

## Report from Rome by Liliana Celani

### AIDS, drugs are top election issues

*No thanks to the leaders of the political parties, who have tried to keep a lid on controversy.*

On June 14, Italians will go to the polls in early national elections, to vote up a new Parliament. The elections were called one month ago, as the inevitable outcome of a long government crisis which followed the resignation of Socialist Premier Bettino Craxi.

To judge from the media, the only "issue" in this election would seem to be the personal confrontation between Craxi and the head of the Christian Democratic party (DC), Ciriaco De Mita, who is claiming the right of his party to take over the premiership again. In TV debates, rallies, and interviews, leaders of all parties are very carefully avoiding any discussion of the problems that Italy is facing right now, and find it more comfortable to reduce the election campaign to personal insults. Craxi, in his first campaign rally in Milan, went so far as to blame God for sending a downpour, which prevented voters from attending.

To the extent that significant political and moral issues have been raised, this has been done from outside the electoral process as such, by Pope John Paul II and by the Schiller Institute. The Pope has been touring southern cities, calling for a fight against "the culture of death," as expressed by proposals for euthanasia and abortion, and for "returning to Italy its Catholic image." At one town, Gargano, he cited a passage of the Apocalypse which had not been used in the liturgy for a long time: "There was a war in the sky;

Michael and his angels fought the dragon. The Ancient Serpent, the one who was called Devil and Satan, was cast down on the Earth and with him were cast down his angels." The Pope explained, "This fight is still relevant today, because the Devil is alive and at work in the world." He urged Catholics not to accept any "compromise or accommodation" with evil.

The Schiller Institute, an international association headed by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, is distributing a leaflet entitled "Stop AIDS to Defend Life!" which includes concrete proposals to stop the AIDS epidemic in Italy. The measures have been endorsed by five Christian Democratic electoral candidates, four of them parliamentarians: the Hon. Maria Pia Garavaglia, who chairs the DC health commission; the Hon. Vincenzo Bianchi di Lavagna; the Hon. Rolando Rocchi; the Hon. Luigi Memmi, a member of the DC economics commission; and Tiziano Garbo.

As the leaflet emphasizes, "AIDS disappeared from the front pages of Italian dailies as soon as the election campaign started. They even wrote that the virus is, after all, not so dangerous, since recent figures would indicate that new cases are not increasing exponentially as initially expected."

The cited, typical wishful electoral lie contrasts sharply with the actual health situation in Italy. According to the Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Italy's top health institution, out of 48,000 people tested in Italy for AIDS in the

last few months, 16,000 tested seropositive. In Naples, in southern Italy, an epidemic of hepatitis has broken out, spurred by poverty and the lack of hospital facilities. One person in seven is carrying hepatitis, which is linked to AIDS in terms of symptoms and immunological deficiency.

The Schiller Institute demands universal screening to determine the real extent of the epidemics in Italy, the allocation of funds for new hospitals, as well as the creation of a national research center, similar to the Pasteur Institute in France, working on a crash program to develop nonlinear spectroscopy and optical biophysics, "with the maximum national and international coordination."

Other Christian Democratic candidates have also taken up issues for which the Schiller Institute is famous: the war on drugs and the call for a new international economic order to solve the debt crisis and allow high-technology industrial development.

In November 1985, the institute held a conference in Rome on St. Augustine and the fight for a just economic order, with the participation, among others, of Helga Zepp-LaRouche and two Christian Democratic parliamentarians, Sen. Vincenzo Carollo and the Hon. Publio Fiori. The conference opened a debate on the link between economics and Christian morality, which is still ongoing today.

One of the speakers at that conference, Publio Fiori, is now distributing an election campaign sticker that reads, "War on Drugs: Vote Fiori!" He gave an interview recently to the weekly newspaper *Nuova Solidarietà*, supporting the anti-drug efforts of Peruvian President Alan García. Parliamentarian Rocchi, who endorsed the Schiller Institute's AIDS program, also supported Peru's efforts to achieve a new economic order, in an interview with the same newspaper.