

FREEMASONRY IN ITALY

Introduction

Italian history is traced back to the legend of Romulus and Remus and describes one of the oldest cultures in the world. Yet, like Germany, it has only a relatively recent history as a unified nation and regional, ethnic and traditional differences are still a part of Italian society. Its politics are complex to say the least and this is reflected in its Masonic history.

History

The Roman Republic and Empire dominated part of the world for many centuries and, with some exceptional periods, was an example of an ancient democratic state. The empire brought roads, canals and forms of civilization to rural communities albeit under slavery conditions.

Figure 1 - The Italian Provinces circa 1860



After the fall of the Roman Empire and by the end of the 18th Century the Italian peninsular consisted of a number of independent City-states shown in Figure 1 and it was not until the mid-nineteenth century that Italy became a united nation.

During the interim period, despite the lack of cohesion and disagreements between these City-states, the Italy people made immeasurable contributions European philosophy, science, and art during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

The Italian peninsula also experienced several foreign dominations. Parts of Italy were annexed to the Spanish, the Austrian and Napoleon's empire, while the Vatican maintained control over the central part of it, before the Italian Peninsula was eventually liberated and unified amidst much struggle in the 19th and 20th centuries.

By 1848 Pius IX and the Papal States were overwhelmed by the movement for Italian unification. The papal prime minister was assassinated, an act which the revolutions leader, the Freemason **Giuseppe Mazzini**, deemed 'necessary and just'. Rome rebelled, Pius fled, and **Mazzini** set up a Roman Republic. It did not last. In 1850 the French put Pius back on the Roman throne, but the secret societies had signalled the end of his territorial power.

Twenty years later Italian unity was achieved, largely through the efforts of three Masons; the revolutionary **Mazzini**, the soldier **Garibaldi** and the statesman **Cavour**. By 1870 these men had destroyed the Pope's earthly dominion. Rome was made the capital of an independent secular nation state and the Papacy was reduced to 109 acres around St. Peter's. In his tortured thirty-two year reign Pius IX issued six bulls attacking Masonry but the definitive condemnation came in 1884 with the Papal Bull "*Humanum Genus*", in which Leo XIII lamented that the pontiff was falsely deprived of temporal power, the stronghold of his rights and of his freedom.

In the late-19th century and early 20th century the new Kingdom of Italy built a colonial empire, colonizing parts of Africa, and countries along the Mediterranean.

Italy suffered enormous losses in World War I but came out on the winning side. The Fascists, led by Benito Mussolini, took over and set up an authoritarian dictatorship 1922-43. Italy was a junior partner of Nazi Germany and Japan in World War II, and after the southern regions had been liberated in 1943 the Fascists fought on until surrendering in 1945. Italy was a hard-fought battlefield in 1943-45.

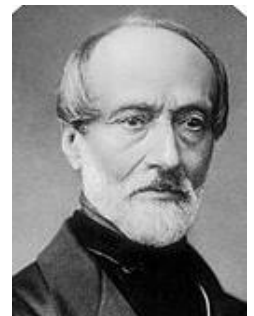
In 1946, due to a referendum, the Kingdom of Italy was abolished, and the Italian Republic was born. The 1950s and 1960s in Italy saw a period of rapid modernization and economic growth and ever since, Italy has been one of the founding nations, or has joined, several organizations, such as the European Economic Community, which later became the European Union, the United Nations, NATO, UNESCO, the G7, which afterward became the G8, the G20, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Freemasons and Italian Unification



An active Freemason, **Garibaldi** had little use for rituals, but thought of masonry as a network to unite progressive men as brothers both within nations and as members of a global community. He eventually was elected Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy. After the Pope's flight from Rome and the proclamation of the Roman Republic, **Ugo Bassi** took part with **Garibaldi's** forces against the French troops sent to re-establish the temporal power. He risked his life many times while tending the wounded under fire, and when **Garibaldi** was forced to retreat from Rome with his volunteers his chaplain followed him in his march to San Marino.

One of the more prominent radical figures in the unification movement was **Giuseppe Mazzini**. The more conservative constitutional monarchic figures included **Count Cavour** and Victor Emmanuel II, who would later become the first king of a united Italy. **Mazzini's** activity in revolutionary movements caused him to be imprisoned soon after he joined. While in prison, he concluded that Italy could - and therefore should - be unified and formulated his program for establishing a free, independent, and republican nation with Rome as its capital. After **Mazzini's** release in 1831, he went to Marseille, where he organized a new political society called Young Italy. The new society, whose motto was "God and the People," sought the unification of Italy.



Garibaldi, a native of Nice (then part of the Kingdom of Sardinia), participated in an uprising in Piedmont in 1834, was sentenced to death, and escaped to South America. He spent fourteen years there, taking part in several wars, and returned to Italy in 1848. After the Revolutions of 1848, **Garibaldi** became the leader of the Italian unification movement. He was popular amongst southern Italians. He led the Italian republican drive for unification in southern Italy, but the northern Italian monarchy of the House of Savoy in the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia whose government was led by **Camillo Benso Conte di Cavour**, also had the ambition of establishing a united Italian state. Though the kingdom had no physical connection to Rome, the kingdom had successfully challenged Austria in the Second Italian War of Independence, liberating Lombardy-Venetia from Austrian rule. The kingdom also had established alliances which helped it improve the possibility of Italian unification, such as Britain and France in the Crimean War.

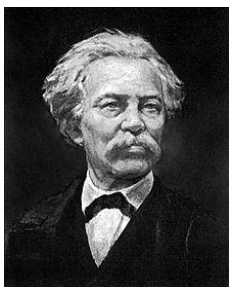


Italy became a nation-state in 1861, when most of the states of the peninsula were united under King Victor Emmanuel II of the Savoy dynasty, which ruled over Piedmont. The architects of Italian unification were **Count Camillo Benso di Cavour**, the Chief Minister of Victor Emmanuel, and **Giuseppe Garibaldi**, a general and national hero.

Cesare Battisti's main goal was to unify all Italians including those living in Italian areas of the Austrian Empire. His was a patriotism based on an ethnic-centered nationalism which even overrode his socialist views and put him at odds with the anti-war, internationalist tenets of the socialist party. Although condemned as a traitor in Austria, in Italy, even today some eighty years later, he is considered a patriot, hero and martyr. In Trento there is a dramatic monument to him at the site of his grave. In towns and cities all over Italy there are streets and piazzas named after **Cesare Battisti**¹.

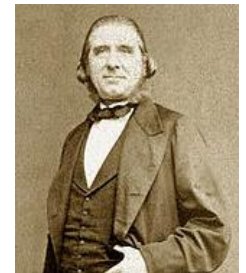


Early in 1821, when the atmosphere was thick with rumours of revolt, **Fredarico Confalonieri** visited various parts of Italy to sound the liberal leaders, who were planning a military revolt but could count only on a few hundred men, and **Confalonieri** warned them that Lombardy was not ready. On the outbreak of the Piedmontese revolt the Austrian authorities arrested Silvio Pellico and Maroncelli and afterwards **Confalonieri**. He was condemned to death for high treason, but through the intercession of his wife and father, the emperor Francis commuted the penalty to perpetual imprisonment in the fortress of Spielberg.



Filopanti Quirico was actively committed in the political affairs of the Italian unification movement and in 1849 took part in the establishment of the Roman Republic. He was appointed secretary of the constituent assembly and was the author of the "Fundamental Decree" which in 1849 declared the temporal government of the Pope as forfeited and proclaimed the Republic. After the fall of the Republic he found shelter in the United States and afterwards in London. Even after the formation of the Kingdom of Italy and his return to Italy, he had to leave his appointment as teacher of mechanics at the University of Bologna since he repeatedly refused to take his oath of allegiance to the monarchy. In 1876 he was elected as a member of the Parliament for the Republican Party. In his work "*Miranda*" in 1858 he develops the idea of time zones. **Filopanti's** hypothesis was to ideally split up the earth into 24 areas along the lines of the meridians, each of which should have its own time differing from the next by one hour, whereas minutes and seconds should coincide. The first time zone should be centered on Rome's meridian.

Alessandro Gavazzi (1809-1889) was an Italian preacher and patriot. He at first became a monk and afterwards acted as professor of rhetoric. Leaving Italy after the capture of Rome by the French, he carried on a vigorous campaign against priests and Jesuits in England, Scotland and North America, partly by means of a periodical, the "*Gavazzi Free Word*". While in England he converted and became head and organizer of the Italian Protestants in London. Returning to Italy in 1860, he served as army-chaplain with **Giuseppe Garibaldi**. In 1870 he became head of the Free Church of Italy, united the scattered Congregations and founded in Rome the theological college of the Free Church, in which he himself taught dogmatics, apologetics and polemics. His lectures at Quebec and Montreal were strongly anti-Roman Catholic; and at both places the soldiers had to be called out to restore order. At Montreal, 40 lives were lost. The riots caused also political repercussions.



The 20th Century

In Northern Italy, industrialization and modernization began in the last part of the 19th century. The south, at the same time, was overpopulated, forcing millions of people to search for a better life abroad. It is estimated that around one million Italian people moved to other European countries such as France, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg. In 1913 the Socialist Party became the main political party, outnumbering the traditional liberal and conservative organizations.

¹ Source: Historia May-June, 1985

The First World War (1914–1918) was an unexpected development that forced the decision whether or not to honor the alliance with Germany. At first Italy remained neutral, saying that the Triple Alliance was only for defensive purposes. Public opinion in Italy was sharply divided, with Catholics and socialists recommending peace. However extreme nationalists saw their opportunity to gain their "irredenta" – that is, the border regions that were controlled by Austria. The nationalists won out, and in April 1915, the Italian government secretly agreed to the London Pact. In 1916, Italy declared war on Germany. Some 650,000 Italian soldiers died and 950,000 were wounded, while the economy required large-scale Allied funding to survive.

Mussolini announced a march on Rome in 1922 and the "Black shirts", a paramilitary unit, took control of Rome; he was made Premier, and a month later he received dictatorial powers. In 1924, Mussolini's coalition won two-thirds of the vote and 375 of the 403 seats. The enemies of Fascism were silenced by terrorism and brute force, as the opposition deputies withdrew in protest in 1924. Mussolini took control of Albania in 1927, and in 1929 made peace with the Catholic Church. The "Lateran Accords" made Catholicism the official state religion, established Vatican City as an independent country, and paid the pope for the papal territory seized in the 19th century.

Masonic Persecution during World War II

In Italy the anti-Jewish feeling is of recent vintage and largely artificial, whereas hatred of Freemasonry is old and deep. In their own countries Hitler and Mussolini Inaugurated their respective reigns with outrages against Masons and Masonic institutions.² Nazi and Fascist publications leave no doubt of their belief that all evil in the world, from the high mortality rate among the dinner guests of the Borgias down to the Versailles Treaty, has been the work of Freemasons, alone or with the help of Israel. Hitler said:-

*"The general pacifistic paralysation of the national instinct of self-preservation, introduced into the circles of the so-called 'intelligentsia' by Freemasonry, is transmitted to the great masses, but above all to the bourgeoisie, by the activity of the great press, which today is always Jewish."*³

Hermann Goering in his capacity as Prime Minister of Prussia said *"in National Socialist Germany there is no place for Freemasonry"*. It was an intrinsic part of the Fascist attitude in Mussolini's realm.

Benito Mussolini went abolishing Freemasonry methodically. Having established his regime, Il Duce proceeded step by step to exterminate the lodges and the influence of Italian Freemasonry. Freemasons had been the creators of the united democratic Kingdom of Italy, but this did not win them any mitigation of horrors at the hands of Fascists. In 1924, Mussolini decreed that every member of his Fascist Party who was a Mason must abandon one or the other organization.



Thereupon **General Cappello**, one of the most prominent Fascists, who had held the post of Deputy Grand Master of Grande Oriente, Italy's leading Grand Lodge, gave up membership in Fascism rather than betray his Masonic ideals. He was to pay dearly for this loyalty. Less than a year later, he was charged with complicity in an attempt on Mussolini's life. It was a palpable frame-up by an OVRA stoolpigeon name Quaglia, but **General Cappello** was sentenced to thirty years in prison, but was released in 1936.^{4 5}

² The American Mercury Newspaper, 1941 - Sven G. Lunden

³ Adolf Hitler "Mein Kampf"

⁴ The American Mercury Newspaper, 1941 - Sven G. Lunden

⁵ Firstworldwar.com

In the summer of 1925 Mussolini got around to dissolving Italian Freemasonry. In an open letter to Il Duce, the Grand Master of the Grand Orient, **Domizio Torrigiani**, a lawyer, had the courage to stand up for democracy and freedom of thought. The price he paid was exile to the Lipari Islands. After nearly going blind there, he died soon afterwards. Hundreds of other prominent Masons shared the harsh Lipari exile with him.



At the peak of the anti-Mason agitation, in 1925-27, black-shirt strong-arm squads looted the homes of well-known Masons in Milan, Florence and other cities, and murdered at least 100 of them.

Masonic History

At the time when Freemasonry began to be introduced into Italy, the country was still divided into its many fiefdoms and Italy was being repressed by the Holy See, which hampered Masonic development. Italian Freemasonry was therefore forced to act clandestinely. This explains the anti-clericalism in the Lodges and their becoming the gathering place of nonconformists of every tendency.



The first lodge was set up in Florence in 1731 and seven years later in 1738 the Catholic Church published the first papal bull against Freemasonry. The various Italian States refused to register it. In 1739 Cardinal Corsini, the nephew of Pope Clemens XII, personally asked the Duke of Tuscany to arrest the Freemasons and to hand them on the Inquisition's tribunal. Only the poet **Tommaso Crudeli** was arrested.

Other lodges were founded in Leghorn, in 1763 and 1765, by the Antients. The Moderns instead established two lodges in 1771.⁶ In 1749 a Lodge was set up in Chambéry named the Saint Jean des Trois Mortiers Lodge, patented by the GLE to the **Marquis François Noyel de Belleguarde**.

In 1783 Vittorio Amedeo III banned Freemasonry from his reign.

In 1746 two Englishmen, **John Murray** and **Joseph Smith** set up a new lodge, with the Italian Brothers **Giacomo Casanova**, **Francesco Grisellini** and **Carlo Goldoni**. Other Lodges followed in the forthcoming years. In 1772 Bro. **Pietro Gratarol** founded L'Union, patented by the Grand Lodge of London.

In Milan two Swiss citizens, **Pierre George Madiott** and a certain **Moussard**, began the first Lodge around 1756. The abbot **Pavesi**, the monk **Celestino Scalzi**, the **marquis Ottaviano Casnedi**, **Earl Carlo Belgioso**, doctor **Vincenzo d'Adda**, General **Joseph Esterhazy** and some officials of the Army were member of the Lodge.

In 1776 another lodge was established in Cremona. The Worshipful Master was **count Pasquale Biffi**, a close friend of **Cesare Beccaria** and of the **Verri** brothers. Other lodges were in Liguria: in Genoa the Old British and Ligurian Lodge was patented by the Grand Lodge of England.

In 1751 pope Benedict XIV released the bull confirming the Freemasonry's prohibition contained in the previous bull. The publication of this new bull forced King Charles VII of Bourbon to ban Freemasonry from his reign. Neapolitan Freemasonry 'slept' till 1763. The Grand Lodge of Holland patented Les Zelés lodge, which was promoted Grand Provincial Lodge one year after. The Grand Lodge of England quarreled with its Dutch sister on the right to patent new lodges abroad. The dispute was won by London, whose daughter lodge, Perfect Union, was confirmed Grand Provincial Lodge in 1770. In 1775, however, the **Prince of Caramanico** set up Lo Zelo lodge, claiming independence from any foreign Obedience.

⁶ "Freemasonry in Italy" Giovanni Lombardo - Masonicnetwork web page

In 1775 king Ferdinand IV forbade any Masonic activity. Some Associates were imprisoned, others exiled.

In 1776 **Diego Naselli** was elected Grand Master of the Neapolitan Grand Lodge. Beside it, the English Provincial Grand Lodge survived. The difference between the two was quite clear - the former was permeated by esotericism, often confining with extravagant fantasy, whereas the latter was more democratic and open to Enlightenment. The French Revolution and the following reaction swept both away.

The Grand Orient of Italy was founded in June of 1805 to Milan, and was set under the regency of Eugene Beauharnais. It was the epoch of the Napoleonic Freemasonry. With the fall of the French empire, Italian Freemasonry fell into a deep crisis. Some groups went on working, especially in Sicily, but this was not enough to assure a united Freemasonry.

The formation of “secret societies” similar to the Freemasonry, but active politically, contributed to make Masonic reconstruction difficult but by the end of 1859, the Grand Orient of Italy was reconstituted.

In the 1867 **Giuseppe Garibaldi** wrote to the Supreme Council in Palermo: “*Let’s make Freemasonry the Roman Bundle, so to act united in politics. We don’t yet have the material unity because the moral unity misses us. Let Freemasonry do this....*”

In 1884 the Pope released the encyclical “*Humanum Genus*” but the Freemasonic press heavily scoffed the Author, Pope Leone XIII.

A Masonic schism occurred in June 1908 owing to a disagreement about banning religious teaching in the elementary schools in the Parliament. The Grand Orient of Italy wanted tolerance, but many Freemason members of Parliament voted against such a motion. Those Brethren then set up a new Masonic body, called the Grand Lodge of Italy, which is still active today, although as a Co-Masonic order.

At the beginning of the First World War, Freemasonry was openly in favor of the war against the Hapsburg Empire, either for ideological reasons – Austria was a Catholic country – or to complete the national independence, by annexing Trent and Trieste. But this did not spare Freemasonry from the hate of Fascism.

In February 1923 the Fascists declared the incompatibility between Masonic affiliation and adherence to the Fascist Party. A wave of violence immediately repressed about 400 Italian Lodges, scattering 20.000 Associates. Mussolini’s politics gained the approval of the Roman Catholic Church and many Freemasons were dismissed from public offices, imprisoned or confined. At the end of 1926 the Fascist Special Court arrested and condemned the **Grand Master Domizio Torreggiani**. Sporadic groups survived covertly. They persevered in meeting as and where they were able, to preserve the ‘light’.

Immediately after the end of the Second World War, the rebirth of the Italian Freemasonry saw a number of other Grand Lodges seeking foreign recognitions so to certify their regularity.

Most of the regular Grand Lodges progressively recognized the Grand Orient of Italy.

In 1972 the Grand Master **Lino Salvini** achieved reunion with the Grand Lodge of Italy, Piazza del Gesù and the exchange of Grand Representatives with UGLE, after 110 years.

This Grand Orient is considered regular by many American Grand Lodges. It was recognized as regular by the English, Irish and Scottish Grand Lodges in 1972 and shortly thereafter by a number of other Grand Lodges. The following year, the majority of Lodges under the National Grand Lodge seceded and joined the Grand Orient, leaving the National Grand Lodge as a weak and splintered dissident group.

Today the Craft counts around 18,000 members in over 600 Lodges and has fraternal relations with over 200 foreign Communions in the five continents.

Some Famous Italian Freemasons

Niccolò Paganini (1782–1840) was an Italian violinist, violinist, guitarist, and composer. He was one of the most celebrated violin virtuosi of his time, and left his mark as one of the pillars of modern violin technique. His “*Caprice No. 24 in A minor, Op. 1*”, is among the best known of his compositions, and has served as an inspiration for many prominent composers.



His fame spread across Europe with a concert tour that started in Vienna in 1828, stopping in every major European city in Germany, Poland, and Bohemia until February, 1831 in Strasbourg. This was followed by tours in Paris and Britain. His technical ability and his willingness to display it received much critical acclaim.



Luigi Cherubini (1760–1842) was an Italian composer who spent most of his working life in France. His most significant compositions are operas and sacred music. **Beethoven** regarded Cherubini as the greatest of his contemporaries.

In 1785 he went to Paris and was presented to Marie Antoinette and Parisian society. The fallout from the French Revolution had a major effect on **Cherubini** until the end of his life. Politics forced him to hide his connections with the former aristocracy and seek governmental appointments. Although Napoleon found him too complex, Cherubini wrote at least one patriotic work per year for more than a decade.

Marquis of Beccaria-Bonesana, Cesare (1738–1794) was an Italian jurist, philosopher and politician best known for his treatise “*On Crimes and Punishments*” (1764), which condemned torture and the death penalty, and was a founding work in the field of penology. The book was the first full-scale work to tackle criminal reform and to suggest that criminal justice should conform to rational principles. He cited Montesquieu, who stated that “*every punishment which does not arise from absolute necessity is tyrannical*”.



Antonio Labriola (1843-1904) was an Italian Marxist theoretician. Although an academic philosopher and never an active member of any Marxist political party, his thought exerted influence on many political theorists in Italy during the early 20th century, including the founder of the Italian Liberal Party and the Italian Communist Party.

Giovanni Bovio (1837–1903) was an Italian philosopher and radical politician. He has been a member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies and was involved in setting up the radical movement “*Fascio della democrazia*” in 1883.



Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) was an Italian Dominican friar, philosopher, mathematician and astronomer. He proposed that the Sun was essentially a star, and moreover, that the universe contained an infinite number of inhabited worlds populated by other intelligent beings. He was burned at the stake by civil authorities in 1600 after the Roman Inquisition found him guilty of heresy. In addition to his cosmological writings, Bruno also wrote extensive works on the art of memory, a loosely organized group of mnemonic techniques and principles.

Other recent studies of Bruno have focused on his qualitative approach to mathematics and his application of the spatial paradigms of geometry to language

Gian Domenico Romagnosi studied law at the University of Parma and became the chief civil magistrate of Trento. Under Napoleon he was raised to the position of Secretary of the Higher Council and was successively professor of law at Parma, Pavia, Pisa and Milan. He made experiments with a voltaic pile and its influence on a compass and showed that an electrostatic charge from a voltaic pile could deflect a magnetic needle.



Patronage

Patronage is a way of life in Italy. Early patronage was associated with the church, which was a result of the powerful political influence in central Italy. The ownership of land determined one's importance, and the church was one of the largest single property-holders in Italy. By the 11th century, bishops were competing with wealthy rural families to become the "patrons" of local land-owners.

Patronage was the key to social status and a career and social mobility were impossible apart from being involved in a network of patronage relationships. Even the working poor found themselves a part of this complicated web in their labour.⁷ The art renaissance in Italy owed much to patronage from wealthy families and patronage exists in undiminished form today.

The Cagliostro Affair



Count Alessandro di Cagliostro (1743–1795) was the alias of the occultist Giuseppe Balsamo, an Italian adventurer, forger and swindler. The history of **Cagliostro** is shrouded in rumor, propaganda, and mysticism. He was born to a poor family in Albergheria, Sicily but was well educated. In Rome he served as a secretary to Cardinal Orsini but he started selling magical "Egyptian" amulets and engravings. He became a forger and swindler, who forged letters, diplomas and a myriad of other official documents. He was expelled from Prussia by **Frederick the Great** and from Russia by Catherine the Great.

Cagliostro returned to Rome, where he was betrayed to spies of the Inquisition and in 1789 he was arrested and sentenced to death on the charge of being a Freemason. The Pope changed his sentence, however, to life imprisonment. He is credited for the creation of the Egyptian Rite of the Freemasons, which practiced alchemy and séances, and in the diffusion of Freemasonry, by opening lodges all over Europe and by introducing the acceptance of women into the community.

The P2 Affairs

Italian Masonic history has been influenced by the political and ethnic history of that country and the P2 Incident needs to be placed in that context. Irregular lodges in Italy, had become quite political during revolutionary periods, and operated as true secret societies. Few other Grand Lodges had recognized Italian Masonry as regular until 1972.

Although politics and religion were officially banned from discussion in lodges, in practice the Italian temperament views discussion of state affairs as a duty. In 1877 the Grand Orient granted a warrant to a lodge in Rome called "Propaganda Massonica". This lodge was frequented by politicians and government officials from across Italy who were unable to attend their own lodges.

⁷ Biagioli, Mario. "Galileo, Coutier". University of Chicago Press

⁸ The Transactions of the Lodge of Research No. 218. "Italian Freemasonry and the 'P2' Incident", Kent Henderson

When the Grand Orient was revived after the Second World War it was decided to number the lodges by drawing lots; Lodge Propaganda drew number two, thus it became P2. It rarely held meetings and was almost inactive.



In 1967, Brother **Licio Gelli**, who had been initiated into a lodge in Rome in 1965, was placed in virtual control of P2 by the Grand Master of the day. He was considered to be a shrewd and successful businessman with a great gift for recruiting. However **Gelli's** growing political influence became a concern and at the Grand Orient Communication in December 1974, of the 406 lodges represented, 400 voted for P2's erasure.

In 1976, **Gelli** requested that P2 be suspended but not erased. This nuance of jurisprudence meant that he could continue to preserve some semblance of regularity for his private club without being answerable to the Grand Orient

In 1980, **Gelli** told a press interview that Freemasonry was a puppet show in which he pulled the strings. Italian Masonry was outraged by this, struck a Masonic tribunal which in 1981 expelled him, and decided that P2 had been erased as a Lodge in 1974 and therefore any contrary action by a Grand Master had been illegal. The same year the police investigated **Gelli** for a range of fraudulent activities and, in searching his house, found a P2 register of 950 names of mostly prominent people. Several government ministers resigned and the Italian Government fell.

Gelli fled to Switzerland where he was arrested while trying to withdraw tens of millions of dollars from a Bank account in Geneva and found guilty of fraud.

The Grand Orient of Italy, after taking disciplinary action against members with P2 connections, distanced itself from **Gelli's** lodge. The P2 affair produced a great number of defections that brought the break-up of several Lodges and the weakening of the others.

Grand Master **Armando Corona** worked hard to recoup the prestige of the Craft, shunning the Brethren who had behaved in an anti-Masonic manner.

The Christian Democrats and Freemasonry

Freemasonry, which was banned under Mussolini, flourished under the Christian Democrats in post-war Italy. But it is still viewed with suspicion by the Vatican and the Roman Catholic Church although the attempts by Pope John XIII for a dialogue encouraged Italian Freemasons and many Catholics joined Lodges at this time. It has been a highly sensitive political issue in Italy since 1981, when the P2 scandal brought down the Christian Democrat-led Government.

Flaminio Piccoli, secretary of the Christian Democrats, said: "*Membership of the party and adherence to the Freemasons cannot be other than incompatible.*"⁹

Italian Communists and Freemasonry

The PCI was founded as the Communist Party of Italy in 1921, by seceding from the Italian Socialist Party. Outlawed during the Fascist regime, the party played a major part in the Italian resistance movement. Despite this, operation "*Gladio*" was instituted just after World War II to oppose attempts by Soviet Russia to subvert Italian politics in favor of Soviet interests. CIA director **Allen Dulles** was one of the key people in instituting Operation Gladio, and most of its operations were financed by the CIA.

⁹ BBC On this day 26th May 1981

This was seen politically as favoring the Christian Democrats and, by conspiracy theorists, as a Masonic anti-communist plot. It is alleged that, during the war **Gelli** had been a member of Mussolini's notorious "Black shirts," and that he used P2 Lodge to direct operation Gladio. Amongst the **Gelli** papers, one claimed that the main enemies of Italy were the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the trade unions. These had to be isolated and the proposed political cooperation with the communists needed to be disrupted.

While **Marx**, **Trotsky** and **Lenin** are all reputed to have joined Freemasonry, Italian Communism considers Freemasonry a bourgeois organization, an "enemy-of-class".

Freemasonry and the Mafia

There is little doubt that Mafia members joined Freemasonry. According to the former Grandmaster of the Grand Orient of Italy, **Giuliano DiBernardo**, "during the years 1976-80, Mafiosi *"competed to become masons ... it was the drug mafia's way of approaching and infiltrating power."*¹⁰

The Anti-mafia Commission reported in 1986 that "there were 2,441 men of honour [Mafiosi]...distributed among 113 Lodges in Sicily. Of these, 33 were indicted or convicted, and another 335 figured in various police records."¹¹ Clearly, if these men were in fact members of regular Masonic Lodges, the system of screening potential members left a lot to be desired and/or the Grand Lodge regulations regarding criminal convictions of members were not being applied.

"Confidence men" have been attracted to Freemasonry to provide moral credibility and we have had two cases in Canberra of men attaining entry to the Craft who were later convicted.

Laws Restricting Masonic Membership

A special law was issued in Italy that prohibited "*secret lodges*". Other laws introduced a prohibition on membership in allegedly secret organizations for some categories of state officials (especially military officers). These laws have been recently questioned by the European Court of Human Rights. Following an action brought by a serving British naval officer, the European Court has established as precedent the illegality of any member nation attempting to ban Masonic membership for military officers, as a breach of their human rights.

Conclusions



The current monetary crisis in Europe is focused on Greece and Italy and will not be resolved simply by the resignation of Prime Minister **Berlusconi**. The task facing Italy is enormous. The mix of politicians, business and organized crime uncovered in the 'Bribesville' scandal has festered ever since the fall of the First Republic. The parallels between Italy's longest-serving Republican Prime Minister, **Berlusconi**, a listed member of P2, and his early political patron, Bettino Craxi, the country's second-longest-serving post-war prime minister, are striking. Craxi was forced to resign as a result of the 'Bribesville' scandal, dire economic performance, and the ensuing tidal wave of disgust that swept through the country in 1992-93¹². Nothing has changed.

Italy, although unified since the 1870s, remains a polarized nation, partly on regional grounds but certainly on political and spiritual grounds.

¹⁰ Operation Hiram: Italian Freemasonry and the Mafia

¹¹ Hiram Op Cit

¹² The Geopolitical Monitor – "*The Politics of Italy's Patronage*" - Andrea Teti - Nov 16, 2011

The Social Democrats and the Communists vie for political power and the Mafia and the Holy See vie for spiritual power. Regional, ethnic and traditional differences are still felt in contemporary Italian society, which is said to largely run on patronage and favouritism¹³.

Since the early days of Rome Italian culture has revered the art of democratic debate. Since Spartacus its soil has been trodden by revolutionaries and invaders.

In such an environment, Freemasonry must be expected to be a little different. But to have a P2 affair and a Cagliostro in your history does make Italian Freemasonry unique.

In Freemasonry we are charged to refrain from religious and political discussion within our Lodges so that no dispute arising on these grounds can disturb the harmony of the Lodge. They are particularly singled out because they are the issues most likely to cause a dispute.

It is expected that Freemasons, as individuals, will fight for what they believe, but to involve their Lodges or their Grand Lodge in political activities cannot lead to benefits for Freemasonry. Italian Freemasonry has been subjected to harassment by the Holy See since it began but has not refrained from anti-clerical activities.

Largely through the work of P2, Freemasonry in Italy alienated itself from the Italian Communist Party, lost any support it may have had with the Christian Democrats and retarded a potential growing understanding with the Holy See. Its alleged relationship with the Mafia is not one of which to be proud.

Involvement in politics has recently seen several Grand Lodges in Europe withdraw recognition from the National Grand Lodge of France. It is to be hoped that the Grand Orient of Italy has learned its lesson.

¹³ The Transactions of the Lodge of Research No. 218. *"Italian Freemasonry and the 'P2' Incident"*, Kent Henderson