Italian Pabloites back Prime Minister Prodi in Senate confidence vote

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Romano Prodi will continue to lead the Italian government. On Wednesday he won a confidence vote by 162 to 157 in the Senate, where his nine-party coalition has a razor-thin majority. A total of 160 votes was necessary for victory.

The subsequent vote in the lower house was expected to be a formality. Prime Minister Prodi's center-left Unione coalition has a comfortable majority in this chamber of parliament.

Prodi thereby emerges in a stronger position following the cabinet crisis he brought about February 21 after he narrowly lost a foreign policy vote in the Senate. Since then, all nine coalition partners have declared their unreserved support for the basic tenets of Prodi's policies.

Prodi insisted that all coalition parties give their agreement to a twelve-point ultimatum which included support for Italy's controversial military intervention in Afghanistan, which is opposed by a large proportion of the population, the expansion of the US military base at Vicenza, the building of a high-speed rail connection (TAV) to France, and the "reform" of the Italian pension system. In addition, the agreement gives Prodi special powers to single-handedly deal with disputes within the coalition.

Among those voting to support Prodi on Wednesday's confidence motion was Senator Franco Turigliatto, whose abstention in the foreign policy vote one week ago played a major role in that motion's defeat.

Turigliatto was elected to the Senate as a member of Communist Refoundation (Rifondazione Comunista). He belongs to the tendency Sinistra Critica (Critical Left), which is affiliated internationally to the Pabloite United Secretariat, a tendency that rejected the principles and program of Trotskyism and broke from the Fourth International in the 1950s, and was led for many years by the late Ernest Mandel. The Italian members of the United Secretariat have worked inside Communist Refoundation since its establishment in 1991, playing a major role in the party's construction.

The executive committee of Communist Refoundation called for Turigliatto's expulsion from the party following his abstention on February 21. Turigliatto himself applied to give up his mandate in the Senate. Until this is officially authorized, he will remain in the Senate, but he will no longer be a member of Communist Refoundation's parliamentary group. Instead, he will be attached to the "mixed parliamentary group" in the chamber.

Turigliatto's behavior in first refusing to vote for Prodi and then a week later voting in his favor casts light on the unbridled opportunism that characterizes not only the Pabloite tendency, but petty-bourgeois radical groups in general.

On the one hand Turigliatto and the Critical Left go to great lengths to present themselves as socialist opponents of capitalism. They have criticized numerous aspects of the Prodi government's policy. At the same time, they insist that there is no alternative to this government apart from a return to power of the right-wing government of Silvio Berlusconi. This is the basis on which they remain members of Communist Refoundation, which is part of Prodi's coalition, and continue to support the Prodi government in parliament.

They are vehemently opposed to an independent movement of the working class directed against the capitalist system and its ruling elite. Their organization extols protest politics, time and again insisting on the necessity to mobilize on the streets. But as members of the government they support Prodi, and their real role consists in capturing the leadership of such mobilizations with the aim of steering them into a political dead end. They provide a "left" fig leaf for Prodi's right-wing policies.

After nine months of the Prodi government, it is clear that in terms of its anti-social domestic agenda and imperialist foreign policy it is virtually indistinguishable from the preceding government of Berlusconi. This state of affairs has forced the Italian Pabloites, who describe themselves as a "current" within Communist Refoundation, into ever more grotesque gyrations to justify their support for the government.

A conference of the Critical Left held January 27-28 was forced to conclude this: "The balance sheet of the participation of Communist Refoundation in the government of the Unione, the centre-left coalition led by Romano Prodi, is catastrophic."

In the international Pabloite magazine *International Viewpoint*, the leader of the Critical Left, Flavia d'Angeli, reported, "With the adoption of a budget for 2007, the most austere budget in the entire history of the Republic, the sending of troops to Lebanon, the maintenance of those in Afghanistan, the confirmation of submission to the dictates of the Vatican on

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questions of civil rights and secularism, the comrades of the Critical Left reaffirmed the necessity of building a left opposition to this government in order to respond to the growing malaise in Italian society."

The conference declined to draw the obvious conclusion, however, i.e., to break with the government party of Communist Refoundation. Instead, according to d'Angeli's report, it decided to "to found its own association, without, however, splitting from the PRC".

The precise difference between a "current" and an "association" is left to the imagination of the reader, along with the question of how one can develop a "left opposition" to a government to which one belongs. One thing remains certain, however, and that is the substantial incomes which representatives of the Critical Left receive from their mandates and membership in a government party.

Just three weeks after the conference, the Critical Left waged its half-hearted rebellion in the course of the Senate foreign policy vote. While Turigliatto abstained, other senators of the Critical Left voted in favor.

Following the decision of the Communist Refoundation executive committee to expel Turigliatto, the Critical Left launched an international solidarity campaign which quickly won the support of a number of well-known radicals, including Noam Chomsky, George Galloway, Tariq Ali, Olivier Besancenot, Alex Callinicos and film director Ken Loach.

The solidarity statement appeals against the "incorrect decision to expel Turigliatto." With revealing bluntness the appeal continues, "We need acts like this, even if they are complicated and difficult, in order to reduce the gap between established politics and society." In other words, Turigliatto's actions are aimed at reestablishing, not undermining, the credibility of the "established politics" of the Prodi government.

In an "open letter to all those who expressed their solidarity," Turigliatto explained why he intended to vote in favor of Prodi in the upcoming confidence vote, although he rejected all twelve points of Prodi's ultimatum, which, he said, "mean agreement to a free trade policy, a policy of sacrifice and multilateral war."

He never planned to bring down the Prodi government, he protested. He sought only to carry out a "dialogue" with those sections of the movement and the left that think along his lines. "In so doing, the government should be allowed to remain where it is," he declared.

Turigliatto has undertaken a final service for Prodi by voluntarily giving up his Senate mandate, an utterly cowardly and capitulatory act.

The solidarity resolution manages to both welcome and reject Turigliatto's resignation in the same sentence. It reads, "In a political context in which a parliamentary seat is considered to have a value above all others, to resign from the Senate after forty years of political activity alongside the workers, and after having participated in the construction of the PRC from the very beginning, seems to us to be an act which is both unprecedented and morally correct, even if we think that he should withdraw his resignation."

The evolution of the Prodi government and Communist Refoundation comes as no surprise to Marxists. The *World Socialist Web Site*—and the printed newspapers of the International Committee of the Fourth International which preceded the WSWS—repeatedly made clear that Communist Refoundation served as a left prop for the bourgeois order. In the 1990s, it gave political support to the technocratic government led by Central Bank head Lamberto Dini and Azeglio Ciampi, as well as to the first Prodi government. All three governments carried out substantial attacks on the working class.

For their part, Turigliatto and his supporters have gone to considerable lengths to defend and support Communist Refoundation, as Turigliatto makes clear in his open letter. He writes, "I have helped build up Communist Refoundation from the very beginning. I have defended it when it was under attack. I have spent hundreds of hours talking to workers in front of factories in Turin and in the course of trips across Italy."

In fact, Turigliatto has misled and deceived workers. If he is now expelled from Communist Refoundation and feels called upon to conduct all sorts of political twists and turns to justify his support for the Prodi government, this is an expression of the profound gulf which has opened up between the government coalition and the population at large.

Workers cannot be so easily led astray. They are beginning to comprehend that Prodi and his right-wing predecessor Berlusconi represent the same social interests—those of a narrow ruling elite that has enriched itself at the expense of society as a whole, while undertaking continual attacks on the working population. Workers are beginning to look for a political alternative that will enable them to fundamentally transform society.

The task of Turigliatto and his co-thinkers in Communist Refoundation and the Critical Left is precisely to block such a development.

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