

Report from Italy by Liliana Gorini

Pertini's re-election in doubt

The President of the Republic has recently acted more like a leader of the opposition to the Republic.

With a few months to go before the election of a new President of the Republic—every seven years—current President Sandro Pertini has accumulated a series of diplomatic *faux pas* which have thrown his re-election into question. The worst gaffe was committed in connection with an invitation to President Reagan to speak at the European Parliament on May 8—anniversary of the Nazis' defeat in Europe.

The Communist Party, the Radical Party, and the German Social Democracy had proposed Pertini as the main speaker. But immediately proclaiming its opposition was virtually every governing party in Europe, in particular the German Christian Democrats, who are keenly aware of the importance of Reagan's visit during that period. Chancellor Kohl has just proclaimed his support for Reagan's defense policy, and now faces growing Soviet-sponsored destabilization as a consequence.

So, European Parliament President Pflimlin invited Pertini to commemorate the 35th anniversary of the Schumann Plan instead.

Pertini's reaction was to cancel his own presence at the May 8 commemoration! "Why should I go to Strasbourg? To play Reagan's subdeacon?"

It was then only ten days before the official visit to Washington of Premier Bettino Craxi, and every party in Italy's governing coalition immediately issued sharp criticisms of Pertini. "Without the country of the deacon Reagan, we would still be subdeacons of Hitler," was the comment of Paolo

Battistuzzi, vice-secretary of the Liberal Party, one of the five in Craxi's coalition. Giuseppe Gargani, head of the justice section of the Christian Democracy, reminded Pertini that Italy had lost the war. If anyone has the right to commemorate the defeat of Nazism, it is America.

Another Christian Democrat, European parliamentarian Adolfo Sarti, emphasized that the German Social Democrats proposed to invite Pertini to Strasbourg deliberately to create problems for Reagan, and "do not represent the majority in the European Parliament, nor in the Federal Republic of Germany."

The only people to endorse Pertini's statement were the Communists and the Radicals. Even if he is 90 years old, Pertini has been considered the most probable choice in the June elections. He has the full support of the Communists, who consider him the only prospective President willing to see a government formed that includes them.

The function of an Italian President is very different from that in the United States. Primarily ceremonial, the presidency mediates in the formation of coalition governments, and gives his official mandate to the premier chosen by the parties. The President also has the function of dissolving parliament when there is a government crisis. That function is constitutionally denied to him, however, during the six-month period preceding presidential elections, known in Italy as *semestre bianco*, white semester.

It is now *semestre bianco*. Yet,

Pertini has been acting more "politically" than ever, going beyond what is expected to criticize the present government or praise candidates for the presidency such as Nilde Iotti, a leader of the Communist Party and former mistress of the post-war Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti.

He has done other favors for the Communists. During a state visit to Spain some weeks ago, Pertini declared: "I am for unilateral disarmament," a stand which not even the Communists dared to take. One year ago, the President took a public stand against President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, calling it "Star Wars" and joining the Communist campaign against "an arms race in space."

His most recent display against Reagan was welcomed by the Communist newspaper *l'Unità*, which had expressed worry at the improvement in relations between Italy and the United States after the endorsement of the SDI by Defense Minister Spadolini during a visit to Washington.

There are other candidates for the presidency. These include Interior Minister Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, a Christian Democrat who is presently involved in increasing Western coordination of anti-terrorist efforts, and Vice-Premier Arnaldo Forlani, also a Christian Democrat. It now appears that one of them will get the support of, not only their own party, but also Craxi's Socialist Party, despite the fact that Pertini is a Socialist.

If Sandro Pertini does not become the next President of Italy, it will be because, over past months, he has not acted like a President of the Republic. He has acted very much more like a member of the opposition—and not just the opposition to the present government, but the opposition to the Republic.