

POLITICS

On the left, a match made in Detroit

By John Judis

DETROIT

ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL mergers in American politics took place in 1980, when the American Socialist Party was formed from the Socialist Democracy of America, the remnants of Eugene Debs' American Railway Union and a dissident faction of the Socialist Labor Party. The Socialists more or less grew steadily for their first 18 years. But in 1919, with the climactic split between Socialists and Communists, the American left became a descending flow chart of Communists, Socialist, Social Democrats, Trotskyists and Maoists. of the day on the American left. Two of the larger socialist organizations, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) and the New American Movement (NAM), with about 7,000 members between them, decided to tie the knot. "We have been socialists, communists, Fabians, social democrats, Trotskyists, liberals, Marxists, anarchists, SDSers, social gospel Protestants, Zionist Jews and Bundist Jews, Catholics who believed all socialists were enemies of religion and atheists who believed all Catholics were reactionaries. We are now an exuberant movement glorying in our diverse modes of interpreting the common socialist values which are basic to our moral and political community," Michael Harrington, the chair of the newly formed Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), told the 300 delegates gathered under the shadow of economic depression in Detroit's St. Andrew's Hall.

Among the delegates, there were varying estimates of the merger's historic significance. "I am sure historians will forget that the Republican Party had its convention in Detroit in 1980, but they will never forget that democratic socialism was born here," said Mildred Jeffrey, the former president of the National Women's Political Caucus.

Jim Chapin, former DSOC National Secretary, was not as certain of the merger's historic role. "The desirability of the merger is so obvious by now that it is not exciting," he said. "It means that democratic socialists now have hegemony on the narrow left."

But Chapin believes that if DSA can continue to grow during the '80s—both organizations have roughly doubled their membership in the last three years—DSA will be well situated to play a leading role if a massive left movement does develop in the late '80s or early '90s. "Just think if a 20,000 member socialist organization like this had existed in 1960," he said.

Difficult negotiations.

The first item on the convention agenda was the dissolution of the old organizations and the separate ratification of the new one. DSOC and NAM gathered in separate rooms. DSOC's meeting was perfunctory. Embarrassed by their conflicting emotions, DSOC's middle-aged leaders, who had already suffered their share of splits and splinters, offered a quick resolution and a rendition of the *Internationale*. NAM's finale resembled the last moments of a '60s commune, with tributes, tears and raised fists.

But once the organizations had dissolved into each other, it was hard to tell the individuals apart. While expected differences in style remained, political differences and similarities cut across the old organizational lines.

When the merger talks were first initiated by DSOC at its March 1979 convention, the two organizations appeared to be far apart. DSOC had been founded in 1973 by a part of the Socialist Party dissatisfied with the Party's subordination to AFL-CIO President George Meany's cold war liberalism. Harrington, Irving Howe and Victor Reuther were still well-equipped to operate politically within labor and the Democratic Party's

higher circles, but they had had a history of bitter conflict with many of the movements of the '60s.

NAM was founded in 1971 by veterans of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and the anti-war, civil rights and women's movements. Many of its early members were suspicious of unions and electoral politics. At the 1972 convention, one New York chapter tried to expel another because one of its members was working on Bella Abzug's Democratic congressional race. If it had ties to the past, they were to American communism rather than socialism, through the participation of former leaders like Dorothy Healey, head of the Communist Party in

"Historians will never forget that democratic socialism was born here," said one delegate.

Southern California, who was expelled for her opposition to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Befitting its anti-war past and Communist lineage, many NAM members viewed the Soviet Union, Vietnam and Cuba with varying degrees of "critical support" and looked askance at DSOC's membership in the Socialist International.

But by 1979, DSOC's leaders were actively courting the survivors of the '60s movements, and NAM members had begun to re-evaluate their opposition to both unions and the Democratic Party. When DSOC's proposal was made, it prompted only about 15 percent of both organization's active members to set up opposition caucuses. But the negotiations still took three years to complete. "Putting NAM and DSOC together was difficult," said former NAM Political Director Holly Graff. "It was hard to discuss politics because even when we agreed, we'd use different language."

In most of the sticky political questions, NAM finally agreed to DSOC's formulations. This was partly a result of NAM's changing views and partly a result of being "less passionate," in Graff's words, about certain foreign policy issues. With the Soviet Union threatening to crush Poland's Solidarity movement,

NAM agreed with DSOC that countries like the USSR were not "socialist" because they were not democratic. With the Socialist International openly backing El Salvador's Democratic Revolutionary Front, NAM dropped its opposition to membership in the International. There was no longer any general disagreement between the organizations about working within the Democratic Party or feminism.

Only the question of Israel and the PLO prompted a compromise based on DSOC's passionate insistence. The final document affirms the Palestinian right to self-determination without mentioning the PLO and supports American military aid to Israel. (Ironically, NAM's support for Israel's right to exist and for recognition of the PLO as a legitimate partner in negotiations was more in line with the Socialist International's position.)

The structural negotiations between the organizations represented more of a compromise. NAM had originally restricted its membership to chapter activists, while DSOC was open to anyone willing to pay a nominal fee. While DSOC had more members, the number of active members was about the same. Since 1979, NAM had moved toward DSOC's looser structure, but in the negotiations it insisted on setting up and funding regional offices that would oversee local chapter development. NAM also won DSOC's agreement to adopt a new name and structure for the organization rather than simply incorporating NAM into DSOC.

National and local activity.

Both NAM and DSOC are what political scientists call "elite" organizations. Their members are primarily college-educated, drawn from the staff and leadership of unions rather than from the rank-and-file, and from city councils and public interest organizations rather than block clubs and parishes. Reflecting the legacy of the '60s, both organizations are also predominantly white.

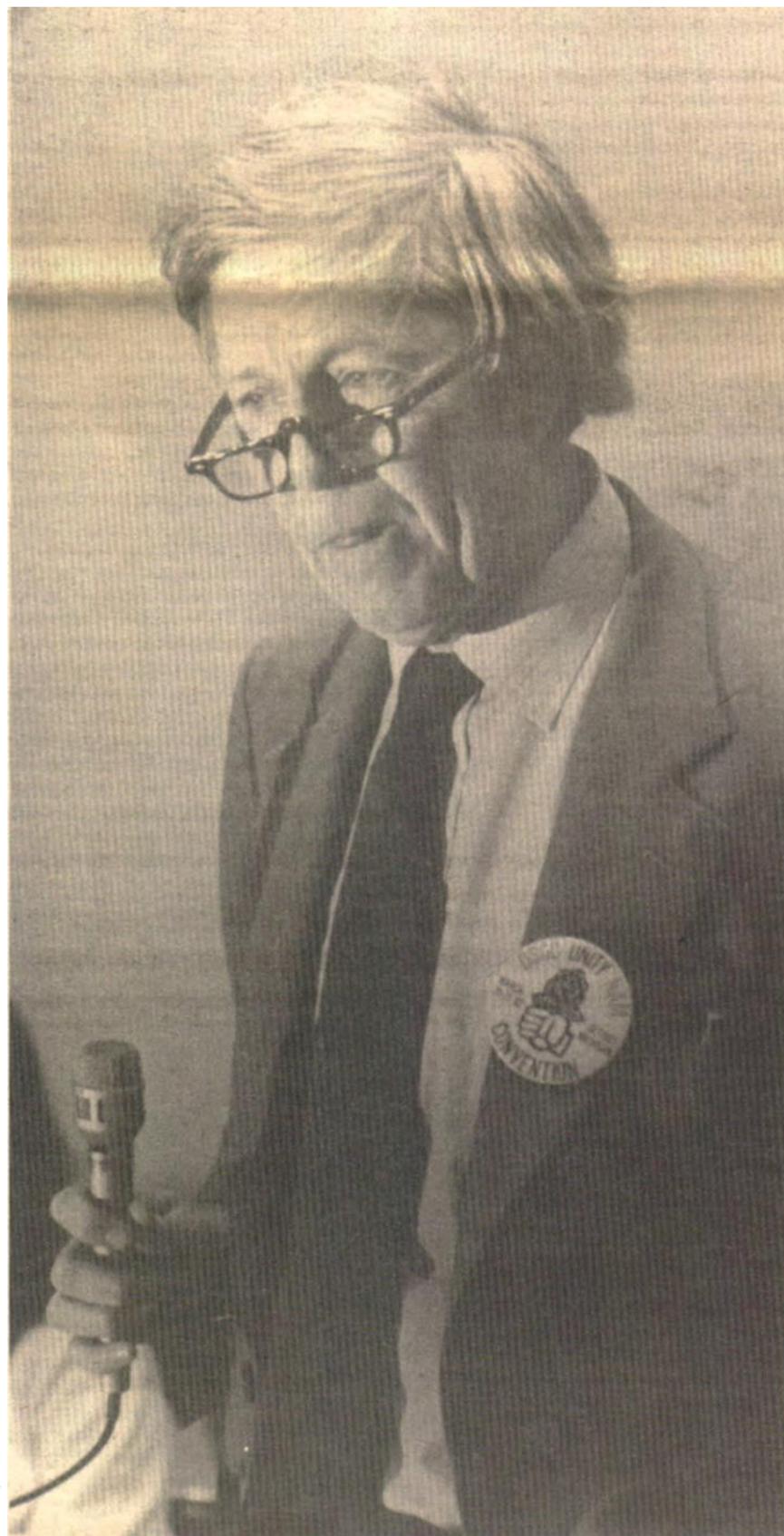
DSOC's main achievement in the last three years has been the growth of its youth section, which now numbers 1,500. It played a major role in campus draft opposition and is now helping to organize the April 6 Washington demonstration against student aid cuts. Jim Chapin even described DSOC as having become "predominantly a youth group."

The record of DSOC's city-based locals has been spotty. In the East, where most of DSOC's membership was concentrated, locals have set up labor-Democratic Party coalitions like Rhode Island's Citizen/Labor Organizing Committee and the Long Island Progressive Coalition. But no DSOC local has its own office, and few have hired an organizer except to arrange annual fundraising dinners.

NAM chapters, always strongest in the Midwest and the West Coast, have become active in citizen action and community organizations and in local electoral elections. In Pittsburgh, NAM helped set up and now helps staff the Pennsylvania Alliance for Jobs and Energy. In Santa Cruz, Calif., NAM boasts the city's mayor, Michael Rotkin, who ran as a socialist with chapter support. But NAM has still not developed any national programs, and its members still seem prey to a certain grassroots localism.

DSOC's national activity, which was expected to complement NAM's chapter work, has also run aground recently. Its main program, the Democratic Agenda, was set up at the 1976 Democratic convention to provide a vehicle for labor and liberals to fight for a left-wing platform. But while it played an important role at the 1976 convention and the 1978 midterm convention, it folded back into DSOC afterward rather than assuming a life of its own. At the 1980 convention, Democratic Agenda's platform efforts were completely overshadowed by the

Continued on following page



Michael Harrington, head of the newly formed Democratic Socialists of America: "We are now an exuberant movement..."

Left

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Carter-Kennedy nomination battle. And now with Democratic rule changes eliminating issues debate at the midterm convention and limited elected delegates role in 1984, the Democratic Agenda strategy appears to have been undermined.

While its problems might be explained by unfortunate accidents like the Carter-Kennedy imbroglio, their source may be deeper. DSOC's strategy assumed that a left-wing realignment in the Democratic Party could occur among the party's elites and then spread downward. But the party itself now appears to be ossifying, leaving politics in the hands of ambitious individuals and independent political action committees.

Will to boredom.

For fear of undoing three years of negotiations, both the NAM and DSOC leaders wanted to avoid any serious debates at the Detroit convention. Many of the speeches were either predictable exhortations to take sword in hand against the Reagan administration or self-congratulatory panegyrics. The delegates showed the greatest enthusiasm when two representatives of El Salvador's Democratic Revolutionary Front made brief statements of solidarity. NAM member and newly elected DSA Executive Board member Stanley Aronowitz complained of a "will to bore-

dom" that seemed to have seized hold of the convention convenors. "The problem is that this outfit doesn't know what it wants to do beyond international affairs," he said.

But during Sunday morning workshops on feminism, labor and the future of the Democratic Agenda, some of the questions facing DSA were aired. In the well-attended labor workshop, DSA members differed on how DSA should relate to the labor movement. In the past, DSOC, which could claim the presidents of the Machinists and AFSCME and several United Auto Workers (UAW) vice-presidents as members, tried to unite labor in political coalitions and to avoid internal labor issues. NAM members, typified by Southern California UAW activist Paul Schrade, focused on union democracy and shop-floor militance. At the labor workshop, several former DSOC members shared Schrade's concerns. "Our old approach has been alliances at the top and support work," one DSOC member said. "But most militant workers reject the DSOC approach. Our problem is to reach workers who are not opposed to DSA politics, but who are opposed to the traditional approach."

The difference in approaches was dramatized when DSOC, at its Debs-Thomas dinner in Detroit the night before the convention, presented UAW Secretary-Treasurer Ray Majerus with an award. For some of the NAM and DSOC members, DSOC's gesture amounted to an endorsement of the recent givebacks that Majerus helped to negotiate.

At the Democratic Agenda workshop, delegates discussed how DSA's socialism



DSA executive board member Richard Healey (foreground, left) warned, "We can't canvass for socialism."

will relate to its public politics. In the past, DSOC has operated as socialists within the Democratic Agenda, but has sought to make it a coalition based upon support for such measures as full employment legislation, national health insurance and a federal energy corporation.

Several delegates didn't see why Democratic Agenda itself could not become socialist. "For us in Dane County there's no problem in being a socialist," said a Madison, Wis., delegate. But other delegates expressed some concern about this approach. "In most towns in Ohio, you'd be out of a job if you are a publicly identified socialist," remarked an Ohio city council member, who is himself a closet socialist.

Gordon Haskell, a veteran of the old Socialist Party who will be DSA's new political director, put the problem in strategic terms. "Our goal isn't just to take over the Democratic Party for socialism," Haskell said. "You have to get labor people and their constituency to take over the Democratic Party, not just scattered middle-class people. The point of the Democratic Agenda is to bring this strategy to bear."

In the feminism workshop, many delegates advocated making support for "reproductive rights" a point of unity in Democratic Agenda as well as DSA. In the past, DSOC leaders had feared that such insistence on abortion rights would drive out the Catholic left.

The socialist agenda.

A more basic political question underlies these different strategic debates within DSA: How can DSA, still an alarmingly small political organization, create a socialist movement in a country where most people view socialism with distrust, incomprehension and even alarm? In the past DSOC's strategy has been to legitimize socialism by getting notables to identify themselves as socialists. During the convention, Rep. George Crockett (D-Mich.) joined DSA's gallery of stars. DSOC also published pamphlets and sent the indefatigable Harrington on speaking tours in order to popularize the idea of socialism. But its principal political activities have been aimed at building what Harrington calls a "democratic left."

NAM was initially much more optimistic than DSOC about "putting socialism on the agenda," but in a reappraisal that took place in the mid-'70s, it adopted a dual strategy of winning intellectual converts to socialism through forums and socialist schools while aiming to build what NAM members called an "anti-corporate movement" through their organizing around immediate issues.

While some DSA members believe that the failure of the Republican right will open vast opportunities for public socialism, most DSA leaders are skeptical. According to DSOC youth organizer Penny Schantz, even students have been afraid to identify themselves as socialists. "There is a resurgent McCarthyism on campuses," Schantz said. "Students are worried about whether being a member of a socialist organization will hurt their careers."

At the same time, most DSA members don't share the view of Harry Boyte that they would have been better off identify-

Afraid of undoing three years of negotiations, both NAM and DSOC leaders avoided serious debates.

ing themselves with a "pluralism of idioms" rather than with socialism. While they are generally sympathetic to the citizen action network's general anti-corporate focus and to Tom Hayden's Campaign for Economic Democracy, they insist that there must still be an explicit socialist organization if there is ever to be socialism in America.

DSA leaders are therefore faced with a strategic dilemma. One proposal, put forth by *In These Times* editor James Weinstein, has been to begin running socialists in Democratic primaries for legislative offices. While most DSA leaders agree that this is desirable, they doubt it is practical except in special cases, because it would separate DSA from its coalition partners.

Newly elected executive board member Richard Healey commented, "There is no mass base now for a socialist proposal. Candidates can only get elected as non-socialists—as radical reformers or as single-issue candidates."

Healey thinks that a division of labor will continue to exist between a socialist organization like DSA and the citizen action and community organizations that build local alliances from the bottom-up. "We can't do what they do. We can't canvass for socialism," Healey said.

Healey rejected the proposal made by some former NAM and DSOC members that the Democratic Agenda, which has been a coalition at the top, should become a mass-based organization. "We can't be the people who activate a mass base. It must activate itself," Healey said.

His view is similar to that of Jim Chapin, who was also elected to DSA's executive board. DSA will remain an "elite" organization that recruits members on ideological grounds. With the continuing failure of centrist Democrats and right-wing Republicans to solve the nation's economic problems, it will be able to win increasing numbers of recruits from among those policymakers and local political and union leaders looking for a coherent alternative to neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, but it will be unable to play an active political role as a socialist political organization until its membership grows considerably and until a mass left opposition—a "democratic left"—exists in the U.S.

Some DSA members don't share Healey's view that being socialist will necessarily limit DSA's mass membership composition. Some members also think there will be greater opportunities for socialist politics, but they will probably have to prove their point through actual successes before it will become DSA's plan of action for the '80s.

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ITALY

By Diana Johnstone

ROME

THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY'S (PCI) decisive break with Moscow over Poland is the most spectacular part of an effort to adjust the party's alliances both at home and abroad so as best to withstand the troubles besetting the left and labor movements not only in Italy but also throughout Europe. For despite socialist electoral victories in France and Greece, the political parties and unions that make up the European working class movement continue to be undermined by capitalist economic restructuring, which is fragmenting the working class and reducing the size and political weight of traditional organized labor.

The PCI is a dangerously aging party. Some 80 percent of its 1,700,000 members are over age 40 and half are over 60. The fading far left, which a few years ago drew youth away from the PCI, has proved unable to provide a comparable political initiation to new generations that are tending to turn away from politics altogether. Thus, to shore up and broaden the working class movement, PCI leaders need to seek alliances in two directions: with European social democracy and with those new movements—women's liberation, ecology, nuclear disarmament—most able to involve young people.

Secretary General Enrico Berlinguer's announcement of a "third phase" of the working-class movement portrays the PCI's present situation as a crossroads rather than a dead end. This is Gramscian "optimism of the will," as "pessimism of the intellect" is warning that failure of democratic political forces to master the current economic crisis is setting the stage for unpredictable irrational movements, social catastrophe and war.

According to Berlinguer, two historic phases in the search for socialism have now run their course. The first produced social democratic parties that achieved some important improvements in workers' conditions, but did not challenge private capitalist ownership of industry, whose current reorganization of the economy is tearing down the foundations of the social democratic welfare state. The second opened with the October Revolution and showed its "exhaustion" with the repression of democratic renewal in Poland. After these first two phases, or ways, opens a third phase, or "third way" toward socialism, which unlike the first must overcome capitalism and unlike the second must preserve and develop democracy.

Whatever they think of this analysis, many Communists, especially in positions of responsibility, are relieved or even exhilarated to be cut loose from the Soviets. But the future is extremely unclear. Day after day in PCI meetings at every level all over Italy, the "third way" is being debated at length. Some old workers still venerate Stalin as the hero who defeated fascism in World War II. They are not going to change their opinion, but neither are they likely to do much about it. The more widespread objections to the new course do not stem from any attachment to the "Soviet model," but rather from economic discontent and, above all, from belief that the USSR, for all its manifest faults, is the only barrier to U.S. imperialism.

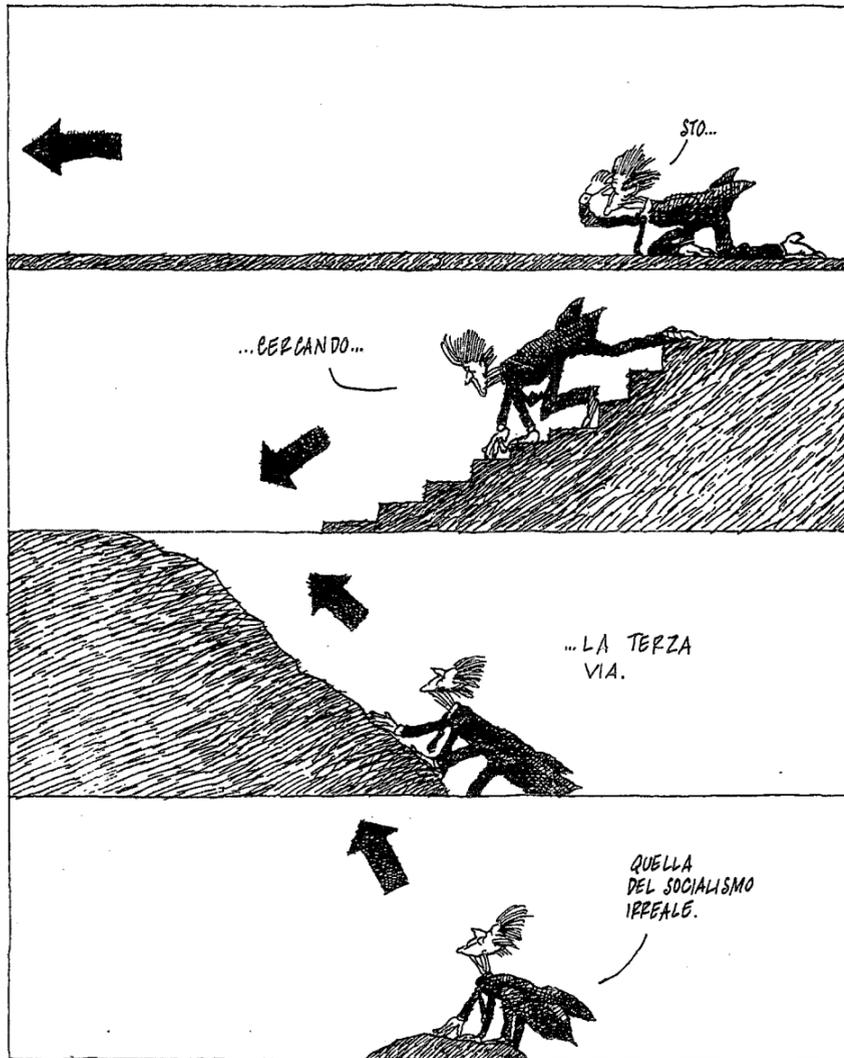
Through the looking glass.

In many respects, crossing from France to Italy these days is like going through the looking glass. For one thing, in France everyone seems carried away by solidarity with Polish workers—except Communist Party leaders. But in Italy, Communist Party leaders' condemnation of Soviet repression of Polish workers is running into grass roots resistance. Communist Party and labor leaders had to bring all their organizational weight to bear to keep a recent Milan demonstration for Poland from being a flop, and even so, many of the marching workers preferred to chant slogans against

Communists turn to a "third way"

SORRIDA, PREGO

di TULLIO PERICOLI ed EMANUELE PIRELLA



Berlinguer: "I'm looking for the 'third way'...the way of unreal socialism."

U.S. intervention in El Salvador.

At a time when pressure is on to reduce the wage mass in Italy, many Italian workers grumble that everyone is praising Solidarity for making demands that no Western labor movement could get away with. Besides, Italian workers who have fought for years against clerical interference in both their politics and their daily lives are easily irritated by the Poles' religiosity. It is striking how much more piously Catholic Solidarity appears in Italy—thanks largely no doubt to Vatican and Christian Democratic influence—than in secular France, where Solidarity has a much more revolutionary image. Indeed, each country seems to create its own Poland to suit its own notions.

The most serious objection to the break with Moscow comes from those who feel the PCI is playing into U.S. hands at a time when the Reagan administration is deliberately creating international tension and preparing for war in Central America, the Middle East and perhaps even in Europe against the Soviet Union itself. These people believe that with the USSR out of the way, the U.S. would be able to crush all revolutionary and anti-imperialistic movements—for example, in Southern Africa, where black liberation movements receive Soviet arms.

A long Berlinguer interview in the Feb.

21 *Unita* attempted to answer the main objections the PCI has been running into from its base. Berlinguer started off by denying that "the development of socialism can consist essentially in the expansion of influence of the so-called socialist camp." Such a conception had failed to provide "ways and means to develop real revolutionary processes" in the West and had reduced communist parties to a role of propaganda and support.

He said the Soviet accusation that the PCI underestimated the danger of war was completely false. On the contrary, he stressed, for peace was the "supreme criterion." Nuclear weapons have changed the problem of war, he argued. The outcome of nuclear war would not be (as in past wars) defeat of the opposing forces, but suppression of life on earth.

"This being the case, we fail to understand how the question of preserving peace can be boiled down to a matter of the international class struggle," the Italian Communist leader said, contradicting the dogma by which the Kremlin justifies its own military might.

"Today, to safeguard and promote peaceful coexistence it is necessary above all to take into account the security needs of all states, from the smallest to the largest (like the USSR, the USA and China), whatever the class nature of their internal system.... Peaceful coexistence rests on

the assumption that even capitalist states can adopt a peace policy. If instead, you start out by discriminating between social systems, then any effective contribution to peace from within the capitalist states is denied to start with, and you end up giving a sense of powerlessness and uselessness to peace movements, since everything is left up to the relationship of forces between...two blocs."

Afghanistan showed the danger of the Soviet doctrine's assertion that peace was strengthened by building up the "peace camp." On the contrary, the Soviet armed intervention only encouraged the other side to be more aggressive and damaged the cause of peace. Berlinguer stressed that opposition to foreign intervention was a main source of the broad movement of solidarity with anti-imperialist struggles in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Thus, if everything is brought down to the international class struggle, identified with two military blocs, then "there is no role left for Europe, which if able to act on its own could make a more effective, if not decisive, contribution to detente, peace and security."

Berlinguer emphasized the "decisive role of the workers movement in Europe" in providing "solutions and new ideas." He said the observation that both social democracy and Soviet-style communism had run their creative course was not a condemnation of their positive achievements, and the PCI objected to "demonization" of both the USSR and of social democracy. "But the essential thing today is that the capitalist system... no longer provides those economic margins on which the major social democratic parties have based their action and their fortunes." So they have to look for new solutions, and the PCI wants to get its word in.

A single alliance.

As secretary general, Berlinguer's role is to hold the party together by synthesizing, or at least combining verbally, its leading tendencies into something resembling a coherent policy. The "historic compromise" policy is dead. Put in terms of personalities, the new "third way" policy expressed by Berlinguer combines the PCI's pragmatic right, identified with Giorgio Napolitano, and its idealistic left, identified with Pietro Ingrao, into a single alliance against the pro-Soviet old guard represented by Armando Cossutta.

As leader of the PCI parliamentary group, Napolitano personifies the party's office holders and practical politicians who want to get on with the business of getting elected and governing. Napolitano is widely referred to as a social democrat or even as the PCI's leading "pro-American." In theory, by removing the veto on PCI participation in national government, the break with Moscow should above all strengthen Napolitano's position in the party. But the triumph of the "pragmatic right" is being held in check, at least temporarily, by two factors: the need for a more revolutionary discourse to combat the pro-Soviet current (ready to pounce on signs of conversion to social democracy as proof of treacherous sell-out), and the circumstance that the PCI's current electoral and governing prospects are not great, due to the Socialist Party's refusal of left unity. The Socialist Party has not only ruled out PCI participation in national government, but also has begun aligning with centrist and right city councilors to force Communist mayors to resign in Florence and other major cities.

The surprising man of the hour is scholarly, 74-year-old Pietro Ingrao, the leader of the PCI left who lost his political battle back in the '60s when the Manifesto group was thrown out of the party. A former president of the national assembly, strongly critical of the Soviet system, Ingrao popularized the term "third way" in a 1978 book. His doubts extend to the whole party-state structure of both communist and social democratic movements—and Berlinguer's attention to "new needs" and "new movements" echoes Ingrao. For Ingrao, the "third way does not pass between social democracy and the left model, but to the left of both" □

The new approach espoused by Berlinguer involves overcoming capitalism while preserving and developing democracy.