

# Venice, the oligarchy's capital, makes plans to rule the 'New Yalta'

by Pietro Cicconi

Venice has stopped putting out the word that she is in her death-throes, as she used to do at the onset of the 1960s economic boom, and has thrown herself into a whirlpool of activity. The entire press talks about Venice: world-class conventions, symposia, projects, intercontinental projects, exhibits and expositions, and above all, closed-door meetings of the oligarchy, both secular and clerical. The nervous little paces with which the "Venice that counts" normally moves from one corner of the city to the other, have become quicker and more frenetic.

On March 9, the Milan newspapers *Il Giorno* and *L'Avvenire* reported, under headlines such as "Venice, Capital of Europe," the press conference of Carlo Bernini, president of the Veneto Region, who announced for spring 1986 a six-day seminar to discuss the role of the "city of the doges" as "the ideal capital of all of Europe: Western, Eastern, and neutral. That is, the Europe that goes from the Atlantic to the Urals." The official consensus that reverberated from this initiative of the Veneto Region and the Cini Foundation was almost universal. This, essentially a "forum for peace and culture," should take place in Venice every two years.

This initiative is flanked by the setting up of an "International Center for the Environment," an idea born of the collaboration of the Venetian economics university, Ca' Foscari, and several California universities, and promoted by several levels of local governments—the region, the province, the city government and by Ca' Foscari itself. Venice is thereby supposed to become the capital of Greenie environmentalism as the complement to pacifism.

Among the most important other initiatives should also be noted the international meeting at the Benedictine Abbey of Praglia, near Padua, on the theme: "Christians Between Technological Innovation and Social Transformation," held between March 9 and 10 on the initiative of the "Institute of Friends of Maritain." It is perhaps one of the most sophisticated initiatives that is simmering in the Venetian pot. Among the illustrious names, we cite only that of Archbishop Rembert Weakland, leader of the U.S. branch of the Benedictine order and the American Bishops' Conference, who directed the writing of the pastoral letter on the economy. The delphic smokescreens of that letter were penetrated by an *EIR* corre-

spondent, who ran into the Abbot-Archbishop in Latrobe, in Pennsylvania, upon his return from Venice. Directly questioned on monetary issues, Weakland admitted he is against "bilateral aid" from the United States to the underdeveloped countries, and favored channeling all aid through one multi-lateral entity: the International Monetary Fund. This position is diametrically opposed to the condemnation of such institutions, expressed by Pope John Paul II.

## 'Venice toward the year 2000'

Another very important meeting was held on March 10 on the theme, "Venice Toward 2000," organized by the Venetian Press Association. The moderator was Venetian Mayor Rigo and the distinguished guests included Italian Minister of Finance Bruno Visentini, Minister of Labor Gianni De Michelis, and Minister of Health Costante Degan. De Michelis, who affects the persona of an unwashed rugby player, threw himself into an impassioned description of the initiatives, while Visentini played the role of the cool aristocrat who would shrink at anything in "bad taste."

The contents of the debate were published in the Venetian magazine *Marco Polo*, in a feature-spread opened by an interview with Cesare De Michelis, the minister's brother, who says among other things, "If then, as the Republic was concluding its 1,000-year history [in the eighteenth century], from Venice there came an exodus of men and things, of intelligence and wealth, today it is finally possible to think about a reversal of direction, a rich and numerous comeback." And: "Finally the organization of the post-industrial society, its logic of growth and development, are no longer incompatible with the historic city." He concludes: "Therefore it is necessary to gather up our forces, energies, and resources into an ad hoc institution . . . which would work to define an overall plan, drawing upon the resources of imagination and intelligence which the architects—the best architects in the world—can, and know how to give; it [such an institution] would gather the economic resources, the great economic resources which are needed. . . . If the Arsenal becomes the headquarters of the Venetian information industry, the center of a productive system that would know how to take advantage of the immense cultural wealth possessed

by the city and the region, the *fondaco* to which merchants and consumers will flock, then Venice will not only have won a battle, it will have, above all, reconquered a role and function in the world which is now approaching the third millennium."

It is an old project: It was promoted by the Fascist Finance Minister Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata, with the petrochemical zone of Porto Marghera, the Biennale art show, the Lido resort, the luxury railroad-cars and hotel chains flaunting the conspicuous consumption of the very rich and very decadent, all centered around Venice. Notwithstanding that project's dismal failure, Volpi's son Giovanni was back at it again a couple of years ago with an interview in the mass-circulation magazine *Gente*, calling for Venice to become a free port, or as he put it, "a new Babylon." Last winter, the famous historian Fernand Braudel climbed on the bandwagon by proposing nothing less than the restoration of the Serenissima Repubblica, complete with Doge, Inquisition, Council of Ten, Senate, and Great Council—all the trappings that made the Venetian republic the most feared bastion of oligarchism and repression in post-Renaissance Europe.

Last January, De Michelis made the proposal of holding in Venice the universal Expo of the 1990s, a proposal which he proudly defined as "a fist" (sports-fan jargon for a culture shock). Starting now, a trillion liras would have to be poured into the project. Meanwhile Venice grabbed almost the entire Italian stand at the upcoming Tsukuba Expo in Japan: stained-glass bridges to replace the wooden one now spanning the Grand Canal, satellites for the spectroscopic mapping of the lagoon, and the most refined laser and other techniques for restoring works of art, and many other by-products derived from the past industrial boom, with which to gussy up the old whore of the lagoon and dazzle the Japanese and other investors.

Dominating the whole buildup is the restoration of Venice's ancient Arsenal. But to do what? No one is explicit. At the "Venice Toward 2000" forum, Visentini merely said that tourism is not enough. The abstract idea is to reconstruct the Arsenal, not merely as an item of folklore, not merely for tourism, and not merely as a center for soft technologies coming out of the Expo, but as a very complex blending of those and other things.

### L'arzanà de' Viniziani

At this point one can't help asking whether it seems likely that a figure like Visentini, the minister of finance who has climbed to his position thanks to the obsequious backing of the Italian Communist Party, in order to enjoy such perverse satisfactions as spreading hunger through Italy by defining meat as a luxury consumption item, can really be interested in giving up his position as a cabinet minister to become the mayor of 80,000 inhabitants who have taken it into their heads to restore a run-down quarter and use it for an exhibit

of technological "toys."

The stench of fraud brings to mind the famous lines of Dante's *Inferno*, when he speaks of the inmates of the fifth ring of the Eighth Circle of Hell, the domain of the Fraudulent:

And so from bridge to bridge, talking of other things  
of which my comedy does not care to sing,  
we came; and we were holding the peak, when  
we stopped to see the other ditch  
of Malebolge and the other vain plants;  
and I saw it as amazingly dark.  
Just as in the Arsenal of the Venetians  
the tenacious pitch boils in winter-time,  
to patch up their unfit boats,  
that cannot sail; in that instance  
whoever makes his boat anew and who patches up  
the sides of one which has made many voyages;  
who beats on the prow and who on the poop. . .

Why in the world did Dante use the bustling of productive activity in the "arzanà de' viniziani" to describe the grafters in this circle? At bottom, the Arsenal was always a model of productivity; suffice it to recall that the workers received their wages even when they were old and no longer able to work—an extremely rare situation for the year 1300. It was a large quarter, very well organized and well cared for by the patriciate, with its own urbanistic structure, which had responsibility for the job of building and repairing the entire Venetian fleet, commercial and military, and providing arms to both the ships and the land fortresses. It was a model feudal laboratory, just as is now being re-proposed.

Dante knew the Venetians well, so well that the latter have decided to say that their otherwise complete archives are "missing" the volumes relating to the period of his visit to the lagoon in 1321, which cost him his life. On the Arsenal Dante understood that this was the only instrument by which the oligarchy could impose its will upon reality, the only link to the real economy. It was the infernal tool by which economic-military diktats were imposed, thanks to the Venetian Empire's immense cultural-diplomatic-espionage superstructure.

In short, without the ships and soldiers, it would have been impossible to trade in slaves, or go to buy where it was possible to buy cheaply and go to re-sell where one could extract the most, to loot capitals of empires, to gain military advantages and logistical support bases. Without the Arsenal, the vast world of spying, of psychological and cultural warfare for which Venice is notorious, would have belonged to the world of dreams; it could never have existed, because the Arsenal was the only contact point between the sick fantasies and reality, through which the expeditions were sent out to ruin the economies of entire regions, and to make and unmake empires.

There is another lesson to learn from history: that of Savonarola, the Dominican "ayatollah" whose fiery sermons sparked the destruction of the Florentine Platonic renaissance in a wave of "fundamentalist revivalism" in 1494. He was a self-declared Venetian agent of influence, who wove the praises of the Most Serene Republic as often as those of the Creator into his sermons, often accompanied by book burning, and his power was—too late—undermined by Machiavelli. It was Savonarola who caused the end of the Renaissance in Italy, by upsetting the balancing role of Florence, and therefore setting off the wave of invasions by foreign troops, egged on by the Venetians, up to the Sack of Rome in 1527. It was after these disasters that intellectuals, artists, and cultured persons began to migrate to Venice, "haven of liberty," and that led to the "long golden autumn of the Venetian Renaissance." Naturally it was autumn, because there was not a drop of creative intellectual energy in Venice. Instead, the Serenissima exploited parasitically the marvelous efflorescence of the other cities to construct, in the ensuing years, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, leading up to the disasters of the Thirty Years War.

### The project of intellectual jackals

Perhaps the comparison between the fundamentalist economic policy of Visentini and the "cultural" policy of Savonarola could dispel the fog hanging over the lagoon. To the Visentinian austerity devastating Italy, and the poverty which is silencing the genius of new generations, Venice counterposes herself as the "beacon of hope," trying to lure the best intellectuals produced in the universities, including from abroad, to make them work in her own Arsenal. It is in this perspective that Carlo Bernini launched the idea of a conference of all European university heads saying, "We want to put European youth in touch with the great masters of thought."

Given that slave galleys no longer are permitted to hold world hegemony, let us see what the new Arsenal could produce for this purpose.

1) **Robotics.** The Russians are enslaving their children on assembly lines because they do not have enough manpower to meet their ambitious arms buildup programs. Venice can offer robots, or "prototypes" of robots, to be eventually mass-produced somewhere in the Pacific, for example. For this Venice can count on its own secret channels in the United States to swipe the know-how deriving from beam-weapons R&D, camouflage it as originality in the Arsenal, and re-sell it to the Russians. These channels could be the IMF Benedictine circle already mentioned, as well as the Aspen Institute, among others. Venice now hosts Aspen's most important foothold in Europe, and the president of Aspen-Italy, Francesco Cossiga, is now a candidate for President of the Italian Republic.

2) **Informatics.** Venice has already "arrived" in the information sector, where it almost has a monopoly through

the Olivetti firm, which also sponsors Venetian art. The president of Olivetti's financial international holding company is Visentini himself. This serves as the control of modern information. In fact, according to the Gnostic definition of Umberto Eco, whoever has control over computers, commands; and whoever executes the programs appearing on the computer, obeys.

3) **Leisure.** The essential component of "recreation" for the technetronic society, is the Venetians' ace-in-the-hole: Carnival; the art of discreet display of power, taste, and culture by a thousand-year-old ruling class; continual experiments on how to brainwash people by convincing them that they are having the time of their life; and the well-established "fashion" and "design" sectors, as well as "art."

The Venetians are convinced that they are impregnable. They say to the Russians: You play your game, conquer what you want, and how you want, but don't ever think you can conquer Venice, because you are too crude to touch this very sophisticated mechanism, and you would pay the consequences, because the U.S.A. would end up having the decisive technological advantage.

This self-confidence in knowing how the East-West game will be played has a particular effect on the ultra-Venetian sector of insurance (Assicurazioni Generali and Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà, RAS), which would increase its own profits incredibly, through its monopoly of intelligence on risks in a shrinking society.

The problem now is, how will the Venetians engineer this "Arsenal"? Presumably, in Phase One everything will be concentrated on the Expo and restoring Venice, although the sheer number of banks which are asking to open their windows suggests that there are many who already know what's in the bag. The investments pouring in already far exceed the number of *palazzos* to be restored, and we imagine that the plan is not like Volpi's rather crude one in the Mussolini days, but that it will develop according to external response.

Venice wants to go back to being the needle on the balance between East and West, as Bernini hinted in his press conference: "The magical city between East and West is simultaneously daughter and mother"—and this is the goal to which Visentini aspires.

### Does Italy deserve confidence?

Let us hear the Russians' opinion: "The future of Europe passes through two roads: peace, or nuclear war, and the Venice initiative is important because it goes toward peace. And it is for this reason that the U.S.S.R. is joining the initiative." These are the words from the Soviet ambassador to Italy, Nikolai Lunkov, concerning the proposal of the 1986 "forum." Translating from the Russian, the word "peace" means Europe's entry into the Soviet sphere of influence, as an overall complex of satrapies, which has to pay tribute to the empire. If that scenario is allowed to unfold, Venice expects to play a major, controlling role.