

## Report from Italy by Liliana Gorini

### Will the Communists be number one?

*The PCI is hoping to ride to power on the coattails of the new Italian Green Party.*

On May 12, 44.5 million Italians will go to the polls to elect local administrations in 15 regions, 6,567 municipalities, and 86 provinces. Despite their local character, the May 12 elections are being watched not only in Italy, but also abroad, as a test to see whether Italy will remain in the Atlantic Alliance or fall into Soviet hands.

The big fear expressed during the election campaign, by all five parties forming the present government coalition—the Christian Democracy (DC), Socialist Party (PSI), Social Democratic Party (PSDI), Republican Party (PRI), and Liberal Party (PLI)—is the *sorpasso*, the fear that the Italian Communist Party, the second-largest party in Italy and the principal opposition to the government, might surpass the voting strength of the Christian Democracy to become Italy's number-one party, repeating the results of the vote for the European Parliament last year, when the Communists outpolled the DC on the strength of an outpouring of sentimental feeling evoked by the death of longtime PCI General Secretary Enrico Berlinguer.

The new head of the PCI, Alessandro Natta, a former member of the fascist youth organization GUF during the Mussolini era, has already announced in an election speech that if the PCI does overtake the Christian Democracy on May 12, "it will demand the premiership. . . . We do not have to wait until the year 2,000," said

Natta to Communist crowds opening the election campaign in Milan. "We have all the political and moral qualifications to govern Italy."

The DC is finally counterattacking, after a period in which the Christian Democrats had sought to stabilize Italy by building a cooperative relationship with the Communists, particularly after the national solidarity government in 1976 led by current Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti.

Some months ago, Pope John Paul II launched a campaign to "re-Christianize Rome," for many years run by Communist Mayor Vetere. Several weeks ago, the Pope spoke at a bishops' conference in Loreto, inviting all Christians to act in according to their religious conscience, an invitation which was interpreted as the beginning of a new "1948" fight between Catholics and Communists. During that year, in Italy's first big election campaign after World War II, the Christian Democratic leader De Gasperi, with decisive assistance from the United States, defeated Communist Party boss Togliatti. After the Pope's recent call, DC General Secretary Ciriaco De Mita, while no De Gasperi by any means, did announce a DC campaign against the "culture of death" expressed by free abortion and the bill to legalize euthanasia introduced in parliament by the Socialist deputy Loris Fortuna.

The new feature of this election campaign, which is also the main hope for the Communist Party, is the pres-

ence for the first time of an Italian Green Party in most municipalities and regions. The Italian Green Party (PVI), which cooperates with the German Green Party, as well as with the Italian Radical Party, is supported and financed by the Italian Communist Party, which sees in it a potential coalition partner, at least at the local level, and often evokes the local coalitions between the German Social Democrats and the German Greenies, such as the one in the German state of Hesse, as an example of what might happen in Italy after May 12.

In order to gain the Italian Greenies as potential partners, the PCI is focusing its election campaign on Green themes, such as the need to develop a "post-industrial" triangle in Lombardy, Liguria, and Piedmont, which used to be the most developed industrial area in Italy. Or substituting "species consciousness" for "class consciousness" in its portfolio of slogans, accusing the European left of having accepted for too many years the ideas of progress and development.

As for the Green Party itself, it has different symbols in each city, and a very localist profile, featuring proposals to close the inner city to cars, or defending birds. The Greens are refusing to distribute leaflets, claiming "they pollute the atmosphere."

Why are the Communists' chances so good in spite of this absurdity? In a word, the policies of the present government. In Venice, the the Republican Party's candidate for mayor is the current finance minister, Bruno Visentini, the head of the Cini Foundation, the Venetian oligarchical think tank. The Republican Party will rent a train and Visentini and the defense minister, Spadolini, will be welcomed by musical bands and majorettes, probably to drown out the angry unemployed who attribute their misery to Visentini's austerity policy.