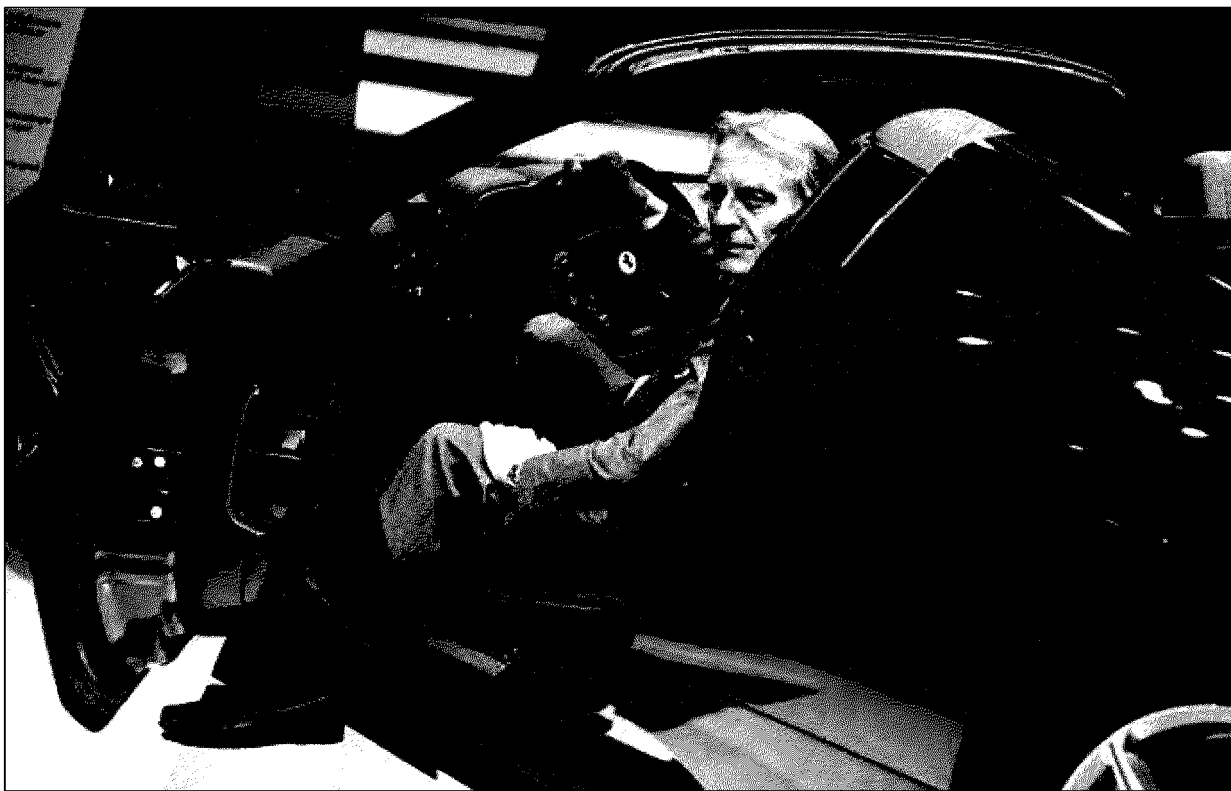


Pro-Monti movement stirs Italy



Drive for reform: Luca Cordero di Montezemolo, Ferrari chairman, at a motor show in Frankfurt last year

getty

Campaign to retain prime minister

Industrialist attacks '20 lost years'

By Guy Dinmore in Rome and Giulia Segreti in Florence

A new centrist movement launched at the weekend by industrialist Luca Cordero di Montezemolo is shaking up Italy's already highly volatile political scene, with the aim of building a platform for Mario Monti to remain as prime minister after elections expected early next year.

Close to 7,000 people packed into a film studio on the edge of Rome on Saturday for the movement's first convention, built on a national network organised by the Italia Futura think-tank set up by Mr Montezemolo three years ago and supported by ACLI, a broad based Christian workers association.

In his pro-reform speech, the 65-year-old entrepreneur, who is chairman of Ferrari, denounced the

"derision and humiliation" Italy had been subjected to over "20 lost years" and anointed Mr Monti as the best candidate to lead national reconstruction.

Tackling the question that is gripping Italy – whether Mr Monti will bow to mounting pressure and take the big step from being an appointed technocrat and run for elected office – Mr Montezemolo told the crowd of mostly profession-

als and entrepreneurs: "We're not asking the prime minister to take the leadership of this movement today because it would prejudice his work."

As media commentators remarked, "today" is the operative word. Mr Monti is in no position to take sides while his unelected government relies on the support of the main parties in parliament to complete urgent legislation, including next year's contested budget, over coming weeks.

However, with March 10 looming as the likely election date next year, Mr

Montezemolo's movement has high hopes it will receive Mr Monti's endorsement, possibly after Giorgio Napolitano, head of state, dissolves parliament in early January.

A possible alliance with other pro-Monti formations would boost their chances of winning the prime minister's hand, and their prospects at the polls.

Speaking at Milan's Bocconi university on Saturday, Mr Monti was asked again about his future. "No one is asking commitments of me, and today I am not giving any," he said. However, he applauded the efforts of civil society groups to engage Italians, especially those adopting initiatives in line with his own.

Italy's post-election stability is worrying European partners and financial markets, with the focus on sustainability of fiscal consoli-

ation put in place by Mr Monti to service €2tn of public debt, the highest in Europe as a proportion of GDP after Greece.

Opinion polls point to the end of Italy's shortlived experiment with a bi-party system resulting in a fragmented parliament, with the centre-left Democrats emerging as the single largest party, but with only some 25 per cent of the vote. A large protest vote is seen going to the anti-establishment Five Star Move-

ment led by Beppe Grillo, an activist comedian who is riding a wave of disillusionment with the main parties and growing discontent with Mr Monti's austerity policies.

Exponents of a pro-Monti alliance, with the prime minister as candidate, estimate they could take some



■ SELPRESS ■
www.selpress.com

15 per cent of the vote.

However, unknowns remain. Aside from bitterly contested negotiations over a new electoral law that could reduce the "bonus" given to the winner in parliament, Italians do not know who will lead the Democrats, as well as Silvio Berlusconi's imploding centre-right People of Liberty, into the elections.

Matteo Renzi, 37-year-old reformist mayor of Florence, is mounting a strong challenge for leadership of the centre-left with a first round of voting in primaries due on November 25. Pier Luigi Bersani, Democratic party secretary, has appealed to his leftwing base with a Monti-sceptic approach and his lead in polls has slipped.

Rallying his supporters in Florence at the weekend, Mr Renzi credited the prime minister's achievements – "If Monti had not been here we would have gone to the dogs" – but made his pitch to be the new generation driver of bolder change.

Mr Renzi and Mr Montezemolo share a similar economic and social agenda. Both support a return to elected government, but disagree over who should lead it.