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THE POLITICAL EVOLUTION OF ITALY AND THE  
INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT: A PERSONAL VIEW

by

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INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT : A PERSONAL VIEW

Being neither Italian, nor a specialist of Italy, nor a scenario-minded futurologist, the writer is three times protected from any illusion of competence in answering questions about plausible evolutions of the Italian scene during the next few years. He can only throw the questions back to the group. Moreover whether cast in the interrogative the affirmative, the conditional or the imperative, these random notes are essentially impressionistic rather than systematic. Their only value may be to reflect the reactions of a relatively distant and uncommitted observer, whose only originality may be in tending to agree more with Signor Moro, Signor Berlinguer, and (according to a recent poll) with the Italian people, than with some of <sup>his</sup> own colleagues, be they right-wing German-American or left-wing Italian intellectuals. [ Never has the well-known paradox of the irresistible force meeting the unmovable obstacle seemed more relevant than in looking to Italy's situation. The irresistible force is made of changes in the economy, the social structures, cultural attitudes and political perceptions which lead away from the existing political and social coalition lead by the D.C. towards an alternative "bloc" which in some way or other would mean a shift to the left and in some way or other would include the communist party as one of its main partners if not the dominating one. The unmovable obstacle is made of an unfavourable environment, particularly economic and international, and particularly under present circumstances. The political force which, by its record and its strategy, has put itself in the most credible posture as an alternative to the corruption obscurantism and inefficiency of the D.C. is the PCI.



At the same time from Togliatti's use of the Greek example to Berlinguer's use of the Chilean one, it has shown itself remarkably aware of the seriousness of the obstacles <sup>danger</sup> represented by the combination of domestic polarisation and external intervention. It has hoped, however, to overcome these obstacles above all through the prudence of its strategy and through the reassuring evidence of its own evolution, but also through favourable conditions in the domestic and international environment : prosperity, East-West détente, calm in the Mediterranean, progress in European integration, which would reduce the hostility of domestic and, above all, international forces or provide a screen against them. To-day, while domestic political conditions seem to show the PCI was too pessimistic and has tended to underestimate the evolution of the Italian people and its own strength, general economic and international conditions tend to justify its worse fears rather than its hopes : instead of managing growth in provisional harmony with Agnelli and the Pope, with the blessing of <sup>a</sup> dynamic European Community, with the benevolent abstention of the superpowers, and in the framework of an Italian-inspired West European Communist strategy, it may have to manage unemployment and inflation, with more direct responsibility for a more dismal heritage than expected, with Italian and multinational corporations being pushed to intransigence or to emigration by objective conditions as much by fear of communism, with the United States and the Soviet Union both hostile, the former adamantly so, due to its troubles elsewhere and to its enhanced priority of stability in the Mediterranean, the latter insisting on ideological struggle and on the unity of the communist movement, finally with other Western communist parties and countries offering more a deterrent than a help.

All these elements combined with the deep reluctance of the respective rank and file, make the favoured communist strategy of "historical compromise" unlikely to succeed. But they do not make the success of any other any more likely, at least in the sense of achieving their respective objectives. All King Henry's, King Lear's ("I shall do such things which they are I know not but they shall be the terror of the earth") and King Canute's exhortations and exorcisms will not succeed in "revitalizing" the aging demo-christian Empty-Duampty, nor will the denial of visas by the United States be taken as a denial of legitimacy by the Italian people. On the contrary, as shown by the two last electoral consultations, a strategy of intransigence towards the PCI is likely to benefit the latter and a refusal of collaboration with him is more likely to advance precisely the left-wing alternative which is feared both by him and by his opponents. The example of Naples, where the prevention of a grand coalition municipality by the right-wing of the DC, had led to a left-wing one headed by a communist may be symbolic.

Conversely, anticipated elections and the choice of a revolutionary or of a frontist alternative run the gravest risks, even in case of victory, to produce first the very thing which the non-communist proponents of the alternative fear, i.e. domination by the communists, and then what the communists fear, i.e. a process of chileanization or portugualisation through what L. CAFAGNA has called "la tenaglia delle <sup>ASPETTANSE</sup> ~~ASPETTANSE~~" (i.e. uncontrolled growth in worker's hopes and demands, and in capitals fears and evasions), leading to right-wing reaction encouraged directly or indirectly by the United States to neo-stalinist or neo-fascist repression and to economic isolation.

While these dialectics (or rather this vicious circle) of polarisation seems more likely than any optimistic scenario, they are much less the inevitable result of objective contradictions between social trends and political environment than the probable outcome of preventive reactions and over-reactions, of self-fulfilling and self-denying prophecies. The winds of change do, unquestionably, blow over Italy as over the whole of Southern Europe; and there is, undoubtedly, a contradiction between change and security. But, to borrow Chairman Mao's vocabulary this contradiction need not by any means be an antagonistic one.

For instance, among the international consequences of communist participation in power, one must distinguish between those which are inevitable (but which, while real, are likely to be marginal : problems for the NPG, for relations with Israel, perhaps, under certain circumstances, consequences for Yugoslavia) and, those which would stem from reactions to the hostile reactions of the US, the Federal Republic, or multinational corporations.

While there may be some illusion (voluntary or not) in the PCI's apparent belief that one can reach a fundamental reform of society (let alone a revolution) without oppressing anybody, I believe it is shown by polls and elections, that in most euro-mediterranean countries a broad majority of the population (as distinct from powerful minorities on the political-economic-military right or the political-intellectual-military left or pseudo-left) tend towards a moderate left, i.e. aspire neither to the status quo nor to revolution but to modernizing and democratic social reforms - which do imply a break with present practices but not a fundamental break with the Western type of society

nor with the Western system of alliances. I also believe that these aspirations are more realistic in terms of the functioning of their respective societies than the belief in the status quo or in revolution. Finally, while each of these countries has its own identity crisis, and while their autonomous evolution would lead to a certain diversification both domestic and international, from social democratic to military regimes, or from certain forms of atlanticism to certain forms of non-alignment, these variations would be compatible with the European balance and with the functioning of Western organizations like the Atlantic alliance and the Common Market provided these, in turn, would adapt, through diversification division of labor and devolution to the challenge of diversity and change. More pronounced national identities within the Mediterranean, a more pronounced mediterranean identity within Europe and European identity within the West, could be compatible with a new and more flexible multilateralism, in which the role of intermediary institutions, groupings or parties (like the European community between the United States and non-aligned countries, or social democratic and socialist parties between capitalism and Western pluralistic communism) would be particularly crucial. But this implies on all sides the "end of either-or", i.e. instead of the dilemma of uniformity or conflict, a balance between diversity and compatibility. It is likely that the mutual intransigence of blind conservatism and blind adventurism as well as the almost inevitable differences of their parallel struggles in different countries will, rather lead, to some countries moving towards the right and some towards the left or some towards a close bilateral link with the United States and some towards a strident anti-americanism. This, indeed, is the most worrisome scenario for the risks both of violent conflict and of paralysis for West European integration as well as

for pan-european détente : for example a right-wing Spain and a left-wing Portugal, a right-wing Germany and a left-wing Italy etc.. The scarce effect of Portugal on the 15th of June elections of Italy shows that, provided they are dealt with intelligently, contagious effects can be deflected. But it is likely that the effect (whether of invitation or of reaction) of events in France over Italy or - in both directions - between Italy and Yugoslavia would be greater. Even more important are the reactions of great powers - mistakenly equating different situations and thus paradoxically preventing by their reactions the positive convergence which could take place. In spite of its limited chances of success however, the idea of European socialism as a bridge between the North and the South as well as between the West and the East of Europe remains just plausible enough to be a valid standard by which to judge national developments, including Italian ones.

THREE GENERAL QUESTIONS WITH ONE "TRANSFORMIST" BIAS

A/ On social structure cultural attitudes and political coalitions

Analysts of Italy, particularly on the non-communist left, often draw political conclusions from a dualistic presentation of Italian society between the forces of progress and those of reaction. I wonder to what extent this dualistic perspective is not either too broad or too narrow if one wants to apply it directly to politics, and whether the two camps notion must not be combined both with a more global structural view and with a more flexible, differentiated political analysis and strategy.

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Two examples : the opposition between the new, modernist, secular, individualistic Italy and the old, traditional, religious one *of the two churches!*

the opposition between the productive Italy and the parasitary - financial - speculative or bureaucratic - one.

Both are true. But the first has misled many sympathizers of the socialist and radical parties into believing they would collect in June 1975 the fruits of the May 1974 referendum - whereas political organization and tradition and issues like efficiency and corruption have a much more direct political impact.

The second leads to identifying all the evils of Italian society with one social stratum expressed by one party. Again this has a broad truth but on the one hand parasitism, clientelism, retributive juggle seem more diffuse, widespread and structurally entrenched than that, on the other hand some important social groups, in particular among the new middle classes are not easily located on one side or the other of the fence. Their economic role and political orientation can vary according to institutions or be understood only by combining the productive-parasitary opposition with other<sup>s</sup> like public-private, urban-agrarian, catholic-non catholic etc. Hence a number of controversial questions : where are the new middle classes going? Are they available for fascism as well as for the left ? On what bases can they form a new alliance or bloc with the working class ? (cf. Sylos-Labini, Alberoni, etc..). What about the "bad" state bourgeoisie, demo-christian clientele, etc. ? What would become of them under a new coalition ? Would a different political leadership suffice to turn the same institutions and the same strata to productive purposes ?



In short, has the new social bloc already emerged or does it have to be constituted progressively through differentiated political alliances charting a course between proletarian sectarianism and unanimistic immobilism ?

B/ On domestic and international politics

To a foreign observer the way the U.S. government feels entitled to publicly authorize or forbid a given political solution in Italy and the way the right and the left, including the communists, seem to compete for American endorsement in their domestic competition by offering greater loyalty or greater stability and efficiency, is a source of permanent puzzlement. While understandable in terms of historical precedents and of harsh ever-present realities, such a situation also seems to involve a great deal of misunderstanding and, at the very least, of pathological elements which cannot help but poison the future both of American-European relations and of Italian politics.

It has to do with the widespread partly justified but partly obsolescent feeling that the influence of the international environment about the evolution and the very survival of the domestic regime <sup>is</sup> are greater than the ability of the latter to influence the former. Hence the central paradox (but also, possibly, the central misunderstanding) concerning the relation between domestic and international politics in Italian preoccupations : there is no country in the West where there is such a great priority given to domestic over foreign politics, yet there also is no country in the

West where the international considerations play so great a role in domestic politics. On the one hand, domestic politics occupy a much greater place than international ones in the political decisions, moves, strategies, combinations, writings or speeches of politicians and of the public. Even more important, the foreign policy, attitudes decisions and moves not only of political parties but of Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers invariably have their motivations in domestic politics : either they are to be simply explained by a search for popularity or publicity or they constitute a subtle signal towards this or that party or fraction on the domestic chessboard. But on the other hand, the question of the international environment and of its reactions, more precisely, the question : what will the U.S. do ? dominates speculations about political alignments (like about the "opening to the left" in the early sixties and about the communist proposal of a "historical compromise" with the Christian-Democrats to-day) or about elections, including the recent local ones.

What the Italians really are interested in and care about, is domestic politics; but at the same time they take it for granted that the international environment, and, above all, the United States, has a decisive say in these domestic politics : they look at it, according to faction and to circumstances, as a threat or as a protection. Some are trying, timidly, to create, in the margins of Italy's international position, a little elbow-room for domestic evolution. Others, sometimes the same, are appealing to the constraints of the international environment to block a domestic evolution they dislike.

To-day, in particular, there is a feeling that we are again at a turning point, as were the "opening to the left" (i.e., the creation of a center-left coalition) with the encouragement of the Kennedy administration and Italy's entrance into NATO. Some of the ambiguities of the latter seem to be emerging again after having been covered up, in more stable times, by the routine functioning of the alliance.

At the time, people like Kennan, Saragat and Brosio perceived that both from an American and from an Italian point of view the problem was one of Italy's strategic position and of her domestic socio-political order, with her military contribution to collective defense against a Soviet threat coming as a poor, almost negligible third. What the United States wants from Italy is essentially access to military bases and a non-communist regime. What Italian elites want from the United States is essentially bilateral help and protection and a framework symbolizing and materializing the socio-political choice in favor of a Western democratic or capitalistic regime. Neither is contradictory with the deep-seated passivity, pacifism, or, at any rate, "domesticism" of a vast majority of the public, or with the vague aspirations to a diplomatic and rhetorical gaullist, non-aligned or mediating role of many political leaders. The military choices of Italy reflect this situation: one of the lowest defense budgets (around 3 %) with one of the highest proportions to personnel costs (around 80 %), one of the highest proportions of superior officers, one of the highest proportions of men assigned to the defense of public order, a deployment also emphasizing the threat from within and the control of the communist-dominated regions in Central Italy, everything seems to point out towards the primacy of political considerations: giving

satisfactions to the military but holding them, so to speak, out of sight, keeping them in reserve for domestic troubles, whereas a real fighting capability involving a raise in the defense-budget and a genuine integration would antagonize this divided and potentially hostile public opinion one wants to appease.

Politically, the seemingly paradoxical line of "pacifist atlanticism" seems to be the lowest common denominator which alone has been capable of absorbing the contradictions between and within Italian political attitudes : a passive acceptance and a political utilization of NATO, compensated by a rhetorical search for peace, détente and an overcoming the blocs, and by feet-dragging on collective obligations. The great debate between atlanticism and neutralism is thus being absorbed by a combination of the two, whereby successive waves of atlantic converts accept the organization but in a "strictly defensive and geographically limited sense" (the formula used by the Charter of Socialist reunification) and by the PCI to-day) and as a contribution to détente; hence coupled with a great reluctance towards any increase of the military burden or of political constraints.

This basic situation still provides the only framework that Italian society can tolerate.

But it has two negative potentials. The first is a potential for misunderstanding. If, besides the military bases, the real preoccupation both of the US and of Italian elites has been Italy's domestic regime more than her military or diplomatic role, the latter may serve as an alibi of

which the very people who use it may have become the victims. Dr. Kissinger invokes the problems for NATO, in particular the NPG, involving communist participation; several Italian politicians (including Saragat and La Malfa) have said that the main objection to the latter was no longer domestic but international. If it is true that these considerations are second to that of domestic stability and prosperity and if it were true that these objectives were, to-day, better served by a reform coalition corresponding to the wishes of the Italian people and involving the PCI than by obstinately clinging to the DC formula, would it not follow that both the U.S. and some Italian politicians are victims of their own rhetoric, deftly manipulated by the right wing of the D.C. ?

The second is a potential for passivity. Both the traditional emphasis on keeping the communists out and the possible revised emphasis on saving Italian economy and society from collapse imply (from the U.S. to the communists) an essentially status quo or passive foreign policy. This neglects the new problems and opportunities present in Europe and, in particular, in the Mediterranean. Reactions to them involve the other traditional great debate of Italian foreign policy - between a Europeanist and a Mediterranean orientation.

There is an analogy here with the atlanticist-neutralist one : Italy has chosen Europe but, within Europe, has become increasingly aware of its Mediterranean or Southern dimension of situation. As Suzanne Berger points out, this situation implies opportunities which should be welcomed by the U.S. In many of the conflicts in the Mediterranean, American interests

are not served by reducing our allies to more or less" loyal assistants in a design of our making. But for Italy to play -- on something more consequential than a rhetorical level - any other part would require both greater political will and resource, in Rome than are currently available and a new American understanding of the possible contributions of Italian initiatives in foreign policy" (Forthcoming paper for Rockefeller project). I would add a third indispensable mediating element: European political will and resource<sup>s</sup>, at the level of the Community of the Federal Republic, of Mediterranean Europe proper.

In spite of the conflicts between Italian evolution and the international environment, isn't it the case that the post-war tradition of the former and the requirements of the latter converge in avoiding stark choices between loyalty and rebellion and in favoring - rather than a dilemma between atlantism and neutralism or between Europeanism and Mediterraneanism or third-worldism - a <sup>draft</sup> strift towards a more independent and a more Mediterranean-oriented policy within an Atlantic and the Europeanist context ?

C/ On models for <sup>political</sup> change

Isn't there a similar paralel concerning domestic evolution between the Italian tradition of connubio, trasformismo, neo-trasformismo, and the possibilities for social change in Western industrial societies. Percy Allum has noted "that a grand coalition between a major bourgeois party and a major opposition party representing groups hitherto excluded from government has been the way, historically, that major working class parties have entered government in Western Europe and because <sup>of it?</sup> legitimized as alternative government

parties" (World Today, November 1974). True, a grand coalition, let alone a historical compromise, has often been a recipe for immobility through mutual paralysis, and the Italian tradition of transformismo is seen as coopting or absorbing new elements into the system rather than transforming the system itself. But this depends on the strength of the respective parties and the pressure of social forces for change. The alternative to immobility or the road towards an alternative bloc may be precisely via a grand coalition whose orientation would be progressively transformed through a shift in the relative power and cohesion of its respective components and in their alignment. As in international politics, power transitions may be at work in a "tectonic" way (to use Ray Cline's expression) through shifts and changes in proportion leading from the hegemony of one party or bloc to that of another under the protective umbrella of a common structure.

At any rate, all other alternatives short of technocratic or military restoration or of stalinist dictatorship involve like a viable grand coalition itself, the reform, regeneration and growth either of the D.C. or of the P.S.I. or of both. Time may give each or both a chance, although scepticism is in order, just as the Communist responsibility for impossible local administrations may tarnish their image <sup>of the P.C.I.</sup>. At any rate the only road to peaceful change seems to lie in gaining time through the continuation of the confronto with the P.C., and its progressive penetration in the area di governo - leading - whether through an ambiguous blend of centre-left and of de facto grand coalition or through an actual grand coalition in case of national emergency - to a left-wing alternative in a relatively distant future. Whether the change is peaceful or not, and whether it can be accommodated by the international environment depends on this environment itself as much as on the evolution of Italy.

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