
Profile: Bruno Visentini

Olivetti's man to bankrupt Italy

by Liliana Gorini

Is he really the "man of the year" in Italy, as the Italian press portrays him in "opinion polls," according to which he is the most popular minister in years? Or is he an accomplice of the Italian Communist Party in imposing a "technocratic presidential government" in which he would be prime minister and the Communist Party the main component, with a program "better suited to a Marxist-Leninist regime in Nicaragua than Italy," as was stated by the Social Democratic leader and parliamentarian Massara? Who is the Italian Finance Minister Bruno Visentini, who has been recently at the center of the biggest battle ever over his tax plan, which is opposed by millions of self-employed workers and family businesses who see themselves threatened with destruction by it, and fervently supported by the communist-influenced trade union federation CGIL-CISL-UIL, because it would "divide sacrifices" among all?

When all the Italian parties asked for fundamental changes in his plan during a parliamentary debate because many clauses of the bill violate the Italian Constitution, he refused to change a single comma, stating proudly that "his philosophy is more important than the parliamentary requests," and that he "has the courage of being unpopular." What is this philosophy of Visentini's, in the name of which thousands of shops and family businesses should simply cease to exist? Is he really the "gentleman," the "man above the parties," the "expert free of any political game" daily praised by the press, which accuse his foes of defending the privileged and even of acting like the truck drivers in Chile?

A Venetian financier

Bruno Visentini was born in Treviso near Venice in 1914 and now lives in Rome. He graduated from law school, and taught commercial law at a university. A turning point in his life was during the Resistance to Mussolini, when he was a founding member of the Partito d'Azione, the party created by British intelligence to make sure that the Italian Resistance would be totally controlled by the British secret services and that the Italian population would not emerge with a sense of

national pride from the ruins of the war. In 1950, he became vice-president of IRI, the Italian state-owned company, and finally in 1964 he was named president of Olivetti, the Italian computer and telecommunications giant which he still controls through the Olivetti Foundation, which he chairs, and through the new president of Olivetti, Carlo De Benedetti, his close associate.

Visentini was also vice-president of the Italian industrialists' association Confindustria in 1974. In 1972, he replaced the late Ugo La Malfa as president of the tiny but powerful Italian Republican Party. He is also president of the Cini Foundation, the Venetian oligarchical center which determines "cultural" and political trends not only in Italy but throughout Europe, and which hosts Aspen Italy and has a large share in the Venetian insurance company Assicurazioni Generali.

He has been in several Italian governments, and particularly in those which involved a voting bloc with the Italian Communist Party around a program of brutal austerity to pay back Italy's debt to the International Monetary Fund. For example, he was vice-premier and budget minister in the second Andreotti government, known in Italy as the "government of national solidarity" because, for the first time, the Italian Communist Party blocked with the majority in order to impose "equal sacrifices" on all.

Visentini and De Benedetti share not only a Venetian background, but also a very clear pro-communist tendency. During the Italian national elections in 1983, they launched a campaign to form what Communist Party head Enrico Berlinguer called during a TV debate with De Benedetti "a government decoupled from the parties" and led by "technocrats" and "experts," under which cover communist ministers could be allowed in the government. To justify this proposal, Visentini and De Benedetti declared that the "firm Italy" was bankrupt and that its "board," i.e., the Italian Parliament and the parties, had to be deprived of any decision-making power in economics and finance and replaced by "experts" or "technocrats." The "firm" Italy should be put under "receivership" according to them, and placed in the hands of those who can really balance the state budget, cutting the cost of living escalator, and imposing heavy taxes on all households.

This is the program agreed upon by Visentini, De Benedetti, and the Italian communists and peddled to the dupes as "fiscal equity." This is why the Italian trade union federation, led by the Communist-controlled CGIL, even held a general strike in support of Visentini on Nov. 21, with banners and buttons such as "I pay taxes, and you?" The worries expressed by parliamentarian Massara concerning a "technocratic presidential government with Visentini as prime minister and the PCI" are not far from reality if one considers that the Italian Communist Party, formally in the opposition, is considering abstaining from the parliamentary vote on Visentini's plan, entering de facto into the majority, and that Giorgio Benvenuto, head of the trade union UIL, one of the

three making up the CGIL-CISL-UIL federation, has already compiled for Visentini long lists of names and addresses of "tax evaders" identified by his "hounds," as the press calls them. It is thanks to the trade-union propaganda that many normal citizens in Italy really believe that Visentini will finally "force the rich to pay taxes," and delude themselves that their own incomes will thus be spared further cuts.

Tax-collection to enrich Olivetti?

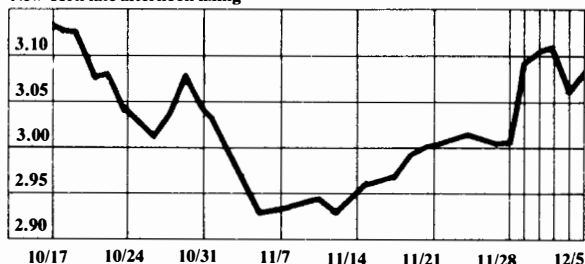
When they praise his "just" fiscal plan, the newspapers and the Communist leaders inevitably fail to report that Visentini is not at all "above all parties," and that he, still heavily involved in Olivetti's business, is guilty of serving "private interests in public office." Visentini's plan in fact forces all shops and self-employed workers to buy expensive cash-registers which would allow the revenue services to check their income and tax almost 40% of it. The idea of the cash registers was discussed by Visentini and De Benedetti when the former was still president of Olivetti and the latter managing director. Then Visentini just happened to accept the post of finance minister in the Craxi government, even though it was not the "technocratic government" he wanted, and immediately presented his tax package, which will enrich Olivetti if only by the forced buying of at least one-million cash registers by the shops. But where will the three-billion liras collected by Visentini by taxing 40% of all self-employed incomes go? Certainly not to pay back the wage-cuts of the workers, who were duped to believe that all their troubles were due to the privileges of the shopkeepers and the middle class. Officially they will go to pay back Italy's debt, which was transformed into treasury bonds, more than half of which are property of big companies such as Olivetti, FIAT, Pirelli, and so on. Once again Olivetti will earn plenty, thanks to this "honest gentleman above all parties."

Bruno Visentini hates Italian blue collar workers as much as he hates the self-employed. For him, the war between different categories of workers launched by the trade unions is only a means to destroy both. His "philosophy" is his dream of a technetronic post-industrial society, in which goods-producing factories are shut down, in which the large networks of small shops emanating an aura of prosperity in the streets of Italy are closed and only the "sunrise industries," computers and telecommunications, of his friend De Benedetti grow. Not by chance, the Cini Foundation just organized a conference on the "conversion" of the Italian economy from heavy industry to computers and telecommunications. Visentini hopes to soon see all Italy looking like oligarchical Venice in the 16th century: rich thanks to usurious banking and slave-trading, and full of spies who, like the "bravos" who targeted their victims by writing the name on a piece of paper and throwing it into the mouth of a stone lion in St. Mark's Square, will denounce their neighbors or even their relatives to the public treasury in the hope of being spared themselves.

Currency Rates

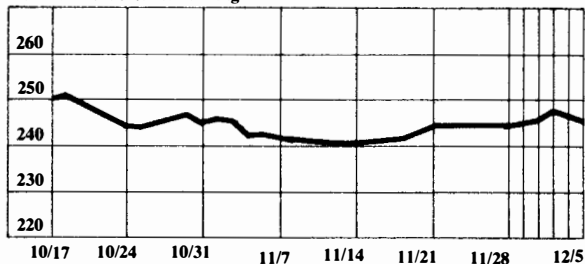
The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



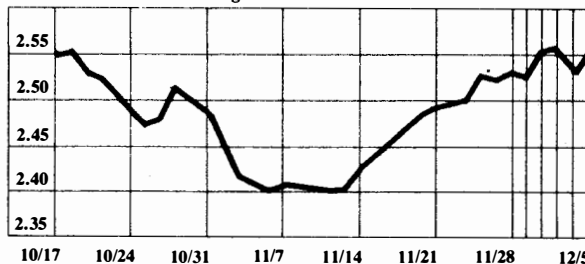
The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing



The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing

