

Report from Italy by Umberto Pascali

'Visentini in Piazzale Loreto!'

The finance minister's plan for a "government of the technicians" has met its first serious challenge.

On Oct. 23, Italy was completely shut-down. Cities like Rome, Milan, Turin, Naples, Palermo, Bologna, and others looked like the Aug. 15 "Ferragosto" holiday: Not a shop was open, the streets were deserted. Italian shopkeepers, organized into a national federation (Confcommercio), conducted a day of protest against the decision of the finance minister, the powerful Venetian Bruno Visentini, to increase taxes in a way intended to bankrupt many.

Bruno Visentini is the president of the newly created Aspen Institute-Italy, centered at the Cini Foundation in Venice. He represents the interlink between Venetian-Swiss finance and the City of London, in Italy normally termed the "British masonry." He considers his attack against the shopkeepers (and against all other "independent workers") the second stage of his strategy, the first being the violent and quite successful assault against the trade unions with the help of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the official union leaderships, who fully endorsed the "necessity of austerity."

The plan was to "get the shopkeepers and the professional people," because "austerity must be equal for everybody."

When Visentini came out with his proposal, in the form of a tax bill now in parliament, he received the total support of the PCI and the trade unions, whose spokesmen declared themselves ready to support the Venetian

oligarch at all costs. The trade unions, especially the Socialist UIL, led by Giorgio Benvenuto, organized virtual private spying squads to check on the shopkeepers and denounce their plans to resist.

Visentini's group, the small "Republican" Party, threatened to collapse the government if his proposal was rejected. The pressure on the shopkeepers, in the opinion of the austerity specialists, was enough to force capitulation. They were accused of representing "Chilean blackmail," and were the victim of a propaganda campaign comparing them to criminals and "sharks" who refused to sacrifice—a social atmosphere quite similar to that of the Fascist period in Italy.

Despite all this, the day of protest was a complete success. "Enough with the leftist dictatorship!" "Visentini, Benvenuto you will not have our scalp!" "We do not want the KGB in our house!" These were the slogans of a shopkeepers' demonstration in Turin; 40,000 marched in the streets. In Milan, the demonstrators shouted: "Visentini in Piazzale Loreto!" (the square in which Benito Mussolini was hanged).

Many politicians felt the winds and came out into the streets to support the shopkeepers, who represent something like 10 million votes. Among them was Christian-Democrat Roberto Mazzotta, who said: "A part of the Italian bourgeoisie wants to make an alliance with the PCI and to use the

Communists like their fathers used the Fascist Party."

The PCI was hurt badly by the success of the protest. For the first time, many people who normally vote for the party entered a strike against it. The small, PCI-controlled shopkeeper association, the Confesercenti, almost collapsed the day before the strike: several of its leaders abandoned the organization. Particularly frightening to the Communist leaders was the fact that in their stronghold, Bologna, about 90% of the shops were closed down. Also frightening were the words of the president of Confcommercio, Giuseppe Orlando, in a speech to the membership: "Remember at the moment of the vote who really defended your interest!"

On October 24, the catholic daily *L'Avvenire* carried a not-so-veiled attack on Visentini: "Natta and the gnomes." Alessandro Natta is the secretary-general of the PCI. "The PCI has de facto concluded an iron pact with the 'gnomes' of lay finance ['British masonry'], those who have been working at all times, starting from the financial world, to reach political and financial power positions such that they could cancel any type of Christian presence in the society, not for practical reasons, but because of their world outlook. What is the aim? The government of the technicians. . . ."

By this expression, invented by Visentini circles, is meant a government controlled by bankers, a sort of "pre-fascism" based on the destruction of the organized institutions of democracy and the imposition of the law of austerity—or usury—entailing the destruction of every organized social group who tries to resist.

Without being entirely aware of all this, the Italian shopkeepers are the first to seriously challenge the technicians' March on Rome.