

gions. . . . We want the dissolution of the national states, in order to regroup them under the protective net of the European Union.” In another interview, given to *Corriere della Sera* on May 8, Maroni said: “There will be strong pressure from the other European peoples. For this reason, we will give birth, next fall, to the Federalist International, with all those in Europe who are fighting to achieve more autonomy or independence.” Maroni made it explicit that the League is counting on austerity to increase popular discontent against the central government: “The referendum phase should start after the summer, when the new government will be seen in action and the burden of the next budget law and of the economic situation will really be felt.”

Bossi’s radical shift has drawn support from his friend Gianfranco Miglio, a political sociologist who first supported the League and then split from it in 1993, when the League seemed to be going in a “moderate” direction. Miglio met Bossi and reported to the press: “I told him: Umberto, go, this is the moment.” “I agree with the Czechoslovakian model proposed by Bossi,” Miglio said. “The First Italian Republic must be swept away. The Constitution must be changed.” He added that if the other forces reject the negotiating table, “there is one way left: the formal request of secession.”

Widespread opposition

Bossi’s announcement has provoked a general chorus of rejection by all political forces, and warnings from many institutional and moral authorities. The head of the Italian Catholic bishops, Cardinal Camillo Ruini, spoke at a meeting of the Italian Bishops Conference on May 6. The unity of the nation, Ruini said, “cannot be denied or compromised.” The Catholic Church, he said, is dedicated to national unity, because it is “rooted in the Christian and Catholic faith.” Without mentioning either Bossi or the League by name, Ruini characterized them as “degenerate expressions” of the “Northern Question”—referring to the discontent of the middle class in the most industrially developed part of Italy, because of the fiscal austerity being imposed by the government. “One must take its authentic aspects and contents seriously,” Ruini said, “without surrendering to its degenerate expressions, which unfortunately are not lacking.” Violating national unity, he added, “would mean going against the possibilities of development and the economic interests of our peoples, both in the North and in the South.”

Indicating Bossi’s apparent political isolation, was a reaction from Antonio Maccanico, a former president of Mediobanca, a merchant bank connected to the City of London. He declared that Bossi should be arrested.

However, that reaction should not delude the reader. Although the general consensus is to reject secession, Bossi has succeeded in achieving one goal: Almost everybody is now in favor of a quick reform that gives more fiscal power to local authorities. This is called “fiscal federalism,” and the issue

discussed is whether the regional governments should be given 30% or 50% of the tax money collected in the region. Even the Catholic Church has accepted this idea, as Cardinal Ruini referred to the necessity of “accepting and making the most of the legitimate demands for recognition” of the role of “local autonomies,” and “more direct and effective responsibility on the part of local management.”

The incoming government, led by Romano Prodi, a friend of international speculator George Soros, is going to move in that direction, as we reported last week. Already, a proposal to reorganize several taxes paid by certain categories of people into one single tax, and to give the money to the regions, has been announced by a special committee. The chairman of the committee is Finance Minister Augusto Fantozzi, but the proposal was inspired by Vincenzo Visco, a member of Prodi’s “Olive Tree” coalition and probable successor to Fantozzi.

Contrary to what some political analysts have written, although Bossi’s call for secession sought to achieve such a political result as the “federalist reform,” the monster he has put into motion is not going to be stopped easily. Instead, one can be sure that the Northern League’s jacobin movement will wait for the weakening effects of decentralization on the central government, to launch yet another attack on the nation-state.

Is the Bush League financing separatists?

by Claudio Celani

In the course of investigating one of the largest money-laundering schemes ever, Italian prosecutors have found evidence linking the criminals to “Bush-Baker associates” in Houston, Texas: specifically, to the law firm of former Bush administration Secretary of State James Baker III. Among those profiting from the \$14 billion money-laundering scheme, was Italian separatist Gianmario Ferramonti, manager of the Northern League’s financial holdings until 1993, and presently in jail on charges of “racketeering” for the purpose of “recycling money.” One of Ferramonti’s accomplices is a banker, Alvaro Robelo, now a Nicaraguan Presidential candidate, with high-level connections to George Bush and Oliver North’s “Contra” networks.

Code-named “Operation Phony Money,” the investigation has been led by Italian prosecutor Davide Monti, based in the city of Aosta, and was carried out with the cooperation of American authorities. Praising the active engagement of the Clinton administration in fighting international organized crime, Dr. Monti told *EIR* that his investigation began after

meetings with U.S. officials.

The Clinton administration has been conducting major operations against international drug-trafficking and money-laundering operations. The Phony Money case is no doubt a result of the radiating effects of this effort.

Dr. Monti's operation started through the arrest of an American citizen, whose name has not been revealed, by the Guardia di Finanza, the police body in charge of pursuing financial crimes, as well as protecting Italy's borders. This person was found in possession of counterfeit bonds, deposited at the Rome branch of the Nicaraguan-based Banco Europeo de Centro America, owned by the above-mentioned Alvaro Robelo.

Robelo is a former Nicaraguan ambassador to Rome, a post which he achieved, according to the *Miami Herald* of March 25, on the recommendation of his relative Alfonso Robelo, a former Contra leader and close adviser to Nicaraguan President Violeta Chamorro. As *EIR* readers know, the Contras were armed and financed by Bush and North's drugs-for-weapons operation.

Recently, Alvaro Robelo launched the movement "Arriba Nicaragua" (Up with Nicaragua), in an evident attempt to imitate Silvio Berlusconi's successful 1994 initiative in Italy. While Robelo is not expected to come even close to being elected President, his person and his bank have been accused of involvement in drug trafficking, to the extent that he has had to publicly reject such allegations.

Now, after Operation Phony Money, it will be harder for Robelo to defend himself. His Rome bank office was one of the centers of the \$14 billion money-laundering operation, according to the following scheme: A customer deposits fake bonds or other assets at the Rome branch of the Banco Europeo de Centro America. Then, he gets from the bank a "certificate of ownership" of such assets. He then goes to Switzerland, where, on the basis of this certificate, he is given credit by another bank, presumably a witting accomplice. One of the Swiss banks involved is Banca della Svizzera Italiana. Another bank, whose name has not been revealed, is the Swiss office of a bank based in Munich, Germany. The "clean" money obtained from the Swiss bank is deposited in Italy or Central America, and the Swiss bank is repaid with dirty money.

The assets used as collateral by the Banco Europeo de Centro America included counterfeit U.S. Treasury bonds; nonexistent diamond sets; false Rubens paintings; and German gold bonds, issued under the Weimar Republic (1923), and guaranteed by central bank gold deposits.

The Bush-Baker connection

The German gold bonds, whose authenticity has not yet been proven, bring in the "Bush-Baker associates" who are mentioned, by that name, in a wiretapped telephone conversation of a person arrested in Operation Phony Money. So far, Dr. Monti explained, there is no proof of direct involve-

ment of either Bush or Baker, just a "reference." But he did not exclude that the investigation could bring new developments.

Indeed, the Baker and Botts law firm specializes in assisting owners of German gold bonds who want to cash them with the German government. This fact is explained by the role historically played by George Bush's father, Prescott, in the banking consortium that marketed the first issues of German gold bonds during the Weimar Republic, according to the Versailles agreement for debt repayment, and went on using the same scheme to finance the Hitler regime. The central role in that operation was played by the European branch of the Harriman bank, of which Prescott Bush was the manager, in association with Kuhn Loeb, Morgan, and others.

Today, the German government recognizes gold bonds issued by the Weimar Republic, but not those issued under the Third Reich. According to the German central authority on old German debts, there are only "a few hundreds" such bonds still circulating, in cuts from 1,000 to 10,000 each. But, according to Girolamo Scalesse, one of the key persons arrested in Operation Phony Money, there are at least 180,000 bonds still in circulation. Prosecutor Monti and his associates seized gold bonds worth \$1.4 billion. Some of them are counterfeit, and some are not, investigators believe.

An added complication is that at the end of World War II, gold bonds in the hands of Nazi officials were seized by Russian troops in Berlin. Part of them went to Moscow, part to East Berlin, and were kept in the custody of the East German secret service, the Stasi, until the fall of the Wall. After 1989, the Stasi and Moscow deposits found their way to markets in the West. Investigators do not exclude that the Phony Money gold bonds may be coming from the Stasi or KGB stocks.

U.S. backing for the separatists

The key individual sitting in the Aosta jail is Gianmario Ferramonti, who was the manager of the separatist Northern League holding called Pontida Fin, until 1993. Ferramonti then left the League, joining separatist hard-liner Sen. Gianfranco Miglio, who had split from the League that year (but who rejoined later).

Prosecutor Monti told this writer that Ferramonti "has influential friends in the United States." Monti could not mention names at this stage of his investigation, but added that "international freemasonic circles" are involved in the Phony Money ring. It is either Ferramonti or his buddy Scalesse, who mentioned the "Bush-Baker" firm on the telephone.

What did Ferramonti use the huge amounts of laundered money for? Is the Bush-Baker law firm involved in financing separatism in Italy with dirty money? Future developments in Operation Phony Money could give an answer to that. Politically, Prosecutor Monti has no doubt: "It is absolutely plausible," he told us, "that international circles are supporting forces in Italy that are striving to break up the country."