De Gasperi through American Eyes

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Introduction

The subject of this paper is the evolution of American public and media opinion toward Alcide De Gasperi, and his political movement, during the Trentine statesman’s seven and a half years as prime minister (1945-1953). The role of public opinion has increasingly drawn my attention as I have worked on the chapter of my De Gasperi biography, dealing with his foreign policy, especially that dealing with the United States. While other scholars—among them James Miller, Ennio Di Nolfo and Federica Pinelli—have touched on aspects of this question, it has not received the kind of direct attention which I believe it merits. Let me add the caveat at the outset that the remarks which follow reflect the fact that I am still in the midst of my primary source investigations. Some of my comments will thus be quite empirical. At points it may be hard to “see the forest for the trees,” as we say in English.

Intellectual and Political Context

Let me begin by setting the stage in a more general vein. The consensus view among historians on both sides of the Atlantic is that, in the course of the 1940s, American policy toward Italy evolved from an overriding emphasis on “democratic reconstruction” to a growing concern for political and economic “stabilization.” Between 1943 and early 1947, democratic reconstruction held pride of place. American attentions focused primarily on the defeat of Fascism, the domestication of the Resistance, the revival of multi-party politics and the reinsertion of a chastened Italy into the international community of nations. With the dawning of the Cold War, however, American foreign policy and public discussion pertaining to Italy were increasingly framed in terms of “stabilizing” the Italian polity in order to “contain communism” in the peninsula. Although anti-communism was the predominant thrust of Vatican and British diplomacy in Italy already in 1944 and 1945, it did not come to dominate American policy in Italy until

1 Lecture delivered at the School of International Studies, University of Trento, December 2, 2004. Let me begin by thanking my gracious hosts Mark Gilbert, Gustavo Corni and the School of International Studies here at the University of Trento. I am most indebted to them, and to the Embassy of the United States in Rome—my co-sponsor for this lecture.


4 Miller, United States and Italy, pp. 3-7.
the promulgation of the Truman Doctrine in early 1947. Alcide De Gasperi was of course central to both the reconstruction and the stabilization stages of American policy in Italy during the secondo dopoguerra.

In order to embrace De Gasperi as an ally, American policymakers and the American public had to look beyond the nation’s traditional “hermeneutic of suspicion” towards Catholicism—a tradition rooted both in anti-papal prejudice and in principled liberal assumptions about the separation of Church and State. Catholic political culture was presumed to derive, inherently and directly, from a rigidly hierarchical and apparently monolithic Church. Al Smith’s ill-fated 1928 bid for the presidency foundered on just these shoals. Prior to the Second World War, the Department of State itself remained an overwhelmingly WASP and Ivy-league dominated “club.”

For its part, America’s intelligentsia between the two World Wars largely embraced an overarching ideology of progressive, pluralistic liberalism. In the early twentieth century, the progressive triumvirate of William James, John Dewey and Walter Lippmann collectively enjoyed a degree of elite cultural hegemony comparable to that of Benedetto Croce in early twentieth century Italy. Like the early Croce too, American liberals discerned fundamental philosophical incompatibilities between neo-scholastic absolutism and the pluralistic, empirically-grounded praxis of parliamentary democracy. To foster such democracy, advance social progress, and circumvent “entrenched interests,” American liberals invested their hopes in a combination of courageous, charismatic leadership from above, and enlightened, responsive public opinion from below.

As liberal politicians, both Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) and his successor Harry Truman placed great stock in the importance of monitoring, and cultivating, public opinion. Indicative of FDR’s solicitude for public opinion was a new initiative launched in 1940 in the Office of Governmental Reports. Under the leadership of Kathryn (“K.C.”) Blackburn, this office began to formally survey editorial opinion from a large number of newspapers from around the United States. With American involvement in the war two years later, a Public Studies Division was created within the State Department to systematically explore the state of American public opinion (defined chiefly as press and interest group opinion) and convey this to policy-makers. The newspapers and news magazines judged most influential by the Public Studies Division—and thus cited most steadily in its press synopses--were the New York Times,

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5 George Q. Flynn, Roosevelt and Romanism. Catholics and American Diplomacy, 1937-1945 (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1976), pp. xii, 15. During the 1930s, the number of Catholic diplomats began to increase within the American diplomatic corps: see Thomas Bailey, The Man in the Street: The Impact of American Public Opinion on Foreign Policy (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1964), pp. 207-208.


the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal, Time and Newsweek. In the immediate post war period (between 1946 and 1952), this service’s staff grew to between nineteen and twenty-five persons. Under the Eisenhower administration and thereafter, however, the staff would atrophy.\(^8\)

More so than his predecessor FDR, Harry Truman asserted that, in foreign affairs, it was incumbent on the president to shape public opinion rather than following it.\(^9\) In public, Truman distanced himself from opinion polls. Yet Truman prized letters from ordinary Americans, and he insisted on reading a broad sample of the torrents of mail which deluged him. While he claimed that these letters did not influence his decisions, his staff labored mightily to keep up with the nearly half million domestic letters which Truman received during his presidency. The White House staff went so far as to divide this correspondence into “pros” and “cons” on major domestic and foreign policy issues, ranging from desegregation to the Cold War.

Each of these presidents engaged their respective publics in dialogue, and in the process widened the circle of domestic socio-cultural tolerance, even as they waged wars overseas. Truman tempered mainstream American intolerance of African-Americans, while FDR demonstrated an unprecedented sensitivity to Catholic-American concerns and sensibilities. Roosevelt began to transcend the high brow, progressive anti-clericalism noted above by his remarkably inclusive New Deal political coalition. Roosevelt’s appeal extended to union members, traditionally-minded southern Democrats and urban, Catholic, white ethnic voters. These working class Americans might not endorse all aspects of liberal pluralism, but they clearly appreciated FDR’s willingness to take risks and experiment in pulling the United States out of the doldrums of the Depression.

Observing from across the Atlantic, Alcide De Gasperi echoed such sentiments in columns appearing in the pages of L’Illustrazione Vaticana in 1933. Writing from his sinecure within the Vatican library, De Gasperi commented favorably on FDR’s pragmatism, complimenting the American president for avoiding a doctrinaire approach to the problems of the day, and for utilizing varied techniques in trying to bring the United States out of the doldrums.

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\(^8\) The Eisenhower administration would cut this staff in half, and by 1965 only three persons were fulfilling this formal function. Bernard C. Cohen, The Public’s Impact on Foreign Policy (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), p. 45. See Cohen as well for the scope and nature of public correspondence with the Department of State, pp. 117-118.

\(^9\) ‘Forward’ by former Truman aide George M. Elsey to D. M. Giangreco and Kathryn Moore, eds., Dear Harry . . . Truman’s Mailroom:1945-1953 (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole, 1999), p. ix. No doubt, this attitude reflected most journalists’ dubiousness about Truman and his reelection chances in the 1948 presidential elections. Just before those elections, “a national news magazine published the unanimous opinion of fifty political analysts that Governor Dewey would trounce him, Truman snorted to his aide, ‘I know every one of those fellows, an not one of them has enough sense to pound sand into a rathole.’”

The coming of the Second World War, and the attendant mobilization of the American economy, dispelled the lingering economic remnants of Depression-era doldrums. But the war effort also exposed latent contradictions within FDR’s New Deal Coalition, and set the stage for the unprecedented pragmatic-Catholic rapprochement of the latter 1940s and early 1950s. The President’s 1939 decision to name a special envoy to the Holy See strengthened his political base among American Catholics, but it also provoked widespread public consternation within liberal circles. In 1942 and 1943, Vatican reservations at the Allies’ insistence on obtaining Italy’s unconditional surrender rankled as well. Eleanor Roosevelt allied herself with liberals within the administration who continued to take seriously the conception of the war as a crusade against fascism and for democracy. The First Lady steadily reminded her husband that the new breed of Catholic diplomats at State—men like Robert Murphy and James Dunn—“could not be counted on to promote unconditional surrender if it meant overthrowing the old regimes in Europe.”

The early stages of the Anglo-American invasion of Italy, from the Sicily landings of 1943 through the liberation of Rome in June of 1944, confirmed the growing influence in the State Department of moderate hands like Murphy and Dunn, and the waning influence of New Deal liberals like Sumner Welles, who was forced out as assistant secretary of state. Also losing influence were committed liberals heading the Office of War Information. Observing these changes, apparently sanctioned by a cautious FDR beginning to eye a tough campaign for re-election in 1944, radical essayist Sidney Hook bitterly observed that, for most of the American left of his day, “Roosevelt had taken the place of a program.”

Other liberal observers were more sanguine. Despite short-term reversals in the substance of American policy in Italy, a flanking action of public outreach and mobilization appeared to hold greater promise over the longer term.

Early Courtship, 1944-1956

The Allied invasion of Sicily and southern Italy in the summer and fall of 1943 precipitated the first American ground-level efforts at defascistization and initial strides toward social reconstruction. For their part, the leaders of Italy’s first post-fascist governments—the Bonomi and Parri governments of December 1944 to December 1945—were also eager

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to foster economic and political reconstruction as they understood these processes. De Gasperi served as foreign minister under both Bonomi and Parri, while Alberto Tarchiani represented Italy as Ambassador to the United States. De Gasperi, Tarchiani and their colleagues were keenly aware of the importance of courting American public opinion as World War II was drawing to a close. As Ambassador Tarchiani, recorded in his diary,

“it was indispensable to create a new psychological situation between the United States and Italy--not only with the administration and with Congress--which would already be difficult to convert in an expeditious manner--but also with American public opinion, which often functions as a tyrannical padrone over official actions and decisions in high places.” (author’s translation)

In December, 1945, De Gasperi moved up to the prime ministership—a position he would hold continuously for the next seven and a half years. He and Ambassador Tarchiani together took on the task of wresting maximum political, economic and diplomatic support from the American government, particularly with regard to the negotiation of a peace treaty with the victorious Allied powers. Between the lines of Tarchiani’s diary entry, I believe one senses anxiety over FDR’s failing health, and about the capacities of then Vice President Truman. Would Truman be able to marshal American public opinion in extending a helping hand to Italy? By the time De Gasperi became prime minister, Truman had been president for about a half a year. But in him De Gasperi faced an embattled and in many ways provincial president still trying to escape the oversized shadow cast by the ebullient, charismatic FDR.

In his courtship of America over the next several years, the Italian prime minister could count on the support of key State Department players, ranging from Secretary of State James Byrnes to the devoutly Catholic U.S. Ambassador to Italy, James Dunn. He knew as well that he would benefit from the ongoing, if sometime shrill, sympathy of the Vatican, which had steadily pushed for increased relief aid for Italy, and also for a temperate Allied-Italian peace settlement. The National Catholic Welfare Conference and its energetic general secretary, Monsignor Michael J. Ready—not to mention Cardinal Spellman of New York other key clerical voices—reinforced Vatican diplomatic pressure in the aforementioned areas.

Paralleling such high politics was the American Catholic press’ Italy-related reportage and commentary. This is an important topic, embracing some 134 local and diocesan papers and 197 periodicals, as well as the weekly “Catholic Hour” based in New York. My paper today however, will

15 Flynn, Roosevelt and Romanism, pp. 5-6.
be sidestepping this lively chorus of voices, save to note the harmony with which they generally echoed the views of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.\textsuperscript{16}

In any case, such “interest group” backing could only go so far. In addition, the Italian leader would need favorable coverage by key voices within the mainstream American journalistic elite. The newspapers and news magazines recognized as most influential within the State Department at this time were the \textit{New York Times}, the \textit{Washington Post}, the \textit{Wall Street Journal}, \textit{Time} (published by future Italian Ambassador Claire Boothe Luce and her husband Henry) and \textit{Newsweek}.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Four Journalistic Voices: Welles, Lippmann, Alsop and McCormick}

In this paper I will draw upon four key journalists whose byline appeared in the “Post” or the “Times” or both. Three of the columnists may be described as moderate liberals--namely Sumner Welles, Steward Alsop, and Walter Lippmann. The forth, Anne O’Hare McCormick, could be characterized as a moderate conservative.\textsuperscript{18}

In their coverage of De Gasperi’s Italy, these four commentators combined two basic vantage points. One approach proceeded “from the bottom up,” foregrounding persistent socio-economic hardships—economic stagnation, unemployment, inflation and socio-economic inequality—and calling for some combination of Italian reform initiatives and outside American assistance to blunt “miseria” on the peninsula. Concomitant to this approach was the presumption that communism represented an aberration—a fundamentally “unnatural” affliction to the body politic—whose cure was to be found in an economic expansion fuelled by free trade, expanded ownership of property, and expanding consumerism.

Alternatively, analyses moved “from the top down,” holding De Gasperi—and to a lesser extent his fellow Christian Democrats—accountable for launching stable and sound political and economic reconstruction. This

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\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p. 4. However, publications like \textit{Catholic World} and \textit{Commonweal} did stray from the Vatican’s line on occasion, and to reach out to liberal, sometimes anti-clerical stateside Italian exiles like Gaetano Salvemini and Nicola Chiaromonte; see John Diggins, \textit{Mussolini and Fascism: the View from America} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 392-393.
\textsuperscript{18} A devout Catholic, reared in Ohio, McCormick was the first woman to serve on the editorial board of the New York Times, and the first woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for journalism. In contrast to Lippmann, McCormick steadily supported the Truman administration’s foreign policy and the west’s struggle against “communist tyranny and obscurantism.” In Federica Pinelli’s words, McCormick embodied “the consensual moderation of American liberalism during the immediate post-war period. Federica Pinelli, “Anne O’Hare McCormick, corrispondente estero del New York Times,” \textit{Annali della Fondazione Luigi Einaudi}, 29 (1995), 555-556. Based in Rome during the early post-war years, McCormick followed Italian politics more closely than did the other three. The proper name “De Gasperi” appeared 80 times in her columns, dating from 1944 and 1954. During this same period, Lippmann referred to De Gasperi by name only seven times, and Sumner Welles only six. These figures can be confirmed using the data base Pro-Quest.
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personalization of Italian politics was gauged extensively, yet almost unconsciously, on the way in which FDR’s charisma and coalition-building guided the United States through its own, New Deal forms of “reconstruction” and “stabilization.” In personalizing their coverage of De Gasperi in particular, liberal and progressive journalists like Welles and Alsop were most prone to employ FDR as their measuring stick, while the more centrist McCormick also found ways to compare De Gasperi and Truman, especially after the latter’s come-from-behind, “give ‘em hell” re-election of November, 1948.

Let me now sample American journalistic coverage of four thresholds spanning De Gasperi’s tenure as prime minister: 1) the referendum on monarchy/Costituente elections (June, 1946); 2) De Gasperi’s January 1947 visit to the US; 3) the national parliamentary elections of April, 1948; 4) De Gasperi’s deepening difficulties with coalition management at the end of the decade.

I’ll begin with the June, 1946 referendum on the monarchy and the concomitant election of representatives to the Constituent Assembly. Sumner Welles, who had served FDR as assistant secretary of state until 1943, lent his still considerable prestige and influence to the task of introducing De Gasperi to his American readership. Welles highlighted De Gasperi and Enrico De Nicola, the newly elected provisional president, as “two able patriots,” starting the new Italian Republic out “under favorable political auspices.” Besides his renown as “Italy’s outstanding constitutional lawyer,” De Nicola was praised for an earlier role not generally known to his American readers: “When the leaders of the democratic and resistance groups refused to take part in any government under Victor Emmanuel III, Dr. De Nicola conducted the negotiations which brought about the abdication of the king. He was thus largely responsible for the establishment of the popular government.” “De Gasperi,” Welles added, “has long since proved his political vision and his exceptional statesmanship.”

Half a year later, in January of 1947, De Gasperi visited the US for the first time, stopping in New York, Cleveland and Washington. The chief goals of his trip were to try to soften the terms of the pending Allied peace treaty with Italy, and to obtain immediate economic assistance. De Gasperi’s ten-day tour is generally viewed as having been a media “triumph,” prompting as it did the favorable comments of a wide segment of the American press, which normally showed only a limited interest in Italy. Especially important was the backing he received from Walter Lippmann—arguably the most respected journalist and independent political thinker of his generation. Lippmann’s January 7, 1947 syndicated

20 Miller, United States and Italy, p. p. 219. See also Perrone’s detailed analysis in his De Gasperi e l’America, pp. 34-74.
column affirmed that “Mr. De Gasperi is no ex-enemy statesman.” Instead, he has been “always our ally and the partisan of the civilization which the war was fought to defend.” Consequently, “our friend” Italy deserved to receive all the aid it required, in Lippmann’s view.21

At the end of his visit, De Gasperi in fact received several forms of American assistance, most notably a check for $50,000,000. But all was not sweetness and light.

This grant proved highly controversial in some sectors of American public opinion. Let me illustrate by quoting from an angry missive sent to the president in mid-January. I apologize in advance for the vitriolic tone of the letter, written by a lawyer from Massachusetts. The letter opens:

“Dear Mr. President,

Last week I saw in the paper where the Italian Premier departed for home with a Fifty Million Dollar payment by the United States Treasury in his pocket. This is not a loan—but a payment!

Italy not only stabbed France in the back and raped Ethiopia, but Italy was OUR enemy in this war as well. Italy fought us, killed our soldiers, but after long and costly fighting we licked Italy. What has Italy got on us that her Premier can come over here and collect FIFTY MILLION DOLLARS?"22

The author goes on to allude to the income taxes that “hundreds of thousands” of G.I.’s (American servicemen) and their spouses will have to pay in order to cover that gift.

To make matters worse, the Italian economy continued to languish throughout 1947. In May, Sumner Welles reported that

“The Christian Democrats are steadily losing ground. Charges of personal corruption have been brought against some of their leaders. But their loss of popular support is primarily due to Prime Minister De Gasperi’s inability to better economic conditions or to lighten Italy’s peace terms.”23

Welles went on to reprimand both American and Italian negotiators for needlessly dragging out negotiations over a 100 million dollar Export-Import credit “which would be devoted to such productive and self-liquidating projects as hydro-electric plants and new industrial enterprises.” Such use of the credit “would consequently reduce unemployment and raise living standards.” Welles also lectured the Italian government over its failure to communicate greater concern about the economic plight of its people--a lapse which, implicitly, FDR would not have committed.24
Similar reservations lingered, both in American press and policymaking circles, prior to the climactic April 1948 parliamentary elections. More representative, however, was the kind of positive spin offered by Anne McCormick in a March 1948 column. As she put it,

“If De Gasperi has grown notably in office. A modest, unpretentious and naturally quiet man, he manifests unsuspected force in this fateful campaign and has developed into one of the most effective popular speakers in a country where oratory is a commonplace endowment. He has more self-assurance than he had a year ago. Despite overwork and anxiety, his gaunt, sharp-faced face has filled out and his wiry frame, toughened by long practice in mountain-climbing, seems reinvigorated if anything by the challenge of battle. The moderator has turned into a resourceful fighter.”

Once the returns were in, McCormick, Welles and Lippmann each expressed relief at the defeat of the united Socialist and Communist opposition. But Lippmann fretted that even a coalition of as much as 60-70%, combining the Christian Democrats and the Saragat Socialists with what he somewhat condescendingly refers to as “the Splinter parties,” would not be enough “to govern the country well during the trying years ahead.”

The key would be to draw additional Socialist support too.

On a more critical note, Lippmann went on to cite a recent Italian dispatch from a fellow liberal journalist Steward Alsop’s to the effect that

“If the US seemed to have given the Italians the impression that we are a ‘reactionary Santa Claus’. The impression needs to be corrected. For unless the non-Communist coalition identifies itself with the reconstruction of Italy, not merely with antibolshevism and relief, the electoral victory we are celebrating today will gradually become rancid.”

Particularly important here is the explicit re-evocation of “reconstruction” as a worthy, and still unrealized policy direction for Italy.

In a May, 1948 column, Sumner Welles looked to a stronger political presence by reform socialists as “vital to the ability of the De Gasperi cabinet to overcome the bitter opposition of the right wing Christian Democrats to those measures of reform which are imperatively needed to correct the flagrant economic and social abuses which are the chief reasons why communism has made any headway among the Italian masses.” Writing earlier that same month, Alsop noted De Gasperi’s “determination” to overcome “opposition from conservatives in his own party.” De Gasperi and his advisers,” Alsop continued, “speak of tax reform, land reform, irrigation schemes, plans for the reorganization of the chaotic Italian industry.”

Here again, I believe, the echo is unmistakable of progressive American reportage in the 1930s, supporting the crusading FDR as he fought to create the TVA and other New Deal initiatives.


26 Ibid.

Prominent among the advisors who Alsop had in mind was, interestingly enough, Minister of the Interior Mario Scelba, “the short, bald, plump, oddly impressive man who is probably the most powerful man in the government after Premier De Gasperi himself.” “As police minister,” Alsop continues, “Scelba is notably efficient without, it is generally agreed, relying excessively on the usual strong-arm methods.” Scelba impressed the American journalist as more “forward-looking” than the norm for European ministers of the interior, emphasizing the possibility of undermining Communist strength “by determined measures of social and economic improvement—land reform of the great latifundias in south Italy, for example.”

Where liberal columnists like Lippmann, Welles and Alsop often portrayed De Gasperi as a latter day FDR, McCormick, especially after April 1948, compared De Gasperi to Truman. In a July 1948 piece, McCormick set De Gasperi’s personal qualities in the following comparative context:

“Today’s political leaders the world over are mostly little men—or men who appear little because the drama they act in is so overwhelming. The curious thing is that democratic countries seem to shy away from men of towering stature. The commonest objection to de Gaulle in France is that ‘he wants to be too big’ and to Churchill in England that ‘he is too much of a personality.’ De Gasperi in Italy and Schuman in France weather crises because, people say, they represent ‘a good average.’ In Europe Truman is hardly more than a name, perhaps because he followed the eye-filling figure of Roosevelt as war leader.”

I find this comment of McCormick’s fascinating, because once again it confirms something that De Gasperi wrote about himself. The following passage comes from an undated manuscript in the papers of Francesco Bartolotta.

“I remember quite clearly how at a certain point in my political youth, horrified by the disastrous effects of excessive rhetoric, I resolved to speak and write simply and concretely, aiming to convince rather than to entrance, to persuade rather than to receive applause.”

De Gasperi acknowledged that his words cold be “fragmentary and nervous” and indeed “asyntactic at times.” But this was a language that “an attentive public accepted and understood.”

McCormick’s columns of 1948-1951 deftly interweave descriptions of De Gasperi the reconstructor and De Gasperi the stabilizer. Allow me to illustrate with reference to a February, 1949 column bearing the title “Coalition Government in Italy is Working”. Thanks to De Gasperi,

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30 Unpublished, undated manuscript, Personal Papers of Francesco Bartolotta.
“The ‘third force,’” shadowy in France and insubstantial elsewhere, really exists and rules in Italy. Naturally, it contains many divergent elements. The left wing of the Christian Democrats is more radical than the right wing of the Socialists. There is a good deal of distinctly audible criticism on all sides. But the part is not more an omnibus than the Democratic Party in the United States, and with all the murmurs and factions it works. The transition from dictatorship to democracy and from monarchy to republic proceeds with surprising smoothness because the government governs.”

For me, these lines implicitly recall FDR’s gift for building and sustaining coalitions. The following lines, however, are more Trumanesque in their allusions:

“This is due in no small degree to the unspectacular but effective leadership of Alcide de Gasperi. The “new men” (governing Italy) are not young men. They are not veterans like Sforza, Orlando, Don Sturzo and a dozen others of the pre-Fascist era who have come back to place their political experience at the service of their country. They are men without political experience like the President and the Prime Minister, who have been pushed to the top almost by accident.”

McCormick continues,

“De Gasperi’s policy is patience. He seems to be feeling his way among the explosive problems he has to deal with, but perhaps this wary mine-detecting method is the stabilizing force that holds the country in balance.”

The most important phrase here is “stabilizing force.”

By the end of the decade, McCormick had begun to temper her portrayal of De Gasperi on ideological as well as personal grounds. As I move towards concluding my discussion of McCormick, let me cite one more passage, this time from a July 1950 column. Transcending the American analogies which had dominated her earlier reportage, McCormick portrayed De Gasperi, Schuman and Adenauer as

“three of a kind, it is sometimes said, because they belong to the same party—that movement toward the “radical” center which is the only new (European) political phenomenon of the postwar period.”

31 *New York Times*, 16 February, 1949
I would like to turn my attention now to the *Partisan Review*, a leftist journal published in New York City. Italian cultural and political affairs garnered fairly regular attention in the pages of this lively publication. Founded in 1934 and briefly affiliated with the American Communist Party, the review provided a welcome forum for readers seeking an alternative leftist vision—neither Stalinist or liberal. Though it regularly attracted only around 10,000 readers, the review became almost obligatory reading for the American intellectual elite: no other publication matched its breadth of contributing thinkers, essayists, novelists, and poets. In this sense I think it occupied a comparable position, within its sphere, to that of the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* within the circle of the “prestige press.”

Leading literary interpreters of the post-war Italian scene within the pages of *Partisan Review* included the philosophical and literary critic William Barrett, writer Eleanor Clark (author of the celebrated narrative *Rome and a Villa*). Of particular relevance for our purposes here is a piece written by Nicola Chiaromonte, a free-spirited, radical Italian exile who had left his native land in 1934 and then fought for the republic in the Spanish Civil War. In his “Letter from Italy,” published in *Partisan Review* in early 1952, the author approached De Gasperi in an ironic key, portraying him as an admirable figure hitched to a power structure in many ways unworthy of him. Indeed, De Gasperi’s personal virtues rendered him indispensable both to his party and to his government. “If the Democristian party were anything like a homogeneous political formation,” Chiaromonte noted,

> “the position of the honest and moderate De Gasperi would remain strong indeed. But the Democratics constitute a very peculiar and treacherous organism; an amalgam of a mass party, a political machine, and a medley of conflicting economic interests... the mass party is supplied by the Vatican and Catholic organizations; the political machine is based on the huge network of key positions the party has been able to build up throughout the country during the six years it has remained in power; the economic interests are simply the big vested interests of Italy, plus Catholic labor.”

Always “the scrupulous bureaucrat of the old Austro-Hungarian school,” De Gasperi

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36 Chiaromonte’s depiction closely parallels that offered some years earlier by H. Stuart Hughes, the OSS officer who went on to become a leading American historian of contemporary Italy: “Americans only saw ‘the upper part of the Christian Democratic iceberg’—the part that symbolized Western democratic values ‘The could not see the lower part—larger and more ramifying, where actions and entrenched practices belied the lofty aims of the official leadership.’” Cited in Diggins, “Mussolini and Fascism,” p. 385.
37 A phrase, in American political discourse, bearing slight but unmistakable connotations of corruption.
38 Nicola Chiaromonte, “Letter from Italy” *Partisan Review* XIX, 1 (Jan-Feb. 1952), 89.
could not be accused of "boldness, or even of the slightest political imagination." 39 In a subsequent moment, Chiaromonte went on to cite Catholic Action leader Luigi Gedda’s “journalistic attacks against De Gasperi’s ‘exasperated democratic praxis.’”40

In conclusion, I would like to turn to another piece appearing in the pages of the Partisan Review. In the May/June, 1951 issue of the magazine, Elizabeth Hardwick published a very short story entitled “A Florentine Conference.” Permit me to quote a few lines here. The scene brings together a young Italian marquis and an American photographer who made propaganda films for the American government:

“This photographer felt deeply the tab of professional insult common to people who have lived in a foreign country for a few years and still find their opinions not asked for at home. His little face, all of it, all at once, frowned with injury. ‘Our policy is hopeless! De Gasperi’s hands are tied because he needs the financial support of the landowners and when you depend upon that support you aren’t likely to set about land reform with any great speed—“

Ah, yes, slow and modest .but a very good man, a good, honest fellow, understand, De Gasperi?” the Marchese said vaguely.

“We ought to back De Gasperi with some of the money we’re pouring into the wrong places, back him and tell him to go ahead with the reforms . He sighed and shrugged, bone weary with his government, that fractious wife driving him to divorce.”41

Here I find summed up several major interpretive keys of my presentation. Reconstruction, however improbable, remained as necessary as ever. New Deal liberals found themselves more and more isolated, even inaudible, in Washington. And De Gasperi remained an icon of decency, but also a presence who now rationalized and justified the conservative status quo.

My goal has been to assist in De Gasperi’s rehabilitation, in a sense—not on the level of power politics, but on that of historical appreciation. I hope I may have managed to free him from the deformations and exaggerations—however inevitable—of the Cold War, the period which British spy novelist John Le Carre` has evoked in works such as his Looking Glass Wars. Instead, we seek to clean the windows so as to see more clearly, from one side of the Atlantic to another, and from our present, privileged position toward our common past.

39 Ibid.
40 Ibid, p 90.
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01/2004. Fitoussi, Jean-Paul, The International Scene and the Economic Government of Europe


