



Rifondazione Comunista Italy's new reformism

Sun, 30/06/1996 - 10:59

The most dynamic left force in Italy since 1991 has been Communist Refoundation. Marco Zito looks at the reasons for its growth over the last five years and whether it has broken with its Stalinist heritage

April the Italian elections put the spotlight on Rifondazione Comunista (RC). RC gained over 3 million votes nationwide and commanded double percentage figures in a string of important cities and towns.¹ It gained enough seats to make its support essential if there were to be a government of the left rather than of the right. This scale of electoral success for a party which openly claims to represent the more combative and class conscious traditions of the Italian working class is certainly an important phenomenon.

RC has, at one stroke, become the ?agship of the left reformist parties which emerged from the wreckage of post-1989 Stalinism. These parties have gathered momentum and support not so much by any specially active role in the class struggle as by attracting those appalled by the ever rightward evolution of former Eurostalinist, Social Democratic and Labour parties throughout Europe.

A constellation of such post-Stalinist and left Social Democratic parties has become a new focus for left activists. Izquierda Unida (IU) in Spain, the PDS in Germany, even the Parti Communiste Française (PCF) and the newly formed SLP in Britain regard themselves as sister parties of RC in an informal, mini-left-socialist international.

Whilst not the largest of these parties, RC is the only one in a position to exert pressure on a ?government of the centre-Left?, the Uliva (Olive Tree) cross class coalition which won the elections.

Despite winning only 35 seats, the support of the RC deputies in the 31 May vote of confidence was vital to the installation of Romano Prodi. . Now RC cannot evade responsibility for this government, pledged as it is to a whole series of rationalisations and anti-working class reforms.

Whether fate has been kind to put it in such a position of responsibility we will see over the next year. It gives workers throughout Europe the chance to see if the reinvention of left reformism can measure up to the challenges of racist Fortress Europe and the neo-liberal logic of Maastricht.

Although RC refused to join the Cabinet, its most prominent leader Fausto Bertinotti gave his backing to the coalition saying it will have the ?conditional support? of the RC in parliament. And this despite Prodi's promise that at least 18 months of sacrifices lay ahead of Italian workers. The new government faces the biggest budget deficit outside the USA (£48 billion) and has committed itself to cut state spending to bridge the gap.

How then can RC reconcile the contradiction between its promises to defend state industry, to fight for a rise in pensions and a return to wage indexation?and its commitment to support a government pledged to do the exact opposite?

What will it do in the face of the government's impending cuts package to get the Italian lira back inside the EU exchange rate system? How will it fight the next attempt to sell-off the state controlled telecommunications group?

Either RC will be dragged along the road behind the Prodi government's cuts, grumbling and threatening, or it will go back into all out opposition and have to take the responsibility for bringing down the government (letting in Berlusconi and Fini) or ?forcing? Prodi to seek the parliamentary support of forces to his right (the Lega Nord of Umberto Bossi).

The end of the Italian Communist Party (PCI)

Rifondazione was founded in 1991. Conceived in opposition to the decisions of the last Congress of the PCI in February it was born nine months later. At its February 1991 Congress the PCI changed its name to that of Partito Democratico della Sinistra (PDS) 'Party of the Democratic Left' and finally severed its residual ideological links to its Stalinist past.

The PCI had long been a reformist workers' party, since 1935 when the Comintern renounced revolution in favour of an alliance with the 'progressive' sections of the capitalist class, nominally to protect bourgeois democracy from fascism, but in reality from working class revolution. For the PCI this was disguised by the fact that 'its own' bourgeoisie was fascist.

But with Mussolini's fall in 1943 and the Italian bourgeoisie's entry into the anti-fascist camp, the PCI was free to realise the popular front with its own capitalist class. Under its veteran leader Palmiro Togliatti, the party completely betrayed the mass anti-fascist struggle of the Italian working class. The PCI actively disarmed the resistance and supported the creation of the first Italian republic in 1945 under right-wing bourgeois leadership.

The bourgeoisie showed scant gratitude to its saviours. With the onset of the Cold War, in 1947 the PCI was excluded from government. This 'ban' lasted for the next forty years. As long as the PCI was tied to Moscow it could not be trusted to enter the government of a major NATO country. Yet it continued to serve its ungrateful bourgeoisie throughout these years. Its main role in post-war Italy was to head off militant working class struggles into a municipal and parliamentary blind alley.

Thanks to a mass membership of more than one million and its control of the CGIL, the strongest trade union federation, the PCI carried out this job, always hoping that one day it would be summoned back into government by a progressive wing of the Christian Democracy (DC).

Nevertheless, reflecting its origins and its ties with the Moscow bureaucracy, the PCI covered its reformist practice in a cloak of 'communist' phrases. At least rhetorically the PCI maintained the perspective of going beyond capitalism once the 'battle for democracy' was secured and even promised it would establish the 'dictatorship of proletariat'.

At the end of the 1980's, with the disappearance of Stalinist regimes worldwide and the acute crisis of Italy's ruling Christian Democrats (DC), PCI leader Achille Occhetto grasped that the PCI at long last had a chance of entering government provided he could reassure the bosses that the PCI had renounced the goal of socialism. Of course, this only performed the role of deluding the party rank and file that devoting their time and energy to the squalid electoral manoeuvres of the party leaders, served a higher cause? That of the ultimate emancipation of the working class.

Occhetto's plan had several components. First, ditch all the inflammatory symbols and names associated with its 'communist' past. Second, accept publicly that capitalism is here to stay and is the best guarantor of economic efficiency.² Third, recognise in parliamentary democracy the highest possible political form. By 1990 Occhetto attributed the collapse of the Stalinist regimes to their lack of parliamentary democracy and accepted unambiguously that change could only be realised through such a regime.³

Fourth, Occhetto championed a radical change in the Italian political system? a constitutional reform to introduce a 'first past the post' electoral system. This would allow for more stable governmental alliances with the PDS at the head of a reformist and democratic coalition.

At the 20th PCI Congress at Rimini in 1991 almost a third of the delegates opposed the 'new course' of Occhetto, although only 70 delegates out of 1500 voted in favour of the motion of Armando Cossutta, the leader-in-waiting of the RC.

Stalinist legacy reaffirmed

For thousands of workers in the ranks of the party, the Occhetto line created deep confusion and demoralisation. A whole body of dogma and ideology, to which they were deeply attached, was unceremoniously thrown into the dustbin. This ideology moreover attached millions of the more class conscious Italian workers to the party. A layer of middle to lower ranking PCI leaders decided to retrieve this inheritance, not a worthless one in terms of an electoral base for winning parliamentary and municipal positions.

The head of this group was Armando Cossutta, now President of RC. Cossutta is a die-hard Stalinist. He was always totally loyal to the Kremlin, supporting every policy somersault, every use of the tanks by the Soviet bureaucracy. He dutifully expressed his solidarity with the August 1991 coup attempt by the hardliners against Gorbachev.

The congress which launched RC was held in Rome in December 1991. It asserted its complete ideological continuity with the old PCI. Even the members of RC saw themselves ?not as a split, but, paradoxically, its opposite, the answer to a mass diaspora provoked by the dissolution of the PCI.?4

Thus at the level of ideology and goals the RC represented not so much a split to the left as a standing still while the rest of the old PCI moved right. The leaders of the RC have all affirmed the relevance of the specific features of Italian Stalinist doctrine as laid down by their historic leader, Palmiro Togliatti.

It was Togliatti who created the distinction between ?reformism? (the policy of the Italian Socialist Party, and rejected by the PCI) and the ?structural reforms? pursued by the PCI. The distinction was more semantic than real but had an important role to play in persuading the mass base of the PCI that it was somehow revolutionary.

?Reformism? was the belief that a political, peaceful, evolutionary and parliamentary transformation of capitalism to socialism was possible. Structural reforms, however, were social changes that would erode the basis of capitalism, such as land reform in the South which would undermine the rule of reactionary landowners and with it the basis of fascism and monopoly capitalism.

In reality, it was all a justification for a popular front alliance with ?progressive? capitalists and a reason for indefinitely postponing the socialist goals of the working class. After the split with the PDS the RC reaffirmed the doctrine of structural reforms and formed the basis of their critique of the PDS.

Even when it came to an assessment of the causes of the collapse of ?really existing socialism? the new party drew conclusions that only served to bolster their reformist project. While still an opposition inside the PCI the future core of the RC leadership argued that the Eastern Bloc was ?a reality in profound contradiction with Marxism.?5 But this was because these regimes held ?a conception of socialism which posed as central the seizure of power and the nationalisation of the means of production.?

Once again this idea reaches far back into the PCI?s past, originating in Gramsci and Togliatti?s mistaken theory that in advanced countries a frontal assault on state power was mistaken since the (democratic) state machine was too intermeshed with civil society, too resilient to be captured in this way. Rather, a ?war of position? (parliamentary and municipal advance, cultural and political ?hegemony? over social as well as state institutions) was necessary. By these means the communists would eventually undermine bourgeois control over all the bodies responsible for gaining the consent of the masses for capitalism.6

Ironically, the RC was now retrospectively applying this theory to the one country where Gramsci and Togliatti had accepted that revolutionaries had been justified in seizing state power by frontal attack?backward Russia!

The RC naturally rejected the PCI?s own revolutionary, pre-Stalinist past. In his address to the founding Congress, Sergio Garavini, elected General Secretary, turned his back on the revolutionary tradition of the factory councils of 1921:

?The primitive vision of political struggle in the pure terms of a fight between workers and capitalists, class against class, was overcome by our Communist Party already in 1926 at the Lyon Congress, by stressing the need for a

complex block of forces for the revolution?⁷

The same cross class strategy can be found outlined too in the party's statutes. The party is:

... inspired by the values of socialism and of Marxist thought, renewing the tradition of Italian communists, in the spirit of anti-fascist resistance and the Republican Constitution, the democratic base from which the communists start for the transformations in a socialist direction of the society and the state.⁸

These popular frontist sentiments would continue to justify the axis of the politics of RC: the search for an electoral alliance with the 'progressives', above all the PDS, when elections were held in 1992.

Building the party 1991-92

The leadership of RC was intelligent enough not to limit itself to building a nostalgic Stalinist sect. In the run up to the first Congress they organised a series of open rallies and meetings in most Italian towns to build a mass base for the party.

They could not rely simply upon a bureaucratic apparatus to get their message across since most of the property and propaganda machine—the daily *L'Unità*, the centre, the fulltimers, the whole of the party apparatus, the local leaders, the CGIL—all stayed firmly in the hands of PDS. With respect to the thousands of old PCI factory cells RC could only count on 38 by 1993.

The leadership had little alternative but to seek to draw in a range of forces outside the PCI ranks: what was left of the Nuova Sinistra, the new left of the 1970's; all the activists that had left PCI in the previous years; youth, etc. The biggest success was the decision of Democrazia Proletaria (DP) to join in June 1991. Among the 702 delegates at the first Congress, 533 were from PCI, 113 from other political organisations (mainly DP), 56 with no previous attachment.⁹

To attract these forces the RC stressed its openness and democracy. To indicate its commitment on this score the first congress adopted a resolution on the environment and made some passing acknowledgement of the merits of feminism. But the democracy was limited. In classical Stalinist fashion the new party did not grant rights to organised tendencies and forced the DP members to dissolve themselves into RC. This seriously limited the impact of opposition to the leadership—the only organised faction allowed.¹⁰

Still, the relative openness paid off in terms of recruitment. Dismissed as an irrelevance early in 1991, the RC managed to attract around 150,000 members organised in 600 circles by May 1991.¹¹ Many of these had been among the most active inside the PCI.

They gained 5.6% of the votes, based essentially in the traditional PCI strongholds of the center-north of Italy like Tuscany and Emilia, but also in the industrial towns of the north such as Milan and Turin. More than 75 % of RC votes were drawn from former PCI electors, especially in the traditional strongholds of the industrial working class.

No sooner had this support within the Italian industrial and political vanguard been demonstrated than RC was called upon to provide leadership to these same workers, on the streets and in the factories.

1992 was a decisive year for the class struggle in Italy. On 31 July, on the eve of the holidays, the leadership of the CGIL and CISL trade union federations signed an agreement with the employers to end the scala mobile (sliding scale of wages that gave some protection to wages against inflation)—an historical gain of the working class from the great struggles of 1969-72.

Then in September the Amato government announced an austerity package to follow the real wage cuts. The same trade union leaders were forced to call demonstrations and general strikes in September and October. Hundreds of thousands of workers paralysed the main Italian cities for weeks. This was the first mass movement of the Italian working class

for 20 years.

The demonstrations turned into a violent protest against the CGIL and CISL leaders. The situation was ripe for the RC to grow at the expense of the PDS. The RC was deeply involved in the movement. In the initial demonstrations its banners demanded a general strike.

Inside the CGIL, RC members struggled against the leadership via a minority opposition tendency called Essere Sindacato¹².

In addition, RC initiated and fully supported a rank and file movement across the trade unions – the Movimento dei Consigli unitari (MCU)¹³ which first met on 20 October in the midst of the strikes. It organised 300 councils which grew to 600 by 9 November and together they pressed for a general strike.¹⁴ Finally, some sections of RC were active in the COBAS movement,¹⁵ half way between a rank and file movement and a new trade union federation, based in certain sectors: railways, schools, civil servants and some car plants.

Despite the advantageous situation all these movements failed in their proposed aim of developing an organised mass movement of rank and file workers capable of serious resistance to the bureaucratised trade union leadership or of founding a ‘class struggle trade union’.

Essentially, Essere Sindacato and the MCU fetishised the unity of CGIL and limited themselves to pressurising the official leadership into action. The COBAS too impatiently looked in the direction of creating a new trade union, underestimating the need for a phase of struggle inside the existing union federations.

But what is worse, all these opposition movements failed to build a united movement of the rank and file on a program of trade union democracy and class struggle. Instead, all of them proposed as the goal of the movement a state referendum to introduce democracy in the unions.

This appeal to the capitalist state, or even to the multi-class electorate, to regulate the affairs of the trade unions betrayed their deep reformist illusions and their inability to understand the bourgeois character of the state apparatus. It completely wasted the opportunity offered by the mass strikes and protests of the workers to get rid of their treacherous leaders.

In part the fact that the RC was not able to fuse all these movements into one behind a coherent programme was due to the fact that different sectors inside RC oriented to different trade union oppositions. This at least was in stark contrast to the PCI of old; its fraction inside the CGIL was well organised and disciplined.

But the main reason for RC’s failure to make more of the mass movement was the reformist politics of its leadership. This can be seen in the declarations of Cossutta when the CGIL leaders were losing control of the strike movement;

‘The parties of the majority [DC, PSI with the external support of PDS] should understand the real situation. Nobody is in control of the plants. While we will try to do our job, it is time that they start doing theirs. Otherwise in a week nobody will know how it will end . . .’¹⁶

The events of the autumn of 1992 proved that the RC had significant roots within a sector of most active trade unionists and class conscious workers. Its prestige was strengthened and it consolidated itself at the national level, further eroding PDS support in the old PCI heartlands.¹⁷ Moreover, the role of the PDS in backing the Amato government’s attacks and then after April 1993 the Ciampi government, forced a further significant minority inside the PDS to resign and join the RC during 1993 (see box on Bertinotti).

The Second Congress

At the Second Congress of RC in Rome in January 1994 a new alliance was born which forms the core of the RC leadership up to the present: the axis of Cossutta and Fausto Bertinotti. Cossutta was re-elected President of RC and

Bertinotti, having entered the party only three months before, was elected General Secretary.

At one level it was an alliance and compromise between the hard-line Stalinist views of Cossutta and the trade union syndicalism of Bertinotti. The political platform of this compromise was not difficult to arrive at. The three main political contributions to the Congress, by chief ideologue Lucio Magri, by Bertinotti and the final majority motion of Cossutta and Bertinotti, all stand on the same ground of left reformism, the only differences being rhetorical, tactical or ideological nuances reflecting their different political traditions.

The Congress was dominated by electoral considerations. In April a referendum (backed by the PDS) approved a 75 % 'first past the post' electoral system to replace proportional representation.

Magri opened the Congress asking bluntly:

'We have to decide if we will stand in the next elections as part of the political front of the left.'

A minority party such as RC without regional majority strongholds was doomed to lose most of its MPs (57 at the time!) if it stood alone. Magri argued that such an alliance of the left was justified by the need to stop the right.

He outlined a short programme for this government: redistribution of the income (wage increases, sliding scale), reduction of the public debt, support for environmental protection, measures to reduce unemployment, democratisation of the state, etc. The whole debate was peppered with references to Marx, the debate between Lenin and Luxemburg, and of course Gramsci and Togliatti.

Taking his cue from Gramsci, Magri said the political strategy of RC was:

'not like a concentrated act of taking power, but as an historic-social process, the construction of hegemony, a transformation not without pain through stages'.

And what should the first stage of this be? Why, an electoral bloc to get as many RC MPs as possible. The final Congress motion committed the RC to:

'a victory of a front of left and progressive forces . . . What we pursue is an alliance with different forces, with different strategic perspectives. An electoral, political and programmatic alliance.'

The decisions of this Congress were an important milestone. They determined that the parliamentary electoralist perspective of the leadership and its search for a progressive coalition against the right would be safeguarded at all costs. The consequences of this were to be seen in the actions of RC during the strike wave of 1994 and the general elections of that year.

Parliament or mass struggle?

In 1994, RC entered the Progressisti electoral bloc, which included bourgeois figures like Segni and La Malfa. While RC increased its score from 5.6% to 6.1%, the left alliance was defeated by the right-wing block of Berlusconi and Fini. Only three months after Berlusconi came to power he succeeded in uniting the working class against him by his attack on pensions. Once more there was a huge wave of anti-government strikes and demonstrations.

What was the line of RC? First, a glance at *Liberazione* (weekly paper of RC) during September and October that year indicates that RC completely side-stepped its responsibility to act as a collective organiser of the strike wave. Once the strike wave was well underway it left the issue of a general strike to a report of a timid declaration of *Essere Sindacato*.

It praises the movement for its 'exceptional' and 'historic' character while refusing to offer it any political direction. How should the workers organise to kick Berlusconi out? By what methods? For what goals? Under whose leadership? *Liberazione* was silent.

This glaring omission was deliberate and flows from the political line of the Second Congress: to strive for the unity of 'the left' above all else. The key tactical line of the leadership was 'to avoid isolation', which meant not putting the CGIL leadership under too much pressure and thereby compromise the sought after unity with the PDS.

In the face of the impending general strike of 14 October the national leadership of RC declared itself at the 'service of the movement'. Bertinotti wrote:

'We are very critical, we consider it a disaster that today somebody [the CGIL] should think of proposing once more the politics of negotiation [with the government]; nevertheless, we have suspended every critical judgement, dissolving our slogans, our banners in the movement.'¹⁹

Having abdicated any responsibility for leading the strike movement to success and overcoming the political obstacles in the path of this, the trade union bureaucracy was free negotiate an agreement with the Berlusconi government which fell far short of what could have been achieved given the strength of the movement.

The truth is that the strike wave was seen as a diversion from the real political (i.e. parliamentary) strategy that was upper most in the collective mind of the RC leadership. RC proposed to the PDS as against the Berlusconi regime not a workers' government based on the factory and strike committees thrown up between 1992-94, but a 'government of guarantee', an interim government open to all the 'democratic' forces interested in electoral reform and new elections.

Their parliamentary cretinism and total commitment to the popular front strategy succeeded in squandering an enormous opportunity. Meanwhile, the plea for co-operation with the PDS predictably fell on deaf ears. Instead, PDS leader Massimo D'Alema chose to support Lamberto Dini, a Berlusconi minister, in an alliance with Lega Nord and to try to split the parliamentary group of RC in order to secure precious votes for the government.

This PDS manoeuvre worked. Applying to the end the logic of the line of the Second Congress, half of the RC deputies (17) decided to support Dini in a vote of confidence in December 1994 and resigned from RC.

During 1995, despite the fact that Dini carried out a similar attack on the pension system as the one earlier launched by Berlusconi, RC did not move a finger to organise the resistance. To do it, would have meant to break the non-aggression pact with the PDS, and particularly the tacit agreement with the trade union bureaucrats.

Far from turning to the left in 1995, RC took its Second Congress perspective of alliances further by extending them on a regional scale and enlarging their scope to include the Italian Popular Party (PPI), one of the fragments of the discredited Christian Democrats. An alliance with the Lega Nord was also proposed by RC in Lombardy and Piemonte, and effectively realised in many local administrations in the north.

RC and the Olive Tree alliance

That RC backed the centre-left electoral and governmental block, Ulivo, for the 1996 elections was therefore no surprise. RC leaders feared losing their parliamentary base above all else since it would remove the key platform from which to pursue their strategy of progressive blocs.

RC backed the PDS. But the PDS in turn backed other bourgeois forces inside the coalition including current prime minister Romano Prodi, ex-DC and one-time manager of state-owned industries responsible for tens of thousands of lay-off in the 1980s. The Ulivo also included Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, ex-boss of the Banca d'Italia, and Lamberto Dini who RC had refused to support when Prime Minister just a few months before!

RC tried to face both ways before the election. It would back the Ulivo list but in the event it won it would not necessarily support a government of it. They would support the list but not . . . Dini's group. But there was no difference between Dini, Bianchi or Prodi.

This tactical doublethink of Bertinotti only served to confuse and demoralise. But pressured between a radicalised base

and the imperatives of its chosen popular frontist strategy such confusion was inevitable.

RC entered the campaign with a left reformist electoral programme designed to reflect the aspirations of its members and supporters; it outlined a series of demands that if implemented would considerably shift the distribution of wealth and income towards the working class and away from the bourgeois class.

For example, in the face of unemployment of 12% RC raised the slogans, 'cut the hours, not the jobs: a 35 hour week for 40 hours pay', which if implemented would immediately create one and half million jobs.

Connected with this was a plan for 'social renewal' of much of the dilapidated infrastructure of public welfare education and health in Italy, especially the poor southern half. RC fought for a system of free health and education for all, opposed all attempts at privatisation and stood for compulsory education up to the age of 18.

In the face of inflation at 5% (well above the EU average) RC called for the re-introduction of the 'scala mobile' wage indexation.

The centre piece of RC programme was defence of the 'social state'. Historically, Italy has always had since the war a high ratio of public spending to GDP; but much of it, such as pension provision, was a discretionary award within the gift of the ruling Christian Democracy.

Such a system needed a radical overhaul, but one which put social provision as firmly part of every citizen's unconditional right. Instead, the Dini government made great strides in undermining the principle of public provision. The reform of pensions, for example, has led to raising the age of retirement. RC argued for a lowering of the age of retirement with special provision for women, the disabled and those whose jobs entailed heavy manual labour.

RC members have also been in the forefront of attempts to fight racism in Italy. They played a leading role in the 70,000 strong demonstration in Rome in 1995 against the introduction of racist immigration laws by Dini. RC stands for the abolition of all racist immigration controls (as usual Stalinists fall short of opposing all immigration controls) as well as standing for the right of all immigrants to full citizenship and special provisions for them in every sphere of public life. In addition it calls 'as a beginning' for 'at least the re-negotiation' of all third world debt as well as an increase in aid for the exploited of Asia and Africa.

The greatest defect of the programme natural given its emphasis is on the 'wider and just development of democracy' as the main goal of RC is its lack of an idea that socialism is both a practical goal and an urgent necessity to resolve the problems faced by Italian workers.

Embarrassed by the collapse of Stalinist 'socialism' and held back by the overriding imperative of deepening the democracy of the capitalist state, RC are incapable of telling those that look to it that bourgeois democracy is a deceit, a trap designed to demobilise mass struggles against capitalism.

RC's reformist weakness appears precisely at that point where the line between 'democratisation' of the capitalist state and its destruction is involved.

So for example, instead of calling on the working class to smash the machine of state repression, the key obstacle on its road to power, RC calls for the reform of NATO and argued vaguely that the all standing armies should 'in part and progressively be turned over to civilian control'.

Worse, in defence of the 'democratic assets of our Republic' there will be 'no need to call for the dissolution of the secret services or the disarming and disbanding of the Carabinieri'²⁰ And this in a society that 20 years ago saw tanks deployed on the streets against students!

Such a programme, if the RC ever got anywhere near implementing it, would lead to disaster. If the RC took its own social reforms seriously they would have to be paid for out of a massive taxation of the bosses' wealth and a complete

reversal of privatisation. This would lead to the forces of bourgeois reaction mobilising all within their power, above all the state machine of repression, to undermine and sabotage the government.

But RC has already given them a pledge that the key agencies of this work would be left untouched and unchallenged by the RC. It would lead to a wholesale retreat from its social reform package or coup?either Presidential and constitutional or bloody and illegal.

The future?

On the eve of the election Bertinotti pledged that after it RC would ?mobilise the masses around the country and on every front.? After the results, Bertinotti explained again in *Liberazione* that ?we will activate a mass initiative to support the parliamentary pressure?.

To date Bertinotti has mobilised the masses?to support a new government whose programme has been dictated by Gianni Agnelli, the FIAT boss.

To justify their radical rhetoric and practical actions the leaders of RC wheel out two arguments. First, they massively exaggerate the danger of the right wing, fascist and authoritarian solution to the Italian crisis. For RC this danger demands above all imposes an alliance to defeat the right wing parties.

Secondly, RC insist that capitalism in the late 20th century is in irreversible decline. Consequently, there is no room for the programme of parties like the PDS and therefore support will drift away from it towards the RC in time when this becomes clear to the mass of workers.

Whether the Prodi government will be able to push through its attacks without resistance is not clear. Despite the support of RC and PDS and their control of CGIL, the working class has already shown in 1992 and 1994 that it is capable of mobilising without or against its own leaders.

In the event of a renewed wave of industrial class struggle against Prodi, RC will play the role of fireman, as it did in 1994. But this will bring it even more into contradiction with its base than in 1994.

Only through an audacious independent intervention by revolutionaries, combining a thorough critique of the leadership line with a united front with the workers influenced by it, can the working class be broken from the chains binding it to the cross class collaboration promoted by RC.

A deep split within RC on a revolutionary programme, similar to the split of Livorno in 1921 which gave birth to the PCI from the Socialist Party, will be essential if RC members are to help in the construction of a new, revolutionary, Leninist-Trotskyist party in Italy.

Footnotes

1 RC made progress everywhere, obtaining an average 8.6 % of the votes and doubling its score in Turin over its 1994 result (from 6.2 to 13.7 %).

2 M J Bull, ?La svolta di Occhetto e la crisi del Pci? in *Politica in Italia*, 1990 pp123-144 (127).

3 A Occhetto, *Dichiarazione d'intenti*, Rome 1990.

4 *Liberazione* 21 December 1991.

5 PCI 20th Congress, *Mozioni, Documenti, Regolamento*, Rome 1990, p9.

6 See A. Cleminson and K. Hassell, ?Gramsci and the Revolutionary Tradition? in *Permanent Revolution*, no 6 Oxford 1987 for a full critique of this idea and of Gramsci?s evolution from centrism to Stalinism.

7 *ibid.*

8 *Liberazione*, *op cit.*

ionale, September-
October, 1947.

9 *ibid.*

10 The Congress elected a 16 strong executive and 20 regional directorates, similar to the old PCI structure.

11 J M Foot, 'The 'Left Opposition' and the crisis?', in *The New Italian Republic* by S Gundle and S Parker, London 1996, pp174 .This figure was corrected to 106 000 at the end of 1994 according to *Liberazione*, 18 December 1994.

12 Roughly translated as 'to be a (real) trade union?.'

13 sometimes called 'gli autoconvocati' (self-convened).

14 MCU was based essentially in the industrial regions of the North. It renewed a tradition of the workers' movement in Italy of the 1970's, namely the organisation of Consigli di Fabbrica, similar to a shop steward committees in Britain. They forged trade union rank and file unity at a factory level on a militant platform.

15 COBAS means COmitati di BASE; rank and file committees.

16 *La Repubblica*, 25 September 1992.

17 The strike wave continued into most of 1993 though not on the same scale as 1992. In February 1993 RC organised a 200,000 strong demonstration in Rome. In September a 300,000 demonstration was called in the capital by trade union rank and file organisations. Long and bitter strikes in defence of the jobs occurred at Alenia, among the miners of Sardegna and the chemical workers in Crotone.

18 *Liberazione*, 28 December 1994.

19 *Liberazione*, 30 October 1994.

20 1994 majority Congress document.

21 Quoted in *Proposta per la rifondazione comunista* April 1996.

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