
Italy

Gulf crisis stokes new 'hot autumn'

by Webster G. Tarpley

The Western European country likely to suffer the greatest initial economic and political disruption as a result of the Anglo-American Gulf crisis is Italy. One reason is that Italy, although it is the fifth-largest industrial economy of the Western world, has absolutely no nuclear energy on line. The lack of even a single functioning reactor means that Italy's dependence on oil imported from North Africa and the Middle East is virtually total.

This dangerous state of affairs reflects the growth in recent years of the Italian green party, the Verdi, who secured the abandonment of the nuclear option in a 1987 referendum. This spells economic vulnerability, as reflected in the heavy losses of the Milan stock exchange, proportionally the greatest in Western Europe since the current crisis began on Aug. 2. The price of gasoline has already been hiked repeatedly, with corresponding losses for motorists and most of all for Italy's hard-pressed farmers.

The Gulf crisis will accelerate and multiply a crisis that was overdue in any case. During the last decade, Italy has witnessed a vast growth in the power of Venetian finance. Many areas of the economy have been totally cartelized: Raul Gardini's Ferruzzi food conglomerate is seeking to hegemonize this entire sector, eliminating all rivals and especially absorbing the small and medium-sized companies that have historically fought for increased production and exports. Now, some of the monopoly cartels are running into difficulties, such as Gianni Agnelli's Fiat auto firm, which controls virtually all Italian auto production. In a recent interview, Agnelli announced that the auto industry was about to contract. A few days later, Fiat announced that some 35,000 of its workers will be placed in *cassa integrazione*, the equivalent of being laid off while receiving a percentage of their previous pay as a jobless subsidy. This is the most serious layoff at Fiat in more than a decade.

Fiat and other manufacturers will shortly have to begin negotiating a new contract with the metalworkers of the FLM union. A similar contract struggle was a centerpiece of the

fabled Italian "hot autumn" of 1969. Indeed, there is more than a whiff of 1969 in the air. Over the past year and more, the typical anarchysindicalist factory committees have begun to challenge the trade unions in a number of factories. These are the "base committees," last seen in the early 1970s. The big trade union confederation, the CGIL-CISL-UIL, is showing signs of life, too, after more than a decade of disarray. Before the summer break this grouping threatened the employers' association, the Confindustria, with a general strike in defense of what remains of the cost of living escalator for workers and employees.

Italy's inflation puts the cost of living, based on an informal supermarket survey, 30-40% over the level of the Federal Republic of Germany. The threatened general strike thus had every chance of success, and Confindustria, under luxury auto maker Sergio Pininfarina, backed down for the moment.

But inflation is only the beginning of the Italian pattern of deep social unrest.

Water: For years there has been a water crisis every summer in the southern Mezzogiorno, but this year has been qualitatively more serious. Around Naples, many large cities have had their water supplies completely interrupted, with nothing but tank trucks parked in downtown squares to provide emergency drinking water.

Hospitals: The crisis of the hospitals is also chronic, but now, every Italian who has a relative in a public hospital must fear that the relative will not come out alive—an acute drama in a country where family ties still have their traditional importance.

Pensions: The government-funded system is organized under institutions like the INPS, which doles out pensions that are often pitifully small but which can still furnish a margin of survival to the sick and elderly. According to many reports, the INPS is rapidly nearing insolvency, which may soon mean: no checks.

Many Italians see these crises as a failure of government to provide the most basic prerequisites of civilized society. The revolt against the "party-cracy" was expressed in June with the mass boycott of referenda on environmental issues by millions of citizens. The propositions, which aimed at outlawing hunting and at virtually eliminating the use of chemicals in agriculture, failed to become law because the number of voters participating was too low. The Italian Schiller Institute was the first and the most consistent advocate of boycotting the referenda, and its call was soon echoed by organizations of hunters and farmers.

A second index of a crisis of confidence without precedent in the postwar Italian Republic was seen in the early summer regional elections. A formation called Lombard League won about 28% of the votes in the area around Milan, the most developed industrial area in Italy. The League was set up by former 1968 activists on the model of the *Unione Valdostana*, the French-speaking local autonomy group in the northwest Italian Alpine valleys. The League's appeal

was based on northern Italian resentment of the elephantine and ponderous Rome bureaucracy, a traditional gripe of the efficient Milanese. Now, hatred of the political parties themselves has brought this to the boiling point.

The Lombard League theorizes Italy as a federal state made up of perhaps five large self-governing units, with Rome responsible for foreign policy and defense only. This recalls the situation in the peninsula in the 1400s, when the contenders included Venice, Milan, Florence, Naples, and the Papal states, plus assorted smaller centers. This plan would of course wreck the national unity that was the best fruit of the Italian Risorgimento guided by Camillo Benso, Count Cavour. The Lombard League offers this institutional reform only, and has virtually nothing to say about real economics. In seeking to broaden its appeal outside of Lombardy, the backers of the League seem to be contemplating a more openly racist campaign—in the manner of France's Jean-Marie Le Pen—directed against Somalian, Filipino, and other emigrant workers whose numbers are swelling. In any case, the strength of the League at this point reflects a protest vote seeking a vehicle, rather than the particular quality of the message being offered.

The principal Italian parties are in notable disarray. The current government of the indestructible Christian Democrat Giulio Andreotti is supported by the five-member coalition of Christian Democrats (CD), Socialists, Liberals, Republicans, and Social Democrats which has been in vogue through the 1980s, but this government is more succinctly identified in the press as the "CAF group," an acronym for Craxi-Andreotti-Forlani. Bettino Craxi is the boss of the Socialists, and Arnaldo Forlani is now the secretary of the CD. But the CAF's hold on power is now weakened. The main internal reason is the dissatisfaction of the Christian Democratic left wing, many of whom are supporters of the former prime minister and party secretary Ciriaco De Mita. The Andreotti government almost fell some weeks ago when four left-wing CD ministers, quit in a dispute over how many minutes of advertising per hour could be presented. Some observers noted that this crisis came as Italy began its six-month chairmanship of the European Community, when Anglo-American forces hostile to Europe would have every reason to wish to weaken and embarrass the Rome government.

The left CD also finds Craxi's power intolerable, and is inclined to consider a new historical compromise with a reformed Italian Communist Party (PCI) as a possible alternative. De Mita has been proposing a reform of the Italian election law that would institute a winner-take-all system on the model of a U.S. congressional district, to replace the present proportional system. This would tend to wipe out the smaller parties and reinforce Christian Democrats and Communists. Socialist leader Craxi, writing in his party paper *Avanti* under a pseudonym, has issued warnings to De Mita, also under a pseudonym, to cease and desist from this attempt.

Then there is the party which still calls itself the Italian Communist Party, but which has decided to change its name to remove the odious *comunista* and which is often referred to as *la cosa* (the thing). The functionary attempting to direct this transition is Achille Occhetto, the party secretary. Occhetto is attempting to balance between the right wing under the PCI shadow foreign minister, the Anglophile Giorgio Napolitano, and the radical left around the veteran Pietro Ingrao. The Ingrao wing has what amounts to its own daily newspaper, *Il Manifesto*, which is growing in circulation because it is the daily newspaper most clearly opposed to Italian participation in the Anglo-Americans' Gulf war adventure. In the parliamentary debate on sending a military contingent to the Gulf, Occhetto and Napolitano wished the PCI to abstain on an interventionist motion proposed by the Andreotti government and the five-party coalition.

This swindle was designed to highlight the maturity of the Communist Party and its availability to join a government, which is Occhetto's ruling passion. But at the moment of the vote, Occhetto was stunned as Ingrao and his group with upwards of 40 votes voted against the Gulf intervention, which passed anyway. This was the first time in history that the Communists had been unable to keep caucus discipline on a vote in the Italian Chamber of Deputies. There is also a right-of-center opposition in part of Andreotti's base, including the Milan daily *Avvenire*, the organ of the Italian Catholic Bishops, and certain parts of the pro-CD Popular Movement.

The Italian chairmanship of the European Twelve places a special responsibility on the Andreotti-De Michelis government. Italy, like the rest of Europe, can still act to take the diplomatic initiative away from the Anglo-Americans and force the convening of a peace conference for the Gulf and the Middle East. As part of such a conference, the Europeans will be called upon to commit financial and economic resources in large quantities for the reconstruction and development of the Middle East. But those resources can be committed in the form of highly remunerative investments. The only alternative is to do nothing, and then be faced with astronomical and useless military expenditures, and with a catastrophic toll in human lives. Therefore Italy, as one of the European countries with the most to lose, must act.

Ferment and agitation among students, farmers, workers, and other layers are now on the agenda of the new Italian hot autumn. These may soon be joined by draftee soldiers who refuse to lose their lives in the service of Anglo-American warmongering.

The Schiller Institute is arguing that the country must go back to the strategy of Enrico Mattei, who built Italy's first nuclear reactors and who also sought mutually beneficial oil-for-technology arrangements with North Africa and the Middle East. Giuseppe Filippini of the Schiller Institute has drawn up a program for modernizing Italian energy policy with extensive reliance on the nuclear option, which the Gulf crisis is now placing on everybody's agenda.