

# Italian PDS founds new party

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A three-day meeting in mid-February saw the founding of a new party, the Democratici di Sinistra (DS—Left Democrats). The ceremony was presided over by the ex-Stalinists of the PDS (Partito Democratico della Sinistra—Democratic Party of the Left) together with the remains of the former Christian Democrats and the Socialist Party, and a few other left-wing groups. Two-thirds of the 1,800 delegates gathered in Florence were from the PDS and its leader, Massimo D’Alema, was elected as the new party’s first chairman.

With 1,321 local councillors and 14 European Parliament deputies, this party has almost as many government functionaries as delegates to its founding convention.

The DS will take the form of a federation, until the individual parties and groups have dissolved themselves. These include the right-wing parties Cristiani Sociali, headed by former Christian Democratic minister Ermanno Gorrieri, and Federazione Laburista, under its chairman Valdo Spini.

On the left of the new party is the Comunisti Unitari (United Communists), which split from the arch-Stalinist Rifondazione Comunista (Refounded Communists) two years ago to join the “Olive Tree” alliance. The Olive Tree comprises the PDS and the Greens, together with the remains of other bourgeois parties, and forms the present government under Prime Minister Romano Prodi.

Aside from the PDS, however, the majority of the founding members of the new party originate from the center of Italian bourgeois politics. Giuliano Amato, the President of Italy in 1992-93, announced his interest in joining. As the head of the completely discredited Partito Socialista d’Italia (PSI), he succeeded Bettino Craxi, who was sentenced to prison for corruption but is now in exile in Tunisia.

The aim of these alliances is to strengthen the right wing of the PDS so they can force through their policies against any opposition from ordinary members. D’Alema also hopes to raise the party’s share of the national vote to 30 percent or more. Since 1991, despite its 700,000

membership, the PDS has never been able to achieve more than 22 percent.

To make the political direction of the new party clear, the hammer and sickle and the color red were removed from all banners, flags and letterheads. The DS party logo will be the social democratic rose at the foot of an oak tree, with a blue background encircled by a ring of 15 stars—the symbol of the European Union.

In his keynote speech, D’Alema said that the aim of the new “left” was to make Italy and Europe “ripe” for globalization. “In the age of globalization neither the old state-fixated left, nor unfettered economic liberalism nor a nationalist right wing are capable of governing,” he said.

He praised the Prodi government for fulfilling the criteria of the Maastricht Treaty for Italy’s entry into the European Monetary Union (EMU), thus “saving the fatherland from the threat of state bankruptcy.”

“Italian capitalism,” he said, must be “renewed and made even more modern and competitive.” This meant “flexibilization for all and on all levels.”

D’Alema presented British Labour Party leader Tony Blair as his model, and declared his aim to be the creation of a two-party system which would provide the stable conditions necessary for Italian capitalism to develop a global strategy. He ostentatiously dubbed this policy, *bipartitico globalizzazione*—two-party globalization.

The founding of the DS marks a new high point in the rightward course of Stalinism in Italy. For almost half a century following the Second World War, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) had millions of members and thousands of local councilors, mayors and parliamentary deputies.

Although it was never part of the national government, it formed the most important pillar of the Italian state against the working class. In February 1991, following the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and just prior to the dissolution of the USSR, it changed its name to PDS in order to give expression to the social democratic politics it now espoused. Since this transformation—“mark 1,” as D’Alema now terms it—the

PDS has functioned as the main guardian of bourgeois order.

Between 1992 and 1994, the parties that had dominated Italian politics since the end of the war, Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democrats) and the Partito Socialista d'Italia (PSI), collapsed. The PDS first supported the shaky government of Giuliano Amato and then that of central bank chief Ciampi. Both introduced sweeping cuts in the state budget in order to qualify for EMU. The unions close to the PDS abandoned the *scala mobile*, the automatic sliding scale of wage increases, and agreed to cuts in real wages.

In the spring election of 1994, right-wing populist Silvio Berlusconi profited from the political paralysis and disorientation of the working class caused by the PDS. He formed a right-wing coalition government with the fascist Alleanza Nazionale of Gianfranco Fini and the separatist Lega Nord of Umberto Bossi. However, faced with protest demonstrations by millions of workers and youth, this government was only able to cling to power for seven months.

D'Alema was elected chairman of the PDS following the defeat of 1994. In an interview with the *Financial Times* last year he explained that he set himself three aims: to transform the PDS into a center party along the lines of Tony Blair's New Labour; to form a stable centre-left coalition to lead Italy into the European Monetary Union; and finally, to change the Italian constitution.

D'Alema envisages Italy with a presidential-style government such as France. He is for abolishing proportional representation and replacing it with a system of majority voting that would weaken the influence of the minor parties.

The "mark 2" transformation of the PDS into the DS is a major step toward the creation of a new center party. D'Alema's two proposed constitutional changes—the creation of a presidency and a system of majority voting—are aimed at stabilizing Italian bourgeois politics and providing a strong government. He has discussed these proposals with all of the leaders of the right-wing and fascist parties, Berlusconi, Bossi and Fini.

The Olive Tree alliance has been in office two years. It has remained stable thanks to the support of Rifondazione Comunista (RC), a wing of the old PCI which split away when the PDS was founded. Last autumn the RC initially refused to support the government's budget proposals, which meant big cuts in pensions. But when D'Alema and Prodi threatened new elections, the RC fell in behind the budget.

In his speech, D'Alema praised his "friends in Rifondazione Comunista" and "their support for the regeneration of our country." He declared, "If instead of them we had confronted a maximalist left, the road to Europe for our country would have been much, much harder." Despite this fulsome praise, D'Alema's support for majority voting is meant to ensure that the government will no longer be dependent on the RC's parliamentary support.

In the *Financial Times* interview, D'Alema, and not Prodi, was presented as the real strongman of Italian politics, able to bring new order to the country by uniting left and right in the government. The aim of the interview was to reassure the *Financial Times* readers in the European banks and corporate headquarters that D'Alema offered a viable means of avoiding the "most dangerous scenario of all for the Euro:" that a heavily indebted Italy might gain entry into EMU, but lack a government strong enough to push through the required budget cuts.

At 122 percent of Gross Domestic Product, Italy's state debt is more than twice as high as allowed under the Maastricht Treaty. The *Financial Times* recently wrote that mass sackings across several sectors of the economy and in the public administration were unavoidable.

The newspaper quoted a former high official of the Finance Ministry, Professor Francesco Giavazzi: "The European partners will let Italy into the monetary union because they regard the country as an important market for their own products and services.... But Italians will then be surprised to find how quickly unemployment will rise.... And they will not have realized that the painful cuts necessary for the country's entry into the monetary union will seem almost harmless in comparison with the measures needed to keep the country inside it."



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