

# Old lineups persist in new Italian crisis

by Leonardo Servadio

The Italian government has gone into crisis again. By the time you read this, the crisis could have been resolved either with the creation of a new government, or with the calling of early elections (the normal end of the legislative term should be next year); or it might still be unresolved.

It is definitely significant that the crisis exploded into the open March 23-24, when Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti was in Washington, meeting President Bush. During the Gulf war Italy was, with Germany, the country in the anti-Iraq coalition which most tried to stall on Bush's policy—and the country whose government representative was the last to be received by Bush. Previously Bush had refused to receive Italian Foreign Minister Gianni De Michelis, although he was one of the most outrageously pro-war spokesmen in Italy.

In an interview run by the Catholic daily *Avvenire* on March 27, Andreotti said he had told President Bush: "I wished him to be able to solve some of the problems which have been unsolved for years and to which he solemnly committed himself in his Oct. 1, 1990 U.N. speech, when he explicitly mentioned Lebanon and Palestine. With their predominant forces the Americans have kept the U.N. from failing again in Kuwait. Now the rule is: one weight, and one measure. The U.N. must become the real leader of international security and Bush must have the historic recognition" of being responsible for that.

This is diplomatic language for saying that now it is expected that the Lebanese crisis be solved, a home be found for the Palestinians, and all the U.N. resolutions be enforced, not only those aimed at protecting Anglo-American interests in the Middle East. The Italian press did not report any comment by the White House after the meeting.

## Cossiga makes his move

While Andreotti was in the U.S., President Francesco Cossiga took the unusual step of speaking out on politics (the President of the Republic in Italy has no executive powers and is institutionally out of the political game), by denouncing maneuvers against his presidency carried out by "financial interests" and by certain press, meaning financier Carlo De Benedetti, his daily *La Repubblica*, and the weekly *L'Espresso*, which have been criticizing him for months. The other group which attacked Cossiga was the PDS, the ex-Communist Party. All these groups had denounced President

Cossiga as connected to the "Propaganda-2" Masonic lodge of Licio Gelli, which was at the center of innumerable scandals throughout the 1980s.

To the Communists' and *La Repubblica*'s dismay, Cossiga went on the offensive. He declared that he knows a few of the P-2 members and that they are honorable persons. Cossiga even proposed to reward the 622 Italians who were on the list of Operation Gladio, the code-name for a group of civilians who were kept ready to undertake action in case of Soviet invasion of Italy, and accused by the Communists of involvement in illegal, anti-communist operations. When a parliamentary delegation showed up to question Cossiga on Gladio, the President presented the PDS ex-communists in the delegation with pieces of the Berlin wall!

After the Communist Party changed its name to "PDS" (Democratic Party of the Left), it was supposed to join the list of parties eligible for government. But this did not happen. The rub was that of all the Italian political parties, the PDS was the most against the war in the Gulf. This stirred up old tensions between the PDS and the other parties, which have all been, in varying degrees, favorable to the Gulf intervention.

In his public statements Cossiga underlined that the President of the country is not just a "notary" maneuvered by the Parliament (one-third of the Italian Parliament is in the Communist sphere of influence). This attitude was interpreted by many as "presidentialist," which in Italy is anathema, especially for the Communists and for the Christian Democrats: Italy is a parliamentary republic and the "executive" is nominated by the Parliament and is under parliamentary control.

Bettino Craxi, the Socialist leader, was all for Cossiga, because his party is proposing a constitutional change to transform Italy into a "presidential" republic, like France or the United States.

The crisis was formally opened Friday, March 29, when Socialist Party leaders declared that they wanted a "thorough" change in the government composition. In reality, the Socialists want early elections, in which they hope to exploit the PDS's present difficulties to gain votes. Officially, neither the PDS nor the Christian Democracy favors early elections. But behind the scenes, the PDS might want to support the Socialists if they promise to form a coalition with the PDS, and without the Christian Democrats, after the new elections. It is highly unlikely, but not impossible.

Cossiga has insisted in public speeches that after the fall of communism in the East, things shall change also in Italy, where politics have been dominated by the Christian Democratic versus Communist dichotomy. But now that the PDS has gone back to old "communist" policy, looking more and more anti-American, while the Socialists look more and more pro-American, and the Christian Democracy wavers between these two—just as it has for the past 40 years—how will things change?