The political elections of March 1994 swept away the vestiges of the old system of *partitocrazia*, and divided the country. Italy's new government was elected because its leader, Silvio Berlusconi had no murky political past (although this, too, is no longer quite as true as it seemed). The worry, though, is that he has no political experience. And the spectres of populism and autocracy are raising their heads. Meanwhile, the corruption investigations march on, engulfing a new sector of Italian society every day. The jails are overflowing and there is no end in sight - investigators reckon 100,000 people may have to be charged. The system of backhanders was so endemic that, almost by definition, any company will have had to pay bribes to gain contracts nad survive. (*Adapted from an October 1994 article in* The Independent*)*