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Italy

PRC: The debate begins

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The Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) took a heavy battering throughout the electoral campaign and in the days following the announcement of the results. The spokespersons for the Olive Tree coalition, so-called democratic and/or left journalists and intellectual masterminds competed in a kind of witch hunt against the PRC and more particularly its general secretary Fausto Bertinotti, who was denounced as guilty of having helped Berlusconi become Premier.

In fact, consciously or not, all these brave people have revealed or confirmed a conception of politics, which has absolutely nothing to do with principle. Ideas, programmes, projects? All in the dustbin! The essential thing is to win votes, seats, and ministerial posts. Yet the candidate of the Olive Tree himself, Francesco Rutelli, had to admit it: a political agreement with the PRC was strictly impossible and to govern together would have been still more so.

What's more, not only had the Olive Tree prepared its defeat with five years of neo-liberal and pro-imperialist policies, but it had also maintained a fundamentally anti-democratic, indeed crazy electoral system following its defeat last year in the referendum on this question.

It did not even want to correct the system in force for the Senate and, so far as the Chamber of Deputies was concerned, it made an agreement with Berlusconi's party amounting to a veritable swindle, ignoring the warnings of the president of the republic.

In short, all the PRC's accusers should note one elementary fact: under a proportional system, of the type the PRC had demanded, Berlusconi would not have won a majority.

Finally, nothing proves that, if there had been an electoral pact, the votes of the Olive Tree and those of the PRC would have been the same; quite probably, a part of the PRC electorate would have abstained and a part of the Olive Tree's electorate would have shifted to the centre-right.

We should stress moreover that the PRC has suffered attacks not only from left DS [former Euro-Communist party-ed.] sectors, who remain fairly ghostly politically, but also from a part of the so-called radical left which had constantly criticised the centre left governments.

These people have been fairly magnanimous in calling for a vote for the PRC in the proportional ballot (25% of seats) to the Chamber of Deputies, but, forgetting that our decision not to contest the single member section (75 %) would allow the Olive Tree to carry about 30 seats more, they refused to call for a vote for us for the Senate.

The author of this article was the object of an attack in the daily *Il Manifesto*. This radical left newspaper, which had refused the publication of a short appeal by the PRC's senatorial candidates in Rome, ran, on the eve of the poll, that is when it was impossible to reply in any way, a whole page on the vote in Rome saying that nobody should vote for Livio Maitan or for another PRC candidate, but rather for the candidates of the Olive Tree. As it happened, my competitor was a minister of the Amato government, belonging to the DS, who had approved all the decisions taken by the coalition, both socio-economic and political (the Kosovo war included). [\[1\]](#)

An image of radical opposition

Despite these campaigns, the PRC held firm, with 5% of the vote in both the Chamber (11 deputies) and the Senate (4 senators), the only party outside of a coalition, which reached the 4% threshold necessary to qualify for allocation of seats. Of the other smaller parties, the Greens met a particularly lamentable result: the common list (called the Sunflower) they had run with a small socialist formation, affiliated to the Socialist International, only scored 2.9%.

The party of Cossutta [called the Italian Communist Party-ed.], originating from the split in the PRC in October 1998, was quite simply swept away (1.7%) and only survives as a fifth wheel of the DS which gave it some deputies (in the single member section) and some senators.

That said, we must admit that the result of the PRC is only satisfying in the given context.

In 1996 the party gained 8.6% (although it only got 4.3% in the European elections of 1999). The conclusion drawn by all is that the PRC is still, fundamentally, a party which attracted votes thanks to its image of radical opposition with a mass influence, but without a real social implantation, with some partial exceptions. The electoral campaign, which was completely autonomous, was characterised above all by the radical interventions of Fausto Bertinotti, whose meetings often attracted many youth.

The initiative that undoubtedly represented the biggest success, took place in Rome with the participation of numerous intellectuals and in a very passionate atmosphere. The most combative passages of the speech, which were particularly applauded, were the following: "the novelty is that capitalism and innovation are henceforth separated from social progress and are in the process of revealing radical contradictions: but, then, politics only has a meaning on condition of showing itself capable of criticising the logic of the market and the company, of recommencing from its highest point, revolution".

Debates in the PRC

The broadest body of the party, the National Political Committee, met on May 26 and 27, to draw a balance sheet of the elections. In fact, it also opened the debate for the next Party Congress scheduled for spring 2002.

The different viewpoints which exist, including in the secretariat [central leadership body-ed.], were expressed on this occasion in camouflaged or highly nuanced forms, notably on the party's attitude towards the DS or the so-called liberal left and on the organisational problems.

It is clear to all that we must pursue an autonomous construction of the party. However some ambiguities, indeed divergences, exist on the orientation to be followed in the current phase. One current, described as "continuist", for which the (old) Italian Communist Party still remains a point of reference, looks not so much to regeneration (although this word has been utilised in a debate on the leadership bodies), but rather reorientation of the DS, which is preparing for a congress in the very near future.

Beyond all the nuances, the dilemma for the DS remains the following: either build a sort of US Democratic Party including the Olive Tree as a whole (course associated with Walter Veltroni), or keep the Olive Tree as a coalition inside which the DS will play the role of a social democratic party, linked to European socialism.

The PRC has every interest in avoiding any sectarian reflex and undertaking a dialogue with what is called the moderate or liberal left. Bertinotti has advanced for some time the perspective of a 'plural left'. However, while he refers explicitly to the French experience, he now seems rather to propose a working hypothesis.

In his conclusion he mentioned in passing the difficulties of the French Communist Party and also the role played by the LCR and Lutte Ouvriere [two French Trotskyist organisations outside the governing coalition-ed.].

He speculated not without reason, that in Italy the kind of movements and viewpoints which exist under specific forms in France, will generally be found inside the PRC. [2]

In conclusion, he sketched out the themes to be debated at the Congress: a systematic analysis of the current conjuncture at the national and international level; the articulation of objectives which can generate a dynamic breaking from the logic of neo-liberal globalisation; the construction of the Seattle-Porto Alegre movement within such an optic.

For our part, we share such an approach, which fundamentally addresses the same problems that we are discussing in the Fourth International. [3] Still, we stressed once again the enormous gap that exists between such political approaches and the reality of the party.

The last campaign revealed again some lamentable practices, electoralist and completely opportunist conceptions and behaviour including on the part of some leaders, in contradiction with not only the Party statutes but also the norms of conduct fixed for the electoral campaign.

It is fairly disconcerting that when one puts such criticisms in leadership bodies nobody contests them, yet the problem continues to be evaded. This Congress must finally debate these problems if it is not to endorse a dangerous drift.

The party leadership accomplished its statutory task of electing presidents for the two parliamentary groups. With a large majority, Franco Giordano was confirmed for the Chamber of Deputies. However, the novelty was the unanimous election for the Senate of Gigi Malabarba, a Milan-based Trotskyist and worker militant at Alfa Romeo, who was illegally sacked by Fiat and is one of the main leaders of the unitary trade union confederation (Cobas) which was founded last Mayday.

In the corridors of the senate, our comrade will have the chance to meet Fiat boss Gianni Agnelli. Gigi has twice won a legal case against Fiat for his dismissal. We now await the verdict of the Court d'Cassation. Will this illustrious body confirm the two verdicts favourable to Gigi or endorse the dismissal of a worker-senator?

[1] Having failed to be elected by a handful of votes after having obtained a little more than 6% (the regional average for the party was 5%), it can be said that IL Manifesto contributed to keeping me out of the Senate. Juge Di Lello, a PRC European Parliamentary deputy, sent a very sharp letter of protest that the newspaper had to publish. The PRC daily, *Liberazione*, published the same letter and a commentary of solidarity with myself from the secretary of the party branch where my campaign was based and from the editorial board of the newspaper.

[2] As often happens, these significant passages were omitted in the version of Bertinotti's speech published by the Party newspaper.

[3] No doubt it was this convergence of themes and diversity of opinions which led the present author, in my intervention at the National

PRC: The debate begins

Committee, to make an unusual lapse: speaking of the upcoming congress, I referred to "our world congress" [also in Spring 2002-ed.] instead of "our national congress"!