

Pathfinder

June 13, 1951

Italian communism flops at the polls



Reds lose key northern cities in early elections

Giuseppe Dozza, handsome, white-haired Communist Mayor of Bologna, ripped open a telegram from Rome one day last week. It was from Palmiro Togliatti, first Communist of Italy. Togliatti was elated over the Communist victory at the polls in Bologna. But except for that, Italy's Communist Party, largest in Western Europe, had little to cheer about as 8.5 million in 28 provinces voted in the first of a series of local elections.

Joseph Stalin and communism, polling only 30.7% of the total vote, had taken a beating in the national election of 1948. That gave Alcide de Gasperi's Christian Democratic (chiefly Catholic) Party control of the government at Rome. But in a nation where local politics often top national politics in importance, the Communists continued to rule the governments of scores of cities and towns. They had won control in 1946 in local elections (held every five years).

Last week the Italians got their chance to do on a local scale what they had done on the national basis in 1948. Since most of the May 27 elections were held in the industrial north, where Communist strength is greatest, it was a good test of CP prestige.

communism flops

On the basis of still incomplete returns from the 28 provinces the Communists and their fellow travelers, the left-wing Socialists, polled about 40% of the votes. (In the same provinces in 1948 they polled 32%.) The Christian Democrats lost ground. They got only 36.3% of the votes against 50.2% in 1948. But a tricky new election law worked to the advantage of the anti-Communists.

Minority Rule. Under the old law, the party polling the most votes won two thirds of the seats—and control—in the local government. In a ten-party race in a city of 50,000 voters, for instance, the Communists might poll 20,000 votes, the Christian Democrats 15,000, with eight other parties dividing the remaining 15,000. This would permit the Reds, even though lacking a majority, to take over the local government.

The Christian Democrats pushed the new law through the Parliament at Rome. It permits parties to pool votes and split the seat they win. Social Democrats, Republicans and Liberals lined up with the Christian Democrats in an anti-Communist coalition.

In 1946 the Reds won Bologna, Italy's "Communist capital," two to one. Last week some 8,000 votes cast for the independent, Fascist-minded Italian Social Movement (MSI) enabled the Communists and their fellow travelers (Pietro Nenni's left-wing Socialists) to nose out the anti-Red bloc by 3,000 votes. That kept Bologna in the Red column.

Landslide. But not even MSI votes could turn the tide in other key cities. The Reds lost control in most of the cities they governed, including Genoa, port of entry for American aid; Milan, Italy's main industrial city; and Venice. They also were swept out of office in 775 of 1,170 towns.

Pathfinder

OldMagazineArticles.com