University of Salford MANCHESTER

Getting personal? The case of Rifondazione Comunista

Newell, JL

Title	Getting personal? The case of Rifondazione Comunista
Authors	Newell, JL
Type	Conference or Workshop Item
URL	This version is available at: http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/10371/
Published Date	2010

USIR is a digital collection of the research output of the University of Salford. Where copyright permits, full text material held in the repository is made freely available online and can be read, downloaded and copied for non-commercial private study or research purposes. Please check the manuscript for any further copyright restrictions.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: usir@salford.ac.uk.

Getting personal? The case of Rifondazione Comunista

JAMES L. NEWELL
School of English, Sociology, Politics & Contemporary History
University of Salford
Salford M5 4WT
j.l.newell@salford.ac.uk

Paper prepared for presentation at the workshop, 'Party leadership in Western Europe: Strictly Personal?' at the 60th Annual Conference of the UK Political Studies Association, Edinburgh, 2 March – 1 April 2010.

Getting personal? The case of Rifondazione Comunista

JAMES L. NEWELL

Introduction

The growing personalisation of politics (by which I mean a growing focus on, and significance for, election outcomes of individual candidates and their characteristics) is a phenomenon that has been driven both by processes extending beyond Italy and by ones peculiar to it. The former include those that have been set in train by the end of the Cold War, which brought the decline of the once deep-seated ideological conflicts between left and right and made policy differences between mainstream parties everywhere harder to identify than in the past. As a consequence, parties have been obliged to mark out their distinctiveness in other ways. One of the ways in which they seem to have done this is by having greater recourse to 'valence' issues as opposed to 'position' issues. Valence issues are ones that allow parties to compete on the basis of being more competent than their rivals. Parties' claims to be more competent than their rivals concentrate their listeners' attention on the personal qualities of their candidates. Second, there has been a growing tendency of parties to compete by throwing mud and attempting to damage each other by fomenting scandal, as the Lewinsky affair in America showed so forcefully – a phenomenon that Ginsberg and Shefter (2002) have called 'politics by other means'. This too has focussed attention on candidates. Third, there has been a shift from 'party-' to 'candidate-centred' campaigning thanks to the development of opinion polling (which has given political actors unmediated access to information about voters) and television and other electronic media (which have allowed candidates to appeal directly to voters) – both developments having diminished the requirement for good party organisation and thus the attention to party itself in campaigns. Finally, media developments have rendered the lives of the individuals who walk on the public stage 'much more visible than they ever were in the past' (Thompson, 2000: 6). If this has enabled politicians to compete by presenting themselves not just as leaders, but as human beings and therefore as 'one of us', then it has encouraged their audiences increasingly to assess them in terms of their character as individuals (Thompson, 2000: 39-41).

The effects of these processes have been reinforced in the Italian case by the consequences of the shift from the First to the Second Republic where it might be more accurate to speak of personalisation as having involved a growing focus on and significance of *leaders* rather than candidates generically. After all, the whole burden of Calise's (2006) argument is that if the traditional role and significance of *parties* in Italian politics has been challenged, then the challenge has come not from candidates but from presidential-type leaders, and the outcome of the contest has yet to be seen. What we might say therefore is that we have seen a shift to 'personalised leadership' in Italy. This shift has been the consequence of three factors.

First, the fact that pre-constituted coalitions now compete for overall majorities of parliamentary seats in a bipolar system means that the voter is in effect being asked to make a choice between alternative proposals regarding the composition of the executive – the identity of the person who will lead that executive thus becoming one of the criteria to be used in making that choice.

Second, prime ministers' positions are now legitimised directly, by the nature of election outcomes themselves, and consequently their power and authority vis-à-vis their cabinet colleagues and parliamentary followers has been much enhanced. From having been mediators in the days when they and their cabinet colleagues all owed their positions to party agreements about executive composition only once the distribution of votes was known, they are now closer to being authoritative leaders even though they have not (yet) acquired the capacity to hire and fire and to direct policy that their Westminster counterparts enjoy. Yet it is likely that the enhanced role of the Italian prime minister has been and is self-reinforcing: the more they are able to provide authoritative leadership the more this is expected of them; and the more this is expected of them, the greater is their capacity actually to provide it (Hine and Finocchi, 1991).

Third, the party-system transformation and the emergence of bi-polar competition had as a concomitant the emergence of Silvio Berlusconi as leader of the coalition of the centre right and of its largest party. His extraordinary success (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2009) in exploiting his own charisma as a means of holding his coalition together, and as the basis of a populist appeal capable of garnering wide electoral support, has obliged the centre left (albeit reluctantly) to attempt to compete on the same terrain (even at the cost of grave mistakes)[1] – driven to do so by two further considerations besides. As the more fragmented of the two coalitions, they have always found it more difficult than their opponents 'consistently to communicate single, precise and shared messages' (Pasquino, 2008: 28) and have therefore been under additional pressure to find leaders capable of imposing the necessary discipline. Second, however, the leaders they have had have generally been unable to do so because they have not led significantly sized parties of their own – and this has driven recourse to primary elections (most notably in October 2005 in the case of Romano Prodi). If these have been seen as alternative vehicles for enabling leaders to create cohesion, then they have, naturally, intensified the spotlight on leaders themselves.

Personalised leadership has, of course, brought outstanding results to Berlusconi and the centre right. First, it has meant that his party has been constantly the most-voted since the early 1990s (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2009: 102). It has enabled him to become one of the longest-serving major political leaders on the continent. Second, it means that he is the centre around which essentially everything in Italian politics revolves these days: On the one hand, he is the fulcrum around which the centre right is built and whose unity depends almost entirely on his continued popularity. On the other hand,

[1] As in 2001 when they sacrificed the advantages of incumbency for the choice of a leader assumed to have an image that would enable him, as leader, to push Berlusconi harder than outgoing prime minister Giliano Amato: see Pasquino (2002).

opposition to him is the only common denominator of the parties on the centre left – and thus the source of their weakness and division; for while the PD has sought to expand towards the centre by shelving anti-Berlusconi rhetoric, this has deprived it still further of any clear identity leaving it vulnerable to the incursions of its allies to which many of its voters feel closer in any event (Diamanti, 2008). As Giuliano Urbani (2009), Culture Secretary in the 2001 government, pointed out at the beginning of 2009: 'to be on the centre right means to support Berlusconi, to be on the centre left means to oppose him'. Third, his personal wealth and his charisma have enabled him to exercise unassailable power over his own party – essentially his own personal creation and without any factions to speak of. Largely as a consequence of these three factors, when he took office in 2008, he did so as the head of what looked like being the strongest government in Italy's post-war history.

This then raises the question of the significance of the emergence of personalised leadership for the radical left in Italy bearing in mind its extraordinary eclipse since the end of the First Republic: I am of course referring to the massive reversal of fortunes that is represented, first, by the decline and transformation of the Italian Communist Party (once the main opposition party and the largest, most influential communist party in the west) – a process culminating in the failure – second – of candidates bearing the socialist or communist label to elect any parliamentary representatives whatsoever in 2008. What role has the growing significance of personalised leadership played in the downfall of the radical left and what has been its own experience with this type of politics? Has it resisted or embraced it? and with what consequences? In the following paragraphs I explore these questions by focussing on Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation, RC) and its organisational and electoral trajectory from its emergence to the aftermath of the general election of 2008.

Rifondazione as a victim of personalisation

In their paper on the search for personalised leadership on the part of the centre left, Campus and Cosenza (2010) show, effectively and convincingly, how, in seeking to adjust its strategies to Berlusconi's communication styles, the Democratic Party (Parttito Democratico, PD) found itself disadvantaged in 2008. Especially interesting is the suggestion that posters bearing photographs of the leader, by recalling Berlusconi's 'visionary' posters of the 1990s, were ill-suited to the poor economic context (which required statesmanlike qualities and a restraint on visionary tendencies). Interesting, too, is the suggestion that despite Veltroni's attempts to take the spotlight away from Berlusconi by refusing even to name him during the campaign, the very refusal, seconded by the posters, merely served to reinforce the continuous implicit presence of the entrepreneur. Put simply, the message of the paper seems to be that in 2008, just as on previous occasions, the centre left found itself fighting the campaign on terms dictated by Berlusconi, unable to shift the contest off the entrepreneur's territory, onto its own. I want to argue that this has been true, for an additional and broader set of reasons, for RC too.

The reasoning goes like this. First, the consequences of its period in government from 2006 to 2008 have been disastrous for it. In the election that followed the government's demise, it fielded candidates within the framework of the Rainbow Left (la Sinistra-l'Arcobaleno, SA). This was an electoral coalition involving the Party of Italian Comunists (Partito dei Comunisti Italiani, PdCI), the Greens and the Democratic Left (Sinistra Democratica, SD), giving RC an opportunity (as the only party of the four with a chance of overcoming the exclusion threshold) of hegemonising the others, while giving effect to that 'consensual divorce' from the PD that would allow both to take their distance from unhappy memories of the Prodi coalition. The SA obtained 3.1 percent of the vote as compared to the 10.2 percent obtained by RC, the PdCI and the Greens combined in 2006. The election post-mortem that took place at a party congress held in July 2008 saw the emergence of two contrasting points of view spearheaded by ex-Social Welfare minister, Paolo Ferrero, on the one hand and Nichi Vendola, president of the Puglia region, on the other.[2] The disagreement led the two groups to sponsor, together with varying combinations of the supporters of the other SA parties, two competing lists at the 2009 European elections: the Lista Anticapitalista headed by Ferrero and Sinistra e Libertà headed by Vendola. In the meantime the Government and the PD had conspired to dish the radical left by introducing, for the first time, a 4 per cent exclusion threshold for the elections, which neither list managed to clear.

The disastrous 2008 performance ultimately responsible for this split was a consequence of the dilemma in which RC found itself by participating in government. On the one hand, it was one of nine parties all of which were essential to the survival of a government with a majority of two. Consequently, every single one of its senators was subject to the blackmail of less radical coalition partners who could threaten government collapse as the price of RC's failure to comply with policies uncongenial to it. In that case the party risked losing more recently acquired supporters who would, more than likely, attribute the collapse to RC 'irresponsibility'. On the other hand, the party was under pressure to resist compromises, especially in relation to its flagship policies, as the price of retaining the commitment of long-standing core supporters, ever anxious about any signs that the party might have sold out. The ultimate failure to resolve this conundrum shone through clearly in the election results: of those who had supported one of the SA parties in 2006, 31.3 percent now abstained or voted for one of the revolutionary parties to the left of SA, while 30.1 percent voted for the PD or the anti-political Italy of Values (Italia dei Valori, IdV) to its right – while only 31.3 percent remained loyal by voting for the SA (De Sio, 2008: 65).

[2] Vendola felt that that the SA had been unsuccessful because it had been a discordant federation. What was needed was a constituent process uniting all those parties of the left willing to rethink fundamentally what being on the left now meant. By overcoming division, such a pluralistic organisation would, by virtue of its size, enable profitable engagement with the other large parties in the Italian political system, and find an interested audience among pressure-group activists, in the trade unions and among the new social movements. Ferrero's view was that inherent in Vendola's position was a danger of the liquidation of the party – whose organisational reinforcement was on the contrary necessary if one were to avoid the twin danger of left unity being deprived of specific horizons, and the risk of conflict among the potential constituent parties over what the nature of the new organisation was to be.

The possibility, not to say likelihood, that they would find themselves in the dilemma I have just described is one that the party's leaders must have been aware of before joining the government; for the Italian Socialist Party (Partito Socialista Italiano, PSI) had faced a very similar dilemma when it joined the government in 1963. And it had ultimately been precisely *because* of this dilemma that the PSI had later degenerated, becoming a party of power brokers, without ideals, for whom the organisation was little more than a means of personal advancement (Newell, forthcoming). So this raises the question of why RC agreed to join government in the first place; and the answer, I believe, is that thanks to the consequences of personalised leadership, it had little choice.

As Mauro Calise (2006) has shown, the emergence of personalised leadership in Italy is bound up with the processes and political circumstances that underlay the 1990s transformation of the party system and that consequently had a profound impact on the internal life of parties. We think that such processes can best be depicted as follows. First, long-term social changes, including increasing urbanisation, rising levels of education and increasing geographical and social mobility, had begun to weaken voters' long-term and ideological commitments to parties well before the upheavals of the 1990s. If this brought declining turnouts, a growing fragmentation of the vote and increasing voter volatility, then it also brought a long-term decline in party membership to which RC itself was in no sense immune when it later emerged (Figure 1; Table 1). Meanwhile, parties were induced to give a higher profile to leaders in their campaign messages, bringing a presidentialisation of electoral competition, by the growing significance, described above, of the mass media in practices of political communication.[3] Together, these two processes – growing weakness of parties 'on the ground' and the presidentialistion of electoral competition – created pressure on parties to strengthen their central organisations.

Consequently, once it had become clear that RC's place in the national party system would be central and not marginal, the party's leaders had decided to increase the resources invested in the central bureaucracy (Bertolino, 2004: 277-8). However, the efficacy of the latter was heavily dependent on the party's professionalisation,[4] and on the resources accruing to RC through the system of public funding of political parties[5] – both of which in turn depended on the party's success in getting candidates elected to public

[3] Thus, while the 'Berlusconi revolution' provided a decisive push in this direction, it was not a push that was entirely original: the entrepreneur's friend and associate, Bettino Craxi, had already done something not dissimilar when, combining the roles of PSI general secretary and prime minister, he had sought to overcome the constant threat of being squeezed by his two larger rivals to left and right, the Communists and Christian Democrats, by cultivating a reputation for decisiveness and firm leadership.

[4] i.e. growth in the numbers for whom politics was the principal source of employment.

[5] Approximately two thirds of the party's income came from the state thanks to the system of public funding of political parties, with the amounts accruing to them being perfectly correlated with their vote totals (Newell, 2000: 77). Bertolino (2004: 323, my translation) notes that public funding

> has been a fundamental resource for the organisational consolidation of the party, to the extent that its central organisation has become totally dependent for its functioning on state contributions. It is only thanks to the allocation of public funds, in fact, that Rifondazione has been able to initiate a limited process of bureaucratic consolidation centrally and locally.

office. So in the years and months leading up to the 2006 election the party was under pressure from at least this quarter if no other to come to some kind of coalition arrangement with the remainder of the centre left; for the results of the 2001 election, when RC fielded its own independent candidates in the single-member constituencies for the Senate contest, confirmed that an independent stance would have risked electoral meltdown: Where two coalitions compete for an overall majority of seats, the rational voter will support an unaligned third party only if it is among the two best placed in his/her constituency. Not even in the central 'red-belt' regions was there a Senate constituency where the party came anywhere near to fulfilling this criterion.

But there was an additional, more specific, pressure deriving from the emergence of personalised leadership that was also driving RC in the direction of a coalition agreement in 2005; for by then it was clear that centre-left voters were more strongly attached to their alliance under Prodi (then called the Unione) than to any of its constituent parties – and united more by opposition to Berlusconi than by anything more positive. RC thus risked massive hostility if it took an independent stance, as this would have weakened the forces opposed to the entrepreneur. So here we have another example of the extraordinary impact of the personalised leadership of Silvio Berlusconi – which not only brings cohesion to his own coalition but also perpetuates the potential for acrimonious division on the centre left thanks to the fact that he provokes very powerful negative sentiments here while also being really the only source of any cohesion in this area of the political spectrum.

Finally, bearing in mind that RC secretary Fausto Bertinotti's search for an agreement with the remainder of the centre left did not go unchallenged in the party at the time, one needs to consider why a mere electoral coalition, of the kind RC had agreed to in 1996, the last time the centre left had won an election, was not put in place. This would have involved RC and the remainder of the centre left agreeing a series of stand-down arrangements whereby in a handful of the single-member constituencies the former would have enjoyed a free run and the support of the latter – in exchange for agreement to put the same arrangements in place, 'in reverse', in the remainder of the constituencies. Such an arrangement, provided it involved no programmatic compromise or prior commitment as to the party's stance in the aftermath of the election, would have satisfied those in the party who were critical of party secretary Bertinotti's search for alliance because they were committed (as a large proportion were) to the view that the remaining centre-left parties could be distinguished from 'Berlusconism' in terms that were quantitative not qualitative and that no long-term alliance with them could be contemplated in advance of agreement on the programmatic content of such an alliance. But it is a reasonable supposition that the remainder of the centre left would have refused any arrangement that did not involve a prior commitment to assume governing responsibilities and thus a programmatic agreement: The last time the centre left had conceded a mere electoral coalition it had found RC taking the position that it would support the government from outside on a case-by-case basis only. And it had subsequently fallen from office thanks to the refusal of 21 of RC's 34 deputies to support it in a confidence vote on the Finance Bill in the autumn of 1998. It would not allow itself to walk into such a trap again.

In short, what we think the case of RC shows is that in Italy as elsewhere, the emergence of personalised leadership has had as its concomitants a withering of parties' links with civil society and thus a growing dependence on professionalization and public funding – as Calise (2000: 18) and others have noted. The result, I want to argue, has been to render the life of parties of the radical left even more difficult than it would have been otherwise. Liberal democracy, by institutionalising political conflict and by offering formal political equality while remaining indifferent to substantive inequalities in the distribution of power has always disadvantaged the left in competition with the right; for on the one hand, it renders illegitimate any political project whose pursuit fails to respect its own institutional principles. On the other hand, by virtue of the substantive power imbalance itself, it erects considerable barriers in the way of the construction of a majority that would allow the pursuit of redistribution by means that *are* deemed legitimate. That the emergence of personalised leadership has compounded this problem is shown very clearly by the results of every election (*none* of which have brought decisive victory to the left) since the start of the Second Republic in Italy (Mastropaolo, 2009).

Personalised politics on the part of Rifondazione

Having considered how RC has been affected by personalised leadership in Italian politics, we now consider what use it itself has been able to make of this type of politics. Personalised leadership does not, in at least one sense of the term, seem to sit comfortably with being on the left because the essence of being left-wing is, as Norberto Bobbio (1994) has persuasively argued, a commitment to the pursuit of equality. According to Bobbio, a society is more equal the larger the number of people to whom resources or rights are distributed; the larger the number of categories of resources or rights distributed; the less restrictive the criteria used for the distribution. Thus universal suffrage is more equal than male suffrage; social and liberal democracy more equal than liberal democracy alone; the acquisition of adulthood more equal as a criterion for the distribution of political and social rights than the acquisition of property.

Such aspirations seem incompatible with personalised leadership since the latter is – arguably – based either on charismatic authority or on clientelism. In the former case support for the leader comes from what s/he is, in the latter case from what s/he can do for the supporter as an individual. Both differ from support rooted in ideological commitments where the leader is supported because of what s/he stands for, and is therefore not leadership of a *personalised* kind at all. Neither charisma nor clientelism is compatible with a commitment to equality. The former grounds the legitimacy of the leader's actions in presumptions about his or her supposedly extraordinary endowments – implicitly valuing inequality by finding the key to happy coexistence in qualities that make humans different. The latter undermines principles of equality because its effect is to distribute resources on a particularistic rather than a universalistic basis – implying that what are important are concrete human relationships rather than abstract rules impartially applied.

So we would not expect to find much, if any commitment to personalised leadership in a party like Rifondazione Comunista which is a party of the radical left.[6] If therefore we *do* find evidence of personalised leadership in a party like Rifondazione, then we will have strong support for the hypothesis of its emergence due to forces powerful enough to override a party's ideology. In other words, the party offers itself as a case to test the hypothesis in the crucial circumstances where it is least likely to hold up, so that if it can be shown to work here, then it is likely to be valid in all other circumstances as well (Hague, Harrop and Breslin, 1998: ch. 16).

In the sense described, Rifondazione has, as far as we can tell, clearly resisted tendencies towards personalisation. One of the indicators of the presence of this phenomenon that Calise uses, in a paragraph that is worth quoting in its entirety, is the degree of internal conflict in a party:

> Obviously, the dramatisation of internal conflicts has not been confined to relationships between the parties belonging to each coalition. Rather it has affected, on both right and left, what once upon a time was the sacrarium of the politburo – transforming the key site and symbol of collegial decisions into an arena where a party's colonels compete publicly and ferociously among themselves and, in a none-too-veiled manner, with the leader. Or else the party's president competes with its secretary (and perhaps one-time heir apparent). Or again, the once noble father competes with the son, prodigal only unto himself. It is a war of all against all also affecting those components, on the fringes of the two alliances, which continue to profess the virtues of social solidarity and joint responsibility, though from the altar of the most unbridled media individualism. As both cause and consequence of this process, there has been a re-emergence, a strengthening and a formalisation of factions as the basis of party organisation – once a violation that was tolerated, or a taboo and unacceptable threat to party unity; today a basic rule for determining the weight of each individual leader, for negotiating internal arrangements and for threatening splits – to the point that even the larger parties have come increasingly to resemble federations of smaller quasi-parties, with the shadow and the threat of personal parties cast over all of the boldest changes and over all the most ambitious plans for merger and aggregation (Calise, 2006: 92-3, my translation).

On the one hand, Rifondazione has, from the beginning, clearly fitted this image; for unlike its main predecessor party, the Italian Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI) RC has never been a democratic centralist organisation but on the contrary, the fact that it emerged through the confluence of a variety of political leaders, each with their own political resources and geographical power bases, has meant the persistence of factional competition, effectively preventing the emergence of strong leadership capable

[6] That is to say it is a party most of whose members have traditionally gone beyond social democracy in wanting the supersession rather than the regulation of capitalism – but not as far as the extreme left with its unqualified commitment to revolutionising the institutions of the state and its repudiation, as a matter of principle, of any governing vocation.

of simply imposing decisions on the entire party. On the other hand, this competition has clearly been based on ideology, not on the personal endowments or abilities of the faction leaders, much less – as far as we can tell – on the promise of clientelistic favours. For example, at the sixth congress in 2005, debate revolved around five resolutions presented by factions each of which could be distinguished in terms of the positions it took towards the idea of alliance with centre left and towards other strategic issues.[7]

Fairly obviously, therefore, RC does not display personalised leadership – is not a 'personal party' – in the sense in which Forza Italia (and now the People of Freedom – Popolo della Libertà, PdL) has been described thus: it is not a party founded as a vehicle for the ambitions of its leader; one whose image is entirely bound up with that of its leader, over which the leader exercises absolute – not to say, patrimonial – authority.

At the outset we suggested that a growing focus on, and significance for, election outcomes, of party leaders and their characteristics, could be taken as the hallmark of personalised leadership. We can therefore think of it as having the three components described by what Poguntke and Webb (2005: 10) call 'the electoral face of presidentialisation': (1) a growing emphasis on leadership appeals in election campaigning; (2) a growing focus of the media on leaders; (3) a growing significance of leader effects in voting behaviour.

We are unlikely, we think, to find much empirical evidence of the third component in the case of RC, not only because of the general difficulties of establishing leader effects alluded to by Poguntke and Webb (2005: 10-11) but also because of the relatively low media profile that is inevitably occupied by a small party in an election campaign: in order for any such effects to be possible at all, a party and its leader will presumably have to get over a certain awareness threshold in people's minds. For what it is worth, on the basis of the data we have available, we can suggest that if leadership effects there are among Italian voters, then in 2008 at least, these appeared to be less significant in the case of Bertinotti than in the case of the leaders of most other parties: Table 2. The first column of the table shows the percentage of respondents giving a mark of at least 6 out of 10 for the leaders of the main parties. If we assume that some kind of leader effect is suggested by a percentage giving such a mark that is higher than the percentage actually voting for the party, then it seems to be present in the cases of all parties and leaders. Perhaps not surprisingly, however, it is *least* present in what are the two most extreme and 'ideological' cases: Bertinotti and the SA, and Santanchè and The

[7] The first was presented by a coalition of forces led by Bertinotti, wanting an alliance, and won 59 percent. The second, 'To be communists', was presented by the faction surrounding the journal, *l'Ernesto*, and won 26 percent. (This faction consisted of those with leanings towards the positions taken by former party president Armando Cossutta, and who distinguished themselves from the Bertinottiani above all by their much more positive view of the experience of communism in the twentieth century). The third resolution, 'For a communist project' was presented by the faction surrounding the Trotskyist, Marco Ferrando and won 6.9 per cent. The fourth, 'Another refoundation is possible', was presented by the 'Critical Left' (Sinistra Critica) or *Erre* faction (another Trotskyist grouping, led by Luigi Malabarba), and won 6.5 percent. The fifth resolution, 'Break with Prodi', was presented by the faction surrounding the journal *FalceMartello* ('Hammer and Sickle') and won 1.6 percent. (This faction identifies with the international tendency, 'Committeee for a Marxist International', formerly led by the British Trotskyist, Ted Grant).

Right (La Destra). This impression appears to be confirmed by looking at the standard deviations which give an indication of the extent to which the leaders polarise voters. Not surprisingly, the highest standard deviation is for Berlusconi followed by Umberto Bossi: only Pierferdinando Casini of the small Union of the Centre (Unione di Centro, UDC) has a lower score than Bertinotti.

At least part of the reason for this will have had to do with the RC's participation in the SA in 2008. This was a coalition within which RC was strong, but not perhaps as strong in relation to the others as the PdL was strong in relation to its own allies. One could therefore anticipate RC being prevented by its allies from attempting to gain any advantages there may have been there to be had by personalising the campaign – through, for example, the inclusion of its own leader, Bertinotti's, portrait on campaign posters. And in fact, though Bertinotti's image was not *absent* from campaign propaganda (Figure 2), nationally, SA posters appeared to mirror those of the PdL and its decision, discussed by Campus and Cosenza (2010), not to include Berlsuconi's portrait in order to give space to the new political organisation he had created (Figure 3).[8] The SA too was a new creation of which many entertained high hopes, it being conceived by large numbers of its supporters, not just as a coalition but as the antechamber to a later merger of its components. Indeed, SA posters went further than those of the PdL in not even including its leader's name, something that might also have reflected the position publicly stated by Bertinotti even before the election, that he would relinquish the leadership once the campaign was over.

Finally, we can get some (rough) idea of the relative focus of the media on leader and party as compared to the situation for other leaders and parties by examining mentions in newspaper articles. For this purpose we used the online database of *la Repubblica* to compare the number of mentions of leader and party, for each of the competitors during the 2008 campaign period: see Figure 4. What we can see is that unsurprisingly, by far and away the largest number of mentions of the leaders are mentions of Berlusconi followed by Veltroni and that both are mentioned much more frequently than their parties – overwhelmingly so in Berlusconi's case.[9] Bertinotti too is mentioned much more frequently than the party he represents, but there is little that seems unusual about this: only for Bossi and Santanchè is this not true and if he is mentioned ten times more frequently than his party, the same is true for Berlusconi and Casini.

[8] Interestingly, here we have yet a further example of the way in which Berlusconi has managed to impose on his competitors the terms on which they must compete with him: SA's slogan, '*Fai una scelta di parte*' very much recalls the famous campaign slogan used by Berlusconi in 2001 when he invited voters to make '*una scelta di campo*'!

[9] On the one hand we might expect leaders to be mentioned more frequently than their parties in any case, quite apart from any influences of personalisation since newspapers report what people say and statements reported have to be attributed to individuals. On the other hand, we might expect parties in any case to be mentioned more frequently than leaders since any party has more than one spokesperson whose statements might be reported.

Conclusion

I am led to draw three conclusions from the discussion hitherto. First, the radical left has been damaged by the causes and dynamics of the emergence of personalised leadership in Italian politics, the case of RC suggesting that if in a post-ideological world personalised leadership brings competitive advantages to most parties, then in the case of radical left parties it increases the handicaps which the requirement to seek power through elections places upon them, partly because it conflicts with such parties' ideological commitments.

Second, therefore, the case of RC suggests that personalised leadership features less highly among radical left parties than among most others. Its natural home appears to be among populist right-wing parties – though the radical left clearly does *perceive* the existence of leadership effects: Bertinotti was chosen to lead the SA, despite his reluctance, because he was perceived as the most charismatic of the candidates for the role.

Third, in the case of 'personalised leadership' there is a danger of conceptual stretching, so that the notion needs clarifying. As things stand, it and like terms are used in the literature to refer to what seems an unmanageable number of things, while in addition, phenomena that are actually quite contradictory have been pointed to as ones supposedly betokening it. Thus, for example, the emergence and growth of Forza Italia is often taken as the epitome of the significance of personalised leadership in Italian politics, since, if it was thanks to it that the 1993 reform of the electoral system triggered the emergence of bipolar party competition in place of the tri-polar competition of the past, then the party was, 'to a substantial extent, the private property of its founder', 'conceived and developed as Berlusconi's *personal party*' (Calise, 2005: 98, italics in original). Yet as we have seen, Calise (for example) *also* takes the opposite – that is, factional conflict (and therefore leadership *weakness*) – as a sign of the phenomenon because – he tells us – such conflict contrasts with an era, dominated by the Christian Democrats (Democrazia Cristiana, DC) and the PCI, the leadership of whose secretaries

> was founded on the unwritten rule enjoining respect, in public pronouncements, for the principle of collegial responsibility. In official speeches the first person singular always gave way, as subject and expression of collective identities, to 'we' or – more frequently and willingly – to the party as the personification of the will of individuals' (Calise, 2006: 90, my translation).

Both of these features – the number of things it refers to and the contradictory nature of its indicators – undermine the utility of the concept – posing the threat that it becomes an article of faith (while – for example – diverting attention from the fact that in one sense it is certainly nothing new in Italian politics, clientelism and factional politics having been two of the most distinctive features of the party – the DC – that ruled the country uninterruptedly for half a century following the war). The framework for analysis offered by Poguntke and Webb for the so-called presidentialisation of politics might offer a way forward, but something *does* need to be done as otherwise the notion risks becoming somewhat like the struggle of the working class: if all history does not in fact appear to

be the history of class struggle because the latter is not, empirically, much in evidence, then one can say that the struggle is 'latent'. If one then objects that there does not even appear to be much evidence of latent class struggle, then one can still save the notion – by arguing that the lack arises from the ideological domination and hegemony of the working class by the capitalists… and so on. So 'personalised leadership' and like terms need to be confined to a limited number of phenomena – I suggest those of the electoral arena – and distinguished more clearly from their causes, dynamics and concomitants than appears to be the case at present.

References

Albertazzi, D. and D. McDonnell (2009), 'The parties of the centre right: Many oppositions, one leader' pp.102-117 in J.L. Newell (ed.), *The Italian General Election of 2008: Berlusconi strikes back*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Barisione, Mauro and Patrizia Catellani (2008), 'L'offerta personalizzata degli sfidanti', pp.137-48 in ITANES [Italian National Election Study], *Il ritorno di Berlusconi: Vincitori e vinti nelle elezioni del 2008*, Bologna; Il Mulino.

Bertolino, Simone (2004), *Rifondazione comunista: Storia e organizzazione*, Bologna: il Mulino.

Bobbio, Norberto (2004), *Destra e sinistra: Ragioni e significati di una distinzione politica*, Rome: Donzelli.

Calise, Mauro (2000), *Il partito personale*, Rome and Bari: Laterza.

Calise, Mauro (2005), 'Presidentialization Italian style', pp.88-106 in Thomas Pguntke and Paul Wbb (eds), *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Calise, Mauro (2006), *La terza repubblica: Partiti contro presidenti*, Rome and Bari: Laterza.

Campus, Donatella and Giovanna Cosenza (2010), 'Not only Berlusconi. The search for a personalized leadership in the Italian Centre-Left', paper prepared for presentation to the panel, 'Personalised Leadership: Not Just a Phenomenon of the Right', 60th annual conference of the UK Political Studies Association, Edinburgh, 29 March – 1 April.

De Sio, Lorenzo (2008), 'Il secondo motore del cambiamento: I flussi di voto', pp.57-70 in ITANES, *Il ritorno di Berlusconi: Vincitori e vinti nelle elezioni del 2008*, Bologna: il Mulino.

Diamanti, Ilvo (2008), 'Il "non luogo dei democratici" *la Repubblica*, 21 December.

Ginsberg, B. and M. Shefter (2002), *Politics by Other Means*: *Politicians, Prosecutors, and the Press from Watergate to Whitewater*, 3rd edition, New York and London: W. W. Norton.

Hague, Rod Martin Harrop and Shaun Breslin (1998), *Political Science: A Comparative Introduction*, fourth edition, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Hine, David and Renato Finocchi (1991), 'The Italian Prime Minister', *West European Politics*, vol. 14, no. 2.

Mastropaolo, Alfio (2009), 'The political context 2006 - 2008', pp.25-42 in J.L. Newell (ed.), *The Italian General Election of 2008: Berlusconi strikes back*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Newell, James L. (2000), 'Party Finance and Corruption: Italy, pp.61-87 in Robert Williams (ed.), *Party Finance and Political Corruption*, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan.

Newell, James L. (forthcoming), 'Between a rock and a hard place: The governing dilemmas of Rifondazione Comunista' forthcoming in Jonathan Olsen, Michael Koß and Dan Hough (eds), *Left Parties in National Governments*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

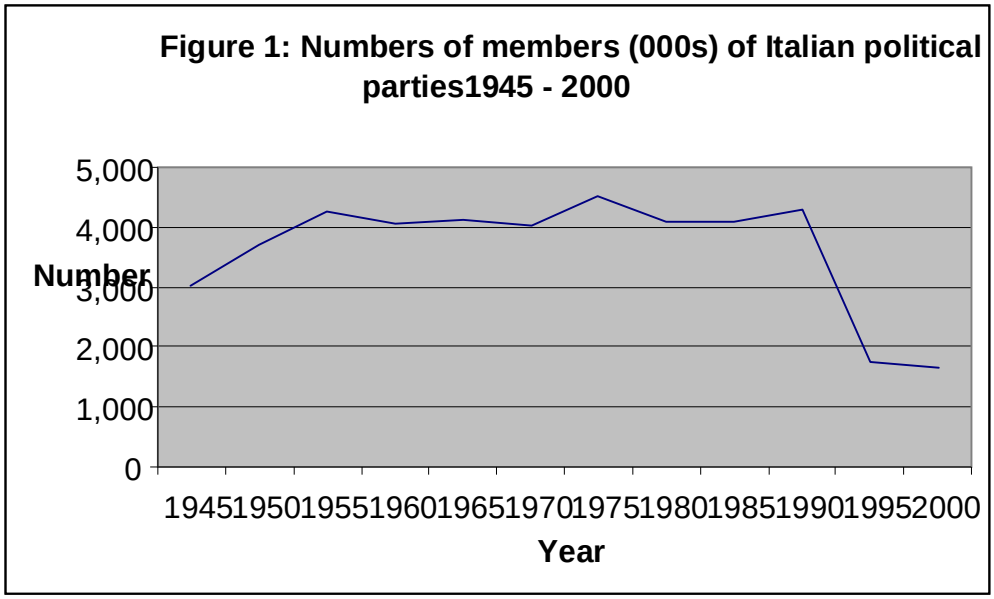
Pasquino, Gianfranco (2002), 'The political context 1996 - 2001', pp.29-46 in James Newell (ed.), *The Italian General Election of 2001: Berlusconi's Victory*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Pasquino, Gianfranco (2008), 'The political context 2001 - 2006', pp.15-32 in James Newell (ed.), *The Italian General Election of 2006: Romano Prodi's Victory*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Poguntke, Thomas and Paul Webb (2005), 'The Presidentialization of Politics in Democratic Societies: A Framework for Analysis', pp.1-26 in *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thompson, J. B. (2000), *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Urbani, G. (2009), Interview with Aldo Cazzullo, 'Urbani: il progretto del «nuovo» Pdl? La debolezza delPd ci contaggia', *Corriere della Sera*, 15 January, p.6.



Source: 'La democrazia: nuovi scenari, nuovi poteri. Spunti per un dibattito', web.tiscalinet.it/pslvr/download/feb/feltrin.ppt

Table 1: Voting support and membership of RC, 1992 – 2006

	1992	1994	1996	2001	2006
Chamber elections: n. of votes	2,202,574	2,334,029	3,215,960	1,868,113	2,229,604
N. of members	117,463	113,580	127,073	92,020	92,752*
Members as % of voters	5.3	4.9	4.0	4.9	4.2

Sources: http://www.ecn.org/reds/prc/VIcongresso/prc0502VIdestini.html
http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rifondazione_Comunista

Note: * figure is for 2005

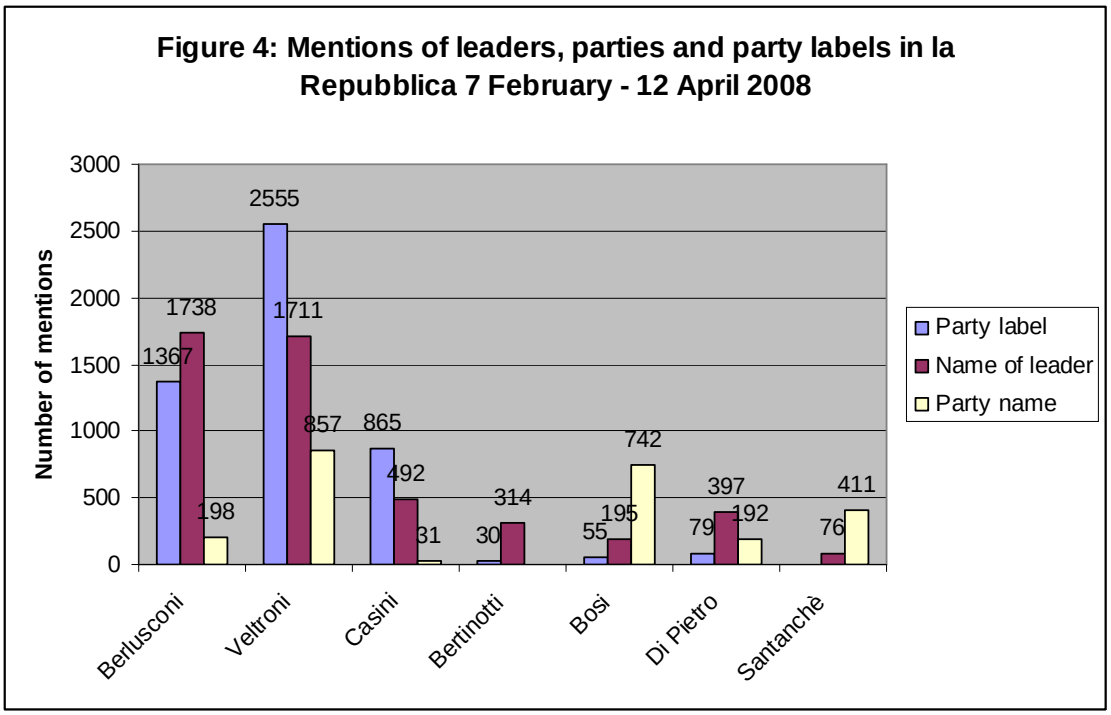
Table 3: Percentages awarding at least six out of ten, average scores and variability in score for the leaders of the main Italian parties, 2008

	Percent	Average	Standard Deviation	Number
Fini (PdL)	54.4	5.8	2.5	2,625
Veltroni (PD)	53.5	5.9	2.3	2,662
Berlusconi (PdL)	53.4	5.6	3.0	2,680
Di Pietro (IdV)	46.6	5.4	2.3	2,610
Casini (UDC)	42.0	5.2	2.1	2,582
Bossi (Lega)	38.5	4.6	2.8	2,625
Bertinotti (SA)	29.7	4.5	2.3	2,562
Santanchè (La Destra)	26.1	4.2	24	2,167

Source: Barisione and Catellani (2008: 138; table 10.1)

Figure 2: 2008 election campaign poster featuring SA leader, Fausto Bertinotti

Figure 3: SA campaign poster for the 2008 election



Note: 'Party label' refers to the abbreviations, PdL, PD, UDC etc. ('Carroccio' in the case of the Lega) by which the parties are also often referred to in the press.