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Implications of the Center-Left Experiment in Italy

Submitted by the
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Experiment in Italy**

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IMPLICATIONS OF THE CENTER-LEFT EXPERIMENT IN ITALY

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A. Center-left cooperation in Italy—the so-called “opening to the left”—has succeeded quite well since its initiation in February of 1962. The coalition has hung together, the parties have demonstrated the resiliency necessary to survive the vicissitudes of coalition rule, and some important legislation has been approved. There have been no fundamental changes in Italian foreign policy, although Fanfani's ambiguous performance during the Cuban crisis may have been an effort to avoid actions or pronouncements which might upset coalition arrangements. (*Paras. 1, 8-9*)

B. The present arrangement for Socialist parliamentary support of the Christian Democratic-Social Democratic-Republican Cabinet is clearly viewed by the parties themselves as an experiment. Conceivably, this arrangement could go on indefinitely, but we believe that the leaders of both the major parties involved, having come so far, will seek within the next year or two to formalize their collaboration and bring the Socialists into the Cabinet. (*Para. 11*)

C. The Christian Democrats will probably require further evidence of Socialist dissociation from the Communists before they agree to formalization and extension of their collaboration with the Socialists. Collaboration has been increased since February; additional Christian Democratic-Socialist local coalitions have been established. At the same time, Socialist-Communist polemics have been increased. Nevertheless, the Socialists continue their participation in the General Confederation of Labor, which

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is Communist led. They have resisted pressures to withdraw, and it is unlikely that they will withdraw for some years to come. If the Socialists can and will take some further steps toward dissociation from the Communists, the Christian Democratic leadership can probably obtain party backing for broader collaboration after the elections. (*Paras. 11-15*)

D. The parliamentary elections which will take place in the spring of 1963 will probably not produce any dramatic changes in the party distribution of the Italian electorate. The results will probably neither repudiate center-left collaboration nor incontrovertibly endorse it. It is possible that collaboration may be suspended or dissolved between now and the elections, but this event would not itself prejudice re-establishment of collaboration after the elections. (*Paras. 17-18*)

E. If collaboration is formalized and extended over a period of some years, significant changes in Italian political life would occur. Some leftist elements within the Socialist Party would probably break off and ally themselves with the Communists. There would be strong pressure for the resorption of the Social Democratic Party into the Socialist Party. The isolation and reduction of Communist strength would come about slowly and would depend greatly upon the depth and duration of Christian Democratic-Socialist collaboration and the degree to which social and economic reforms were in fact achieved. We believe extended collaboration would come about only if the Socialists provided more explicit commitments than they have to date regarding Italian participation and active cooperation in NATO and the European Economic Community, and we believe the Socialists will provide such commitments. Nevertheless, their participation in the government would probably lead to some changes in the conduct of Italian foreign policy and probably to some reduction of support for US and allied positions on international issues, particularly on those not directly related to the North Atlantic Alliance. (*Paras. 21, 23-24*)

F. The consequences of terminating center-left collaboration would depend greatly upon the conditions under which the breakup occurred, how long the collaboration had endured, and what had been accomplished during its existence. If the cir-

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cumstances were such as to drive the Socialists back into the arms of the Communists, the consequences would be worse than if the experiment had never been tried. We believe the Christian Democrats would be aware of the dangers of such a breakup and would seek ways of preventing a polarization of political forces. We believe they would not give themselves over to rightist leadership, would try to adhere to a left-of-center course, and would leave open the possibility of re-establishing collaboration with the Socialists. Termination of center-left cooperation would confront Italy with serious problems of government, but it would not necessarily lead to a crisis of regime. (*Paras. 25-27*)

G. It is noteworthy that the center-left experiment has been initiated during a period when Italy is enjoying rapid and unprecedented economic growth. Gross national product rose by eight percent in 1961, and unemployment has been reduced to 3.2 percent. The economic lot of the average Italian has improved, but many of the old problems remain. Italian wage levels are still the lowest in the EEC, and southern Italy remains poverty-stricken and economically underdeveloped. The experiment does not appear to have significantly affected the so-called Italian economic "miracle"; 1962 will also register high growth rates although possibly slightly below those of 1961. (*Para. 6*)

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DISCUSSION

I. FACTORS LEADING TO THE FORMATION OF THE CENTER-LEFT COALITION

1. The formation in February 1962 of a center-left coalition government depending upon the parliamentary support of the Italian Socialist Party, led by Pietro Nenni, is the most important change in Italian politics since 1948. The new coalition, led by Amintore Fanfani, consists of the Christian Democratic, Social Democratic, and Republican Parties. The arrangement for Socialist parliamentary support is based upon an informal agreement between the Socialists and the coalition partners, and it does not extend to all matters. Nevertheless, it is a major reversal of policy for the Christian Democratic Party, which took the final decision to enter into this arrangement only after much soul-searching and years of discussion and preparation.

2. One of the most important factors encouraging this step was political arithmetic.¹ Prior to 1953 the Christian Democratic Party held an absolute majority of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies. In the general elections of that year the Christian Democrats lost this parliamentary majority but retained enough strength to enable them, by combining with the Social Democrats, the Republicans, and the conservative Liberals, to create a bare parliamentary majority. However, governing with a coalition dependent upon Social Democratic votes on the left and Liberal votes on the right was a very difficult task; these two parties were so far apart on domestic issues that little important legislation could be enacted. Moreover, the Christian Democratic Party itself contained a strong right-wing faction and was unable to develop a consistent and unified approach to Italy's domestic problems. The general elections of 1958 somewhat improved the strength of the center parties, but differences among them still prevented the emergence of strong and effective government. Nevertheless, these elections did show a slight shift toward the moderate left and a decline in the extreme right. Within the Christian Democratic Party the left and center factions were somewhat strengthened. From 1947 on, the Communists and Socialists, who came to control almost 40 percent of the Chamber of Deputies, were in opposition.

3. After 1953, developments within the international Communist movement disoriented the Italian left. The anti-Stalinist revelations of Khrushchev and the suppression of the uprising in Hungary shook the Italian Communist Party to its foundations and precipitated a series

¹ See table on page 14 for the party distribution of seats in the Chamber of Deputies resulting from the elections of 1948, 1953, and 1958. A pie chart (Figure 1) shows the current distribution of parliamentary strengths.

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of intraparty debates and a loss of party morale which continue to this day. More important, a large sector within the Socialist Party, including Nenni himself, became increasingly disillusioned with Soviet Communism, began to view association with the Communists as damaging to their interests, and initiated moves to disengage from the Communists.

4. A number of other developments occurred which made the so-called "opening to the left"—a subject which had been widely discussed since the mid-1950's—a more approachable goal. One was the failure of the experiment undertaken in 1960 by the Christian Democrats to work out a coalition with the extreme right (the brief and turbulent Tambroni government). Another was the growing trend toward the creation of Christian Democratic-Socialist coalitions in the local governments of numerous cities and towns in north and central Italy, including most of the major industrial areas of the country. Finally, the apparent effort of the new Pope to withdraw the Church from an active role in Italian politics and the willingness of the hierarchy to tolerate center-left cooperation as an experiment left the Christian Democratic leaders free of a possible Vatican veto if they succeeded in forming a working relationship with the Socialists.

5. In the last analysis, it was the determination and political acumen of the leaders of both parties which finally brought off the agreement of February 1962. It required considerable planning and skill over the past five years for Fanfani and Moro in the Christian Democratic Party and Nenni in the Italian Socialist Party to win sufficient consent in their own parties to undertake the experiment. For Nenni, in his declining years, this experiment is an effort to leave the ranks of the opposition, to play a role in shaping the new Italy, and—hopefully—to win for the Socialists the leadership of the Italian left. For most of the Christian Democratic leaders, the experiment is regarded as the only acceptable way of avoiding the weaknesses of minority government, of broadening the base of Italian democracy and insuring the continuation of parliamentary government, of isolating the Communist Party and drawing away its mass following, and of undertaking and executing a reform program to correct the evils and imbalances in Italy's social and economic structure.

6. It would appear to be paradoxical that this cooperation between center and left, between Catholics and Socialists, should have been initiated, not during a period of national crisis, but rather when the Italian economy was enjoying a period of rapid and unprecedented economic growth. In 1961, Italy's gross national product (GNP) increased by about eight percent. In the same year gross investment amounted to 25 percent of GNP, and exports rose by 15 percent. Unemployment has been reduced to about 3.2 percent, and shortages of skilled labor exist in some industries. The economic lot of the average Italian has

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improved, but many of the old problems of Italy still exist. Italian wage levels are still the lowest in the European Economic Community (EEC), and southern Italy remains poverty-stricken and economically underdeveloped. The economic expansion of the north has in fact created problems for both north and south; migration to the north has stripped the south of many of its best trained and most energetic workers and added new population to the already congested community facilities of the north. The experiment does not appear to have significantly affected the so-called Italian economic "miracle"; 1962 will also register high growth rates although possibly slightly below those of 1961.

7. Indeed, it appears that the current rapid economic expansion permitted, rather than deterred, the materialization of center-left cooperation. It has made the experiment seem less dangerous than before because there was now less reason for radical measures, and it has made the experiment more likely to succeed because there were greater financial and economic resources with which to work and less fear that economic reforms would lead to economic stagnation. Finally, the two parties, seeing Italian life being reshaped by economic change, must have seen the opportunity to win some of the credit for themselves while weakening their political competitors on the extreme left and extreme right.

II. PROBLEMS AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE CENTER-LEFT COALITION

8. *Success to Date.* No postwar Italian Government has been invested after so much controversy, with so much advance preparation, or with so many hopes—and fears—riding on its progress. The Fanfani coalition has, thus far, succeeded quite well. Some important legislation has been passed in the fields of economic planning, education, and social services. Nationalization of electric power, one of the major Fanfani commitments to Nenni, has been approved by Parliament. The coalition has hung together and, to date at least, has demonstrated the resiliency necessary to survive the vicissitudes of coalition government. It survived the wheeling and dealing of the presidential elections, the strain of formulating and enacting the electric power bill, and the popular test provided by local elections in June and November of 1962. Indeed, the elections appear to have strengthened the cooperation between the parties; additional Christian Democratic-Socialist coalitions have been established in local jurisdictions, and today most of the major cities in Italy are administered by center-left coalitions.

9. *Foreign Policy.* Since its investiture, the coalition has adhered strictly to the principal cornerstones of Italian foreign policy—NATO and the EEC. The Socialists neither sought nor received any commitments regarding foreign policy, except for a broad statement that Italy

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would work with her allies toward the peaceful solution of international problems. If there has been any change in policy since the coalition was formed, it is a matter of tone rather than substance, of emphasis rather than content—but some of these changes in tone would probably have occurred in any case, simply as a consequence of growing Italian self-confidence. Nevertheless, the support of the Socialists for the coalition does pose problems. Fanfani's ambiguous performance during the Cuban crisis may have been, in part at least, an effort to avoid actions or pronouncements which might upset coalition arrangements or prospects.

10. Socialist foreign policy is officially neutralist, but in fact had a pro-Soviet coloration during the days of Socialist-Communist collaboration. Today, the Socialists interpret neutralism differently. They now say that "to withdraw from NATO under present conditions would jeopardize the European equilibrium" and might upset the present "truce" between blocs. What they desire is an Italian policy which, while remaining loyal to Italy's commitments within the Western Alliance, is directed at a detente which makes military blocs unnecessary. In general they oppose military buildups and military solutions, favor compromises on international issues, and believe that the West should rely upon those in underdeveloped areas who "espouse liberal and democratic ideals" rather than upon "ultra-conservatives" and "military adventurers." These foreign policy views, though not in direct conflict with those of many Social Democrats and some Christian Democrats, nevertheless do suggest considerably less agreement with some significant Western foreign policy views than that demonstrated by past Italian governments. On the other hand, the Socialists approve of European integration, favor EEC, and want to see the UK enter the Common Market.

11. *The Question of Continuance.* The present arrangement between the coalition parties and the Socialists is clearly viewed by both sides as an experiment. It goes as far as the Christian Democratic and Socialist Parties permitted their leaders to go, and neither party appears to want to alter this arrangement before new parliamentary elections take place in April or May of 1963. Nenni has recently called for a five-year pact with the coalition parties and is apparently prepared to widen his collaboration after the elections, but the Christian Democrats will probably require further evidence of Socialist dissociation from the Communists before seriously considering such a pact. The strength of the present informal arrangement lies partly in its limited nature and partly in the desire of Nenni, Fanfani, and Moro to make it work. Conceivably, it could go on indefinitely, but we believe that the present leaders of both parties, having come so far, will seek within the next year or two to formalize their collaboration and bring the Socialists into the Cabinet. Whether they can go so far depends, of course, upon

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a variety of considerations, including the situation in the parties themselves and the election outcome.

12. *The Problem within the Christian Democratic Party.* The Christian Democratic Party contains powerful figures who remain opposed to collaboration with the Socialists; these include the ex-Premiers Pella, Scelba, and Tambroni. They would certainly prefer to terminate the arrangement; at present they are doing their best to keep it as limited as possible. They are calling for a general "clarification" of Socialist-Communist relations. They make much of continued Socialist participation in the Communist-led General Confederation of Labor, and they point out that the government's policy of establishing semi-autonomous regional governments could open the way for Communist-Socialist dominance in some important areas of the country. These are problems with which Fanfani and the other party leaders must cope if they are to satisfy their opponents that the course of collaboration is not a dangerous one. If the Socialists can and will take some further steps toward dissociation from the Communists, the Christian Democratic leadership can probably obtain party backing for broader collaboration with the Socialists after the parliamentary elections.

13. *The Situation within the Socialist Party.* Nenni's problem within the Italian Socialist Party appears to be at least as difficult as that of Fanfani and Moro. His margin of victory for authorizing collaboration with the Christian Democrats was narrow, and much of the left wing of his party remains obdurately opposed to the loosening of Socialist-Communist ties. Nevertheless, the success of Nenni in getting legislation approved which the party has desired has strengthened his position, and he probably now has wider support within the party for collaboration with the Christian Democrats than he has had in the past. But the *carristi*, the party's left wing, are clamoring for the full implementation of the government's program and are resisting even token assurances to the coalition partners that the Socialists are moving further away from cooperation with the Communists.

14. *Socialist Cooperation with the Communists.* There is continuing Socialist-Communist cooperation in the various labor, consumer, agricultural, and other cooperatives. The Socialists and the Communists also still collaborate in many more communal and provincial governments than do the Socialists and Christian Democrats. However, most are small cities and towns, Bologna being the only major city still run by a Socialist-Communist administration. Many more people, by far, are governed by Christian Democratic-Socialist local administrations than by Communist-Socialist ones.

15. Socialist-Communist cooperation is closest in the General Confederation of Labor, whose membership totals about 2.5 million and in which the Communists have a predominant role. The Socialist leaders have

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resisted pressures upon them to withdraw their workers, or at least to permit their workers to withdraw, from the Confederation. Their goal, they say, is to achieve a unified labor movement free of political affiliation (all three Italian labor federations are party connected), and in any event many Socialist labor leaders and workers are so entrenched in the Confederation machinery that it would be personally disadvantageous to withdraw. Although the Socialists probably will make some gestures toward greater cooperation with the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats on matters of labor policy, it appears unlikely that they will withdraw from trade union cooperation with the Communists for some years to come. Meanwhile, there is a danger that the Communist leadership of the Confederation might conduct a strike in such a manner as to provoke government suppression, and this would put a severe strain on Christian Democratic-Socialist political collaboration.

16. *Consequences of the Experiment for the Communist Party.* Center-left collaboration has made some progress toward its goal of weakening and isolating the Communists. It has sown further dissension and confusion in their ranks, and it has stimulated Socialist-Communist polemics on both internal and foreign policy matters. The Communists lost votes in the 1962 local elections, although it cannot be demonstrated that this loss was a consequence of their isolation—it may have had other causes. The Communists have reacted to the prospect of increasing isolation by identifying themselves with the most popular features of the government program. They have, of course, made the most of the sensitive points of difference between the Socialists and the coalition partners, especially internal security and trade union matters. They have considerable means for applying pressure on the Socialists in the Labor Confederation and in the cooperatives; they almost certainly will step up the pressures as the spring elections approach.

17. *The General Elections of 1963.* It is possible that collaboration may be suspended or dissolved between now and the elections to permit the parties greater freedom in campaigning. Collaboration may founder in the next few months on some such issue as the establishment of additional regional governments. Should this occur, it would not reduce the importance of the elections as a major test of the center-left experiment and would not in itself prejudice re-establishment of collaboration after the elections. There will probably be some changes in the electoral system, in particular an increase in the size of the Chamber of Deputies likely to enlarge the representation of the industrial cities of the north. This will probably in itself result in some increase in leftist strength in the new chamber.

18. We believe it unlikely that the election results will produce dramatic changes in the party distribution of the Italian electorate. The extreme rightists will probably lose further strength, some of this going

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to the Liberals, and the Communists might also lose some ground. There will probably be a continuation of the slow drift to the left of center within the electorate as a whole. Any gains for the Socialists and Social Democrats, and any losses by the Communists, would be interpreted as justification for continuing and broadening center-left collaboration. Indeed, it may be that the leftist and left-center gains which probably will occur will be a natural product of this collaboration, although it may not be demonstrable on purely objective grounds.

19. While the Italian voters will almost certainly not repudiate the principle of center-left collaboration, neither is it likely that their voting pattern will incontrovertibly endorse it. Nor is it likely that the results will so change the political arithmetic as to eliminate those considerations which led to the initiation of the experiment in the first place. In any case, the two major parties involved will probably still be confronted by divisions within their ranks and the need to take account of irreconcilable elements within their parties. More significant, however, the election results, whatever they may be, will not erase the basic ideological differences between the two major parties, and they will not enable the Socialists at one easy stroke to separate themselves finally and completely from the Communists.

III. FUTURE IMPLICATIONS OF THE CENTER-LEFT EXPERIMENT

20. Center-left collaboration has been a political fact in Italy for almost a year. It has had some successes, it has weaknesses, and it has problems which must be surmounted if it is to continue or to expand. The parliamentary elections will not eliminate either the weaknesses or the problems. We believe the chances are good that the experiment will continue, or even be expanded, after the parliamentary elections, but some of the factors involved are so complex and unpredictable that we cannot estimate its longer term future with confidence. In the paragraphs below, we consider some of the consequences which might follow from either broadening or terminating the present arrangement.

A. If Collaboration is Formalized and Broadened

21. Broader collaboration, whether or not it provided for immediate and direct Socialist participation in the government, would provoke significant changes in the parties involved. The Socialist left wing has already been somewhat reduced in size and influence, but some of its elements always have been and remain pro-Communist, and would probably break off and ally themselves with the Communists. The right-wing Christian Democrats would probably not break away—the pressures for Catholic political unity have always been strong and will remain so. They remain unreconciled and uncooperative, neither fully submissive to party discipline nor openly rebellious, hoping for the collapse of the coalition in order to reassert their leadership. As col-

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laboration developed, most of these opponents would probably become reconciled to it and seek to play a role within it.

22. Progress toward the major goals of center-left collaboration, namely execution of a program of major social and economic reforms and isolation and reduction of Communist political strength, would come slowly and depend greatly upon the depth and duration of the collaboration among the parties. The longer the relationship went on, the more changes in Italian society would be made, and the greater the chance that Communist strength would be sapped. It should be noted, however, that while some Communist voters in Italy are merely poverty-stricken people who might be expected to desert the cause once economic betterment was a fact, others are dedicated to a thorough revamping of Italian society, and these will probably never become convinced that a Catholic party can or will consent to the changes they desire. In our view, continuing and deepening collaboration would indeed produce more and much needed reforms, but it would probably not lead to an early and dramatic reduction in Communist popular support.

23. Continuation of the experiment would probably cause some changes within the Italian left. The Social Democratic Party would lose its *raison d'etre*, and there would be strong pressure for its resorption into the Italian Socialist Party. If the coalition then broke up, the center might have permanently lost an important component. On the other hand, such a unified party would be more moderate and closer to the center than the present Socialist Party. We doubt that the trade union movement would become reunified for many years to come. The General Confederation would probably continue to be led by Communists, although the degree of Communist control might gradually be reduced.

24. We assume that the present coalition partners would not agree to formalization and extension of their agreement with the Socialists without more explicit commitments regarding continued Italian participation and active cooperation in NATO and the EEC. The Socialists have already demonstrated a capacity for modifying some of their historic doctrines; we believe they will provide such commitments and indeed they might even go so far as to find a rationalization for supporting current levels of military expenditure. Nevertheless, their participation in the government would probably lead to some changes in the conduct of Italian foreign policy and probably to some reduction of support for US and allied positions on some international issues, particularly on those not directly related to the North Atlantic Alliance. Individual issues would probably be decided as they arose, and some of these—such as those related to nuclear weapons—might be very difficult for the coalition to resolve. It is possible that on some particularly difficult problem the coalition would collapse. It should be noted again

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that there is a secular trend toward greater Italian independence in foreign policy, and the Italians will probably strive for a larger voice both inside and outside the councils of the West, whether the Socialists participate in the government or not.

B. If Center-Left Collaboration is Terminated

25. The consequences of a termination of the center-left collaboration would, of course, depend greatly upon the conditions under which it occurred, how long collaboration had endured, what had been accomplished during its existence, and what changes in party alignments and strength had occurred during its tenure. For example, a breakup accompanied by a sharp shift in leadership in either party would probably foreclose further efforts toward collaboration for perhaps years to come. On the other hand, a breakup after several years, especially if the Socialists had already broken most of their remaining ties with the Communists, would probably be less consequential; a Socialist opposition on the left, though disgruntled, would be less dangerous to the future of Italian democracy than the Socialist-Communist unity of five years ago. In any event, if the circumstances of the breakup were such as to drive the Socialists back into the arms of the Communists, and if in addition the Social Democratic Party had given up separate existence, the consequences would be worse than if the experiment had never been attempted in the first place.

26. On the whole, we believe that the dangers of a breakup under the conditions we have just described are fully appreciated by the Christian Democrats. These dangers will, in effect, deter them from permitting center-left collaboration to terminate in acrimony and lead them to seek ways of preventing a polarization of political forces. If the present Christian Democratic leaders come to the point where they can no longer compromise issues with the Socialists and feel that they must terminate the arrangement, we believe that they will not give themselves up to rightist leadership within the party or lead it into cooperation with the extreme right. Having established themselves as a progressive force, they would probably seek to keep that image alive, trying to win left-of-center votes to their own standard while leaving open the possibility of re-establishing collaboration with the Socialists.

27. Termination of Christian Democratic-Socialist cooperation would, of course, create serious problems of government. The Christian Democrats, if they sought to govern alone, would have a very difficult time patching together a working parliamentary majority. There would probably be recurrent governmental crises, some of which might be tense and prolonged. At the worst, continuation of parliamentary government might become impossible. On the other hand, the leaders

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of the Christian Democratic and Socialist Parties—in the face of threatened political collapse—might find some way of composing their differences or at least of developing a *modus vivendi*. We believe that this course would be more likely than a breakdown of parliamentary government.

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PARTY STRENGTHS IN THE ITALIAN CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES FOLLOWING
THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS OF 1948, 1953, AND 1958

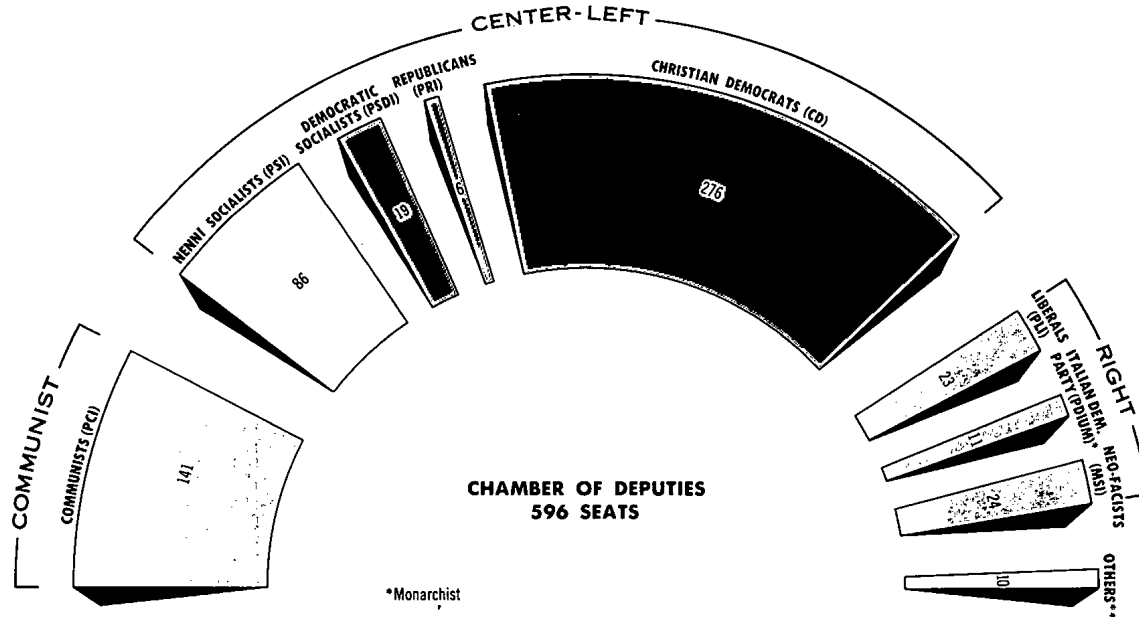
	1948		1953		1958	
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
Christian Democrats	304	53.1	262	44.4	273	45.8
Social Democrats	33	5.8	19	3.2	22	3.8
Republicans	9	1.6	5	0.8	6	1.0
National Bloc ^a	19	3.3	...	...	...	...
Liberals	...	...	14	2.5	17	2.9
Communists	...	...	143	24.2	140	23.5
Socialists	183 ^b	31.9	75	12.7	84	14.1
Monarchists	14	2.4	40	6.8	25	4.1
Neo-Fascists	6	1.0	29	4.9	24	4.0
Other	5	0.9	3	0.5	5	0.8

^a A combination made up largely of the Liberals and the National Reconstruction Union.

^b Popular Democratic Front of Communists and Socialists.

PARTY COMPOSITION OF THE ITALIAN CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES November 1962

Figure 1



*Monarchist
 **Includes seats held by deputies who cannot be readily classified with any of the above parties because they represent individual, dissident or regional points of view.

- Government
- Support
- Opposition

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