

A Nation Without a Leader



FRAME 10

Italy's prime minister steps down, just to step back up.

BASIC LEVEL

Italy's prime minister is shown in this picture. His name is Silvio Berlusconi — SILL-vee-oh ber-luss-KOH-nee. Just a few days ago, he resigned his job. **What does this mean?** (*He quit.*) He did this because a prime minister has to have the support of many different political parties. His party lost some support, and people said he needed to make a new government. He resigned so he could spend time getting a new government together. Then, he was sworn in as prime minister again. **Do you think the U.S. should have a government like this, or do you like the way the American system works?** In the new government, Berlusconi has the support of more parties than just his own. But the real test will be next spring. That is when national elections will happen in Italy. Berlusconi is not very popular in Italy right now. He will have to work hard to get Italians to vote for him. END OF STORY

GENERAL LEVEL

The man shown here is Silvio Berlusconi. He recently resigned as the prime minister of an important European country. **What country is this?** (*Italy.*) This left Italy without a prime minister for several days. The Italian president, who has less power than the prime minister, took charge during those few days.

Berlusconi resigned because his government had lost support in the country. The economy has been bad lately, and Berlusconi has also upset many Italians by backing the unpopular war in Iraq. But, no one was worried because this happens in Italy quite often. In fact, Berlusconi, who has been in charge for four years, is the longest-lasting leader Italy has had since World War Two. Besides, everyone knew that he was going to form a new coalition government soon. **Does anyone know what a coalition is?** (*A coalition government brings together several different political parties.*) Berlusconi's party is conservative, so he made sure to include liberal parties as well. **In this country which of the two major parties is conservative, and which more liberal?** (*Republicans, conservative; Democrats, more liberal.*) **Would this system ever work in the U.S.?**

Berlusconi was criticized for keeping most of his old government's ministers. Many people wanted to see real change. Last week, he presented this new government to the Italian parliament for a vote. **From your news reading, did this government pass the vote?** Berlusconi will face his real test next spring when national elections will be held. **Do you think people will vote for change then?** END OF STORY

ADVANCED LEVEL

When Silvio Berlusconi resigned recently as Italy's prime minister, no one was surprised or shocked. After all, his center-right wing Forza Italia party had been losing support for some time. **Why?** (*The Italian economy has been bad for quite a while, and Berlusconi has also supported the war in Iraq, which is very unpopular with most Italians.*) And this sort of thing happens all the time in Italy — when a premier loses his coalition in the government, he resigns. **What is a coalition?** (*A temporary alliance of different parties, put together to keep a government in power.*)

Besides, everyone knew that Berlusconi would be out of the prime minister's office for only a few days. He had to assemble a new government to present to Italy's parliament for a confidence vote. Although he was expected to fire several of his cabinet ministers, Berlusconi kept most of them, because his party dominates the parliament. **From your news reading, did this confidence vote pass?**

However, Berlusconi's long-term political future seems shaky. Next spring will see a round of parliamentary elections, and his party is losing in the polls to a center-left wing party. Berlusconi also keeps getting himself in trouble — he recently insulted a German diplomat by saying he would be perfect for a role as a Nazi soldier. This comment made headlines all over Europe. It is seen as typical of Berlusconi's brash, somewhat insensitive style. **Is Germany right to be insulted by this comment?** END OF STORY