

IN THE WORLD

ITALY

Rightist "rigor" is rejected by voters

By Diana Johnstone

ROME

ITALIANS DID NOT DO AS THEY were told. For months they had been told that, luckily for them, their permanent ruling party, Christian Democracy (DC), had a dynamic new leader, Ciriaco de Mita, who was going to bring Italy up to date in line with the "economic rigor" policies of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

Business leaders were delighted and the Italian people were supposed to be delighted as well. Commentators, the media and opinion polls told them that, in fact, they were.

The left was in a slough. Abroad, Mit-

percent. The PCI held its own with 30 percent. Never has the gap between the two largest parties been so slim.

Moreover, the PCI is reinforced in the economic and cultural centers of northern Italy, whereas the Christian Democrats are more and more becoming the leading party of the boondocks.

The PCI edged ahead of the DC in the country's economic capital, Milan, as well as in Venice and Rome, and improved its lead over the DC in the important industrial centers of Turin and Genoa. In traditional strongholds of Emilia Romagna and Tuscany, with their rich cultural centers like Bologna and Florence, fully half the electorate now votes Communist.

Craxi's Socialists did not manage to reap the full benefit of the DC collapse.

ery and jobs. There is a natural consensus in the propertied classes to try for whatever model of economic recovery seems most feasible, regardless of its effect on employment. These influential classes give political parties the task of gaining majority approval for such policies.

The Italian elections show that neither the Christian Democrats nor the Socialists have had great success in "selling" such policies. Christian Democracy is traditionally a mass party whose power is based on distribution of favors—a political practice and philosophy quite in opposition to the survival-of-the-fittest "rigor" suddenly preached by De Mita, to the applause of international financiers and bankers. The Socialist Party has a middle-class wing of technicians and professional people with a place to carve out for itself in a ruthlessly "modern" economy, but meanwhile the PSI's traditional labor constituency has been transferring its votes to the PCI. All the publicity for economic "rigor" turned out to benefit the party that has always preached it—the Republican Party, Italy's traditional party of free enterprise. But it is a party whose expansion is limited by a clearly defined upper-class base.

Another beneficiary of the much-advertized worldwide "swing to the right" were the fascists of the Italian Social Movement (MSI), who enjoy a sort of extra-territorial power base in parts of the Italo-American community in the U.S. The MSI's nationwide increase of from about 5 to 7 percent of the vote was distributed very unevenly, with the biggest gains in poor southern areas where the deepening insecurity of unemployment and criminality create a growing middle-class demand for order. The fascists scored highest in troubled Naples, with 20 percent, mostly at the expense of the Christian Democrats who fell behind the PCI, now the city's number one party.

"With the collapse of the Christian Democrats, a blow has been struck at the attempt to impose a right turn on Italian politics," PCI general secretary Enrico Berlinguer told the election night crowd. "For the first time it would be numerically possible to form a government without the DC."

This is an unexpected encouragement to the PCI's new "democratic alternative" line, after the failure of the "historic compromise" attempt to govern alongside the DC. Technically, the "democratic alternative" is now possible in terms of a coalition between the PCI and all the other smaller left and center parties. Politically, this is out of the question at present, not so much because Craxi says no (the opportunism and talent for compromise of Italian politicians have overcome much greater obstacles) as because the international climate is overwhelmingly hostile. But in the long run...

The elections were then a surprise moral victory for the PCI after its definitive break with the Soviet model and adoption of the democratic left line long advocated by Pietro Ingrao and the *il manifesto* group expelled from the PCI in 1969. In a happy reconciliation, the *manifesto* leaders who had gone on to form their own Democratic Party for Proletarian Unity (PDUP) were assured of re-election by a place of their own on the PCI electoral lists. In Milan, PDUP

leader Luciana Castellina scored a personal triumph. There were also good scores for other independents given places on the PCI list: jurist Stefano Rodota and Franco Bassanini, who was expelled from the PSI for his objections to the cruise nuclear missile base in Comiso, Sicily.

Peace movement boost.

Castellina, Rodota and Bassanini are all prominent members of the editorial staff of *Pace e Guerra*, the political weekly that has become the voice of the peace movement in Italy. The elections are an encouragement to the peace movement, which has a potential central role to play in the building of a new left coalition.

Opposition to the missiles and to rearmament was also a main campaign issue for the small far-left party Proletarian Democracy (DP), which got into the parliament for the first time with votes mostly from the northernmost part of the country. PCI, PDUP and DP are the main political components of the peace movement so far, alongside the Italian Catholic Workers Association (ACLI). This willingness, even eagerness, to work with independent parties to its left is a little-noticed but significant sign of the PCI's democratic evolution.

In Sicily, the Christian Democrats lost heavily, the PCI held its own and advanced slightly in Palermo and Caltanissetta, and a good part of the DC losses were taken up by the MSI, which got about 12 percent. In Comiso itself, the Christian Democrats lost three seats, the Socialists picked up three and the Communists, the largest party, gained one. In the small island of Lampedusa south of Sicily, the PCI ended 35 years of Christian Democratic hegemony by winning 55 percent of the vote.

The future of the fight around the missile base at Comiso cannot be read in these figures. In an interview in *Le Monde* on June 15, FIAT president Giovanni Agnelli said he thought that "if the elections had been held in six months the question of the missiles would have been in the center of the campaigns."

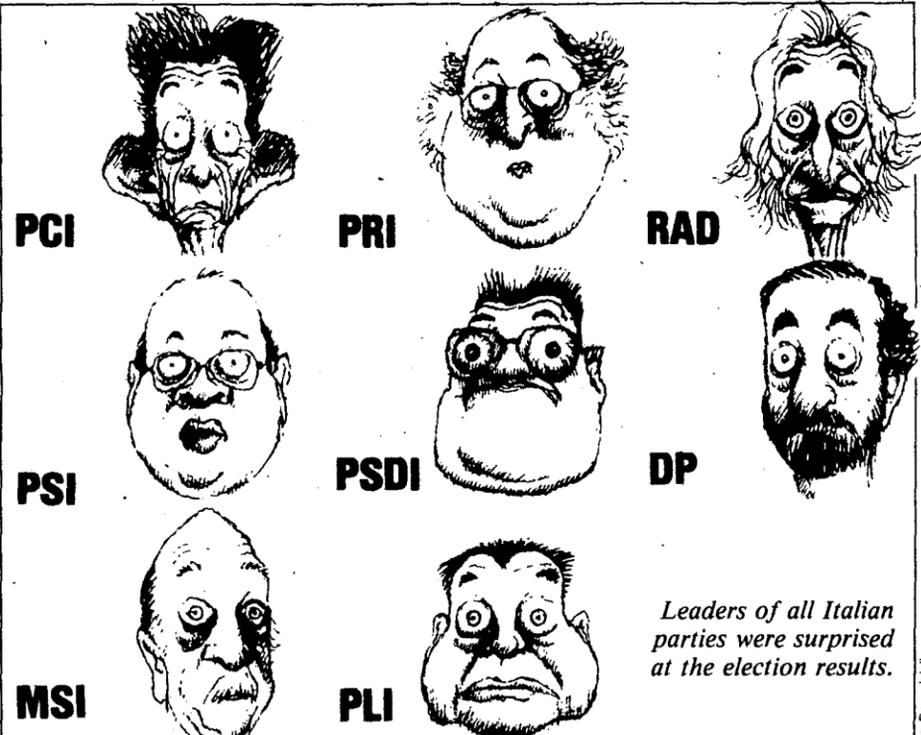
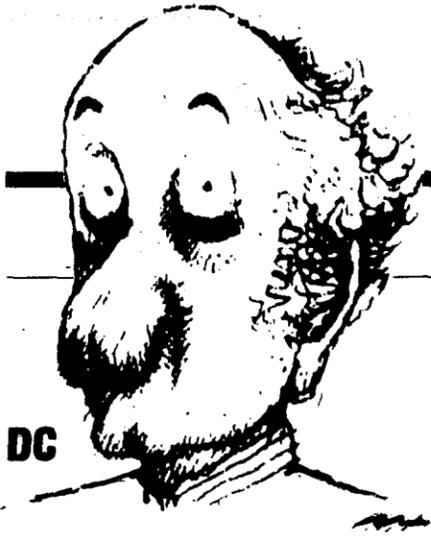
"But you know," he added, "Italy is a fatalistic country, a frontier country between the North and the South, the Mediterranean and Europe, and Italians have a tendency to think that they are not really masters of their fate."

It is this fatalism that Italian leaders are counting on so that they can ram through the stationing of American cruise missiles. Leaders of the governmental parties have their own political reason, alluded to by Agnelli in the same interview. The Communist Party has to prove it has changed, to gain "reliability," he said. "But what proof can it give? In foreign policy, it has adopted a position toward the USSR that none of its fellow Communist parties has taken. And it did so with success. Hereafter, it must define itself on the question of the missiles...."

The Euromissiles came along just in time to provide a new "test" with which the government parties could flunk the PCI as ineligible to share government in a province of the American empire. Thus these parties can hope to go on dividing up government spoils among themselves for the next 35 years just as they have for the last 35 years.

Tied to this political consideration is the growing importance of the Italian arms industry, one of the few sectors of the economy that continues to show a profit. Italy is the world's fourth arms exporter—after the U.S., the USSR and France—and to keep this position in an increasingly competitive world market requires a government that will give priority to promoting arms sale contracts.

Italy manufactures helicopters and other medium-technology hardware mostly on U.S. license for export to Third World countries. This industry is heavily dependent on the U.S. both technologically and politically—which amounts to another good reason for keeping the PCI out of government forever. Yet even without government prospects, the PCI's popular support refuses to go away.



terrand appeared too Gaullist to provide the hoped-for encouragement to an Italian left alternative, the German left had been defeated just when it was really getting interesting, Thatcher had been triumphantly re-elected in Britain, Spanish Socialist Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez was abandoning his opposition to NATO and to the Euromissiles and European leaders had come back from the Williamsburg summit looking like yokels after letting an economic summit be transformed into endorsement of the Pentagon's global strategic concept.

At home, labor had been weakened by unemployment and there was no possible political alternative since Socialist Party (PSI) leader Bettino Craxi had firmly ruled out any left coalition with the Communist Party (PCI). So in the June 26-27 national elections here, the PCI was supposed to start its rapid descent toward oblivion while Italians decided which conservative sauce they were to be eaten with.

It didn't exactly turn out that way, which is why there was rejoicing at Communist Party headquarters in the historic center of Rome as the returns came in. "Europe is turning to the right, but we are Italian, thank God!" someone exclaimed. Contrary to all predictions, it was Christian Democracy, not the Communist Party, that was going down to historic defeat.

When the count was in for both the House and the Senate, the DC had dropped from more than 38 percent in the 1979 elections to a postwar low of about 32.5

In Craxi's home town, Milan, the PSI with 11 percent of the vote was overshadowed by the Republican Party, which jumped from 5 percent four years ago to 12 percent. The Socialists' overall increase from about 10 to 11 percent was meager reward for all of Craxi's efforts.

It was Craxi who brought down the coalition government headed by Amintore Fanfani in hope of strengthening his party's bargaining position in the distribution of cabinet posts and other spoils of office. The PSI's position is indeed strengthened in relation to a weakened DC, but so is the position of former premier Giovanni Spadolini's Republican Party, with 5 percent nationwide and, moreover, the traditional confidence of the "enlightened bourgeoisie" of northern Italy's private sector economy.

What's happening here?

The Italian election results cannot be explained without reference to concepts like "class" and "capitalism." These concepts are taboo to mainstream commentators, hence their discomfort with the Italian election. Basically, the main underlying factor is a consensus on the part of the entire Western bourgeoisie for policies designed to bring about economic recovery in terms of assuring profitable returns for investment capital, but not in terms of creating jobs or meeting social needs.

As labor leader Bruno Trentin has pointed out, there is no longer any equivalence between economic development and employment, between recov-

BRITAIN

By Tariq Ali

L O N D O N

LAST MONTH'S GENERAL ELECTION results in Britain were no surprise. What is surprising is that many people appear unaware that the sweeping Conservative victory could leave a devastating imprint on life here.

The Tories claimed their victory was the conservative equivalent of 1945, when Labour trounced Winston Churchill's wartime party. While there is more than a hint of demagoguery in this claim, there is little doubt that the postwar consensus established that year by Labour has now been repudiated by the New Model Conservative Party, under Margaret Thatcher's leadership. What is different from Labour's 1945 landslide is that Thatcher saw a slight decline in the popular vote since 1979 and the anti-Tory parties together obtained 59 percent of the votes.

The two most noticeable election results have been the almost simultaneous changes occurring in Britain's two largest political parties. Thatcher has quickly utilized her base in London to force a debilitated band of industrial capitalists to toe the line, despite government-sponsored deindustrialization. The latter have been promised the pickings as the Tories start to denationalize or privatize the most profitable sectors of state-capitalism (British Telecom, the giant telecommunications network, is first on the list). Along with her defeat of the Tory's patrician wing, the brutal sacking of Francis Pym (senior Tory leader and former foreign secretary) symbolizes Thatcher's determination to end the long period of harmony between the nascent bourgeoisie and the aristocracy established after the monarchy was restored and the English Republic destroyed in the last decades of the 17th century.

There is a definite whiff of McCarthyism in the air here. Thatcher's second term threatens to be much nastier than the first, and not just for those who are out of work. There have already been hints that the political views of schoolteachers, polytechnic and university lecturers as well as those of media people will be closely monitored. Civil servants have already been warned that membership in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) could adversely affect their jobs in the so-called "sensitive sectors" of certain ministries.

During the election campaign, slick and smarmy Thatcherite Cecil Parkinson, chairman of the Conservative Party, pledged that "we are going to drive out extreme left-wingers out of British politics." This was a coded reference to the Bennite left inside the Labour Party that, despite losing nationally, still controls a number of important local governments, such as London and Sheffield. The leader of the Greater London Council (the nearest British equivalent to a mayor of New York), Ken Livingstone, recently announced that the focus of battle against the Tories must move in extra-parliamentary directions if they are going to be stopped.

Meanwhile, as post-election blues are replaced with semi-permanent despondency, one can discern three crucial issues, all interrelated, that have been raised by the election results. The first is the future of the Labour Party. Since the '30s and '40s, the anti-Tory coalition has been constituted inside the Labour Party. This coalition was badly damaged with the defection of the former right-wing Labour cabinet ministers who formed the Social-Democratic Party (SPD) and aligned themselves with the Liberals. This split led to Thatcher's election to a second term and a catastrophic decline in Labour's share of the vote.

What is the future of the Labour Party now that Michael Foot has announced his decision to vacate the leadership in October? The choice of a successor is sadly limited. A major tragedy of this election stunned millions of Labour supporters at approximately 2:30 the morning of June 11, when the results from



Gloom and doom: Labour left faces an uncertain future

Bristol East were announced. Tony Benn, the only national leader capable of providing a socialist alternative to Thatcherism, had been defeated by an unknown Tory stockbroker. This was the result of a year of political scheming by Labour's right wing and its chief hatchet-man, John Golding, who through a series of sordid maneuvers had prevented Benn from running in a safe Labour constituency in Bristol.

At that moment on June 11, the mood of socialists throughout the country went from gloom to doom since they lost a major voice in national politics at a critical juncture. This feeling was expressed best in the Fleet Street daily *The Guardian* by features editor Richard Gott. He wrote that Benn and Livingstone were Labour's only credible alternatives to the Tories. But instead of recognizing this, he argued, "the choice is between a Welsh gas-

There is a whiff of McCarthyism in the air. Political views of teachers will be monitored.

bag and a Yorkshire windbag." He was referring to Neal Kinnock and Roy Hattersley, the Batman/Robin duo currently being touted by the media as Labour's "dream-ticket" for party leader and deputy leader. This ticket is possibly a "dream" for the British establishment, but for socialists it is a nightmare. During the election campaign, Thatcher made many references to the Labour Party as if it were some form of preservative, expressing the hope that it would return to "moderation" and help to "make our politics much more like those of the U.S."

On the political spectrum, Kinnock is left of center, while Hattersley is to the right. Both are glib career politicians. Kinnock built his media reputation by vigorously opposing Benn during the

deputy leadership campaign of 1981.

Of course, they are in reality a non-choice. How revealing of capitalist democracy that it is the only one acceptable to the arbiters of British politics. It is almost as if the British state is saying to the Labour Party: "You have been a central pillar of stability for me. Over the last few years you have tried to escape my bear-hug. These two boys could bring you back."

The same old story.

This is a depressingly familiar view. Kinnock victorious would bring back Wilsonism without Wilson. A triumph for Hattersley would mean Callaghanism minus Callaghan. It is true that Wilson led Labour to victory on three occasions, but the policies of Labour in office (under him and Callaghan) also paved the way for Thatcherism. This memory has yet to be obliterated from working-class consciousness. Neither Kinnock nor Hattersley—updated mutants of those two former Labour leaders—will be able to resolve this crisis of strategy.

The roots of this crisis lie in Labour's inability to win back so far the employed skilled workers. A majority of them voted against Labour this time around. Only 35 percent stayed loyal to their old party, while 39 percent voted Tory and the remainder switched to the SDP/Liberal alliance. Thus it can be argued that the election marked the beginning of the political disintegration of the Labour movement here. This was best symbolized by electoral results in Corby and Barrow in Furness. Both of these traditional bastions of Labour power had long been almost impregnable. But Corby had recently witnessed the closing of its steel plant, and any anticipated backlash had been prevented by Conservative firmness coupled with seemingly handsome redundancy payments. Barrow-in-Furness was the home of Vickers armaments factory, which will get more contracts when Britain buys Trident missiles. On election day both towns returned a Tory member of Parliament.

This reflects the slow and not unpredictable death of Labourism—the traditional ideology of British social-democracy. The new debate inside the Labour

Party revolves around whether this ideology should be resuscitated or whether the political and economic situation demands a New Model Labour Party that is committed to radical democracy and socialism. The first course is favored by most trade union leaders, who seem unaware that the foundation of their house is under attack and that a well-heeled gang has already split with much of the old furniture.

During the last three decades Labour has relied so extensively on the British political system to return it to power that it has forgotten the ABCs of political organization. So the craft of becoming a political party will have to be learned all over again if the gains of Thatcherism are to be reversed. Britain now has three explicitly pro-capitalist parties. If the Labour Party remains permanently mortgaged to Labourism, it will die a slow but painful death. Kinnock and Hattersley might provide the facade of a temporary restabilization, but this would crumble either just before or just after the 1988 election.

A related problem is the theory question of electoral reform. Britain's antiquated single-member district system has long been considered an anomaly in the rest of capitalist Europe. It now seems like an outrage. Thatcher's "landslide" was based on a 30.8 percent turnout of the electorate and 42 percent of the votes cast. Thus the majority of British voters cast their ballots against the Tories. Considering these numbers, all the talk about a mandate from the British people rings hollow. If Labour had received the same number of votes as the Tories and had attempted to implement its non-nuclear defense policies, the outcry would have been heard all the way across the Atlantic. The common Labour argument against any form of proportional representation is that it produces "permanent coalitions." But it is in the party's long-term interests to argue for a system of representation that is more reflective of the electorate.

The example of Sweden and Austria over the last five decades is a refutation in itself, but there is a further and more relevant point. In a sense every Labour government has been a *sui generis* coalition against the Tories. It is the breakup of this old coalition that has produced the present impasse.

Labour is in every sense at the crossroads. Stoutly defending the *status quo ante*, many of its parliamentary leaders are like the Bourbon monarchs of old—learning and forgetting nothing. It would be a major tragedy if they waited for further debacles before altering course. ■

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