

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

• NOTABLE & QUOTABLE

• FEBRUARY 6, 2012, 7:24 P.M. ET

Notable & Quotable

Walter Olson on Italy's labor-law reformers who have to live under armed guard.

The Cato Institute's Walter Olson writing at cato-at-liberty.org, Jan. 30:

Pietro Ichino, a professor of labor law at the University of Milan and a senator in the Italian legislature, is known as the author of several "neoliberal" books and studies recommending that the Italian government relax its extraordinarily stringent regulation of employers' hiring and firing decisions. As Bloomberg Business Week reports, that means that Prof. Ichino must fear for his life: "For the past 10 years, the academic and parliamentarian has lived under armed escort, traveling exclusively by armored car, and almost never without the company of two plainclothes policemen. The protection is provided by the Italian government, which has reason to believe that people want to murder Ichino for his views."

They're not just being alarmist. In 1999 and 2002 leftist gunmen associated with the Red Brigades murdered two other reformist labor law professors, Massimo D'Antona and Mario Biagi. Prof. Biagi, a well-known figure nationally, was shot as he arrived at his Bologna

home and dismounted his bicycle. While five members of the Red Brigades are serving prison sentences for his murder, sympathizers remain at large, and Ichino's name appears on a Brigades hit list. . . .

Like his slain colleague Biagi, Ichino started out as a man of the Left—a Communist parliamentarian, in fact—who became convinced that the state-enforced equivalent of lifetime job security actually worked against the interests of ordinary young workers, who were increasingly frozen out from being offered jobs in the first place. Increasingly, moderate European opinion is coming to see that view as persuasive—even if few show as much courage as Prof. Ichino in voicing it.