

Report from Italy by Paolo Raimondi

Referendum points toward social chaos

The Communists have lost two votes in a row, but that is the least important feature of the recent electoral operations.

On Sunday, June 9, the Italian population was called out to vote for the second time in two weeks, this time on a referendum on the cost of living escalator (*scala mobile*). Partisans of the coalition of parties involved in Bettino Craxi's government, who voted "no" on the referendum, won with 54.3% of the vote, against a strange coalition led by the Communist Party (PCI) and the neo-fascist MSI party.

Anyone who concentrates his attention on what is merely obvious—that the PCI has been defeated twice in a row, first in the May 12 administrative elections—misses the most important feature of these electoral operations. Their sole aim has been to undermine Italy's already weakened democratic institutions.

The issue which divided the nation in this referendum could not have been more artificial: the coalition voting "Yes" wanted to abrogate a law which cut the COL four points, for a total of \$12; but this law was already scheduled to expire in February 1986, regardless of the vote!

The underlying issue is the economic crisis and the government's austerity measures. But these are not challenged by anyone: The government is following the direction of Finance Minister Bruno Visentini, instituting drastic cuts in the budget and tax hikes. The PCI is the most outspoken supporter of this austerity policy, with Visentini acting on behalf of the

Bank of Italy and International Monetary Fund.

While it is clear that for the immediate future, the government of Craxi will stay in power, the referendum campaign saw the emergence of three important new developments:

- For the first time, a communist-fascist alliance which gained 46% of the votes;

- The highest abstention rate (22% of the voters) since the postwar period;

- Heightened social tensions oriented in the direction of "class struggle."

Demonstrating the hidden goal of "class struggle" chaos, the president of the Italian industrial association (Confindustria), Luigi Luchini, gave a press conference just three minutes after the closing of the polls to announce that the Confindustria has unilaterally decided to cancel all cost-of-living reforms.

A few hours later, the PCI cells in some of the biggest factories of Milan and Turin called for wildcat strikes.

Similar provocations, combined with high unemployment and a growing economic crisis, add to the ingredients for a period of intense new trade-union activity in Italy.

But the most important political event facing the country now is the fight around the election of a new President of the Republic. This event is expected to be a turning point in

Italy's political life of the past 40 years. Forces around former Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, Bruno Visentini, and the Communists intend to institute undemocratic, authoritarian changes in the Italian constitution and their success will depend on the outcome of the presidential election.

The two chambers of the parliament will begin to meet to elect the new President on June 24. At this time, everyone is repeating only one name: Giulio Andreotti.

In Italy, Andreotti represents the same appeasement policies toward Moscow that are backed by West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and NATO General-Secretary Lord Peter Carrington. If Andreotti is elected, he will immediately challenge Bettino Craxi's confused, but generally favorable position on the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative.

In recent days, the possibility that President Sandro Pertini would win a second term were destroyed by yet another scandal surrounding his person. Pertini was told to sign a pardon for a Red Brigade terrorist, Fiora Pirri Ardizzone, former wife of the notorious fugitive terrorist Franco Piperno, who is now in Canada. Pertini admitted that he signed the release order without reading it, a regular practice with him.

In other words, Pertini is too old to be re-elected.

The only other alternative to Andreotti is former Prime Minister Francesco Cossiga, who is not much better than Andreotti when it comes to special deals with the Soviets. Cossiga was recently appointed chairman of the Aspen Institute of Italy at a conference organized by the Cini Foundation in Venice. Aspen is the arm of the U.S. think-tank based in Colorado which has been an architect of schemes to hand Europe over to the Russians. The Cini Foundation is headed by none other than Bruno Visentini.