

Italian crisis: a test for Europe

by Paolo Raimondi

After weeks of parliamentary defeats on the important budget debate, on Feb. 10 the five-party ruling coalition of Italian Prime Minister Francesco Gorla resigned. It would be wrong to see the present crisis as simply the 47th postwar government change in Italy. It is a very dangerous test for all the European democracies at a moment of global confrontation. Italy was, after all, the first country in the West where "new solutions" were tried after World War I.

Neither internal squabbles in the Christian Democracy, nor the opposition by powerful lobbies to the austerity measures in the *Finanziaria*, a law modeled on the American "Gramm-Rudman" budget cuts, explain the crisis. The reality has to do with international pressures to adjust Italy to the context of the INF treaty and the worldwide economic depression.

Italy is being squeezed to move on a more neutral path and to set up a corporatist scheme to reorganize its economy. Gorla finally resigned when it was clear that Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti and the Communist Party had joined forces against him. Andreotti's faction has used the secret ballot dozens of times to sabotage the coalition and to discredit not only the government, but Parliament in particular, as an institution.

Recently, Andreotti, the strongest booster of the INF treaty with Moscow, objected to the plan to deploy the U.S. F-16 jet fighters from Spain to Italian air bases because this might disrupt disarmament talks. The Communist Party, which took credit for forcing Gorla out, is campaigning to dissolve the Italian army and replace it with a civilian unit to deal with ecological questions!

Andreotti wants to make a deal with the Communists, if possible now, or as soon as the resistance to this is wiped out inside his Christian Democratic Party. Failing that, Andreotti will try to install Ciriaco De Mita, the party secretary, in the government, knowing that he will soon be discredited by the economic and institutional crisis. Andreotti's third option would be to accept another Gorla-type transitional government while he concentrates on capturing the Christian Democracy's power center. This would put him in a position to deal directly with the Italian Communist Party, in the context of the superpower deal over a neutralized Europe.

Families go for political power

If we look at the crisis from the economic angle, the picture comes into sharper focus. The families that control Italy have been very dissatisfied with the budget discussion, which they consider too soft; they demand that the next government impose more draconian measures. They complain that in 1987 the deficit ceiling was overspent by some \$5-8 billion.

The message is clear: There is an economic reality which more or less functions despite the existence or not of the government. This is a very important point in the strategy of the old oligarchical families and their aggressive economic operatives like Fiat president Gianni Agnelli, and Olivetti chairman Carlo De Benedetti.

Italy is shaken right now by a wave of economic strikes which are first hitting the public sectors like transportation, health, and education. These strikes are socially destabilizing, both because they hit the nerve centers and are run by new, independent groups which are outside the traditional trade unions and very volatile.

Politicians' stupidity is feeding the unrest. Education Minister Galloni told teachers in Milan that they have to accept wage cuts. Former Premier Gorla told the doctors who were complaining that even the 1987 budget planned to combat AIDS was not used, that "we are not sure that by spending this money we could stop the AIDS virus."

In recent months, almost without a murmur of public debate, the public sector of the economy was almost completely dismantled. Mediobanca, which has controlled Italian finances since World War II, has been privatized; the state steel company Finsider will be dismantled. Next in line to be given away is the oil giant, ENI. In this situation the Agnellis and the De Benedettis are moving to become economic superpowers by liquidating any opposition, destroying the small competitors, and merging with other forces in a reorganization process in which, according to them, only 20 big economic conglomerates worldwide will emerge from the economic depression with total oligarchical power and control.

While the politicians, the parties, the governments, and other institutions discredit themselves and are discredited by this old and new oligarchical drive toward domination, the Agnellis and the De Benedettis are profiling themselves as the real leaders and owners of the nation. All the channels of the private and public television networks are mobilized to give appealing profiles of Agnelli and De Benedetti and their families as the future "fathers" of the Italian population.

A recent editorial in *Espresso* magazine, largely a De Benedetti fiefdom, called for a new institutional government led by the governor of the Bank of Italy or by the president of the Constitutional Court, to rule in the coming period of critical economic decisions and reorganization. A few days earlier, the editorial of *Corriere della Sera*, mainly controlled by Agnelli, spoke about the "families" coming back into the economy and into political power.