

Italian communist senator takes stand against war

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On February 21, senators Franco Turigliatto from the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) and Ferdinando Rossi from the Party of Italian Communists (PDCI) disobeyed party instructions and abstained on a vote in support of the foreign policy of the government of prime minister Romano Prodi. Because of their action the vote was lost and, although not obliged to, Prodi chose to resign, throwing his nine-party “Union” coalition into crisis.

A week later, on February 28, the two “renegade” senators voted in favour of a motion of confidence that put Prodi back in the saddle on the basis of a 12-point platform. What, if anything, had changed?

In a “Letter to all who have expressed solidarity”, Turigliatto explained his vote and subsequent decision to ask Italy’s upper house to accept his resignation as a senator. The letter gives an insight into the dilemmas facing Italian anti-capitalist activists who are trying to build opposition to the neoliberal and pro-war Prodi administration (which maintains 1800 Italian troops in Afghanistan) without opening the door to the return of Silvio Berlusconi’s hated right-wing “House of Freedoms” coalition.

The letter outlines Turigliatto’s reasons for “what I would call a ‘technical’ vote in favour” of the motion of confidence in the Prodi government, “even as I reject Prodi’s 12-point program in its entirety”.

Turigliatto guaranteed that he “can’t be counted upon to support the mission in Afghanistan, the High Speed Train lines or the counter-reform of the pension system ... even if that means risking a new government crisis”, and that he would continue to oppose the doubling in size of the US military base in Vicenza.

The letter explained that Turigliatto’s actions were not intended as a “cheap political stunt to provoke a government crisis”, but rather, “It was a responsible action based on my own convictions and on those of people who, like me, feel alienated from a foreign policy that continues to wage war, albeit ‘multilaterally’, that upholds a neoliberal conception of Europe and that thinks that sending soldiers around the world is a way of ‘counting’ in international politics”.

Rather than himself provoking a government crisis, Turigliatto argued, “That’s overwhelmingly been the work of the government itself and of the policies it has adopted ... Prodi’s 12 points enshrine a neoliberal shift committed to imposing a policy of sacrifices and multilateral war. The attacks to which I’ve been subject and the bogey waved by my accusers of a return to government by Berlusconi have been deliberately aimed at covering up his reality — the fact that the balance sheet of the months of Prodi government has been extremely negative and that what is looming will be even worse.

“Obviously, my party doesn’t share this judgment and strongly supports the new government. This view is also shared in various ways by society at large, by the movements, by trade union activists

and by the radical wing of the peace movement, even by those [100,000] who came out in Vicenza on February 17. Yes, the fear of a return to government by the right is very strong. There are also those who think that the game with the Prodi government isn't yet played out and that its survival forms the framework in which more advanced gains — or at least a democratic dynamic — can be secured.

"Not having decided to bring about the fall of the Prodi government, I think that it's fair to test out these perceptions, to open up a discussion with that large part of the movement and of the 'people of the left' who think this way, by allowing the Prodi government to remain in place. But I will never be on hand to vote in favour of war in Afghanistan nor to be an accomplice of the anti-people policies of this government."

Turigliatto foresees "a period in which a social opposition to the policies of the Prodi government will have to be developed, an opposition that is bound to have parliamentary repercussions. That's my goal."

Turigliatto writes that his convictions and his ties with the workers' and social movements "have coincided perfectly with those of Communist Refoundation" over the past 15 years. "A couple of days ago, however, my party declared me 'incompatible' simply because I've remained faithful to the historic program of the PRC." As someone who has "built the PRC from its foundations", Turigliatto is bitter and disappointed about threats of his expulsion from the party. "But it's the result of a deep-going change in the PRC's priorities and in its political behaviour — higher ideals are being sacrificed to a passing political project, unleashing a process of denaturing of the left that has now outlawed me."

Turigliatto concludes: "If the House rejects my resignation, I will still vote against the war as long as I am in the Senate, because opposition to war and the link with the working-class movement are the compass that guides my political behaviour: they have always been the alpha and omega of a working class and anti-capitalist perspective."

P.S.

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