

Report from Rome by Claudio Celani

Communists set back in elections

But with Socialist Party leader Bettino Craxi doing Moscow's bidding, the only good news is emergence of the "Patrioti."

For the first time in the postwar period, the Italian political landscape, characterized by a strong Communist Party backed by one-third of the electorate, might change. This was signaled by the results of partial administrative elections, held in several cities throughout the peninsula at the end of May. The Communists (PCI) suffered a severe loss of 3.5% on average; the Christian Democrats, Italy's biggest party, gained an average of 1% against predictions of losses due to the economic crisis; but the big winner was the Socialist Party of Bettino Craxi, which gained an impressive 4%.

The growth of the Socialists and the collapse of the Communists brings forth a scenario that political pundits have been predicting for decades—the emergence of a French-style left cartel, with a strong Socialist Party dominating a coalition in which the Communists have a minority of votes, and hence represent no real danger to democracy. So far, this scenario had been defied by the seemingly solid vote of the PCI, ranging around 30%, as the late party leader Enrico Berlinguer attracted increasing numbers of middle-class votes and threatened to “pass” the Christian Democrats. Now, under the shallow leadership of Alessandro Natta, the Communists have been unable to stop an electoral slide that could soon see the Socialists “pass” the Communists.

Unfortunately, all this is not good news. The press analyses that the emergence of a social-democratic, “European Left” in Italy, and the disappearance of the Communists means

the end of the Soviet influence in Italy, have yet to be demonstrated. Indeed, Craxi's party has so far signaled exactly the opposite.

It was the Socialist Party, in fact, that promoted the anti-nuclear referendum that put an end to Italy's nuclear program, culminating in the halt to construction of the Montalto di Castro plant, and the closure and dismantling of the modern Caorso plant and the older Trino Vercellese plant. That decision has squandered investments that amount to at least 7 trillion liras, exactly the amount the government is now trying to obtain through budget cuts and tax increases in the effort to “balance the budget.” Italy depends on imported oil for 80% of its power needs, the highest percentage among industrialized countries. It will be forced to import electric energy from France and Switzerland in the future due to the decision to renounce nuclear energy. Depending on oil also means depending on Moscow's allies such as Qaddafi and Khomeini, or Armand Hammer's Occidental Petroleum.

The Socialist Party's anti-nuclear campaign was instigated by Socialist International chairman Willy Brandt, who was recently in Moscow to discuss a common action among Socialist and Communist parties in Europe.

The reasons for the Socialist victory are to be found in the defeatist behavior of the pro-Western parties, rather than in positive programs or merits. Given the choice of voting for parties and candidates who have the same policy, the voters voted for the most arrogant ones, and that is Bettino

Craxi's Socialists, whose lust for power definitely outdoes the already proverbial greed of the Christian Democrats.

The real hope of the 1988 Italian vote, therefore, does not come from the PCI defeat, but from the emergence of the “Patrioti d'Italia,” a political grouping connected to Lyndon LaRouche's international movement, chaired by Fiorella Operto. The Patrioti participated for the first time in the elections in Nave, a small town near Brescia, where they scored 1.4% of the vote. The Patrioti beat the MSI (neo-fascists) and the Liberal Party, a party which holds such key government posts as the defense ministry. Further, many protest votes were given both to the Patrioti and the Christian Democracy, and therefore canceled each other out.

The Patrioti spent very little on their campaign, but succeeded in introducing key issues, such as the fight for a New World Economic Order, the AIDS issue, and the need for classical culture in public education. The pro-austerity Republican Party of former Premier Giovanni Spadolini was hit by this, and lost votes to the effect of being excluded from the city council. Key to the encouraging result for the Patrioti was the organizing drive led by Franco Adessa, head of the slate, which drew good press coverage before the vote in the local newspaper, *Il Giornale di Brescia*. “The election campaign is a chance to educate people,” Adessa is quoted in *Giornale*, together with Costanzo Rivadossi, a former city councilman who decided to run with the Patrioti because his party, the Christian Democracy, is negating its tradition.

The Patrioti in Nave have started to build a movement which has national roots and will be consolidated in the coming weeks and months.