

BOOKS

Straight talk about Italian Communism

THE ITALIAN ROAD TO SOCIALISM

An interview by Eric Hobsbawm with Giorgio Napolitano
Lawrence Hill (Westport, Ct.),
\$3.95 paper, \$6.50 cloth

The Italian Communist party was launched in 1921. In the following year the fascists staged their "march on Rome" and Mussolini was installed as premier. From 1922 until the end of World War II in 1945, the CP struggled to overthrow the fascist regime.

In its infancy, the party was compelled to grapple with very mature questions. Why did the Italian working class suffer such a catastrophic defeat? Why did fascism triumph? These questions reflected a painful experience: i.e., a profound crisis does not necessarily presage socialist revolution; it can also lead to the victory of fascism. On a global scale this lesson made its most traumatic impact with Hitler's conquest in 1933, but the Italians had a ten-year headstart.

One cannot begin to comprehend Italian communism without taking these and other historic factors into account. The first merit of Hobsbawm's interview with Napolitano (a member of the Italian CP's Secretariat) is its elucidation of the historic background and experience that helped make Italian communism what it is. Companion merits are the pertinent elaborations of the contemporary Italian and world contexts, of certain internal dynamics in the Italian CP's development, and of key Gramscian concepts that inform the party's theory and practice. Finally, there is the specific examination of the party's program and tactics.

The sum of all this is the most lucid and most competent exposition available of what Italian communism is all about. Because Hobsbawm is so keen and know-

ledgeable, and because Napolitano does not dispense official pronouncements and is not oracular or pompous, the interview acquires the flavor of a free exchange between peers.

The crux of the discussion is contained in Napolitano's declaration that "the fundamental task before us (in Italy and Western Europe generally) is to affirm working class hegemony through the democratic process." In the expansion upon this theme, there are some significant emphases.

With respect to the democratic process, for example, the recurrent emphasis is upon the direct, active participation of the many millions. This is not only a matter of desire or intention. Napolitano cites striking instances in which Italian Communists have acted as effective champions of grassroots democracy.

He refers more than once to Gramsci's injunction that a class aspiring to hegemony must be capable of sacrificing crude or narrow economic interests to reach a "certain equilibrium in compromise" with the social groups it proposes to lead. Preoccupation with narrow group interests contradicts Gramsci's conception of hegemony in which the working class is first convinced and then persuades other subordinate social groups that it possesses not only the economic and political competence, but also the cultural and moral authority to assume leadership of society.

In political practice this idea of sacrifice is not easily implemented. Discussion of the difficulties is broadened to encompass the overall issue of tensions and conflicts within any alliance that includes a variety of groups and interests, and it ranges from the Chilean experience, to Lenin's New Economic Policy, to present day Italian politics.

Even more complex, perhaps,

Antonio Gramsci, Marxist theoretician, as a young man.

is another policy flowing from the conception of hegemony. Dominating Italian politics is the recognition of a profound crisis—economic, social, political, a crisis of hegemony. In confronting this crisis, Napolitano argues, it is not enough for the working class movement to limit itself to denunciations of capitalism and its masters, or to actions purely in defense of the workers' economic interests. It must offer a program for resolving the crisis in terms that correspond to political realities. One of these realities is that neither the left alone,

nor any other single political force, can resolve the crisis. This, in essence, is the problem addressed in the "historic compromise" proposed by the Italian CP.

Many more specific topics are covered. The world communist movement. Internationalism. Attitudes toward the Soviet Union. The nature of the crisis of contemporary capitalism. The relationship between the Italian CP's program for structural reform and the transition to socialism. It is not possible here to summarize "positions" on even the most important of the topics. What is

suggested, however, is the comprehensiveness of the interview and its methodology.

We are not given a series of dicta. We are offered a critical examination of complex problems as they are confronted and perceived and responded to in action by one of the very few contemporary organizations that is a significant political and ideological force, not only in its own country, but in the global arena.

—Al Richmond

Al Richmond is, among other things, the author of *A Long View from the Left*.

Why poor people's movements fail as they succeed

They win through movements, not organizations.

POOR PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS: Why They Succeed, How They Fail

By Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward
Pantheon, 1977, \$12.95

Piven and Cloward have written a very important book, which calls out for discussion and debate. Their thesis is deceptively simple: poor people gain when they engage in the politics of disruption; lose when they focus on organization building, lobbying and electoral politics. In short, poor people win through movements, not organizations.

The authors bolster their argument with an analysis of two poor people's movements from

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the 1930s and two from the 1960s. Common elements can be identified in all cases.

As economic and social crises mount, poor people go through a transitional period where they stop blaming themselves for their condition and come, more and more, to see the system as the problem. (e.g., before the New Deal, with "welfare" mostly a private matter and economic conditions at their worst, an "unemployed workers' movement" began. "As indignation mounted... some people not only defied the prohibition against going on the dole, but some even began to defy the apparatus of ritualized humiliation that had made that prohibition so effective." Soon, large numbers of people with relatively loose organization came together "in sporadic street demonstrations, in rent riots, and in the disruption of relief centers.")

The revolt spreads quickly, and the first line of state defense (local sources of revenue) soon become exhausted. This forces local

officials, including big city mayors and business leaders, to lobby in Washington for federal aid and for progressive changes in the welfare law. These officials become, in effect, poor people's lobbyists.

If, however, poor people's groups themselves shift to organization building and lobbying, they lose their direct action focus, are coopted and doomed to failure. That is the lesson Piven and Cloward draw from the history of the Workers' Alliance during the Depression and the National Welfare Rights Organization of the '60s. On the former, they state: "That leadership failed to understand that government does not need to meet the demands of an organized vanguard in order to assuage mass unrest, although it does have to deal with the unrest itself." As for the NWRO, as it "gradually became enmeshed in a web of relationships with governmental officials and private groups, it was transformed from a protest organiza-

tion to a negotiating and lobbying organization... The political beliefs of those in the leadership stratum became more conventional, the militancy of the tactics they advocated weakened, and the presumed goal of membership expansion receded."

Finally, the hierarchical, representative nature of the organization removes poor people from its day to day activities. They lose their activism and with it a sense of themselves as powerful.

Although Piven and Cloward take a critical stance toward these movements, they give them their due. Both have played a role in the history they recount, and theirs is a criticism filled with understanding and passion. Certainly the movements have helped raise the living standards of the poor and eliminated much of the daily terror black people have faced. But more could have been done. The need to seize the right time to press the issue cannot be underestimated. As "periods of profound social dislocations are

infrequent, so too are opportunities for protest among the lower classes."

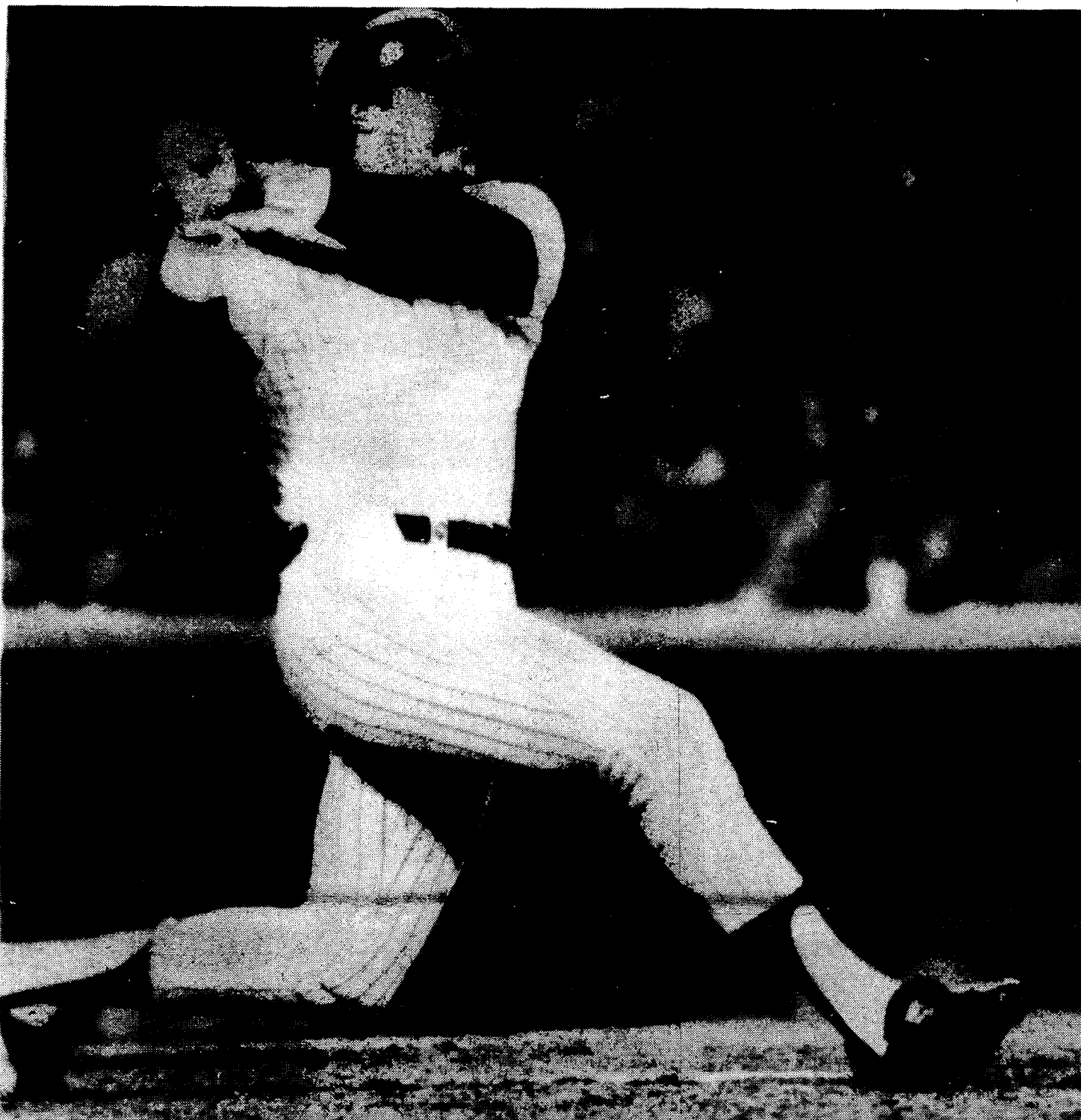
Piven and Cloward's critique of organizations includes unstated anarchist analysis, and the tactics they describe as successful might well be considered anarchist actions.

While disruption may work in the short run, can organization be dispensed with over the long haul? The authors do not deal with long term strategies, but they might answer that for the poor, long term planning is a luxury they can ill afford.

Another issue remains: the possibility of alliance between the non-working poor and the working poor. Scapegoating of the first group for the votes of the second has always been a dishonorable American political tradition. Bringing these groups together, while at the same fighting anti-poor politicians and legislation, is an honorable goal in need of a strategy.

—Maynard Seider

Free-for-all agents



Reggie Jackson's '77 season serves as a microcosm for the success of the draft. The big winner last year, he had an erratic season, but saved the day in the World Series.

By Barry Codell
Changes in baseball's salary structure gained a new foothold this month as the diamond's second annual free-agent player auction neared completion.

Twenty-seven year old Lyman Bostock, who has spent two and a half seasons with the Minnesota Twins, walked away from the grab-bag humming his new owner's favorite tune, "Santa Claus is coming to town." Bostock's \$3 million windfall came from the old cowboy and Christmas crooner, Gene Autry; in baseball circles, owner of the California Angels.

Lyman Jr., a line-drive hitting lead-off man who had a .334 average in 1977, reportedly rejected an even higher offer from the New York Yankees.

Bostock's father, Lyman Sr., toiled for the New York Cubans, Ethiopian Clowns and the Birmingham Black Barons in the early 1940s as a player in the Negro National League. Bostock senior's salary was reputed to be approximately \$4,000.

"I know the President of the United States makes \$200,000 a year. We all have our jobs," said Bostock. "Evidently more people support sports than the President. Singers and dancers make big money, too. An Elton John makes \$7 million a year."

Angel president Buzzie Bavasi was pleased about the decision to sign Bostock, whose salary while playing for the Twins was only \$30,000. "If Jimmy Carter could hit .336 he would make more, too. We live by the Golden Rule. He who has the gold makes the rules." Bavasi said nothing regarding the Angels' recent economy wave that resulted in the firing of secretaries and scouts.

(Last year Autry okayed the spending of \$5.2 million to corral three players: Joe Rudi, Bobby Grich, and Don Baylor. Rudi and Grich, however, spent most of

the season on the sidelines due to injuries. Baylor, under intense pressure from fans to justify his salary, slumped most of the year and at season's end, asked to be traded, claiming he was misused.)

Last year no aberration.

Bostock's teammate Larry Hise also found riches in the latest draft, signing with Milwaukee. Other new signers include former White Sox outfielders Oscar Gamble and Richie Zisk, San Diego and Texas, respectively; pitcher Doc Medich, Texas; relievers Rich Gossage and Rawley Eastwick, Yankees; and slugger Dave Kingman, Cubs.

Pundits who saw the 1976 free-agent bidding as a one-shot aberration were befuddled as this year's free-agents again were offered millions of dollars in exchange for autographs decorating multi-year contracts.

During the past season owners, fearing that last winter's offers had brought most of them closer to bankruptcy than a championship, had talked a lot about sobriety and restraint. Owners such as the White Sox' Bill Veeck and Philadelphia's Ruly Carpenter prophesied that the desirability of players selling themselves on the open market would be confined to their imagination.

Yet, by the end of the draft, all of the first-stringers among the free-agents had signed lucrative long-term contracts.

Carpenter lamented, "This time they [the owners] are wilder than ever. Last year, 24 players received an estimated \$24 million! And when my players see what inferior players are getting, they'll march in here with outstretched palms." He said the Phillies have a payroll of over \$4 million already, and though they set a team record of 2.7 million fans, they lost

"If Jimmy Carter could hit .336 he would make more too."

a "significant sum of money."

Nonetheless, the new system now seems entrenched. A player now has the right to move where the Astro-turf is greener.

Killing the reserve clause.

The change has not come easily. Until recently the team had absolute control of its players' services, including the right to sell or trade.

These rights were embodied in the reserve clause, which provided that management had the right to renew a player's contract if he refused to sign a new one. (It was also entitled to cut his salary 20 percent upon renewal.) In this way players were coerced into signing unfair contracts.

The reserve clause was challenged in the '20s and in 1922 Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes upheld its legality. Holmes ruled that baseball as an institution was not required to answer to anti-trust laws (the basis of the challenge).

In 1969 star St. Louis outfielder Curt Flood refused to report to Philadelphia after a six-player trade had transferred his contract to the Phils. He insisted he was "not a piece of property to be bought or sold irrespective of my wishes."

Flood sat out the following year while his case was pleaded unsuccessfully in U.S. District Court. He made a comeback attempt in 1971, but, citing physical and emotional strain, he soon retired.

In 1972 the Supreme Court ruled 5-3 against Flood, but, significantly, urged modification of baseball's anti-trust exemption through congressional legislation.

After the players' strike, owners accepted the idea of negotiating the standard player's contract, and binding arbitration of players' salaries became a reality in 1974. Flood's efforts had played a big part in pushing the 100-year-old national game into modern labor practices.

The reserve clause itself was dealt an historic blow in 1975. Arbitrator Peter Seitz ruled that pitcher Andy Messersmith's contract had been illegally renewed after he failed to agree on a salary with the California Angels. Seitz declared Messersmith a free agent, free to offer his services to any major league club.

Seitz, who had shaken the establishment a year earlier when he declared Jim "Catfish" Hunter a free agent due to a contract "technicality," was thereupon fired by baseball. His Messersmith verdict, however, was not overturned by the courts.

(Messersmith, ironically, was recently sold to the Yankees for \$100,000 by the Atlanta Braves, who had signed him to a \$3 million contract in 1975. Brave owner Ted Turner declared, "I want to go with the less-established, hungrier players." The deal was made pending approval by Messersmith, who confided, "I only want to play for a winner.")

The first free-for-all.

After the Messersmith ruling, players began to play out the final year of their contracts without signing—"playing out their options"—to see if better opportunity existed for them with other teams. These free agents were pooled and selected in a

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