

NEO-FASCISTS IN POSTWAR ITALY

12 May 1960

The recently formed cabinet of Fernando Tambroni is unique among postwar Italian governments in that his Christian Democratic party is dependent for its majority in the lower house on the neo-Fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI). This development, which came about over vehement objections both in and outside the ruling Christian Democratic party, has focused renewed attention on the long struggle of Italian Fascism to reassert and rehabilitate itself. As proponents of an authoritarian, nationalist, anti-Communist solution for Italy's political difficulties, the neo-Fascists can hope to profit from continuance of the division within the Christian Democratic party.

Postwar Development

At the end of World War II, most Fascists from the Mussolini era sought refuge in other

political groupings, including the Communist and Christian Democratic parties. A small hard core, however, joined a



TAMBRONI

new group, the Common Man party, which was later absorbed by a Republican Revolutionary Action group. In December 1946, this became the Italian Social

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Movement, headed by Mussolini's secretary of popular culture. The early MSI stressed revolutionary aims, used strong-arm tactics against moderates as well as Communists, and cooperated with the Communists in support of a bill to deprive the security forces of fire-arms. The MSI survived numerous attempts to outlaw it, but in the first national elections in 1948, it polled less than 2 percent of the vote and elected five deputies.

During the next 10 years the growing influence of the party's conservative wing resulted in fewer electoral alli-

Without any exaggerated alarms, without believing that Hannibal is at the gates and a march on Rome is in preparation (I was among the very first in 1919, on the eve of the apparent Socialist triumph, to warn of the Fascist peril), I retain the right and the duty to raise my voice at the first symptoms, at the still faraway portents.

From an editorial by Luigi Salvatorelli in La Stampa, 26 April 1960.

ances with the Communists and more with the Monarchists. It won nearly 6 percent of the vote in the local elections in 1951-52, and came close to holding a balance-of-power position between the Communists and Christian Democrats in some local governments. In 1953 it elected 29 deputies to the national lower house. In the 1958 national elections, however, with a national trend to the center-left, it had declined to less than 5 percent of the vote and 24 deputies. It nevertheless remains the fourth largest party in a parliament where at least ten political groups are generally represented.

Support and Program

In general, the MSI appeals to down-at-the-heel aristocrats, petty bourgeoisie anxious to clean up city hall, and protest voters unwilling to support the parties of the left. Supporters

also include refugees from former Italian overseas territories, noncommissioned officers, policemen, and civil servants, as well as shopkeepers and artisans dislocated by the postwar changes in the Italian economy. Subject to sharp divergencies among its hoodlum and conservative following, the MSI is at the same time nationalist, corporatist, republican, anti-Marxist, and anti-capitalist. In general it is anticlerical, a fact which has not deterred former Catholic Action chief Luigi Gedda from urging--almost successfully in 1951--Christian Democratic electoral alliances with the MSI.

Like the Communists and both Socialist parties, the neo-Fascists at first were strongly opposed to the North Atlantic Treaty. The MSI now pays lip service to NATO and has tried to improve its relations with

US Embassy. Nevertheless, party supporters are still bitter over the American role in the collapse of fascism, and the neo-Fascist paper Borghese described President Eisenhower on his European trip last fall as "a murderer who comes back to the scene of his crime."

The neo-Fascists opposed EDC; they now object to the supranational aspects of the European Community. In a sense, the issue of nationalism has been dimmed by Europe's postwar efforts at integration, and lost colonies, too, are becoming an old story; corporatism is still an ugly word. At the same time, remnants of fascism remain alive in most of Western Europe--as shown by the anti-Semitic outbursts of the past winter. Italy retains the dubious prestige of having "invented" fascism, even though others may have administered it more efficiently, and Italian

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Fascists maintain relations with those in other countries through attendance at periodic international meetings such as that at Malmo, Sweden, in 1957.

Domestically, the MSI is troubled by competition on several of the issues for which it stands. The Communists claim a monopoly on anticapitalism, the Christian Democrats on anti-Marxism. The lay democratic parties--Liberals, Social Democrats, Republicans--offer a more respectable home for anticlericals. Practically everybody is republican, even including the monarchist parties, both of which have formally become the Italian Democratic party.

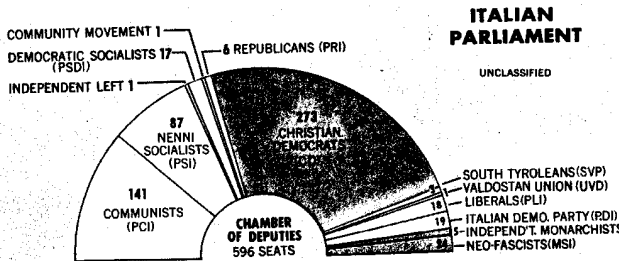
Nevertheless, the neo-Fascists exemplify a basic Italian nostalgia for international adventures and for the standing of a great power. Italian nationalism is undergoing a revival as a result of Italian resentment over nonparticipation in great-power conferences and over US coolness toward the Italian state-owned oil monopoly, ENI, and its holdings abroad. Because the democratic tradition is not deeply rooted in Italy, there is nostalgia also for an authoritarian central government which can impose order.

Current Situation

There has been a rapid comeback of Fascists in virtually every field of endeavor--as university professors, technicians, businessmen, and editors--while in the diplomatic service Fascists had simply continued on. Fascists also

trol a tiny fraction of organized labor. No stigma is attached today in business and social life to the espousal of Fascist ideas, and a number of fairly prominent Christian Democrats were once prominent Fascists. Fascist Marshal Giovanni Messe, Rommel's successor in the Tunisian campaign, is now a Christian Democratic senator.

The party got its first real break in 1957 when Premier Zoli reluctantly accepted one neo-Fascist vote as part of his majority in the lower house. By the time Segni's all-Christian Democratic cabinet was formed in 1958--with the rightist parties supplying it parliamentary support--MSI influence on Italian Government policy was becoming increasingly apparent. Segni's labor minister was the first to attend a meeting of the neo-Fascist labor confederation. Italy's attitude toward the touchy South Tirol minority seemed to toughen under the nationalistic influence of the neo-Fascists, and Italian military visits to Spain were stepped up.



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The MSI is not yet entirely respectable as a party, however, the Monarchists broke the 1956-59 unity-of-action pact for

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that reason. Limited working alliances between the Christian Democrats and the MSI have developed in 28 local governments, including Milan, Genoa, and the regional government of Sicily. The neo-Fascists recently threatened to withdraw and precipitate crises in these governments if the Christian Democrats should form a center-left government at the national level. On 4 June 1959, a national holiday commemorating the 15th anniversary of Rome's liberation

of all other parties except his own. Thus the MSI now can pose as a patriotic supporter of the government in time of emergency.

General Raffaele Cadorna, celebrated leader of the anti-Fascist wartime resistance, recently voted in the Senate in favor of Tambroni's neo-Fascist - supported government and resigned his membership in the association of Italian resistance fighters. His action probably will not be questioned by the

post-Mussolini generation, which never participated in the anti-Fascist guerrilla fighting that contrasted so favorably with the efficiency of the Italian armed forces in World War II.

Prospects

The MSI's long-range prospects are not bright, as its leaders, who are not strong, have the problem of holding together its revolutionary and conservative wings. Neither the present party secretary, Arturo Michelini, nor his colleague and predecessor Augusto de



De Marsanich and Michelini

by the Allies in World War II, the Christian Democratic mayor of Rome was "out of town" and so avoided offending the neo-Fascists by being present for the ceremonies and parade.

When the Liberal party withdrew its support of the Segni government in February, Segni resigned rather than rely solely on neo-Fascist and Monarchist votes. Fernando Tambroni, however, has now given the MSI a touch of respectability by accepting neo-Fascist backing for his "administrative cabinet against the opposi-

Marsanich, has succeeded in catching the public imagination. Nevertheless, the anarchic state of Italian politics offers the MSI two possible opportunities to exert strong influence on the government.

It can hope to profit from rising tensions between a rightist government and a leftist electorate--tensions which could build up to a rightist coup aimed at preventing an "opening" to the Socialists. Neo-Fascist bully boys would probably be a major element of any extremist venture headed by figures such as former

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Defense Minister Pacciardi or Senate President Merzagora, who appear to have right-wing revolutionary leanings.

If such a coup does not occur, the neo-Fascists can hope to exert ideological influence more gradually in their role as ally of a Christian Democratic party apparently determined to stay in power at all costs. Although the quest for respectability makes them initially

inexpensive allies. they would eventually demand a quid pro quo, possibly involving occupancy of certain key government positions and a more nationalistic Italian foreign policy. Because of the stigma still attached to the neo-Fascists, their inclusion in the government could be expected to bring about a reaction on the part of the Italian public toward the extreme left. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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