as Mayor in 2007, the era of the ‘non-party’ figure appears now also be coming to a close for the centre-left in Genoa.

In the next section, a brief account of how local politics both generally and in Genoa functioned under the old system is given, following which the main points of the 81/1993 reform are outlined. We then discuss the exaltation of ‘civil society’ and all that was ‘new’ and ‘non-party’ in the early 1990s. This provides the necessary background for the next two parts of the paper which discuss the quite different relationships with the PDS/DS of the two centre-left mayors elected so far under the new system in Genoa, Sansa and Pericu, and shows that their degree of ‘newness’ may have had a lot to do with it. We then argue that, for the centre-left, the era of ‘new’, ‘civil society’ candidates may be now coming to an end, save in those situations in which it cannot otherwise win. Finally, in the conclusions, we reflect on the reform of local government and its effects, arguing that not only should we question how much was actually ‘new’ after 1993 at local level, but how much of what was ‘new’ has in fact been good for Italian democracy, locally and nationally.

OUT WITH THE OLD

BEFORE THE REFORM

Before the 1993 reform, Italian mayors and their executives were extremely weak with local government based on what Vandelli (1997, p.7) termed ‘the total dominance of the parties’. Although formally chosen by the members of the City Council Chamber, nominations for the position of mayor were in reality decided by party hierarchies according to national logics, the delicate calculations of lottizzazione (spoils-sharing) and complex veti incrociati (criss-crossed vetoes). Put crudely, the main party elites bargained with each other along the lines of ‘you get this ministry, we get that mayoralty and they get the managing directorship of that semi-state body’ and/or ‘well, you don’t want us to have the mayor, we don’t want them to have it, they don’t want you, so it’ll have to go to that other lot’. As a result of these
processes, for example, two of the last three mayors of Genoa under the old system came from the Partito Repubblicano Italiano (PRI) and the Partito Socialista Democratico Italiano (PSDI), both of which regularly gained less than 5 per cent of the vote in the city.

Once in power, the mayor was generally quite a powerless figure, a hostage of the Council Chamber and the parties. Furthermore, even within his/her giunta (cabinet), the mayor was only a primus inter pares in relation to the assessori (cabinet members) who were chosen and imposed by the parties, again respecting first and foremost the need to maintain a whole series of precarious balances between and within parties at both local and national levels. Of course, the cabinet was not the true locus of power as important (and often also relatively minor) decisions were taken behind the scenes by party elites. Just like at the centre in Rome, therefore, politics in the periphery was characterised by endless disputes and logjams with the result that decision-making was extremely slow and instability was endemic. Hence, in the period 1972-1989, the average length in office of local executives in provincial capital cities was just twenty-two months (Cazzola 1991, p.25). Of course, it should be noted that most mayors were very familiar with the machinations of the parties, given 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).

As mentioned above, in the last decade of the old system, Genoa had mayors from the PRI (Cesare Campart, 1985-1990) and the PSDI (Romano Merlo, 1990-1992). The case of Merlo is worth dwelling on for a moment as it provides a good example of how local politics often worked. A PSDI Councillor, Merlo had received just 767 preference votes in the 1990 Council elections. Nonetheless, he was subsequently chosen by the Council Chamber as Mayor. The roots of what seems, at first sight, a strange outcome lie in the relationship between the two largest parties of the ruling coalition, the PCI and the Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI). Although at national level, the PSI only participated in coalitions led by the Christian Democrats (DC), the party agreed to enter municipal government in Genoa with the PCI in 1975. The price for bringing twenty-four years of DC mayors in the city to an end however was that the new mayor would have to come from the PSI and not the PCI, despite the latter being by far the largest party of the coalition, gaining between 35 and 40 per cent of the vote in Genoa for most of the 1970s and 1980s compared to the PSI’s 10-15 per cent. As a result, following the 1975 Council elections, the Socialist Fulvio Cerofolini was chosen as Mayor with Giorgio Doria of the PCI as vice-mayor. Of course, given what has been said
above about the power of the mayors, we should not confuse having the figurehead with having the final say. As in many other cities where the PCI and the DC were relatively evenly-matched, the Communists accepted that their time had not yet come to regain the mayoralty (Interview with Silvio Ferrari, 28 February 2006). Genoa, after all, was not Bologna. Or even Turin. It was, to use the title of Luciano Cavalli’s famous book, a ‘divided city’ in which the industrial western districts constituted a miniature *zona rossa* (red zone) of massive PCI support with the more bourgeois eastern areas voting in large numbers for the DC and the smaller lay parties of the centre-right (Cavalli 1965). Indeed, it is important to remember, despite the common impression of Genoa as one of Italian’s main ‘Left’ cities (in part due to its role in the Resistance) that, throughout the 1950s, the DC in fact outpolled the PCI in Genoa before the latter once more moved ahead in the 1960s.

Despite having to allow Cerofolini of the PSI to take the post of Mayor in 1975, the PCI thereafter wielded much greater power than before behind the scenes and its local leaders were able to gain experience of serving in municipal government. And, by the time of the 1990 Council elections, the party (which, especially following the fall of the Berlin Wall, was undergoing radical change under Achille Occhetto’s leadership at national level) was no longer prepared to step aside and allow a PSI member to become Mayor. For its part, however, the PSI was still unwilling to vote a PCI member as Mayor. A situation of *veto incrociati* thus ensued, the only way out of which was the eventual election of Merlo from the smallest party of the coalition, the PSDI.

It was not until December 1992, and a dissolution of the PCI and founding of the PDS later, that Claudio Burlando of the PDS (the main successor party to the PCI) replaced Merlo and Genoa thus got its first Mayor to have held a PCI membership card since Gelasio Adamoli in 1951. This historic local event occurred amidst *Tangentopoli*, with the PSI in particular being badly hit by the exposure of political corruption locally and nationally and thus too debilitated to object to Burlando taking over. However, the corruption scandals did not leave the PDS entirely untouched either and, after only five months as Mayor, Burlando was arrested and taken into custody in May 1993 on charges (of which he was subsequently acquitted) of fraud and abuse of office (Baiardo 2002, p.19-20). In the meantime, however, the mayor was forced to resign and, with the crisis of the parties now at its height, a ‘technical government’ was appointed by the state with Alfio Manna and then Vittorio Stelo
running the city until December 1993, when the first-directly elected Mayor, Adriano Sansa, took office.

**THE 81/1993 LAW**

The 81/1993 Law was passed in March 1993 by a very under-pressure parliament, many of whose deputies were under investigation (Mershon and Pasquino 1995). Introduced in order to avoid a likely referendum on the local electoral system, it was intended as ‘a response not just to the malfunctioning of local administrations, but also to the crisis of legitimacy which had struck the party political class’ (Piselli and Ramella 2002, p.8). The basic idea behind the reform was, as Carlo Trigilia says, that ‘it was necessary “to free” mayors from the pressures exerted by the parties on them and their executive, thus allowing mayors to make more effective decisions in the public interest and to be evaluated by citizens on the results of their work’ (Trigilia 2002, p.598). In sum, the principal objectives therefore were greater stability and governability, greater autonomy of the mayors from the parties and greater clarity of political responsibility (Baldini and Legnante 2000).

The most important innovations of the 81/1993 law were that (a) it made the position of Mayor 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 new 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 majority in the Council Chamber (the bar for this *premio* would later be reduced to 40 per cent at the first round by the 120/1999 law, which also increased the Mayor’s term in office from four to five years); (c) the Mayor was given sole power to appoint and dismiss *assessori*, who could no longer serve contemporaneously in the Council Chamber, and whose number was strictly limited in order to prevent posts being created to satisfy party demands; (d) 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, p.11).

**‘NEW IS BETTER’ AND THE ‘CIVIL SOCIETY’ MYTH**
The reform occurred not only at a time when the political system was in crisis due to the revelations of Tangentopoli, but also when the referendum movement, led by Mario Segni, was at the height of its power. Despite his own long personal (and family) history in the DC, Segni sold a deceptive, but seductive, vision of a virtuous civil society oppressed by political actors and requiring major institutional reforms to liberate itself. The reform of local government, seen as embodying the worst elements and effects of the Partitocrazia (partyocracy), thus became one of the key goals of the movement.

Segni and his movement were greatly helped by the media which promoted the belief ‘as widespread as it was hypocritical that Italy was a country with two distinct faces, in which the corrupt and deceitful political class was responsible for all the failures, backwardness, injustices and malfunctions of which a hard-working and honest civil society was the innocent victim’ (Tarchi 2003, p.129). In this Manichean view, ‘civil society’ essentially stood for ‘the people’ and the enemies of the people were the corrupt oligarchs of high finance, big business, the Mafia and, most of all, what the first famous populist of the Italian Republic, Guglielmo Giannini, called the ‘UPP’: the uomini politici di professione, ‘professional politicians’. And if populism is, above all, ‘a discourse which pits a virtuous, homogenous people against a set of self-serving powers-that-be’ (McDonnell 2006, p.127, Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2007), then Segni and his referendum movement, even if we allow them the benefit of the doubt as having been well-intentioned, certainly appear as the principal founding fathers not just of the Second Republic, but of the ‘populist paradise’ which it would become (Zanatta, 2002, p.286).

As Mastropalo observes, ‘during the referendum movement campaigns, the modern and the new – without asking too many questions about their contents or quality – were positively juxtaposed with everything that was old’ (Mastropalo 2000, p.76). Thus, before the first direct elections for mayors were held, there began ‘a hunt for new faces to present as candidates, in place of the old party men’ (Tarchi 2003, p.161). This was not, however, an unwelcome development for all parties. In particular, the PDS saw in it ‘a way of both increasing its vote in previously unfriendly sectors of society and diluting its communist roots’ (Mastropalo 2000, p.107). Given the manner in which Burlando’s short term in office had ended in May 1993, and at a time when the judges were seen as leading the fight against the corruption of the Partitocrazia, it was no surprise therefore that the PDS in Genoa should
support the candidature of a ‘civil society’ figure who had made his name by exposing local party corruption: the *pretore d’assalto* (‘campaigning magistrate’) Adriano Sansa.

**AND IN WITH THE NEW…**

‘From the knapsack of Italian history reappeared the myth of the Prince, only this time with the blessing of democratic legitimacy’ (Calise 2004, p. 61)

The 1993 local elections were the first experience for Italians of directly electing their government leaders. If it was a new experience for the public, it was also a new one for many of the mayors: for 20 per cent of Italian mayors in office in 1994, the top local job was their first in any public institution, party or civil society organisation, a situation which had applied to just 2.9 per cent of their predecessors in 1992 (Recchi 2002).

**ADRIANO SANSA**

‘Eh bien, mon Prince. Gênes et Lucques ne sont plus que des apanages’ – Opening line of *War and Peace*.

One of these new mayors was Adriano Sansa in Genoa. As we have said in the introduction, Sansa belonged to what we have termed the first category of ‘new’ subnational leaders, i.e. those genuine newcomers who base their appeal on their lack of any prior involvement in party politics, their success in other fields, and their strong ‘outsider’, ‘civil society’ and, to smaller and greater degrees, ‘anti-party’ identities. Sansa ticked all these boxes. He was, as Carlo Baccetti (1998, p.207) noted, ‘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’ and his 1993 programme stressed the need to ‘reduce the intrusion of the parties and to appoint administrators faithful to the community’ (Monteverde 1999, p.82). This Sansa duly did, once elected. And, partly as a result, four years later, he would become the only big city mayor in Italy not to be supported for re-election by the parties which had endorsed him 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.
In stark contrast to his predecessor Merlo three years earlier, Sansa’s votes in December 1993 could be counted in hundreds of thousands rather than simply in hundreds and the new mayor felt that he had a strong electoral and constitutional mandate to govern independently. His view of the parties which had supported him was that they should be consulted, and agreement be reached on the major strategic and administrative decisions facing the city, but, only, he stressed, ‘the “major decisions”, not matters of daily administration’ (Sansa & Galletta 1997, p.47). However, according to Sansa, once he took office, he found that ‘there was still a tendency of the party Secretaries to seek total control over administration’ (Interview with Adriano Sansa, 14 December 2002). Among those choices which Sansa felt was solely up to him was that of the assessori for his cabinet and this would become one of the key points of contention with the PDS. So much so that, four years later, Sansa would claim ‘I have no doubt that if I had agreed to appoint this and that assessore, I would be sitting here, being supported for re-election and praised to the skies’ (Sansa & Galletta 1997, p.52).

Sansa’s cabinet was made up of mostly of independents, many from the world of Catholic associations, and he selected only two members of the Council Chamber as assessori (Baccetti 1998, p.213). This did not go down well with the PDS who, Sansa claims, first asked him ‘to change one assessore, then two, then three, four, five. I refused because I thought my assessori were competent’. (Sansa & Galletta 1997, p.74). The pressure got so insistent that ‘sometimes in meeting with the party secretaries, all that was said was “are you going to change that assessore for me or not?”’ (Sansa & Galletta 1997, p.76). When he pointed out that the new law makes the Mayor responsible for choosing and dismissing assessori, the attitude of the PDS was apparently one of ‘leave the law to one side, don’t insist with the law’ (Sansa & Galletta 1997, p.51, emphasis in the original). Indeed, not only were the PDS unhappy with some of Sansa’s non-affiliated assessori, they also wanted him to remove some of those PDS members whom he had appointed to his cabinet, but who were seen as not sufficiently obedient to the party. Amongst these was the vice-mayor, Anna Cassol, whom the party eventually succeeded in getting replaced with the PDS Regional Secretary, Claudio Montaldo. A similar situation occurred with regard to the question of mayoral nominations to public bodies. For example, when Sansa wanted to appoint the PDS regional councillor Giuliano Gallanti as President of the Port Authority, the PDS opposed
him on the grounds that he wasn’t their preferred choice. Sansa appointed him anyway, but the party were not happy.

Montaldo says of the post-1993 period that, although the parties were initially still in crisis, once they started to recover, they found it very tempting to begin interfering again in administrative questions (Interview with Claudio Montaldo, 22 February 2006). He adds that, for the relationship between parties and directly-elected local leaders to work, ‘you need to establish the key points of the programme for government before the election, have very clear agreements and then rigorously respect the different spheres of competence. And this is sometimes frustrating for the parties’ (Interview with Montaldo).

Given this relationship, it is no surprise that, 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 Adriano Sansa, 14 December 2002) Of course, if the PDS and the smaller parties of the centre-left had wanted to get rid of Sansa at any stage, they could easily have brought him down with a no-confidence motion in the Council Chamber. However, apart from provoking new elections for the Chamber and mayoralty which, following a logic of turkeys being unlikely to vote for Christmas, nobody wanted, this would not have looked good at all for the party. Unlike under the old system therefore, the parties found that they now had to bide their time before they could change the Mayor, however uncooperative he/she proved to be.

When it did finally come in June 1997, the decision not to support Sansa’s re-election as mayor was announced in a 42 line note which accused him of having ‘scant capacity for interlocution’ (Sansa & Galletta 1997, p.9). More precisely, what this meant was that (a) he did not ‘communicate’ well with the public; (b) he had little time for the culture of mediazione involving the parties and local interest networks. It is worth looking at these two charges for a moment:

Unlike many of the other new mayors such as Francesco Rutelli in Rome, Sansa made no attempt during his time in office to court media attention and establish a national profile. On the contrary, as the current editor of the Genoa edition of La Repubblica, Franco Manzitti, laments: ‘I got him invited lots of times on television because I thought he would present a
good image of Genoa. After all, he is like Cacciari: he is good at speaking on television. But he never wanted to go’ (Interview with Franco Manzitti, 23 February 2006). Similarly, Chito Guala, one of Sansa’s independent assessori recalls how the mayor would refuse to break meetings of the cabinet in order to give the local lunchtime television news details for a story. He says that he talked to Sansa on numerous occasions about the need to establish better relations with the media, but the reaction was always one of ‘in time, the people will see the good work we have done’ (Interview with Chito Guala, 3 December 2005). This touches on a problem which all the new mayors faced: how to deal with the great weight of expectation on them and show the public that, despite the major financial difficulties which they inherited, change was occurring. As in the case of Antonio Bassolino in Naples, the way many Mayors dealt with this capability/expectations gap was to use ‘symbolic politics’ – highly visible, but often low-cost, projects and good communications programmes in the local and national media designed to show the public that the new local governments were active and that things were improving (Cilento and Allum 2001; Trigilia 2002) Sansa, by contrast, invested heavily in important (but not highly visible) long-term projects such as dealing with the underwater rivers in Genoa which had caused floods and fatalities in previous years, putting the Council’s finances in order, and beginning to tackle the city government’s huge and inefficient bureaucratic machine. When told to ‘inaugurate lots of things, whether they’re ready or not’, his response was ‘why? If they’re not ready, I’m not going to participate in that kind of farce’ (Interview with Sansa).

While Sansa had little time for the new media-friendly ‘image politics’ of the Second Republic, he also had little time for what he saw as a relic of the ‘old’ system: the long-standing culture of mediazione in Italian politics. The impression of Sansa among the political class was thus, as Marco Nesci of Rifondazione Comunista (RC) puts it: ‘he was closed within his own system and impervious to politics, to political mediation’ (Interview with Marco Nesci, 20 February 2006). Manzitti comments that, due in part to Sansa’s past as a magistrate who simply applied the law, ‘he had neither the capacity nor the physiology for mediation’ (Interview with Manzitti). Despite the formal independence and greater decision-making powers of the new mayors, however, the capacity to understand and deal with the networks of power in cities is essential to achieving results. As Trigilia argues in his conclusions to the most significant study to date on local politics since the 1993 reform, 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 co-operate in
complex and often tiring decision-making processes, for which there exist no easy shortcuts in democratic societies’ (Trigilia 2002, p.602). Or, as Claudio Burlando, comments ‘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 Claudio Burlando, 15 February 2006).

Of course, notwithstanding Sansa’s lack of ability as a communicator and a mediator, he is right when he says that the main reason why he was not supported for re-election lay in his relationship with the PDS. More precisely, the fundamental reason he was not re-supported was that Claudio Burlando did not want him to be. Burlando himself acknowledged this in an interview with La Repubblica in April 2006, saying ‘it was Benvenuti who got rid of Sansa, but I was behind it’ (La Repubblica, 5 April 2006). Franco Manzitti explains it in more detail, saying of the decision not to support Sansa’s re-election:

It came from a Sanhedrin, as they say, from four or five people who still today govern politics in this city. It’s not like things have changed: Burlando; Graziano Mazzarello (an important DS senator); Margini who, at the time, probably had a secondary position; Benvenuti who was, let’s say, Burlando’s cutthroat; and a few other minor figures in the DS who stayed quiet and just listened. Basically Burlando’ (Interview with Manzitti).

Indeed, the seeds of Burlando’s decision to oppose Sansa’s re-election had probably been sown several years beforehand. Reflecting on Sansa’s campaign in 1993, Manzitti recalls that, at the annual Festa dell’Unità organised by the PDS:

Sansa got up on the stage and, speaking for the first time as candidate for mayor, with Burlando sitting in one of the front rows, he launched into an attack against political corruption. He didn’t name Burlando, but he gave a speech which was clearly saying ‘I am here to change that way of doing politics’. He gave him a strong (metaphorical) slap. I think that, in the end, the decision to get rid of Sansa stems from that day (Interview with Franco Manzitti).

Trigilia comments that one of the most significant findings of their research project examining how local politics has changed is the ‘decline of those cordate politiche (‘political cartels’)…in which the mayors were located in a subordinate position to a capocorrente (‘faction leader’) (usually a national parliamentarian) (Trigilia 2002, p.582) However, mayors and subnational leaders do ultimately remain located in a subordinate position to local party satraps such as, in the case of Genoa and its region Liguria, Burlando on the centre-left and
the powerful Forza Italia ex-Minister from Imperia, Claudio Scajola, on the centre-right. If such a figure decides that you are not to be re-elected, then that is that.

Sansa explains the decision not to support his re-candidature as follows:

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).

In fact, so far were the PDS prepared to go to stop him becoming mayor again that, according to Sansa, in his last months in office, after he had announced that he would run as an independent in the 1997 elections against the centre-left’s official choice, Giuseppe Pericu, they deliberately made it impossible for him to conclude an important agreement to resolve the long-standing dispute over the future of the Cornigliano steelworks. According to Sansa, he had reached a definitive agreement with Emilio Riva, the industrialist running Cornigliano. All that remained were for the various sides formally to sign it. However, in Sansa’s last month in office, Riva came to see him and, after complimenting him on having reached an agreement, added

‘but maybe none of this will happen, because, if it does, it would represent a huge political success for you. And because the parties of your majority in the Council do not want you to have a huge political success, they themselves will stop you from concluding this agreement’, which, as it turned out, was partly true as the agreement was ready, but I did not receive the necessary political support and so was unable to sign it (Interview with Sansa)

Ultimately, as we have seen, the relationship between Sansa and the PDS failed because of each side’s conflicting visions of their respective roles. 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, and their divorce was slow, painful, acrimonious and costly. As Sansa says, 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 CSM?’…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”. Well I’m not
going. I’m going to say publicly that I disagree and what this election is about’ (Interview with Sansa).

...AND THE NOT SO NEW

If Sansa did not turn out to be the right Incitatus for the PDS’s Caligula, we might turn the metaphor around and ask if perhaps the new mayor instead resembled Caligula in some ways. After all, like Sansa, the young emperor was unqualified and unprepared for the role he assumed, having held no prior public position. In fact, some historians claim Caligula had a nervous breakdown, brought on by the pressure of being constantly in the public eye after a life spent mostly out of it. Were the genuinely new mayors similarly unequipped for the roles they took on? Whatever the advocates of ‘civil society’ candidates said, running a city, region or country is not like managing a company, being a judge or chairing a university department. In fact, this is exactly the type of populist idea promoted in the 1940s by Guglielmo Giannini (2002) that ‘any galantuomo can do politics’ and later seized on most notoriously by Silvio Berlusconi.

As it turned out, very few of those genuine newcomers in the first wave of directly-elected mayors have remained in politics and one of the key reasons for this was precisely their lack of preparation for the role. Take, for example, the applied mathematician, Mario Primicerio, who served as centre-left mayor of Florence from 1995-1999 and was, like Sansa, a newcomer who had never been involved with parties or government institutions. In an interview in 2000, Primicerio explained his decision not to seek re-election in 1999 on health grounds, saying that ‘the stress of the life of a Mayor (who has to face many responsibilities with enormous external restrictions on his decision powers) is such that, without a long period of training for it, there is a real threat to one’s psychophysical equilibrium’ (Stakgold 2000, p.3).

In fact, with the notable exception of Illy, whom we will discuss later, the most enduring of the 1993 Mayors have been those like Bassolino, Rutelli, and Cacciari who could combine experience of the ‘old’ with the veneer and rhetoric of the ‘new’, i.e. those subnational leaders who not only had previous experience of the culture of mediazione, of dealing with local party elites, interest networks and institutions, but were also media-savvy communicators with an understanding of the importance of ‘symbolic politics’ (Trigilia
2002). All the things that Sansa, as we have seen, was not, but which his successor as Mayor of Genoa, Giuseppe Pericu, proved to be.

GIUSEPPE PERICU

After their experience with Sansa, the PDS were careful to make sure they got someone more to their liking with the next centre-left mayoral candidate. As a former member of the PCI/PDS hierarchy in Genoa, Silvio Ferrari, revealed: ‘I participated along with Burlando, at the first meetings, held in private homes, with Giuseppe Pericu. It’s not like he was just picked at random. We knew who he was’ (Interview with Ferrari). As we said in the introduction, Pericu belongs to what we termed the second category of new mayors, i.e. those who present themselves primarily as ‘non-party’, ‘civil society’ figures, but who gained considerable political experience during the First Republic, dealing with local parties, institutions and interest networks. Although, since his re-election in 2002, he has become a member of the DS, Pericu has presented himself in each campaign as ‘non-party’ and distances himself from party politics, saying that he considers himself, and thinks he is perceived by the public, as ‘more of an administrator than a politician’ (Interview with Giuseppe Pericu, 28 March 2003).

Moreover, in contrast to the magistrate Sansa, Pericu had gained vast experience of the art of *mediazione* from his career as a lawyer. As one of the top administrative law experts in First Republic Genoa, he had worked extensively with public bodies and acted as a consultant for the PSI in numerous cases involving local levels of government, parties and interest groups. In Manzitti’s view, Pericu thus had ‘a fluency in these relationships that Sansa could only dream of. Pericu was someone who had bargained with these people. His job had been to find common ground between them’ (Interview with Manzitti).

Of course, Pericu’s relationship with the parties has not always been harmonious. During his nine years as mayor, he too has had problems with them over issues such as the composition of the executive and administrative questions. Although, from the start, Pericu gave more space to the parties and attempted to maintain an acceptable balance between them in his choice of *assessori*, like Sansa, he also says that attempts to interfere have been made. He comments that ‘this tendency of the parties to seek a bigger role is on the increase. I see it not only in my own case, but also with regard to my fellow Mayors in the other big cities’
(Interview with Pericu). However, he seems to have a degree of comprehension for the position the parties now find themselves in within the new subnational leader-party relationship. He comments that:

They have a very difficult job to do. That is, they have to be able to come up with innovative policies and interpret the society around them without however getting involved in matters of daily administration, which has to be left to the institutions. That’s a complicated, difficult job. It’s much simpler to busy yourself with the little things, or to go and annoy the mayor! (Interview with Pericu)

For their part, the DS appreciate Pericu’s approach to the relationship. As Montaldo put it, unlike Sansa, ‘Pericu has shown propensity for mediation, for dialogue’ (Interview with Montaldo). Mario Margini, until 2005 the regional secretary of the DS and now an assessore in the municipal giunta, says ‘the difference between Sansa and Pericu, in my view, is that, although Pericu does not allow interference in administrative matters, he does recognise the role of the parties’ (Interview with Mario Margini, 13 December 2005). It is interesting to note, that, according to Margini, although the DS assessori hold regular meetings among themselves to discuss matters, ‘Pericu has never come. He considers himself “directly elected by the citizens”, full stop. After that, obviously, he is willing to listen. But, you know, in the end, very often he does things his way’ (Interview with Margini).

Of course, ‘very often’ is not ‘always’. But, as we have seen, while formally independent, if they are to achieve results, mayors do need the co-operation and help of the parties, and particularly of local party satraps in cities like Genoa. And, while it may no longer be entirely the case that ‘the influence of the Italian mayor is based on his capacity to access the “centre” of the party organization’ (Tarrow, 1977), Sansa comments that one of the reasons why he was unable to do more to tackle the major transport problems in Genoa was that he found Burlando so unaccommodating when the latter was Minister for Transport in Rome (Interview with Sansa). By contrast, it seems likely, for example, that the good relationship enjoyed by Pericu with the centre-left hierarchy played a significant part in the choice of Genoa by the Ulivo government as the site for the 2001 G8, an event which provided the funding for the City Council to carry out a range of important urban renewal projects.

However, despite enjoying large public consensus - especially after his handling of the 2001 G8 - Pericu did not want to run for re-election in 2002. First of all, he apparently felt he was becoming too distant from his previous role as a lawyer and University Professor. Secondly,
notwithstanding his abilities as a mediator, he was getting tired of dealing with the parties in his giunta, where there were problems with Rifondazione Comunista in particular. As a result, Manzitti says ‘he didn’t want to run for a second term. Absolutely not. I remember that he spoke really sincerely to me about it a few times before taking the final decision’ (Interview with Manzitti). In the end, Pericu chose to run again, but only after he had been repeatedly implored upon to do so by the DS, primarily on the grounds that, if he did not, they would have been forced to put forward the outgoing DS President of the Province, Marta Vincenzi, who, although very popular in the city, was apparently considered ‘ungovernable’ by the local party hierarchy. Moreover, for its part, the national hierarchy of Forza Italia and Scajola were also content to see a second term for Pericu, considered a capable mayor with whom central government in Rome could have a positive dialogue. For example, Berlusconi’s right-hand man Gianni Letta apparently considered Pericu an excellent interlocutor (Interview with Manzitti). This logic was reflected in the centre-right’s choice of mayoral candidate, the elderly former PSI President of the Province and Region, Rinaldo Magnani, whom, it is said, they knew had no chance of defeating Pericu and whom Forza Italia in particular did little to help in the election campaign. Reflecting on the experience, Magnani later said:

In politics, there is a way of letting someone win without actually saying it explicitly. So, when the moment came, one almost got the impression that the centre-right slackened the reins and that the centre-left was aware of this and so did not whip its horse. They even gave the impression that there may have almost been a high-level agreement that things should turn out as they did…(Interview with Rinaldo Magnani, 18 December 2002)

This version of events has been substantially confirmed by other elite interviewees who have said that Magnani was deliberately picked as a ‘respectable losing candidate’ by Scajola. Indeed, after the election, Berlusconi told journalists: ‘Pericu is an excellent Mayor. Even I knew that. In fact, we did not even put up a top candidate against him’ (La Repubblica, 28 May 2002). It is interesting, therefore, that, from a ‘civil society’ centre-left mayor (Sansa) whose re-election was bitterly opposed by the local elite of the main party which had originally supported him, Genoa moved to one (Pericu) who was compelled to stand again by the main party of the centre-left (in preference to ‘one of their own’) and then facilitated in his re-election by the main party of the centre-right. Although the citizens may have subsequently cast their votes and handed Pericu a 60 per cent first round victory, the mayor was re-elected because the key parties of both sides effectively gave the voters little possibility to do otherwise. In the case of Sansa, we commented that it demonstrated that, if a
local party satrap decides you are not going to be re-elected, then that is that. In the case of Pericu, therefore, we might add that if two such figures decide that you are going to be re-elected, then that also is that.

**IN WITH THE OLD, OUT WITH THE NEW?**

With the election of Claudio Burlando as President of the Liguria Region in 2005 and the candidature of Marta Vincenzi of the DS in the 2007 mayoral elections, it now appears, however, that the era of ‘civil society’, ‘non-party’ subnational leaders may be coming to an end for the centre-left in Genoa. The former DS regional secretary, Mario Margini, comments: ‘parties are now more inclined to look outwards when they are not sure of winning than when they are sure of winning’ (Interview with Margini). Of course, as Baldini and Legnante (2003, p.88) argue, unlike in national elections, there are no longer any cities in which the parties can be absolutely sure of winning directly-elected subnational contests. The most obvious example is the victory of Giorgio Guazzaloca in the 1999 Bologna mayoral elections when the local centre-left seemed to believe that an obedient local electorate would rubberstamp whomever they put forward (Campus and Pasquino 2000). However, whether or not the centre-left’s subsequent choice of the high-profile former CGIL leader Sergio Cofferati as its candidate in 2004 was a response to this or simply a welcome opportunity to ‘park’ an awkward figure for the party hierarchies (particularly the DS) away from Rome, the rule that the parties are increasingly putting forward ‘their own’ men and women in areas where they believe they can win and opting only for ‘civil society’ candidates with a catch-all appeal in areas where they are the underdog remains generally true.

A good example of this logic is the only survivor of the genuinely new mayors from 1993, Riccardo Illy, formerly Mayor of Trieste and now Regional President of Friuli-Venezia Giulia. As he says: ‘if the centre-left coalition had not been in the minority in Trieste, and then in the region, they simply would never have come looking for me’ (Interview with Riccardo Illy, 7 June 2005). In the cases of local government leaders like Illy and Sandro Biasotti (former centre-right president of the Liguria region), although they belong to what we termed the first category of new subnational leaders, unlike Sansa, they are supported for re-election because their supporting local coalitions are weak in terms of structure, organisation, personnel and core electorate. If the parties want to have any chance of winning, there is no alternative other than to put up with self-styled personaggi scomodi
(‘troublesome individuals’) like Illy and Biasotti. As Illy says, ‘I know that I will be tolerated, as a personaggio scomodo, for as long as I can make a minority coalition win. When I am no longer needed, I will be replaced by a politician, someone from the parties’ (Giani 2005, p. 15). Thus, again in contrast to Sansa, Illy has been able to continue his career despite his steadfast refusal to appoint members of any party to his cabinets and despite party criticisms of him that he does not communicate with the public as they would like (Interview with Illy).

Notwithstanding his strong party identity, Burlando did conform in 2005 to what Magnier (2004, p.172) refers to as the increasing ‘decline of partisan labelling’ in subnational elections by also having a personalised civic list ‘Gente della Liguria per Claudio Burlando’ supporting his candidature. However, he remains very closely identified with the DS and continues to take the key decisions regarding local politics in the city. His cabinet contains just two independent assessori and nine party politicians, including a series of former party mayors and vice-mayors of different cities in Liguria. In its composition, it is also delicately balanced to reflect the respective strengths of the DS and the other parties of the centre-left. As Nesci of RC claims, compared to Pericu’s giunta, in Burlando’s ‘there is an attempt to establish a more correct and explicit relationship between the parties’ (Interview with Nesci). Although there has been a certain amount of infighting thus far in the life of the Burlando government, some important results have been achieved, most notably the resolution of the future of the Cornigliano steelworks. After the attempts (and, for whatever reasons, failures) of the varyingly ‘new’ leaders Sansa, Pericu and Biasotti, to solve one of the city’s longest-running and most contentious problems, it appears telling that the two people who finally signed and sealed its resolution in late 2005 were Claudio Burlando and the Minister for Productive Activities, Claudio Scajola. This supports the argument that, as we discuss further in the conclusions, the return of Burlando and other ‘professional politicians’ to subnational office may be no bad thing. In fact, in our view, if parties are essential to democracy, then the withdrawal of parties from local government leadership is ultimately a dangerous process which calls into question their legitimacy (Mair 2006). Consequently, the move of powerful politicians such as Burlando from behind the scenes to the front of the local stage is to be welcomed.
CONCLUSIONS

Using the case-study of Genoa, this paper has sought to make a contribution to the debate on changes in local politics in Italy since the 81/1993 law. After proposing a broad classification of directly-elected centre-left subnational leaders according to their degrees of ‘newness’ and attitudes to the parties, it outlined how local politics functioned prior to 1993, before listing the main changes introduced in the reform and discussing the (anti)political climate in which this occurred. The paper then examined the very different cases of the two centre-left mayors elected to date in Genoa, Adriano Sansa and Giuseppe Pericu, showing how, in both instances, their degree of preparation for the role (particularly their experience and appreciation of mediazione) along with their relationships with the local PDS/DS hierarchy were the key elements shaping their tenures. Finally, it is suggested that the era of ‘civil society’ and ‘non-party’ candidates appears to be coming to an end for the centre-left in cities, like Genoa, where it can win without them.

As was mentioned in the introduction, many commentators have praised the 1993 reform on the grounds that it has allegedly brought politics closer to the people, made subnational government more transparent, helped create a new political class of independent mayors and contributed significantly to the quality of democracy in Italy. The evidence presented in this paper suggests the conclusion, however, that, first of all, we should not overstate the changes that have occurred and, secondly, it is questionable whether they have all ultimately been to the good. Let us take a brief look at just a couple of these claims: Paul Ginsborg (2003, p.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 – to Italian democracy’s clear benefit’ (Newell 2007, forthcoming).

As far as the relationship between voting and political responsibility is concerned, my research on subnational leaders makes me inclined to agree with Mario Caciagli who warns that ‘it is important to bear well in mind that the visibility of the person wielding power does not mean transparency’ (Caciagli 2005, p.201). As we have seen, the PDS left the stage in Genoa, but not the theatre, after the 1993 reform. Rather, as was argued, they conducted a temporary strategic retreat, during which time ‘new’, ‘civil society’ and ‘non-party’ leaders
were put forward as candidates. Indeed, as Mastropaolo contends, the PDS saw this as an opportunity to extend their appeal beyond the traditional communist electorate (Mastropaolo 2000, p.107). Moreover, whatever the formal powers and responsibilities conferred on the mayor by the new law, in the case of Genoa, the PDS clearly believed that, as before, the mayor was subordinate to the party hierarchy and that they could dictate whom he should appoint and how he should conduct himself. When Sansa refused to go along with this, the party was able to make his job extremely difficult, before ensuring that he was not re-elected. By contrast, in 2002, the local powerbrokers of the two main parties, the DS and Forza Italia, ensured that Pericu stood again and was easily re-elected. Thus, while the ‘myth of the Prince’ did indeed return to Italian politics with the 1993 law, as Calise (2004, p.61) says, in the case of Genoa, the new Prince soon found that the city remained an apanage of the old satrap. From that point of view, the election of Burlando as regional president in 2005 represents a far better link between voting and political responsibility than those of ‘non-party’ candidates.

Whether the effects of the reform have exclusively been to Italian democracy’s clear benefit is also open to question. Or, to put it another way, is ‘new’ always better as Mario Segni’s referendum movement so loudly proclaimed? One of the effects of the introduction of directly-elected mayors and the antipolitical rhetoric surrounding it has been, as Calise (2006, p.72) argues, to pave the way for the subsequent rise and success of Berlusconi. After all, like the new law - which has strongly personalised the position of subnational leader and supposedly freed him/her from the dominance of parties and elected assemblies - populism advocates ‘the desirability of a “direct” relationship between people and leadership, unmediated by institutions’ (Worsley, 1969: 244; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2007). And, like some of the new mayors, populist leaders are impatient of mediation procedures ‘that frustrate the alleged popular will’ (Crick, 2005: 625). It is also important to remember that, amidst all the talk of the reform bringing politics closer to the people, the new system has done nothing to halt the fall in turnout at local level (Di Virgilio, 2005, p.19; McDonnell, 2007). Finally, the retreat of powerful party politicians from institutional positions of leadership cannot be a good thing for representative democracy in the long term. In an era of political apathy and declining turnouts, surely there need to be more ‘zones of engagement’ between parties and the public, not less (Mair, 2006). In Genoa, one of the problems with local government in the last decades of the First Republic was that the PCI was not allowed to hold the position of mayor, despite it being the largest party. As a result, it wielded power
in less obvious ways, behind the scenes. It thus seems paradoxical that the way of improving transparency and local government in the Second Republic was for their successor party to do likewise. From that perspective, therefore, it can only be good for democracy that, in Genoa and elsewhere in Italy, Caligula now seems willing to take the responsibility of being Consul himself.

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