



## *Declino e crollo della monarchia in Italia*

*I Savoia dall'unità al referendum del 2 giugno 1946*

**[Decline and fall of the Italian monarchy**

**The Savoys from the unification to the referendum of 2 June 1946]**

By Aldo A. Mola

© 2006 Arnoldo Mondadori Editore S.p.A., Milano, Mondadori 2006.

pp. 307-8

### EPILOGUE

In the summer of 2006 Vittorio Emanuele of Savoy sprang to the forefront of the media. Arrested and held in custody by the police in Lecco under humiliating charges (16 June) he was imprisoned in Potenza, consigned to house arrest, then released under the constraint to remain in Italy subject to investigation. Two months later his position was worsened by a charge of contempt owing to some words he spoke (or were attributed to him) while a prisoner. From the various press stories, letters and questions to radio and TV networks, both national and abroad, it emerged that most people were under the impression that Vittorio Emanuele was «the king». Many of them concluded that the scandal had already gone much too far and that the monarchy was dead. From the prosecution's wire-taps.

Their indignation was to spread even further because from the end of May to early June the media devoted enormous importance to the crowded gatherings of the chivalrous Order of Santi Maurizio e Lazzaro [Saints Maurice and Lazarus] at S. Paul's Basilica in Rome, a site which belongs to the Holy See. Many thought, innocently enough, that the meeting had been given the approval of the Republic, which was certainly not the case. As far as Italy is concerned the Order has not existed since 1 January 1948, and does not exist today. The XIV provisional and concluding norm of the Constitution is peremptory on this point: «The Order of Santi Maurizio e Lazzaro remains solely as a hospital corporation, functioning under regulations established by law.» Only time can tell what value it has, and will have, for the Holy See.

The more people are convinced of it, the more disappointed they are likely to be.

The monarchy however was by no means annihilated by Vittorio Emanuele of Savoy's impulsive declarations to the magistrates of Potenza, nor by their consequences. Ever since 18 March 1983 the succession to the Crown of Italy had been transferred to another can-

didate, Amedeo of Savoy, Heir to the Throne and Head of the House of Savoy.

.....

pp. 310-14

Umberto II gave his son a full account of the patrimonial consequences of his exclusion from the succession: the privileges he held by testament as Heir to the Throne would be gone, he would no longer receive the legacies of «persons» in his favour and his monthly cheque (till then, twice the amount of the cheques that went to his sisters) would be reduced. He would receive none of the rights his father was entitled to, as Head of the House. However the king was especially anxious to remind him that «every consideration of a material nature must come second to those of a moral nature». Umberto re-echoed the cry of David to his son with the flowing locks: «Absalom, O Absalom... my son, my son...» Was Vittorio Emanuele nursing schemes of rebellion against his father, the House, the monarchy? Was he really aware how high the stakes were?

The king asked his son to countersign the letter personally brought to him by persons of absolute trust, and who were to inform the king of anyone who might influence his son's decisions. Vittorio signed «per presa conoscenza» (*sic*) [read and taken note], then took his time to reply. Was he thinking it over on his own? Or seeking advice? If so who from? Three months later, on 15 April 1960, he wrote to his father from Cascais. He thanked him for so scrupulously explaining the situation, «so patiently and diligently», in which he would find himself were he to marry a woman «whoever she may be – not of royal blood». He promised «to think it through, meditate and decide». He declined the offer of some trips abroad since he preferred to immediately launch himself into the career of a broker.

In 1959 Roger Garaudy published *Perspectives de l'homme*, Ernesto «Che» Guevara wrote *La Guerra de guerrillas* («War Bands» would have said Giuseppe Mazzini) and John XXIII announced the convocation of the ecumenical Council, Vatican II. This was the year of *Il Gattopardo* [The Leopard] by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa (1896 – 1957), *Die Belchtrommel* [The Tin Drum] by Günter Grass and the film *A bout de souffle* [Breathless] by Jean Luc Godard. Immediately after followed Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* and Luchino Visconti's *Rocco e suoi fratelli* [Rocco and His Brothers]. How was a twenty-year old supposed to behave in an age when rock culture was the norm? It came to this: was Vittorio Emanuele doing the right thing? Or the wrong thing? Could he follow his own impulses or was he expected to toe the line in regard to norms centuries

old? Was he to submit to «reason of State» when the form of the State that had produced these rulings had ceased to exist?

In *Lampi di vita, la storia di un principe in esilio* [Flashes of Life, the story of a prince in exile], written in 2002 in collaboration with the journalist Alessandro Feroldi, Vittorio Emanuele recounted some of the stages of the itinerary that were to be crowned by his marriage with Marina Ricolfi Doria. The «memoirs,» however, do not always correspond to proven facts. On the one hand the author claims that he is ‘heir to the throne’; on the other hand he states that he was the first to accept the republic. «In this day and age», he adds, «I fail to see the use of restoring the throne in Italy. We all know that Italy cannot revert to being a Monarchy... By now the monarchy in Italy has no reason to exist». That of course implied the total liquidation, as well as assuming the futility, of a «monarchical party». In the interests of coherence, it might as well finish off the job by the abolition and dissolution of the dynastic Orders: Santissima Annunziata, Santi Maurizio e Lazzaro... Some of the opinions expressed in these pages appear to bear traces of a modest acquaintance with, and not without a certain contempt for, the norms which governed and upheld the House of Savoy.

But what were, what are, these rules? Unlike what is generally said about them, the «Law of the House», which Umberto II kept referring to so emphatically, does not prohibit marriage between «unequals»; that is to say between princes and persons of another lineage, including the bourgeois class. The Royal Patents issued by Vittorio Amedeo III on 13 September 1780 put the point very clearly: «It shall not be lawful for a Prince of the Blood to contract marriage without first obtaining Our permission, or that of Our royal successors....» These were confirmed on 17 July 1782: members of the House may not contract marriage «without Our permission and that of Our royal successors...». Obvious. The norm responds to political necessities. The marriage of princes seals, or at the least proposes, alliances without excluding future conflicts. Only the Head of the House – and this was also the case with the other royal families, not just the Savoys – with his complete knowledge of all the secrets of foreign and military policies, was occasionally in a position to know what would most benefit the State. For instance it was unthinkable that a marriage could be contracted with a member of a family who was, or might shortly become, an enemy unless of course the marriage was intended to serve as a cover for secret strategies.

This principle, as the constitutional lawyer Franco Edoardo Adami points out, was absorbed from the civil code of the Kingdom of Italy which accepts the fact that the Head of the Family has power of approval for the marriages of his children and also subjects the marriage of special categories (ambassadors, officers of the armed forces) to the consent of the appropriate authorities who are called upon to decide in the interests of the State.

So on 25 January 1960 Umberto II spoke out very clearly. The House included royal princes, i.e. descendants of the kings and of heirs to the throne, and princes of the blood, i.e. belonging to the family through collateral branches. This is the way things had been for centuries. Nobody was empowered to change these laws because «in a free country nobody could be outside or above the law», as stated in the report on the 1865 civil code for the Kingdom of Italy.

The 18 July 1963 issue of the weekly «Oggi» published an interview with Vittorio Emanuele. It touched on sensitive points concerning family and politics. Umberto II knew by experience that the thought process of anyone interviewed is often twisted. He was considerably embittered because his son had not felt the need to speak or write to him on «questions that directly concerned him», instead of spilling them into a magazine. As a father and above all as Sovereign and Head of the House of Savoy he then asked his son to state very precisely whether he shared, or no, the statements attributed to him. And that was no incidental inquiry. Seated beside Marina, the eldest and «prettiest» of the Ricolfi Doria sisters in the opinion of the interviewer, the prince opined that «the Italian monarchical party should have dissolved immediately after the referendum when his father left for Portugal. The most powerful supporters of the Kingdom had disappeared, or no longer lived in Italy...votes had been lost at the time, but even more votes are being lost today». The monarchists were thus dismissed, or at least given warning. He added that one had to «face the facts»: the chances of a restoration of the Throne in Italy were practically hopeless. So one might just as well...

The prince went on to say that within a few months he would marry Marina Doria without losing his rights to the succession. The «ultimate decision» would rest with himself alone. Finally, in his opinion, there was no truth in the story that Umberto II had spoken of the succession to his nephew, Amedeo of Aosta.

By now Umberto II had been living in exile for 15 years. When he walked out to look at the Atlantic his eyes would cloud with melancholy. Day after day he was more and more alone. He was conscious of the nostalgic verses: «Amore di terra lontana,/ per voi tutto il cuore mi duol...» [Love of the distant country / how my heart aches for you]. He incarnated the thoughts and hopes of millions of his countrymen, convinced that the State had need of him. But without forcing the issue. No uproar. For his country his motto was. «Italia inanzi tutto», «Italia sopra tutto» [Italy before all else Italy above all else], taken from a page of Giosuè Carducci, a poet driven by his fierce republican spirit, a follower of Garibaldi, and yet a senator of the Kingdom, a poet who sang of the *Bianca Croce di Savoia* [White Cross of Savoy] and the *Eterno Feminino regale* [royalty the eternal feminine]. In fact, were Umberto ever to return to the throne, he would be exactly what he had always tried to be: a king, not for a caste, not for a party or for monarchists only, but for everyone, even fanatical republicans, just as his father and ancestors had been. However... however the laws had to be respected. Staggered by the declarations of his son (or what had been attributed to his son) on his wedding plans and upon which he not been informed, the King gave Vittorio Emanuele serious warning. Actually he only needed to repeat «word for word» exactly what he had written to him three years before, in January 1960: his son could not marry without his father's consent. In doing so he would lose the dynastic succession, his privileged monthly cheque, his special patrimonial inheritance, and above all the title of Heir to the Throne, and this included the title of Prince of Naples. He would find himself excluded from the House. Of course a marriage contracted without the king's consent would remain perfectly valid from a civil point of view, nor would his father's affection be any the less. However his personal feelings could not be allowed to hinder in any way the continuance of the House and the Monarchy. *Repetita juvant...*

This short eloquent letter was brought to his son by men in whom the king placed absolute trust. Since it was a sort of 'last appeal' the king requested a written reply. Consequently Vittorio Emanuele's handwriting appeared on his father's letter dated 25 – VIII – 63. «The interview», his son replied, «did not represent what I thought.»

Ever since January 1960 the king had set limits within which his son would be able to move in perfect freedom: marriage was possible between unequals, but could only be granted with his father's previous con-

sent. As Umberto II concluded on 13 July 1963, «You know perfectly well that I am only motivated by the affection I have for you, and the wish to assure for you the best possible future, but this could never run counter to the way things are done in our family».

Everything was possible but always within the rules which had governed the House through 29 generations. Nothing was possible once they were overstepped. On this central point the king remained unshakable. He did not wish nor - and this was all-important - was he allowed to change the laws in force, seeing that the sovereign is not above the laws of the House; he is their supreme custodian whose job it is to guarantee their efficacy and see that they are carried out.

.....

pp. 316-19

Early in the 1960s Umberto II reviewed the stormy events of his brief reign. He saw quite clearly what the crisis represented: it was the first move in the drama of post-war Europe.

Overall destruction and the urgent drive for reconstruction. Enthusiasm and catastrophic blunders.

Among the states which emerged vanquished from the hostilities of the Second World War, two changed their institutional forms: two monarchies became republics, Italy in western Europe and Bulgaria in the east. In Bulgaria the Tsar of the Bulgarians, Boris III, died of a sudden and violent disease on his return from a stormy meeting with Hitler in Berchtesgarden. The Throne passed to his son Simeon, under the Regency of the Bulgarian Prime Minister, Bogdan Filov. The monarchists were massacred. The lucky ones sought refuge abroad. The Patriot Front, communist in inspiration, was under the leadership of Dimitrov, formerly strategist of the Moscow Third International. The leader of the agrarian party, a moderate conservative, was sentenced to death. On the 8 September 1946 a referendum abolished the monarchy. The widowed Tsarina, Giovanna of Savoy, daughter of Vittorio Emanuele III and Elena of Montenegro, managed to get out in time and bring her family to safety.

But the abolition of the monarchy in Bulgaria was just one episode in the rapid growth of the USSR's domination of Eastern Europe. These countries were harshly subordinated to Soviet economic interests and were finally sealed by the Warsaw Pact that gave Moscow a free hand to put its doctrine of «limited sovereignty» into practice: i.e. armed interference in support of the other fraternal Communist parties in the governments of the German Democratic Republic, Poland, Hungary,

Czechoslovakia, Romania and, as we have seen, Bulgaria.

In 1946 the change of institutions in Italy was not all that necessary for the general state of political equilibrium, neither for western Europe nor for the political-military alliances of the future (NATO, the Atlantic Pact...) founded on the Atlantic Charter of 1941. Even the process of integrating Western Europe had no need of yet another republic or one monarchy the less. The Kingdoms of Belgium, the Netherlands and the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg united. In its turn the European Union contained three monarchies: the Crown of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Denmark and Sweden. Norway is also a monarchy and shows no signs of being an anti-democratic country.

In the course of the twenty years which followed the war, the monarchy in Greece was overthrown (December 1967). This was shortly to be balanced in the Mediterranean by the return to monarchy in Spain, pre-announced in 1969 with the proclamation of Prince Juan Carlos as heir of the *caudillo* for the leadership of the State. On the other hand the fall of the USSR, many years later, heralded no restoration of monarchy in Eastern Europe. A man of culture and appreciated by all, Simeon was motivated by a passionate concern for his country and rose to be head of the government of Bulgaria. He worked hard gaining widespread national support, yet the passing of communism did not result in restoration. The same held true for Romania. In Albania the monarchy seemed all set for success, but there too it failed. It seemed fairly clear that monarchy is by no means encouraged by the governments which had profited by the fall of the Soviet system and won a place in the markets of eastern Europe; particularly the U.S.A., France and Germany, while Great Britain remained content with its own monarchy. This was the situation in Serbia, Croatia and, as far as one can see, Montenegro; countries where the short-lived monarchies had barely struck root.

In Italy approval of the Constitution and its coming into force made the triumphant republican vote of 2-3 June 1946 inevitable, and unchangeable. The monarchy followed its historic destiny, sealed by the unbreachable gap of 13 June 1946 when the government confiscated the powers of the Head of State and the sovereign, who was, and remained, the only legitimate claimant to that title until 18 June, left Italy. For Umberto II the drama of his father, after the «unconditional surrender» of September 1943, was repeated on a far greater scale. In 1943 many monarchists also thought that the king's abdication could save the monarchy. They had in mind

Carlo Alberto, who abdicated on the evening of the defeat at Novara. In so doing they committed a historical error by fatally drawing a conclusion with no political foundation. Actually Carlo Alberto did not abdicate after the armistice, but only to put his son, Vittorio Emanuele II, in a position to obtain better terms for the peace than those which, in all probability, would have been dictated by Field Marshal Radetzky. And such was the case. In September 1943 however it was the king, through his government, who strived to prevent the surrender from transforming into the *debellatio* for the State itself. Admittedly it went wrong, but it might have been much worse. Two years before, the British Foreign Minister had drawn up a project for the partition of Italy into four zones to be assigned to Great Britain, France, Yugoslavia and Greece, while Rome was to be entirely handed over to the Pope. On the 14 January 1943 the British Foreign Minister, Anthony Eden, wrote to the American Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, that the Anglo-Americans should aim for the «internal collapse of Italy» thereby causing such disorder that it would force a German occupation». Churchill too did not overlook the fact that «both the king and Badoglio would collapse under the hatred caused by the surrender». In May 1943 the American State Department was inclined towards suspending the prerogatives of the Crown; it was only after 25 July that Churchill began to wonder whether it was in fact a good thing «to dismantle and destroy [in Italy] the entire structure and expression of the State».

Since he had not abdicated at the time of the armistice, the king found it more and more difficult to decide on the best moment to do so. In the end he was forced to a decision by external pressure rather than personal conviction. This had already happened with the establishment of the Lieutenancy when it was announced with a view to the event with which it was meant to coincide (the liberation of Rome). But of course no one could foretell the date of the liberation.

Exactly the same thing happened to Umberto II.

.....

pp. 321-23

While his father sorting out his papers and keeping the flame of tradition burning Absalom leaped the ditch. On 15 December 1969 Vittorio Emanuele «IV» signed a decree ruling that «his beloved and most gentle» father had violated the Statute by countersigning the D11 25 June 1944 n.151 and 16 March 1946 n.48 (*sic*), which gave the citizens the right to choose and regulate the form of the State. But not only that. According to the prince, it was at that very moment when his father

was leaving the Quirinale and dissolved all those who had sworn the oath of loyalty to the king, that Umberto II abdicated. The original of this decree was deposited in a sealed file with a notary in Geneva. Witnesses were the accountants, Aldo A. Giacci, self-styled referent of a monarchical movement, already on the rocks before it even took off (as Licio Gelli recalls); and Giordano Gamberini, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Italy since nearly 9 years. In his plans Vittorio Emanuele's affiliation with the lodge could have hastened the recognition of Italian masonry on the part of the English. The following day «Vittorio Emanuele IV» conferred upon Marina Ricolfi Doria the title of Duchess of Sant'Anna di Valdieri. The job was done. The marriage would no longer be one between «unequals».

As he relates himself in *Lampi di Vita* Vittorio Emanuele and Marina were married with civil rite before a Justice of the Peace in Las Vegas on the 11 January 1970. What of his father? The royal patents? The House? Antiquated! «I informed no one, not even my parents», wrote Vittorio Emanuele. The 7 October 1971 saw the religious ceremony, which was held in the chapel of the Salesian Institute in Teheran. Umberto II knew nothing about it beforehand, consequently he had nothing to approve or to disclaim. It was all written down in the laws of the House. Repeatedly he had reminded his son of what would occur, and now there was little point in restating what he had said before. Besides he had long since taken measures. As we read in *Lampi di vita*, «One fine day the privy purse [two thousand Swiss francs a month] was suddenly removed».

By contracting this marriage in his own way Vittorio Emanuele had «left the House». *Ipsa iure* Amedeo d'Aosta now became the heir to the throne.

The king became increasingly closed within himself. He read. He sorted out his papers. He appealed to the Italians to come to terms of agreement and unity.

The night of 17 and 18 August 1978 was the night of the «accident» on the island of Cavallo. Vittorio Emanuele was charged with the death of a young man who died after being seriously wounded by gunshot.

Umberto II said nothing. What was there to say? It was becoming more and more difficult for him to contain within a single soul the affection of a father and his sense of duty towards the House and its history.

The trial was held on 13 to 18 November 1991. Vittorio Emanuele was acquitted of the main charge, but sentenced for abusive ownership of firearms.

In the mean time there had been further developments. On the 18 March 1983 Umberto II died after a long ex-

hausting illness. He wished to be laid in a tomb at the Abbey of Hautecombe in Savoy, the land of his ancestors. The last of the Savoy-Carignano kings wished to rest opposite Carlo Felice, the last direct descendant of Carlo III the Good (1486-1553) and Beatrice of Portugal. There are witnesses who agree that Umberto II had instructed that the royal seal be enclosed in his coffin.

He made no explicit move to name his successor. What need would there be? The norms spoke for themselves. He was certainly under no obligation to ask for confirmation by the republic, which had never at any point been recognized by him or by any of the other reigning families. Each family had their own rules. They were simply applied, at mostly given account of if and when necessary. Moreover there were no precedents. It had never happened before because it had never been necessary. The king had no time for superfluous gestures. They are not thought royal. Carlo Alberto abdicated in favour of his son: a very clear transition. Vittorio Emanuele II had died in the arms of Umberto I who was assassinated on the 29 July 1900. Vittorio Emanuele III abdicated - his signature on a notarised document to that effect - in favour of Umberto II who for his part referred to the law and left it to the law to decide what followed.

The House of Savoy had no use for coronations, pomp and circumstance. Its style was sober, concrete. And so was Umberto II's.

On 7 July 2006 Amedeo of Savoy, 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Aosta, unanimously with the Council of Elders of the Kingdom, confirmed his position as Head of the House of Savoy. To his son Aimone, he entrusted the task of clearing up the question of the dynastic Orders; to his cousin Maria Gabriella the task of restoring brilliance to the rediscovered cultural aspects of the monarchy.

The intricate question of the referendum on state institutions, the conflicts among members of the House, the role of the Savoy family in the history of Italy and Europe again became the centre of attention, apart from idle curiosity which sometimes has a way of being over concerned with secondary matters.

That antique cry seemed to echo from the vaults of the Abbey of Hautecombe: «The king is dead, long live the king...»