

## Report from Italy by Liliana Gorini

### 'Benvenuto's hounds'

*The communist-controlled trade unions are providing the finance minister with spies and thugs against "tax-evaders."*

In the 16th century, Venetian spies used to write down on a piece of paper the name of the person they wanted to denounce to the powerful Council of Ten governing Venice. They then put the piece of paper in the mouth of a stone lion in San Marco square, where still today you can read the inscription, "Per Denontie Segrete" (For Secret Denunciations).

The *bravos* (thugs) hired by the Council of Ten would then take care of the denounced individuals, strangling them and throwing the body in a canal.

Today, in the age of telecommunications and technetronics, the heirs of the Council of Ten hire the trade unions to get a complete, computerized list of the enemies they want to eliminate. This is the true meaning of the four-hour nationwide general strike organized by the communist-controlled CGIL-CISL-UIL trade union federation to support the fascist fiscal package of the Venetian Bruno Visentini, finance minister in the Craxi government.

Visentini is at the same time president of the holding company of Olivetti, the Italian computer giant, and a prominent representative of the Venetian Cini Foundation and its committee "to save Venice."

On Nov. 21, workers in industry, transport, school, and other "employed" categories followed the call of their trade-union leadership and participated in the strike with slogans and stickers: "I pay the taxes, and

you?" They called for "fiscal equity" and a "equality of sacrifice" among all workers. Visentini's program would tax up to 40% of workers' incomes in the "self-employed" category, shopkeepers, for example, bankrupting many.

The strike had been called by the trade unions in order to make sure that the Italian parliament approves Visentini's package. Having imposed on the industrial workforce brutal austerity measures, the trade unions want those same brutal austerity measures—imposed by the International Monetary Fund as a program to ensure repayment of Italy's foreign debt—to be extended to family businesses.

Visentini was initially opposed by the Social Democratic and the Christian Democratic parties, since the package includes anti-constitutional measures such as so-called "inductive assessments"—a shopkeeper, or any other self-employed worker "suspected" of evading taxes has to go to jail before being proven guilty, and then must prove his innocence, even though the Italian constitution unconditionally states that the accused is innocent until proven guilty.

This measure, in particular, was supported by the trade unions.

In order to make sure that Visentini's fascist economic plan works, the trade unions have assumed the role of "spies" for the finance minister. Speaking at a conference entitled "I Pay the Taxes, and You?" held on the eve of the strike, UIL general-secretary

Giorgio Benvenuto, himself a socialist and close friend of AFL-CIO chief Lane Kirkland, presented a complete list of "suspected tax evaders," with names and addresses, and various charts of the main categories of self-employed which should be hit by the finance ministry. The same charts were put on walls all over Italy in a UIL poster with the same headline the day of the strike.

Some newspapers were so embarrassed by the proscription lists of Benvenuto that they refused to publish them, publishing only the charts and presenting them as the result of the researches of five or six of "Benvenuto's hounds." At the same time, 86 shops were shut down by the finance ministry because they are "suspected" of manipulating the cash-registers imposed by the ministry on every shop, in order to prevent a cash receipt for a sale from being issued. The receipt, of course, allows Visentini and his hounds in the trade unions to check the income of every shop, and grab 40%.

The Italian parliament is discussing and voting on Visentini's plan paragraph by paragraph, and is expected to approve it thanks to the pressure from the trade unions, the Communist Party, and the Republican Party, which otherwise threaten to provoke a government crisis.

The biggest shopkeeper association, Confcommercio, has already conducted one general strike, and is now discussing a two-day strike should parliament approve the program. The Confcommercio's first strike, in October, featured slogans like "No to the left dictatorship" and "We don't want the KGB in our house," a reference to Benvenuto's spies.

There was one other slogan, and most appropriate: "Visentini in Piazzale Loreto!"—where Mussolini's body was hung upside down.