

Italy's elections: Will the Trilateral Commission's dream come true?

by Leonardo Servadio

On April 5, there will be new elections in Italy. The electoral battle has been ongoing for months now, with old and new scandals emerging and re-emerging every day. But it is not the usual election campaign; some have compared it to the 1948 elections, which saw a frontal clash between the Popular Front of the Communist and Socialist parties on the one side, and the Christian Democracy and its allies on the other. At that time, the issue was whether Italy would stay with the "western world," or go with the Soviet Union. Now, the issue is what kind of institutional change Italy should undergo.

The most drastic changes, in the direction of a "presidential" system (Italy, since the end of World War II, has been governed by a parliamentary system), are called for by a variety of forces which include President Francesco Cossiga; the Republican Party of Giorgio La Malfa; the Socialist Party of Bettino Craxi; and the emerging "Leagues" (led by the North League of Umberto Bossi), which since the 1990 local elections in Lombardy, the country's richest and most populous region, has attained as much electoral strength as the Christian Democracy. Changes of a more limited scope are proposed by the Christian Democracy and by the former Communist Party, now called the Party of the Democratic Left (PDS).

All the changes proposed go in the direction of strengthening "executive power"; but the "presidential" option would require a total change in the political structure of the country, and aims quite openly at excluding from the government the Christian Democracy, which has been, in part, the political instrument of the Catholic Church. Therein lies the crux of the matter, rather than in the formal mechanisms of government per se.

The economic issues

In an interview published by the daily *La Repubblica* at the end of February, Prof. Ralf Dahrendorf, the renowned "political scientist" of Oxford, said: "In order to have a healthy economy, countries must have a low inflation rate, adequate interest rates, and, above all, a public debt and a budget deficit of acceptable dimensions. It is precisely in these areas that Italy, together with Belgium, has grave difficulties. And I believe that, if these difficulties remain, Italy

will be excluded from the construction of Europe; this will damage Europe, and will damage Italy."

The Italian public debt has reached unprecedented heights. The current account deficit in 1990 represented 11% of the Gross National Product, or 143,815 billion liras; the total public debt toward the end of 1991 was 1,440,963 billion liras (over \$1 trillion), well above 100% of GNP, with a tendency to double every 10 years.

The argument of those who propose the "presidential" system is that the "parliamentary" system necessarily leads to an inability to control public expenses. Since the "presidentialists" can hardly ignore the economic crisis in the "presidential" United States, it is clear that their aim is not really to "save" the economy at all, but to impose a political change. Italy needs a "thin but effective government," said Dahrendorf in his interview, calling for a change to be effected at the political level: "The Italian Republican Party represents one such source of ferment for change, and I wish them success." His interview was published on the day of the Republican Party congress.

The heavily Anglophile Republican Party stayed out of the current government, led by Giulio Andreotti; it was quite strange that the Republicans decided to do so in 1990, when this government was created, since they have been the most consistent ally of the Christian Democrats in the government ever since the early postwar period. The Republican Party represents some 3% of the electorate, and it has definitely no possibility of becoming an "alternative" to the Christian Democracy (DC). Why pick a fight with the party with which they have been coalition partners for so many years? Yet during the past year, La Malfa, the leader of the Republican Party, has continuously attacked the DC.

The Trilateral strategy

In the summer of 1983, the Trilateral Commission met in Rome, and analyzed the political situation in Italy. The commission established that the Italian political system was too "blocked," since it was centered on the Christian Democracy. This should be changed, they said, with the introduction of a system of "alternation." But Italy does not have two big political entities, like the United States does; there are

three, the Trilaterals concluded: a Catholic pole, which should continue to be represented by a smaller DC; a Socialist pole, which should be constituted by an alliance between the Socialist Party (PSI) and the Communist Party (then the PCI, now the PDS), with the last in a subordinate position; and a "lay" pole, including all the other non-Catholic forces, led by the Republican Party. The Republican Party in Italy is considered the party of "money"—of the banks.

With the collapse of the communist system in 1989-90, evidently the conditions required by the Trilateral Commission started to be realized. The Communist Party started to lose votes, and everybody now expects that with the new elections, it will be overtaken by the Socialist Party. Already, important local governments have been formed in Milan and Brescia (two leading industrial cities in the north of Italy), thanks to some important representatives of the PDS, who decided to join the PSI, thus giving that party enough strength to create governments in coalition with the DC. The PDS is still the second-largest party in Italy.

The DC also started to lose votes, at least in northern Italy, to the advantage of the Lombardy League, also called the North League. As a matter of fact, it was when the Lombardy League in 1990 got some 20% of the votes in local elections, reaching the same percentage as the DC, that President Cossiga started to push openly for a presidential system, directly entering the arena of political discussion, as no other President had done before.

Now President Cossiga is engaged in a fight to prevent the DC from establishing an alliance with the PDS over the issue of institutional reforms. Cossiga has been denouncing the emergence of a new "historical compromise" between the DC and PDS—as at the time of Aldo Moro, the DC leader killed by the Red Brigades after organizing in 1978 a government supported by the PCI, aimed at giving Italy relative independence from American influence (see article p. 46).

A cultural issue

Both the Italian Church and the Vatican have, through their press, criticized Cossiga repeatedly. It is not new for the DC to come under attack from a variety of forces and for it, in order to defend its positions, to call on the support of the communists. What makes the attack particularly violent this time, is that it is happening in a cultural context which is highly degraded, where the principles of morality which go with a Christian vision of life have been largely forgotten by the population. The dominating culture is "lay," consumerist, and hedonistic. It is significant in this regard that Italy now has a fertility rate of approximately 1.3 children per woman: a rate of reproduction well below zero. People prefer to spend their money on new cars, than on children. It is in the context of this new hedonistic culture that the Republican Party entertains the Trilateral Commission's dream, to defeat the Christian Democracy.

Green Queen supports Earth Summit

by Mark Burdman

Britain's Queen Elizabeth II has taken the unusual step of issuing a statement, in her own name, supporting the June 1-12 U.N. Conference on the Environment and Development in Brazil, the so-called Earth Summit or Eco-92. The occasion was the March 9 annual Commonwealth Day Message, in which Her Majesty, speaking in her capacity as "Head of the Commonwealth," called on the Commonwealth nations to mobilize to ensure the success of the Rio event.

The Queen's message is inclusively noteworthy because of her explicit endorsement of the concept of "stewardship" of the Earth. This concept has been put forward by the ecolingo movement as a gnostic-pagan alternative to the injunction in the Book of Genesis for man to be "fruitful and multiply" and to assert "dominion" over nature. Heretofore, she left such gnostic pronouncements up to her husband, Prince Philip, and to her son Prince Charles. For her to issue such a statement may contain the seeds of a constitutional controversy in the United Kingdom, since the Queen is formally the head of the Church of England and is obliged to uphold the principles of Christianity in that capacity.

That the Queen would so speak, also bespeaks the British



Promoters of the "green" agenda: Queen Elizabeth II with George Bush at the White House, May 1991.