

ITALY'S "OPENING TO THE LEFT"

Is the New Coalition a Beginning—Or an End?

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Since the Italian General Elections of April 28–29, the buzz of speculation has been increasing noticeably. For they seem to have provided infinite diagnostic opportunities, as though to confirm Gaetano Salvemini's description of those scholars who incline "neither on the one hand to partiality nor on the other to impartiality."

Thus, the losses of the Christian Democracy Party (CD) to the Liberal Right are explained as a rejection of the "opening to the left." "On the other hand," CD losses to the Socialist and Communist Left are attributed to the slowness with which the "opening" was being put into effect. From yet another side, the losses have been attributed to the melting away of old barriers against the Communist class-enemy. Proponents of this view point with alarm to the encyclicals of the late Pope John, *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*. Even William Buckley, Jr., whose journal printed a quip about the first encyclical (*Mater, Sic Magistra, Noli*) felt constrained to defend Pope John (in a letter to the *New York Times*) from allegations of creeping liberalism.

There is, then, something for everyone in the Italian elections. The Conservative can say, "I told you so," the Radical can rejoice in the gains of the Left and the role of the Church in politics remains as enticing an issue as ever.

But the most exciting questions which are posed by Italian political data arise from the strength of Italy's Communist Party (PCI). In Italy's circumstances—a South of Balkan poverty and a North of Ruhr-like prosperity—can liberal parliamentary democracy be made acceptable to all interests? That is, will coalitions defeated at the polls accept their defeat without mounting the barricades? This is the first question, and it tests a democracy's health. The second question obviously is this: should the Communist Party be treated as other competitive parties within the parliamentary system? Two answers to this question of what to do about domestic Communists are commonly offered.

One is that coercion—stretching what are generally

regarded as acceptable limits in a democracy—is justified by the violence latent in the world Communist conspiracy. Thus, the movement's leaders are harassed, their meetings broken up, their members socially ostracized, etc. The second answer most likely to be offered is that in a healthy society, people of every social class will come to have a stake in stability. When the workers, so the argument goes, feel that they can extract more concessions by obeying the "rules of the game" than they could by refusing to play, the struggle for political power and influence will be conducted peacefully. Without the nourishment provided by discontent, the growth of communism will be stunted and it will wither and die.

A part of the fascination exerted by Italian politics arises from the fact that Italy has tried both coercion and concession. Her police forces—tourists still comment on the submachine-guns, armored vehicles and multitudes of uniforms in evidence—are notoriously heavy-handed in dealing with political demonstrators. In 1960, for example, when demonstrations were provoked up and down the peninsula by the acceptance of Fascist support for the ill-starred Tambroni cabinet, police action resulted in ten unarmed demonstrators being shot down in cold blood. (It will not do to shrug these off as "Communist inspired." The Genoa riots, for example, were widely supported and an out-of-breath PCI had to run to catch up to an aroused public opinion.) Riot-sticks, tear gas, cavalry charges, fire-hoses and small-arm fire have comprised one answer to the Communist challenge. Such coercive measures, however, have had no restraining effect on the PCI or on its popularity.

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The "opening to the left," finally begun in 1962, has been an attempt to implement the second answer by cutting the ground from under the party of Togliatti. Essentially, the "opening" refers to the fact that the majority Christian Democracy Party (it still controls 41% of the seats in the Chambers) solicited a benevolent neutrality from the Socialists, the members of the PSI led by Pietro Nenni. Having broken with the Communists (PCI) over doctrinal matters,

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the PSI has consistently refused to break all ties with their class-colleagues to the left. Aside from the fact that it is mutually profitable for their parties to present joint lists in local elections, the function of the Socialist Party, as Nenni has put it, is "to make war on capitalism not on communism." The counterpart to be offered the PSI for their refusal to vote against a Christian Democratic Cabinet includes reforms of the schools, more economic planning, meeting the constitutional requirement of creating autonomous regional governments, and nationalizing electrical production and distribution. For a price in program, the PSI is to allow to stand a reformist CD Cabinet whose avowed purpose was to persuade the PSI to break *all* ties with the PCI and to look to the bourgeois state for the reforms demanded by its rank-and-file. The recent elections can be cited as evidence that, even more markedly than coercion, this attempt failed to contain the PCI. The election results reveal significant changes in the last several years.

The Christian Democracy Party, in 1958, won 42.4% of the vote. In April of 1963, that proportion skidded to 38.3%, representing a loss of over 755,000 voters. At the same time, the two left parties, the Socialists (PSI) and the Communists (PCI), gained, respectively 45,240 and 1,059,400 votes. Taken as proportions of the national electorate, however, these figures take on a new significance. For the PSI, which had been supported by 14.2% of 1958's voters lost .4% in 1963, going to 13.8%, while the Communists went from an impressive 22.7% to the remarkable figure of 25.3%, meaning that one of every four Italian electors chose the party of the hammer and sickle.

The losses suffered by the Christian Democrats did not all accrue to the parties of the Left, however. Indeed, it is the fact of simultaneous gains by the *laissez-faire* Liberal Party (PLI) that provides grounds for so much brow-furrowing speculation. The PLI actually doubled its proportion of the vote, going from 3.5% to 7% by picking up even more voters than the PCI did, 1,094,972. How can the simultaneous Christian Democracy losses to Right and to Left be explained?

Let us examine the basis of CD strength to begin with. Even before World War II began, Mussolini had lost the support of the leadership within each of the groups whose support had made his success possible. By 1943, the disaffection of these groups—the army, industry, landowners and the Church—was complete and the diminutive King finally found the courage to order *Il Duce's* arrest.

Throughout the ensuing period of "co-belligerency," of Resistance and Civil War, the militant Left seemed sure to triumph. Having led Partisan bri-

gades, able to boast a consistent opposition to a wholly discredited regime, the Left was certain enough of the inevitability of its triumph that it laid down its arms (more accurately, cached them away against the possibility of a Fascist resurgence) and even helped incorporate the Lateran treaties between Italy and the Vatican (1929) into the new Constitution.

In fact, what happened was that the classes which had chosen to turn their backs on Mussolini and then on a drowning Fascist order looked elsewhere for an instrument to perpetuate their privileges and protect their prerogatives. They found it in the revived Catholic party, now called the CD. The consequence was that the people who had done the most to topple Fascism, end the Monarchy and create the Republic once again found themselves excluded from a regime led by the spokesmen of the very interests whose initial reaction to working-class pretensions had been a hysterical resort to Blackshirt "action squads."

In sum, the chief function of the Christian Democrats has not been to implement a positive program of social reform and democratization but to serve, as Fanfani is quoted as having said in 1958, as a "dike" against communism.

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That the CD, rather than another non-Fascist, anti-Communist party was cast in this role can be attributed largely to the role of the Church. Chafing under attempts by Mussolini to restrict its activities, the Church found it congenial to support the only party of Catholic inspiration. To the Right, the parties were either rendered impotent by their obvious nostalgia (the Monarchists and neo-Fascist "Italian Social Movement") or were unavailable to the Church because of their secularism (such as the Liberal Party, under whose standards pre-Lateran Italy had been governed). To the Left, the parties were either tainted by the memories of Garibaldi (the Republicans) or by the programs of Marx (the Social-Democrats and militant Left). The CD, on the other hand, was both available and amenable to priestly pressure on its behalf.

Contributing to the symbiotic relationship between a party supported by an "official" Church and a Church protected by the majority party was the enfranchisement of women. Studies by both French and Italian observers have clearly shown that a greater proportion of Italian women have voted CD than have supported any other party. Indeed, Mattei Dogan concludes his study of the 1958 elections with the eye-opening suggestion that if women did not vote, the Socialist-Communist coalition would have had a majority of the seats in the Chamber of Dep-

uties in 1958. In 1963, had the franchise been restricted to adult males, and had the CD lost its 62% female support while the Communists lost their 35% feminine voters, the Communists *alone* would have had a 200,000 vote plurality over their Catholic rivals. The actual swing of female voters to the Left, for reasons assessed below, testifies to their influence.

The CD's majorities can be seen, then, as a response to several imperatives; the need for a "dike" to protect both property and privilege and the need for a barrier against atheistic Marxism. What has the "opening" done to the CD's ability to meet these needs?

Obviously, a party which bargains with Socialists and offers to fulfill their programmatic demands in exchange for their benevolent neutrality is no longer a reliable "dike." It is primarily for this reason that many CD Right-wingers, democrats only by default, turned their faces and their votes toward the more congenial Liberal Party. Unambiguously opposed to making any concessions to the Marxist Left and an unwavering proponent of *laissez-faire* economic principles, the Liberal Party gained over one million votes, a gain which reflects recognition of the Liberal Party as Italy's "new dike."

The ability of the Christian Democracy Party to discharge its second function, that of acting as a barrier against godless communism, has not only been compromised by the negotiations with the Socialists, but by the initiative of the late Pope himself. His second encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, was widely hailed as marking the Vatican's embrace of the twentieth century. Like *Mater et Magistra*, it sought to come to terms with a secular, industrial and increasingly agnostic world. Yet because it drew a distinction between the doctrinal error of Marxism and the errant Marxist, many working-class women felt themselves, for the first time, free to vote with their husbands, fathers and brothers.

In sum, then, those who disapproved the "opening" as the first step on the road to serfdom shifted their vote to the Liberal Right. Conversely, that far greater number which doubted the sincerity of the Christian Democracy commitment to the promised reforms shifted their support leftward. After all, if the programs of the Socialists are worthy of support by Christian Democrats, there is really no reason not to vote directly for the programs by voting for their most convinced advocates. Itself a "federation of ideologies," the CD's position was inevitably ambiguous.

Yet one of the most significant pieces of data to note in this connection is that the recipient of these leftward-wandering votes was not the Socialists, but rather the intended victim of the "opening," the

Italian Communist Party. Indeed, if one distributes the 1,170,000 new votes among the parties in the proportions of 1958 and 1963, the Socialists should have gained from 161,000 to 166,000 votes. The fact that its total increment was an unimpressive 45,000 suggests that it lost heavily to the Communists, toward whose "isolation" the Socialists were tacitly contributing. To many class-warriors of the most intransigent wing, collusion with the Catholic center in order to break the working-class front is tantamount to class-treason. When, to such booming rhetoric, can be added the whispered aside that such collusion doesn't even pay, the intransigence can be expected to stiffen.

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Where does that leave the Christian Democracy Party? Its leadership is unambiguous on only a few points; one is that it regards as alien to the party's mission any move Rightward. Aldo Moro, Premier of the new coalition government, by exploiting the widespread hostility to just such a move in 1960 has made that point abundantly clear. A Centrist coalition would be rejected by both the gas-and-water Socialists of Sr. Saragat and the miniscule Republican Party. Presumably, if the CD is going to remain the strongest Italian party (and Communist gains should not obscure the fact that the CD still has 38% of the nation's votes), it must pay whatever price the Socialists will demand for their continued non-opposition. More importantly, the Christian Democracy Party will have to apply all its energies toward reducing the unsightly bulges left by years of virtually unchallenged power. Charges of corruption, moral laxity, graft in high places must henceforth be answered.

If a genuine choice between meaningful alternatives is a characteristic of democratic government, then Left victories, by forcing the CD to "renew itself," in a phrase dear to Moro, will have been most useful. For Italian voters in the future will have a choice. A widely supported Liberal Party is clearly becoming the lodestone of a Constitutional Right. On the Left, it is to be hoped that a unity can be created—perhaps around what Italian journalists once dubbed the *Kennediani* of the CD Left. But let it be clear that Socialist non-opposition must be obtained. Since the Socialists are keenly aware of this, the price exacted is going to be high, and will without doubt include concessions to the Communist Party. An "opening" designed to bring about a rupture between Socialists and Communists, in other words, has been doomed by the shift to the left of Socialist voters; but an "opening" which aims at genuine and sweeping reforms of Italy's social sys-

tem can yet save Italy's embryonic democracy.

Those in power cannot ignore the PCI, whose condemnation of the social order extant is endorsed by one voter in four. The alternatives seem to be either to make concessions to that party or for the State to find itself, as in 1960, toe to toe with a hostile population.

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The concession most likely to be demanded by the PCI-PSI—and, rather than risk civil disorder, likely to be acceded to by the CD—is withdrawal from Nato. Some influential Italians are writing that the “opening” is essentially anti-nationalistic. It is here that a number of disconcerting pieces in the Italian puzzle fall into place. For it seems to me that the element in President de Gaulle's policies which has provoked the least resistance among other Europeans is precisely the vision of a wholly independent Europe; independent of an overwhelming American social and economic influence; independent enough, in fact, to make its own way in the world. In precisely such a Europe, a non-Nato Italian government, “open” to the Left, would be able to add its voice to the increasing clamor for a resolution of Europe's differences with Russia. Common sense as well as the Italian diplomatic tradition argue that one seeks to negotiate while one has some negotiable commodity. Never likely to live like a lion again, Italy has one bargaining lever in dealing with the Soviet Union: her membership in an anti-Soviet alliance.

Opting out of Nato, it might be argued, would

be opposed by middle-class Italians. But I am not persuaded that this is a sound view. An accommodation with the USSR could be made to seem beneficial to a great many Italians. For example, all those sensitive to Italy's military weakness and ready to acknowledge that she would be immediately obliterated in the first phase of a European War (the more quickly since she houses American missiles) must look with some longing at a settlement which might reduce this certainty. Moreover, the business community, while militantly opposed to Communist-run labor unions in industry, is less opposed to lucrative contracts for Soviet purchases of Italian office equipment, automobiles, precision machinery, textiles, pipe-lines, etc. Italy's dramatically increasing productive capacity has been moving at a pace beyond the capacity of her national economy. The Common Market has taken up many of the surpluses; but surely, it would be worthwhile considering the possibility of opening a market “from the Arno to the Urals.” Furthermore, a policy of rapprochement with the USSR would hold out the promise of placating and silencing the PCI and the unions it leads.

Such a vision of a non-Atlantic, independent Europe is not offered because it is attractive, but because it seems the likely conclusion of events. It need not be hopeless. A sufficiently dynamic Europe might yet make communism superfluous, by creating a society in which whole populations can feel they have a stake. The initiative, however, must come from the classes accustomed to receiving deference rather than advice. They haven't much time.

“The total failure of total violence to provide the security we crave presents us with what is at once a pressing need and a great opportunity to develop some alternative means to achieve the security we desire and to preserve the values we hold dear. More than this, it provides us with a definite hint as to the direction this alternative must take if it is to offer any hope of success. Instead of contributing further to the denigration of man, a new approach to security must recognize and rest upon the concern for man—any man, including our potential enemy—just because he is a man. We must resolve that if, in the words of John XXIII, ‘individual human beings are and should be the foundation, the end and the subjects of all the institutions in which social life is carried on’ these institutions can never be given absolute priority over the worth of these individual human beings. Therefore, our means of defense must be so organized and our policies so developed that they find their effectiveness in the identification and exploitation of the essentially human qualities and capacities in ourselves and the potential enemy and not in the continued effort to destroy the greatest possible number of ‘them’ at the least possible cost to ‘us.’”

from AN ALTERNATIVE TO WAR by Gordon Zahn

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