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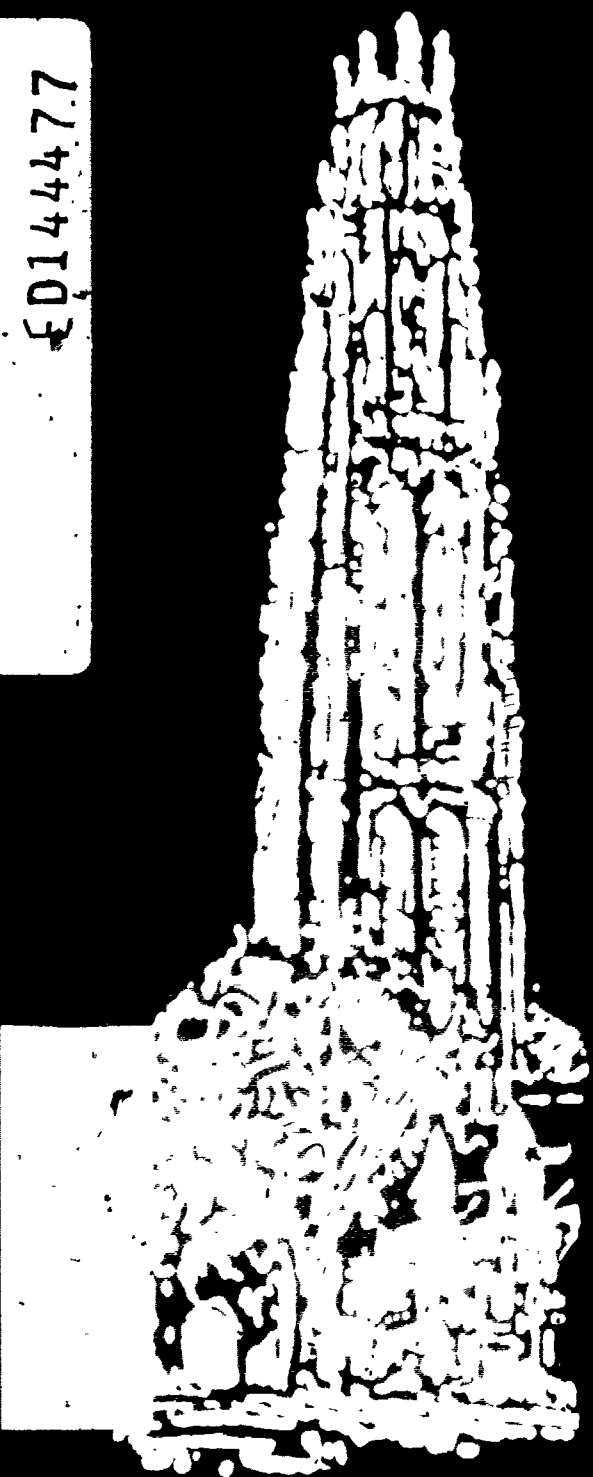
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ABSTRACT

This paper is a draft of a chapter to appear in "Academic Power: Patterns of Authority in Seven National Systems of Higher Education," edited by John H. Van de Graaff. It traces the historical development of universities in Italy with emphasis on the relationships among students, professors, and towns. Consideration is also given to levels of organizations within the traditional Italian system and demands for reform and change. (LBH)

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THE STRUCTURE OF ACADEMIC
GOVERNANCE IN ITALY

by

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YALE HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAM
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ITALY

by Burton R. Clark

The great age of university development in Italy took place between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. Bologna was begun in 1158; Padua, Naples, Rome, and other universities of the present system had developed into substantial, recognized institutions before 1400; and more than two-thirds of the universities extant in the mid-twentieth century had been established by 1600. Only a few new universities, now mainly peripheral seats of learning, were started between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries.¹ The university is among the very oldest major social institutions of Italy, its antiquity surpassed only by the church and the communes. It existed long before a modern national state was created in the mid-nineteenth century.

Formed when guilds were the primary form for organizing urban work, the early universities were themselves guilds and guild federations, collective efforts by students and faculty to sustain self-regulating clusters of people with shared interests to control a small domain of activity and

defend themselves against other groups.² Italy was notable between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries for the power of student guilds. As alien residents of city-states, students from other parts of Italy as well as other countries needed to band together in self-defense. At the same time, like the professors, they felt free to move the university from one city to another: "Townsmen and professors alike, stood in awe of a body [the university of students] which by the simple expedient of migration could destroy the trade of the former and the incomes of the latter."³

But townsmen and professors no longer had to stand in awe once they learned to make the university stand in place. By the fifteenth century, through the erection of permanent buildings, the entry of professors onto city payrolls, and the recruitment of hometown boys as students, city fathers and professors had established dominance over the students, and the most important chapter in the history of student power was at an end.⁴ Henceforth, the important power struggles pitted faculty guilds against the encompassing chartering and administrative frameworks of church and state, particularly the latter, which funded and often

attempted to regulate the academic guilds as they did the many craft and merchant guilds on whom, in turn, they were dependent. In their significant ties to city-states and provincial rulers, Italian universities may be considered as being "state universities" from the fifteenth century onward.

The ancient Italian universities were originally centers for professional studies and, like their counterparts in France and Spain, continued through the centuries to focus primarily on preparation for law, medicine, and public administration, the latter field generally drawing on law graduates. Between 1500 and 1850--centuries of decline for the universities and for the Italian peninsula as a whole--university activity was for long periods reduced virtually to the study of law alone.⁵ Its fields of study already diminished, the Italian university became even less open than its counterparts in northern Europe to admitting and developing new fields as a way of adjusting to changing social demands. Science fared especially badly: Internal resistance meshed with a weak interest in scientific advances among Italian ruling circles and with the censorious

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resistance of the Catholic church mounted in the Counter-Reformation.⁶ Conditions at the universities deteriorated further during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when a venerable institution such as Bologna, which in its earliest centuries attracted students by the thousands from near and far, was reduced to a few hundred students.⁷ During this period of university decline, the entire peninsula suffered as it was turned into the battleground and playground of Austrian princes, French kings, and Spanish dukes. Too, the elite of the Italian city-states, unable to form a nation, not only feuded among themselves for three-and-a-half centuries (1500-1850) but remained at the mercy of their more powerful neighbors who had managed to consolidate political control across the large entities that became the nations and empires of modern Europe.⁸

When the Italians finally were able to achieve national unification in the period 1850-1870, they began a gradual nationalization of university support and control. The Liberal leaders of the new nation, mainly Piedmontese of the Turin area who had been heavily influenced by French

forms of governance and administration, began a trend toward both political and administrative centralization, drawing power from the cities and the regions and concentrating it administratively in the central offices of a set of national ministries and bureaus that would grow increasingly unwieldy and balkanized.⁹ They wanted, among other interests, an educational system that would help to make a nation, supporting national identification and unity over the divisive local loyalties of the old cities and provinces, over the disaffection of southern peasants and northern workers, and over the declared opposition of the church to a secular state that had conquered papal territory. An interest in trying to achieve equity and equality through unitary, uniform administration, much like France's, would also develop over time. All education was placed under a national ministry of education. The universities were given a direct, vertical relationship to the ministry, not even formally answering to an area prefect of the national government, much less to local or regional government.

As a result of this trend, which accelerated during the Fascist period (1922-1945), the century of development

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between the 1860s and the 1960s saw the national system achieve a virtual monopoly. In 1960, Italian higher education was conducted at thirty places: twenty-four universities supported primarily by the state and firmly within the state system; and six "free" universities, so called because they were supported mainly by cities, provinces, or private groups. The "free" universities needed recognition by the national system in order to grant a legitimate degree. Falling under general state supervision, they organized their affairs on the model of the state universities.¹⁰ The thirty universities accounted for 98 percent of enrollment. Thus there were really no higher education institutions other than the universities, and there were no private sector institutions truly independent of state authority.

The universities have varied widely in size. In 1960, the University of Rome had 45,000 students, Naples 28,000, while historic Pavia, Perugia, and Parma each had fewer than 5,000, and others such as Camerino and Macerata had only 1,000 or fewer. In the great student expansion of the 1960s, the disparities in size grew large. By 1970, Rome had doubled to 90,000 students, Naples to more than 60,000, while small and moderately large universities were adding

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students in much smaller numbers. Disparities among the universities' fields of study were equally striking. A university in Italy can contain up to twelve faculties (Facoltà). Nine of the faculties cover primarily professional areas: medicine, law, engineering, economics and commerce (mainly the latter), agriculture, teaching, architecture, veterinary medicine, and pharmacy. Three comprise what in the United States would be segments of the liberal arts: letters, science, and political science. The types of faculties are distributed unevenly among the universities: Some universities specialize in only one or two fields, whereas others are comprehensive, covering virtually everything that is recognized within the whole system. In 1960, for example, the University of Rome had all twelve faculties, while Parma had six, Siena three, and Macerata one. A university with a faculty in letters might not have a science faculty. Some have neither.

The types of faculties vary enormously in power, as measured by such simple indicators as the number of chairholders found throughout the national system: for example, in 1960, medicine had about 440 and law 325, compared to about 65 in teaching and 40 in architecture.

Each faculty is entered directly from the secondary level and leads to the single degree of laurea after four, five, or six years of study, with all graduates assuming the title of dottore.

Finally, the Italian universities have been part of a wider structure of elite selection. Universal elementary education did not take hold in Italy until the 1950s; its achievement was a government priority in post-World War II reconstruction and modernization. As elsewhere on the Continent, the secondary level was divided into elite schools (classical and scientific licei) that led to automatic admission to the university, and non-elite schools that ended in technical and teacher training. With the secondary schools serving as a screening mechanism, Italian universities as late as 1960 were admitting 5 percent or less of the age group. Mass education at the secondary level in the late 1950s and early 1960s meant that many more students would enter the open doors of the universities after 1965.

LEVELS OF ORGANIZATION

The operating levels of the traditional Italian system are somewhat similar to the German and French, following the

Continental style of university organization. At the lowest level, the chair and institute are the organizational units, with the chairholding professor doubling as director of a research institute or as the head of a main section within it. The structure places one man in full charge of both a teaching sector and a research sector, thereby making him a boss and encouraging the personalizing of power. Within his teaching and research domains, the professor personally selects junior personnel and acts as a sponsor in arranging their future careers as well as in deciding their current assignments. The power of the professor is also enhanced by his personal accumulation and filling of a wide network of roles: teaching on several faculties, even in cities far distant from one another; editing and managing a journal; engaging in outside professional practice; advising private organizations and local governments; and serving in posts in the national government, including the legislature and the Cabinet. With so many other roles, professors have served only part time as professors. Now to make them full-time professors became an issue in the reform efforts of the 1960s and early 1970s. The professor's capacity to accumulate privileges and powers increases his stature in

the local cluster, raising him even farther above the assistenti and others of lesser rank. Therefore, at the base of the national system, organization tends to be unitary, hierarchical, and particularistic. We may even say that it is guild-like in vertical authority, with a master having extensive direct control over what are, in effect, journeymen and apprentices.¹¹

The second level of academic organization in the Italian system has long been the faculty (Facoltà). Numbering about two hundred in the system as a whole, the faculties are the inclusive units to which professors and students belong and hence are organizationally more important than the universities. In internal operation, the faculty is an assembly of chairs, a horizontal grouping of powerful persons who regulate the less powerful at Level 1. The chaired professors, each representing certain subdomains and having one vote, come together in a faculty council (Consiglio di Facoltà) to decide on issues that fall within the collective domain of the faculty. As in Germany, the chairs elect their nominal superior, the dean (Preside), who has little or no independent administrative power. Thus, the Facoltà is not nearly unitary in authority structure, at least not by

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bureaucratic standards, but is more like a federation. Because it is a collegial body, with strong elements of collegiate monopoly, it is more horizontal than hierarchical. And because the colleagues who come together in the faculty council are fairly autonomous rulers of parts of the organizational countryside, decisions are influenced considerably by academic politics. The professors are much like senators representing different territorial interests, operating in a legislative body that dominates the executive. They must form majorities based on mutual regard for one another's established rights and territorial jurisdiction; Senatorial courtesy mixes with bargaining, coalition formation, and occasional power plays. Here, as at the lower level, organization is guild-like, but now in the horizontal relation of a group of masters coming together to vote on common policy. The chair and faculty levels in Italy together place autocracy within collegiality, or, conversely, offer collegial relations among autocrats, having retained the vertical and horizontal relations that together characterize guild authority.¹²

At the next highest structural level, the university as a whole, organization is quite loose. The ruling body,

the Senato Accademico, is an assembly of elected deans and certain other elected professors. Before the reforms of the 1970s, there was little or no representation of junior faculty or students. The nominal superior official, the Rettore, is not bureaucratically appointed but is elected from the ranks of the chairholders to a short term of three years. Without any power base beyond the professors, the rectors have remained amateur administrators, on rotating terms of office and subject to recall.

The bureaucratic side of university organization centers chiefly on the post of the administrative director, who is indeed appointed from on high. This civil servant often has a long stay in office and is expected to serve as an arm of the national government. Traditionally, administrative directors were relatively weak, serving as bookkeepers for faculties and universities run by academic notables. They have grown stronger in recent years as the university system has grown and the need for order and coordination has increased. But local professors have exercised general jurisdiction even over the business affairs of the university through an administrative council, on which they and the rector sit with the administrative director. Thus there

are important similarities between the organization of the university and the faculty, most notably the considerable monopoly of collegial power by constituent professors. The main difference between them is the greater looseness of the university structure and the high degree of autonomy of the constituent faculties. As inclusive membership units, the faculties need not be physically grouped but may be scattered around a city. Little horizontal linkage has been needed among them in order to accomplish the necessary work. Thus, the structure of the university is loosely federative, virtually coalitional, with a minimal hierarchy. Constructed around the autocratic powers of its voting members, the university, like the faculty, allows for and even encourages the patronage and favoritism usually found among elected governors.

Above the university level in Italy, in the superstructure of academic control, there has been no major multicampus administration (Level 4 in our comparative scheme), nothing that would parallel the German structure of state control (Level 5), nor even any clustering of universities within regional administration of the national government. The structure connects the university to Rome, the national

capital (Level 6), specifically to a division of higher education within the mammoth Ministry of Public Instruction, topped by a minister of education and his staff. Formal lines of authority, as in many other countries, flow upward from the minister to a chief executive and the national legislature. The national system has impressive powers. It decides admission policy. Graduation from one of its approved secondary schools ensures admission to the university system as a whole and the choice of faculty at a particular university. All degrees are awarded by the national system rather than by the individual university. All chairholding professors and "stabilized" assistants are regular civil service personnel, placed in categories of status and salary that cut across the system. The system finances the universities and has paid up to 80 percent of their costs in recent years, the balance largely made up of student fees and income from a declining base of university-owned property and endowment.

As mentioned earlier, the Fascist period increased educational centralization, thickening the common rulebooks applying to all university personnel. During this period even the curriculum became nationalized, with national

codes specifying not only which fields of study would be available in the faculties of the various universities, but also naming the courses that were to be uniformly required throughout the country in each specialty, and listing what additional options were approved for each university. In short, admissions, finance, personnel policy, and curriculum were made uniform and centralized. Especially fascinating is the fact that after the Fascists fell from power, the fat rulebooks were not thrown away or even seriously amended or reduced. The nationally codified rules and laws had become important sources of power for various bureaus of the fragmented national government and thus provided protection and advantage to whichever officials or groups had come to have their interests vested most effectively.

In the higher education sector, the chairholding professors form a key group. The Italian system is noteworthy for how skillfully the professors have managed to parlay local power into national power. They hold considerable control over what goes on at the center; control is not lodged primarily with bureaucrats or nonacademic politicians. Power flows along lines of professorial networks, nationally as well as locally. These networks connect

decisionmakers within the system. A generalist professor provides more coordination than a specialist professor, and the Italian professor-general in his elaborated and accumulated roles alone can help link parts of the center to one another, the top to the bottom, as well as parts of operating units to each other.

A second structural key is peer election, the wide national use of the elected committee. The center of the national system is interlaced with committees composed of professors, whether in the Ministry of Public Instruction or the National Research Council. One such committee (Consiglio Superiore dell'Istruzione), at the apex of the structure alongside the minister, has had, for example, important powers of approval and veto over any changes in the nationalized curriculum. Research monies are given away by committees of professors meeting as segments of the National Research Council. The appointment of another chairholder in the system involves an ad hoc committee of professors working at the center on behalf of the entire system. They must administer a national competition and select three victors, one of whom will get the chair-- through often complicated processes of maneuver and exchange

among individuals and faculties. In all such national committees, members are not appointed. They are elected by fellow professors, with the voting population usually decided along lines of related disciplines. This democratic procedure operates within a limited electorate, one totaling about 3,000 professors nationally as late as the early 1970s. Coupled with peer election, of course, are peer review and decision.

It has been by means of unusual role accumulation on the part of individual professors and their uncommon peer control that a considerable collegial monopoly at the local level in the Italian structure has been transferred to the highest reaches of the national system. There is some role for bureaucrats in the central ministry, and many rules set forth bureaucratic lines in finance, curriculum, personnel, and other matters. Like states everywhere, the government is particularly concerned about the handling of state-allocated funds. Administrative officials, in the university as well as in the central office, are most likely to assert their bureaucratic position in accounting for the allocation of specifically budgeted monies. But bureaucratic coordination plays only a secondary role, to

the point of functioning often as a façade for the professorial oligarchy which rules and coordinates the system. The influence of the professors even extends to important political offices, with chairholders serving in the Cabinet and legislature, where they occupy strategic positions on the education committees. Compared to the professors' stature and status, the permanent state officials, including planners, are embedded in a public agency known for the mediocrity of its personnel, within a public administration that in quality and effectiveness is generally ranked lower than that of Germany, France, and Britain.¹³ The dullness of the bureaucracy has increased the need for academics to help provide the order mandated by the national-system approach and, while so doing, to write their own privilege into the administrative rules and turn central control to their own advantage. Italians have had reason to speak of the professors as barons (i baroni) and, at times, of their country as professor-ridden.

Italian public administration is known for its weak horizontal coordination and its strong verticality, with segmental bureau controls extending downward from the center like stakes driven into the ground.¹⁴ The higher education

sector has some of this quality but it has two additional features: The top of the stake rests in the hands of those who are supposedly located far down the line, an imposing case of an internally located interest group controlling a segment of government and doing so through guild-like means of autocratic and collegial control; second, the lowest operating units retain such impressive arbitrary power that the overall bureau, itself a balkanized sector of the general government, is in turn balkanized into several hundred faculties and several thousand chairs and institutes.

In the comparative perspective of the six levels of academic organization, the Italian structure is one that has concentrated power primarily at the bottom, secondarily at the top, and only weakly in the middle. The chairholders, rooted in the lowest operating units, occupy not only the first level of organization but also the second and third: The "substructure" is in their hands, controlled from the bottom up by the guild combination of collegial authority superimposed onto a base of autocratic authority. Little effective supervision by bureaucratic arms of the central state or surveillance by external groups penetrates to these levels. In the secondary concentration of power at

the top level, guild and bureaucracy are interwoven. Yet here too the structure is biased toward professorial control. The overall combination of faculty guild and state bureaucracy has finally and most notably meant weakness among a class of administrators whose interests would be vested in effective internal university and faculty coordination and in the linking of the universities to one another in multicampus and regional systems.

REFORM AND CHANGE

As in other nations, recent demands for reform have hit the traditional Italian system hard. By 1960 it was clear that, because of the expansion and widening of access occurring in the 1950s at the lower educational levels, the university system would soon face much larger numbers of students whose social background and educational preparation would vary more widely than before. Such perceptions were articulated in reports in the early 1960s, and proposed university-reform legislation throughout the decade pressed for a number of changes.¹⁵ There seemed so much to be done, on pragmatic as well as ideological grounds, that proponents of reform generally crafted "big bills," some with as many as one hundred clauses. All the political parties entered into prolonged debate; the junior academics, increasing

rapidly in number and assuming more responsibilities, lobbied with increasing vigor; and some important scientists joined in, angrily arguing that the traditional structure worked against the development of science and reporting invidious international comparisons and critical external opinion.¹⁶

But the professors as a bloc, together with some of the more conservative politicians, resisted change throughout the 1960s, and none of the big bills, some debated for three to four years, was passed. Exemplifying this lack of movement, throughout the entire postwar period the national government started no new universities until the founding of the University of Calabria in 1972. The old group of thirty universities had to absorb nearly the full impact of an expansion in which unchecked student traffic swelled the large urban universities to gigantic size. Universities that predated 1500, rooted in guild-like organization, now faced ever larger masses of students.

One result of resistance to change was, therefore, a severe overloading of the system. Also overextended was the effectiveness of the full professors themselves at some of the central universities, and particularly at the University of Rome. Having kept their ranks narrow, they were overwhelmed.

by the number of students and junior staff they had to supervise and somehow manage. A full professor working only part-time might face twenty assistants and a thousand students. The old guild ties, heavily dependent on personal intervention, were no longer adequate in such circumstances. By 1970 the system had moved into so deep a stage of institutional insufficiency that it was becoming apparent to groups outside as well as within the structure. Student discontent escalated rapidly after 1967 and helped to dramatize the tribulations of the greatly expanded student body. Their explosive outbursts shattered glass; their dogged occupation of buildings tied up some faculties for months at a time. But factionalism, fatigue, and its own organizational insufficiency soon weakened the Italian movimento studentesco, as they had in other countries.¹⁷

Beginning in 1969, when something had to be done to pacify some of the students some of the time, small changes were made. Access to all faculties was granted to the graduates of all the different kinds of secondary schools, replacing the streaming that had limited admission to graduates of the elite classical and scientific licei. The fixed national curriculum was made considerably more flexible

when students were granted the right to devise individual programs of study. In practice, this entailed greater local determination of curriculum as students and faculties worked out requirements. The examination system was revised to allow students a better chance of passing within a given period, although faculty schedules now were even further crammed by time given to examinations. Too, "small laws" (leggine) gradually increased legal support and job security for teaching personnel below the chairholder, with "stabilization" (essentially tenure) given to about 15,000 professori incaricati who already had assumed many duties of the full professors.

Most important, the academic ancien régime's unresponsiveness during the increasingly turbulent 1960s led to a diminished respect for the professors by groups other than the students. Such an erosion of their fundamental legitimacy made possible a shift in the distribution of power. The political parties, trade unions, and other outside groups grew more willing to intervene and to form temporary, active coalitions. In the fall of 1973, by means of an executive decree that bypassed normal legislative channels, the government rammed through what may prove to

be substantial changes.¹⁸ The major provision was a projected increase in full professors from 3,500 to 10,000 in a few years' time. A second measure sought to weaken the politics of choosing professors for national personnel committees by substituting selection by lot for election by constituency. Other measures attempted to stabilize further the status of lower teaching personnel and to grant them more participation and representation in faculty bodies.

Meanwhile, beyond the purview of the established faculties, an interesting trend was accelerating. The Italian system has long provided an unpublicized option for local initiative: begin a university, university branch, or a faculty with local sponsorship and municipal financing, but without recognition by the national system; and then, before the first students have completed the work for a degree, have the new unit legally ratified, supported by national funds, and accredited to award the degree by lobbying the unit into the national system. This option recently has been exercised more and more, especially in the North, as local opinion, in the service of local need and ambition, has raced ahead of the system's willingness and capacity to respond. For example, embryonic subsystems

seem to be forming around Milan and Turin, as small emerging units seek to collaborate for mutual advantage. Central Italy, long monopolized by the University of Rome, produced the new University of Chieti, which operates three campuses under a common budget. Such efforts are in the spirit of regionalization, a shift away from centralized government whose time may have come. It was promised in the Constitution of 1948 and even received some legislative action in 1970.¹⁹ In short, increased activity at the local and regional levels may result first in a de facto and later in a de jure regionalization of the universities. The system has apparently grown too large to continue without some strengthened coordination at Levels 4 and 5 in our comparative scheme.

The nature of change in Italian higher education is heavily conditioned by the nature of the traditional structure that we reviewed in the first two sections of this chapter. The state monopoly has weakened greatly the leverage of market forces—for example, the competition among institutions for faculty and students. The guild controls of the professors within that monopoly have blunted bureaucratic intervention and isolated planners from the most powerful constituency, the professors themselves. Even the power of

professionalism has been vitiated, as many of the scholarly and scientific disciplines have been fragmented and impeded by the conservative local academic clusters. By default, the real leverage rests with uncontrolled numerical expansion and politics. The events following recently instituted reforms, the post-1968 'small laws,' suggest that when political considerations are so basic, reform becomes a matter of adjustment through political incrementalism, studied indirection, and planned bargaining.²⁰ The government cannot pay steady attention because of its overloaded agenda. When it does pay attention, it deals from the weak position of coalition government and mediocre bureaucracy. The overcrowded higher education sector strains with internal conflicts: The junior faculty and exasperated external groups are able to exercise growing influence in favor of reform, against the entrenched capacity of the traditional chairholders to dilute reforms forced upon them and to effect counterreforms; the need for increased coordination among the balkanized domains of the chairs and the faculties conflicts with the idea that the way to open things up is to increase the number of operating units and risk an even more fragmented structure. Small victories are won now and

again: easier rites of passage for students; greater job security and higher rank for lower personnel; an increase in professorships that may spread power at the senior level and in time produce de facto departments.

An effort is underway in Italy to change the political dimensions of a heavily politicized academic system. The general structural drift is toward establishing, where an entrenched power monopoly once stood, a political arena in which exchanges will be made, bargains struck, and tacit agreements reached by a larger number of groups who have an interest and stake in the structure of the system. The political alterations may then in turn provide an opening for such administrative changes as strengthened campus coordination that will help faculty federations become modern universities.

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16. For example, the so-called "Brooks Report" of OECD on Italian science. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Reviews of National Science Policies: Italy (Paris: 1968).

17. Federico Mancini, "The Italian Student Movement," American Association of University Professors Bulletin 54, no. 4 (Winter 1968):427-432; Guido Martinotti, "Italy," in Students, University and Society, ed. Margaret Scotford Archer (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972), pp. 189-193; Gianni Statera, Death of a Utopia: The Development and Decline of Student Movements in Europe (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

18. Clark, Academic Power in Italy, Chapter 4, "Reform." This urgent measure was announced by the government on October 1 and became law sixty days later (Law n. 766, November 30, 1973).

19. On the limitations and possibilities of regionalization in Italy and France, see Sidney Tarrow, "Local Constraints on Regional Reform: A Comparison of Italy and France,"

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Comparative Politics 7, no. 1 (October 1974):1-36.

20. The political and administrative constraints on planning in Italy as well as in France and Britain are discussed in

Jack Hayward and Michael Watson, eds., Planning, Politics and Public Policy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

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