

Election Puts Italian Communist Leader Back in Limelight

(Editor's note: Western observers are concerned by the new vitality and renewed popularity of the polls of the Communist party in Italy, the largest in Western Europe. In this dispatch, a veteran United Press International reporter in Rome examines the situation.)

By ERNEST SAKLER
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Rome - (UPI) - The Communist danger in Italy today is greater than it has been since 1948.

Many have been saying in recent years, especially since the country's economic boom

in the Common Market, that Italian Communism was dead. But in the Italian general elections in April, the Communists picked up one million more votes than in the last election.

The massive gains, which no one has yet thoroughly explained, put Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti back in the limelight of world Communism and put him in a strong position at home.

A number of commentators feel that responsibility for the Red advance rests at least as much with the shortsightedness of Italian Democrats as with Togliatti's shrewdness.

But even Togliatti himself seemed to be surprised by his massive election gains. Although now he has taken a "knew-all-along" attitude and speaks with the assurance of a man who feels Communism's final climb to power in Italy is only a matter of time.

Some observers, both inside and outside Italy, have blamed the Red advance at least partly on the Catholic church's "softer" approach to Communism during the reign of Pope John XXIII.

But this ignores, or grossly underestimates the independence and individualism of the Italian voter, Catholic in religion though most of them may be. The question is one for politicians, the educators, the civic leaders, not for the church.

If you ask an Italian why the ruling Christian Democrats lost votes and the Communists gained, a typical answer is: "Because the people were fed up."

Has Same Meaning

The same Italian will note that the million votes gained by the Liberals - a moderate rightwing, staunchly democratic and pro-Western opposition party - had much the same meaning: a protest

against the way the country was being run.

The "protest" itself is against the tantalizing slow-vague. It apparently is aimed

against recurrent financial scandals - some true, some manufactured - against politicians generally. Italy's unprecedented prosperity of recent years did not seem to assuage the discontent.

The argument seems to go like this: If you used to earn one Lira and someone else earned 100, the fact that now you earn two and the other man 200 (or you believe he does) doesn't make you any happier. Another factor is that the person who has just discovered prosperity, things that were tolerated for centuries may suddenly become unbearable.

Togliatti's strength is in his awareness of this discontent and in his efforts to personify it in his party. His recent election campaigns were almost entirely "against" the Christian Democrats rather than being "for" anything.

With the uneasiness there is in world Communist party ranks over the Sino-Soviet split and other aspects of Nikita Khrushchev's policies, Togliatti might well have been embarrassed in giving the comrades too many specific things to fight "for."

This has shown itself in Italy in the fact that the Communists have been plagued over the past few months by a steady trickle of defections of minor provincial party officials who searched their minds and found that they were not Communists any more.

But unlike the Marxist-schooled party officials, Italian voters are uncomplicated. With many of them, Togliatti's campaign against government "inefficiency" and "corruption" was a hit. The Communist vote skyrocketed from 6.7 million votes in 1958 to 7,767,601 in April, the highest Italy's Reds have ever polled. For the first time since 1946, the Communists and Socialists combined outpolled the Christian Democrats 39.1 to 38.3 per cent.

Workable Alliance
If current efforts for a workable alliance of Christian Democrats and Socialists fail, new elections in the spring of next year are extremely likely. And if the Communists advance again, this could well touch off a chain reaction in which first the Socialists and then other groups or individual parliament members would jump on the Red bandwagon.

Most non-Communist politicians agree that a more effective government policy in past years could have stopped the Communists and even caused a serious crisis in their ranks. But these critics have opposite views of what that policy should have been.

Togliatti, back after the war from years of exile in Moscow, rebuilt the Communist party from scratch in Allied-liberated Italy. The emphasis then was on violence. In the "Red belt" of Emilia Romagna, Communist underground fighters who descended from the hills at the end of the war summarily "executed" hundreds - some of them Fascists, others just people they happened to dislike.

For a time, the tide was running for them. Communist ministers were in the government coalition while Communist labor leaders stirred strikes and riots against that same government in a two-pronged bid for power.

Ousted the Communists
In 1947, the late Christian Democratic Premier Alcide de Gasperi ousted the Communists and Socialists from the government and forced a decisive test. In general elections in 1948 the Christian Democrats and other democratic parties under De Gasperi leadership trounced a Communist-Socialist "peoples front." Red hopes of winning power peacefully at the polls seemed to be dashed for all time.

A few months later, a Sicilian student shot and seriously wounded Togliatti. The party, left leaderless, reacted in the instinctive way, launching a nationwide insurrection. The fighting lasted five days and claimed 21 lives. More than 200 were wounded. But eventually the tough riot police under Interior Minister Mario Scelba put down the insurrection.

One such occasion was in July, 1960, when many were killed in Communist riots against the late Premier Fernando Tambroni, who rested on unpopular neo-Fascist support. Tambroni's government fell, but the Communists gained no say whatsoever in the cabinet that followed it.

Has Taken Pains
By and large, Togliatti has taken pains to build a popular image of the Communists as a peace-loving, democratic party and a defender of the constitution against the "dictation" of the Christian Democrats. His political game has been rather unscrupulous even by Communist standards.

In 1959-60 he shocked a number of party members by joining forces with neo-Fascists to support the Sicilian government of rebel Catholic Silvia Milazzo.

Even before then Togliatti's parliamentary policies made a number of revolutionary-minded party veterans and fellow-travelers unhappy.

In 1956, with deStalinization and the Hungarian revolt, the Socialists of Pietro Nenni, until then faithful allies of Togliatti, broke their "unity of action" pact with the Communists and started on a long and uncertain path which so far has taken them only mid-

way between Communism and anti-Communism.

The shock at the time was heavy. A number of leading Communists, including deputy Antonio Giolitti and Sen. Eugenio Reale, one of the founding members of the Cominform, noisily quit the party. Hundreds of others tipped out quietly.

In two years, according to official party figures, membership in the Italian Communist party fell from 2,053,000 to little over 1.7 million. It has since been rising almost steadily but is still far short of the 2 million mark aimed for by the party leaders.



YOUTHFUL LEADERS GREETED - President Kennedy is shown as he greeted the president and vice president of the Boys' Nation in the White House Rose Garden. The President is shaking hands with Richard J. Stratton, 17, Boys' Nation president, of Leland, Ill., as Jack W. Hanks, 16, Midland, Tex., vice president, looks on. (UPI)

Pickets Posted at Pilot Rock Plant

By United Press International

The Lumber and Sawmill Workers Union have extended its strike against Georgia-Pacific Corp. with the posting of pickets at Pilot Rock, Ore.

About 250 sawmill and logging employees were affected. The pickets appeared about 6 a.m. The Lumber and Sawmill Workers and the International Woodworkers of America began closing down Georgia-Pacific operations last week in a contract dispute.

The only plants still operating are at Woodleaf and Feather Falls, Calif.

Commercial Fishermen End Strike For Prices

Portland - (UPI) - Independent commercial salmon fishermen along the Washington and Oregon coasts have ended their spontaneous "strike" for higher silver salmon prices when most buyers agreed to pay 32 cents per pound.

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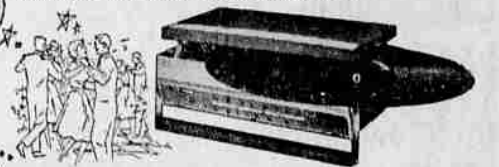
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