ESSAYS

In the first essay John Najemy of Cornell University finds in Florence the gradual adoption of guild membership as the main criterion for holding political office. For him "corporatism" became the main criterion for political rights as a guild-dominated regime came to rule Florence in the early Renaissance. The second essay is drawn from a chapter on the "Growing Structure of the Commune" in Frederic Chapin Lane's magisterial survey of Venetian history. Lane (1900–1984), who spent his career at The Johns Hopkins University, where he became the dean of Venetian historical studies in the United States, draws on earlier archival and manuscript research to argue that the so-called closing of the Great Council was actually an enlargement of its membership. As Venetian merchants fled back to Venice with the fall of the Crusading States in the Levant, influential members of the patriciate jockeyed to gain a place in the city's assembly and offices. The result was the locking in of important men of the city to run the government.

Guild Republicanism in Trecento Florence

JOHN M. NAJEMY

The familiar image of republican Florence as a political community has been dominated by ideas and assumptions largely inherited from the civic humanists of the fifteenth century, and in particular from Leonardo Bruni. This view of Florentine politics rests on two central notions: first, on the idea of the sovereign, centralizing state, the embodiment of the *res publica* and the locus of all political life; and, second, on the conviction that the operative components of this civil community were individual citizens to whom an equal degree of liberty was guaranteed by the state and from whom the exercise of active responsibility was expected within the state. For Bruni's contemporaries, these notions clarified and simplified the moral dimension of political life by focusing loyalty and responsibility in the abstract idea of a state that existed above parties and factions and that derived its legitimacy from the express or implied consensus of its politically active citizens.

For modern historians—both the believers in and the debunkers of the ennobling myths of Florentine republicanism—the assumptions of the civic humanists have proved to be congenial territory. To the believers, they provide the comforting confirmation of the unity of theory and practice. To the skeptics, they furnish the foil against which the cynical realities of patronage and elitist politics clearly emerge. Both camps have assumed that the alternative frames of reference for understanding Florentine politics consist in either the success or the failure of Bruni's twin notions. According to this view, the significance of the Florentine political experience in the two and a half centuries of the republic lies either in the successful realization of the goals of centralized state sovereignty and the consensus politics of participatory individualism or in their failure and the consequent affirmation of private and factional

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politics. Within the scope of these alternatives, historians of Florence have set out to measure the strength of the republic by gauging the extent to which the sovereign power of the state was or was not impaired by competing loyalties and allegiances and by assessing the size of the political class through a counting of officeholders or eligibles. Both investigations have yielded useful and important results, but their application to this conceptual framework assumes only one kind of republicanism and one kind of participatory politics. Yet for a century and a half before Bruni's generation another kind of republicanism, based on the corporate politics of the guild system, was both a real and a controversial alternative in the world of Florentine politics.

In Italy as in much of Europe, corporate and associative forms of organization proliferated during the thirteenth century: communes, guilds, parties, *consorterie* [clans], confraternities, companies, and universities—all of them classifiable under the generic term of *universitates* [associations]. The phenomenon was spontaneous, complex, and infinitely varied, yet it generally tended toward the realization of the basic features of medieval corporation law within the framework of what Walter Ullmann has called the "ascending theory" of government. Each corporation was in essence the product of collective self-government by a body of equals. Many were based on some social, professional, or voluntary principle of selective inclusion. The legal principles used by the canon lawyers to explain the nature of ecclesiastical corporations in the thirteenth century were also applicable to the experience of the many secular corporations of late medieval Italy. A corporation was inherently the free creation of its members, acting voluntarily and in concert. The powers exercised in the name of the corporation were held to reside in the community of the members. The membership of the corporation, or a council representing the same, delegated those powers to elected heads, who served for limited terms and with the specific mandate to preside over the corporation, or to represent it, within the limits of its written constitution, according to the will of the majority, and for the common good of the community. The corporations acquired a legal personality and began to perform functions of a semi-public nature. Many of them, especially the communes and some organizations of merchants, also gained the power to make and enforce their own laws. Self-regulation and limited but increasing legislative power and jurisdiction were the first steps toward the assumption by medieval corporations of an autonomous political existence. To this point the development was principally internal and common to a variety of different corporations and organized *societates* [guilds].

The guilds of the Italian communes shared in this general process of corporate growth. In most cities there was a large increase in the number of guilds and a rapid extension of their political functions. With the upsurge in population and vigorous social mobility during the second half of the thirteenth century, wave after wave of new social and professional groups began to organize themselves in societies, confraternities, and guilds. The political and institutional dimension of this social revolution, often referred to as the rise of the *popolo* [people], was firmly grounded in the principles of corporatism. Logically enough, the strongest and best organized of these societies discovered that their greatest potential for political advancement lay in the direction of corporate federation. Through the political and sometimes military union of a large number of guilds under a common banner, the corporate model of political organization was, in effect, extended from the level of the single corporation, consisting of individual members, to the corporate federation, consisting of individual guilds. The same notions of corporation theory that had been applied to the experience of individual guilds were now applied to what was in essence a giant corporation of many guilds. The federation was the voluntary creation of its constituent parts; power and legitimacy derived from the community of corporations and from the express consent of the elected representatives of each participating corporation. Notions of delegation, representation, and consent regulated the life of the federation as they did that of individual corporations. Each guild within the federation was considered an equal and free member of the corporate community, just as the status of each individual member of a corporation or guild was held to be one of equality and autonomy vis-à-vis the other members. . . . The creation of federations or unions of guilds, representing coalitions of new or newly prominent social classes, was achieved at different times during the course of the thirteenth century in a number of places including Padua, Bologna, Rome, Milan, and Florence. . . .

In Florence, the guilds did not content themselves with achieving the condition of an "estate" or "order" within the commune. They proceeded instead to a third stage in which the very sovereignty of the commune was absorbed by the corporate federation itself. The aim of the guild movement in Florence was to achieve the greatest possible degree of association between the commune and the corporate federation. To the extent that this was achieved, it became possible and, indeed, necessary to apply to the organization of Florentine communal government those same basic principles of corporation law that had been nourished on the level of single corporations and that had subsequently been elaborated within the framework of the guild federation. The affirmation of these corporate principles of political organization at the level of communal government produced what can be called "guild republicanism."

Guild republicanism first became a reality in Florence during the 1290s. The creation in 1282 of a new chief magistracy of communal government called the "Priors of the Guilds" was a preliminary step (the very name of the new office suggests the merging of the legal identities of the commune and the guild federation), but not until 1292 did the adherents of the guild movement succeed in implementing a specifically corporate approach to the election of the priorate. In the electoral debate of November 1292, which marks the real beginning of the popular government based on corporate principles, it was decided that the new Priors would be elected according to a system that called for independent nominations from each of twelve guilds and that allowed no more than one Prior from any guild in each term of office. Inherent in this apparently simple innovation in electoral procedure were two ideas of potentially revolutionary significance: first, that each of the guilds would participate, through its Consuls, autonomously and on an equal basis with the other guilds, in the electoral process; and, second, that, as far as possible, the guilds were to be evenly represented in the priorate. . . . The Ordinances of Justice of January 1293 gave formal constitutional expression to the vision, implied in the outcome of the November debate, of the Florentine commune as a sovereign federation of equal and autonomous guilds, and it did so in unmistakably corporate language. The opening lines of

the first rubric, which established the legal framework for the union of the twenty-one guilds in their "good, pure and faithful society and company," echo the famous dictum of Roman law, *quod omnes tangit,* which was the basis of many attempts during the late Middle Ages to understand the nature of representative and corporate systems of government: "That is judged to be most perfect which consists of all its parts and which is approved by the consent of them all. . . ." The "parts" were, of course, the guilds themselves, and this opening clause forcefully asserted that the legitimacy of the corporate federation (which, according to these same Ordinances, was now entrusted with both the election and the defense of the central magistracy of communal government) had henceforth to derive from the consent of the equal partners of the corporate union. The decentralized sovereignty of the guild federations and the interposition of the corporations between citizens and commune effectively made the guilds the vehicles for the expression and interpretation of the popular will.

To appreciate fully the implications of this constitutional arrangement, it is useful to have some idea of the size of the guild community that was called upon to participate in the federation. Working from some precise matriculation figures and a few hopeful guesses, a reasonable estimate for the period around 1300 would be in the range of seven to eight thousand matriculated members of the twenty-one guilds, with perhaps fifty-five hundred to six thousand in the top twelve guilds. In a population of about one hundred thousand, the guild community thus included more than a third of the adult males of the city. What made the new arrangement revolutionary in terms of the social bases of politics was that these guilds represented the interests of specific professional and occupational groups. The corporate formula for attaining the consent upon which the legitimate exercise of the government's power was now based guaranteed an equal voice to each of the participating guilds and thereby institutionalized the representation of a wide range of social groups with varying economic and class interests.

This complex of ideas about the nature of politics in a commune ruled by a corporate federation did not die in Florence with the failure of that first guild government. It survived—fitfully, unevenly, and in an increasingly radical form—through most of the fourteenth century. The guilds, of course, remained, and so, in theory at least, did the corporate union of the twenty-one guilds. But, as a matter of policy, the oligarchic governments did not stress the close constitutional association of the commune and the corporate federation. These governments sought to disengage the electoral process from the corporate principles of the guild system and to base the legitimacy of government and the consent of the community on grounds other than those of the decentralized sovereignty of the guilds. Although these aims were definitively achieved by the end of the fourteenth century, guild republicanism did not die easily. On a number of occasions during the century, this alternative conception of the Florentine body politic reappeared in the political arena as the constitutional claims of the corporate system were reasserted. Two of these occasions are worth looking at in some detail.

One of the most striking instances of the revival of Florentine corporatism occurred in the crisis of the 1340s. The circumstances are well known: oligarchic government was severely compromised by military failures in 1341, by the disastrous appeal to a foreign tyrant in 1342–43, and by the impending collapse of several of the largest banking companies. In the fall of 1343, the proponents of guild government resurrected the ideas of 1293 with a new and more radical formula: "the Florentine Republic," it was asserted in at least two official documents of these years, "is ruled and governed by the guilds and guildsmen of the same city, and especially by the Consuls of those guilds. . . ." In this formula the verbs *regitur* [rule] and *gubernatur* [govern] themselves connote sovereignty, and the *res publica,* so dear to the civic humanists of the fifteenth century, is here made to coexist with and, indeed, is "ruled and governed" by those most unclassical institutions, the guilds. There is, moreover, a remarkable parallel between this self-definition by the new popular regime and the description of it by Giovanni Villani, who excoriated this government for its dependence on "guildsmen, manual laborers and illiterates, since most of *the Consuls of the twenty-one guilds, by whom the commune was then being ruled, were lowly guildsmen.* . . ." Villani's echo of the formula for corporate sovereignty, coming as it does from a harsh critic of the regime, is a compelling confirmation of the popular government's own conception of its constitutional order.

How accurate were these claims? Perhaps the most dramatic example of the expansion of guild power and the impact of corporate politics in these years can be seen in the role that the guilds played in the settlement of major bankruptcies. One of the prime objectives of the guild regime that came to power in the fall of 1343 was to establish firm control over the institutions which would be called upon to deal with these complex litigations and especially to resolve the conflicting claims of foreign creditors and appeals for delay from hard-pressed bankers and merchants who hoped to shift the burden of the claims against them onto their own debtors. Chief among these institutions was the Mercanzia, which had been founded in the first decade of the fourteenth century to deal with a similar banking and credit crisis. The Mercanzia was an oligarchic institution dominated from its inception by the international bankers and merchants of the five major commercial guilds (Calimala, Cambio, Lana, Por Santa Maria, and Medici e Speziali). The Mercanzia's five governing councillors (one from each of the five guilds) had traditionally used their power to protect this commercial oligarchy and its vital economic interests. It was to the Mercanzia that the petitions of creditors came and from which the threatened bankers expected a sympathetic hearing. But the government of the guilds had other plans for the Mercanzia: in July 1344 an *ad hoc* Committee of Twelve was created and joined to the five councillors. Special legislation authorized the Twelve and the Five, sitting together as a single body, to administer the settlement of creditors' claims through the seizure, distribution, and sale of the goods and assets, including land, of the bankrupt merchants.

The popular government, in short, steered the banking crisis toward a solution that meant disaster for the great companies by allowing the claims of creditors to be satisfied directly through the liquidation of the enormous landholdings that served as the indispensable security in the high-risk deposit banking business. The joint committee of the Five and the Twelve became the ultimate arbiter in this process at a time when the greatest banking companies of Florence were collapsing. It was thus a matter of enormous importance that the all-powerful Twelve (who could, of course, out-vote the Five and were essentially in control of the situation) were elected by the

Consuls, not of the five guilds of the Mercanzia, but of all twenty-one guilds of the corporate federation.

Nor was this the only application of the principles of Florentine corporatism in the bankruptcy crisis. Early in 1346, as the fate of the powerful Bardi company was about to be decided, the Consuls of the bankers' guild held a council meeting to discuss what advice the guild should give to the government "concerning the assets of bankrupt merchants." The government very likely requested such advice from the bankers' guild and perhaps from other guilds as well. In any case, the result of this open debate in the guild's "representative assembly" was a recommendation that officials of the commune be empowered to seize the landholdings of bankrupt merchants and to prevent them from being used or inhabited until the claims of creditors had been satisfied according to stipulated agreements. The details and the outcome of this policy of the guild government must await further study, but the important point here is that the popular government, facing the greatest economic crisis in the history of the Florentine merchant oligarchy, calmly formulated a policy based on the direct consultation of at least some sectors of the guild community and carried out that policy through a committee that was elected and directed by the Consuls of all twenty-one guilds. It hardly needs to be added that the Bardi were indeed ruined.

From this specific instance of guild government, it becomes easy to understand why, in the minds of many prominent Florentines like Giovanni Villani, who agonized over the destruction of the Bardi, the whole idea of government by or through the guilds began to be very distasteful. Villani had no quarrel with the Ordinances of Justice as the foundation of a convenient and patriotic historical myth. But the actual implementation of that document's constitutional principles in the delicate circumstances of the 1340s was another matter altogether. It was madness, he believed, to expect that lowly guildsmen, from each and every one of the twenty-one guilds, could properly care for the affairs of the republic. The guild idea had been revived at a time when the economic survival of the Florentine oligarchy was in doubt, and what Villani accurately perceived was that the implementation of corporate principles at such a time was bringing Florence dangerously close to a condition of class conflict in which his own class was at a distinct constitutional disadvantage. For, in any arrangement in which the twenty-one guilds spoke with twenty-one equal voices on public issues, the oligarchy was bound to be hopelessly outnumbered. The dangers for the oligarchy inherent in the principles of 1293 began to be understood, and one of the first acts of the restored oligarchic regime of 1348 was to reduce the number of minor guilds from fourteen to seven through the consolidation of several corporations. This attempt to deprive the nonoligarchic guilds of their numerical advantage in the corporate federation lasted only two years. But the fears engendered by the revival of corporate principles of government in the 1340s were never allayed in the minds of Florentine merchants and bankers. The alienation of the Florentine upper classes from the ideals of their own corporate past was crucial to the ultimate failure of guild republicanism.

The increasing radicalization of the guild movement in that same decade of crisis also contributed to the alienation of the upper classes from the assumptions of corporate politics. As a result of the bankruptcy settlements and the early legislation on the funded public debt, government by the guilds was now associated with an openly anti-oligarchic stance on economic issues. But the movement was radicalized in another and perhaps more profound sense in these years. The notion of the guild community as a voluntary federation of equal and autonomous members tended, in the nature of things, to be an expansive ideal. Popular governments often needed support for their constitutional and political programs and were most likely to find it lower down in the social and professional hierarchy among those groups willing to trade such support for recognition of their own corporate and political aspirations. Although the oligarchy was beginning to recoil from the idea, the constituencies of the established guilds had, in fact, set an important example by embracing the idea of corporate organization as the most effective means for safeguarding their class interests.

This example was not lost on those artisan and working elements of Florentine society that did not have their own legally recognized guilds. . . . As early as the fall of 1342, the dyers of the textile industries petitioned Walter of Brienne for a guild of their own to be equal in standing to the established guilds. In 1345 the government dealt harshly with Ciuto Brandini, the leader of a workers' movement that aimed at the creation of a corporation—a union, we would say—in defense of their interests. He was executed by a government that wrapped itself in the principles of corporatism, for the crime of having attempted to establish a corporation for workers. For the upper ranks of the guild community, which felt threatened by such attempts, class interests and constitutional principles began to veer apart. The growing hostility of the established guilds toward the corporate aspirations of those without guilds seriously weakened the long-term prospects of guild republicanism. The guild movement began to discover that it was alienating both the upper and the lower ranks of Florentine society. Caught in an unstable position between the oligarchy, which despised the corporate system of government, and the lower classes, which desired nothing more than to become a part of it, the guild movement was increasingly isolated and on the defensive.

Amid these internal tensions and unresolved contradictions the theories of guild government were revived in the long social crisis of the 1370s and early 1380s. The reaffirmation of corporate principles began as early as 1370 in the wool guild. In opening the election of the guild notary in that year to the full membership of the guild's council, the proponents of reform resurrected a classic formula: "it is just and consonant with law," they asserted, "that this election be held by the guild and its members, since *that which touches all must be approved by all*." These reforms culminated in January 1374 with a provision that made it obligatory for the Consuls to hold regular meetings of the guild council at least twice in each consular term of four months. But it is the prologue of this provision that sums up in the most optimistic terms the basic assumptions of corporate politics underlying this renewal of the ideals of consent and representation in the guild:

> Whenever it happens, as a result of some compelling necessity, that the Consuls of this guild convoke and assemble good and expert members of the guild in the guildhall, and seek counsel and confer with them on matters of utility and benefit to the guild, with the assembled members of the guild continuously consulting and talking with each other in these assemblies and meetings, the result is that many issues are raised and brought to the attention of the Consuls of the guild, which redound to the honor, utility, and convenience of the guild and its members.

Regular meetings and spontaneous consultation among the members, faith in the collective wisdom of the members to discern the common good, initiatives emerging from such exchanges to mold the policies of the leadership—such were the basic ideals of guild republicanism and of the ascending quality of corporate government. The implementation of these ideals within the community of the Florentine guilds during the decade of the 1370s enabled the guilds to become the focal points of initiative, opposition, and ultimately revolution in 1378.

The revival of corporate principles within individual guilds was paralleled in these years by their reaffirmation at the level of the corporate federation. Sometime in the summer or fall of 1378, an advisory committee of twelve citizens submitted to the Signoria a long list of recommendations, or "ricordi," dealing with the most difficult and sensitive issues facing the government. At the end, the authors reminded the Signoria that in turning these proposals into legislation they must not forget to consult with the *Capitudini*, or Consuls, of the guilds:

> Finally, it seems to us that, if it seems fitting to you, all of the aforementioned matters should be brought up and discussed with the Consuls of the guilds, and *their advice on these questions should be requested;* so that, if all or part of these proposals become law, it will have been done with the agreement and consent of the guild Consuls; *and then it can truly be said that it has been done with the consent of the whole city*.

Here again, in a most revealing formulation, is the fundamental assumption that the exercise of communal sovereignty was ultimately dependent upon the consent that could only be obtained from a consultation of the guild community. Such consent was, moreover, equivalent to the consent "of the whole city." The implication is clear that, without the approval of the Consuls of the individual guilds of the corporate federation, the enactment of the committee's proposals would be vulnerable to the charge that they did not enjoy the legitimizing support of the popular will.

In the circumstances of 1378, of course, the consent of the guild community came closer to the consent of the "whole city" than it did in more normal times. The revolution of that summer resulted in the expansion of the corporate federation to include three new guilds, two for the skilled artisans of the textile industries and one for the unskilled Ciompi. The reassertion of corporate principles of government both within the guilds and within the federation was accompanied by an extension of those principles to a wider range of social groups. From this perspective, the events of 1378 may reasonably be viewed as a "guild revolution" and as the last serious attempt by Florentines to construct a polity on corporate principles.

The government that emerged from this revolution prevailed for another three and a half years. How it viewed itself can be seen in a *missiva* [letter] of 1380, written by the chancellor, Coluccio Salutati, concerning the conspiracy of a band of exiled Guelfs against the regime. Among the crimes planned by these exiles, he wrote, were murder, torture, arson, and the destruction of "the most honorable corporations of the guilds of our city, *through which, by the grace of God, we are what we are,* and without which, should they ever be suppressed, the very name of the Florentines would without doubt be erased from the face of the earth." *Per quas sumus quod* *sumus:* through which we are what we are—half a generation later this would certainly have seemed an extravagant and almost incomprehensible claim, especially from a chancellor of the republic. But for the Salutati of 1380, working for a government that based its legitimacy on the corporate principles of guild republicanism, it was perhaps only natural to proclaim that the very identity of the Florentines and the reputation of the city were bound up with the survival and prosperity of their guilds. That a humanist chancellor of the republic could have uttered such sentiments may serve as testimony to the extraordinary power of the guild idea as public policy in those years.

Why, then, did the idea fail? Aspects of the answer have already been suggested. The guild republicanism of the Florentine corporate community was, to be sure, an expansive but never a universal ideal. Although the guild constitution had been built on the fundamental right of corporate association, the established guilds denied this same right to the lower orders of Florentine society. Guild republicanism might have succeeded as a socioconstitutional system if its basic principles had been allowed to extend far enough. Paradoxically, the success of the guild idea in 1378 assured its ultimate failure. The Florentine upper classes were profoundly frightened by the social radicalism of the guild revolution of 1378–82, and the impact of the experience cast a long shadow over the next generation. Bankers, manufacturers, and international merchants, realizing that the principles of the corporate state were an ever-recurring danger to their own security and hegemony, began to see the guilds in a different light; no longer were the guilds considered central to the Florentine political system or to its historical traditions. . . .

The first chronicler to articulate an open hostility, not merely toward individual actions of the guilds and their Consuls, but to the very assumptions and foundations of corporate politics, was Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, who wrote in the aftermath of 1378. The spectacle of the independent guild of dyers making life miserable for the woolen cloth manufacturers of the Arte della Lana was more than Stefani could tolerate, and he began to associate the whole idea of guild government, not altogether wrongly, with social and class revolution. This negative posture toward the aims of corporatism in his own day led Stefani, like Villani, to play down the significance of the guilds in the political history of Florence. They appear in his account of the distant 1260s, but not in that of the 1290s, and only sporadically in that of the 1340s. Stefani not only neglected guild history; he specifically rejected the underlying principles of any corporate polity. The "popolazzo" and the "mezzani" of Florence, he asserted, exist "con niun ordine"—that is, in the absence of any established institutional framework. Here, in view of the experience of 1378, the wish was certainly father to the thought, but Stefani's explanation for the presumed inability of the Florentine middle and lower classes to organize themselves politically is nonetheless revealing: "they are too numerous to be gathered together or to come to any firm decisions." By rejecting the possibility of meaningful consent obtained through the collective participation or representation of communities of equal members, Stefani, in effect, denied the validity of the corporate state. . . .

But in rejecting the ideals and assumptions of corporatism, Stefani began to put something in their place. He praised the patrician families of Florence, "the *grandi* of wisdom, gentility, and order," for the manner in which they made decisions among themselves: by honoring and "revering the wisest person of their line or, at the most, the wisest few." Because there are "fewer of them to be convened and consulted," it is easier for them to discuss their affairs and to bring into harmony *"la volontà degli appetiti."* Here was an alternative vision of the political process based on the related notions of decision-making authority concentrated in the hands of the experienced few and willing consensus of a wider community that "reveres" their wisdom and judgment. In essence, Stefani substituted the patrilineal family—with its built-in hierarchy and notions of descending, but benevolent, authority—for the fraternal corporation of equal members—in which authority ascended from the membership to its delegated leaders—as the preferred model for understanding and ordering the political world of the commune. The use of the family as a model for conceptualizing political relationships in a community dominated by aristocratic power and hierarchical values (which nonetheless felt the need to justify the existence of the ruling "one or few" with the notion that their authority served the common good and thereby rested on the implicit consent of its beneficiaries) was destined for a long and successful career in the second century of the Florentine republic. Again, it was Bruni in the *Life of Dante* who popularized the idea with Aristotelian notions of the family as the "original" and fundamental political unit, "from the multiplication of which is born the city." In this transformed world of political assumptions, it was no accident that the most powerful and revered Florentine of them all, Cosimo de' Medici, was dubbed *pater patriae* [father of his country]. . . .

The rejection of corporatism and the tentative formulation of a contrasting model of consensus politics, pioneered by Stefani in the 1380s, were assimilated and elaborated into a new vision of Florentine republicanism in the early fifteenth century by Leonardo Bruni. In his hands, the guilds were written out of Florentine history, expunged from the tradition they had helped to shape.

In the *Histories of the Florentine People,* he mentioned them only in the context of the 1378 revolution, as if to emphasize their subversive and socially disruptive tendencies. That the guilds had a significant or lasting impact on Florentine politics or society would be impossible to tell from the pages of Bruni's *Histories*. So Bruni grounded his new republicanism in the centralized sovereignty of the state and in the consensus of a broad, unified, and undifferentiated political class. And, in fact, the number of Florentines considered and accepted for high office was enormously expanded in these years: nominations for the *Signoria* in the much smaller urban population of 1433 were nearly twice what they had been in the mid-fourteenth century; the number of approved candidates, over two thousand in the scrutiny of 1433, was three times greater than in 1391. This explosion of the office-holding class provided the wide base for the consensus politics of the Albizzi years. Of course, only a fraction of this class enjoyed the authority of the decision-making inner circle, and the difference between a Buonaccorso Pitti, on the one hand, and a Goro Dati or a Giovanni di Paolo Morelli, on the other, is a measure of that distinction, even within the limits of the upper class.

Ultimately, consensus politics turned on a separation between participation and power. The legitimacy and stability of this system depended upon the consensus represented by the thousands whose names were introduced into the electoral process and who thereby gained, as Bruni so accurately observed in the funeral oration on Nanni Strozzi, the "hope" of ascending to the honors of high office. The political class of the guilds was co-opted to the purposes of the ruling group and wooed away from its traditional, but essentially always ambivalent, attachment to corporate politics. In the process the guilds were reduced to offices of the state, subordinated legally and constitutionally to a sovereignty in which they no longer had any part. If the corporate ideal can be said to have survived beyond the 1380s or the 1390s, it was largely in the form of legislative obstructionism on the part of disgruntled artisans or futile conspiracies hatched by still unresigned workers. In the eyes of the upper classes, however, it survived only as conspiracy and sedition perpetrated by malcontents, not as a political and constitutional program grounded in the respectability of law and custom. Cut off from their political function, the guilds no longer served as vehicles through which the aspirations and grievances of social groups could find adequate, rational, and effective expression. . . .

The Venetian Aristocracy Takes Control

FREDERIC C. LANE

Unity within the [Venetian] aristocracy was equally important in maintaining peace within the city. In communes that were shaken by uprisings of the middle or lower classes, fights between members of the ruling class gave the rioters their chance. Venice could restrain family rivalries more easily because it inherited from the Byzantine Empire a tradition of unified allegiance to a sovereign state. This unity was reinforced by many institutional arrangements . . . : the large number of offices and councils, the brief terms of office holders, and their ineligibility to succeed themselves. These practices made it possible to disperse powers and honors widely. No family was allowed more than one member on the Ducal Council, on any important nominating committee, or on any important administrative board. Whenever a nominee for office was being voted on, his relatives were required to withdraw.

Rivalries were reduced also by outlawing campaigns for office. Theoretically, the office sought the man, and anyone elected to office was required to serve. If he refused, he was subject to a heavy fine and made ineligible for other offices, unless excused by the Ducal Council, as he would be if he was legitimately absent from the city or about to leave on a trading voyage for which he had made contracts. Some offices were profitable and were desired on that account, so there were restrictions on the extent to which members of the nominating committees could name each other for such posts. Others, such as some of the ambassadorial missions, entailed heavy expense, and even rich men would have avoided them if possible—unless they had political ambition to match their wealth and desired the honor. But a man was not supposed to choose offices he wished to stand for; he was obligated to accept the posts for which he was picked. The requirement that a man must serve when selected expressed the Commune's claim to unqualified allegiance and accustomed members of the ruling class to subordinating their individual interests to those of the state.

We regard political parties as an essential part of any government reflecting the will of the community, but George Washington and other founders of our nation shared the view which was that of the Venetians and indeed all earlier republicans, namely, that party rivalry was vicious, the destroyer of freedom. Like the Venetians, our Founding Fathers tried to avoid it by various devices, such as the Electoral College—unsuccessfully, as events proved.

Among the devices which they did not adopt but which the Venetians applied quite effectively, in addition to obligatory office-holding, was nomination by lot. It was quite common in the Italian city-states of the Later Middle Ages to place the names of qualified citizens in a bag or urn and to draw them out blindly. Such practices, used in various ways, introduced an element of chance and of rotation into the selection of officeholders. Drawing lots prevented a few men, those best known on account of achievements or family, from being the only ones to obtain the honor and power that went with office-holding. It also prevented election campaigns which would intensify rivalries, hatreds, and the organization of factions. Its disadvantage of course was that it gave out offices without distinguishing between men of more and less zeal and capacity.

The Venetians found a compromise which lessened the disadvantages while keeping the one main advantage, the moderation of factionalism. Selection of men for councils and magistracies at Venice consisted of two parts: nomination (which they called *electio*) and approval (which we would call election). At first the nominations seem to have all been made by the doge and his Council, but before the end of the thirteenth century, important nominations were made by committees whose members were chosen by lot. It was provided after 1272 that at least two nominating committees, each chosen by lot, be required to meet immediately and report a candidate or a slate of candidates to be voted on immediately, the same day if possible. The selection of the nominating committee by lot and the immediacy of the nominating and the voting were expressly designed to prevent candidates from campaigning for office by appeals that would inflame factions. On the other hand, the need of obtaining the approval of the Great Council was a protection against the choice of incompetents.

In spite of the laws, men did seek particular offices, sometimes for personal advantage, as is illustrated by one of the very few tales of practical personal politics in late thirteenth-century Venice. Nicolò Querini, a member of one of the richest and most powerful families, sought to be chosen governor of Negroponte, hoping to use the post to advance an inherited personal claim to a nearby Aegean island. After he had failed in spite of great efforts ("gran practica," a contemporary called it), his son Matteo Querini was named as one of the two nominees for that post chosen by the nominating committees. When this was reported to the doge at noon as he was dining, he exclaimed: "Then the son will be where the father could not get to be!" But the Great Council approved the other nominee instead of Matteo Querini.

The most sought-after office, that on which party rivalries were sure to focus if there were parties, was the dogeship. The closely contested election of 1229, when Giacomo Tiepolo and Marino Dandolo received equal votes in the nominating committee and Tiepolo obtained the honor by lot, showed the danger. While the doge-

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