

ITALIAN GOVERNMENT

How Cossiga was ousted from power

by Margaret Bardwell

The uneasy balance of power in Italian politics that has been in effect since Francesco Cossiga took over the premiership in April, when the anti-Communist, pro-NATO forces took power, has once again shifted with the collapse of the Cossiga government and Cossiga's resignation Sept. 27. Now, the more moderate wing of the Christian Democratic party, led by former Premier Giulio Andreotti, has another chance to form a more stable government allied to the policies of the European Monetary System, and to West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and French President Giscard.

While the trigger for the collapse of Cossiga's government came in the repeated failure of Parliament to approve Cossiga's economic appropriations legislation, the causes for the collapse lie with Cossiga's foreign and domestic policy, and the makeup of the government coalition itself.

Cossiga's coalition consisted of the cold-war wing of the largest party, the Christian Democrats, the small Socialist Party, and the tinier Republican Party. This coalition has been an unswerving supporter of the Carter administration-NATO "forward defense" posture for Europe, including making Italy the base for NATO's southern flank, a jumping-off place for NATO's presence in the Persian Gulf, and has undone the bulk of the oil-for-development economic cooperation deals worked out between Italy and the Arab world.

Finally, Cossiga has been tainted since his tenure as Interior Minister under Andreotti with being soft on terrorism and drug running. His own wing of the Christian Democrats has been rocked with scandal. Former Christian Democratic president Carlo Donat Cattin was forced to resign when it became known that his son was a member of a terrorist group, and that Donat Cattin and Cossiga were implicated in helping Donat Cattin's son flee Italy.

The other crucial difference between the Cossiga

government and any potential Andreotti government is in the longstanding policy of cooperation between Andreotti and the Italian Communist Party, the so-called historic compromise.

The Italian Communist Party is Italy's second-largest party, with about 30 percent of the vote. Its base of support is chiefly among Italy's skilled industrial workers, especially in the auto and steel sectors. It has been a firm supporter of Andreotti's policies of East-West detente and Third World development. While the Communists have never been a partner in the various Christian Democrat-led coalition governments since the end of World War II, they were a prominent force in the previous Andreotti-led government, and were pointedly excluded from the Cossiga government at the behest of U.S. Ambassador Richard Gardner in favor of the Socialist Party.

The forward defense issue

With Europe increasingly uneasy about the prospects for war with the Soviet Union given the unstable Middle East situation, and the recent announcement of the Carter administration's PD 59 limited nuclear war doctrine, the leak that the Cossiga government supports proposals by Carter's national security adviser Brzezinski and U.S. Defense Secretary Harold Brown to use Italy as NATO's southern flank made the unstable Cossiga government even more shaky.

On Sept. 26, the Communist Party daily *L'Unità*, in an article written by Communist Party defense spokesman Arrigo Boldrini, said that Italy's Socialist Defense Minister Lelio Lagorio was supporting Italian participation in the Carter administration's plans to use a rapid deployment force in the Persian Gulf. According to Boldrini, Lagorio planned to involve Italy in a "so-called 'forward defense' in the Mediterranean against eventual threats to central Europe from the south." Further, Boldrini charged, "it seems obvious in this context that the Italian government does not reject the theory—put forward by U.S. Defense Secretary Harold Brown—that Italy could be involved in a limited conflict. There are very worrisome signs to this effect in recent statements by the minister."

Agence France Presse reported Oct. 1 that under a compromise within the Christian Democrats, a five-party coalition will probably be offered that does not include the Communists. The Communists have indicated that they will not refuse to support such a government if it is more stable than Cossiga's. Andreotti, meanwhile, is said to be working out a compromise with other factions in the Christian Democracy that would have him take over as Christian Democratic president while allowing either current president Flaminio Piccoli, or Arnaldo Forlani—currently charged with forming a new government—to become Premier with the collaboration of Andreotti's faction.