

Report from Rome by Leonardo Servadio

Communist Party, the new 'thing'?

The PCI wants radical plastic surgery on its Achilles' heel—70 years of close association to Bolshevism.

The "thing" (*cosa*) was the interim name chosen by Italian Communist Party (PCI) general secretary Achille Occhetto in November, when he announced he wanted to change the party and generate out of it a totally new "thing" capable of ruling Italy, in alliance with other left forces. While Occhetto searches for a new name, wickered tongues have referred to it as "Cosa Nostra."

On March 8-11 the PCI held an extraordinary party congress in its stronghold, Bologna, to discuss the proposal. With 67% of the delegates on his side, Occhetto won the day. The new PCI will emerge at an "ordinary congress" a few months hence. Against Occhetto's proposal was a "conservative" group, led by Aldo Tortorella and former party secretary Alessandro Natta, who wanted to keep the status quo, and a small group around Armando Cossutta, who has a "Brezhnev-like" pro-Soviet bent.

In his keynote, Occhetto called for a total overhaul: statute, political orientation, name, and tradition (Communists are good not only at changing current strategy, but also at transforming the past). Occhetto more or less embraced the "free market," and this led to an burst of glee in those business layers, epitomized by De Benedetti of Olivetti, who hope to see a new political constellation formed around the PCI, as an "alternative" to the Christian Democracy (DC), which has dominated Italy since World War II ended.

With the recognition of different currents of opinion within the party (a majority and two minority groups),

the PCI is now trying to acquire the look of a "pluralistic" and "democratic" party. One of the internal opposition leaders, Tortorella, has been named party president, as a way of signaling how pluralistic the once monolithic "thing" has become.

But is it really changing? Two elements are important: 1) Among the final resolutions of the congress was the statement that the new unified Germany should stay out of NATO. 2) In an about-face, Socialist Party (PSI) leader Bettino Craxi greeted Occhetto's "change," announcing that finally the "unity of the left" could be achieved. In short, Craxi said that with the Occhetto line he might abandon the ruling alliance with the DC to join in a new government with the PCI. The prospect is not immediate, but in two years could become reality—more or less the time frame set by Socialist International boss Willy Brandt, at the SI's meeting in Geneva last November.

Brandt, who is also at the center of the process of recycling the Eastern European Communist Parties into social democratic parties, worked out a plan for the PCI to join the Socialist International within two years. In Bologna, Occhetto for the first time declared that the PCI wants to join the Socialist International. At that point, nothing stands in the way of the PCI, or whatever the "thing" will be called, building a government with the PSI.

How did it come about that the PCI, which in the 1970s decided to be pro-NATO, is now taking an anti-NATO stand on the Germany issue? Occhetto went to Moscow and met

Gorbachov in February 1989. They discussed that the PCI should change, become a new "thing," and build new alliances, especially with the Greenies and the Socialists. Cooperation between PCI and Brandt's SPD (the German Social Democracy) has been upgraded. Next, Occhetto went to New York—the first time for a PCI secretary—where he met establishment figures like Edgar Bronfman and David Rockefeller and lectured at the *New York Times* and the Council on Foreign Relations. Then he was feted at Washington parties with CIA and State Department representatives.

Out of the Moscow and U.S. visits, the new "thing" was generated. It was clear that the PCI would become in Italy the party of the "New Yalta," just as the German SPD has this role in Germany. Occhetto wants a neutral Germany, which can be better controlled by Moscow in agreement with the Anglo-American establishment. After all, the first recent leader to demand a "neutralized" Germany was not Gorbachov, but the SPD's Egon Bahr. At a congress held in Rome in February, under the title "The Left, Security and Europe," PSI sociologist Tamburrano said: "Gorbachov and Reagan, by taking away the missiles, have brought the parties on the left closer to each other."

Craxi's PSI in the recent years has been totally Washington-oriented, while the PCI has always been Moscow-oriented. With the "New Yalta," the two parties are to bury the hatchet of their 1970s-80s quarrels, and join in an alliance pivoted on the green, ecologist, anti-industrial policy. That is the instrument by which the two superpowers want to control the world in the 1990s. In other words, the PCI has not changed, but has remained primarily an instrument of foreign influence in Italy. It is the same old "thing."