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The INF Controversy: Italian Perspectives

by

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Of the countries that, by the end of this year, should start the deployment of the new NATO INF, Italy is probably one of the steadiest; it will not falter on the application of the second half of the double-track decision, approved by the Italian Parliament in 1979.

The last general elections (held the 26th and 27th of June 1983) brought about some changes in the relative strength of the various parties. The Christian Democrats (DC), the traditional majority party, experiences a loss of votes, dropping from its 38.3% (in 1979) to the present 32.9%. The biggest party of the opposition, the Communist Party (PCI), which made an issue of its opposition to the INF deployment, remained more or less at the same level, dropping from 30.4% to 29.9%. (One should remember however, that the PCI had recently absorbed a little splinter party of the left, the PDUP, which had 1.4% of the votes in 1979). In spite of the DDC defeat and the ability of the PCI to maintain its share of the vote, the present Parliament has an even clearer majority in favour of the INF deployment, than the past one. In the House, the present relationship should be one of 413 against 217 (as opposed to 405 against 225 before the elections) and in the Senate the number counts 206 in favour and 109 against (before the elections: 204 against 111).

The difference between the two groupings is so high as to exclude any possible "surprise" and to compensate for any possible "defection" from the Majority. That is why the opposition is trying to a greater degree, to influence the choice of the government, and to "soften" the stand of some parties, instead of relying on new parliamentary confrontations. The weakest spot of the present majority, according to the calculations of the opposition, should be found in the Socialist Party (PSI: 73 members of the House and 38 senators). In fact, even if the PSI abruptly changed its mind, joining the PCI in the Opposition, there should be enough support left in Parliament for the INF decision to be implemented. But, in this case, the majority would need the backing of the extreme Right: a very unwelcome support.

As things now stand, however, there is no indication that the PSI would like to change its position. Quite the contrary: the present Prime Minister, Bettino Craxi, is also the General Secretary of the PSI, and is on record as one of the staunchest supporters of the NATO decision right from the beginning. It is certainly true that the PSI has an old and very respected tradition of neutralism and pacifism, going back to its XIX century roots, and that its militants are not always completely at ease when they speak about military or security matters. But times are changing and old political and ideological convictions are fading away rapidly; during the last ten to fifteen years the PSI took on a lot of responsibilities also in the defence field. A socialist representative, Lelio Lagorio, who was recently Minister of Defence for the last three years (he has now been succeeded by the former Republican Prime Minister Giovanni Spadolini), managed to build up enough political support for important increases in the Defence Budget.

Prime Minister Craxi, after consultations with other European leaders, and with the US Government, has proposed a kind of "new look", especially designed to diminish the pressure of the PSI coming from the left. For his "new look" he has sketched three different options: - first: success of the Geneva negotiations on the INF. Two possible outcomes: zero option, or limited, intermediate reductions. In either cases there will be no problems: the new missiles would be deployed with the agreement of the Russians; - second: that Moscow abandon its present negotiating tactics, and change its mind on some key points. In particular: abandonment of the request to take into account, at the INF table, the French and the British nuclear missiles, and acceptance of the principle that the new american INF missiles may eventually be deployed in limited numbers in Western Europe, to be counted against its SS-20s. In this case, and if the negotiations are advancing satisfactory, it could be possible to delay the deployment of the NATO INF, pending a rapid conclusion of the agreement- third: failure of the negotiations. In this case the missiles will be deployed automatically, according to the schedule already agreed upon. No new decision has to be taken, in Parliament or elsewhere (even if a debate in Parliament probably will be unavoidable: but no new pronouncements will be asked for, by the Government). The NATO countries, however, should propose to the USSR the continuation of the negotiations for the beginning of new negotiations, to climate or reduce the weapons that are being deployed.

It is quite clear that the second option has been put forward with the arguments of the opposition in mind. In fact the opposition argued that to delay the

deployment would not be tantamount to abandonment of the 1979 NATO decision, and at the same time would "send a signal" to the USSR, increasing the chances of an agreement. It is also evident however, that Prime Minister Craxi has reversed the argument, arriving at very different conclusions: it is no more NATO that should "send a signal" to the USSR. On the contrary NATO would be on the receiving end of a signal asked for, from Moscow. (1)

Andropov's recent, blunt, answer to the Reagan's new proposals also approved by the Italian Government, has reinforced the Government's position and has for all practical purposes scrapped the second option put forward by Craxi.

The Opposition then is left with just one possible course of action: a strong popular mobilization against the missiles, to increase pressures on the Government and to complicate and possibly delay the deployment. But in this case to the opposition seem to be in a bad fix.

The PCI has tried to alarm and mobilize public opinion through the publicity given to certain opinion polls, designed to maximize the negative end result. Moreover a so called "referendum" has been launched, to collect signatures against the deployment of the INF in Italy. This "referendum" however, is being held without all the necessary legal requirements and controls and is not reaching all citizens. The signatures collected so far do not even approach a significant fraction of the number of ballots gathered by the opposition parties during the last general elections (12.5 millions).

The PCI has organized a campaign according to the traditional scheme of the "frontist" policy of the past: it has put non-communist figures (such as the former editor of a catholic daily, Raniero La Valle, now member of Parliament, elected on the communist ticket as "independent") in the forefront and it has formed "alliances" with organizations formally linked with the Majority, presenting them as the "real representatives" of the popular vote. But this traditional approach has not been totally successful. The only relevant catholic organization which decided to join the opposition to the INF has been the Associazione Cattolica Lavoratori Italiani (ACLI), an association normally on the left of the bigger Trade Unions. And even the ACLI president, Domenico Rosati, has publicly declared that pressure will be applied mainly for the purpose of reaching a positive agreement at

the Geneve negotiations ~~for reaching an agreement~~, and less in opposition to deployment of the missiles in Sicily. (2)

The three major Trade Unions (CGIL, CISL and UIL), represent the entire Italian political spectrum, from the center to the left, from the Christian Democrats to the Communists, Socialists, Social-democrats, Republicans etc. They have produced some joint declarations against all the missiles (American and Russian) and in favour of the zero option. They have organized some big rallies (especially in 1980-81) against rearmament on both sides. (3) But more recently they have been keeping lower profile, probably to avoid exacerbating divisions among them.

The big rallies organized by the Trade Unions first and then by the pacifists and the PCI, had mixed results. Some of them were quite successful (up to 200 000 people, and even more), but only thanks to the communists' traditional ability to organize mass participation on the national scale. When this organization was lacking the rallies marches sit-ins etc., shrunk to much smaller numbers (a few thousand and even less).

Even more revealing of the relative passivity of the Italian reactions to the pacifist campaign, has been the very low support from the "intellectuals". The Italian "intelligentzia" in the past has been quite vocal against american military choices, from the Korean to the Vietnamese wars. This time, on the contrary, the "intellectual" support is limited to very few personalities such as the writers Alberto Moravia and Paolo Volponi or the painter Renato Guttuso: most of them already members of the PCI (Guttuso) or elected as "independents" to the Parliament on the communist ticket (Volponi). The only intellectuals who seem willing to get involved in this poolitical fight are a group of scientists, especially physicists.

Finally, it is worth pointing out to the divisions within the pacifist movement. Some are traditional divisions, not very relevant to the outcome of this confrontation, such as those existing between the liberation, non-violent, radicals (generally federated in the small but very active Radical Party) and the marxist-leninist communists. The division exist, but both share the common goal of blocking the deployment. More important is the presence of smaller groupings of the extreme left, favouring a strategy against Nato, military bases and the like. PCI, radicals and pacifists in large part share the choice for legal and non-violent

tactics. On the contrary, on some occasions we have witnessed the utilization of violent tactics and "agen provocateurs" from these smaller groups, believed to be related with the remaining terrorist organizations operating in Italy. Both the PCI and the government fight against these violent groups, but the PCI is not always capable of blocking them or identifying them before they act. The pacifist movement is very composite, allowing for the presence of any kind of ideology, from the archists to the "Guevara-type". And the PCI has to confront the noisy, if small, opposition of the neo-stalinists (called "kabulists", from Kabul) such as those of the "Lista di Lotta", an organization chaired by the former Air Force General (and former deputy-Saceur) Nino Pasti, blindly pro-Soviet. Inside the PCI, the "kabulists" are estimated to number from 10% to 30% of the total membership.

These divisions have weakened the opposition to the INF deployment. "Pace e Guerra", a weekly magazine representative of the pacifist opinions, has been forced to shut down by the withdrawal of financial support from the "independents" of the PCI. At the beginning of 1983, the internal divisions brought about the dissolution of the "committee of committees": a kind of ecumenical federation of all the groups of the opposition, and the main organizer of the biggest pacifist manifestation held so far, in Rome in 1981 (about 250.000 people, according to the police, and about 500.000 according to the "c. of cs."). A new big manifestation should be held in Rome by the end of the current month, but it is believed that it will be organized mainly by the communists themselves.

The growing hegemony of the PCI over the pacifist and its greater (and still increasing) public "visibility", are a better asset for the Government than for the opposition. It "politicizes" the issue, increases misperceptions, and diminishes the credibility of the propaganda. The pacifist stance inevitably becomes more and more identified with the Soviet stance, with all its obvious drawbacks.

Up to now the biggest successes of the opposition have been granted by some mistakes of the Government, and especially of the police: two sit-ins organized in Comiso recent months (bringing together about 1.500 persons each), to blockade the main gate of the military base, have been attacked and dispersed by the police with unnecessary violence (even if some violent actions had been initiated by the smaller leftist groups). A couple of parliamentarians have been slightly injured, creating some sensation in parliament and in the press.

The biggest problem of the future, for the Government, will be how to ameliorate the performances of the Police, in order to avoid an escalation of violent confrontations (possibly favouring even a terrorist come back). In the meantime the pacifists will probably organize a number of other "events" in Comiso, starting from the pieces of land they bought near the military base. According to the expectations of the Defence Ministry, the hottest moments will arrive when the first GLCM will be deployed and when the missiles will come out of the base, for dispersal.

As far as the reactions of the local population of the Comiso area are concerned, the majority of the observers agree that there is a mixture of "cautious neutrality" and "job expectancy". The presence of a large number of Americans, there since last spring, has not yet stirred up discontent. The stand taken by the socialist mayor of Comiso, strongly in favour of the government's decisions, and very matter of fact on such delicate questions as increases in the price of houses and land, has been a unique blessing for Nato. (4)

In conclusion, can Nato be totally confident on future Italian behaviour, as far as the INF are concerned? Largely, yes. There is, however, a negative factor, not to be underrated: the rapid slide of the PCI from its pro-government stance of 1978 to the present opposition, is increasing the Italian internal political instability. Since 1975 the PCI has begun to detach itself from Moscow. On various occasions both the PCI Central Committee and its General Secretary, Enrico Berlinguer, have declared their willingness to keep Italy in Nato. Berlinguer even said that the existence of Nato was a kind of "guarantee" for the PCI being able to proceed along its independent path, away from the Soviets. These declarations have never been officially repudiated by the communists. But now, even though there has been no formal disavowal of these statements, the PCI is currently multiplying anti-American statements and narrowing the gap with Moscow. A lone exception has been its reaction to the shooting down of the KAL Jumbo, over the Sea of Japan: the PCI has condemned the Russian action and the Kremlin reactions, but has also pointed out that the Russians were driven by "the increasing tensions in international relations", which are the responsibility of Reagan and of the Nato INF, at least as much as of Andropov.

On the INF issue, where in the beginning the PCI was asking the USSR to destroy all its European SS-20, in exchange for the scrapping of the Nato deployment, now

on the contrary it has accepted the Andropov line, and is speaking of the need for an "European" balance, between the Russian SS-20s and the British and French missiles.

This evolution of the PCI, partly due to internal political reasons (the communists did not like the election of a socialist as prime minister, especially one who was not asking for their support), has slowed down the process of "socialdemocratization" and "occidentalization" of the Italian left, bringing back the sharp divisions and the ideological confrontations of the Cold War. It is even worse today, because the Italian political system is in a state of grave disarray, shakily confronting a deep economic recession and experiencing a growing disaffection of the electorate for the traditional political parties: in the 1983 general elections about 11% of the electorate did not show up and about 6.5% cast blank ballot. This percentages are unusually high for Italian standards, and a worrying for the long-term stability of the political system.

NOTES

1. The Italian government is also in favour of a drastic reduction of the short-range tactical nuclear weapons of NATO in Europe. One would think that a linkage could be established between this reduction and the INF negotiations in Geneva, at least as a kind of goodwill gesture from the Western side, for which a response in kind will be required from Moscow.

As far as the Dutch and French national deterrents are concerned, the Italian position is that the British and French SLBNs are clearly strategic weapons, not to be included in the INF negotiations. The only weapons that could be compared with the INF are the 18 French missiles of the Plateau d'Albion. In general the Italian government's opinion is that these independent nuclear deterrents should be taken into account in the future, after their modernisation, in a new multilateral strategic conference. In no way however should the Soviet Union be allowed a number of strategic weapons equal to the sum of all the Western deterrents.

2. The Catholic Church in Italy has maintained a balanced position, avoiding any involvement in the peace movement. On the moral ground, it seems to believe that there is no big difference between a limited nuclear war and a general conventional war, in Europe. Practically a few priests took part in some peace rallies, without the backing of the hierarchy.
3. At the same time asking for a delay of the deployment in Sicily.
4. On the double key issue there has been some confusion. The U.S. owns both the warheads and the missiles. According to the Italian government, however, there are agreements and procedural arrangements making necessary its approval before firing. The issue has not been publicly raised in a strong way. The PCI seems unwilling to raise it, perhaps because the prospect of an Italian finger on the INF could make it more difficult for the PCI to enter any future coalition government. In the present majority, the Socialists, the Republicans and some high officials (both in the military and in diplomacy) could be more interested in such a development, with the perspective of increasing the Italian status in the Alliance.
The deployment of INF in Sicily could also have some influence on the future Italian defence policy. It will probably increase the military deployment in the South. Some reactions could come from other Mediterranean countries, such as Libya.

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