

Italian state opens showdown against secessionist Northern League

by Claudio Celani

After the failure of the Sept. 15 secessionist demonstration organized by the Northern League, which was supposed to show mass support for Umberto Bossi's lunatic project of a Northern Italian nation called "Padania," Italian state authorities have moved against the League leaders, starting a long-awaited showdown. As of this writing, five national prosecutors have opened investigations against Northern League leader Bossi, for crimes ranging from "slander" (a misdemeanor) to the serious "attempt against the unity of the state," which is punishable with life imprisonment. If any of the League leaders are believed to have committed the crime *in flagrante delicto*, they can be arrested immediately.

However, although the evolution of the Northern League into a racist, fascist-like movement with its own militia cannot be ignored, some observers are worried about the ability of state authorities to implement a serious crackdown. A faction in the Italian liberal establishment, allied to the City of London, supports the League, and is pushing to radicalize the conflict in order to weaken the state institutions and implement free-market economic reforms. Therefore, the state must neutralize the Trojan horse inside its institutions; thus only, can it hope to be effective in the decisive fight for its survival.

The Padania flop

If the plans cooked up in the British Foreign Office had gone through, Sept. 15 would have given a shock along the whole "southern flank" of Europe, accelerating the strategy for demolition of sovereign nation-states. On the same day that the Serbian fascists were supposed to win elections in Bosnia, Italy's Northern League was expected to mobilize a mass demonstration for the symbolic birth of "Padania," the entity encompassing northern Italian regions, which is supposed to secede from the Italian nation, according to Bossi's lunatic proclamations. But events have taken another turn.

It is known that the huge vote garnered by the League in the last national elections (up to 30% in regions such as Lombardy and Veneto) is mainly a protest vote, and League voters do not support Bossi's secessionist intentions. However, a mass turnout would have inserted the League back into the political game from which it has been recently excluded. Above all, this would have helped defeat the resistance, in the present government coalition, to radical budget-cutting and privatization policies demanded by the International Mone-

tary Fund and the so-called "financial markets."

But instead of the millions of people promised by Bossi, a few tens of thousands showed up at the three-day pagan celebrations on the Po River, culminating in a rally in Venice, the chosen capital of the "Padania" state. On Sunday, in Venice, according to the League, there were 70,000 people; according to the press, 30,000; according to the Carabinieri (military police), 18,000; according to the national police, 15,000; according to the city police, 10,000. In contrast, a counter-demonstration called by the conservative National Alliance party in Milan, drew a crowd of 150,000.

The lack of a consistent popular support for Bossi's lunacies prompted Italy's President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro to give the green light for a crackdown. In a speech on Sept. 15, Scalfaro, a former prosecutor who presides over Italy's Superior Council of the Magistrates, the governing body of the Judicial branch, declared that the Judiciary should move and find out whether League leaders could be prosecuted because of their secessionist campaign.

The next day, Francesco Borrelli, chairman of the Milan prosecutor's office, declared in an interview with the daily *Corriere della Sera*, "We are a step before a legal prosecution" against the League. Borrelli's statements gave a signal at least as important, if not more, as Scalfaro's. In his capacity as director of the self-proclaimed Clean Hands "anti-corruption" campaign, Borrelli has been one of the most powerful Italian figures in the last years. Due to its role in virtually destroying Italy's traditional political system, the Clean Hands pool has been characterized as "the real government."

Bossi's game

Prosecuting League leaders is not difficult. In fact, they seem so eager to provide grounds for constitutional violations, that one has the impression that they want to be prosecuted. For instance, in Mantua, during his voyage along the Po, Bossi called on the "government of Padania," a farsical body formed by League members, "to start recruiting a Padania national guard." The next day in Venice, in front of the few thousand Leaguers, he had the Italian flag pulled down and replaced with the "Padania" flag, a stylized green flower symbolizing the "Sun of Padania." The ceremony was guarded by 300 "Green Shirts," the League's militia. Bossi then read the result of the "referendum" organized among

League supporters (2 million, according to the League; fewer than 130,000, according to police), who overwhelmingly voted for separating "Padania" from the Italian state, and announced that the secession would be completed in one year.

On the next day, both the Mantua and Venice prosecutors' offices opened official investigations. On Sept. 18, the police entered League headquarters in Milan, seizing records by force against resisting militants. In the violent confrontation, League number-two man Roberto Maroni was slightly wounded. Forty-eight hours earlier, Maroni had shown up with Bossi at a press conference where, before the international media, Bossi had declared: "If they arrest me, I will declare myself a political prisoner, and you know what will happen then."

Experts on "strategy of tension" scenarios consulted by this writer suggest that Bossi wants to provoke a reaction in order to play the martyr, confident that, at present, a legal action would not have "facts" (besides his statements) to really hurt him. A token action against the League, in the judgment of observers, would provoke a reaction from League extremist fringes, ready to start a Corsican-like terrorist upsurge.

Gladio and George Bush

The League is pre-programmed to work in such a direction. Sections of Italy's "parallel secret service," which played a role in staging terrorism in the 1970s and 1980s, have placed themselves at the highest level inside the party. For example, it has been revealed that the chairman of the League Parliament group, Domenico Comino, was recruited into the NATO secret organization "Gladio," a "stay behind" network which was supposed to fight against a possible communist military attack against Italy. In reality, behind the official structure, Gladio covered for a parallel one, which ran destabilization operations, including acts of terrorism. Documents from the military secret service, SISMI, now in the hands of the Parliament Investigating Committee on Terrorism, show that Comino was assigned to the Fourth Special Training Center of Gladio, in Asti, which, since the middle of the 1980s, was in charge of dealing with organized crime and industrial security, activities which are far away from the original aims of the structure.

Other documents, seized by investigators after the Andreotti government, in 1990, revealed the existence of the secret Gladio organization, show that its members were trained for actions aimed at promoting separatist insurgencies.

But Gladio was not an "Italian" operation. It was part of NATO and, as such, run by British and pro-British American command structures, which overlap with George Bush and Oliver North's international drug-running and terrorism operations.

Not accidentally, the name of George Bush surfaces in one of the five investigations of the League, code-named "Phony Money," run by the Aosta prosecutor's office headed by Dr.



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Davide Monti. In an interview with *EIR* last June, Monti had pointed to the existence of an "international secret service structure" supporting a money-recycling scheme he had uncovered, in which prominent League members were involved. In the investigation, the name of Bush had emerged, through the law firm of James Baker III in Houston. This firm had assisted League-connected figures in a scheme designed to lure Russia into buying old Weimar Germany Gold Bonds at a discount, and using them at face-value to pay back outstanding debts to the German government. Such an operation, Monti stressed, would have destabilized Germany. The scheme also involved investments in derivatives speculation, forgery, and fraud. Key to the operation was Alvaro Robelo, a Nicaraguan banker, well connected to high-level Contra circles.

On Sept. 18, a committee of the Italian Senate gave Monti the green light to force Bossi to appear in Aosta in order to be interrogated on the "Phony Money" scheme.

A breakthrough in this investigation would give public exposure to the real international dimension of the secessionist threat. At the same time, the Italian government and pronation forces must recognize that the problem to face is the economic collapse due to free-market policies, a collapse which has generated the electoral support for the League. That protest vote can be manipulated to destroy the nation even after Bossi and company are removed from the scene.