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FOR EVER CREEPING ?

The Italian political situation between
the all-too familiar and the unpredictable

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Even with the strong positive incentive of a ticket to Athens and under the compelling threat of I.A.I. power, the writer finds it next to impossible, in the middle of January 1977, to write anything on the Italian situation with even the remotest chance of being both new and reasonable. The two familiar but contradictory impressions : "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose" and "Things can't go on like this for ever" or, applied to Andreotti and Berlinguer : "We can't go on meeting like this" reach, in its mind at least, such a perfect stalemate, as to create a rather stable balance of perplexity.

Having gone through the same exercise under analogous auspices just a year ago¹, my over-all impression is that : the fundamental structures and trends as they appeared in November 1975 have not changed, but that conjuncturally the situation is at the mercy of an incident, the Andreotti government may well have fallen between this writing and our conferences or, again, it may last six months or more. At a deeper level, however, the situation may be reversed; it may appear that precisely at the normally most instable and unpredictable level, that of political combinations and governmental formulae, a certain consensus has been reached within the political class on the absence of any real alternative to the "non-sfiducia" and the "creeping compromise"; but that the underlying social tensions and economic difficulties may well, contrary to precedents and to conventional wisdom, explode in the face of the slow evolution or the "imperceptible movement" (Moro) and of the subtle ambiguity prevalent at the political level.

Therefore, while my 1975 paper was an attack against both left-wing and right-wing notions of clear choices (under the guise of alternativa di sinistra or of scontro frontale) and a praise of trasformismo, to-day I feel, in accordance with the Gattopardo, that for trasformismo to prevail some choices have to be made more than is done at the present time either by the Andreotti government or by the P.C.I., the unions or, for that matter, the P.S.C : there must be choices in order to avoid The Choice. I continue to believe that the genius of Italian politics lies in combining apparent opposites and in adapting to the new without sacrificing the old; but I feel, even more than in 1975, that the economic and international environment may force starker choices upon a fundamentally reluctant political elite or may impose grave penalties for its inability or unwillingness (however wise in traditional political and historical terms) to bring itself to make them.

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1. "The Political Evolution of Italy and the international context : a personal view", Joint meeting - IAI - Chatham House, Mandiana, 20-22 November 1975.

In a way, this was the starting point of last year's observations, but the parameters have been, I think, substantially if not decisively modified. I was speaking of the clash between the irresistible force (i.e. the internal evolution of Italy leading to communist participation to power) and the unmoveable obstacle (i.e. the unfavorable economic and international environment). To-day, it seems to me that the international environment has been modified in the direction of a greater permissiveness : one Gardner replacing one Volpe does not bring a spring but still the result of the German and American elections has weakened the dangers of bipolarization and confrontation, while relations with the Arab countries and the East (from the Soviet-sponsored Fiat deal with Lybia to the anti-communist stance or preconditions of other oil powers like Iran and Saudi Arabia) offer new perspectives fraught with danger but also with possibilities of manoeuver. But, conversely, the domestic resistances to the historical compromise, even in its creeping form, seem stronger than many, including myself, expected. In a way, the present "creeping historical compromise" which, as I predicted, has been reinforced by the very attempts made to block it (whether coming from the socialists provoking the elections, from the demo-christians waging an electoral campaign of polarization under Fanfani or from Kissinger opposing contacts with the P.C.I.), appears as too much for the socio-political constituencies of the D.C. and, evenmore, of the P.C.I., and too little for the economic decisions which have to be taken. Of course, the two opposite reproaches may converge : one of the reasons why the working-class base of the P.C.I. is reluctant towards the creeping compromise and towards the economic sacrifices which are being asked for by the Andreotti government and more or less accepted by the communists is that there are no compensations either on the psycho-political level through the official participation of the P.C.I. in government, or on the socio-economic level through effective reforms or through equivalent sacrifices imposed upon other social groups : conceivably, a coalition government (whether under the label of the historical compromise or of the emergency government) would be more acceptable because it would have more authority both in terms of legitimacy and of efficiency. But conversely it would also provoke more tensions and opposition, the formal participation of communists in government seeming to be the symbolic threshold set, implicitly or explicitly by international (U.S., Germany after Porto-Rico), economic (see the reactions to the 1976 elections in terms of flight and re-entry of capital) and, above all, internal, particularly intra-D.C., political forces, beyond which passive toleration or clandestine complicity would turn into active opposition or unsettling rebellion.

For the communists themselves, being saddled with the responsibility of unpopular measures would hardly be an unmixed blessing.

It becomes very hard, then, to decide whether for them and for the country as a whole the creeping compromise combines the advantages or the disadvantages of government and of opposition, whether it is the best or the worst of both worlds. For the interests of the country, if the need for swift, radical decisions by the government and for the acceptance of austerity by the population and the consequences in terms of inflation and dangers of authoritarianism in case of inaction are what Carli, La Malfa, and Amendola say they are, it looks at the worst of both worlds. For the communists, the

answer is more ambiguous, since it is very difficult to balance the advantages and disadvantage of limited increases in power and of limited increases in responsibility, but clearly the disadvantages have been more apparent recently. But for the Demo-Christians, it seems clear that it is the present situation which is the more advantageous; and, for the time being, it is clearly they who make the running. It is true that the Andreotti government is permanently threatened, but its fundamentalist opposition (from de Carolis to Fanfani) seems, in spite or because of the ^{government's} weakness, to have been rather more effectively controlled or circumvented than was the case in the centralized P.C.I. It is true that the creeping compromise is not a static situation, that it continues to creep in the direction of ever-increasing participation of the P.C.I., through parliament, through summits and, apparently through rather intensive if discrete daily consultation and bargaining; but, while, in a sense, constantly retreating, it is more than ever, the D.C. which imposes its own rhythm and its own control on the process, while the P.C.I. is torn between acquiescence, the call for new initiatives and the temptation of returning to real opposition; since neither the "suite en avant" nor the "retour en arriere" seem really practicable it seems the prisoner of its own advances, and the comparison of Fausto de Luca with Napoleon's situation and the D.C.'s Kutnzov-like strategy seems particularly apt, just as Lucio Magri's formulation: "Rather than using the P.C.I. to control the economic crisis, Andreotti uses the economic crisis to control the P.C.I."

But here, by the same token, lie the weaknesses of the pragmatic, temporizing strategy of Andreotti, as well as of Moro's reflective pause and imperceptible movement and of Piccoli's "tempi lunghi della democrazia". They are the masters of the logic of political manoeuvre; but theirs is the weakness, as well as the strength, of a purely political and instrumental universe which depends upon the social and economic environment stable remaining or, at least, evolving in a way, which would be sufficiently slow and ambiguous to lend itself to their style of management and manipulation. But the question is whether political ambiguity and temporization, economic emergency and social tensions can coexist for long.

At the recent Euro-American conference held in Bologna (November 18-20) a consensus seemed to emerge around Prof. Suzanne Berger's proposition that the collaboration between D.C. and P.C.I. may already have reached its peak, but it was difficult to see where one went from there. The present situation clearly was unsatisfactory; but any real alternative, of the right or of the left, had lost all plausibility except for the advocates of a politique du pire, whether revolutionaries of the left who would like to see the D.C. lead alone the country to disaster or the right of the D.C. who would like to see the left demonstrate its inability to master an economic situation made of an even more galoping inflation and an even more depreciated currency.

There seems, then, no alternative except a continuation of the present situation however unsatisfactory, since it is least unsatisfactory to the partner who has the greatest control over it, namely the D.C., or an increase

in communist co-responsibility, leading to a de facto or de jure emergency government if, precisely, social and economic emergencies chase the Andreotti-Berlinguer dealings from under the table and force their compromise to run into the open instead of creeping in the dark.

At present, given the current defeat of the proponents of an exclusive power of one or the other of Italy's halves one may say that each of the major parties has a preferred immediate formula and a more ambiguous long-range perspective : emergency government to-day, historical compromise to-morrow for the communists, emergency government to-day, left-wing alternative to-morrow (or, unavowedly, return to the centre-left) to-morrow for the socialists, confronto to-day, complete ambiguity to-morrow (with, probably, a preference for a return to the centre-left, without renouncing, for some, the hope of a return to the centre-right or excluding, for others, a resignation to the historical compromise if the preferred alternative fails, but the prevalent consideration clearly being the immediate one of gaining time) for the democrats. One may say that, for the time being, a consensus has been emerging within the political class, around the preferred conception of Andreotti and Moro. The question, then, is whether the gap which has been narrowed within the political class has not been widened between this political class itself and the country at large.

It may be worthwhile, then, to confront the current political formulae not only with the preferences of the political leaderships but on the one hand with those of their followers or of Italian society in general and, on the other, with the constraints of the domestic and international situation. One could have, then, four levels of analysis : the two political balances, domestic and international; and the two "infra-structural" dimensions of civil society and of the economy.

From a political point of view, both the domestic political balance and the international environment seem to favor the continuation of the confronto or of the creeping compromise, i.e. of D.C.-P.C.I. de facto cooperation without formal institutionalization. This seems to correspond to the preferences both of Andreotti-Moro (as distinct from Fanfani) and of Carter and the post-Porto-Rico Schmidt (as distinct from Kissinger). But on the one hand, civil society is more divided than ever, both by the political ideological antagonisms of a generation of hostility between D.C. and P.C.I. and by the social antagonisms over who will pay for the austerity; their logic is that of the scontro frontale: on the other hand, the urgency of the economic crisis seems to favour the opposite logic, that of a new corporatism or of collaborations between state, business and unions, hence of an emergency government or of national union.

To start the other way round, one may say that the socio-economic situation is essentially contradictory in that it accentuates both factors of division and factors of unity, and that the task of political forces, both Italian and international, is to mediate between these contradictory trends. Subjectively, inflation and unemployment increase social tensions and inequalities and accentuate political confrontation at the grass-roots; objectively, they can be cured only by some kind of consensus or social contract. The mixture of opposition and collaboration made necessary by the contradiction between

their, mass followers and between them and their respective leaders at least as much as between these leaders themselves and by the contradictions between the needs of the international environment and those of the domestic situation, point towards ambiguous and contradictory efforts for mediation and conciliation or towards a multiplicity of partial creeping compromises. The important point is that given the multiplicity of actors and the varying degrees of **revalry** and convergence, of conflict and cooperation, between them, we have, rather than one grand alternative between compromise and confrontation, a series of n-person non-zero-sum games or, put another way, a series of interested intermediaries trying to find a common denominator between adversaries while playing their own game. For instance between the more intransigent faction of Confindustria and the more intransigent grass-root workers a series of intermediaries are trying to play a role : the leadership of the Confindustria, the government, the P.C.I., the leadership of the unions represent different degrees of mediation. Nor is this all since one must add the mediation which has to take place within each of these grouping (for instance between the very independent and vocal ministers within the government) and, even more important, the simultaneous compromises often are rivals as much as complementary; they constitute "parallel divergences" as well as "convergences" .

For instance, the Church, while pushing the D.C. to intransigence questions like abortion, seems to make its own overture towards a compromise by seeming to abandon its exclusive support of the demo-christians at the episcopal conference on Evangelization and Human Promotion, and by responding with less than outrage to Prof. Argan's assiduous courtship of the Vatican. The dialogue between Confindustria and the Unions is encouraged as vital by the Andreotti government and the Communist Party; on the other hand, there are hints of the two partners reaching their own compromise at the expense of the State, through the fiscalization of social charges, a compromise which neither the government nor the P.C.I. which has to consider as an interclassist party and a "partito di governo" other interests than that of the industrial working class can entirely welcome. The Communist Party and even, to a lesser extent, the Unions, have accepted the principle of the primacy of the struggle against inflation as compared to growth and even employment : hence their remarkably negative reaction to minister Donnat-Cattin's warnings that the government's deflationary policy would produce a great increase in unemployment. On the other hand, they do ask for the coupling of the struggle against inflation with a struggle for reform. This leads them towards the definition of a new middle-term project but, for the time being, to the advocating of the idea of "industrial riconversion" and, in the name of this idea, to supporting measures taken by the government to support unproductive industries, including Montedison, which has brought them under attack from the rest of the left, including the independent economists elected on their own lists, like Claudio Napoleoni.

A final exemple : the policy of Agnelli, leading to find needed capital in Lybia, under Soviet auspices, is welcomed both economically and politically by the Italian state, who for once, is not asked for its subsidy and by the P.C.I. whose call for good relations with the East and the Arab world to satisfied. But the idea of big firms having their own foreign policy and entering under the dependence of unpredictable foreign powers brings possible complications and dangers both for Italy's international and domestic situation. In short, the multiplicity both of dimensions and of actors, ^{in the} economic, social, political and diplomatic compromises being pursued at the same time, sometimes in coordination sometimes at cross-purposes with each other, contributes to making ambiguity the Key word of the Italian scene.

Personally, I am deeply convinced that among these many dimensions of conflict and accomodation, of dilemmas and ambiguity, those linked to the economic crisis and to its social and political consequences are, to-day, the most critical ones. But they are also the ones about which I am least able to express an independent judgment. In the rest of this paper, therefore, I shall present a few tentative observations and interrogations about choices and non-choices in two arbitrarily selected areas : the evolution of the Communist Party and Italy's international stance. The analogy and the link between the two can be seen in quasi-geographic terms, in the question of a western, eastern or southern orientation, of an atlanticist, a europeanist or a mediterranean policy. After the war, Italy's choice of the Atlantic alliance and of European unity has been presented as a "scelta di civilta"; but, as I have argued elsewhere, it contained elements of synthesis or juxtaposition of opposites as well as of choice : the debate between atlanticism and neutralism led to what I have called pacifist atlanticism; the heritage of a mediterranean tradition have led at the same time to the fear of being isolated from Europe's modern north and to the claims for a (mostly verbal) role from within Europe in the mediterranean and in the direction of the Third World. On all these matters as well as on internal ideological and political ones, the evolution of the Communist Party has been towards acceptance of integration into and, sometimes, enthusiastic if belated support for Italy's basic Western orientation, without, however, ever making a clear break with its past, its leninist model of organization, its ties with the World communist movement and the Soviet Union, and its Third-Worldist view of North-South relations. To-day, the crisis of the Western social, political and economic systems as well as of European integration and of NATO, as well as the growing military power of the Soviet Union and economic power of the Arab states, creates the possibility of a counter-trend, towards a greater emphasis on the non-Western element. This could be an opportunity as well as a danger, but only if Western forces and organizations find enough vitality in themselves to adapt and to attract, to resist and to renovate, to become the active agents of a process of mutual transformation rather than its passive victims whether through an attitude of rigid refusal or through one of unconditional acceptance.

Regarding the P.C.I. its characteristic preference is to be in good terms with everybody (with the possible exception of Mr Pannella and the Radical Party), with the D.C. as well as with the unions, with social forces (including the industrialists) as well as with its own working-class militants, with the United States as well as with the Soviet Union. It wants to protect - under a roof - (or a cloud ?) of universal benevolence, its very real evolution whose crucial trend, I think, is adaptation to Italian and to western society. But this trend itself has its own dialectics : the P.C.I. wants (and, in a sense, must) become a "partito di governo" without ceasing to be a "partito di lotta", to accept pluralism without abandoning the hegemony of the working class, to become more democratic without ceasing to be centralist, more inter-classist while continuing to represent the working-class. It wants to differentiate its vision of socialism from the Soviet model without ceasing to consider the Soviet Union as socialist or to belong to the international communist movement, to accept NATO while continuing to see the international role of the Soviet Union as essentially peaceful and progressive, to support the political unity of Europe while maintaining as much solidarity with the Third World as with the Nine. In short, it does not want to be alien or isolated in Italian and Western society, but it wants to remain different, and in a sense this is what its potential partners want too since its appeal lies precisely in, on the one hand, becoming respectable and "salonfähig", but on the other hand, retaining enough central control and enough of a working-class character to be able to deliver a greater measure of law and order and of austerity than the other parties. Hence the ambiguous and contradictory character of the effects of Italy's economic, political and even more social and moral crisis on the evolution of the P.C.I.

Both the objective constraints of the situation and the demands of his interlocutors have led it, in the last year or so, to take important steps away from the classical leninist model. Concerning relations with the social structure and the political regime, the acceptance of pluralism and the recognition of the importance of middle classes and of private (including large) industry, the essential steps had been taken, progressively, over the last few years, but the progress made by the P.C. in the conquest of strategic positions of political power, within society, has reinforced these trends by making them more concrete - e.g. through the importance given to parliament and to regions, through the responsibilities assumed at the municipal level as well as in discussing the economic program of the government. The interesting point is that the evolution in relations with society has come to the point where, to remain credible, further steps have had to be envisaged in other areas less amenable to tactical shifts : those of ideology and - the ultimate issue for any communist party - of the structure of organization and power within the party itself. The conciliatory pronouncements in the direction of other political parties and social forces have led the P.C.I. to the verge of abandoning the two crucial notions of the party as avant-garde of the working-class and of the avant-garde function of the

working-class itself, since they admit that the working-class is represented by several parties and that it is the new social bloc as a whole which would exercise a hegemony which would, at the same time, be respectful of pluralism.

This desacralization of the role both of the party and of the working-class has stirred both the hopes and demands of the non-communist left and the fears and warnings of the Soviet Union and of the more traditional or dogmatic elements within the P.C. itself. They have led to the important debates which were both expressed and put under the rug at the last two central Committee meetings of October and December. Ideologically, the Party has been challenged by socialist intellectuals to answer whether the notions of pluralism and hegemony were compatible and whether their conception of the latter was still the same as that of Gramsci : this has made it more difficult to reconcile the old and the new by covering changes with the blessing of a reinterpreted Founding Father and has led, it seems, to a debate within the party itself among its intellectuals.

Even more important is the question of democracy within the party itself. While always remaining firm on the refusal of organized factions, the P.C.I. admits that the problem exists and claims that its practice of democratic centralism is more and more a secular as opposed to religious one, and involves, less and less centralism and more and more democracy. To a great extent this is true, as shown by the publicity given to the debates of the Central Committee, by the freedom of expression given to the Grand Old Men of the Party who lack effective power but, precisely for this reason, are allowed to polemicize with each otherⁱⁿ public and to express different trends of thought without committing the Berlinguer leadership which, then, gives an authoritative line. The trend has gone, however, even towards institutional reforms like the creation of a national council and a certain decentralization which holds the prospect of regional leaders having a certain degree of autonomy comparable if inferior to that of union leaders. However, the trend to organizational reform has run into even more opposition than on ideological matters, in the name of the notion that the party must be one of struggle more than of government and must "remain different" (Cossuta).

This necessity of both reducing and maintaining differences leads to two kinds of responses, both of which are in evidence at the present time. First, both theoretical discussions and the practice of the P.C.I. where it occupies positions of power seem to confirm that while it has moved from the advocacy of dictatorship to that of pluralism, its conception of the latter is a rather hegemonic, and consensual one, that of a kind of "permissive integralism". The communists seem sincere when they refuse government by terror and persecution of opponents and when they value criticism and a plurality of voices; but their attitudes on a variety of issues (the Constitutional Court, the RAI TV, the University, the schools, the role of intellectuals, the radical party) seem to indicate that, in their view, the plurality of opinions and voices has to be brought into some kind of consensus or harmony by the firm hand of a wise authority able to synthesize the various traditions and currents of opinion. But this is neither a final synthesis nor one step in a direction

which moves irreversibly towards a broader and more decentralized conception of pluralism.

Indeed, this is where the impact of the economic crisis, and of the indirect governmental responsibilities assumed by the P.C.I. shows its contradictions by pushing ^{the} latter both forward and back ward along this very road. If the first task of the Communists both in their own eyes and, even more, in those of the other farces of society, is to bring the working-class to understand that inflation is the main danger and to accept austerity, this, in a period of crisis, and in front of working-class reluctance or outright rebellion, may involve a hardening both on ideological and organizational grounds rather than a further social-democratization. It is highly characteristic that the P.C.I. which had let the C.G.I.L. be more and more independent and enjoy a certain degree of monopoly in the factories while itself was concentrating on territorially rather than working-place based activities, is busy reconstituting factory cells at an almost frantic pace and holding a huge number of meetings in order to regain a direct influence over the workers. Ideologically, this is accompanied by a return to more frequent and explicit mention of the hegemonic role of the workingclass. Programmatically, the crisis is presented by Berlinguer in his latest intervention as an occasion for a revolutionary change towards a society based on austerity, work, puritanism and, more generally, a restoration of moral values.

The determined opponents of the P.C.I. have been quick to argue that these steps towards a return to increased centralization and to more traditional marxist talk indicate that the P.C.I. is returning to its leninist essence which it had only been hiding. If, however, one keeps in mind the other changes in the direction of pluralism which are taking place at the same time, and, even more, if one remembers that the aim both of this revolutionary discourse and of the recentralizing practice is to make the working-class live with austerity and love it, one can just as well argue the opposite case, i.e. that the P.C.I. is acting as a good watchdog of the government and of the bourgeoisie, that the return to leninism is a means towards the goal of acceptance of the national interest or of bourgeois society, or, again in Gattopardo-like terms, that "things have to go back in order to go forward". An even more plausible and, at any rate, more open interpretation, is that the P.C.I. is showing above all a love of seriousness, morality and discipline which is deeply ingrained in leaders like Berlinguer and Amendola and is part of their appeal - by contrast with the ethos ^{and} behavior of most of the political class - in the Italian public but that these virtues can be put at the service of different types of objectives and of social orders, and that their ultimate destination remains unpredictable, not least to the communist leaders themselves.

On foreign affairs, communist ambiguities are both related and different. The debate on attitudes towards the Soviet Union is part and parcel of the debate on pluralism and freedom. The dialectics of this intra-left, intra-western, and intra-Italian debate have led the Italian communists, by and large, ever more away from an unconditional defense of the Soviet Union, via

a criticism of specific illiberal acts, towards an emphasis on the difference between the western type of socialism and the Soviet one, attributed first to regional and historical differences, but verging more and more on a fundamental critique and rejection of the system at such. But the same dialectics also lead to pauses and counter-reactions, as most Italian communist intellectuals refuse to abandon not only the idea of socialism but the idea that the Soviet Union is a socialist country : irritated by the attacks of dissidents and of social-democrats, they refuse to be put in a purely defensive position : by affirming that Eastern and Western experiences both contain positive and negative elements, they, at the same time, follow their taste for universal conciliation and maintain a link with their own past. Conversely by claiming to see no contradiction between their present eurocommunism and their past bolshevism, they show themselves to be different both from Eastern communism and from western social-democracy. Beside the psychological aspect there may be an instrumental one : given the attachment of many of the militants to the Soviet model and the need of the leadership to make them accept the support of the Andreotti government and of austerity it does not want to affront them on a second issue and to give the Soviets an opportunity to unite the two kind of hard line opposition: the pro-revolutionary one on domestic issues and the pro-Soviet one.

But this raises the broader problem of relations between the P.C.I. and the Soviet camp. Here the Soviet attitude seems, at least on the surface, no less ambiguous or contradictory than Italian ones. Half of the time the P.C.I. is indirectly attacked for the sins of eurocommunism, pluralism, regionalism, etc. ; the other half it is praised and its leader Berlinguer is honored, in and by Moscow. The strategy of the historical compromise is sometimes attacked as corresponding to a ruse of the bourgeoisie who wants to compromise the communists by making them pay for the crisis of the capitalist system, but its successes are praised as advances of the communists towards power and of the continent towards the left.

The response of the P.C.I. is mostly on the side of discretion; it tends to answer every attack at a lower level than it is made, to avoid provocations (unlike their French counterparts) and unnecessary criticism of the Soviet Union but follow firmly its own path. After the Berlin Conference it seems that a tacit non-aggression pact, on the basis of agreeing to differ and to explain differences by different circumstances was in effect between Brezhnev and Berlinguer. But it is clear that, if real, this ideological Yalta is breaking down. The P.C.I. under the effect of the internal Italian discussion on socialism and freedom, and the CPSU, under the effect of the dissident movement in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe and of its proclaimed links, at least in the GDR, Czechoslovakia, and to some extent Poland with eurocommunism, are compelled to trespass more and more into each other's territories, to tear away the fig-leaf of regional differences and to expose their basic disagreements on the meaning of freedom and socialism.

Neither side, however, seems to contemplate a formal rupture ; both seem to hold to another, more stable compromise, which can best be understood by reference to the classical distinction between inter-party and inter-state relations. At the level of ideological and party relations, the two sides are obviously diverging more and more; but they may have common or converging interests concerning the foreign policies of their respective countries. At the Berlin conference the final document could only express agreement on an ideological vacuum, but it was much more substantial on international politics, where it practically approved the major themes of Soviet foreign policy. The Soviet Union obviously considers Eurocommunist parties, especially the Italian one, as dangerous potential heretics ideologically, whose influence in the Soviet empire must be fought at all costs, but also as political forces which may participate into power and which, already now, may exercise a favorable influence on their countries' attitude towards the international scene.

Concerning the attitude of the P.C.I., there is a major difficulty for the Soviet Union since even on international matters proper (like the political union of Europe, including British entry, direct elections to the European Parliament and supranationality, or participation to NATO including the presence of American bases) the Italian communists have, increasingly, taken positions which are contrary to the Soviet one, culminating in the recognition of NATO by Berlinguer as a protection of the kind of society he wants to build against a Prague-type Soviet intervention. But, first, on every other issue, concerning in particular détente, North-South relations or the Middle East, the position of the Italian communists and their view of the world and of the Soviet Union are compatible with the view, promoted by the latter, of a vast camp of peace, including the non-aligned and the euro-communists, in the struggle against imperialism; second, in spite of their declarations and intentions, they may objectively be a factor of weakness if not in the European Community (where the French communists are more than eager to play that role), at least in NATO, where their total lack of preparation in strategic matters and their unconditional commitment to détente make them good candidates for a finlandizing role; finally, the Soviet Union may consider that despite the PCI's deplorable intentions, external factors, such as American hostility towards them or military weakness and the Community's paralysis or unresponsiveness to Italy's needs may force it to look back to Moscow as an alternative - whether in the guise of protector against other or of a presence too dangerous to ignore or to resist.

This, indeed, may be one of the reasons of the Italian communists' prudence towards the Soviet Union. They, after all, realize like Ugo La Malfa that they are trying to get farther away from Moscow at a time when the Soviet Union, in terms of military pressure, is getting closer to Western Europe. Repeated hints have seemed to suggest that their conversion to NATO holds as long as the present balance, but that if Yugoslavia were to slide towards the Soviet camp they themselves would have no choice but to slide towards Yugoslavia's present position of non-alignment. This speculation puts their allegiance to the West into a rather disquietingly conditional, instrumental or opportunistic light; it certainly corresponds, for the leadership, to a hypothesis

profoundly at odds with the direction in which they want to go. But it may justify a certain hedging in their foreign policy position, and a certain slant, in their atlanticism and their europeanism, towards avoiding to displease either the Soviet Union or the Third World.

In so doing, they are ^{not} entirely at odds with a more general trend in Italian foreign policy, including the crucial one of Italy's large industry. When challenged by foreign observers about their "non-western" attitude on Angola, Lebanon, or the Entebbe raid, Italian communist leaders usually reply that their stance corresponds to a general consensus across the Italian spectrum which, for the first time, is unanimous on foreign policy. This is a vast exaggeration but does contain a grain of truth. The conversion of the socialists and then of the communists, in strikingly similar terms, to the post-war choices on NATO and Europe has obviously reinforced Italy's commitment to them; but at the same time the "weight of the relatively losing" neutralist or mediterraneanist side may have been increasing again, less through the influence of the newcomers or of other forces like some fractions of the D.C., than by the change in the international environment and in Italy's situation.

Even from the point of view of military protection, changes in the East-West balance or threats of pressure, or exclusion by the United States, in case of communist participation in power, may tempt other than the communists to look for reassurance in the East or, at least, to hedge their bets in their commitment to the West. Much more immediately and importantly, Italy's dependence on oil and on foreign capital combined with the weakening of the community framework and with the political conditions attached to American and German help, may open new opportunities in the East and the South but also new vulnerabilities to political influences.

From the first, East-West, point of view, it is striking that, during the recent visit of Foreign Minister Forlani to Moscow, it seems, according to Barbara Spinelli, that the Soviet Union has proposed Italy a kind of privileged relationship based on a kind of special situation within Europe and NATO. Of course, Italy refused but, as Barbara Spinelli rightly remarks, the fact that the approach was made is in itself significant. Moreover, even Forlani's response to Brezhnev's advocacy of a "no first use" agreement is based on the weakness of Italy's defense budget, on the small number of its troops, on the short duration of its military service and on its intention not to increase any of these (1^a Giornale, Jan. 14, 1977) : a perfect example of "pacifist atlanticism" and of a propensity to "finlandization" if the definition of this situation is that the weaker partner feels compelled to reassure the stronger one.

But it is economic considerations which have prompted the very high international activity in the last few months, culminating in the Fiat-Lybia deal concluded in Moscow, and in the frantic travelling of Italian ministers to Washington, Bonn, Paris, Moscow and Bagdad. The fact that it is col. Khadaffi who invests in Fiat and that Italy is giving credits to the Soviet Union while receiving them from elsewhere does point towards a new configuration in Italy's international economic policies and situation.

It would be wrong to see in these decisions a grand political and economic design to shift from Europe and the West towards the Mediterranean or the Third World and the communist one. It is true that the P.C.I. has been advocating just such a reorientation - but it seems to have played no role in the Fiat deal. The broadening of Italy's economic horizon beyond Europe has been advocated by various forces and individuals for eminently sensible reasons : Fiat has gone in the direction of world-wide interests, various Italian plans (coming from men like Dr. Carli and Ossola) have advocated a triangular relationship between petro-dollars, western know-how and eastern markets or labor force : none of these has been presented as or does have to mean, an alternative to Europe. On the contrary Andreotti, Agnelli and Berlinguer (or at least Amendola) seems to be united in the belief that the European dimension (from Eurocommunism to the direct elections to the European Parliament) can provide the framework which would make communist participation to government in Italy acceptable. Conversely it is in relations with the East (for instance at the CSCE) and with Third World countries (Lomé Convention, Global Mediterranean policy, Euro-Arabe dialogue) as well as in handling the problems linked with the encouragement of democracy in the mediterranean area, that the European community can find a new vitality which, indirectly, would benefit the West as a whole, including the United States.

These reassuring and positive perspectives should not, however, blind us to the possibility of less optimistic developments. When all is said and done, it still remains rather unexplained that a deal between Fiat and Lybia should be concluded in Moscow, it still is a fact that Lybia had been trying for years to invest in Western Europe and had failed for political reasons which did not operate in Italy's case, that some clauses in the agreement are secret and may concern armaments, etc.. Without speaking, as some journals have done, of Italy falling into a "sarrazin-barbaresque sphere of influence", there are hints of the regretful acceptance of a reversal of the colonial relationship in some of av. Agnelli's statements (for instance to Il Mondo, Dec. 15, 1976). It may not be entirely fanciful to raise the specter of Italy's sliding towards some degree of "maltification", i.e. of its becoming the locus of competing Lybian, Soviet and residual Western influence in a general stance of non-alignment and concentration on the North-South dimension with some military links to the West.

Of course, this presupposes both that Italy's main political, social and economic forces, should change their basic orientations and that the European Community and the United States should encourage or force them to do so, by their own weakness or hostility. While the first condition is unlikely in any case, and certainly out of the question as a deliberate choice, it may become less unthinkable as a result of the second condition, i.e. of an objective drifting apart of Italy and of its northern and western neighbours. This could come about because of catastrophic domestic developments (i.e., for instance, Latin-Americanization under one of three scenarios, the Argentine one of galloping inflation plus assassinations, the Chilean one of fascist-dictatorship taking over after a failure of the left or the Cuban one of an original leftwing regime becoming an orthodox communist one through American opposition and Soviet support), of the Community being unable to play an active and positive role, or of the United States getting its priorities wrong.

None of this is impossible, particularly the failure of Europe, as such, to play a central role. Already, while from Agnelli to the P.C.I. the European connexion has priority for all, there is a danger that this priority may become less and less relevant to actual everyday behavior, that it should be "marginalized" and "redimensioned". A reaffirmation of priorities backed by concrete acts, is needed from everyone.

My personal conclusion, then, is that while the "creeping compromise" has been the least bad possible formula and may still be the only practicable one, all the actors involved will soon have to go one step further. The communists will have to affirm their West European priority over their ties with the Soviet Union and the Third World, the socialists will have to stop trying to outflank them both on their left by encouraging the unions to be intransigent and on their right by encouraging the D.C. to hope for a return to the centre-left, the D.C. will have to give priority to the fight against inflation over the political advantage of using the communists without giving them a chance to legitimize their collaboration in the eyes of their followers, the European Community and the United States will have to give at least as much priority to the political interest of safeguarding Italy's society and economy as to strategic precautions, and ideological objections. The "creeping compromise" will either lead to a historical compromise on the European and Western scale, or it may be replaced by an isolation or a collapse of Italy which would be less creeping than creepy.

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