

Report from Rome by Galliano Maria Speri

No to the Green dictatorship!

The Schiller Institute shows how to win, when 5,000 demonstrate in Rome against a punitive tax on plastic shopping bags.

The first serious counteroffensive has been launched in Italy against the deindustrialization campaign promoted by the Greens. On May 11, industrialists joined with workers in the factories that produce plastic bags, against a crazy tax of 100 liras (about 7¢) imposed on a product that only costs 20 liras, and mounted a very combative demonstration in one of Rome's central squares, the Holy Apostles, a few steps away from the Ministry of the Environment.

The rally, organized by the ANSAP (Association of Producers and Transformers of Plastic Bags), was supported by the Schiller Institute, whose banner, "No to the Green Dictatorship," not only dominated the square but set the political tone of the initiative.

The feistiest demonstrators gathered right under that banner and took bundles of the newspaper *Nuova Solidarietà*, which supports the Institute's work, for distribution. They held up signs reading "Yesterday terrorists, today ecologists," and a particularly popular one, "The ecologists are green like Qaddafi's dollars," referring to the money channels that feed into the "Green" and "peace" movements in Europe.

From early morning onward, the square bulged with thousands of demonstrators from all regions of Italy, carrying tens of banners—all, naturally, made of plastic. The initiative marks the birth of an alliance between the productive sector and workers. Both the proprietors of the companies that have been forced to shut down because of the tax, and the workers

who have been drawing unemployment for five months and are worried about their job futures, were present.

The big industrial associations have long since abandoned the interests of the plastic bag producers, which "only" represent 5% of the sector, and they have accepted the tax willingly as a means of getting rid of small and medium-sized competitors. The politicians, who reckon that the plastic bag sector does not add up to many votes, have put through a tax which is blatantly unjust and hits a manufactured product which is actually much easier on the environment than the paper bags which are supposed to replace the plastic ones!

One of the shouts that went up from the rally was: "The politicians want to tax plastic bags because they are used to getting their bribes in paper envelopes," and also, "Politicians sold out to the interests of the paper industrialists."

A particularly serious problem is that the unions tried to sabotage the Rome demonstration in every way. One industrialist from Naples revealed that the CGIL (Communist- and Socialist-linked confederation) and CISL (Christian Democratic-linked confederation) called up all the factory councils and mobilized them *against* taking part in the demonstration. It seems the unions don't care if 10,000 jobs are lost.

"I changed my activity," said an industrialist from the Abruzzi region, "and with a group of partners, I invested 4 billion liras in plants for plastic bag production, and now I'm out on the street."

Thousands of bags were passed out during the demonstration with a tree drawing and the slogan, "Don't cut me down, use plastic bags," which passersby grabbed eagerly, asking why plastic bags, which are so useful to housewives, should be so hated by environmentalists, who propose cutting down thousands of trees to produce paper bags.

A delegation formed by the president and vice president of ANSAP then marched to the Ministry of the Environment at nearby Piazza Venezia, hoping to be received by Minister Giorgio Ruffolo, who for more than six months has refused not only to retract the provision but even to meet with sector spokesmen. Probably the delegation would have waited another six months in front of Ruffolo's doorstep if a Schiller Institute member had not invited all the demonstrators to move toward Piazza Venezia until they were right under the ecologist minister's office window, to underline with their presence the advisability for the insolent minister to receive the delegation.

Only when the whole square—which happens to be Rome's major traffic crossroads—had filled, did the Environment Ministry bureaucrats agree that the cabinet chief would receive the delegation.

Ruffolo himself, who arrived in a fret by a side door, assented to the creation of a task force of ministry staff and plastics industrialists, to review the measure and find an acceptable compromise. While no one thinks Ruffolo's promises will be kept, it was the first time the environmentalist dictators were forced to review their positions in the face of a protest by a sector that has no intention of rolling over and playing dead.

It will sound the trumpet for all those other sectors of industry and agriculture that want to fight.