

Report from Rome by Leonardo Servadio

Pro-nuclear party on the ballot

Twelve candidates in a small town in northern Italy aim to send a national signal to politicians.

In Caorso, a tiny town of 5,000 inhabitants in northern Italy, stands the nuclear plant which is the symbol of Italy's wrong energy policies in the last 20 years. It's a modern plant which displays the best of "made in Italy" technology, but it sits idle while Italy imports electricity.

That is why on April 6, an uproar broke out when a slate of 12 candidates filed for the city council elections under the name Italians for Progress. Their platform is to reopen debate on nuclear energy, not just in Caorso. They see the Caorso vote as a kind of test for national energy policy.

Italians for Progress want to return to nuclear energy, which was shut down in late 1987 by a national referendum. "Because," as candidate Angelo Spinelli, a Milan dental technician, explained, "by deciding to return to nuclear we can undertake the indispensable path to reaching self-sufficiency in electricity production." Today, Italy imports 80% of the energy it consumes.

"Worst of all, more than 20% is imported as electrical energy," adds candidate Giuliana Sammartino, "mainly from France and Switzerland, countries which have lots of nuclear plants. So why should we keep our own nuclear plants shut down? Why import energy produced by our neighbors' plants, with all the price hikes and loss of know-how this involves?"

"Caorso must be reopened," said slate leader Marco Fanini, vice-president of the national Schiller Institute, in a regional newspaper interview published April 11. "The plant can go

back on line, as the safety conditions have been continually verified." On April 8 the nationally circulated Milan daily *Corriere della Sera* quoted Fanini saying that "now is the time to send a signal to the politicians," since there are more and more blackouts, and no way to satisfy increasing energy demand.

A storekeeper in Caorso confirms that "most people here are pro-nuclear. The plant is not dangerous, if it is operating. It is dangerous now, because it is fueled up but not running, the personnel are demoralized and understaffed, and the maintenance may be under par." Townspeople rapidly filled the petitions to nominate the slate, as soon as they heard it was pro-nuclear.

Back in 1987, while the Socialists, Communists, and Greens were pushing the anti-nuclear referendum, Caorsans recall that groups of "ecologists" camped out there demanding that the plant be shut. "Wherever they went, the grass all died," said one resident wryly. They blockaded roads, slashed tires, and defaced walls and street signs. Now, the plant is inactive, although it could operate. A "Green" congressman is working to turn this limbo into a definitive shutdown.

Given the electoral system, in which the slate that gets the most votes takes 16 of 20 council seats and the second-runners take the rest, Italians for Progress may not win any posts. But since not one of the leading parties—Christian Democrats, Socialists, or Communists—has defended nuclear energy, any votes for the

Progress slate will send an important signal.

Candidate Enrico Levi said in his campaign statement to Caorsans: "By ecology we mean the study and care of the environment. If an industry pollutes, it must be operated so as not to pollute any more, or else another industry must destroy its wastes in a better, more complete, and more economical way, above all by deriving from the waste as much as possible in the form of energy or fertilizer: Normal incineration is not the most rational way.

"Caorso's plant has been shut for years. It could produce energy, which we badly need. Its radioactive waste is a problem, but a very minor problem which can be solved, while burning coal and oil gives off quantitatively much greater and uncontrollable pollutants."

Engineer Levi recalls, "In '39 I fled to Switzerland because of the racial laws. I studied physics at Lausanne University and in '45, when the Hiroshima bomb exploded, Professor Haenny explained to me how it worked, but he also said the process could be controlled. And that's what happened.

"Your plant is about 20 years old—that's not old. Like all big plants it may need improvements and new technology. But it is a heritage that must be put back into the service of the community as soon as possible: It must produce energy, to help our country's economic development, create prosperity and jobs, and free us from slavery to petroleum.

"As long as the plant is closed, your capital is lost. It is the symbol of development, blocked by the irrationalism of the Greens and their fellow travelers. And I assure you that the radiation in your basement will not increase. It will be the same as 50,000 years ago."