

- 9 See Firth (1957: 292).
- 10 My formal description of factions relies heavily on Nicholas (1965) and Boissevain (1964).
- 11 See Boissevain (1964).
- 12 For further details of election results in this period see Appendix C.
- 13 Most emigrants return to Pertosa during elections, mainly because they are entitled to cheap fares.
- 14 For example, this section of the electorate tends to be the main recipient of the Vatican charity relief (POA) parcels, parcels of food and clothes distributed through clerical organizations, usually on the eve of elections.
- 15 Thus, it was said in Pertosa that the main reason for the 'unexpected' victory of the *Aratro* alliance in 1953 was that it was a period of high unemployment and near famine. For the first and probably the only time since the war *foresi* took an active part in the election campaign.

## Chapter 10

### Politics and Social Change

#### Local Politics

One of the most striking features of politics in Pertosa is the remarkable similarity between the structure of parties and political conflict in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although party labels have changed, and nowadays the electorate has a much wider range of political choices, the principles on which parties are recruited, the aims of their leaders and even the motives behind the quarrels which divide them have remained very much the same. The ideological content of politics is still very low, and the same sort of factional rivalries which divided the nineteenth century Liberal party still gives shape to all the main political parties in the village. Indeed, Salvemini's analysis of the structure and organisation of local government in Molfetta at the turn of the century has a curiously modern ring, and even today it is still one of the best general accounts of political processes in the communes of southern Italy.

But despite these structural similarities, there can be little doubt that there have been profound changes in village political organisation in post-war years, particularly in the social composition of the parties and the communal council, and in the bases of leadership. The most important of these changes is the gradual decline in political power and influence of landowning families.

Until about 1960, parties in Pertosa were dominated by local notables. They were largely responsible for the appointment and dismissal of party secretaries, and their friends and clients were usually in charge of the main political and religious associations. Through their friendships in Rome and the provincial capital they could generally by-pass the formal party hierarchy, and, if necessary, their decisions received the backing of national politicians and even ministers. Similarly, within the village they were usually able to control the choice of electoral candidates, and even if they were ineligible or unwilling to hold executive office on the council themselves, they normally made sure that the mayor and *giunta* respected their interests. Thus, the first three post-war administrations in Pertosa were all headed by

landowners, whose clients were strategically placed in executive positions on the council.

By contrast, in the last five or six years the supremacy of the gentry in the parties and their absolute mastery of the commune has been challenged. In the last three years of the 1961-1965 *Aratro* administration they had no representative on the *giunta*, and for the first time the village's richest landowner received a tax assessment which was based on his true income. Similarly, since 1963 local notables have had little influence on the appointment of DC party secretaries, or on the way in which they run their offices. Although they were still able to influence the choice of mayor during the 1965 elections, they have only one representative on the present DC *giunta*, which in general terms is hostile to their interests.

The declining political influence of the gentry is directly related to their loss of economic standing in the village economy, which I described in detail in Chapters 4 and 5. As a result of the growth of emigration and the expansion of employment opportunities outside the village, their control of land has lost its former political significance. Nevertheless, although peasants no longer depend on the gentry for land and labour, with the expansion of the welfare functions of the state, they have come increasingly to rely on the bureaucratic intermediarity of the village upper classes. Thus, by switching from patronage to brokerage roles, and by exploiting their networks of political ties outside the village, landowners have been able to conserve a part of their former power.

In the course of their switch of roles, however, the gentry lost their monopoly of power. Although the political contacts which they built up in the major power centres of the wider Italian society in the years immediately after the war provided them with an initial advantage over members of the new professional class, the latter have become equally well qualified to act as bureaucratic intermediaries. Indeed, in the last few years there has been increasing competition and conflict between them, and, on the whole, the new professionals have come out on top.

But the gentry's decline in power is also due in part to the deliberate policy of national political parties, which, since the war, have made strenuous efforts to strengthen their constituency organisations. Although between 1946 and 1948 all the main political parties established branch offices and associations in Pertosa, until the mid-nineteen-fifties constituency organisations (with the possible exception of the *Camera del Lavoro*) were of scarcely greater importance than they had been under Liberal Italy. For the most part, they were little more than landowners' associations. They functioned spasmodically and inefficiently, and, indeed, most landowners

preferred to deal directly with local deputies and national politicians rather than going through the formal party hierarchy.

The strengthening of the DC party organisation was largely the work of Fanfani, who became general secretary in 1954. At the fifth national party conference of that year, he argued that particularly in the South the party needed to be freed from the influence of outside elements, especially that of the Church and local notables. He called for the creation of a modern mass party based on 'efficient party sections and organisation', and for 'a politics of ideas and facts, instead of a politics of agitation and macaroni'.<sup>1</sup>

Fanfani set out to achieve his aims in three main ways. First, he sought to strengthen the party secretariat, and particularly the position of the provincial secretaries, who were encouraged to embark on parliamentary careers and given access to party patronage resources. Secondly, he attempted to foster the growth of a new middle class political elite in the South, who were to replace the old DC notables. Thirdly, he instructed local party secretaries to promote the political education of the electorate by explaining in detail party programmes, policies and ideologies.

The success and limitations of the Fanfani reforms are well illustrated by the development of the DC party organisation in Pertosa. Although the old DC notables have retained some of their former influence, they have lost their monopoly of political power, and have been reduced to the status of an important pressure group within the party. Conversely, a new class of professionals has come to play a major part on the local council, and most of the leaders of the DC village associations are now recruited from its ranks. Although in the last few years these new professionals have been able to create extra-village networks and to tap state patronage resources, they are much more dependent on the party hierarchy than the notables who preceded them. By channelling patronage through the provincial secretaries the DC party has succeeded in retaining far more control over its present local representatives than over their predecessors. Indeed, nowadays, party patronage resources tend to be allocated according to criteria of political efficiency, and not as personal favours from local deputies to their grand electors.<sup>2</sup> Since they are obliged to work through the party hierarchy, the present generation of village politicians have far less opportunity to play off their political superiors.

But on the other hand, the Fanfani reforms have failed to create a mass political movement, or to transform a party based primarily on clientage into one deriving its strength from 'ideas and facts'. Politicians in Pertosa have made no attempt to explain party policies and ideologies to the electorate, and parties are still recruited in much the same way as in the past. If the

clienteles of local notables are gradually disappearing, they are being replaced by those of semi-professional middle class politicians. Patronage, far from declining, is now in the process of becoming bureaucratised.

#### **Patronage**

Many of the changes which I have just been describing are also reflected in the changing nature of patron-client relations. Throughout the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century, patronage in Pertosa was confined to a very small sector of the population. There were relatively few patrons, and most peasants and artisans were excluded altogether from the patron-client system. The power and influence of patrons to assist and protect others was almost entirely derived from their ownership of land, and their control of the major economic and political resources of the commune. In a period of acute land scarcity and economic shortage clients could be granted land and provided with employment on favourable terms, or rewarded with minor offices and benefits in the gift of the landowner dominated council. Generally speaking, relationships between patrons and their clients were long-term, exclusive and multifunctional, and were often re-inforced by ties of spiritual kinship. But although these relationships were clearly reciprocal, the balance of power was undoubtedly in the favour of the patron. There were far more potential clients than patrons seeking supporters and, with the exception of a few peasant voters, clients had very little to offer in return for the favours they received. At best, they could provide deference, respect and demonstrations of esteem, but these were not scarce commodities in this period. Although landowners as clients in the national patronage system constituted a hinge between village and state, their role as brokers was of comparatively little significance, for most of their clients had only infrequent and spasmodic dealings with national authorities.

In the course of the last decade the traditional patronage system has been modified in a number of important respects. To begin with, as the result of the emergence of the new professionals, there has been a notable increase in the number of patrons. Coupled to the fact that peasants as voters are now worth cultivating, this has led to the rapid expansion of patron-client networks in the village. Secondly, there has been a change in the basis of the power and influence of patrons. The ownership of land has given way to bureaucratic intermediaryship as the primary source of status and prestige; patrons (in the strict sense of the term) are gradually being superseded by brokers. Thirdly, the content of the ties joining patrons and clients is also changing. Nowadays, peasants' relationship to upper class patrons are shorter-lived, more vaguely defined and less frequently ritualised than in the past, and in recent years there had been a growing tendency for them to

become functionally specific.

Overall, there can be little doubt that these changes have been to the advantage of peasants and artisans. Not only is there a far wider range of patrons from which to choose, but since the power, influence and resources which patrons command is directly related to the number of votes they can guarantee to their political superiors outside the village, they are obliged to compete amongst themselves for the support of clients. Consequently, peasants are able to play off upper class patrons against each other, and in their quest for aid, protection and bureaucratic intermediaries to shop around for the most favourable terms.

Although in recent years patronage has changed its form, there are few signs that it is diminishing in either scope or intensity. Indeed, with good reason, many Pertosini believe that it is increasing. In expanding its range of services and benefits the government has tried to ensure that its investment in development has an additional political pay-off in the form of increased electoral support for the DC party. As Weingrod has commented, "the 'politics of development' is a central cause of the expansion of party patronage."<sup>3</sup>

As never before, villagers are being thrust into contact with the state bureaucracy and national and provincial agencies. As citizenship rights are extended and welfare benefits increased, their need for help in preparing documentation and in seeking *raccomandazioni* becomes ever greater. Indeed, even children are not immune from these pressures, and there is considerable evidence to suggest that they are socialised at an early age into the necessity of seeking patrons and *raccomandazioni* in school. Thus, as an only slightly cynical village schoolteacher once remarked, 'The only lesson which children learn here is that in order to be successful they must find somebody to recommend them.'

But there is another, and perhaps more important, reason for the persistence of patronage. As several Mediterranean anthropologists have pointed out, beliefs in patronage, corruption and *raccomandazioni* form a complex but closed system of explanation.<sup>4</sup> Success is explained *ex post facto* as the result of the power of *raccomandazioni*; failure is not attributed to a lack of ability or effort, but to the impotence of one's political patrons. Villagers are well aware that some officials are more honest than others, and even agree that a few appear to be incorruptible, but their belief system is sufficiently strong and flexible to explain away such exceptions. Thus, I was told that an official who was 'notorious' for his honesty and impartiality was merely employing a superior and rather subtle stratagem. According to my informant, his aim was to make such a nuisance of himself to the local DC secretariat by sticking to the strict letter of the law, that party leaders would



be provoked into requesting his transfer. Since an honest official could hardly be punished, his superiors would be obliged to promote him to a better post.

Accusations of corruption and political *imbroglio*, and the protestations of innocence which they inevitably evoke, are equally difficult to verify, for ethnographer and villager alike. But whilst I have no doubt that many accusations of this sort are exaggerations or fabrications, in the last resort, their truth or falsity is of little importance. Since villagers believe them to be true, they become real in their consequences. When officials are universally held to be corrupt, they have little incentive to be honest. As long as Pertosini continue to believe in the necessity and efficacy of *raccomandazioni*, they will seek the support and protection of upper class patrons.

#### Village and State

One of the major aims of this study has been to describe the way in which Pertosa has slowly emerged from relative isolation over the last two hundred years. At the beginning of this period the village was a tightly knit and almost closed community. The most meaningful social relations of the vast majority of its inhabitants were confined within the boundaries of the commune; their experience of the outside world was limited to brief summer forays to the coast in search of temporary work, and to occasional encounters with royal troops and tax collectors. By contrast, by 1965 Pertosa had become a *paese di passaggio*. Most of its male and an increasing number of its female inhabitants spent the greater part of their working lives outside the village. Many of them were as familiar with the suburbs of New York, Milan, Munich and Nottingham as they were with the streets of their own native village; and those who remained in Pertosa were constantly reminded by press, radio and television that they were part of a wider national society.

Although a great many factors have contributed to this process of transition, its prime mover has undoubtedly been the state. At the beginning of this period, the state was mainly concerned with the maintenance of law and order and the collection of taxes, and provided these conditions were met, local authorities were granted a fair degree of autonomy. Gradually, however, throughout the nineteenth century successive national governments began to take a more active interest in local affairs. Although for both technical and structural reasons they were unable to interfere in the day-to-day running of the commune, the reforms and legal changes they introduced at the national level had a profound effect on village society. Thus, the Jacobin land reforms introduced by the French government in Naples provided the

legal basis for the emergence of a new middle class elite; the unification of Italy consolidated and legitimated its position. Similarly, improvements in communications and the economic infrastructure made possible the vast rural exodus of emigrants in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Since the beginning of this century, state intervention in village affairs has become even more intense. Under Mussolini the power and control of provincial authorities was strengthened; in post-war Italy successive Christian Democrat governments have assumed a wide range of welfare functions, and have consciously tried to develop and modernise the South. Nowadays, as I have tried to show, the state and government party have immense influence on Pertosa and its inhabitants. Through its access to state patronage resources, the DC party has not only been able to influence the outcome of relatively minor political decisions, but, in part, at least, it has been responsible for shaping the structure of the local party. Similarly, the prefect's control of the purse-strings of local finance, and his power to intervene and modify the decisions of local administrators, constitute a fundamental limitation on the council's sphere of activity. Conversely, with the expansion of the welfare functions of the state, there are few villagers who are not obliged to have regular and frequent dealings with the national bureaucracy and its local field agencies.

But it would be mistaken to see Pertosini as the purely passive recipients of change. By exploiting the personal networks of members of the village upper classes, and the chains of patron client ties which link them to the decision-makers and the power centres of the wider national society, they have been able, in some measure at least, to influence those political and bureaucratic decisions which most directly concern them. And, indeed, many local institutions have shown a remarkable resilience and an ability to adapt to changing circumstances without losing their basic characteristics. Nevertheless, the ability of villagers to influence national policy decisions is extremely limited, and with the growth of state intervention in village affairs their room for manoeuvre has progressively declined. The personal networks of their leaders are only partially effective, and they have had no say in many of the most important post-war reforms and policies which have directly affected their welfare. At best, they have been able to mitigate their consequences, and to modify the details of the way in which they were put into operation.

The increasing complexity of village state relations presents the anthropologist with a number of problems. His traditional tools of analysis are far more suitable for describing the institutions of closed communities than for exploring the ways in which peasant villages fit into wider and much more



complex national societies. Indeed, the great anthropological temptations in dealing with peasant societies are to provide either over-simplified contrasts between national and local value systems, or to concentrate exclusively on describing the interplay between sets of village institutions. Thus, for example, it is tempting to interpret the dilemmas of village office holders purely as a conflict between norms of impartiality on the one hand, and the obligations of kinship on the other; or to explain the decline in landowners' political power as a straightforward consequence of their loss of status in the village economy.

But these are temptations which must be avoided, for reality is far more complex. Thus, office holders' dilemmas are not simply based on a contrast between local and national values, but on internal contradictions in the structure of the Italian bureaucracy as a whole. Similarly the declining political influence of the gentry is due to a number of factors, not the least important of which is the deliberate attempt by national political parties to reduce their power. Although as anthropologists we are not always able to deal adequately with problems of this sort, we must at least be aware of our limitations, and be able to point to the areas in our analyses which need fuller elaboration by other specialists.

#### Notes to Chapter 10.

- 1 Quoted in Tarrow (1967: 308).
- 2 This point was made very forcefully by one of Tarrow's informants, who remarked, 'By giving greater power to its organizational leaders, the DC transformed *clientelismo* of the notable into *clientelismo* of the bureaucracy' (1967: 326).
- 3 Weingrod (1968: 384).
- 4 See, for example, Boissevain (1966: 30).

## Appendix A.

### Population in Basilicata and Pertosa

#### (a) Basilicata

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>
1735	277,000
1808	378,685
1828	429,053
1843	485,018
1861	479,958
1871	510,231
1881	517,063
1901	485,138
1911	468,877
1921	464,619
1931	509,047
1936	531,674
1951	616,009

#### (b) Pertosa

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>
1661	1,290
1747	2,600
1807	2,663
1810	2,850
1823	3,215
1829	3,440
1838	4,075
1861	4,089
1871	4,232
1881	4,695
1901	4,931
1911	5,021
1931	4,380
1936	4,233
1951	4,546
1961	4,290

Sources: The population figures for the period before 1861 are taken from a wide variety of sources, those after 1861 are based on census material published by ISTAT (The Italian Central Institute of Statistics).

## Appendix B.

### 1. The Composition of the Communal Council in Pertosa by Social Class, 1946-1965.

Class	Year and Party											
	1946		1949		1953		1957		1961		1965	
	DC	SOC	DC	S/C	DC	S/C	DC	S/C	DC	S/C	DC	S/C
Landowners	2	2	-	2	-	1	-	1	-	2	1	1
Professionals	1	-	1	1	1	-	2	1	-	2	5	1
Shopkeepers and Minor Impiegati	1	1	1	3	1	3	3	-	1	1	1	1
Artisans	7	1	2	5	1	5	6	1	2	5	6	1
Peasants	5	-	1	5	1	7	5	1	1	6	3	-
Total	16	4	4	16	4	16	16	4	4	16	16	4

### 2. The Composition of the Assessorate by Social Class 1946-1965

Class	Year					
	1946	1949	1953	1957	1961	1965
Landowners	1	-	-	-	-	1
Professionals	1	1	-	1	1	3
Shopkeepers and Minor Impiegati	-	2	2	1	1	-
Artisans	1	-	1	1	1	-
Peasants	1	1	1	1	2	-
Total	4	4	4	4	5	4

1. In the 1961-1965 administration one of the assessors resigned and had to be replaced.

### Appendix C.

#### Communal Election Results, Pertosa 1946-1965

Lists	Year											
	1946		1949		1953		1957		1961		1965	
	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%
PSI	909	46	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DC	1,030	54	887	44	1,117	49	1,280	55	925	43	1,056	56
Aratro <sup>1</sup>	-	-	1,112	56	1,165	51	1,227	57	821	44	-	-
Total	1,939	100	1,999	100	2,282	100	2,309	100	1,253	100	1,877	100

1. The Aratro list is a joint list presented by the Socialist and Communist parties. In Pertosa the Communist party was founded in 1947, and it first allied with the Socialists in 1949.

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