

ITALY

Would-be revolutionaries beware

By John Low-Beer

At the end of June, against a backdrop of escalating terrorism in Italy, the Christian Democrats, the Communists, and the smaller parties of the center and center-left signed an agreement on a common program. While the program was hailed by the Communists as ushering in a new era, its significance was downplayed by the Christian Democrats (DC). Amintore Fanfani, one of the leaders of the DC, criticized the vagueness and generality of many key items. Subsequent developments are proving him right. No sooner was the ink dry on the agreement than splits developed on two important political matters.

One dispute concerned the implementing of the law transferring many of the powers of the central government to the recently created regional governments. The central administration is one of the political strongholds of the Christian Democratic party, and its factional bosses are reluctant to surrender control over their fiefdoms to the regional governments, many of which are in the hands of the Communists and their allies.

The second dispute was over the so-called "fair rent" bill. The original draft of this bill allowed landlords a 3 percent return on their investment. The Christian Democrats, supported by the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement, proposed to raise the profit to 5 percent. If accepted, this change would result in much greater rent increases than under the 3 percent figure.

A compromise has now been reached on the first issue, and compromise is in the offing on the second. But the disputes illustrate the weakness of the Communists' position. In both cases, they placed their desire for agreement with the Christian Democrats about the substantive issues involved. The Christian Democrats, in contrast, showed little desire to give way on specific issues. With conservative factions within the DC opposed to any kind of agreement with the Communists, the party has an excuse to renegotiate the program at each step. In the event that the program fails to meet its objectives, the Communists, who have courted the Christian Democrats with such assiduity, will be given most of the blame.

Communist lose ground.

Already now, the feeling is widespread that the Communists have lost ground since their surge forward in the 1976 elections. Their supporters want results quickly and have little patience with the notion of a transition period. They fear that the system will absorb the Communist party just as it absorbed the Socialists in the '60s.

In most cities where the Communists came to power in 1975, they have little to show for their two years effort. Bologna, the showcase city of the Communist party, is not typical. Under Communist rule for 30 years, it is a small city with a stable economy and population. Other cities with newly elected Communist administrations, such as Rome, Milan, Turin, Naples and Venice, face severe problems: fiscal crisis, shortages of reasonably priced housing, inadequacy of social services such as schools and hospitals, and transport systems deeply in debt. City governments have little autonomy in Italy, and the fiscal crisis reduces still further their room for maneuver.

As the Communists move toward an alliance with their erstwhile enemies, the Christian Democrats, a political void has been created to their left, which has been successfully exploited by the terrorist groups, who benefit from the sympathies of some among the frustrated youth unable to find jobs. In the last few months guerrilla attacks have become an almost daily occurrence. Most frequently their selected victims are shot in the legs. The targets are foremen and managers, conservative journalists and professors, and, in recent weeks, lower-level elected officials of



In Rome, followers of the Radical party rally in May in defiance of a police ban on demonstrations.

UPI

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the Christian Democratic party. Arson and bombings are also frequent.

Escalation of violence.

The escalation of violence in the last few years has been gradual but steady. In the early '70s, actions were primarily demonstrative in character. Cars were burned. Managers were kidnapped and later released. Over the years, connections were established between mafia kidnapers and terrorist groups. The jailing of some terrorists led to the recruitment of common criminals. Within the Red Brigades, the Nuclei of Armed Proletarians (NAP), and other groups advocating armed struggle, the first generation, who had their roots in the student movement of the '60s, was replaced by a second generation, much less timid in its use of violence.

Since last winter the atmosphere of tension and violence has been increased by the "Autonomy" groups. These groups reflect frustration among students with no prospects of decent employment, for whom the earlier phases of the movement have produced no results. Their philosophy is anarchistic. They do not carry out organized terrorist attacks, but they do come to demonstrations with pistols in their pockets, ready to use them should the occasion arise.

The strategy of the terrorist groups appears to be similar to that of terrorist groups elsewhere: terror will provoke repression, unmasking the bourgeois state and leading to a revolutionary upsurge of the proletariat. In all examples so far (Uruguay, Argentina, West Germany), repression has occurred, but the revolution has failed to follow. These examples make it obvious, if it was not already, that a guerilla strategy in a bourgeois democracy can only favor the forces of reaction. In fact, some evidence suggests that the ter-

rorists have links and support on the right, and that there are provocateurs among them.

If one of the goals of the terrorists is to bring about the failure of the Communist strategy of "historical compromise" with the Christian Democrats, they may well succeed, not in the short run, but in the longer run. After nine years of continued mobilization, the Italian left is pessimistic and disoriented. Neither opponents nor supporters of the "historical compromise" see an easy way out of the current crisis. Great difficulties face the would-be reformer, to say nothing of the revolutionary.

Barriers to change.

In the 30 years they have been in power, Christian Democrats have created a class structure admirably suited, at least until recently, to providing them with political support, and highly resistant to changes that might rationalize the economy. The main peculiarity of this class structure is the growth of traditional middle class groups that are elsewhere in decline (small businessmen, shopkeepers, small landowners, and small farmers), an artificial growth stimulated by the Christian Democrats and rarely opposed by the other parties who are all afraid of alienating such large groups of potential supporters. These traditional middle class groups as well as other special interest groups are very important to the Christian Democratic party's power base, and are able to block reforms whose necessity is recognized even by the Christian Democrats themselves.

The state itself constitutes a further formidable barrier to change. The public administration is riddled with people hired through patronage, and for this and other reasons is highly inefficient. It includes innumerable autonomous and semi-autono-

mous agencies, many of which have long outgrown their usefulness.

State-owned industrial conglomerates control a large part of the Italian economy. These groups are able to make large financial contributions to various political factions, and have become the bases of a private power often only nominally subject to public control. During the last few years, as a result of political pressures, these conglomerates have taken over many bankrupt companies, placing a significant burden on the economy as a whole while coming increasingly to serve narrow political ends. The machinery of government is relatively impervious to the policies set by Parliament. Delays of two to three years in spending money allocated by Parliament are very common.

The alternatives facing the Communist party are disquieting. Accepting partial responsibility in the present situation does not enable the party to prevent the development of terrorism and may even promote it. Yet the PCI is reluctant to return to the opposition. The Christian Democrats have already amply demonstrated their inability to implement the changes necessary to halt and reverse the downward social and economic spiral.

The Communists fear repeating the mistakes made by the left over 50 years ago, when its refusal to emerge from a largely rhetorical opposition in a period of crisis contributed to the success of Mussolini. Their greatest hope, utopian though it may be, is to bring Italy out of the present crisis with a strengthened democratic framework, thereby gaining support for further steps in the direction of socialism.

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THE CASE THAT WON'T DIE

In 1920, shoemaker Nicola Sacco and fish peddler Bartolomeo Vanzetti, both anarchists, were convicted of murder. They were executed in 1927, but the case, an international sensation, won't die.



Sacco, right, Vanzetti, Center, with a guard.

I. Librettos & Secret Papers

Eight years ago Robert D'Attilio worked as a part-time stage manager for the now defunct Boston Philharmonia. His chief musical achievement was the writing of a libretto based on an obscure Lithuanian folk tale. Looking for another subject for an opera libretto, D'Attilio decided on the most controversial trial in Massachusetts history, the Sacco-Vanzetti case.

In 1920 Nicola Sacco, a shoemaker, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a fish peddler, were tried and convicted of the murders of a shoe factory paymaster and a guard in South Braintree, Mass. In 1927 the two men, both anarchists, were electrocuted.

The case became an international sensation; from Berlin to Buenos Aires, millions protested. In Paris troops had to guard the American embassy. American intellectuals, liberals and leftists rallied in support of Sacco and Vanzetti in the vain effort to prevent their executions.

The subject seemed naturally dramatic to D'Attilio. The more he read about the case, however, the more convinced he became of its hopeless complexity and the impossibility of using it as the basis of an opera.

But D'Attilio's avocation soon became his principal work. Being fluent in Italian, he began delving into the newspapers and pamphlets of the early Italian-Ameri-

can anarchists, the milieu from which Sacco and Vanzetti emerged.

The Boston Public Library, which has in its archives the only film of the Sacco-Vanzetti funeral, attended by over a quarter-million people and marred by scuffles with the police, was interested in expanding its collection on Sacco-Vanzetti. D'Attilio began working jointly with Francis Maloney, the library's assistant director, in taping interviews of old-timers who recalled aspects of the case and times.

A grant enabled him to travel to Italy, where he did research in the government archives in Rome.

D'Attilio became a thorough expert on the case. Writers of articles and books on Sacco-Vanzetti regularly seek his judgement on its various aspects. He has an historian's fastidiousness about materials, unwilling to concede a fact until it is conclusively proven.

He is also reticent to talk about his own research, but he gives the impression that the book he is preparing will present some surprises. "I don't like to speak too much before my work is done," he says. "It does no good unless there are facts that show guilt or innocence. Speculation means nothing in the Sacco-Vanzetti case. Otherwise it's a waste of paper."

Asked if he thought the men were guilty, D'Attilio responded that there is no firm evidence establishing their guilt. He believes that there is "no question that they were unjustly tried. If they were tried in a different time they probably wouldn't have been convicted."

D'Attilio is also at the center of another, more recent, controversy. In the spring of 1974, he informed Harvard University's library that he wished to see a single envelope of documents it possesses; in the fall of that year he made a formal written request. This was the beginning of a protracted process that culminated with the Cambridge City Council passing a resolution demanding that Harvard open this package, which contains papers that be-

longed to former Harvard president A. Lawrence Lowell and is marked simply "Sacco-Vanzetti."

Lowell headed a three-member committee after the trial that advised Gov. Alvan Fuller that they found no basic discrepancies in the evidence against the anarchists. Although there is no way of knowing, it is widely suspected that some working papers from this committee are probably what comprise the sealed documents. There is a chance that they may shed new light on the affair.

Five years after Lowell's death in 1943 Henry Yeomans, his friend and biographer (but not the executor of his papers), gave Harvard a package labeled "Sacco-Vanzetti," on the condition that it not be opened until Dec. 9, 1977.

Yeomans' right to seal Lowell's papers is questioned by D'Attilio. He doubts whether Yeomans had any legal standing to do this. If the papers deal with state matters and are not personal correspondence (as is commonly thought, since Lowell was notorious for his consistently prim refusal to express personal feelings), then, D'Attilio says, they are not private property to be withheld from the public.

When Harvard denied D'Attilio access to the documents he explained his trouble to Cambridge Mayor Alfred Vellucci, whose political base lies with the Italians of East Cambridge.

In late January the Cambridge City Council unanimously passed a resolution asking Harvard to open the "Sacco-Vanzetti" envelope.

Harvard professor Oscar Handlin, chairman of the library committee, replied a few days later, "There is no indication that these papers deal with the Sacco-Vanzetti trial." On March 15, Harvard's general counsel Daniel Steiner issued a one-page statement rejecting the city council's request. He said, "If libraries such as Harvard's do not honor commitments, individuals are likely to destroy papers which will then not be available

By Sidney Blumenthal