

Italians vote for a pro-West government

by Liliana Gorini

On May 12, over 44 million Italians went to the polls to renew most municipal, provincial, and regional administrations, and to decide on the fate of the five-party government led by Premier Bettino Craxi, which had been openly challenged by the Italian Communist Party. PCI national secretary Alessandro Natta threatened to demand the premiership for the Communists, had they overtaken the Christian Democracy in the local elections.

Since the voting was nationwide and had more a political than an administrative flavor, the results have been universally interpreted as a clear "no" to the Communists, both in the national government and in the local "giuntas," where they have been ruling for years.

Far from overtaking the Christian Democracy, as in the 1983 European elections, the Communist Party took heavy losses, going from 34.5% in the European elections to 30.2%, and losing most local administrations, not only in Rome, the capital, which had had a Communist mayor in recent years, but in Turin, Milan, and even Bologna, the Communist stronghold, which for the first time in four decades will not have a Communist mayor.

The Christian Democracy, prompted by Pope John Paul II's demand for re-Christianizing Rome and call for a campaign against euthanasia, regained the votes lost due to the incompetent policies of its general secretary, Ciriaco De Mita, and went from 33% in 1983 to 35.1%. The biggest personal success was that of Premier Craxi, whose Italian Socialist Party rose from 11.3% to 13.7%, confirming his position as premier of the most durable government since the postwar period.

SDI was the key issue

The secret of Craxi's victory over the Communists, who had focused their campaign against him, particularly after his March 5 visit to Washington and his endorsement of Reagan's SDI, was precisely the SDI issue. A few days before the vote, Craxi called together the five party leaders of the ruling coalition to discuss Italy's participation in the SDI. For the first time all five parties agreed to send a positive answer to Secretary Weinberger's offer and to mobilize Italian industry for SDI research. They also agreed to get rid of the Communists in every local administration possible, replacing the left governments with five-party coalitions on the national model.

Immediately afterward, Craxi called on voters not to abstain from voting. Voter participation was the highest in the last 15 years. As two German dailies, the *Mainzer Allgemeine Zeitung* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, stressed, the voters were well aware of choosing between a Communist takeover and a pro-Western, pro-SDI government.

The defeat has provoked a flurry of dissension in Communist Party ranks. One veteran PCI parliamentarian pointed out in an interview with a national weekly that the running of homosexuals advocating the legalization of pedophilia, on the Communist slate, had badly hurt the party. In Turin, the local PCI machine has asked for an emergency party congress to dump national secretary Alessandro Natta.

The Communists still have loyal friends, such as Italian President Sandro Pertini and Defense Minister Spadolini, a Republican, who met in a villa in Florence and emerged to urge that the Communists "not be isolated." Spadolini and Finance Minister Bruno Visentini—author of a fiscal reform backed by the Communists because it bankrupted 1 million shopkeepers, unable to pay 40% of their income to the internal revenue agents—are even threatening to leave the government if the Communists are isolated. This crowd had hoped to form a technocratic government including the Communists, as the only "kapos" able to impose the desired cuts on wages and living standards—hopes the May 12 voting dashed.

Since the economic issue is the Achilles heel of all parties, which fully agree on the necessity to cut industrial and agricultural production, the health system, pensions, and living standards just to content the International Monetary Fund hyenas, the Communists now plan to get revenge for the May 12 results with the June 9 referendum on the cost of living escalator. They gathered 1 million signatures for it two years ago, and it will occur unless there is a labor-industry agreement on paying the wage increases due under the cost of living mechanism.

Since the same Italians which voted for a pro-Western government do not want to see their wages, pensions, and health benefits cut further, the June 9 result is likely to be very different from May 12, and the PCI would play it as a confirmation of the fact that only with the PCI in the government can IMF austerity be imposed and explained to the workers.

The other big friends of the Communists are the Italian Greens, which ran for office for the first time and got from 1% to 2% of the votes. In the South Tyrol, they got almost 8% of the votes, and are ready to join a Nazi-Communist alliance with the fascist party MSI, which became the first party in that region, and the South Tyrol People's Party, whose anti-industrial and protofascist ideology is very similar to that of the Green Party. The Italian Communists count now on the 2% of the Greens to form "red-green" local administrations wherever possible, and cite as a model the "various forms of cooperation between the German Greens and the SPD."