

Italian politics headed for a shift?

by Leonardo Servadio

The Italian Communist Party (PCI) suffered a resounding defeat in the municipal elections held May 29 in 166 municipalities. The Communist Party, the second biggest party in Italy after the Christian Democracy (DC), was bypassed in those municipalities by the Socialist Party (PSI). If this trend continues in future elections, starting with the European Parliament elections on June 18, that would mean a significant shrinking of the importance of the PCI, which is the biggest Communist party outside the East bloc. Where the elections were held, the PCI dropped from an average of 22.1% of the vote, to 16.9% of the vote; while the PSI increased from 17.0% to 19.1%, and the DC, from 36.9% to 39.6%.

The Communist setback seems to be due to the fact that the PCI has progressively abandoned all the pro-industrial policies which characterized this party in the 1970s, when the party was growing. At that time the PCI was against drug consumption, but now it is in favor of liberalization of drug laws; it tended to favor nuclear energy development, but now it is totally anti-nuclear; it was quite pro-industrial, but now it is totally ecology-oriented and monetarist in philosophy.

Achille Occhetto, the party boss, went recently to the U.S.A., the first PCI general secretary to visit that country, and was received by the mightiest spokesmen of the financial elite: Seagram's and DuPont's president Edgar Bronfman, and retired banker David Rockefeller. In a dramatic shift in line, the PCI paper *Unità* stopped speaking of the Central Intelligence Agency as a dark coven of spies plotting destabilizations, and has started describing it as a think-tank of intellectuals who study the world political situation in depth.

Occhetto held secret meetings at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, after which the party paper "leaked" that he said that he would be ready to be the "junior partner" in a Socialist Party-led government. This is quite a shift. The PSI and its leader, Bettino Craxi, were the target of the most violent political attacks from the old-style Communist Party. Under these conditions the PCI would lose votes, since its previous ideological identity has been totally transformed—at least apparently.

Does the PCI want to lose votes?

Ironically, this loss of votes might be something desired by the PCI leadership. In fact, if the PCI were so reduced in

size at the national level (which will be seen in the June European elections and the next national political elections), it could really enter a government led by Craxi, something that Craxi would never accept as long as the PCI is bigger than the PSI. This means that for the first time since 1945, it is hypothetically possible to have an Italian government without the Christian Democracy.

At the moment this is pure speculation, yet one must bear in mind that, ever since the possibility of Christian Democratic-Communist alliances collapsed due to the assassination of DC party president Aldo Moro in 1978 and ensuing events, the PCI's only hope to enter the government was to form an alliance with the PSI.

This idea was presented by Occhetto in a magazine interview in *Espresso*, shortly before leaving for the U.S.A. Occhetto said that the DC government of Ciriaco De Mita should fall soon, and be replaced by a Republican-led government (the Italian Republican party, PRI, is small and well connected in the banking establishment), which would pave the way for a subsequent government with PCI participation. This means a change in the political system in Italy: from a DC-centered system, to a "bi-polar" system, around the Christian Democrats and Socialists, respectively.

It was former Finance Minister Bruno Visentini, a spokesman for the old Venetian oligarchy, who in opening the PRI congress during the second week of May, declared that the PCI should enter the government and that De Mita shall fall. The following week, on cue, ex-Premier Craxi at the congress of *his* party, the Socialists, said that Premier De Mita will have to leave the government after the European elections. Craxi spoke on Saturday morning, May 20; that afternoon, De Mita resigned in protest against such attacks from his coalition partner.

Italian President Francesco Cossiga appointed Republican Party spokesman Giovanni Spadolini to "probe" the possibility of forming a new government. Spadolini started his "probe" by meeting the governor of the Bank of Italy Ciampi, and National Economy and Labor Council (CNEL) president De Rita. In short, true to its tradition of a "lay" party taking orders from the financial forces, Spadolini ignored the political forces and went to his masters.

Consulting CNEL, which is the equivalent in modern Italy of the old Chamber of Corporations created by Mussolini in 1936, and which has been totally ignored by all governments so far, indicates that some significant institutional change might really be on the boards—a constitutional change in the direction of bolstering the power of the financial and banking community over Italy's politics and economy. A Socialist-Communist-Republican party government would be a perfect tool to apply the kind of post-industrial austerity that these forces demand of Italy. For the time being, such a government would not be possible, but clearly, the majority of the non-Catholic forces in the nation is aiming in this direction.