SD to the NEWS

by PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY

Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002
Phone: 618-462-5415

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COMMUNIST THREAT IN ITALY

Italy is the home port of the American Sixth Fleet. Italy hosts a network of American bases and NATO facilities, and is at the center of NATO political and military planning and operations. Italy is also a charter member of the NATO Nuclear Planning Group in which the most sensitive issues of nuclear defense are discussed. Italy's tremendous importance to the security of the Western world can hardly be overestimated.

Yet Italy today is on the verge of a Communist coalition govern ment or financial bankruptcy, or both. As John onnally recently said, "The Mediterranean was the cradle of ci ilization. It is not beyond reason that it could also become its grave."

In June 1975 the Communist Party came within two percentage points of being the largest political party in Italy. This was **the** greatest gain any political party has made in Italy since 1948.

The Italian Communist Party is trying to present the image that it is a national party, independent of the Soviet Union. Its leaders are very sophisticated, even charming. Actually, -the Italian Com munist Party maintains iron discipline and tolerates no meaningful dissent. Its present leader has repeatedly stressed the party's "unbreakable ties of solidarity with the Soviet Union."

The official Italian Communist Party position on membership in NATO is ambiguous. The Communist newspaper has declared that Italy should not accept NATO "as it is" because it is "the instrument of American manipulation of Europe."

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Even if Moscow agents do not stage-manage every action of the Italian Communist Party, it is clear that its basic goals and pro grams do not include defense efforts or cooperation with NATO. The overriding purpose that gave birth to NATO and has nurtured it for three decades is the defense of the Western democracies against potential aggression from the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact govern ments. There is no way that any Communist Party will ever assist in that ob,jective.

Unfortunately, the political power of the Communist Party is only one prong of a three-pronged danger. From without, the Italians see the ominous presence of the Soviet Navy in the Mediterranean, usually kept at about 50 ships, and easily able to expand in time of crisis to 95 ships, as it did during the October 1973 war.

The third prong is the defeatist attitude of many pro-Western Italians. Having witnessed the collapse of U.S. commitment to South Vietnam, they now fear a similar retreat in Western Europe in the face of Soviet imperialism. I*@lione e1e Wtestling witt1 the question w-A r :tlrny sbauJ d *vat* QQat rQRLi.r:;g 1·itI1 tit@ Gemmttttir:d;s 1,he11 the t;nI ted ~~vtatcs nas aiready reaoned its own compromise with tho Soviets in~~ tho ll8lsjuki agreeweni l9st y@eFu

If the Communists are able to control or even dominate the Italian government, this would mean the neutralization of Italy and the closing of key NATO and U.S. bases, resulting in the collapse of NATO's southern flank. Turkey and Greece could hardly resist pressures from the Soviet Union, and the Mediterranean would soon become a Soviet lake. It is likely that whoever controls Italy will control the Mediterranean.

The risks to the West in permitting the Communist Party to come to power in Italy are simply too great to be tolerated. Presidential candidates should discuss this issue.

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