

<https://npa31.org/spip.php?article71>



Italy

# The political phase and the European party

- IV Online magazine - 2004 - IV359 - May/June 2004 -

Publication date: Sunday 16 May 2004

---

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

---

**This document was presented to the vote by Gigi Malabarba, Flavia D'Angeli, Franco Turigliatto, Salvatore CannavÀ<sup>2</sup>, Lidia Cirillo, Barbara Ferusso, Elena Majorana, Livio Maitan and Nando Simeone at the meeting of the National Political Committee (CPN) of the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC), held in Rome on March 6-7, 2004.**

**The nine members of the CPN who are signatories to this document, activists in the Bandiera Rossa current, belonged to the majority at the time of the last congress of the PRC in 2002 (see [IV 340, May 2002](#)).**

*The CPN adopted by 67 votes the resolution presented by the majority which approves the PRC's joining the Party of the European left (PGE), whose founding congress will be held in Rome on May 8-9. 53 people voted against this project. The opposition was divided between four other resolutions: one criticizing the project of the PGE because it does not involve the more orthodox CPs (the Greek KKE, the Portuguese CP and the CPs of eastern Europe) and asking that the founding congress of the PGE be put off until after the European elections (30 votes), two others considering that the project of the PGE testifies to a capitulation to reformism (12 votes) and accusing it of abandoning "the class programme" (4 votes), and finally the document which we reproduce here (7 votes in the absence of two of the signatories). The CPN elected a delegation of 12 members - 6 women and 6 men - to represent the PRC at the founding congress of the PGE, including Flavia D'Angeli and Gigi Malabarba.*

A thread runs through the various aspects of the debate in our party. It exists at various levels, which, apparently, move on parallel courses but which represent, taken one by one or as a block, a constant slippage in relation to the decisions of the last congress. The party is currently plunged in confusion and malaise and faces difficulties with regard to its capacity for militant initiative. The discussion on the European party is only one aspect of this situation and it would be not very comprehensible without a more general reflection. For these reasons, we propose, for discussion and vote, a general document, analysing the current situation and proposing choices which result from this.

## Permanent war

The political situation continues to be marked by the offensive of the US administration and the logic of the permanent and preventive war. In spite of the failure of the war against Iraq - if Saddam has been overthrown, the Iraqi people are in a worse situation than before and must, moreover, face the terrorist phenomenon - the Bush administration continues to use its military and technological superiority to dominate the planet, employing, as well as weapons, its economic force as shown by the competitive devaluation of the dollar. This warlike policy thus marks a phase of strong instability and uncertainty, even on the democratic level, on a world scale. The action of international terrorism, which in its autonomous determination pursues the objective of a new internal "order" in the Arab world, not only does not constitute an acceptable response, but does nothing but reinforce the US government's projects of imperialist domination.

It is in this dynamic that the European Union is embarking on the project of creation of a European power. The project of a neoliberal European Constitution, for the moment in abeyance but not abandoned, goes in this direction; but it is still more the sense of the project for a directory proposed by France, Germany and Great Britain (which also could involve Italy). The European power project is not just at the economic level but also on the military plane, which is essential to defy the United States. This dynamic is contradictory; it is founded on an obvious competition between the two principal imperialist blocs (see the trade confrontation and the levies imposed on US exports) but also on

attempts to build a political, economic and military agreement (see the Franco-American joint intervention in Haiti).

Within this framework the offensive against workers on an international scale continues. It is particularly visible in Europe in the policies imposed by the Stability Pact - challenges to pensions systems, flexibility at work, wage cuts. The denunciation of the obstacles to the Stability Pact do not constitute a reversal of the tendency of neoliberal policies, but only an attempt by the dominant classes to provide themselves with the maximum public resources to face the economic crisis.

## The attack of the Berlusconi government

This process is particularly obvious in Italy where we observe an increasing aggressiveness of the government, in particular as regards the social aspects. The final adoption of law number 30, [1] the proposed pensions reform, the federalist project, the increase of internal repression constitute aspects of a neoconservative project which seeks the support of sectors of the bourgeoisie and which, at the same time, tries to tighten the ranks of a parliamentary majority in crisis, incoherent and lacking political and social legitimacy. The government is caught in a contradiction that is the consequence of its own social policies: by striking against broad popular sectors, they also strike against a sector of the centre-right electorate. The objective of welding together neoliberalism and populism is far from realized out and, especially, the marriage between neoliberalism and electoral consensus remains a mirage (not only for the conservative forces but also for the moderate left, as the defeats of Schröder show). In this crisis, Berlusconi seeks, on the electoral level, to reinforce his personal position and leadership, without losing sight of the need for maintenance of a good relationship with the principal sectors of the Italian bourgeoisie, wedged between European recession, the excessive strength of the euro and the desperate search for concrete results. The support for Luca di Montezemolo at the head of Confindustria [2] represents this attempt.

## The centre-left

The paradoxical element is that the moderate forces of the Olive Tree pursue the same goal. The birth of the unitary lists is within this framework. What should constitute a significant new element, the Convention of the unitary list, represents a factor directed not towards the constitution of a new reformist force, but towards the constitution of a social-liberal subject as an alternative solution for the Italian bourgeoisie once the failure of the Berlusconi government is assured. Prodi's European manifesto, the only programmatic horizon of the new unitary list, the proposals for pensions "reform", the attitude during the Parmalat affair [3] and the will to reach an agreement with the centre-right on the law on investment are unambiguous evidence of the fact. The logic of alternation remains the dominant logic of the political framework, with probable effects on abstentionism and disaffection on voting and politics. That resides in the fundamental attraction that the political framework of centre-right and centre-left exerts on broad sectors of the Italian bourgeoisie and employers who, with an acute sense of their class interests, resort to the two groupings. The "bipartisan" support for the candidacy for the presidency of Confindustria is an obvious proof of it.

In addition, the declarations of the leaders of the Left Democrats (DS) and Margherita leave no room for doubt. The refusal to vote on the Italian military mission in Iraq conceals in reality the support of the Olive Tree for the Italian presence in Iraq. And the reference to the UN is not enough to mask the aspiration to become a reliable interlocutor of the United States. The support for the military operation in Afghanistan, the first application of the doctrines of infinite war, confirms this option. The decision in this context to take part in the manifestation of March 20 does not reduce the gravity of the choice. It worsens it by a political testimony of cynicism which contrasts with the need to refound the forms of politics. The leading group of the Olive Tree expresses a "responsible" attitude towards the European Union. By approving the Convention, then the draft constitution of Giscard d'Estaing (and Fini and Amato),

the Olive Tree showed the substance of its policy while supporting actively and with conviction a "Europeist" culture which, with contempt for democracy, both formal and substantial, tries to transform the Old continent into a neoliberal receptacle controlled by the rules of the market. And what to say of the attitude of Romano Prodi, who directs the European Commission, defending the Stability Pact and financial stringency with vehemence. This Stability Pact has for years strangled not only national policies but also the possibility for local bodies of carrying out modest reforms in favour of the citizens.

## The necessary unity

The examples could continue - from the Margherita's support for the law on medically assisted techniques of reproduction, [4] to the charges of "wildcat strike" against the urban transport workers - but it is enough to render comprehensible enough to us the need for re-examining the orientations adopted at the time of the last National Political Committee. Today the bases for programmatic agreement for government with the centre-left do not exist. From the point of view of unity against the right, it is possible to build an electoral agreement to beat Berlusconi, but without that implying a governmental responsibility. The very perspective of electoral unity to drive out Berlusconi cannot have any effectiveness if one does not realize first the unity which we really need, in the struggles in progress, around a common platform founded on the general demands of the vast movement which fights, in an as yet dispersed way, against the neoliberal policies of Berlusconi, often supported by the EU. Here resides the principal problem, and here one can grasp the limits and contradictions of the forces which, on paper, would and could constitute the solid allies of a possible left alternative. We think initially of the CGIL, which from the point of view of unification of the struggles, does little or nothing when it does not work straightforwardly to sap their power or to slow them down, as in the case of urban transport, as a function of a resumption of dialogue and a special relationship with the CISL or UIL. [5] The signs of a revival of dialogue are rather strong: from the contents of a series of unitary passages of the three trade-union organizations to the illusions created around the election of a new president of Confindustria.

A new phase of collaboration through dialogue would be carried out on a level even lower than that of the 1990s, because Confindustria regards as acquired and consolidated the anti-worker measures of the government, and as untouchable the current distribution of the national income which the weakened trade-union organizations cannot renegotiate.

That is why it is so significant today that the party supports the project of the FIOM fully, [6] to break with this policy and build a new phase of conflict and protagonism of the working class, a project which has a very political significance, not only at the trade-union level.

It is also significant to maintain an active support active for the initiatives of rank and file trade unionism and its attempts to resist dialogue as protagonist in significant experiences of class struggle.

## A new phase of the movement

In addition, as indicated by the mass mobilizations of recent months, the work of the "movement of the movements", which is too turned in on itself, should be started again. The movement is in an impasse of forms of representation and coordination, with difficulty in laying down common objectives and grounds for growth. Beside this dead end, however, one notes a global rise of social conflicts: the struggle in transport or schools, the metalworkers' summits, the fight against precarity of the university researchers, the struggle in the health sector, environmental struggles in Scanzano and Civitavecchia, [7] the extraordinary mobilization of Terni in defence of the iron and steel industry, and

other, often fragmented struggles. The conflict has known big days of mobilization, but it has started to root itself in many workplaces, with a greater capacity for articulation and deepening of the struggle. From now on the concrete class struggle reveals the need for a unifying platform around certain central points: the fight against precarity starting from the boycott of law 30, wages (including the social wage), the defence and revival of the social state, the abolition of the permanent centres of detention [8] and rights of citizenship for immigrants, the re-legitimation of public intervention and the defence of common property, democracy of and in the movements, starting from the representativity of workers.

[<https://npa31.org/IMG/jpg/359271.jpg>]

It is by determining platforms common to the various struggles, by a project centred on the reconstitution of links and the recombining of the new and old labour movement, that it is possible to pass today to a new phase. A phase that will develop concrete unity of action privileging the “continuity of the movement” over the “continuity of the groups”. The occasion of May 1 in Milan goes in this direction and must thus strongly engage our party.

In addition, it is necessary to propose not only the need for a general strike to block the new counter-reform of the pensions system, but a national meeting in due form of delegates from the entire world of work to define the common contents of trade-union struggle and demands. Immediately, there is March 20 and the mobilization against the war. There is no doubt that pacifism continues to animate most of the Italian movement, even in its more moderate components. It is necessary to note positively the capacity to work in a unitary manner to build the March 20 demonstration, to which we are strongly committed. But the problem remains not to exhaust the pacifist movement in a dimension of testimony, by an annual demonstration, which tends to preserve its function of overall public opinion but not its effective capacity to act politically. In other words, we need to work so that the necessary ethical dimension - which the debate on non-violence tends to codify, by crystallizing it - also becomes a political proposal. That involves the articulation of the movement in thematic and continuous campaigns around certain key points - military expenditure, Italian and foreign military bases, the process of construction of the European army - as sites of intervention for a movement which must find the forms and the instruments to remain present after March 20.

## Reading the 20th century

In this project, the movement does not need a debate on non-violence, whatever the cultural and political value of this latter. It is not the first need of a movement that has made peaceful forms of struggle a distinct and natural feature of its own existence.

It is true on the other hand, that the discussion on non-violence contains the hypothesis of a redefinition of party identity, of a rupture with the failures and the errors of the 20th century, founded on a rereading of the century and communist history which does not correspond to the concrete history of the class struggle and which is not very useful for a real critical assessment of the experiences of the past.

The selected point of attack of the rereading of the 20th century is the nodal point of war and through it the question of violence. We are told that a certain propensity, or concession, to violence, traversed the communist movement to the point of altering its original aspirations and deforming its significance. This criticism is not limited to the horrors and atrocities of Stalinism, but goes beyond this, seeking and finding errors and horrors committed from its “youth”, a series of original sins, which move the critique of Stalinism towards a more general criticism of the violent attitude of the workers' movement contained in the so-called “seizure of the Winter Palace”. Thus, without ever trying hard to verify this caricatural image, the October Revolution is put in question, as a watershed in the theory and practice of revolutionary Marxism that highlights its allegedly violent character, leaving in the margin its historical significance as liberation and autonomous activity of the masses. In the centre of this process there was, indeed, one of the greatest historical events, the capacity of the masses with to organize themselves in a democratic way through the Soviets,

through the factory councils, to practice a level of democracy that even most democratic of republics has ever known.

The paradoxical aspect is that in founding the reasons for the Stalinist involution on a supposed original sin of Communism, the seizure of power as a violent act, one minimizes the significance of Stalinism itself, by reducing it to a variant, certainly horrible, but ultimately secondary, of a much broader problem located upstream. In addition to Stalin, one rejects Lenin, and with him, we imagine, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg. In the end it is Stalin and his social counter-revolution who are relativized.

This discussion certainly contains the possibility, still completely unexpressed, of a progressive and left wing emergence from the errors of the 20th century. From this point of view, it can be useful to pose the thorny and never resolved question of power. But reducing the question of power to original errors and horrors results in banalizing a significant aspect of political action, that of being able to decide and of being able to change the world. What has always been the prerogative of the dominant classes is questioned with violence when it comes to the oppressed classes. We can discuss seriously, and it would be useful, if the organization of power produced by the October Revolution was the best adapted to this phase. But can we agree that when a mass revolution breaks the existing order it should not adopt a system of rules, institutions, participatory democracy as we would say today, in order to be capable of weighing on reality, defending its revolution, change the existing state of things?

## Democracy

At every high point of the mass movements of the 20th century, these forms of self-organization reappeared in various forms, against the efforts of all the apparatuses of social democratic and Stalinist origin to destroy them or empty them of their substance by reducing them to reformist logic. It is necessary to deepen the critique of Stalinism and a great part of communist history (it would be more correct to say: of the formations modeled on Stalinism) marked in reality by a double involution on the question of strategy and power: either social democratic, which abandons the construction of a revolutionary process, or authoritarian in a vertical and putschist direction. These are deeply antithetic conceptions to a revolutionary and democratic strategy of self-organization of the masses. In reality, this discussion does not take account of the effects of an idealistic attitude which locates errors not in the concrete historical determinations of processes but in abstract categories. The key element to propose a coherent and advantageous discussion on the question of power and a "left" exit from the errors of the 20th century turns around the unresolved question of democracy. The revolution presupposes participation and democracy in all the phases of its evolution. If there has been a constant element in the tormented events of this century, in its errors and horrors, it relates to the deficit of a real and substantial democracy. It is the absence of a real socialist democracy, founded on a true "self-emancipation of the workers" under the terrible pressure of the civil war and the isolation of this experiment, in addition to the errors made in this context, which undermined from within the revolutionary process opened by the October Revolution; it is the lack of democracy of and in the movements, in forms which guarantee self-organization and autonomy, which prevented, at various historical phases of the 20th century, movements from creating the conditions of countervailing power and which allowed their recovery by the social democrat and Stalinist apparatuses; it is the absence of an effective democracy of and in the party, which blocked free debate between the various options - always over-dramatized and resolved by splits, ideological confrontations and rancour - and it is the absence of an effective participation in choices and their applications, which allowed the growth of the cult of the leadership and the bureaucratic apparatuses. The theme of revolution, which remains central for our identity, must today be linked to that of participation and democracy: this is the most invaluable lesson which comes to us from the movement for global justice when it demands participatory democracy for another possible world.

## European policy

## The political phase and the European party

---

The discussion over the 20th century and the errors of the communist movement must have a natural consequence in concrete and current choices. If we want to really criticize the bureaucratic and vertical practices of the workers' movement, we cannot accept that a significant choice, like the constitution of a new European party, is taken behind the closed doors of the secretariats and the diplomatic relations of the party. It is an improper exercise of power.

Today we are on the eve of the European elections: a central event for the life of the party around which it is useful that we present the choices that we make. Any organizational assumption must be founded on a long-term plan and a clear and shared political orientation. Starting precisely from Europe and the place it occupies in the principal current political choices.

The existence of a vast movement, social, political, trade-union and citizen, which, starting from the European Forum in Florence, passing by that of Paris, mobilizes and fights in the name of another Europe, constitutes an invaluable opportunity to advance an alternative project for another Europe.

A Europe, above all, which rejects war as an instrument of resolution of international disagreements and which, consequently, would start "disarm", by reducing military expenditure and closing military bases, starting with US bases, firmly opposing any project of a European army.

Starting from the rejection of war, Europe must reject the idea of building itself on the basis of ethnic or gender exclusion. In our Europe, nobody should feel foreign and citizenship should be universal. The mobilizations of immigrants, which are beginning to coordinate on a continental scale since the Paris Social Forum, must be supported and unified with the other struggles.

Thus the social terrain can become the true ground of mobilization and unity which, in the name of another Europe, identifies partial and common objectives which can reinforce the struggles themselves. There will not be another Europe if we do not manage to carry out a European strike in defence of welfare, basic social rights, trade-union guarantees and so on. There will not be another Europe if beforehand, the movements have not experienced stable relations, networks and effective coordinations, joint struggles by developing to the utmost the experience of the European Social Forums. In this sense the conception of democracy itself can and must be enriched. The European Constitution is not a question that can be delegated to the governments or institutions like the Convention. It is a general question which should establish the bases for a new substantial democracy which benefits from the experience of the movements, develops the participatory method, identifies new participatory structures which are not abstract but according to the social and political content of another Europe.

For these reasons, it is necessary to reject the draft convention. A policy of amendment is not possible. Several forces, not only the social democrats and the greens, have already chosen to support it - also trade-union organizations and associations which defend the need for this text because of the absence of any constitutional reference point. Against the Constitution of the multinationals and capitalist globalization, it is necessary on the contrary to build a vast social mobilization, of a mass nature, and to thus create the conditions for another Europe, another Constitution, of the people, social, democratic and peaceful.

## The European party

Our congress set itself an ambitious but necessary objective: to build a new political subject, able to unify the forces of the alternative left on the common points of the fight against globalization and war. This construction of a European political subject must go in hand with the growth of the movement for global justice, pacifist, ecological, workers, precarious workers, youth, women, intellectuals on a continental scale. The events following the congress

## The political phase and the European party

---

confirmed the need for a new political force, not imposed from above, or merely figurative at the institutional level, but the outcome of a real process, which is constituted in sharp social struggles decided collectively on the supranational level. An organization that will be formed by successive rapprochements, but which would have a credible agenda of work immediately. A plural subject, open, formed by various sectors of the workers' movement and the class, which could act, to discuss, to build a program to meet the capitalist challenge. Not a more or less diplomatic tie-up, but a subject able to carry out "refoundation" on the continental scale and thus equipped to fight in a more effective way the forces of the right and to open a battle for hegemony with the social democrat parties, a true alternative to them and their governments.

From the movements and forces present at the European Social Forum, representing social struggles, worker struggles, those of the precarious young people who demonstrate in various countries, emerges the demand for a European anti-capitalist organization able to represent the various identities and subjectivities: an anti-capitalist subject of workers and youth, which is also feminist, ecologist, internationalist.

While being present within the GUE, the European parliamentary group made up primarily of the parties of "communist tradition", in recent years our party seriously committed itself to the work of the European anti-capitalist left which met every six months, during the EU summits, a work of political deepening, of patient convergence between the various forces which make it up, of participation in the new movement since its beginning. Convergence with these forces, with their political and ideological orientation must be reinforced and developed in line our congress orientations underlining the new centrality of the construction of the social conflict, the movements, participatory democracy from below, and the search for a new revolutionary project of rupture with capitalism and transition towards an alternate society, inasmuch as it is true that the introductory report of the congress proposed putting revolution on the agenda.

The hypothesis of construction of a European left party was integrated within this radical choice, which stems from a political judgment on the various currents of the left in Europe, in relation not only with programmatic political positions but also concrete political choices. It implied an appreciation not only of the social democrat currents but also of the parties of the so-called "communist tradition". The choice of the congress thus impelled reinforcement of relations with anti-capitalist currents to the detriment of relations marked by continuity of a past to be reevaluated or by "governmentalist" orientations of a social democrat type.

Rifondazione had precisely assumed the role of hinge between the various forces by cultivating plural relations, while developing in terms of proposals and influence its own experience and the credibility it had won. Today Rifondazione must make a political choice clearly:

– it can place at disposal its role and its politics on a European scale, its presence in the movement to carry out the construction of the anti-capitalist left, thus going in a direction coherent with its congress, without closing the door on anyone, by maintaining a plurality of relations and by supporting the renewal and the strengthening of the entire non social democrat left;

– or it can build a European party, with a centre of gravity much more to the right, with a general and vague content, as expressed in the text signed by the 11 parties, where there is no explicit rejection of the European Constitution, which is not by chance, but where one finds an ambiguous reference to the European army and a generic reference to the movement of movements.

Thus, it can constitute an axis with moderate political forces, of which several share the responsibility for neoliberal policies with the social-democrats in power, or work in a consistent way for a more coherent hypothesis with the alternative left.

That such a choice should be made, initially, by a restricted circle of the party - without an adequate participation of the leading organizations and the whole of the party, without a thorough reflection on the implications that the two options can have on the future of our party in Italy, but more especially on the possible configuration of left alternatives, able to answer the challenges of the capitalist process of European unification - seems to us a serious error of the secretariat that this national political Committee must start to overcome.

That moreover such a choice could be made without even feeling the need to invite forces which constitute the Conference of the anti-capitalist left, confronting them with of an accomplished fact, is not, in our opinion, the best way of proceeding.

## A constitutive process

For these reasons, Rifondazione decides to reopen in other terms the process of constitution of a European left party, by the promotion of a constituting process in due form which involves all the interested subjects. The starting point can only be a judgment on the dynamics and projects of capitalist unification, an evaluation of the significance of the European Convention, a valorization of the various forms of resistance and struggle which emerge, a full participation in the movement against capitalist globalization, a work to build the networks, the links, the platforms of struggle against the policies of capital and the governments which are their expression.

All that means a severe judgment on the policies of social democracy, party to the choices of the European dominant classes and in consequence, the construction of an alternative to these social-democratic forces: these forces should not be excluded from convergences and common and unitary initiatives when these are possible and useful for the development of the movements; but a general political orientation, political practices, social insertion strategically distinguish us from these forces. An alternative force, essential today to build a perspective for European workers, will be anti-capitalist in a coherent way and thus an alternative to social democracy, or it will not be born.

It is on the basis of such a process of discussion that we must renew links, rebuild contacts, open anew discussions, with all the political forces that are ready to undertake them today. At the end of such a process, we will be able to see who is really interested and ready to commit themselves fully in the construction of a European project that is anti-capitalist, solidaristic, democratic and social.

---

[1] Law number 30 (legge 30) is a law on flexibilization of work imposed by Berlusconi.

[2] Confindustria is the Italian employers' association.

[3] Parmalat is a multinational dairy products corporation whose bankruptcy caused a political crisis in Italy, revealing fraudulent accountancy. The central Bank of Italy was blamed for not monitoring the company's banking operations. The affair also clarified the links between the Olive Tree and particularly of the sector around Romano Prodi with the large northern Italian banks.

[4] This new law was voted through under the pressure of the Catholic hierarchy. It could open the way to a legal challenge to the right to abortion, because it considers that the embryo is a legal "subject".

[5] These are the three traditional Italian trade-union confederations. In 1995, the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL) claimed 5.25 million members, the Italian Confederation of Trade Unions of Labour (CISL) 3.75 million and the Italian Union of Labour (UIL) 1.73 million.

## The political phase and the European party

---

[6] The FIOM is the metalworkers' trade-union federation.

[7] In Scanzano the entire population mobilized against the installation of a site for storage of nuclear waste; while in Civitavecchia there was widespread opposition to the installation of a coal-fired power station.

[8] The permanent detention centres were set up as part of the offensive against immigrants and asylum seekers.