

Foreword

These two studies published here as Volumes 2 and 3 of the CSAC Monograph Series, derive from fieldwork carried out in the late sixties and early seventies: an earlier version of the first, 'Land Politics and Power in a southern Italian Community', was originally submitted as a doctoral thesis in the University of London; the second, 'The Political and Social Context of Industrialisation - the case of Manfredonia', is based on a research report written for ISVET (*Istituto per gli studi sullo sviluppo economico e il progresso tecnico*) in 1974. Although both were independently researched, there is close continuity of themes and argument between them. Both seek to evaluate post-war southern Italian development against the background of a troubled history of acute social change and rural turbulence traced back to the fall of the *ancien régime*; both examine the way in which major changes in agricultural practice, land use and tenurial systems transformed patterns of stratification and the distribution of power in local communities; both are concerned with continuities and disjunctions in political forms and the role of patronage in impeding social and economic change. Somewhat fortuitously, they are neatly paired.

A major problem in assessing the consequences of post-war development policies, is how to disentangle the effects of specific, state-sponsored, development programmes from far less visible and dramatic changes brought about by migrant remittances, transfer payments, Common Market subsidies and a whole range of near universal social and welfare provisions gradually established throughout Italy since 1946. With their clear-cut objectives and statements of intent, land reform programmes and development pole policy are much more amenable to straightforward cost-benefit analysis, and it is only too easy to fall into the trap of believing that they are the font of all change, and that the systematic transformation of the South only begins with the advent of the large scale development programmes of the post-war years. In this context my two case studies provide an instructive contrast. As a relatively isolated hill-top village of the interior, Pertosa has been virtually excluded from the 'benefits' of direct intervention programmes; on the other hand, with two land reform and land improvement schemes and an important industrial complex, Manfredonia has been a major 'beneficiary'. Nevertheless, on completion of fieldwork in 1971, I was left with the overwhelming impression that in terms of those things which

mattered most to their respective inhabitants - general standards of living, housing, job prospects, access to welfare, medical and educational services, there was little to choose between the two. Manfredonia undoubtedly enjoyed a much larger and expanding resource base, but the potential advantages accruing from land reform and industrialisation were being rapidly eroded by an influx of migrants who swamped the job market and put increasing, often intolerable, pressures on local services. In these circumstances, my evaluation of Manfredonia's economic prospects was inevitably somewhat dismal.

Without further fieldwork it is impossible to offer a detailed assessment of social and economic changes in these two communities after 1975. Brief visits made to both in 1990 (whilst engaged in subsequent research in Ascoli Satriano, one of the 'methane' communes of the south-west Tavoliere) would not incline me to revise my original, pessimistic, judgment. Although both have shared in a general improvement in prosperity and living standards common to much of the South throughout the eighties, in different ways both face an uncertain future. Despite a modest increase in tourists and tourist facilities, Pertosa's economy and population (now below 3,000) have slowly declined over the last fifteen years, and the well-being of its demographically skewed population is increasingly dependent on transfer payments, migrant remittances and the windfall profits of earthquake relief. Manfredonia has fared little better, and many of the criticisms of the opponents of the industrial project in 1969 have been proved fully justified. Physically hemmed in by the concrete wilderness of its industrial infrastructure and subject to periodic pollution from industrial effluent, it has been largely excluded from the tourist expansion of the Gargano. A steadily increasing population, which has now made it the second largest town in the province, has continued to exert pressure on jobs and services. A modest expansion of the Macchia industrial complex in the late seventies was partially offset by the collapse of the *Ajinomoto-Insud* plant. A decade later the ENI industrial complex itself was under threat of closure. Perhaps the most telling comment came from a local school teacher (who had himself worked for many years in Manfredonia) during the 1990 summer festival in Ascoli Satriano. 'At the end of the methane campaign', he said, 'we were bitter in Ascoli when we found that the only reward for our efforts was the consolation prize of two tiny industrial plants. Perhaps we were wrong. In retrospect, even token industrialisation is better than the industrial involution which has been Manfredonia's lot.'

Although some of the ideas, themes and citations in these studies are now somewhat dated, overall, perhaps, they do not greatly affect the balance and direction of argument in what are essentially descriptive analyses.

Nevertheless, in the light of more recent research, three themes at least require further brief comment. The first concerns the historical background to these studies.

Like many other ethnographers of southern Italy and Sicily in this period (Bell, Blok, Davis, Douglass, Jane and Peter Schneider, White)¹, I sought to offer more than mere sketch-map history, and argued that many contemporary institutions, rituals and cultural values could only be understood by setting them in the context of series of dramatic changes which had occurred in the nineteenth century, and particularly processes of state formation and the introduction of capitalism into the countryside which followed the feudal and ecclesiastical land settlements of the early nineteenth century. This perspective, if not wrong in itself, is certainly too simple. Recent research by social and economic historians and, above all, by historical demographers suggests that it grossly over-privileges the nineteenth century, and offers a far too unilinear and foreshortened view of Italian history². It is now clear that by the end of the eighteenth century Manfredonia (and probably Pertosa, too) was a far more 'open' society than I had envisaged and that, as a result of the supervisory role of the *Regia Dogana*, Tavoliere towns in general had had an intense and intricate relationship with the state throughout the early modern period. Similarly, many of the changes classically associated with the land settlements of the nineteenth century are now shown to have been foreshadowed in previous centuries.

A second point of uncertainty is the cultural obstacles to change thesis which was an important theme in the Manfredonia study. This line of enquiry was suggested by ENI itself who believed that a failure in the host community to understand the logic of industrial development and technological innovation was a serious impediment to change. From the outset I was cautiously sceptical of the value of this approach if only because, already by the late sixties, both the cultural obstacles thesis and related sociological arguments about convergence and the logic of industrialism had been substantially discredited. In the event I found little supporting evidence for either argument. Somewhat surprisingly this style of argument (albeit in an inverted form) was resuscitated by Italian sociologists in the late seventies with the claim that key factors in the social structure and value system of central Italian society - extended families, *mezzadria*, patterns of rural urban cooperation, had greatly facilitated the development of small industrial enterprise and was largely responsible for the economic expansion of the *Terza Italia*³. Although some of these elements (for example, three generational family cooperation amongst fishermen) can be discovered in some sub-sections of Manfredonia's population, their effect, if any, was very slight, neither impeding nor stimulating industrial growth or a positive

evaluation of the opportunities offered by the introduction into the community of new industrial technologies.

A third and final set of comments is required concerning the role of patronage in local politics and in processes of development. A major theme in both studies was that, despite changes in form and content, throughout the period under review, patronage had continued to shape the structure of political competition and party affiliation, that it was an important determinant of voting behavior and that, overall, it had tended to impede economic and social development. Despite subsequent anthropological discussion about the 'myth' of patronage and the well rehearsed argument that patronage is little more than a landowner ideology masking class exploitation,⁴ I am not inclined to change my original view substantially. Especially in the Manfredonia study, I sought to specify some of the limits to patronage, and suggested that with increasing prosperity it was losing some of its force. I also sought to explain why, earlier in this century, Manfredonia, unlike other towns in the south Tavoliere,⁵ had been relatively impervious to class-based politics. In both studies I tried to show the differential impact of patronage in local as opposed to regional and national elections. At worst, and especially in my account of electoral behaviour in Pertosa, I perhaps exaggerated the significance of patronage by playing down other sources of political commitment and, also, political apathy.

Although I do not wish to imply patronage is the only or even the dominant force in southern Italian politics, it is certainly not insignificant. Even the most cursory examination of local election results in Pertosa and Manfredonia after 1975 shows that Salvemini's theory of alternating factions still holds broadly true, and that political competitions and outcomes are still predominantly shaped by patronage interest. Interestingly, the struggle for mastery of patronage resources which followed the introduction of large-scale earthquake relief programmes in Pertosa and the communes of the Sub-Appennino Dauno in the eighties was not very different from the political turmoil occasioned by land reform and industrial development schemes a generation earlier. Overall, patronage remains the single most important source of blockage in the Italian political system.

Notes

1. Bell, R.M., 1979, *Fate and honor, family and village: demographic and cultural change in rural Italy since 1800.*

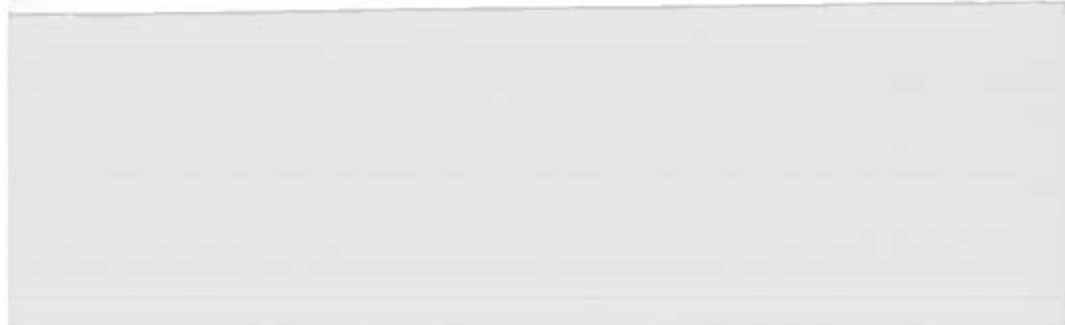
- Blok, A., 1974, *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village 1860-1960*.
Davis J., 1973, *Land and family in Pisticci*.
Douglass, W.A., 1984, *Emigration in a South Italian town: an anthropological history*.
Schneider, J. and P., 1976, *Culture and political economy in Western Sicily*.
White, C., 1980, *Patrons and Partisans: a study of politics in two southern comuni*.
2. See, for example, Marino, J.A., 1988, *Pastoral economics in the Kingdom of Naples*, and also Gérard Delille, 1988, *Famiglia e proprietà nel Regno di Napoli*.
 3. Bagnasco, A., 1977, *Tre Italie. La Problematica territoriale dello sviluppo italiano*.
 4. Silverman, S., 1977, Patronage as myth. In Gellner, E., and Waterbury, J., *Patrons and clients in Mediterranean societies*. Also, Li Causi, 1975, Anthropology and ideology. *Critique of anthropology* 4-5.
 5. Snowden, F., 1986, *Violence and great estates in the south of Italy: Apulia, 1900-1922*.



The following table shows the results of the experiment. The first column is the number of trials, the second column is the number of correct responses, and the third column is the percentage of correct responses. The data shows that the percentage of correct responses increases as the number of trials increases, indicating that the subject is learning the task.

Number of Trials	Number of Correct Responses	Percentage of Correct Responses
10	5	50%
20	12	60%
30	18	60%
40	25	62.5%
50	30	60%
60	35	58.3%
70	40	57.1%
80	45	56.25%
90	48	53.3%
100	50	50%

The results of the experiment show that the subject's performance is stable, with a consistent level of accuracy across different trial counts. This suggests that the subject has reached a plateau in their learning process.



Chapter 1

The South¹

North and South

For more than a century, the problem of economic disparity between North and South has been one of the main issues in Italian national politics, and a source of bitter debate amongst Italian scholars, journalists and politicians. Although nobody has ever denied the relative poverty of the South, there has been little agreement about its causes, and still less on the remedies for it. It has been attributed to many different factors: an unfavourable climate, lack of natural resources, poor communications, racial inferiority, Bourbon misgovernment, the exploitation of northern industrialists and the Piedmontese bureaucracy, and the incapacity of the southern ruling classes (to pick out just a few of the main themes from the voluminous writings of the *meridionalisti*²). The remedies which have been proposed are equally various, ranging from pleas for local self-government and regional autonomy on the one hand, to the recommendation of state intervention and national economic planning on the other.

Although detailed regional statistics are not available for the period immediately following unification, there can be very little doubt that economically the South got off to a very poor start. In 1861 it had only 184 kilometers of railways to the North's 2,336 kilometers,³ and in the Neapolitan provinces only 527 out of the 1848 communes had roads.⁴ Agricultural yields were lower than in the North, and the prevalence of malaria made it difficult to work the relatively few fertile plains. There was little industry in the South, and most of it was concentrated on Naples. In fact, in 1863, only 50 of Italy's 422 joint stock companies were to be found in the South.⁵ Both the birth and the death rates were far higher than the national average, and illiteracy was more common than in the North. In 1861, largely as the result of the heavy debts incurred during the wars of independence, the Italian state was on the verge of bankruptcy. In an attempt to balance the budget, taxes, particularly on land and foodstuffs, were greatly increased, and the Piedmontese tax and tariff systems were extended to the whole of Italy. Although these fiscal measures aroused hostility throughout the country, their effects were most marked in the South, which previously had been lightly taxed.

Southern landlords protested that 'the land was being martyred', and indirect taxes, especially the infamous *macinato*,⁶ (effectively a tax on pasta and bread) drove the peasants into insurrection and brigandage. Moreover, southern industry, no longer protected by high tariffs, rapidly declined.

Despite financial difficulties, the government was determined to improve the economic infrastructure, and in the first two decades of Italian unity invested heavily in roads, railways and ports. These improvements undoubtedly helped the South, but they failed to satisfy the *meridionalisti* who claimed that it had received much less than its fair share. Nitti, for example, argued that the South had paid far more in taxes than it had received in state expenditure on public works, and that the industrial development of the North was, in part at least, founded on the 'colonial' exploitation of the South.⁷ Although Nitti had been accused of exaggeration,⁸ it is certainly true that Italy's financial recovery between 1870 and 1880, and the growth of trade and industry in the North which followed in its wake, were achieved at the expense of agriculture. In the words of Stefano Jacini, chairman of the first parliamentary inquiry into the state of Italian agriculture in 1878, 'political Italy had sacked agricultural Italy'.⁹

Between 1863 and 1910 there were three major parliamentary inquiries into conditions in the South, and from the mid-seventies the *meridionalisti* began to publish the results of their own investigations. These studies provided the basis for a much more thorough comparison of the differences between North and South, and lent strength to the *meridionalisti's* contention that the state's policy since unification had aggravated the disparity between them. By 1900 the South's per capita income was less than one-half that of the North. In 1911 its consumption of industrial power was only slightly more than Piedmont's, and its agricultural yields were often no more than one-third of the national average.¹⁰

In the early years of Italian unity, the state was unwilling to concede that the South had special problems, and refused to intervene directly on its behalf. Its rulers believed that most of its difficulties were due to Bourbon misrule, and that they could best be solved by good government and improvements in the economic infrastructure. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it was clear that this policy had failed. Alarmed by peasant unrest, and partly aware of the extent to which the South was slipping behind, the government reluctantly agreed to special legislation. Between 1904 and 1914 a series of laws were enacted which were designed to encourage industrialisation and the improvement of agriculture. Although these measures were of some benefit in areas which had been singled out for special concessions,¹¹ they were far too small in scale to effect the economy

of the South as a whole. During the Great War, and the Fascist era which followed, the South was largely ignored, and conditions grew steadily worse. In the twenty year period between 1928 and 1948, average real incomes fell by almost 25%.¹²

It was not until after the Second World War, with the establishment of the *Cassa del Mezzogiorno* (The Fund for the South) and the introduction of Land Reform in 1950, that the state made a concerted effort to solve the problem once and for all. But even today, after almost twenty years of massive public investment, the gap between North and South remains. At best, it is growing no wider.

Southern Agriculture

One of the obstacles to state intervention in the South was a curiously persistent belief in its potential wealth and fertility. Throughout the nineteenth century most Italians accepted the ancient myth of the natural prosperity of southern agriculture: the '*omnis feret omnia tellus*' of Vergil, the former granary of Rome, the land which Minghetti, Italy's first Minister of the Interior, could describe as 'the most beautiful and fertile in Europe'.

The man most responsible for destroying this myth was Giustino Fortunato, a landowner from Basilicata, and one of the founders of the *Rassegna Settimanale*, the main mouthpiece of the *meridionalisti* in the years 1878-1882. He argued that in reality the South was a land of low rainfall, few rivers, poor clay soils and erosions. Most of it (about 80%) consisted of barren hills which were, unfortunately, too low to guarantee the continuous presence of snow and a regular supply of water. Cultivation was extensive rather than intensive. Large areas of the countryside were without roads or houses; the plains were swampy and malaria-ridden. In short, the South was arid, infertile and extremely poor.¹³

Although both in climate and vegetation the *Mezzogiorno* conforms to a general Mediterranean type, it can be divided into distinct agricultural zones. In a classic classification,¹⁴ Rossi-Doria distinguishes between two main types of agriculture; the first he calls the treed *Mezzogiorno* (*Mezzogiorno alborato*), a zone of intensive cultivation in which the vine, the olive and the almond tree predominate, the second is the bare *Mezzogiorno* (*Mezzogiorno nudo*), characterised by the *latifondo*, the large estate. In its turn this second type can be divided into two: the capitalist *latifondo* and the peasant *latifondo*.

The treed *Mezzogiorno* extends along the west coast from Naples to Sicily, and is also found in the heel of Italy running from north of Bari to Lecce. In this area cereals occupy only a small part of the total acreage, and

it is mostly cultivated with vineyards, olive groves, vegetables and, where irrigation is available, with citrus fruits. Production is for the market rather than for subsistence. It is from this zone that the bulk of Italy's fruit and vegetable exports come, and in terms of income per hectare is one of the richest regions in Italy. Since, however, it supports a very dense population, poverty is just as common as in other parts of the South. Most of this region was developed as the result of considerable capital investment in the second half of the nineteenth century, although small parts of it are of earlier origin. Land is highly fragmented. Much of it is still owned by middle class proprietors, but the individual working farmer is not an uncommon type of entrepreneur in the area.

The capitalistic *latifondo*, characterised by large estates run with wage labour, stretches along the eastern sea-board from the Tavoliere in Puglia to Calabria. Traditionally only a small part of the labour force was permanent. Workers from the nearby towns on the slopes of the Apennines or from the interior were engaged as day labourers during the busy seasons of sowing, weeding and harvesting. Since malaria and the aridity of the soil made intensive farming in this area difficult if not impossible, its agriculture was based on a mixture of cereals and sheep. In winter the coastal plains were used as pasture for the transhumant flocks of the interior; in summer they were devoted to the production of wheat. The type of entrepreneur was mixed: at the one extreme was the large landowner who managed cereal production himself or through his agents, but who preferred to rent his estates to groups of shepherds in winter, at the other there were shepherds who organised the cereal culture themselves. In recent years the capitalistic *latifondo* has lost some of its former importance. It is here that the Land Reform Board has been most active: many large estates have been broken up, divided into plots, and allocated to peasants.

The third zone, and that with which this study will be principally concerned, is the peasant *latifondo*. It is found in the central uplands and is by far the largest of the three. Although large estates are also common in this area, they are worked quite differently than on the plains, typically being divided into small plots and sublet to peasant smallholders. The main crops are cereals and vegetables, and a few sheep and cattle are also reared. The land, however, is quite unsuitable for cereal production, and yields are much lower (often no more than one-third) than on the plains.

In the central uplands, the peasant is the consumer of by far the greater part of his own produce, and his contact with the market is minimal. He is almost always what Rossi-Doria calls a 'mixed figure' (*figura mista*);¹⁵ at the same time smallholder, tenant, share-cropper, and day labourer. Despite

his versatility, unemployment and underemployment are common. Until recently underemployment and a scarcity of land characterised this area, and more than any other combination of factors were responsible for large scale emigration.

Population, Land conversion and Emigration

For over a century overpopulation has been a serious problem in the central uplands of southern Italy. In Italy as a whole the population doubled in the period 1861-1961, and although the total increase in resident population of the central uplands was no greater than in the rest of Italy, its economic resources were far too limited to support even a modest rise.

The region of Basilicata, which straddles the southern Apennines, and which consists for the most part of rugged, mountainous terrain, provides a good example of the effects of overpopulation. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, Basilicata had a predominantly pastoral economy. More than half its territory consisted of forest, one-eighth was permanent pasture, and almost one-half of the remainder was waste land.¹⁶ Although on the coastal plains arable farming was quite common, the large baronial and ecclesiastical estates of the interior were run as sheep and cattle farms; the forests were used to pasture goats and pigs. The export of cattle and animal products to Naples and the Amalfi coast was one of the main sources of wealth of the region.

Between 1735 and 1861 the population of Basilicata went up from 277,000 to 479,958, and in the next hundred years rose a further 30%.¹⁷ One of the immediate consequences of this rise was that the inhabitants of the central uplands were driven to bring under the plough large tracts of land which would have been better left as woodland or natural pasture. In the last resort it is impossible to ascertain how much land was converted to arable since, until the introduction of the new land register in 1930, the measurement of land was inexact. However, a parliamentary inquiry in 1910 estimated the percentage of forest destroyed in the communes of Basilicata and Calabria at 25% to 60%.¹⁸ This percentage refers only to the period 1861-1910, and there is no reason to think that deforestation was on a much smaller scale in the first half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, in 1847 the Intendant of Basilicata complained that large scale deforestation and land conversion had led to a sharp decline in animal husbandry.¹⁹

If population pressure was the main incentive to deforestation, it was by no means the only one. The new rural middle classes, who had invested in land during the feudal and ecclesiastical land settlements at the beginning of the nineteenth century, sought a quick return on their capital by cutting

wood, and dividing their estates into arable fragments which were then leased to peasants. In the words of the parliamentary commissioners in 1910, 'The three land settlements (*eversioni*): the feudal, the demesial and the ecclesiastical have swept through the forests of the South like three cyclones, razing them to the ground'. Similarly, to the communal administration beset by debt, the sale of wood from the communal forest was, and still is, all too easy a prospect of raising short-term income. In the inter-war period, conversion was officially encouraged by Fascist propaganda with its emphasis on self-sufficiency and its slogan, 'the battle for grain'. As late as 1947 sheer land hunger led to conversion, when large numbers of half-starved peasants invaded state forest land. After prolonged negotiations, the Forestry Commission was obliged to assign to individual peasant families large tracts of pasture and semi-wooded territory.

The effects of deforestation and conversion have been disastrous. Generally speaking, they have resulted in the impoverishment of soils and erosion, and they have increased the risk of flood damage and landslides. One of the few advantages of the system of fragmented and scattered peasant holdings is that if a plot of land or crop is swept away by one of the many landslides which follow the winter rains the loss is, at worst, partial.

Although the change from pastoral to arable farming helped to absorb some of southern Italy's ever-increasing labour force, it proved no more than a temporary solution to the problem of overpopulation. In the central uplands few peasant families were without land of their own, but the small plots they owned, and the small amount of work they could find elsewhere, allowed them, at best, to maintain their families at subsistence level. If beggary and unemployment were rare, underemployment was very common.

The peasant solution to the problem of overpopulation was emigration, either seasonal or permanent. Emigration has a long tradition in the *Mezzogiorno*. By the beginning of the eighteenth century the system of villeinage had completely broken down on the southern mainland. Far from being bound to remain on the land of their feudal overlords, peasants seem to have been remarkably mobile. At the end of the century, the Neapolitan government was obliged to introduce passports in order to control the seasonal migration of southern Italian peasants into Sicily. Eighty years later, in his description of social and economic conditions in Calabria and Basilicata, Franchetti remarks,

'Although it is a contradiction in terms, agriculture here is still in a nomadic state.'²⁰

He was referring to the seasonal migration of labour from the central uplands to the coast and Sicily. Since crops ripen earlier on the plains, large numbers

of day labourers from the mountains came for the grain harvest in May or June, or for olive picking in November. These migrants were usually organised in small groups (*paranze*) of kin and friends, and their aim was to earn a quick cash income to pay for such items as a daughter's trousseau or a piece of land.

Although this type of emigration never completely disappeared, in the second half of the nineteenth century it declined in both volume and importance. Before 1867 emigration abroad was of little consequence in Italy, and where it occurred it was from the North rather than the South. After this date, however, emigration, mainly directed towards the United States and South America, assumed ever greater proportions. It offered far greater economic opportunities than the system of internal migration: the change to break for ever with harsh landlords, or to acquire sufficient capital to buy land and set up as an independent farmer. In fact, between 1869 and 1909 more than 60,000 peasants emigrated from Basilicata alone, and it has been estimated that in the period 1871-1951 some nine million southern Italians went abroad.²¹

After the end of the First World War there was a considerable reduction in the number of emigrants, partly because of the new American immigration laws, partly because Fascist Italy disapproved of emigration. In the last fifteen years, however, emigration from southern Italy has once again become important. Although it is difficult to make a precise estimate, since 1951 at least 2,500,000 southerners have moved to the North, or have gone as seasonal migrants to Germany, France or Switzerland.²²

Undoubtedly, emigration has helped to reduce poverty and unemployment in the South. Peasants no longer contract the prolonged series of debts which were once so common, and an influx of money from abroad is now being used to repair and modernise their houses. Indeed, nowadays most southern towns have an air of modest prosperity. Nevertheless, most southerners are reluctant to admit that emigration is a permanent solution to their problems. Landowners complain that they have difficulty in finding labour, and for peasants, whose work conditions abroad are often harsh, it is explicitly described as a sacrifice. Yet as far as the central uplands are concerned, it is difficult to find an alternative solution. The land is unsuitable for intensive cultivation, and the government land reform plan was a complete failure in this area. Local politicians often talk about encouraging tourism or attracting industry, yet in neither field have they had much success so far. Agriculturally, the most satisfactory solution would be to reconvert to pasture and forest, but a pastoral economy could never provide full employment for the present number of inhabitants.

We are left then with the *ad hoc* solution of emigration, devised by the peasants over the last hundred and fifty years. And the communes of the interior have become *paesi di passaggio*, towns of passage, towns in which most peasants are born, grow up, marry and die, but from which they are absent for the greater part of their adult working lives.

Roads and Communications.

One of the most remarkable features of rural life in southern Italy in the nineteenth century was the sheer volume of geographical mobility. Although city-bred travellers visiting the South often spoke of the remoteness and isolation of the towns and villages of the interior, it is difficult to reconcile their impressions with the available historical evidence. Apart from peasant migration, most of the rural upper classes spent part of each year in Naples, and from the late eighteenth century there was a steady flow of professionals and civil servants from the city who invested their savings in land and set themselves up as country gentry. At all social levels intermarriage between neighbouring towns seems to have been fairly common. Moreover, the fact that at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Basilicata almost 7% of the labour force were employed as carters and muleteers gives some indication of the volume of internal trade.²³

This degree of geographical mobility is even more surprising if one considers the rudimentary state of the system of roads and communications. Although in 1861 Basilicata covered an area of more than 10,000 square kilometers and had almost half a million inhabitants, it had no railways, few social services, and less than 300 kilometers of carriageable roads. In the entire province there were only five orphanages, six hospitals and thirty-four elementary schools; only 15 out of 124 communes had roads which connected them to the provincial capital. Many towns lacked doctors, veterinarians and midwives, and less than one-quarter had regular postal services.²⁴ For more than twenty years the Bourbon authorities had discussed the possibility of building a trans-Appennine railway, but their projects had never come to fruition. Although they made some attempt to maintain the most important national highways, by 1861, the Appia, the main road from Naples to Bari, was in a state of disrepair and was impassable in winter months. Indeed, in the absence of carriageable roads, by far the commonest form of travel was on foot or on horseback, along the dense network of mule tracks and drovers paths which connected the towns of the interior to each other and to the provincial capital.

For most of the nineteenth century travel in southern Italy was both dangerous and expensive. The countryside was infested with brigands, and

landowners, merchants and government officials travelling from Naples to the provinces were compelled to employ the services of troops or armed retainers. Thus in 1857 the mayor of a small town in Basilicata complained to the Intendant about the expenses he had incurred in travelling to Naples on official business. His journey took five days, and his expenses included a passport fee, two sets of customs dues and the costs of hiring and maintaining four armed retainers.²⁵

The lack of an efficient system of roads and railways had a number of important economic and political consequences. First, the high cost of transport limited the volume of internal trade, and provided very little incentive for the growth of economic specialisation or the production of cash crops. Secondly, it effectively restricted the exercise of central political authority. In the second half of the nineteenth century, many conservative landowners looked back on the Bourbon era as a golden age of low taxation and minimal government interference in local affairs. The state was predatory and regulatory, but provided taxes were paid and law and order was maintained local administrators could enjoy a fair degree of autonomy. It would, however, be mistaken to think of local autonomy as the result of either Bourbon benevolence or policy. In southern Italy, as in other preindustrial states, inadequate technology and a poor system of communications were major limitations on the power of central political authorities. Thus, although in the last decade of Bourbon rule the electric telegraph had been established in all the provincial capitals of the kingdom, there was no effective way in which the provincial authorities could control the day-to-day decisions of communal administrators, nor could they ensure that their orders had been fully carried out.

Even after the unification of Italy the autonomy of local leaders and politicians remained largely intact, and they were often able to avoid putting into practice laws and administrative regulations which were inimical to their interests. In this way the new forestry code and the regulations governing the division of common lands and the administration of communal relief funds were systematically ignored or manipulated in the favour of the rural middle classes. The provincial authorities were often well aware of local abuses, but found it difficult to eliminate them. Thus, in a report of 1865, the Prefect of Potenza remarked that he suspected that all sorts of malpractices and irregularities had taken place in the communes in his charge. However, since the presence of brigand bands made it unsafe to travel in the countryside, and since many communes were remote from the seat of government, it was impossible to maintain any kind of close supervision.²⁶

After unification, the central government embarked on an extensive programme of public works. Between 1863 and 1881 a series of acts were passed empowering local authorities to build provincial roads, and the state itself undertook to improve and expand the national highway system. By 1904 more than 2,000 kilometers of roads had been built in the province of Basilicata,²⁷ and most communes were connected both to the nearest rail-head and to the provincial capital. Even more important was the building of the railways. In 1881 the trans-Appennine line from Naples to Metaponto was inaugurated, and by 1914 three provincial branch lines had been added. In the same period there was modest public investment in schools and hospitals, but progress in this sphere was slow, and it was only after the Second World War that social welfare services were expanded and developed. By 1880, most towns in Basilicata were connected by electric telegraph, and by the end of the Great War a rudimentary bus service was in operation. Electricity was introduced in the nineteen-twenties, and by 1965 most peasants, even those living in the most remote rural communes, owned or had access to a radio or television set. Immediately after the Second World War, the government, in an attempt to relieve unemployment, initiated an ambitious programme of road construction and renewal, so that roads which for generations had remained unmade and impassable in winter were finally made fit for motor traffic.

Nowadays the road system and public transport in southern Italy is still far from satisfactory. Local buses and trains are slow and unreliable, roads are frequently allowed to fall into disrepair, and the national highways are unsuitable for modern traffic conditions. Nevertheless, it is impossible to deny the improvements which have taken place in the last hundred years. Eighty years ago, a provincial landowner going on business to Naples or Rome made his will before leaving home; today, thousands of peasants leave their villages each year and travel in modest comfort to northern Italy or the common market countries.

Over the last hundred and fifty years the villages and towns of the interior of southern Italy have slowly emerged from relative isolation. This process has had two main dimensions. On the one hand there has been a gradual expansion of the economic frontier, on the other a transformation of the relations between village and state. As a result of emigration many peasants have been absorbed into the national or even an international economic system. Others have chosen to invest the profits of emigration in local enterprises, or have used the opportunities provided by employment in the government service to raise their economic position and prestige in the village. In the sphere of politics, the improvement in roads and communications was the major prerequisite of the expansion of government interference

in communal affairs, for it made possible the detailed supervision and control of the local political elite. At the same time, however, government intervention in local affairs has taken a more benevolent direction. Since the Second World War, it has increasingly assumed direct responsibility for the provision of welfare services, and in the last twenty years pensions, sick pay, maternity and unemployment benefits have been extended to many categories of workers.

In his famous novel, *Christ stopped at Eboli*, Carlo Levi remarked, 'To the peasants the state is more distant than heaven and far more of a scourge, because it is always against them. Its political tags and platforms and, indeed, the whole structure of it do not matter. The peasants do not understand them because they are couched in a different language from their own and there is no reason why they should ever care to understand them.'²⁸

Even today, the state and its representatives are distrusted by the peasantry, for whom the moral community is still coterminous with their own native villages. But, despite their hostility, few can afford to ignore it, for in southern Italy, as in most complex societies, it has come to provide a range of services and social benefits on which their economic well-being depends.

Notes to Chapter I

- 1 The South - or *Mezzogiorno* as it is commonly called - includes five regions on the southern mainland: Abruzzi and Molise, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata and Calabria, and the islands of Sicily and Sardinia.
- 2 The *meridionalisti* were a group of writers and politicians who studied and popularised the Southern Question from the 1870s onwards.
- 3 SVIMEZ (1961) *Un secolo di Statistiche Italiane, Nord e Sud*, (1861-1961:477) Rome.
- 4 Nitti, F.S. (1958, Vol 2:264).
- 5 Clough, S.B. (1964:166).
- 6 The *macinato* or grist tax was a tax levied on all grain ground at the mill. It was introduced by Sella in 1868.
- 7 Nitti, 1958, Vol.2., *Nord e Sud*, passim.
- 8 Clough and Levi claim that the statistics on which Nitti's argument was based are misleading, and that between 1861 and 1880 the South received a major share of public investments (1956: 337).

- 9 Quoted in Seton-Watson (1967: 86).
- 10 Seton-Watson (1967: 307).
- 11 For example, exemption from taxation and customs dues effectively encouraged the growth of industries in Naples, and the expansion of the port.
- 12 Hilderbrand (1965: 291). In the same period average real incomes in northern Italy fell by 4%.
- 13 Fortunato (1926: 309-22).
- 14 Rossi-Doria (1948: 2-34).
- 15 Rossi-Doria (1948: 19).
- 16 Pedio (1961b: 30).
- 17 For further details see Appendix A.
- 18 *Inchiesta parlamentare sulle condizioni dei contadini nelle provincie meridionali e nella Sicilia*, Vol V, Tome 3, Relazione Nitti, p. 76.
- 19 Pedio (1961a: 124).
- 20 Franchetti (1875: 71-87).
- 21 Lopreato (1967: 44).
- 22 Lopreato (1967: 44).
- 23 Pedio (1961a: 132).
- 24 Verrastro (1961: 208-9).
- 25 ASP, *Fondo Amministrazione Comunale*, fasc. 17, p. 6.
- 26 ASP, *Fondo Prefettura*, fasc.3, p. 2.
- 27 Verrastro (1961: 214).
- 28 Levi (1959: 58).