

'A leftwing government is not enough'

New left leader criticises Italian Communists strategy

A leader of Italy's new left calls the Italian Communist party's policies "dangerous" and says "it is a race against time as to whether unrest in the movement and growth of our own party can force them to change it."

Giangiacomo Magoni, a member of the politburo of the Proletarian Unity party (PDUP), says the Communists "are supporting a deflationary policy that is going to weaken the working class and ultimately, it's going to weaken the PCI's own bargaining power."

The PDUP joined with two other new left parties to form a coalition in last summer's elections that polled 560,000 votes, winning six seats in Parliament. Although coalition parties form the second-largest left bloc, their membership of 40,000 is small compared to the million members of the Communist party (PCI), which polled more than 11,000,000 votes in June.

► PCI is sincere.

Magoni, who spoke on several American college campuses in October, says the Communists are doing just what they say.

"Americans often ask if they are sincere. As if when you have an organization with more than a million members and millions of votes you could be insincere. What is said by the leadership becomes the active policy of hundreds of thousands of people. You can't fool anybody when you're that big."

"And they back up what they say. They accept not only parliamentary democracy, but capitalism. They don't believe a transition to socialism is now possible in Italy."

Behind the Communists' caution, he says, is fear of American intervention.

"People here don't realize to what extent the U.S. is a dominating factor in Italian political life. Just to give two examples, our chronic deficit in the balance of payments means we rely on the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. The more indebted we become, the more dependent."

"Then, after the election last June, then-chancellor Helmut Schmidt of West Germany said that representatives of major Western powers met with Henry Kissinger in Puerto Rico to discuss the Italian situation. They decided that the Communists would not be allowed to take part in the government, but they would be allowed, and indeed requested, to support it externally, particularly the deflationary policy."

"This was the only way of checking the working class who must bear the brunt of the policy."

► Interpretations of Chile.

PCI and PDUP strategies are based on different reading of events in Chile in 1973, when a rightwing coup overthrew the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende with covert American aid. The Communists don't press too hard for fear of a similar coup in Italy.

"But it's like giving in to blackmail," Magoni says.

The trouble with PCI policy, he believes, is that it won't prepare people for the kind of struggle necessary to achieve independence from the U.S.

"Support for the deflationary policy will mean higher prices for utilities and the like, higher taxes and lower wages. That will weaken the working class, and thus the PCI. The momentum from the mass movement of the past years will be lost," he says.

"Dependence on the U.S. is like a cancer. We in PDUP believe that just as when you go for an operation you are much weaker right after, so if we

become independent from the U.S., things will be much worse at first. But in the long run it will get better. The Communists try to convince us we can live more happily with cancer."

"One way to read the Chilean lesson is to say that they did too much in terms of defying American power and of isolating the working class from the middle class," Magoni says, "but if you stick your head out a little, you get it cut off, but when you stick it out the whole way, there may be other consequences."

To avoid the army and police force turning against revolution, as in Chile, the PDUP is organizing a democratic movement among soldiers and police. "The PCI doesn't like this," he says. "They prefer to negotiate with the army and police from the top."

► To raise the threshold of involvement.

He adds, "You also have to look at another country that succeeded in becoming independent and socialist, Vietnam. They succeeded because they made it clear they wouldn't compromise. They raised the threshold of American intervention, made it very costly for the U.S. to win. And they did it in a way that appealed to democratic opinion in the U.S. and that split the U.S. on the issue."

He believes the explosion of movement among Italian students, workers and women since 1968, which has spurred the PCI growth, can form the basis of a socialist revolution, given leadership that makes the goal clear.

"Why didn't the U.S. go into Angola?" he asks. "Because it was clear they would have to send the marines in. As long as the U.S. can dominate Italy at no political cost it will do so. When it can't be handled through secret CIA appropriations, it will be more costly in economic and political terms to the U.S. and that's the only way to stop it."

"When we do this, we have to make clear to people what's at stake. People will have to make sacrifices, but for something worthwhile. Now, the people are making sacrifices under the Christian Democrats, but it won't change their relation to the government or their own daily life."

► A European alliance.

When the break with the U.S. comes, the PDUP would favor rebuilding Italy's economy by forming an alliance with other weak Common Market countries, like Britain, to bargain for a better position vis-a-vis Germany. They would develop Italian agriculture (Italy depends on agricultural imports) and negotiate trade deals with Third World countries. "We could break U.S. control over prices for raw materials and we'd get in return new Third World outlets for our industrial exports," he explains.

"But the central problem of revolution in Western countries is, what do you throw out the window in the revolutionary process and what do you keep? There are certain values of individual liberty and democracy in the broad sense that have been distorted gradually under capitalism, but are nonetheless real."

He points out that leading U.S. ideologues are saying the U.S. suffers from an excess of democracy. The examples of Watergate and the Pentagon papers have led the U.S. ruling class to no longer respect its own laws, he says.

In Italy, "either you expand democracy or it dies. That means bringing it into the working place and then you have to start to question the property system and the capitalist organization of labor."

"You have to say the production places belong to the people who work in them and to society as a whole. Democracy then becomes socialist, and incompatible with capitalism."



Giangiacomo Magoni: "Dependence on the U.S. is like a cancer."

In These Times photo by Jane Melnick

► A leftwing government is not enough.

"A leftwing government is not enough. You also have to have a great mass movement and a collective capacity to move for greater power in the plants."

The PDUP hopes to influence the PCI to take a more aggressive stance by continuing to build a mass movement that will demand more democracy. Magoni believes criticism within the PCI, notably by Luigi Longo, might lead the party to demand a share in government, but would not mean the other changes the PDUP would like to see.

"We can't influence them by arguing from within the party," he explains. "Just as the Italian women's movement was able to force the PCI to change its stance by organizing thousands of women who demanded the right to abortion, so we will be able to influence them only by building a mass movement that pushes them."

"The two instances in the Western world in which an attempt has been made to relate socialism and democracy—Czechoslovakia and Chile—have been cases of the most ruthless repression with the passive assistance of the other superpower," he says. "The reason is, if people get into their heads that they can have the whole loaf, that they don't have to choose between democracy and socialism, then you're playing with fire. You are talking about changes in the U.S., in Eastern Europe, in the whole international equilibrium of power."

—Judy MacLean

Rightists seeking Socialist favor

Rome. Italian rightists are pressing for a coalition between dominant Christian Democrats and much-fewer Socialists, with whom they were allied most of the decade before last June's general election.

This solution is also believed to be favored by the U.S. and attention is focusing on a visit that Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti will make to Washington early next month for talks with both the Ford and Carter administrations.

But the Socialists repeated recently they were not prepared to rejoin the Christian Democrats in government unless the Communists were included. This leaves only a new general election, in which rightwing Christian Democrats believe they could pick up votes.

Added to government difficulties, besides the bleak economic situation, is that Andreotti has a number of longstanding enemies inside his party who would like to see him fall.

An interview with a leading rightwing Christian Democrat last week was a sign of increasing unease among party rank-and-file, who suspect Italy is moving toward an "historic compromise"—an alliance between Christian Democrats and Communists.

—Reuter

You should see what you're missing!

"That television is crowded...with so much pap is a national disgrace..."

Public television viewers across the country were treated last week to a startling documentary in which a number of top writers and producers of commercial TV's primetime entertainment told what they felt about the "product." Remarkably frank interviews were intercut with clips from programs, illustrating the commentator's point.

What follows is taken from a program transcript by permission of the Chicago Educational Television Assn., which produced the program.

Announcer: Television. Why is it the way it is? ...The writers and producers you are about to meet feel you're missing the full creative potential of the medium. And they say that you've been missing it for so long that your taste for quality programming has been subverted...And to you, the public to whom the airwaves belong, they say, "Don't blame us, we're not allowed to give you our best ... And you should see what you're missing."

Larry Gelbart has been writer and coproducer of the highly successful CBS show "M*A*S*H," which he developed for TV. After writing 97 episodes, Gelbart has chosen to leave television and write for the stage and screen.

Gelbart: People who bring ideas to the television development people are often invited to leave their brains and their hearts and their feelings outside the door The hypnotic glaze that we've thrown over almost all America with this—I was going to call it pap, but I think it's more dangerous than pap. I think it's crap. We're going to pay for it somewhere down the line...

We have kids who have...never heard real laughter... I see my own grandchild watching television on Saturday morning, and he's watching animated cartoons that have a laugh track.... That's an imposition by a very small group of people on our tastes. He's being made to think that things that really aren't funny are funny because something is laughing. He's too young to understand what a laugh machine is and I'm too old to explain it to him...

I realize I'm criticizing shows that have audiences in the millions and millions of people, but I think that they're somehow being cheated out of the experience of watching television that can touch them, that can make them feel, that can make them care and can entertain them. I don't think that those are mutually exclusive.

Susan Harris is a relative newcomer to television. She has written single episodes for "All in the Family" and first became embroiled in controversy when she wrote the abortion episodes of "Maude." In 1975 she created and wrote the series "Fay," which was cancelled three weeks into the season.

Harris: Originally Fay was to be a divorced woman in her early 50s. I wanted to make [her] into somebody real, somebody who has problems, somebody who gets rejected, somebody who is scared. Somebody who is vulnerable.

I wrote the script for the network, and they loved the script, but would only shoot it if we lowered the age about 10 years and made Fay glamorous... They felt the public would accept it more. They like pretty people on television...

In the original pilot Fay was just separated. She was not yet divorced. They were drawing up the papers. They said we had to put in that she was divorced. People were uncomfortable with the fact...that she was dating and having another life. If they were divorced, it made it a little more acceptable....

Fay had just come back from a weekend that she had spent with a man. We had to change that so it appeared that she had not met this man when she was away. No affair could be mentioned. Her ex-husband comes in at one point and she says, "I'm having an affair, Jack." That had to be cut and changed to, "I met a man, Jack. I think it's serious."

Segment from "Fay," broadcast on NBC:

Fay: I met a man, Jack. I think it's serious.

Jack: Oh! I'm not surprised... I guess I was just hoping it would be later. After all, we've only been separated a few months.

Fay: Ten.

Jack: I guess I don't consider it the most dignified thing in the world at this time.

Fay: Well, I suppose your having an affair while we were married was.

Jack: Well, that's different, Fay.

Fay: With a 23-year-old manicurist...

Jack: ...One little indiscretion.

Fay: One indiscretion! Jack, for four months you had the most highly buffed fingernails in the whole state.

Ironically, he could talk about his extramarital affairs but she could never mention hers after they were divorced.

Week-to-week on a day-to-day basis [the broadcast network people] are with you on the script all the way. So you get notes every day about the changes that have to be made... One particular person is assigned to your show and he reports to his superiors. They go over your script and say, "Delete, delete, delete, delete." You call up and you scream and you win some and you lose some...

One of the most appalling cuts we did was in a show where Fay's ex-husband had what appears to be a heart attack, and Fay believes he's died. Her reaction to the news...is "Oh, my God, oh, my God!" That's the appropriate thing to say when one is in shock. They called and said no way could we say "Oh, my God!" I said, "What could we say in its place?" Someone at the network suggested, "Lord love a duck!"

The compromise we struck was she could say, "Oh dear God." [That] is reverent, and "Oh, my God" wasn't. She could say "Oh, my God" once, and the rest had to be "Oh, dear God." That was our compromise....

The response to "Fay" being cancelled was absolutely overwhelming. I don't know how many letters came, but even



Heresy: Joseph Wambaugh and Michael Gelbart on the set of "M*A*S*H."

the network admitted it had never gotten a barrage of mail like that. It had no effect at all. People were outraged, and the network—they couldn't care less...

It's a business. It exists to make profits. The profits are made by selling time. If "Fay" reaches—let's say a 24 share (that means only getting 24 percent of all the people watching television)—that's not enough because the other two networks are getting more.

They have to charge less for their advertising time and that's all they're interested in: the money they get...and beating the other two networks. So if 20 million people are watching "Fay" and there could be a show that 40 million people would watch, they don't care about those 20 million people. It's a business and they're in it to make money and that's all.

Abby Mann won both the Academy Award and the New York Film Critics Award for his screenplay, "Judgment at Nuremberg." His script for "The Marcus-Nelson Murders" won an Emmy in 1973. His most recent TV experience has been as creator and writer of the NBC series "Medical Story."

Mann: "Medical story" became a cop out, and stilted, and a bore... The series did not only differ from the intention I had.... Somehow in this inexorable stream of our society, it became the very antithesis of the reasons I wrote the for.... And when people talk to me they say isn't it a pity that "Medical Story" has gone off, I say it is surprising to me it didn't go off before this. And don't want it to be used as a whipping boy against other anthologies.... It wasn't what it should have been. It deserved to go off....

There are so many talented writers, directors and actors. I just can't help thinking what a pity it is that we don't have a medium that calls out for the best, rather than the worst.... That television is crowded from morning to night with so much pap is a national disgrace.

David Rintels is president of the Writers Guild of America, West. As a writer, he has specialized in court-room and political drama. In 1975 he wrote the highly acclaimed special, "Fear of Trial," the story of the blacklisting of John