



## Italy Judith Bloomfield

Piero Borghini's informative article on the Italian political impasse (*Marxism Today*, March 1981) begs a number of questions about the Italian Communist Party's strategy.

Was or was not the so called 'turn of November 27' an abandonment of the historic compromise? The answer depends of course on what you mean by historic compromise.

In the persuasive definition Borghini outlines, of a convergence of intermediate strata, women, youth and the unemployed around the working class movement and its political expression in Communist, Socialist and Catholic collaboration, few would quarrel.

But was this the way the historic compromise was implemented from 1976-9? Borghini argues that 'a political strategy should never be confused with a formulation for government'. But how far did the PCI distinguish the two? The historic compromise was presented and enacted as *an institutional relationship with Christian Democracy (the DC)*.

Summed up in the slogan of 'national solidarity', the launching of the 'democratic alternative' in November of last year meant that the PCI no longer sees Communist-Catholic collaboration taking that form.

### The gains of collaboration

What were the gains of this period of collaboration?

Borghini discusses the problems of trade unions exerting control over investment and the lack of an alternative industrial culture separately from the political situation at the time. How does he evaluate the historical experience of political collaboration? In that period the PCI accepted a series of deflationary measures — the so called 'austerity

policy' for a number of social reforms: a law on rent control, which, in the absence of a massive council house building programme in the cities and sanctions against keeping property empty, has closed the market for rented accommodation; a law on youth unemployment which has not been implemented by Christian Democrat communes; the law on abortion, which was actively opposed by the DC and the important clauses of which, on sex education and the establishment of a family counselling service at local level, have been violated by most Christian Democrat communes (not to mention the abuse of the conscience clause by Catholic doctors opting out of abortion in the public sector, only to find their conscience clear in the private clinics). The law against terrorism can hardly be considered a social reform and while it may be considered vital for defeating civil atrocities, it gives the police dangerous powers of detention without bringing charges.

This hardly seems a record worthy of Communist sacrifice — in terms of loss of votes in 1978, of discontent at the base and perhaps most important of all the drift away of young people from the party's sphere of influence.

### Progressive potential

Has the DC progressive potential within it?

Christian Democracy is a political alliance welded together by far more than anti-communism, the division of the world into blocs and the division and passivity in Italy. Its success also rests firmly on extensive patronage through the state, allied with conservative traditionalism in the South, collusion with the Mafia, and is reinforced by residual Catholic values of familial and patriarchal authority.<sup>1</sup>

Does the Left DC differ fundamentally

from the rest of the DC? Andreotti's involvement in the cover-up when he was minister, of secret service involvement with the fascists in the Piazza Fontana bombings, gives rise to doubts. Not only has he been implicated in the petrol scandal but Freats, Moro's personal secretary, is being investigated for the private fortune he amassed at the time. Is the Left DC immune from the corruption, concealment and abuse of power which characterises their party? Hardly. Borghini, recognising this criticism, asks rhetorically why Communists cannot try to change political forces just as they try to change social forces.

This answer is not trivial but simply wrong. Social forces have an objective position in the system of production, social reproduction or civil society. With the socialisation of labour (eg, the mass entry of women into the workforce and the extension of the state) and the emergence of democratic movements, the breadth of political alliances around the working class movement are vast. But they exclude the organised bourgeoisie.

Political forces represent traditions, ideologies and organisational structures which insert social forces in a particular framework in support of certain policies. The fact that Christian Democracy is a mass party should not delude us as to its method of organising *and subordinating the Catholic masses*. The historic compromise of 1976-9 recognised the *integrity* of Christian Democracy, the exact opposite of Gramsci's concept of *dismantling* the 'historic bloc' of the bourgeoisie, and building a new bloc around the working class.

This requires the winning away of the

<sup>1</sup> Though the Abortion Referendum gives further proof of the weakness of the DCs moral grip.

Catholic base, especially in the South, from the DC — as has just happened in the abortion referendum and in the North with the joint trade union federation and divorce referendum.

What change?

What then has changed or must change?

If the DC did not fundamentally change in 1976-9 and has now even gone into reverse, what has changed? The PCI has changed — and is pursuing a democratic alternative to the DC. But hesitantly and without giving up hope of the DC, as Borghini's article indicates. Most important of all, however, are

three fundamental requirements which were lacking in November, and are still either absent or uncertain.

Firstly a draft programme as a basis for discussion and mobilisation. Secondly a direct appeal to the other major Left party, the Socialist Party to enter into an alliance around this programme. This was partially rectified by Berlinguer's appeal to the recent Socialist Party Congress but has been hindered by personal polemics as well as objective difficulties. And thirdly an appeal to all the democratic *movements* and youth to press for their aspirations and realise their social goals within the democratic alternative.

In the absence of concrete proposals and appeals, the democratic alternative, has been criticised as the Party 'going it alone' with honest and capable *individuals* of all parties and more, but hardly an alliance of organised political forces. If the Party is to become the reference point for all democratic forces, secular and Catholic, and build a real mass alternative to Christian Democracy it must see much more clearly and speak much more unequivocally about the alternative programme and its allies. •

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