

ITALY

Are Communists being led into a trap?

By Diana Johnstone

In mid-April, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) got bad news from Castellammare, an industrial town on the Bay of Naples. In city council elections, the Christian Democrats gained heavily, going from 33 percent in last June's parliamentary elections to 40 percent while the PCI fell back from 45 percent to 33 percent—a whopping loss of 12 percent. The PCI also lost ground in a number of small town municipal council elections, although by a smaller margin.

This puts the PCI in a bind. The Christian Democrats can cite the Castellammare results as well as the PCI's inability to control the labor base, as further reason not to accept the "historic compromise" of letting the PCI into a government coalition. And the PCI will be less inclined than ever to vote to bring down the minority government when that would mean fresh elections that might very well wipe out the gains the Communists made last year.

The April 17 municipal council elections may not indicate a national trend—in the provincial council elections the same day in Rovigo, in the Veneto region, the PCI made gains—but the electoral setback was the first in years, and is likely to be widely interpreted as the sign of a trend.

The predictable, indeed predicted, way things are going in Italy is disturbing. Chris Matthews wrote in the *International Herald Tribune* last Jan. 14 that there was no need for the U.S. to do anything to stop the Communists in Italy. "The Communists unaided are already doing a great job of minimizing their own influence in Italy," he observed. "For in their laudable efforts to be nice to Premier Giulio Andreotti, Pope Paul, Jimmy Carter, anyone in fact who can get them a step nearer that always receding mirage of the historic compromise, the Communists are getting badly out of step with the more than 12 million Italians who voted for them last June."

Trilateral Commission member George Ball made a similar prediction prior to the June 1976 elections. He argued that there was no need for American officials to make dire threats to keep the PCI out of the Italian government. Economic pressures (especially from West Germany) would be enough to create a situation in which the PCI's efforts to be "responsible" would inevitably bring it into conflict with its base.

In this scenario, everyone is acting on cue, including at least some of the far left, whose denunciations of the PCI sellout are part of the script.

Radical pessimists.

A sizable sector of the Italian far left, including Lotta Continua and the "Autonomy" movement, has been so convinced that the "historic compromise" was bound to succeed—because it provided capitalism the only solution to its crisis—that its militants have been behaving as if the PCI were already in power. The most violent of the far left groups in Italy are not trying to precipitate revolution, as did the 19th century Blanquistes. On the contrary, they are acting out of a most radical pessimism.

They assume that the PCI and the trade unions will play the role of Northern European Social Democrats in a corporate state along West German lines or that a fascist military dictatorship will take over. In either case, these radical pessimists foresee a long period of police state dictatorship, and fancy their task as organizing the first kernels of an eventually spreading popular armed resistance movement. This is the outlook of such urban guerilla groups as the "Red Brigades," which much of the left suspects are manipulated by rightist extremists, who use them as an element in the "strategy of tension."

The main carrier of radical pessimism within the working class movement and



Rome police search members of ultraleft "autonomous collectives" during the May Day demonstrations, where they clashed with Roman trade unionists.

Photo by UPI

the main parent of the "Autonomy" movement has probably been Lotta Continua (Constant Struggle), founded in 1969 by a fusion of student and worker local organizations. It claimed some 10,000 militants until it took its spontaneism to its logical conclusions last fall and "dissolved itself into the movement."

For seven years Lotta Continua displayed considerable tactical resourcefulness in organizing around specific issues, along with a total lack of strategic intelligence. This combination is characteristic of a certain number of "Maoist" movements of the 1960s, whose militants functioned quite well on the basis of a revolutionary hope nourished not by any analysis but by triumphalist myths and by mimicry of the (supposedly) dedicated lifestyles of the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutionaries. Such movements tended to adopt a populist, anti-intellectual style that kept their leaders sheltered from any critical analysis of their strategic notions.

Living with the earthquake.

The results of the June 1976 elections, in which the left in general and the revolutionary left in particular (with only 1.5 percent of the vote) did much worse than its leaders had predicted, threw Lotta Continua into a serious crisis. The steadily rising movement had not risen as much as they had thought, the general offensive of the masses was much farther off than anticipated, the struggle was not only constant, it began to look eternal.

This led part of its membership, especially the women, to undertake a radical criticism of militant practice: if they were going to have to go on living like this for many years, some things would have to be changed. Rebellion had been growing among the women of Lotta since the organization's men attacked a women's demonstration in Rome in December 1975 to drag them, in the name of proletarian solidarity, out of the company of bourgeois feminists."

Some women say that Adriano Sofri de-

cided to dissolve the organization as a final way to avoid the self-criticism demanded by the feminists.

Sofri and the leadership group, with no clear strategy to offer and having grossly misjudged the political situation, avoided serious political criticism from their own rank-and-file by declaring an end to the discussion without solution. Sofri maintained that since collaboration between the PCI and the Christian Democrats was now the basis of a durable status quo, there were no more "political contradictions" but only "social contradictions," which militants should sound out by throwing themselves into the mass movement, from which they would eventually rebuild the organization along the lines indicated by the new struggles that were sure to arise. It was necessary to learn to "live with the earthquake," he said.

Since a lot of militants were leaving the organization anyway, it is hard to tell how many did so on Sofri's instruction.

No historic compromise.

Other sectors of the Italian far left, notably the Manifesto group that came out of the PCI and knows it well, is convinced that the "historic compromise" is an erroneous strategy and that the event will never take place.

Among the arguments variously advanced to support this analysis are the following:

1. The subjective commitment of the PCI—as of the French Communist party—to socialism, or at least to the interests of the working class, is much greater than is assumed by some of its leftist critics. For all their seemingly unlimited readiness to compromise, the "reformist" Communist parties derive their internal strength and cohesiveness from a traditional Marxist working-class culture that they cannot repudiate without falling apart and that makes them permanently "subversive" elements within a capitalist order.

2. The leading forces of the capitalist world do not seem, for their part, to consider the Communist parties the equivalent of Social Democrats and show no serious sign of willingness to use them, in countries where they are strong, to integrate the working classes into the capitalist system.

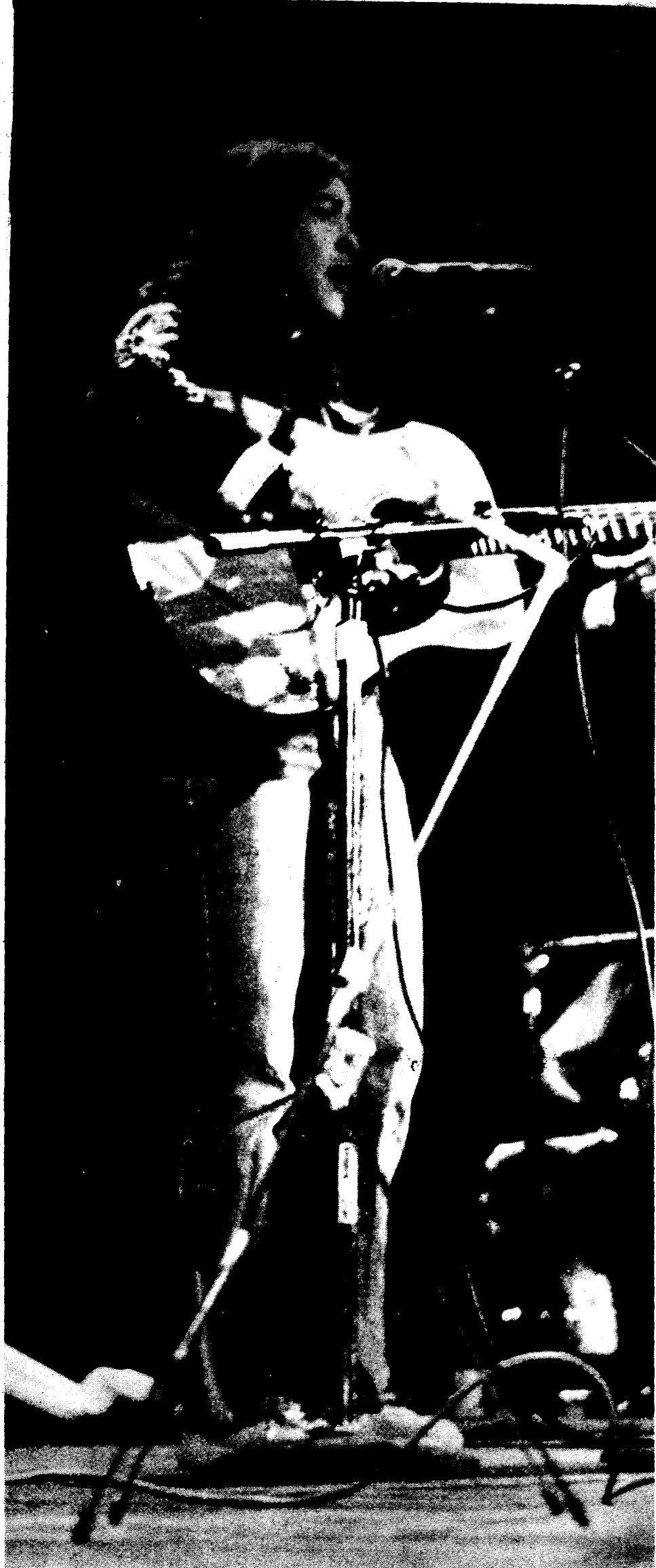
3. There are signs that the nature of the present economic crisis does not allow the integrationist solution in Southern Europe. This is not because such a solution is intrinsically impossible either politically or economically, but because what is called the "crisis" is in reality an *economic war* launched by the dominant sectors of American capitalism, intended in part to break the hold of the Communist parties on the working classes of France and Italy.

The world economy is to be organized around the "energy crisis"—portrayed as a natural catastrophe, although planned by the oil companies (and banks) that own virtually all energy sources. The international division of labor will be altered so as to break up the social blocks that provide the political base for the traditional Marxist parties.

This analysis has gone along with a more optimistic attitude towards the possibilities of socialist revolution, hope being based on the prospect that the PCI will realize it is being led into a trap, change its strategy, and move leftwards in coalition with the Socialists and the revolutionaries...although here the picture gets a bit hazy.

In practice, this outlook has recently led the Manifesto group to do little other than persuade some Communists that they are on the wrong course. Not having developed an organizational strategy of their own, they now have little practical alternative to offer to the disaffection that is showing up, not in the PCI leadership, but at the base.

Diana Johnstone is a journalist in Paris and publishes a newsletter called Owl.



Cris Williamson

T.J. Osnick



Berkeley Women's Music Collective

The new feminist

Women's music is still in its early stages, exploring. It says things pamphlets and speeches can't, she

There is a new musical genre emerging out of the last decade of feminist struggles and awareness. The new women's music ranges from the hard-rock political messages of Bev Grant to the lilting musical synthesis of Cris Williamson; from Hazel and Alice's twanging Appalachian-country guitars to Kay Gardner's sensuous, classical-style flute, to musicians like Holly Near who defy musical classification but come nearest to the folk tradition.

This feminist music flowers outside the established record and concert circuit. Small record companies cut the records; feminist publications and bookstores sell them; and women's groups and an emerging network of women producers put on the concerts. The musicians play at each other's shows and on each other's records. They play at demonstrations and benefits, and give workshops at movement conferences. Once a year they meet in Champaign-Urbana, Ill., for the annual women's music festival.

In the questioning of old values and cultural ferment created by the women's movement, these women have developed different politics and goals, yet all have been shaped by, and continue to shape, the movement. Their music opens new realms of experience previously unexamined in popular music or examined only from a male viewpoint.

The right to fight.

Rape has been glorified in hard rock, depicted as tragedy in folk music. Bev Grant's song to Inez Garcia, who killed a man who helped rape her, expresses a new attitude: "Women got the right to fight." Dierdre McCalla, a black feminist singer from Nebraska also sings of a woman who kills her rapist:

*No, judge your honor,
No, I did not want to kill that boy.
But he would not listen to me, can't you see,
I could not take him on me any more.*

Willie Tyson, in "Merciful Mary" has a woman charging rape of her soul before the Supreme Court. Not surprisingly, the case is thrown out, leaving Mary less merciful and wiser.

"Don't Put Her Down, You Helped Put Her There," sung by Hazel and Alice, describes a favorite country music subject, the "honky-tonk angel" of the bar—this time from the woman's side.

These singers also break the silence on many unsung aspects of woman's existence: "Ain't no time for sad desperation" sings Deborah Lempke of Berkeley Women's Music Collective in a song about menstruation as a joyful, rather than painful or shameful experience.

The inner lives of women are shared in songs like Margie Adams' "Lost in Inner Space" and Meg Christian's "Scars."

Cris Williamson's beautiful "Waterfall" talks about the flow of life in women's rhythm:

*When you open up your life to the living
All things come spilling in on you
And you're flowing like a river,
The Changer and the Changed...*

Songs full of anger frequently become audience favorites. "One time we wrote a vicious song," says one of the members of The Deadly Nightshade. In "Dance, Mr. Big" a former secretary takes revenge when her ex-boss comes looking for a job, asking, among other things, to see his legs.

Margie Adam sings, in "Fury":
*The waves of hate crash over me
And wash me clean of fear,
The ocean of my anger swells
To cover all who hear...*

Songs of struggle.

"Women's music is political, but so is what we're getting on AM radio. That tells us how we should relate to each other and the world," says Adam.

Some songs directly reflect political struggles. For instance, Bev Grant wrote "Together We Can Move Mountains" based on a statement by a woman in a tenants' strike. "I like songs that grow out of struggle. They can really move people," says Grant.

Bonnie Lockhart of Berkeley Women's Music Collective sings "Still Ain't Satisfied" about the gains of the women's movement and the need to keep fighting.

Holly Near, who wrote powerful anti-war songs in the early '70s, continued with themes like Wounded Knee and women in prison. One of her most popular songs is about freedom fighters throughout the world, including Chilean singer Victor Jara, the students who died at Kent and Jackson State and an anonymous Vietnamese woman:

*It could have been me
But instead it was you
And it may be me dear sisters and brothers
Before we are through...
But if you can die for freedom, I can too.*

New loves.

The American popular song has endless variations of romantic love themes. Women's music celebrates other loving relations. Friendship may be the subject, as when Ginni Clemmens sings:

*Life's a long and twisted road,
Many curves and unseen bends,
So I'm lookin' for some long-time friends.*

Or the songs may celebrate the sense of community created by women struggling together to liberate themselves. Cris Williamson's "Song of the Soul" and "Sister" kindle a celebration, as she and the audience sing together—

Lean on me, I am your sister



Willie Tyson

Jane Melnick