

Italy's War on Crime by Marco Fanini

'Visentini is like Mussolini'

Social warfare is breaking out as the fascist economic policy of Finance Minister Bruno Visentini is imposed.

Almost 2 million shopkeepers went on strike Dec. 13 against Finance Minister Bruno Visentini's unconstitutional fiscal program. This was the second national strike against it: The first was held Oct. 23, when the plan was still being debated in the Senate.

This time, the strike was supported not only by Confcommercio, the Christian Democracy-linked shopkeepers' association, but also by the left-oriented association Confesercenti. The latter had refused to take part in the first strike because the Italian Communist Party (PCI) supports Visentini's austerity, which they call "fiscal equity."

The shopkeepers demonstrated against the austerity program in Rome with the slogan "Visentini is like Mussolini." The head of Confcommercio in Rome rallied the angry shopkeepers by denouncing Visentini's injunction that all Italian shops had to buy cash registers produced by Olivetti when he was still president of the giant Italian computer firm. Another racket, the shopkeepers' association head went on, is that people denouncing shopkeepers as "tax evaders" get "productivity rewards."

According to a clause in Visentini's plan called "inductive assessments," any shopkeeper can go to jail on the simple "suspicion" of tax evasion. This violation of the Italian constitution's provision that every citizen is considered innocent until he is proven guilty, was imposed the week of Dec. 17 by a government decree. In its unholy haste to get the entire austerity package, and particularly the at-

tack on the shopkeepers, passed before Christmas, the government resorted to decreeing its "inductive assessment" law despite tremendous parliamentary opposition. Under the Italian constitution, a prime minister can impose a law by decree even after the parliament has voted it down—risking the parliament calling a vote of no confidence on the issue.

In this case, the government felt quite confident in going ahead with its policy. Another, minor clause of the austerity package was voted up by the parliament because the PCI members abstained rather than voting against it.

There will be little opposition from the trade unions either. The unions have declared that they will carry out a "wage reform" abolishing the Cost of Living Escalator if Visentini's plan is accepted.

To avoid the issue of their open support for the fascist austerity policy of the IMF and of Visentini, the trade unions are now convincing workers that their wages have been reduced, not because of IMF policy, but because shopkeepers do not pay taxes. This trade union campaign, which has gone so far as the unions publishing "proscription lists" of names and addresses of "suspected tax evaders," has brought to a head the potentially very dangerous social warfare in Italy.

The groups being pitted against each other—the workers and unemployed and the shopkeepers—are outraged by, but politically impotent in the face of, the economic crisis. There is great danger of social explosions in the next months. Visentini's plan will

provoke drastic price increases—Visentini has proclaimed meat a "luxury item," subject to a Value Added Tax of 18%—and will increase the already very high unemployment by closing down many of the small shops. These economic crises will be accompanied by the danger of a revival of terrorism, announced by the Red Brigades during the current trial appealing the convictions in the assassination of former Prime Minister Aldo Moro.

Another consequence of Visentini's plan will be the likely entry of the PCI into the government majority coalition sometime in May, after the six-month freeze on forming a new government due to the presidential elections. The PCI is already de facto a member of the majority because of its support for Visentini's program, which has been consistently opposed by the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats, both members of the government coalition.

The corporatist alliance between Visentini's small Republican Party, the PCI, and the trade unions could well result in the formation of a "government of the technocrats" with Visentini as prime minister and the PCI in the majority, as many Social Democratic and Liberal party leaders have warned.

Luciano Lama, head of the Communist-controlled trade unions, a Communist whose name was suggested after the death of PCI head Enrico Berlinguer's death as a new general secretary of the party, proposed such an alternative government in a recent interview. After kicking the Christian Democrats out of the government, Lama said, they could achieve a programmatic alliance of Communists and Republicans for an "income policy," the other name for the IMF's fascist economic policy for Italy.