

Italy: Immigration, Economic Flexibility, and Integration

Kitty Calavita

University of California, Irvine

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Introduction

Since the republic of Italy was formed in the late 1800s, millions of Italians have emigrated, seeking economic opportunities in virtually every corner of the globe. In the three decades after World War II, over 7 million Italians left Italy, helping to form the backbone of the labor force that provided the economic boom in European countries to the north (Istat, 1980).¹

In the late 1970s, Italy's migration stream began to reverse course, and by the early 1980s for the first time more immigrants entered Italy than left it. The 1981 census showed a net increase in population due both to return migration and new arrivals (Maciotti and Pugliese 1991: 6). It also indicated that the number of people "present" in Italy exceeded the number legally "resident," suggesting an influx of unauthorized immigrants. Since then, the number of immigrants to Italy has increased rapidly, and Italy now has one of the fastest growing immigrant populations in Europe. Indicative of Italy's recent emergence as a country of immigration, in 1999 for the first time remittances from immigrants in Italy to their countries of origin exceeded remittances coming into Italy from former Italian emigrants (Pugliese 2000a: 15).

While immigration to Italy is a relatively new phenomenon, it has undergone several important changes in the last decade, as has the Italian political economy itself. Perhaps the most important of these changes are the continually increasing schism between the economies of the northern and southern regions of Italy and the correspondingly different economic roles of immigrants in those regions; an increase in

¹ Four million of these returned to Italy periodically as they shuttled back and forth from jobs in northern Europe and elsewhere.

the proportion of legal immigrants relative to the illegal population, particularly in the north; greater activism on the part of employers in demanding immigrant labor; a new center-right coalition government that has made immigration controls a centerpiece of its political platform; and, the continuing regional de-centralization of immigration policymaking and implementation.

It is often noted by government sources, scholars, and media commentators that Italy has among the lowest birthrates in the world, that its native population is declining, and that it has a rapidly aging population. It is also generally recognized that the increased standard of living over the past three decades means that fewer Italians are willing to work for the meagre wages that some jobs pay, and fewer still are willing to move to the economically expanding regions of northern Italy for such jobs. Despite these demographic and economic trends, and the role of immigrants in offsetting them, the public debate in Italy over the advantages and disadvantages of immigration and the proper policy response remains heated. The debate intensifies periodically when there are highly visible and dramatic landings of boatloads of immigrants and refugees, as was the case in March, 2002, when the arrival in Sicily of a boatload of 928 Iraqi Kurds prompted the government to declare an immigration “state of emergency” (Martirano 2002: 9; Romano 2002: 1; Mola 2002: 21; *Migration News* 2002c).

This paper examines the new immigration to Italy, the role of various sectors of Italian society in advocating on behalf of immigrants or contesting their presence, and the parameters and consequences of Italian immigration policy. The data I will present here reveal two very broad patterns. First, the new immigration to Italy is largely a labor migration and is perceived as such by both the immigrants themselves and policymakers.

Not only do the majority of immigrants enter Italy for economic reasons, but legal residency is generally predicated on a labor contract. Second, there is a considerable gap between the announced intention of Italian immigration policy and its outcomes. This chapter presents the latest available statistics on immigration in Italy, the integration of immigrants in Italian society and the role of immigrants in the economy; sketches the outlines of Italian immigration policy; and, attempts to account theoretically for the wide policy gap between intent and outcome.

The paper is organized as follows. First, I will present data on the size of the immigrant population, the national origins of immigrants, their regional distribution in Italy, and their integration into Italian society. Next, I will focus on the role of foreign workers in the economy, including a discussion of the characteristics of the Italian economy and the location of non-European workers in various sectors of the economy and in Italy's different regions. In the third section, I discuss Italian public opinion towards immigration. Then, I describe the policy response to immigration over time, beginning with the laws of 1986 and 1990, and tracing in more detail the comprehensive law of 1998 and its reform by the current center-right government. In this section, I emphasize the conspicuous gaps between the purported intent of government policy, particularly its emphasis on integration, and its actual effects. In the concluding chapter, I attempt to make sense of the apparent failure of Italy's immigration policies, with particular emphasis on the economic-structural and ideological context.

The Size, Distribution, and Integration of the Immigrant Population

Italy was transformed from a country of emigration to a country of large-scale immigration in part as a consequence of domestic economic growth and the increasing immigration restrictions of its northern European neighbors. The economic discrepancy between Italy and northern Europe had narrowed by the mid-1970s, with per capita income and gross domestic product in Italy rapidly approaching that of more affluent northern European countries (Venturini 1991: 93-94). The increased employment opportunities and higher wages accompanying the “economic miracle” in Italy attracted immigrants from the developing world, much as ten or twenty years earlier southern Italians had been pulled north to industrial jobs in France, Switzerland, Germany, and even northern Italy.

This initial influx of immigrants occurred at precisely the moment that northern European receiving countries began closing their doors to foreign workers. To some extent, Italy became a “back door” to the rest of Europe, but it also became an alternative to northern destinations (Macioti and Pugliese 1991: 12). In a 1991 study of 1,525 legal and illegal immigrants in Italy, approximately 40 percent stated that one reason they chose Italy as a destination was its relative ease of entrance; an equal number mentioned job opportunities in Italy as a reason for their choice (CNEL 1991: 43).

Official figures on the size of the legally resident population vary according to the government agency producing the data, their sources, and the administrative purposes of the data collection. One source for the number of foreigners legally resident in Italy is the Ministry of the Interior, whose data are based on the number of residence permits issued each year. However, the Catholic service organization, Caritas, which deals extensively with immigrants in the provision of services and is widely regarded as the most

authoritative source on information about immigrants, has argued that government data tend to undercount foreign residents, particularly minors who do not necessarily have separate residence permits.

According to the Ministry of the Interior data, there were approximately 1,400,000 legal foreign residents in Italy as of January 1, 2001. Caritas estimates that the total number of legal immigrants is closer to 1,700,000 (cited in *Annuario Sociale* 2001: 571). As Table 1 shows, the number of legal immigrants in Italy has risen almost five-fold since 1981 and has doubled in the last decade alone.² With a total population of 57 million, Italy still has the lowest percentage of foreign-born residents (less than 3%) in Europe. Table 2 compares the estimates of the Ministry of the Interior and Caritas, and shows the distribution of legal residents across Italy's 20 regions. As we see here, well over half of Italy's legal immigrant residents live in Italy's industrial northern regions. Almost half of the immigrant population lives in just two regions—Lombardy (the northern region around Milan) and Lazio (the central region where Rome is located). The concentration of immigrants in Italy's northern (and to a lesser extent, central) regions has continued over time, and indeed shows signs of increasing (See Table 3).

While Milan and Rome and other major cities have the largest absolute numbers of foreign-born residents, the highest per capita concentrations are found in some of the smaller towns and villages of the northeast. For example, the town of Altivole in the

² The Italian census agency (Istat) has recently released figures from the 2001 census that put the number of legally resident foreigners in Italy at 987,363 (Istat, cited in de Luca 2002: 13). This figure is considerably lower than previous estimates of federal agencies and immigration experts. This in part reflects the fact that the census figures include only those immigrants who have registered their residency with city hall, a technical requirement for all residents of Italy. This is clearly a subset of those immigrants with residence permits (on which the Ministry of the Interior estimates are based). The lower figure may also be the result of the notorious difficulties of census-counters to document the presence of foreigners and other marginalized individuals. The President of the prestigious Italian Center for the Study of Social Phenomena (CENSIS), told one reporter, "I believe that the figure of [987,363] is...an underestimate" (quoted in de Luca 2002: 13).

northeast region of Veneto has the largest ratio of immigrants to natives in Italy. In a town of 6000, there are approximately 900 immigrants, according to the Mayor. Of the 329 immigrants officially registered in City Hall, 25 different nationalities are represented. In this town of critical labor shortages and a declining and aging local population, one out of every two new hires is an immigrant (Stella 2001: 17). In this rather remote town in the northern Italian countryside, one long-time local resident says with a glint in her eye, “I came to expect just about anything out of life, except that I would grow old in a Chinese industrial district” (paraphrased in Stella 2001: 17).

The size and distribution of the irregular or undocumented immigrant population is difficult to gauge. Not surprisingly, estimates vary. The Minister of the Interior has put the number of illegal residents at about 250,000 (cited in CNN Italia online, December 18, 2000). The Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development (Organizzazione per la Cooperazione e lo Sviluppo Economico, cited in *Annuario Sociale* 2001: 553) estimates that the number of illegal immigrants—including both those who entered illegally (the “clandestini”) and those whose entry or residence permits have expired—approaches 20% of the immigrant population, or about 340,000. Caritas has most recently estimated that there are approximately 300,000 undocumented immigrants in Italy (cited in *Migration News*, 2002a; see also Pugliese 2000a: 17).

As shown in Table 4, the majority of immigrants to Italy come from outside the European Union. The largest source region for non-EU immigrants is Africa, followed by Eastern and Central Europe. Morocco is the single largest source country, providing approximately 10% of the total number of legal foreign residents in Italy. If illegal residents were included, the percentage from Morocco would be even larger. As Table 4

indicates, there has been a substantial increase in the share of non-EU residents since 1994, including a dramatic increase in immigration from Eastern and Central Europe, and smaller but significant increases in the proportion of immigrants from African and Asian countries.

The proportion of female immigrants has increased slightly over time, with women now constituting approximately 45% of the legal immigrant stock (See Table 5). The distribution of female immigrants across Italy's regions roughly approximates that of the male immigrant population (Annuario Sociale 2001: 573). However, female immigrants come disproportionately from a select number of countries. While 72% of foreign residents from Morocco are male, females account for 66% of immigrants from the Philippines, 70% of Polish immigrants, and 68% of immigrants from Peru (Ministry of the Interior 2001: 278).

Given that Italy is a country of rather recent immigration, it is perhaps not surprising that the degree of integration of its immigrants—as reflected in a variety of indicators—is somewhat less than in countries of long-term immigration where many foreign residents settled decades ago and have developed deep roots. Fewer than one-quarter of foreign residents have lived in Italy for at least five years, and only about 15% (many of whom come from the United States and from other European countries) have lived there for a decade or more (See Table 6). It is worth noting that these figures are on the rise, with the number of foreign residents living in Italy at least five years increasing by over 28% from the end of 1998 to the end of 1999 (Caritas 2000: 170).

Another important indicator of the degree of integration of immigrants into Italian society is naturalization figures. The acquisition of Italian citizenship is difficult for those not born with at least one Italian parent. Because Italy is essentially a country of *jus sanguinis*, there are only two routes available to foreigners to obtain Italian citizenship—marrying an Italian citizen and living in Italy as a legal resident for at least ten consecutive years. In 1998, approximately 12,000 foreign citizens were granted Italian citizenship. In 1999, fewer than 11,300 achieved that status, with 85% of those based on marriage to an Italian and only 15% (approximately 1700) the result of long-term residency (Caritas 2000: 175; see also Zincone 2001: 123).

It is estimated that there are currently in Italy 160,000 “mixed” married couples, or couples in which one partner is foreign-born (Caritas 2000: 185). In 1996, 9875 Italians married foreigners, 19% of whom were from the European Community and 34% of whom came from Central or Eastern Europe (Caritas 2000: 187-188; see also Zincone 2001: 121-122).

Another way to gauge the extent to which immigrants are settling into the host society is to consider the family status of immigrants and the number of immigrant children present. As Table 7 shows, more than 300,000 residence permits were issued to non-EU immigrants for purposes of family unity in 2000. While the number of immigrant children in Italy is still relatively small, it is increasing rapidly. In January, 2000, there were 229,851 immigrant children present, representing a 26.6% increase over the previous year (Istat 2000). And, in the eight years from 1989 to 1996, there was a 145% increase in the number of babies born in Italy with at least one immigrant parent (ISMU-Cariplo 2001: 20). The number of immigrant children in Italian primary and secondary

schools has increased from just over 6000 in the academic year 1983/84 to more than 85,522 in 1998/99 (See Table 8).

In other words, while the integration of foreigners in Italy probably lags behind their integration in countries of longstanding immigration, the rate of settlement into Italian society seems to be increasing. The incidences of binational marriage, long-term residency, naturalization, and the presence of families have all increased substantially over the last decade. As we will see in a later section, the percentage of legal immigrant workers who have permanent, full-time jobs (in contrast to seasonal or part-time work) is higher in Italy than in any other country in Europe, suggesting that they have become an integral part of the economy as well.

Bonifazi and Sabatino (2000: 44) call this progressive integration of immigrants in Italy a “stabilization” and “normalization” of immigration. They explain, “These dynamics are, without a doubt a consequence of the evolution of immigrant flows and the individual choices of immigrants and their families, but they are also the result of the possibilities present in our country, of its interests and its needs.”

Immigrants Offset Low Birthrates, Aging, and Population Declines

A number of recent studies reveal that “Italy is the oldest country in the world” (quoted in Rosenblatt 2001: A17). A recent U.S. Census Bureau study shows that 18% of Italy’s population is now over the age of sixty-five, and that by 2030 fully 28% of Italy’s population will be sixty-five or older (as compared to 20% for the U.S.) (Kinsella and

Velkoff 2001). The President of the Banca d'Italia, citing a Eurostat study, warned that in 2025, four of the five "oldest" geographical regions in Europe will be in Italy, and that this aging trend will have "profound consequences for the retirement system and for national health care expenditures" (quoted in *La Repubblica*, July 31, 1999: 23). Under the headline "It Will Be Immigrants Who Save Italians' Pensions," the Bank president pointed out that only a hefty infusion of younger and working-age immigrants can ward off the impending crisis (*La Repubblica*, July 31, 1999: 23).

Italy has one of the lowest birthrates in the world, vying with Spain and Japan for that dubious distinction. A recent United Nations report (United Nations Population Division 2000), entitled "Replacement Migration: Is It a Solution to Declining and Ageing Populations," found that Italy, with a birthrate of less than 1.2 per couple, has the most rapidly aging (and declining) population in the world and would have to admit over 2.2 million immigrants annually for the next thirty years in order to fill labor demand and stave off a crisis in its pension system. As shown in Table 9, Italy would require at least 6500 immigrants per million inhabitants, the largest ratio reported in the study. According to this report, in the absence of immigrants, Italy's population would decline from its current 57 million to approximately 41 million by 2050.

The *Annuario Statistico Italiano* (www.demo.istat.it/previsioni/index.html) paints a similar picture. Assuming gradual increases in immigration, this state agency projects a decline in the Italian population from over 58 million in 2010 to 52 million by the year 2050. It also forecasts continued increases in life expectancy, and a continually aging population. With pensioners in Italy already out-numbering active workers, it is not hard

to understand the concern of the president of the Banca d'Italia and his blunt warning, "Italy needs immigrants" (quoted in *La Repubblica* 1999: 23).

Overview of the Italian Economy

Virtually since its unification, Italy has been divided into a thriving industrial north and a quasifeudal, agrarian south. Although the Italian government sponsored emergency measures in the 1960s and 1970s to reverse the effects of decades of underdevelopment in the south, the results were limited to the transfer of a few large factories, many of which have subsequently transferred elsewhere or closed down. This uneven development supplied northern industry in the post-World War II period with an almost limitless supply of cheap labor from the south. Italy's economic growth rate approached 6 percent annually from 1951 to 1971 and the gross national product more than doubled. Millions of people left southern Italy from 1950 to 1975, some crossing the border to northern Europe but many others migrating to the booming factories in northern Italy.

In addition to this geographic split, a pronounced structural division crosscuts the Italian economy. Italy's economy includes a few very large companies (such as Fiat and Olivetti) that have achieved international prominence and an international market, and larger secondary and underground sectors comprising small, often family-run, businesses. The proportion of the Italian economy constituted of smaller businesses has been increasing over the last twenty years. While in 1981, the average size of a company's payroll was twenty, by 1997 the typical Italian firm had shrunk to eight workers

(Ambrosini 2001: 49). By 2000, more than 59% of Italian workers were employed in companies with fewer than twenty workers (Istat 2000).

Italy has one of the largest underground economies in the developed world, ranking second only to Greece. With over 28% of its gross domestic product delivered by this “submerged” part of the economy, and employing approximately 25% of the total workforce, this is a thriving and integral part of the Italian economic system (Eurispes 2001: 752-762). Nor does it show any signs of retreat as Italy joins the roster of high-tech, advanced capitalist economies. Indeed, it is estimated that the proportion of the economy that is “underground” has increased by more than 10% since 1994. Here too, there is a pronounced geographic difference, with approximately 51% of underground work found in Italy’s southern regions (Tartaglione 2001: 3).

Unemployment has historically been high in Italy, and remains high for much of the country. The official unemployment rate in 2001 was 9.1% (Istat, cited in Petrini 2002: 6). There are dramatic regional variations here as well. In the north, official unemployment is only 3.9% (falling as low as 3% in some areas of the northeast), while in the south--despite recent declines--it still reaches 18.8%, affecting over half of the region’s youth (Istat, cited in *Corriere della Sera* 2002b: 10; Istat 2001: 238; Caritas 2000: 233-234). While the unemployment rate in northern Italy is lower than that of many of its northern European neighbors, overall Italy’s unemployment rate is second only to that of Spain (Eurostat, cited in *Annuario Sociale* 2001: 688).³

³ With the unemployment rate so high in the south and dangerously low in the north, Italian policymakers periodically attempt to devise plans to encourage southern Italians to move north for jobs as they did in the post-World War II period. The principal factors keeping unemployed southern Italians from taking jobs in the north are the high cost of housing in northern industrial centers relative to the modest wages of industrial employment (at approximately \$850 a month, a skilled auto worker earns little more than a supermarket clerk), and a pension and disability system that provides many households in the south with at least one source of income.

Other economic indicators also reflect the divergence between Italy's less developed southern regions and its booming central and northern regions. While per capita income in the south is among the lowest in the European Community, per capita income in northeastern Italy is 20% *above* the European Community median (Carini 2001: 18). Poverty rates show similar gaps. The Italian poverty rate has hovered around 12% (affecting approximately 8 million people) for several years. But, over 63% of poor families live in the south, where the poverty rate reaches 23% (Istat, cited in Grion 2001: 33; Casadio 2001a: 12).

Beyond these economic and regional divisions, it is important to consider the role of state regulation in the Italian economy, which is at least partly the product of labor union strength. Union-negotiated national work contracts set wages and benefits for particular categories of work. These salary scales and benefit packages apply to virtually every sector of the formal economy (excluding very small firms). Even for workers in sectors of the economy that are not unionized, the courts have determined that national contracts are generally applicable, since judges have interpreted the constitutional guarantee of "reasonable compensation" to mean that which is stipulated by national work contracts. In this context, minimum wage laws are supplanted by far more advantageous union contracts.

The hiring system itself is highly regulated. Except in the case of very small enterprises, employers generally must hire from government supervised "hiring lists," with unemployed workers being hired on a first-come, first-served basis. Something akin to a union hiring hall, these lists at least theoretically preclude the employer from shopping for "a positive work ethic" or, as some have called it, "a propensity for self-

exploitation”(Venturini 1991: 107). In addition, a workers’ rights law passed in 1970 at the height of labor agitation and union strength places strict limitations on the conditions under which Italian workers can be laid off.⁴

Taken together, these components of the formal Italian economy render it relatively inflexible from the employer’s point of view, bringing us back to the issue of duality, for the highly regulated formal sectors enhance the appeal of the informal and underground sectors. As early as the 1960s, Italian employers used the underground economy as a way to circumvent the demands of unions and to increase flexibility. Traditionally, the informal economy has been made up of small firms specializing in artisan manufacturing and family-run services. However, during the labor unrest of the 1960s and 1970s, even large employers like Fiat began decentralizing and parceling out work to the underground or informal economy (Guidi, Bronzino, and Germanetto 1974; Milanaccio and Ricolfi 1976; Calavita 1986a and b).

Not only has this offset the “rigid” nature of the Italian economy, but recent developments have tended to reduce the inflexibility of even the formal sector. According to one Italian economist, in spite of persistent complaints from employers, “It is not really true that the Italian economy is rigid and inflexible. If you remove the public sector, the rest has as much turnover (“mobilita”) as the American economy...”(Ambrosini 2001: 56). While this comparison might be something of an exaggeration, the Italian economy *has* undergone changes in recent years that--for better or for worse--have mitigated much of its famed “inflexibility.”

⁴ The center-right government is currently pushing to revoke this protection, triggering a fierce national debate, widespread labor demonstrations, and a nationwide strike that involved close to 13 million workers (*Los Angeles Times* 2002b: A12; *Los Angeles Times* 2002c: A4; Sivo 2002: 6-7; Giannini 2002: A1).

For one thing, part-time work is more common as a result of a Legislative Decree (2/25/2000, no. 61) prompted by a European Community directive that loosened restrictions on such work (Caritas 2000: 237). Temporary work has also increased, rising to 6.8% of the Italian labor force by 1999.⁵ Together, part-time and temporary work contracts account for 12.6% of the formal labor force, with 21% of Italian women working in such jobs (Ambrosini 2001a: 50; *Annuario Sociale* 2001: 686). While this percentage might not seem high relative to some other countries' experiences, it represents an increase of over 45% since 1992. And, 57% of all new hires in 1999 were for part-time or temporary work (Ambrosini 2001a: 50).⁶ Interestingly, the phenomenon is more common in the center and northern regions than in the south, where such contracts comprise only 11.7% of all formal contracts. According to one analysis, the large underground economy in the south masks the actual extent of the part-time and temporary work being done there; similarly, the presence of a large underground makes such "contingent" formal contracts unnecessary and largely irrelevant (Centorrino 2001: 11).

The following section explores the role of immigrants in this bifurcated and segmented economy, an economy that is at once both "inflexible" and shot through with precarious and unregulated work.

Immigrants in the Italian Economy: Geographic and Sectoral Variation

⁵ Of course, if the underground economy were included in these statistics, the percentage of part-time and seasonal work would be much higher.

⁶ In the economic boom of the last year, part-time, temporary contracts have declined for the first time in a decade while the number of full-time and permanent positions have increased (Istat, cited in Petrini 2002: 6). This trend is probably a temporary adjustment to the tightening of the labor market and the expanding economy. A recent effort on the part of the Berlusconi government to eliminate labor laws that make it difficult to lay workers off, is likely to increase labor turnover and enhance the "contingent" quality of work, however that work is officially defined.

As shown in Table 7, the vast majority of residence permits in Italy are issued for the purpose of work. There is increasing recognition on the part of policymakers and employers that immigrant workers are critical to the survival and competitive edge of the Italian economy. As one immigration expert (Pugliese 2000b: 65) has put it, “It is more and more clear that the Italian productive system needs immigrant workers, especially in the small enterprises of the north and some central regions....We have entered a period in which immigrant workers are an integral part of the national working-class and not simply part of its marginal fringe.”

The economic location of immigrants varies markedly by region of the country--sometimes even by city--by sector, and by immigrant nationality and gender. The fact that the specific nature of their contribution depends on their economic niche and the local context makes it difficult to draw unilateral conclusions about the role immigrants play in the Italian economy. In particular, there is no simple answer to the question of whether immigrants complement the Italian workforce or replace local workers. Nonetheless, certain patterns and trends emerge as important. Among these are the following:

- Immigrants tend to do the most arduous, undesirable work in each sector and region for the lowest pay.
- Immigrants work disproportionately in the underground economy and the secondary and tertiary sectors.

- At the same time, there has been a rapid increase in the presence of immigrants in the formal economy and in manufacturing, particularly in the northeast and in certain areas of central Italy.
- Immigrants in Italy now have the highest percentage of full-time, regular (“legitimate”) work (65%) than in any other European country (Ministry of the Interior, cited in CNNItalia Online, December 18, 2000).
- Immigrants fill niches left by Italians in some areas and sectors, supplement scarce labor supply in others, and directly compete with local workers in some sectors and regions, particularly in the south during economic downturns.
- Immigrants are increasingly union members.
- There are dramatic differences in immigrant employment in the north and center, and in the south. In the south, they are most frequently farmworkers or domestic helpers, while in the northeast and center they are disproportionately in manufacturing, mostly in the small and medium-sized shops that are concentrated in those regions.
- In the south, immigrants are more likely to be illegal and to work in the underground economy than in other regions. In the north, the vast majority of immigrants are legal residents, and they have made substantial inroads in the mainstream economy where they supplement a tight labor supply.

Immigrant workers are found in virtually every sector of the Italian economy. They are street vendors, domestic workers, nurses, factory workers, night watchmen, gas station attendants, farmworkers, construction workers, prostitutes, garment workers, dishwashers, foundry workers, livestock workers, maritime workers, metalworkers, and office “errand-boys.” But, they are clustered in manufacturing, agriculture, domestic service, and a variety of other services. Table 10 shows their distribution across these sectors in the different geographic areas of Italy. Because such a large proportion of Italy’s immigrants live in and around Rome and Milan, the two regions (Lazio and Lombardy, respectively) where these metropolitan areas are located are listed in this table separately.

The dynamics of immigrants’ contribution to the economy and the conditions of their employment vary so much, it will help to do a sectoral analysis.

Industry/Manufacturing. Italy is unusual in the high percentage of immigrant workers in manufacturing. They are increasingly an important part of the labor force in the small and medium-sized enterprises that have been proliferating in the north and northeast over the last few years (Pugliese 2000a: 15; Caputo 2000: 91). The demand for immigrant workers in manufacturing in this region is no doubt in part due to the low birthrates of Italians and the reduced labor supply not only related to falling birthrates, but also to the reluctance of southern Italians to move to work in northern factories as they once did. At the same time that these demographic changes have tightened the supply of Italian labor in the north and center, economic shifts have taken place, adding a further pressure on the labor supply. As small and medium-sized production units have boomed in this post-Fordist era, the

search for labor has intensified. And, the “just-in-time” production associated with these small shops places an additional premium on the flexibility and mobility of immigrant workers.

Many of these workers are in metalworking, particularly in the Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna and Veneto regions. But, they also work in chemical-related industries, foodstuffs, textiles, foundries, tanneries, and slaughterhouses. Most work in small and medium-sized shops, but several hundred immigrant workers are employed by the giant Electrolux, with its 15,000 worker payroll. The small shops in which immigrants are generally concentrated are sometimes subcontracted by very large firms, such as Fiat and Olivetti, who contract out the most hazardous and arduous work.

The majority of immigrant workers in industry and manufacturing have residence permits, although many work in jobs that are defined as “irregular” in some respect—for example, social security is not paid or the employer has not complied with all government reporting requirements. According to an Italian Department of Labor estimate in 1999, in the northeast and in Lombardy (around Milan) where immigrants are overwhelmingly concentrated in industry, approximately 91% of immigrant workers were legal residents; but, roughly 30% of immigrants worked in jobs that were in some way “irregular” (cited in Zincone 2001: 339).

The Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale (INPS, the Italian social security administration with which all employers and employees are supposed to register) provides useful data that allow us to estimate the number of immigrant workers employed in legitimate businesses. The agency documents the number of positions that are registered with INPS, and thus is a good source for estimating the number of official and

regular workers since all such workers must be covered by this national social security system. Table 11 shows the increase in the number of regular immigrant workers from 1994 to 1998, with the largest number being in manufacturing and industrial services. Because INPS data do not always provide information on the nationality of employees, the number of immigrant workers they represent is likely to be under-estimated. Alessandra Venturini and her colleagues (Gavosto, Venturini, and Villosio 1999), in a study conducted for the International Labour Office, have argued that the number of immigrant workers registered with INPS is in fact quite a bit higher than these data reveal.

It is generally understood that in the manufacturing sector in the north and center of Italy, there is a looming labor shortage that immigrants are used to offset. It has recently been estimated that in the “industrial heartland of northern Italy,” there is a 100,000 to 160,000 worker shortfall, and that this number is growing (Hundley 2001: 1). In one suburb outside Milan, the CEO of an auto parts company recently pleaded with government officials to open the doors to more immigrant workers. Unless he could recruit 1500 new workers over the next few months, he said, the new machinery he had just received would remain in its packing boxes, and, as he put it sardonically, “The train will not leave the station” (quoted in Hundley 2001: 1).

Wages and working conditions in manufacturing and industrial services, as with all sectors, vary--sometimes dramatically--between the north and the south, even within the same categories of work (Caputo 2000: 88). What remains constant is that wages and working conditions for immigrants generally are worse than for local workers. Net wages for immigrants in metalworking can range from roughly \$600 a month in the northern

regions of Piedmont and Veneto to close to \$1000 a month for a worker with seniority in north/central Emilia-Romagna. They can make slightly more in chemical-related industries, foodstuffs, and slaughterhouses, where they perform the most grueling and precarious tasks (Caputo 2000). A few non-EU workers are in high-profile, highly skilled positions, such as Brazilian engineers working for Fiat in Turin or high-tech Asian workers with Olivetti, but they are the exception.

Some low-end industrial jobs are paid by the hour or piece rate, and the proportion of illegal workers is generally higher. For example, Rumanians, most of whom are without residence permits, frequently work in the underground economy in Piedmont painting car parts for body-shops, making approximately \$30-\$35 a day. Garment workers in the south (who are predominantly Chinese and Bangladesh) are also paid piece rate. It is said that whole Chinese families working in the garment industry in southern Italy often earn the equivalent of \$250 a month for 8-10 hour days (Caputo 2000: 92). Nor are such wages confined to the south. In Altivole in Veneto, discussed above, a large Chinese community works clandestinely in garment sweatshops scattered across the small town. Average wages for 18 hours a day at piece rate come to approximately \$350. According to one report, if you work at a “phenomenal” pace, you might make \$500 (Stella 2001: 17).

Construction. Unlike other sectors that are more regionally specific, immigrants are employed in low-end construction jobs all over the national territory, although their concentration is greater in the north (See Table 10). According to many observers, their presence in this sector is growing, and extends beyond what official statistics indicate,

particularly in the south where their presence in small, underground firms goes unreported. Indeed, the construction industry contains the greatest proportion of illegal immigrants working in the underground, in part because this sector is comprised of so many small firms beyond the pale of government and union regulations (Caputo 2000: 90).

Immigrant construction workers are often hired as day laborers from streets and piazzas where such workers congregate. They are generally paid by the day, and wages vary from the north to the south (but wages tend to be the same for both legal and illegal immigrants). In some northern areas, immigrants in construction often earn as much as \$50 a day, and in parts of central Italy, where government regulations subsequent to the 1996 earthquake have improved wages and working conditions, they can earn \$800 a month. In the south, in contrast, wages for immigrant construction workers range from about \$15 a day to \$30 for up to 12 hours of work. Overtime is rarely paid, even in otherwise “legitimate” firms. This pay scale is, in absolute terms, the same as that of the early 1990s, despite a considerable rate of inflation during that period (Caputo 2000). Immigrants working in the construction industry in the south are among the most poorly paid of all immigrant workers, second only to that of undocumented farmworkers and some miscellaneous service workers, such as office “errand-boys.”

Agriculture. Italy (like Spain) differs from the rest of Europe in the high proportion of immigrants who are engaged in agricultural work. It is estimated that approximately 38% of all non-EU immigrant workers in Italy are employed in agriculture (Osservatorio Ares 2001), and they make up roughly 10% of all farmworkers (Notizie

Ansa 2002a). In 2001, there were at least 80,000 immigrants employed in Italian agriculture, and the number has been increasing at approximately 15% annually (Notizie Ansa 2002a). The vast majority (88%) of these farmworkers are employed on a seasonal basis, with the peak season lasting from June to September. One observer points out that the reduced amount of time required for the harvest as a result of recent technologies has meant increases in the number of immigrant workers who are used for shorter periods of time (Gueye 2000: 136).

As indicated in Table 10, while there are many immigrant farmworkers in the north, the area with the heaviest concentration is the south, where much of Italy's richest farmland is located. If irregular and undocumented workers were included in this table, the disproportionate number of immigrant farmworkers in the south would be even more evident. Indeed, much agricultural work throughout Italy is done "irregularly," even when the immigrants themselves are legal (Caputo 2000: 88-89). It is estimated that more than 73% of Italian agriculture is "irregular" in some way, with the figure for the south reaching 85% (Tartaglione 2001: 5).

A high percentage of immigrant farmworkers come from eastern Europe (some put the number as high as 67%; see *Notizie Ansa* 2002a), particularly Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Albania, and Rumania, although this varies by region, as do the types of farm work and wages. In Lombardy, Indian immigrants do most of the cattle-raising and work as stable-hands; in the southern regions of Sicily, Puglia, Calabria, and Campania, Moroccans and other North Africans work in hothouses and fish farms, harvest watermelons and tomatoes, and pick olives; in central Umbria, Moroccans work

the tobacco crops; and, in the northern region of Trentino, eastern Europeans tend honey production (Caputo 2000; Gueye 2000).

Farm wages are generally paid by the day. In Campania, one of the poorest regions of Italy, immigrant farmworkers work 8-10 hour days for \$10-\$15, a wage that has lost ground over the last several years. In Puglia, where labor contractors take a 5-10% cut, immigrants make piece-rate picking watermelons, with a fast worker making about \$500 a month (Caputo 2000: 89). In the center and north, where agricultural work is generally not “irregular,” and workers are more likely to be paid according to union contracts, immigrant farmworkers can earn up to \$900 a month (Caputo 2000: 89). Overall, however, farmworker wages are among the lowest of any sector, and a disproportionate number of workers are undocumented.

As mentioned above, immigrants in Italy often supplement the local labor supply rather than substitute for it, particularly in northern manufacturing. According to one researcher and union official (Gueye 2000: 136), however, it is in southern Italian agriculture that there are most likely to be sporadic tensions between immigrant workers and locals who fear displacement during economic downturns.

Domestic Service. Immigrant women are heavily concentrated in domestic service, including not just cleaning services, but elder care and child care. The Minister of the Interior recently warned that immigrant workers are especially critical in this area, “[T]oday we can all see that the only ones taking care of our loved ones—whether they be our elderly or our children—are immigrants” (quoted in Fazzo 2001: 29).

In 1996, INPS data showed that of the 209,726 domestic helpers registered with the Italian social security system, 46-50% of them were non-EU immigrants, of whom 71% were women (Caputo 2000: 92; Ambrosini 2001b: 92). Immigrant women in domestic service come primarily from the Philippines and South America, particularly Peru, although in recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of eastern European women in this sector. Almost without exception, the education level and qualifications of these immigrant women, and their social position prior to immigration, far exceeds the menial work they find in Italy.

Because of the in-house nature of this work, one might expect it to be disproportionately “irregular” and clandestine. There are for sure a significant number of immigrants in domestic service outside the reach of government regulations and social security rules. Some work under conditions that constitute a flagrant violation of established labor rights (Pugliese 2000a: 18). Interestingly, however, a large percentage of immigrants in domestic service are legal and the work tends to be regular, with this sector being second only to manufacturing in the numbers registered with the social security system. This no doubt is related to the relatively generous quotas for domestic service in Italian immigration policy, to be discussed later.

The large metropolitan areas of Rome and Milan account for roughly half of all immigrant domestic serviceworkers, with the rest mostly dispersed throughout the northwest and the south. Indicative of the dependence on immigrants in this sector in Rome and Milan, three out of four domestic serviceworkers in these two cities are immigrants (Ambrosini 2001b: 92). Wages vary according to region and the type of work involved. Live-in helpers in the north and center earn approximately \$800 a month, while

in the south they are paid no more than \$500, and this, according to one observer, only for Philippine workers (Caputo 2000: 92). For hourly work, domestic helpers' wages range from approximately \$3.50 an hour in the south (sometimes even for a married couple working together) to \$8 an hour in the north. Wages can also differ depending on the nationality of the worker. For example, Philippine workers are relatively highly paid, while Sri Lankans are generally not (Caputo 2000: 92). Interestingly, remuneration seems to depend less on the legal status of the immigrant and more on the immigrant's nationality and their region of employment.

While manufacturing, construction, agriculture, and domestic service are the primary categories in which immigrants work in Italy, they are found in many other sectors and perform a wide range of services. For example, they are engaged in miscellaneous services like office "errand-boy," night watchman, and dishwasher, and are an important component of the tourism industry, particularly the hotels and restaurants on the Adriatic coast that boom during the summer season but are virtually deserted by late August (Gueye 2000: 136). In some regions, immigrants are primarily street vendors, like the Senegalese who line the streets of large cities, selling cigarette lighters (Milan) and faux designer purses (Florence) and who ply the beaches of Tuscany and Sardinia in the summer (Zanfrini 1996; Berti 2000: 134).⁷

⁷ One in-depth study of a group of Senegalese and Moroccan immigrants found that the Senegalese had found work as street vendors when they first arrived, moving on to factory jobs once they had settled in. Moroccans, who reported that the market was largely saturated by the Senegalese, were less likely to work as street vendors upon arrival. According to the author of this study, the concentration of the Senegalese among street vendors has to do in part with their pre-immigration experience with commerce and in part with immigrant networks in Italy that facilitate their entry into this niche (Berti 2000).

There is no question but that immigrants are an increasingly critical element of the Italian economy, although they play a different role in various sectors, in different geographical regions, and according to their gender and nationality. In some locales and sectors, they supplement a dangerously tight labor market. Indicative of this tight labor market, Italian employers in 2000 became actively involved in lobbying the government for more immigrant workers (Codini 2001: 26), and local government officials warned of catastrophic labor shortages in the absence of greater access to immigrant workers (quoted in *Notizie Ansa* 2002b:13 and 2002c: 46).

According to one of Italy's most respected immigration experts (Pugliese 2000b: 65), "The process of stabilization is perhaps the most significant aspect of immigration in Italy in the 1990s." By this he meant that immigrants are increasingly integrated into the economy and are more and more likely to be legal residents and have "regular" jobs. Immigrants' increased union membership is indicative of this "stabilization." While unions in Italy are undergoing changes and overall membership is in decline (Mottura 2000: 123), the rate at which immigrants are joining unions is increasing. According to the records of the communist-affiliated union CGIL (one of the three largest union confederations in Italy), immigrant membership increased 22% from 1998-2000 (Mottura 2000: 124). Interestingly, immigrants working in factories in Italy's southern regions are more likely to be unionized (45%) than in the post-Fordist, small enterprises of the north (30%) (*Notizie Ansa* 2002d: 49). In some southern regions, union membership among immigrant factory workers is even higher than that of local workers (*Notizie Ansa* 2002d: 49). And, there are signs that immigrants might be an important component of future labor agitation. In one recent case, all 16 immigrant workers at a slaughterhouse near

Lake Como went out on strike to protest violations of labor law in their plant, while the 19 Italians in the plant kept working. For some immigrants it was their first strike ever. As one striking worker from Senegal said, “It was [my first strike] for me, and it was also for my colleagues from Morocco and from India, and we thought our Italian co-workers would join us....Oh well, it will be for the next time” (quoted in *Notizie Ansa* 2002e:27).

But, the pace of this stabilization process should not be exaggerated, nor should its inevitability. In a country where one-quarter of the gross domestic product derives from the underground economy, and where immigrants are concentrated in sectors (like agriculture) known to be largely “irregular,” undocumented immigrants and/or immigrants in “irregular” jobs still play a pivotal role. One recent study (Osservatorio Ares 2001) estimated that Italian employers save approximately \$13 billion annually on taxes and social security payments by using irregular immigrant workers.

So compatible is the infusion of immigrant workers with the irregular economy that some Italian scholars have argued that the presence of a low-wage immigrant workforce has attracted capital away from the formal economy to employ immigrants clandestinely, thereby expanding the size of the informal and underground economies and displacing Italian workers (Dell’Aringa and Neri 1987). Others (Maciotti and Pugliese 1991: 81-85) note, however, that it would be an oversimplification to conclude that immigrants are the primary force behind the expansion of the underground economy. Instead, they suggest that the roots of this expansion go far deeper. They argue that the Italian economy has experienced a “crisis of the Fordist-Taylorist model,” as have all late capitalist economies (1991: 76). The result is a new organization of production characterized by decentralization and an emphasis on flexibility. Third-world

immigration offers Italian employers an opportunity to adapt to this new economic model.

Rapidly declining birthrates, an aging population, and booming manufacturing enterprises, have added another ingredient to the equation. For, immigrants in Italy—at least in the north and center—not only contribute an element of flexibility and hence a post-Fordist advantage, but they fill critical labor shortages. With official unemployment in some northern regions approaching 3%, employers and local officials have sounded the alarm and are launching an urgent campaign for more immigrant workers. Once considered useful primarily for their flexibility and desperation, third-world immigrants in Italy are now recognized as an integral part of the country's economic survival.

Underscoring this role of immigrants as filling labor shortages and taking jobs that most Italians shun, Venturini and Villosio (2002) use government data from the Italian Labor Force Survey to show that in general immigrant workers in Italy have either no effect or a complementary (positive) effect on employment opportunities for Italians. Similarly, Gavosto, Venturini, and Villosio's (1999) statistical analysis found that in most cases, the effect of immigrant workers on Italians' wages was positive. Ambrosini (2001a) generally concurs with this interpretation, but cautions that the availability of immigrant workers may allow employers to eschew strategies that would be beneficial to local workers. For example, the presence of immigrants in the industrial north means that firms do not have to move to areas in Italy where local workers might be more readily available (for example, the south), nor do they have to raise wages or improve working conditions to attract unemployed Italians to areas of high employment (Ambrosini 2001a: 61-62).

Public Attitudes Toward Immigrants

The political landscape of Italy has changed substantially in the last ten years. Not only did reforms in the aftermath of exposes of high-level official corruption in 1994 and 1995, known colloquially as “Tangentopoli” (loosely translated, “Kickback City”), weaken the strong party system of government, but there has been a tilt to the right of the Italian electorate. One author opens a book on the extreme right-wing movements emerging in Europe in the last decade with the observation, “Italy was the first European country in the last fifty years in which the extreme right was affirmed politically and institutionally” (Caldiron 2001: 15).

After decades of Christian Democratic and nominally socialist governments, in 1994 the industrialist and soccer magnate, Silvio Berlusconi, put together a coalition government made up of the Lega Nord (Northern League), Forza Italia (“Go Italy!” Berlusconi’s new party), and the Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance, the progeny of the Fascist Party of WWII). This right-wing government did not last long, but Berlusconi was re-elected in 2001, and once again presides over one of the most conservative governments in Europe.

The vehemently anti-immigrant party, the Northern League, with its leader Umberto Bossi, is an important participant in this coalition, as is the neo-fascist National Alliance. The “Polo,” as the coalition is called, emphasizes security, law and order, the fight against immigration, and regional fiscal autonomy. Local jurisdictions too are increasingly governed by one or another of these rightist parties, with the presidents of the regions of Liguria, Lombardy (Milan), Veneto, and Piedmont all Polo adherents. In

the regional elections of 2000, the National Alliance candidate won a provincial governorship in Lazio (Rome) on an anti-immigrant platform, with his proclamations of “wild clandestine immigration” and the “social deviance” it produces (quoted in Smith 2000: 18). The point here is that there seems to be sufficient popular support for this anti-immigrant position to help propel right-wing parties to power in Italy.⁸ According to one report, Berlusconi’s advisors advised him to “ride the tiger” of immigration in the elections of May 2001 (quoted in D’Avanzo 2002: 15).

From this perspective, the recent discovery of a boatload of nearly 1000 Kurdish refugees off the coast of Sicily and their emergency landing amid much hand-wringing and alarmist rhetoric, has been called “manna from heaven” for the Berlusconi government coalition (D’Avanzo 2002: 15). Having come to office on an anti-immigrant platform, the incident allows the government to curtail the administrative proceedings prior to deportations as part of the “state of emergency” it has declared. More symbolically, it allows them to continue to “ride the politics of fear” (D’Avanzo 2002: 15). Umberto Bossi, leader of the northern League, has not hesitated to capitalize on this opportunity, exploding, “If I had my way, we would sink these smugglers’ ships, blow them out of the water” (quoted in *Migration News* 2002c: 27).

The focus of much of the right’s anti-immigrant rhetoric is on the issue of multiculturalism. Following a massive demonstration against the government’s proposed new law on immigration (discussed below) in January, 2002, the Vice President of the Italian

⁸ The popularity of the Polo’s anti-immigrant stance should not be exaggerated, nor should its role in securing Berlusconi the victory in the national election in May, 2001. Berlusconi himself owned and controlled many media outlets, which he saturated with upbeat images of himself as a successful entrepreneur and efficient manager. Nonetheless, his anti-immigrant position was well-known and at the very least did not prove to be a political liability; and, some local politicians, such as the National Alliance candidate mentioned above, have secured office at least in part on the basis of their restrictionist stance on immigration.

Senate from the Northern League argued that the pro-immigrant lobby “wants not an immigration of workers but a re-population of the country by immigrants, which is extremely dangerous for our identity, for the social equilibrium, and for our sense of being one people: In sum, it (immigration) represents the worst aspect of globalization” (quoted in *Notizie Ansa* 2002f: 2). At the same rally, counter-demonstrators held up anti-immigrant placards. One Northern League supporter displayed a banner, “Yes to Polenta, No to Couscous!” Since the September 11 attacks on the United States, the anti-immigrant sentiments are mixed with concerns over terrorism and the perceived connection to Arab immigrants. Northern League supporters demonstrated outside the Islamic Cultural Institute in Milan in October, 2001, urging officials to “Close the Cultural Center” and “Get the terrorists out of Milan” (quoted in Reuters News Service 2001).

A number of intellectual leaders have recently joined the anti-immigrant fray, particularly as it relates to multiculturalism. Writer and scholar Giovanni Sartori (2000) writes provocatively about the dangers of multiculturalism, focusing particular attention on the Muslim presence in Italy. Journalist Oriana Fallaci has called Arab immigration “a secret invasion.” Focusing on the issue of cultural diversity, she insisted provocatively, “We might as well admit it. Our churches and cathedrals are more beautiful than their mosques” (quoted in Henneberger 2001: A4). The archbishop of Bologna, Giacomo Biffi, fueled a public debate when he expressed his concern for the increasing number of Muslims in Italy: “Let’s remember that the Catholic religion is historically the religion of Italians, and it can not assimilate others.” “The great majority of Muslims,” he claimed,

want “to remain foreign to our humanity, and are just waiting to try to make us like them” (quoted in Unguendoli 2000: 3).

Equally vocal on the other side of the immigration issue are the wide range of immigrant associations, employers’ groups, religious groups, NGO’s and union confederations, who advocate on behalf of immigrants and insist on the benefits of both an enhanced labor supply and cultural diversity.⁹ All three major union confederations in Italy—CGIL, UIL, and CSIL—lobby and work on behalf of immigrants. In fact, next to religious organizations, unions are the primary immigrant support group. In most major Italian cities, union caucuses and advocacy groups welcome immigrant workers and help them gain access to jobs, health care, housing, and coveted residence permits.

Certain traits of Italian unions and their economic context help account for this supportive posture. Italian unions have historically been influenced by progressive politics. Less narrowly focused on workplace issues than most American unions, Italian unions have maintained solidarity with oppressed people in the Third World as an important part of their broader politics. Immigrant advocacy work is in some ways the domestic counterpart of this international commitment.

As immigrants increasingly enter the mainstream economy in Italy, one might expect concern on the part of unions that they represent a competitive challenge to union workers. Quite the opposite; unions advocate on behalf of laws that make it possible for immigrants to legalize and for their entry into the formal economy where they might be organized. This stance is at least in part the product of practical, strategic considerations (Mottura 2000). As Watts (2000) points out, union officials are aware that immigration flows are difficult to control, and unlikely to disappear, and they have opted to welcome

⁹ For good summaries of immigrant associations in Italy, and the role they serve, see Carchedi (2000).

the new workers. At a time when unions are losing ground in all advanced capitalist countries, Italian unions see in these immigrants a vital source of their future strength (Author interview with a coordinator for the CGIL Office of Immigrant Affairs).

A variety of Catholic charity associations--such as Caritas, Comunita' di Sant'Egidio, etc.--comprise another important pro-immigrant lobby and support group. A recent article in the Jesuit periodical, *Civiltà Cattolica*, warned that it is a "grave mistake" to consider immigrants as mere "instruments of the labor market," ignoring their "human dignity" (Simone 2002: 187). Not only do these Catholic groups advocate for more liberal laws affecting immigrants, but they offer critical social services. Caritas, with its vast network of medical personnel and facilities, is the most important provider of immigrant health care in Italy. In Catholic Italy, the credibility and political impact of these service organizations working on behalf of immigrants should not be understated (Perlmutter 2002). Speaking of the powerful pro-immigrant coalition of unions and the Catholic church, a major left-wing newspaper described a 1995 rally in defense of immigrants, "Only in Italy could a Catholic prelate talk on a union stage to a crowd of workers, who were primarily black and Muslim" (*Il Manifesto*, February 26, 1995, quoted in Perlmutter 2002: 11).

Among the most significant developments of the past few years is the increased role that employers play in supporting immigration. For the first time, in the spring of 1999, the major Italian industrial organizations came out publicly urging the government to provide them access to more immigrant workers (ISMU-Cariplo 2001: 26). They have kept up the pressure ever since, even pressing the government to enact measures that would reduce the illegality and marginality of immigrant workers (Zuccolini 2002: 4).

The Association of Industrialists of Udine in the northeast, concerned about severe labor shortages, has formed a coalition with the local neighborhood organizations to seek solutions to immigrants' grave housing problems and to initiate a variety of "integrative" programs (*Notizie Ansa* 2002g: 1). Employers in the northeast region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, where the unemployment rate has hit an all-time low of 2.3%, argue that "there is no time to waste" in devising more open immigration policies (Maccaferri 2001: 1). Illegal commuters from neighboring Slovenia are called the "keystone" of local industry by employers, and they lobby hard for policies that would legalize this border-crossing (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, April 30, 2001).

Mirroring the diversity and breadth of immigrant advocacy groups in Italy, a mass rally was convened in Rome on January 19, 2002, following the introduction of a restrictive immigration bill in the Italian legislature. Organized by Roma Social Forum and with participants from all the major unions, legal and illegal immigrants from dozens of nations, Catholic charities, students, intellectuals and artists, and leftist political party officials, the rally drew over 100,000 people. Against a backdrop of reggae, Peruvian, and African music, the demonstrators condemned the proposed immigration bill as "racist and shameful" and declared themselves opposed to this project of a "xenophobic and racist society" (quoted in Casadio 2002: 10). The leader of the CGIL, the left-leaning union confederation, urged, "Immigrants are an essential resource for the country's economy"(quoted in Casadio 2002: 10-11). Even the mayor of Rome was there,

admonishing the government restrictionists, “Multiculturalism enriches us” (quoted in Casadio 2002: 10-11; see also *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 2002a: A4).¹⁰

A number of studies have focused on the attitudes of ordinary Italians towards immigration and multiculturalism. One European study on tolerance of diversity found that Italians are among the most tolerant people in Europe, with only 11% of Italians admitting to outright intolerance, 21% expressing ambivalence, 54% defined as “passively tolerant” and 15% “actively tolerant” (*Il Manifesto*, March 21, 2001: 6). Despite these relatively high levels of general tolerance, Italians were more likely than most Europeans to be “disturbed” (14.3%) by the presence of persons with a different religion (*Il Manifesto*, March 21, 2001: 6).

Somewhat at odds with this portrait of Italians as relatively tolerant of diversity, but perhaps consistent with the right-wing’s recent political successes, one study found that one-third of Italians now think immigration is their nation’s worst problem (cited in *Los Angeles Times*, January 20, 2002a: A4). Other studies paint a less dramatic picture. According to a recent survey by one of the most respected research organizations in Italy (Censis, cited in Casadio 2001b: 25), immigration was the fifth-ranked social problem, most often lagging behind crime, unemployment, traffic congestion, and drugs. The number of Italians mentioning immigration as a major problem increased, however, from 15.9% in 1997 to 21% in 2000 (Casadio 2001b: 25).

Another annual survey found that from 2000 to 2002, there was a slight decrease in anti-immigrant sentiment in Italy (Fondazione Nord Est, cited in Bordignon 2002: 10-11). This survey revealed that 40% (compared to 46% in 2000) of Italians believe

¹⁰ According to one report, a group of Japanese tourists, coincidentally caught up in the events, applauded with approval (Roncone 2002: 5). The national coordinator of the Northern League took a different view. “That rally,” he said, “would have been a great opportunity for a round-up” (Roncone 2002: 5).

immigrants are a threat to public safety; 29% (32% in 2000) think they take jobs away from Italians; and, 24% (27% in 2000) worry that immigrants threaten Italian culture and identity. While these figures still seem high, the survey found that Italy was the only country in Western Europe where anti-immigrant sentiment was falling.

Table 12 shows the results of three different studies that have measured Italians' attitudes towards immigrants and immigrants' rights. While the studies vary in methodology and sample characteristics, the findings are generally consistent. As we can see in this Table, the studies suggest relatively high levels of support for immigrant voting rights, while at the same time revealing images of immigrants as potential criminals and, to a lesser extent, as contributing to unemployment.¹¹ A separate study with 800 respondents conducted in the central region of Emilia-Romagna, known for its leftist politics and progressive populace, reports that 74% of respondents agreed with the statement, "Immigrants are invading our cities." Just over one-third believed that immigrants were taking jobs away from locals, and 57% said immigrants were "necessary to do the work Italians don't want to do" (Melossi 1999: 59).

Another survey (cited in *Migration News* 2002b: 30) found that tolerance of immigrants was region-specific. According to this survey, while only 10% of Italians nation-wide believed that immigrants take jobs that Italians won't do, in the northern region of Lombardy—with the highest immigration inflow in the country and one of the lowest unemployment rates—80% of respondents said that immigrants do jobs that Italians will not do (*Migration News* 2002b: 30).

¹¹ For more details on these and other similar studies, see Caritas (2000: 204-209) and Valtolina (2001: 143-159).

It is difficult to generalize from these studies and from the wide-ranging political expressions cited here. We might draw several tentative conclusions, however. First, the debate over immigration in Italy is ongoing and vigorous, with a host of political, religious, and cultural groups representing pro-immigrant and anti-immigrant positions. Second, anti-immigration sentiment remains high, and right-wing politicians have capitalized on this, probably even fueled it. Third, in the face of this anti-immigrant sentiment, there is still a solid block of support for immigration and immigrant rights. From Catholics with their concern for the humanity of immigrants, to unions' advocacy on behalf of potential members, to various ideologically committed advocacy groups, to employers who are alarmed at the shrinking labor supply, the pro-immigrant force represents a powerful countercurrent to rightist nativism.

Immigration Law and Policy: Contradictions, Shifts, and Impasse

Prior to the 1980s, only two Italian laws addressed the issue of immigration. The first, passed in 1931 (Law #773) as part of a larger bill relating to public safety, laid out procedures for foreigners to apply for residence permits. The second (Law #125, passed in 1949) clarified how foreigners could obtain permits “for the purpose of work,” after first receiving a residence permit (Adinolfi 1987). What little immigration there was prior to the 1980s was regulated primarily by administrative decrees from various government ministries.¹² Together these decrees established a system of legal immigration that was driven by the needs of individual employers who periodically requested immigrant

¹² This practice is not uncommon in Italy, where some observers have called it “government by memo” (Adinolfi 1992: 11).

workers to fill labor shortages. No annual ceilings or quotas were set, nor did they seem necessary given the small number of immigrants involved.

The first indication that things had changed came in 1982, when a Ministry of Labor circular called a halt to all authorizations for foreign workers from outside the European Community. Also included in this circular was the first attempt at legalizing those already present in Italy and illegally employed. This legalization program stipulated that all employers must “regularize” their illegal immigrant workers. The amnesty process required that employers pay all back taxes and social security payments, and post a bond equal to the cost of the return ticket for the foreign workers they were sponsoring for legalization.

Not surprisingly, the legalization program was a failure, with fewer than 16,000 immigrants being “regularized.” In fact, the consequence of this law was to increase dramatically the number of irregular foreign workers in Italy. As Bonini (1991: 90) observed, as a result in part of prohibiting any further legal immigration, “the condition of irregularity became a *modus vivendi*.” La Terza (1987) concurs, pointing out that the closing down of the legal immigration channel just as more immigrants began to view Italy as a desirable destination vastly increased the number of illegal immigrants. The irony, she says, was that “the preoccupation that immigrants [brought in through legal channels] should not compete with Italian workers has resulted in the worst kind of competition: The number of illegal immigrants soared, meaning lower costs in terms of social security payments and wages, and increased flexibility. Competition was enormously enhanced precisely by the fact of encouraging illegality” (La Terza 1987: 35).

On December 30, 1986, Italy passed its first comprehensive immigration law. This law, titled “Foreign Workers and the Control of Illegal Immigration” (Law #943), was in large measure the product of pressure from unions and the left opposition parties who contested what they saw as abuse of the rapidly growing number of illegal immigrants following the decree of 1982. It consisted of three primary components: foreign workers’ rights, rules on the employment of foreigners, and another legalization program.

Article 1 stipulated that all legal foreign workers in Italy would receive equal treatment to that of Italian workers. It included a provision for family unification, access to housing, and nondiscrimination in services such as health care. Article 12 provided for employer sanctions for the first time, specifying that smuggling immigrants or hiring illegal immigrants “for the purpose of exploitation,” could elicit a fine of approximately \$1000-5000 per immigrant, and one to five years in prison. The undisputed centerpiece of this law was an expansive legalization program. Unlike the 1982 legalization plan, this time no fines were imposed on employers of legalizing immigrants for violations of labor laws; however, employers were held responsible for paying back social security and other taxes.

Speaking to the pronounced gap between the provisions of this law and its conspicuous lack of implementation, one legal scholar complained, “The chronic vice of Italian politics is an excess of legislation and a deficit of implementation” (Onorato 1989: 307). Others spoke of the law’s “uncertainty” and the “bureaucratism” involved in enforcement (Minister of Labor Formica, quoted in Sestini 1989: 331).

There was considerable confusion, for example, over how to enforce the employer sanctions provision. Despite the possibility of a prison term, one Ministry of Labor official told the author that employer sanctions were entirely a civil matter (Author interview, July 1992). Furthermore, different labor inspectors held different opinions about who was ultimately responsible for enforcement. One inspector explained to the author that the Ministry of Labor was responsible and had wide discretion over the imposition of fines; another insisted with equal certainty that upon finding employers in violation, labor inspectors were to notify the police (Author interviews, July 1992). While there is some evidence that this latter interpretation is accurate, those responsible for immigration matters at the central police agency in Rome seemed far less interested in the early 1990s in enforcing employer sanctions than in arresting and repatriating Brazilian prostitutes (Author interview, July 1992). So obscure was the employer sanctions law that some labor inspectors had to be shown the section of the law before it was clear to them what I was referring to. When asked how many fines had been levied for employer sanctions, a senior official from the Ministry of Labor smiled and said, “What shall I say?” (Author interview, July 1992).

The legalization program, while far more widely publicized than employer sanctions, was not much more successful. When the law was passed, it was estimated that there were between 600,000 and 1.2 million undocumented immigrants in Italy. However, only about 107,000 applied for regularization under the 1986 law (Onorato 1989: 307). According to Onorato (1989: 307), the most important reason for the failure of this program was “the bosses’ interest in not regularizing ‘black labor’ ...in order to save on health and social security contributions and the minimum wage, and...the general

vulnerability of immigrants to their employers that led them not to seek regularization for fear of losing their jobs.”

On February 28, 1990, a new immigration law was passed, known simply as the Martelli Law, after its primary author and sponsor, then Deputy Prime Minister Claudio Martelli. Among the most important provisions of the Martelli Law were the blueprint for a quota worker system and a new legalization program. With regard to the quota system, the law stipulated a process through which the government would determine annually the number of foreign workers in specific categories to be admitted. This quota was to be arrived at in consultation with unions, employers, and other interested groups. In addition, the law included a relatively generous legalization program. In contrast to previous amnesty programs, under the Martelli law the process was generally initiated by the immigrants themselves rather than their employers. It stipulated that employers of legalizing immigrants would not have to pay back contributions to social security for their regularized workers. Residence permits under the Martelli regularization law were valid for two years, to be renewed for four years if the immigrant could demonstrate that s/he was continuing to work and had a sufficient income. For those working in the underground economy, it was possible to make an “auto-certification” of income earned, but this included divulging the name of one’s employer.

Over 234,000 immigrants applied for legalization under the Martelli law, and approximately 171,000 of these had applied for renewals by the deadline. Only about 15,000 of these renewals were based on “auto-certifications” of income, probably indicating both that those working in the underground economy were under-represented

in the first phase of the program and that underground workers were still reluctant to risk their jobs by essentially denouncing their employers.

Italy's experience with the 1986 and 1990 laws is characterized by a glaring discrepancy between the law "on the books" and the law "in action." At this time, immigrants were even more heavily concentrated in the service sectors in the underground economy than they are today, and it may be precisely this function as illegal workers in an illegal economy that limited the ability to regulate and regularize them. In other words, those characteristics that make so-called Third World immigrants attractive to certain sectors—their invisibility, marginality and vulnerability—are the same qualities that make it difficult to control their employment (through employer sanctions) or legalize them (through regularization programs). Both employer sanctions and legalization may be destined to fail in the context of a large underground economy where immigrants' employment is partly contingent on their marginality.

Even the annual quotas for foreign workers did not work as planned. The law had required a complicated process of consultation between many governmental agencies and interested parties before announcing the annual number of visas "for the purpose of work." But, in some years, no numerical quotas were fixed at all; when they were forthcoming they were unrealistically low; and, the consultation process "rarely conformed to the parameters of the law" (Adinolfi 1992: 70).

By 1998, the Italian experience with immigration was beginning to change. For one thing, immigrants were increasingly necessary to manufacturing and other sectors of the formal economy, no longer simply filling gaps in the underground. According to one of Italy's most respected immigration experts, Enrico Pugliese (2000a: 14), the law of

March 6, 1998 (Law #40) was the first Italian immigration law to recognize the importance of immigrants as workers. Others have said it was the first time in Italy that immigration had been dealt with outside of a sense of national emergency, and that it represented the first “systematic and comprehensive treatment” of the subject (McBritton and Garofalo 2000: 95).

This law (made effective in July, 1998 by Law #286) attempts to establish a more precise mechanism for determining the annual quotas (McBritton and Garofalo 2000: 98). The consultation process is to include consideration of the numbers of foreign workers already on government hiring lists, employers’ labor needs, unemployment rates, etc. Once the annual quota has been established, employers are to send requests for workers, either by name or by numbers of workers needed, to the Ministry of Labor. The employer must testify to providing conditions of work equal to that established under union contracts, and must guarantee some “housing assistance.” If the quota has not been exhausted, the employer will receive the workers requested, who—even if specified by name and even if already residents of Italy—must return to their country of origin to re-enter Italy with the requisite paperwork. Once foreign workers enter Italy on a quota, if they continue to secure work, they may have their residence permits renewed indefinitely without returning to their home country. In most cases, residence permits are issued for two years, and are renewed if the original conditions (usually work in the formal economy) continue to be met.

The law also provided for an annual quota for seasonal workers. Within this quota, workers can enter for periods from twenty days to six months (which can be extended to nine months). If they secure permanent work during this period, they must

exit Italy and come back in through the permanent quota. Employers requesting seasonal workers must specify, in addition to the conditions of work and housing assistance, how they intend to get the workers to leave once the work is completed.

For the first time with this law, foreign workers (with the exception of seasonal workers) are not to lose their residence permits if they lose their jobs. Instead, they have up to a year to secure another job, but must be actively seeking work. While residence permits were thus partially disconnected from work contracts, a renewed commitment to employer sanctions was signaled, with a fine of \$1000-\$3000 for each illegal immigrant employed, and a possibility of three months to one year in prison.

Law #40 also established a sponsor system, whereby any public entity may sponsor immigrants to come to Italy to work, as long as they are willing to guarantee a source of livelihood and as long as they come within the annual quota. Besides employers' associations, entities eligible to sponsor immigrants include labor unions, immigrant advocacy groups, and other NGOs. The law also provided for family reunification, again within the quota, and relatives of legal residents can immediately get work permits once inside Italy.

The 1998 law also lays out the rights of foreigners in Italy. Among its major provisions are the right to equal treatment with Italian workers; access to the full range of services of the public health care system; and, for the undocumented, the right to urgent care, and the right to attend public school. In addition, the law sets out an ambitious plan for a network of "reception centers" throughout Italy to provide legal and illegal immigrants with emergency food and shelter, as well as language instruction and a wide range of other cultural and social services.

Finally, the law provided for a “carta di soggiorno” or residence card, that for the first time created a category of permanent legal residents. After five years of continuous legal status, if immigrants have a legitimate job and sufficient income to support themselves and their family, they and their spouses and minor children are eligible for this residence permit which, unlike all previous residence permits, is open-ended in duration.

Introducing an essay on the difficult implementation of this law, Fasano and Zucchini (2001: 39) muse, “Laws, like ideas, walk with men’s legs. The latter can go where the law seemed to want to go, they can stand still, or they can go elsewhere altogether.” Others speak more prosaically of “serious problems of application” (Marra and Pontrandolfi 1999: Preface). In fact, none of its major components—employer sanctions, the quota worker system, reception centers, and permanent residence cards—appear “to go where the law seemed to want to go.”

Employer sanctions are still rarely enforced. McBritton and Garofalo (2000: 102) explain the ineffectiveness of this provision of the law, “The lack of controls over the underground economy in general certainly limits their [employer sanctions’] feasibility, especially *vis a vis* those employers who evade all [government regulations and reporting requirements]” and are therefore effectively outside the scope of government oversight. Employer sanctions has also been challenged in court, with inconsistent results. Most recently, the Italian Supreme Court declared that it is not a crime to hire immigrants who lack *work* permits, although the same decision seems to have upheld the sanction against employers who hire immigrants without *residence* permits (Italian Supreme Court, Criminal Division, May 9, 2001).

The quota worker system also continues to be plagued by controversy and periodic paralysis. While the law was put into effect in July, the annual quota for 1998 was not announced until October and resulted in undocumented workers already in Italy taking the allotted slots, leading some observers to remark that it was a *de facto* “legalization rather than a foreign worker program” (Codini 2001: 26). The quota for 1999 was not issued until August, was not preceded by any analysis of labor needs, and simply re-issued the 1998 numbers. Speaking of the default to the preceding year’s quota, McBritton and Garofalo (2000: 98) comment sardonically that it is not clear whether the law permits this, “but here the letter of the law does not shine with clarity.”

The quota for 2000 was arrived at relatively expeditiously in February, with 63,000 slots opened up for foreign workers. Some of these (12,000) were reserved for workers from Albania, Tunisia, and Morocco, with whom Italy has special collaborative agreements. Of the remaining slots, 28,000 were designated for dependent employees, including seasonal workers, 15,000 were for sponsored immigrants, and 2,000 were for the self-employed. But, by the spring, employers and regional officials warned of an impending shortage and requested additions, some of which were authorized (Codini 2001: 26). The following year, again the initial quota of 63,000 was later increased to 83,000, with the bulk of the additions dedicated to seasonal workers who comprised 33,000 of the total. As the under-Secretary of the Interior (quoted in Galluzzo 2001: 18) said, “It was the least we could do. Many firms would risk closing without the supplement of seasonal workers.”

In addition to the unwieldy process involved in arriving at the quota numbers and the *ad hoc* and reactive quality of the quota, the process by which workers qualify has

been subject to criticism. Referring to the requirement that temporary workers who secure a permanent job must return to their home countries to be called back in under the quota, McBritton and Garofalo (2000: 104) lament, “The regulations reproduce...the same bureaucratic *iter*, so Kafkaesque, that the law was meant to avoid and results in a powerful incentive [for immigrant workers] to stay and become illegal, waiting for a new legalization program.”

The ambitious plan to provide immigrant reception centers throughout Italy, bearing the pro-immigrant fingerprints of the leftist coalition government who spearheaded this bill, has predictably fallen short of its far-reaching goals. Most of what are called euphemistically “reception” centers are in fact detention centers for illegal immigrants. Under the heading “Is This Any Way to Welcome Them?,” a journalist (Gullo 2001: 59) described conditions at one of the largest of these centers which he described as “a maximum security prison” for illegal immigrant “guests.” Caritas, the Catholic charity, provides shelter and food for legal immigrants in most major cities, but space is limited, and these shelters bear little resemblance to the cultural and social service enclaves envisioned in the law. I visited one of these centers on the outskirts of Venice that resembled a halfway house, with residents let out during the day to work but otherwise kept under close scrutiny.¹³

The residence cards that for the first time give long-term immigrants the possibility of permanent legal status have been slow to come and unevenly accessible. As with much immigration policy in Italy, implementation of the residence card system is left to local authorities, in this case the provincial police. A recent study of its implementation across three provinces in Lombardy found dramatic differences in what

¹³ See Codini (2001: 27-28) for a summary of the critiques of these immigrant reception centers.

is required to obtain this coveted document (Fasano and Zucchini 2001). In all three cases, the documents requested by local police exceeded what was required by law. In one province, it was the local policy *not to release any permanent residence cards at all*, in clear violation of both the letter and the spirit of the law (Fasano and Zucchini 2001). The Director of Immigrant Affairs at the CGIL office in one large northeastern city told this author that the local authorities were “fussy” about giving out these residence cards, and that the only ones he had seen issued were given to immigrants married to Italian citizens (Author interview, July, 2002).¹⁴

As I write this, a new immigration law is wending its way through Parliament. Consistent with the restrictionist stance of the Berlusconi/Northern League/National Alliance governing coalition, the hotly contested immigration bill would reverse most of the liberal provisions of the 1998 law. Most importantly, it would eliminate the sponsor system, increase the focus on seasonal foreign workers, and make work contracts the prerequisite for residence permits, doing away with the one-year grace period for terminated workers to find new jobs (*Corriere della Sera* 2002a: 4). In addition, a narrowly tailored legalization program for domestic workers has been announced by the Berlusconi government. The program excludes all other types of workers and requires the employers of legalizing domestics to pay a heavy “tax,” precipitating criticism that this legalization law is simply “stuff for rich people” that only rich people can afford (quoted in *Notizie Ansa* 2002i).

¹⁴ Anti-discrimination laws for housing have similarly had only spotty effects. According to union officials and social service representatives, housing is the number-one problem for immigrants in Italy (Author interviews, July, 2001). Despite provisions in this law that prohibit tenants from discriminating against (legal) immigrants, discrimination is widespread and largely goes unpunished (Ambrosini 2000: 140). Advertisements for rentals in newspapers often state explicitly, “No foreigners” (quoted in Smith 2000: A1).

Discussion

Two patterns can be discerned in this tortuous path of Italian immigration policy. First, there are continuous starts, shifts, circlings back, and changes of course. In less than two decades, there have been four major pieces of legislation (1986, 1990, 1998, and 2002) and innumerable amendments, decrees, and government “circulars.” In the course of twelve years, there were four legalization programs (1986-87, 1990-91, 1996, and 1998), each accompanied by statements underscoring the extra-ordinary circumstances justifying this by-now ordinary component of Italian immigration policy.

Second, throughout this period, there is a marked disjuncture between the stated purpose of law and its actual practice or effect. Whether the issue is restrictions and controls (such as employer sanctions, control over illegal workers, or control of the borders), or the rights accorded immigrants by law (such as access to permanent residence cards, reception centers, and equal rights with Italian workers), “the legs” of Italian immigration law frequently do not “go where the law seemed to want to go.”

Two sets of tensions may underlie both of these patterns. First, it seems probable that there is a structural inevitability both to current immigration flows and to regulatory failure at the margins of post-Fordist economies. A consistent theme throughout this volume is the relative inability to curtail immigration from third-world countries to the first world given the economic realities defining each. At the same time, both European Community pressures and internal political exigencies require that immigration be controlled and that borders be secured. In this context, the elusive search for the magic

bullet of immigration control yields twin results: the trial and error, *ad hoc* approach that accounts for the unstable terrain of Italian immigration law, but mostly and--inevitably--“error” as these efforts are doomed to fail.

The second set of tensions at play here relates to the demographic and economic reality that Italy *needs* immigrants, versus the threat of economic and cultural competition that immigrants represent to many Italians. A report from one of the most prestigious foundations studying immigration in Italy (ISMU-cariplo 2001: 6) sums up this complicated dynamic: “Thus, in the face of an immigration that is ever more... necessary, the social alarm of which it is the object does not subside and in fact...increases.” As one journalist has put it, “The contrast is shocking between the demographic and socioeconomic scenario versus the picture that politicians and legislative strategies draw” (quoted in D’Avanzo 2002: 15).

Unemployment is still high in some parts of Italy and in some sectors, particularly in the south, and reliable studies have shown that in some contexts recent immigrants may in fact compete with Italian workers and heighten tensions (Gueye 2000: 136; Gavosto, Venturini, and Villosio 1999; Ambrosini 2001a: 62). But, a sense of economic competition with immigrants afflicts even those Italians who would seem to be most economically secure. Melossi’s (1999) study of 800 Italians in Emilia-Romagna confirms the prevalence of fears of immigrant competition. Among these respondents in one of Italy’s most affluent regions with one of the lowest unemployment rates and highest wages in Italy, and a tradition of left-wing progressive politics, 72% said (when specifically asked) that they could think of nothing positive to say about immigrants, and

48% had negative things to say. Thirty-four percent agreed with the statement, “Immigrants take work from Italians” (Melossi 1999: 59).

Antipathy towards immigrants in Italy often takes the form of an aversion towards multiculturalism, and/or towards the particular cultures that immigrants bring with them. In a nation that defines itself as relatively culturally homogeneous, the influx of immigrants from around the world has caused alarm. The mosque has become the symbol of multiculturalism for a wide range of spokespeople who object to this contamination of the “purity” of Italy’s Christian civilization (Archbishop of Bologna, quoted in Valli 2001: 41).

Right-wing political parties have capitalized on, and fueled, these economic and cultural fears and the aversion towards immigrants they provoke. The Northern League, the National Alliance, and Berlusconi’s Forza Italia, have all made immigration restrictionism a central plank of their platforms and have reaped the benefits in local and national elections. While Italy appears to remain one of the most “tolerant” countries in Europe, and a long tradition of Catholic charity, Communist party influence, and left-wing unionism shores up an important pro-immigration lobby, nonetheless a hot streak of populist antagonism to immigrants is readily available for political exploitation.

One Italian economist (Ambrosini 1999) titled his recent book, *Utili Invasori*, or “Useful Invaders,” calling attention to this conflict between the simultaneous utility of immigrants and hostility towards them. The playing out of this tension has many effects. Most important here, politicians and parties who capitalize on the hostility must ultimately come to grips with the utility. The result of this conflict between what the economy (and demographics) needs and what politics can exploit, goes beyond the

grudging part-open door and the message to immigrants it implies: “Wanted but not welcome” (Zolberg 1987).

It also means that politicians on the right (and the left, for that matter) are likely to promise controls they are unable to deliver on, not only because of the difficulty of stemming the immigrant tide (discussed above), but also because such promises inevitably get diluted in the waters of economic reality. This is most apparent at the local level, where so much of Italian immigration law is actually implemented. The most dramatic examples of the dampening effects of economic realities on restrictionist rhetoric involve regional and municipal officials from right-wing parties whose platforms are anti-immigrant but who nonetheless must respond to the need for immigrant workers. For example, the Councillor in charge of immigration in Veneto, Raffaele Zanon, is a member of the anti-immigrant National Alliance party. In the face of employers demanding immigrant workers, a tight labor market, and a growing economy, Zanon has not only softened his anti-immigrant stance but has taken the lead in establishing an inter-regional discussion group on the social and economic integration of immigrants (Author interviews with Veneto officials, July, 2001). Zanon’s most recent proposal to national Party officials asks that regions be allowed to secure more immigrant workers. The proposal, he explains, derives from consultations with employers and the “particular needs of the (Veneto) region’s social and economic system” (*Notizie Ansa* 2002h: 1). Just as there is a gap between the restrictionist rhetoric of the right-wing coalition heading up the Italian government, and the economic imperatives faced by its local officials, so there is a disjuncture between the strict laws regulating immigration to Italy and the reality of their implementation and enforcement. One journalist has summed it up, “It is not easy to

use an iron fist against immigration without hitting the interests of employers...and without mortgaging the very future of the country” (D’Avanzo 2002: 15).

This tension between economic and demographic reality on one hand and antipathy towards immigrants on the other may also be responsible for the failure of legal provisions extending equal rights to immigrants. While the establishment of permanent residence cards or anti-discrimination laws for immigrant housing, for example, represents a nod to the reality and inevitability of the immigrant presence, their implementation depends on the good will of lower-level local officials, particularly the police. As we have seen, in the context of widespread fears and hostility the predictable result is a gap between the promise of those provisions and their delivery.

One Italian immigration expert (Ambrosini 1999: 13) writes, “Immigration is a kind of mirror in which the structures, development dynamics and unresolved questions of the host society are reflected.” As we have seen, the tensions and dynamics of the Italian political economy play themselves out through immigration policy--with all its twists and turns, spotty enforcement, and inevitable failures. This inexorable link between the structural tensions of society and the tortuous path of its immigration policies thus provides a “mirror” through which both may be viewed more clearly.

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