

Socialists in Italy produce another Duce

by Muriel Mirak

When Benito Mussolini rode to Rome in an expensive rail compartment to seize power for his National Fascist Party in 1922, many otherwise rational observers abroad greeted the dictatorial takeover with applause. Italy had been nearly destroyed in the First World War, what was left of its industry demolished by anarchosyndicalist strike actions culminating in the disastrous factory occupations of September 1920. In the wake of total economic breakdown, mass unemployment, and popular discontent, fascist terror squads took over the public piazzas during 1921 and 1922, lashing out at business and labor organizations of both Catholic and Communist orientation. It was on the crest of that terror wave that the squadrist leader Mussolini, who had been the extremist leader of the Italian Socialist Party, rode to power.

The rationale behind many foreigners' (including Italian-Americans') support for the 20th century's first fascist dictator was to be found in platitudinous notions of "law and order"; somehow, many thought, perhaps Winston Churchill's friend, the "strongman" Mussolini, will be able to set Italy aright, stop the strikes, get the trains moving on schedule, and put the economy back on its feet.

Such well-meaning foreign observers were to find out how wrong they had been only when the British-financed Mussolini experiment was repeated in Germany 10 years

later. Twenty years after Mussolini took power, many of those same benevolent observers, especially on this side of the Atlantic, found themselves signing up as volunteers to fight what had emerged as a fascist monster throughout Europe. Even the British, who had bankrolled both the Italian and the German fascist movements, were impelled into action when their creature Hitler (Mussolini's ally) pointed his guns westward—and not merely against the Russians that Churchill intended to destroy.

Craxi's moves to become Il Capo

It would be well to recall the lessons of 1922-24 Italy today. For today a new Mussolini has emerged aiming to take power, and the same layers of well-meaning observers, guided by the informed pens of *New York Times* and *Washington Post* journalists, are knowingly nodding that a "strongman" is the only solution to Italy's troubles.

Italy's second Mussolini, Bettino Craxi, has just consolidated dictatorial power over his Italian Socialist Party (a subsidiary of the Socialist International which has vowed to bring down President Reagan). The 42nd National Congress, held in the Sicilian mafia's capital of Palermo, was a repeat performance of Mussolini's maneuverings within the National Fascist Party; like his

predecessor, Craxi used the congress to annihilate internal opposition and emerge sole PSI spokesman.

Craxi handled the congress so much like a Führer that the national press openly compared him to Mussolini and called him "il capo" (the boss or Führer). In the weeks of pre-congressional party assemblies held across the country, Craxi's powerful political machine, based on mafia drug running and terrorist networks, and oil by Qaddafi's Libyan regime, bought up delegates by the carload, so that, as the proceedings opened, he could boast a majority that only Mussolini had equalled.

In the party elections that concluded the congress, Craxi outflanked the corrupt and disorganized internal opposition fringes by turning the tables on traditional electoral procedures. Instead of allowing the general secretary to be elected by the Direzione (the national committee), Craxi railroaded through a statutory change allowing for direct election by the 350 delegates. Despite cries of "Savoy!" (Italy's former royal house), and "Down with the monarchy!" along with outright accusations of "fascism" hollared out in the hall, the vote went through and Craxi was proclaimed secretary by a more than 70 percent majority.

Corriere della Sera, the paper of national record just bought up by Craxi funds, commented that Craxi at the beginning of the congress "had taken delight in presenting himself as a Marinettian [Marinetti was a futurist poet and ally of Mussolini], a German, even a Mussolinian, according to some colorful definitions," and at the end was crowned "King Bettino."

This "coronation" as the press dubbed it, signaled the final phase in a long march toward power that Craxi has carried out over the dead bodies of numerous opponents.

Incremental gains

Former PSI Secretary DeMartino, for instance, lost all political clout in the PSI in 1977 when Craxi-related terrorist networks kidnapped his son and, through combined psychological and financial blackmail, destroyed him. Giacomo Mancini, the patron of terrorist Franco Piperno, who once sat atop a powerful mafia organization, has been apparently blackmailed into submission by Craxi's more potent machinery, and must content himself with barely 2 percent of the party. Simultaneously Craxi has been bludgeoning other political formations into submission as well, with Gestapo-like brutality.

First, the Forlani government, the current coalition that the PSI, with key ministries (defense, state holdings, finance, foreign trade, health) is part of. Forlani's government was forced to close shop and shut down parliament for the period of the PSI congress. Five national party chairmen (from the Christian Democra-

cy, the Communists, the Social Democrats, the Republicans, and the terrorist fringe parties) attended the congress personally. And as they took the floor to address the congress, they were greeted with abuse and blackmail.

The rowdy delegates booed and hissed DC Party Chairman Piccoli (the man who, ironically, holds the most responsibility for having created the conditions within his own party to let the Socialists into the government), and Craxi threatened him with a government crisis. Craxi stated that the Forlani government "will be the last of a certain type" and that "if the objective circumstances should be posed for a Socialist to become prime minister, we would not accept being turned down." To another of his coalition partners, the Republican Party, Craxi had another ultimatum: either accept a program to Craxi's liking at its upcoming May congress, or the new Mussolini would create a government crisis.

In short, Craxi's much-touted guarantees of "governability" for Italy were revealed to be based on a simple blackmail threat: do as I say, or I pull the government down.

Craxi's treatment of the opposition Communist Party was no kinder. Chairman Berlinguer's presence had been secured, according to insiders, only through tough arm-twisting involving Sicilian mafiosi. Following mafia killings of Communists over the past year, the Communist national daily *L'Unità* early last month raised the startling question of whether the assassinations were organized by PSI assassins, which adds credibility to the charges of such arm-twisting. So, Berlinguer went to Palermo. And Craxi, not hiding his deep satisfaction, quipped: "He didn't go to Moscow, but he came to Palermo. There must be a reason."

When a PCI representative later had some mildly critical remarks to make about the congress, Craxi dispatched a henchman to issue another threat; either the Communists behave and accept the PSI "for what it is," or they will pull out of the numerous coalition governments they have with the Communists on a local level.

Dismantling Italy

The "offer you could not refuse" that Craxi is making retreats of the footsteps planted by Mussolini over 50 years ago. Craxi proposed a global "reform" of the Italian parliamentary system, replacing the "superfluous" bicameral system with a presidential dictatorship. From that position, which the PSI plans to control, Craxi promises to outlaw strikes; eliminate the cost of living escalator and other social legislation, and put through Global 2000-style austerity. The economic program just released by Francesco Forte, a Central Committee member of the PSI and close factional ally of

Craxi, calls for a genocidal reduction of the Italian population from today's 60 million to 20 million.

Institutionally, Craxi has voiced his commitment to create a single "lay" party grouping, which, excluding the Christian Democrats and the Communists, would include the prodrug, proterrorist Radicals, the Liberals, the Social Democrats, the Republicans and—although this has not yet been stated, except behind closed doors—the historical party of fascism, the MSI (Italian Social Movement). That political structure would constitute the modern version of Mussolini's NFP, and would annihilate whatever it could not succeed in assimilating until a perfectly totalitarian situation were consolidated.

Although the utter dismantling of mass-based political parties like the DC and PCI may seem impossible, the Craxi threat is not to be underestimated. Despite the fact that the PSI controls only 10 percent of the electorate, it has risen to the position of literally conditioning Italian politics because of its decades-long policy of systematically undermining social institutions. Modeling its activities on the terrorist campaigns of Mussolini, the PSI has, since the tragic 1969 Milan bombings, used political terrorism and Watergate-style scandals to erode the nation's republican institutions. Any politician, trade unionist, magistrate, policeman, journalist, or intellectual who stood in the way has been ruthlessly mowed down. When, in 1979, the Andreotti faction was definitively defeated, the PSI stepped into government power, signaling the terrorists' de facto seizure of power.

If Craxi is not stopped by political developments from outside Italy, he, like his idol Mussolini, will go all the way to dictatorial control.

What that would mean for Europe and the world is simply what it meant last time round. The Second International and Jesuit forces backing Craxi's meteoric rise to power in Italy are intending to use that battered Mediterranean country as they did after 1922, as a battering ram against the Giscard-Schmidt European axis. The Second International's mobilization to unseat Giscard by electing Mitterrand and thereby to topple Schmidt hinges in part on the success of their operations in the southern flank. This points up the significance of Italy's de facto break with the European Monetary System (since Andreotti's 1979 ouster), its break with the Saudis (through a PSI-orchestrated oil bribery scandal) and its strategic economic ties to the outlaw regime of Libya.

Italy, under Craxi, is to be the first domino to fall in a series of planned Second International fascist takeovers of Europe's sovereign nations. Just like in 1922 and 1933. The question is: will the well-meaning observers abroad let it happen? Or will they prevent it before a third world war breaks them out of complacency?

The fate of France is at second-round fight for

The final runoff of the French presidential elections on May 10 is shaping up as the toughest and most crucial electoral fight in the history of the Fifth Republic.

What is at stake in these elections is the continued existence of the Fifth Republic itself, which the Socialist International's François Mitterrand has devoted his political career to destroying. Mitterrand was a leading supporter of the unstable, crisis-ridden Fourth Republic, in which he served frequently as minister. The Fourth Republic came close to destroying the French nation before it was saved by Charles de Gaulle's bold creation of the Fifth Republic.

Outside France, a defeat of President Giscard would mean the destruction of the Franco-German alliance, which under Giscard and his ally Chancellor Helmut Schmidt had been the most important factor in preserving world peace during the four years of Jimmy Carter's stay in the White House.

Second-round fight

The extremely close results from the first round "primary" on April 26 indicate an even tougher fight for the second round than the one that took place in 1974, when Giscard defeated Mitterrand in the runoff by a margin of only 400,000 votes.

Mitterrand's vote last week was higher than the total he achieved in two previous presidential bids. An additional indication of how tough a fight lies ahead for the next two weeks is that if one simply adds to Mitterrand's vote the percentage achieved by several left and extreme-left candidates and one ecologist candidate—all of whom have to pull out of the race—Mitterrand tops the 50 percent mark.

However, the result of the second round is never determined on the basis of simply adding up "left" and "right" votes from the first round. That is the trap confronting Giscard between now and May 10.

The results of the April 26 election also serve to