

When Hopes Come to Naught. The Question of Italian Communists' Participation in Government and the Failure of a Particular Strategy, 1974-1978

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In 1975, the significant success of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) at the administrative elections raised concern about the political stability of one of the main border-countries of the Cold War in Europe. The PCI seemed to achieve the so-called “sorpasso” of the Christian Democrats: the difference in the electoral outcome of the two Parties was only 1.8%.

The outcome of the administrative elections adumbrated a further victory for the PCI in the political elections in 1976. Washington was concerned about their results: Rome was central for the Western alliance because of its geographical position (it was one of the Mediterranean nations which hosted relevant NATO forces); its economic partnership and its political position as a mediator between East and West. A triumph of the PCI could have led to a wide imbalance in the Mediterranean area, with heavy consequences on countries that had just began their democratic transition, such as Spain, Portugal and Greece. Thus, Washington expressed its worry about the “complicated Italian electoral geography”:¹ the wide discontent for the economic crisis could have increased communist consensus among moderate public opinion, tired of the incapability of the Italian leading class to get out of the economic and financial problems.²

The Italian public opinion, disappointed with the ineffective outcomes of its ruling class, became upset by rumours about the US involvement in covert operations in Italy. In December 1974, Seymour Hersh wrote a front-page article in the *New York Times* headlined “Huge CIA. Operation reported in US against anti-war forces”. Hersh’s article alleged that the Agency had been engaged in massive domestic spying activities. The US Congress soon launched an investigation of the entire Intelligence Community and its possible abuses. The congressional investigations eventually delved into all aspects of the CIA and the IC, highlighting CIA involvement in key events of the Western Europe policy such as the political elections in Italy in 1948.

1. U. GENTILONI SILVERI, *L’Italia sospesa. La crisi degli anni Settanta vista da Washington*, Einaudi, Turin, 2009, p.149.
2. GFL [Gerard Ford Library], Arthur Burns papers, Folder: Italy, box B75, Division of International Finance to Chairman Burns, Possible arrangements for further federal reserve assistance to Italy, 26.01.1976; John E. Reynolds to Board of Governors, Memo on the Italian economic and financial situation, 23.01.1976; Frederick R. Dahl to Chairman Burns, Examiner classification of country risk: status of Italy, 29.01.1976; Chairman Burns to Charles J. Siegman, EC Monetary Committee conditions for \$1 billion EC loan to Italy, 03.03.1976.

This kind of interference soon became a paradigm in the matter of covert operations outside American boundaries.³

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's approach to the Italian communist forces seemed to remember such kinds of interference: public statements against the PCI participation in the government, possible economic covert operations as well as the support to Christian Democrats, appeared to part of the public opinion as open interferences in the Italian context.⁴ "Botteghe oscure" was supposed to lead such widespread discontent.⁵

In contrast to this belief, this paper aims at showing that the PCI substantially reduced its public anti-Americanism and launched a new policy toward the US.

Our main objectives will be thus analysing first, the Italian communists' perception of the US interference and their policy in connection to this. Second, to investigate what image the PCI had of the United States, dealing especially with its ruling class and new political actors. Third, and last, to understand if other Italian social and political actors – apart from the PCI – bear on the definition of the US image in the Italian progressive public opinion and on the development of the relationship between Americans and Italian communists.

This paper is part of a broader research, which deals with the political and cultural relations between the PCI and the US during the 1970s. It is based on primary sources from the Central Archive of the Italian Communist Party (Fondazione Istituto Antonio Gramsci of Rome), from the Gerald R. Ford Library, the National Security Archives, as well as on interviews and the analysis of secondary sources such as the daily and weekly newspapers *L'Unità*, *L'Espresso* and *La Repubblica*.

A New Policy Towards the US?

In the mid-1970s, the events in the Mediterranean area – the collapse of the Portuguese regime, in April 1974, the end of the Greek government of the colonels some months later, and the conclusion of the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, in Spain, in 1975 – substantially changed the equilibrium of the South-European region.⁶ Three authoritarian regimes fell, strengthening the group of the European democratic countries. The Italian Communist Party – led by Enrico Berlinguer since 1972 – looked very attentively at such a kind of change: that evolution could forecast new possibilities

3. M. DEL PERO, *CIA e covert operation nella politica estera americana del secondo dopoguerra*, in: *Italia contemporanea*, 12(1996), p.699.
4. U. GENTILONI SILVERI, op.cit; M. MARGIOCCO. *Stati Uniti e PCI, 1943-1980*, Laterza, Bari-Rome, 1981.
5. Botteghe oscure was the name of the street of the PCI's main headquarters in Rome. In the Italian historiography is used as synonymous of the PCI.
6. F. ROMERO, *Storia della guerra fredda. L'ultimo conflitto per l'Europa*, Einaudi, Turin, 2010, pp. 241-243.

for Leftist forces in Italy, and especially for the PCI and its strategy of “historic compromise”.⁷ As consequence of the Chilean coup in 1973, Berlinguer in fact made known its proposal, which was to develop a special dialogue between the two main political actors of the country, the PCI and the Christian Democrats. It was a great change and a big challenge for a Party that aimed at gaining democratic credibility after being formally excluded from the Government since 1947.⁸

The Italian Communist Party was not considered as the most loyal to Moscow and orthodox communist party of the Western world (belonging this role to the French Communist Party). In the early 1970s, at international level, the PCI made its European choice and began to look at European integration as a process which could open up new opportunities.⁹ Furthermore, its condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and its critical position in the world conference of communist parties – held in Moscow, in 1969 – put the PCI on the edge between criticism and heresy. However, its undeniable tie with the Soviet Union and its communist legacy and ideology restricted the PCI to the opposition ranks. Since the 1960s, the gradual openings toward Leftist forces (first the Italian Socialist Party which took part in the Centre-Left government since 1963) made the PCI think that the international developments – e.g. détente and the democratic changes in the Mediterranean area – could forecast a new political placement for communist forces.¹⁰

From the very first moment, nevertheless, the leaders of the PCI were very aware that such a good development could become a trap. In September 1974, during a meeting among leaders, Berlinguer pointed out that the new “positive events” in Southern Europe could raise doubts and worries in the US leadership, “especially dealing with military and strategic issues”.¹¹

This understanding of the situation influenced the PCI’s perception in two ways in the key months before elections, in 1974 and 1975. First, the belief that – in the US policy – Italy was considered merely one actor among others in the wide context of the Mediterranean area: the central role that Italy could have had in the aftermath of the second WW was definitely over. Thus, the US policy towards Rome was determined by several factors: in front of the leftist shift of Southern Europe, the pos-

7. Berlinguer had been Deputy Secretary since 1969; his influence had been growing during the long illness of Luigi Longo, officially the leader of the Party from 1964 to 1972. F. BARBAGALLO, *Enrico Berlinguer*, Carocci, Rome, 2006, pp.105 f.; see also: A. HÖBEL, *Il Pci di Luigi Longo, 1964-1968*, ESI, Napoli, 2010, pp.583-601.
8. A. SANTONI, *Il PCI e i giorni del Cile. Alle origini di un mito politico*, Carocci, Rome, 2008; R. GUALTIERI, *L’Italia dal 1943 al 1992. DC e PCI nella storia della Repubblica*, Carocci, Rome, 2006, pp.52 f. and pp.165 f.
9. M. LAZAR, *Maisons rouges. Les Partis communistes français et italien de la Libération à nos jours*, Aubier, Paris, 1992; A. VARSORI, *La cenerentola d’Europa? L’Italia e l’integrazione europea dal 1947 ad oggi*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2010, pp.302-314.
10. S. PONS, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, Einaudi, Torino, 2006; L. NUTI, *Gli Stati Uniti e l’apertura a sinistra: importanza e limiti della presenza americana in Italia*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 1999.
11. IFG [Istituto Fondazione Gramsci], APCI [Archivio del Partito Comunista Italiano], Direzione, MF 079, Berlinguer’s speech, meeting, 12.09.1974, p.27.

sibility of interferences of any kind could increase, as the on-going anti-communist campaign was showing.¹²

Second, Italian communists believed that loyalty to NATO was definitely central in reassuring the Ford Administration about their democratic credibility. Since the end of 1974, on several occasions during private talks, Berlinguer stressed the need to calm Americans down about the Italian communists' wish to adopt a "non-unfriendly" policy towards the US. In doing this, Berlinguer did not mean to passively accept the American interference in the Italian domestic policy: the defence of the autonomy of the peninsula remained central in the strategy of the PCI. Nonetheless, Italian communists' public attempts to reassure the US about their position on foreign policy clearly showed that Berlinguer decided to follow a different strategy, based on the belief that the international process of détente could open new perspectives. This new approach – supported by the President of the Party Luigi Longo – did not arouse enthusiasm among Berlinguer's comrades. In particular, the long-term leaders Giorgio Amendola and Gian Carlo Pajetta marked their belief that the PCI undervalued dangers coming from the use of secret services and NATO bases for domestic and "not legitimated" actions. According to them, the Party had to focus on the persistence of the anti-imperialist struggle.¹³ On the contrary, other representatives of the Party – such as the former Head of the Foreign Department of the PCI, Carlo Galluzzi – pushed for a more realistic and concrete international policy of the PCI, based on the assumption that the Party had to take a new position on foreign policy issues, a position as a ruling party.¹⁴ As usually, Berlinguer was able to "make the synthesis" of the two different positions: a policy that was not prejudicially negative towards the United States and the renouncing to getting out of NATO were the official choices in the XIV Party Congress.¹⁵

Envisaging a "Western Europe" that was "neither anti-Soviet nor anti-American", Berlinguer announced that the PCI would not ask for the Italian withdrawal from the NATO. It was a significant change in the Party's strategy: as Silvio Pons has well underlined, in this doing Berlinguer benefited of the identification between Europeanism and Atlantism, taking the chance to "embrace the first in a credible way, while avoiding to adhere to the second unconditionally". So, the change in the Party's strategy did not mean that Italian communists became US fans: as Alessandro Brogi pointed out, Berlinguer was not less anti-American than the most part of his comrades.

12. In particular, Dario Valori: IFG, APCI, MF 208, Meeting among leaders, 23.10.1975, pp.377-401. About the importance of the Mediterranean context in understanding the Italian foreign policy: E. CALANDRI, *Il Mediterraneo nella politica estera italiana*, in: A. GIOVAGNOLI, S. PONS (eds), *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni '70. Tra guerra fredda e distensione*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2003, pp.351-382.
13. IFG, APCI, MF 81, Berlinguer's speech, meeting, 07.10.1974, pp.48-49; Longo's statement, meeting, 16.10.1974, p.85; Statements by Giorgio Amendola and Gian Carlo Pajetta, meeting, 07.10.1974, pp.48 f.
14. IFG, APCI, MF 205, Carlo Galluzzi's discourse, meeting, 19.06.1975, pp.82-102.
15. *XIV Congresso del Partito Comunista Italiano*, Editori Riuniti, Rome, 1975.

It was the PCI's realpolitik, based on the idea that the PCI had to develop a fruitful dialogue with all democratic forces of the Western bloc, realizing a Westpolitik.¹⁶

The US Interference in Italy: A Never-Ending Story?

Such a new attitude had to cope with the negative positions held by the US Administration towards the PCI, during the electoral campaign for the Italian administrative elections of June 1975. One month before the elections, *L'Espresso* revealed the US denied the entry permit to Giorgio Napolitano, one of the most prominent representatives of the moderate wing of the PCI.¹⁷ Napolitano had been invited to hold some seminars and conferences in the US by the University of Yale, Harvard, and Cornell and by the MIT. A few months later, the Pike Committee – in charge of investigating the use of covert actions abroad by the CIA – finished its work. Although Gerald Ford and his entourage tried to impede the publications of the outcome,¹⁸ it became known substantially confirming the US covert actions in Italy.¹⁹ The official press of the Party strongly denounced the illicit interventionism and interference in Italy by the United States, deprecating the anti-communist purpose of the US policy in Western Europe.²⁰

Even in the academic field – where the first analysis of the US interventionism in the late 1940s was promoted under the supervision of Ennio Di Nolfo – some pro-Leftist scholars and eminent representatives of the Party (such as Umberto Terracini)

16. E. BERLINGUER, *La proposta comunista. Relazione del Comitato centrale e alla Commissione centrale di controllo del Partito Comunista Italiano in preparazione del XIV Congresso*, Einaudi, Torino, 1975; S. PONS, op.cit., pp.49 f.; A. BROGI, *Confronting America. The Cold War between the United States and the Communists in France and Italy*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2011, p.312; about the Westernpolitik toward the SPD: A. GUERRA, *La solitudine di Berlinguer*, Ediesse, Rome, 2006, pp.157-160.
17. *L'Espresso*, 18.05.1975.
18. GFL, Folder: Italy, President Leone, box 56, Ford to Othis Pike, 15.01.1976; Memorandum for the President, 01.1976; GFL, Collection: John Marsh Files, Folder: Italy – Investigation of Alleged American payments to influence Italian politics, box 19, Thomas Morgan to Ford, 06.1976 and Brent Scowcroft to Thomas Morgan, 16.06.1976.
19. About the support to neo-fascist and extremist forces in Italy, see: M. DEL PERO, *L'Italia e gli Stati Uniti: un legame rinnovato?*, in: F. ROMERO, A. VARSORI (eds), *Nazione, interdipendenza, integrazione. Le relazioni internazionali dell'Italia (1917-1989)*, vol.I, Carocci, Rome, 2005, pp. 310-311 and note 12, p.314. Among the popular literature, P. MASTROLILLI, M. MOLINARI, *L'Italia vista dalla CIA, 1948-2004*, Laterza, Bari/Rome, 2004.
20. *L'Unità*, 18.01.1976. See also: V. BOSCO, *L'amministrazione Nixon e l'Italia*, Eurilink, Rome, 2009, p.219.

drew a parallel between 1975 and 1948 elections, denouncing the “subjugation” of Rome to Washington.²¹

Although official statements stressed the parallel to the US covert operations of 1948, minutes of private meetings among leaders revealed a little and limited concern about that. Analysing confidential encounters of the “Direzione”²² during the electoral campaign of 1976, we can surprisingly find a significant but not astonishing worry about political implications of the CIA at the beginning of the year, while a decreasing attention during and after elections. Just to make an example: in February 1976, Longo said that “there are all the makings for the creation of a situation beyond control”. Berlinguer – a few days after the elections, on 24 June 1976 – commented the influence of the US in very few lines, combining it with that of the Catholic Church and reducing its importance in the definition of the electoral weight of the Christian Democrats.²³

With regards to this, the PCI revealed a double-image of the United States: if the US political leadership in office was considered the worst representative of imperialism, the situation was bound to get better because of the general improvement of international relations. The faith in détente brought Italian leaders to think that the replacement of the American leadership in office would have probably modified the US foreign policy towards Western countries in a priori non-negative way concerning a possible participation of Leftist forces in the governments. According to the main leaders of the PCI, the last elections and the fall of three authoritarian regimes in Europe were clear signals that the situation was going to change: more democracy was needed, and such a necessity was closely linked to a demand for more autonomy from the US by the European national domestic contexts.²⁴ In fact, the US interventionism was seen as not affecting the Italian situation only: the PCI warned European social democrats about possible American interference, whose alleged aim was maintaining Europe in a condition of limited sovereignty. Since the mid-1970s – the PCI argued – there was a substantial correspondence between foreign and domestic policy

21. S. GALANTE, *La politica del PCI e il Patto atlantico: Rinascita 1946-1949*, Marsilio, Padua, 1973; S. GALANTE, *La fine di un compromesso storico: PCI e DC nella crisi del 1947*, Franco Angeli, Milan, 1979; D. ARDIA, *Il Partito socialista e il Patto Atlantico*, Franco Angeli, Milan, 1976. See in particular the statements by Aurelio Macchioro and Umberto Terracini, E. AGA ROSSI, *Italia e Stati Uniti durante l'amministrazione Truman*, Franco Angeli, Milan, 1976, pp.51-53 and 188-198.
22. The so-called “Direzione” was the party executive, the leading organization which set policy for the entire party at the national level.
23. IFG, APCI, MF 0211, Meeting among leaders, 07.02.1976, pp.120 f; MF 239, Meeting among leaders, 24.06.1976, p.615. This opinion – that could seem as an exaggeration – was conditioned on one side, by rumours from the US Pike Commission about covert actions in Italy and, one the other, by the tragic Italian situation, upset by terrorist attacks. See: A. VENTURA (preface: C. FUMIAN), *Per una storia del terrorismo italiano*, Rome, Donzelli, 2010; P. CALOGERO, C. FUMIAN, M. SARTORI, *Terrorre rosso: dall'autonomia al partito armato*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2010.
24. *Rinascita*, 23.01.1976 and 12.03.1976. See: F. HEURTEBIZE, *Le peril rouge. Washington face à l'eurocommunisme*, Puf, Paris, 2014; F. HEURTEBIZE, *Washington face à la participation des communistes au gouvernement en Italie (1973-1979)*, in: *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 1(2014), pp.95-111.

trends: in that moment, the situation could be modified thanks to the international context of détente.²⁵

Hopes related to a possible and significant change in the US policy (and ruling class) brought the PCI to follow a double path strategy, based on two main pillars. The first was the consistent confirmation that a communist participation in the government will not lead to a withdrawal from the Atlantic Alliance. Such affirmation was repeated several times by relevant representatives of the Party and confirmed by the well-known interview to Berlinguer by Giampaolo Pansa, at the eve of the Italian political elections of 1976.²⁶

The other relevant element of the Italian communists' policy in the mid-1970s became the increasing attention to the development of a dialogue with the United States. After the statement about the "historical compromise" by Enrico Berlinguer, Botteghe oscure began to attract the attention of some representative of the US institutions. In August 1974, the first Secretary of the US Embassy, Robert Boies, asked to establish a "successful dialogue" with the PCI, mentioning the possible change in the US attitude towards Italian communists due to the new Ford Administration.²⁷ In reality, the institutional dialogue was obviously a rocky road: thus, the PCI began to develop relationships with the academic and – more generally – the cultural arena of the United States.

Curiously, the idea that the US intellectuals could be interested in having contacts with Botteghe oscure emerged during a dialogue between the Italians and the Vietnamese Communists. The latter suggested to the PCI's leader the development of dialogue with parts of the American society that were not prejudicially negative to the communists, e.g. intellectuals, parliamentarians, students.²⁸

Some relevant communist intellectuals believed that such a suggestion could be useful. As Adriano Guerra reconstructed, the first contacts were established between the communist journalist Giuseppe Boffa and the American diplomat Peter Bridges.²⁹ Moreover, after his first trip to the States, Boffa pointed out that the PCI could find available interlocutors in parts of the academic field, the State Department, some progressive press, and the Democratic Party – especially the area close to Senator Edward Kennedy.³⁰ Boffa argued that those environments did not wish to be on friendly terms with the PCI; nevertheless, their attitude was characterized by a genuine interest towards the Italian communists' evolution. The journalist of *L'Unità*

25. *Rinascita*, 16.04.1976, 23.07.1976 and 11.06.1976.

26. As precedent, we can quote: *Rinascita*, 30.05.1975. The interview by Gianpaolo Pansa was published on the newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, 13.06.1976, IFG, APCI, MF 239, pp.1158-1171.

27. IFG, APCI, MF 080, Note about meeting between Segre and Boies, 13.08.1974, p.401. This argument has been developed in-depth in: V. LOMELLINI, *Bisbigliando al 'nemico'? Il PCI alla svolta del 1973, tra nuove strategie verso Washington e tradizionale antiamericanismo*, in: *Ricerche di Storia Politica*, 1(2013), pp.25-44.

28. IFG, APCI, MF 032, Meeting of the "Direzione", 26.04.1972, pp.610-624.

29. A. GUERRA, op.cit., p.125; see also: G. BOFFA, *Memorie del comunismo. Storia confidenziale di quarant'anni che hanno cambiato l'Europa*, Ponte alle Grazie, Firenze, 1998, pp.165 f.

30. IFG, APCI, MF 206, Notes by Giuseppe Boffa, 21.05.1975, pp.332-337.

warmly suggested favouring such relationships in the belief that developing relationships with the academic world could improve the dialogue with the US political arena.

Since the mid-1970s onwards, Italian communists believed that cultural dialogue was not simply a way to deepen dialogue with the US, but the main tactic to do so. The cultural aspect and, in particular, the dialogue between the PCI and the “professors’ club” – as they were called – is absolutely central in understanding the Italian communists’ attitude towards, and hopes in prospect of improvement with Carter’s entourage, first, and administration, later.

The role played by some scholars seemed – at a first glance – very relevant indeed. In particular, some Italianists such as Joseph La Palombara, Sidney Tarrow and Peter Lange – who were also occasional consultants for the Department of State – were perceived by the Italian communists as key characters in the re-definition of the PCI image in the US and also abroad. To the Italian communists, US intellectuals’ statements on the Italian press promised the new dynamism of Washington. In doing this, a key role was played by Stanley Hoffman, chairman of Harvard’s Centre for European Studies from its creation in 1969 to the mid-1990s. In Italian communists’ mind, he gave his contribution in condemning the logic of the Cold War and its consequences in terms of domestic policy in the Western bloc, conditioning the view of the State Department about the politics toward the PCI.³¹

A relevant centre of interest for what was happening in the PCI and – more generally – in the Italian political context was the review *Foreign Affairs*, published under the Council for Foreign Relations. Sergio Segre, the Head of the Foreign Department of the PCI, made regular contacts with William Bundy, editor of *Foreign Affairs* from 1972 to 1984, who repeatedly asked Segre to write articles about the strategy of the PCI.³² Zygmunt Nagorski, the Secretary of the Council of Foreign Relations, in several occasions publicly expressed his belief that the Italian Communist Party was a democratic political actor, whose line was based on the legacy of the well-known leader Palmiro Togliatti. Nagorski openly supported the idea that the US had to open dialogue with the PCI: ignoring signals coming from Botteghe oscure could have been an “errore madornale”.³³ Furthermore, after the formation of the so called “governo delle astensioni”, the Director of *Foreign Affairs*, Robert Chase, had come to say that his group was disappointed by the PCI because of its caution in directly taking

31. Interview of the author with Joseph La Palombara, 30.01.2010; IFG, APCI, MF 204, Note by Starubin, 17.04.1975, pp.541-542.

32. IFG, APCI, MF 212, William Bundy to Sergio Segre, 18.12.1975, pp.296-297. Bundy wrote also a key book on the foreign policy of the Presidency Nixon: W. BUNDY, *A tangled web*, Tauris, London/New York, 1998.

33. *Daily American*, 18.07.1975.

part in the Italian Government, an option his group would have been glad to support.³⁴

Generally, such a positive attitude was welcomed among the leaders of the PCI, who publicly took a favourable position regarding such forces. Commenting the US decision to deny an entry permit to Napolitano, in spring 1975, the official newspaper of the PCI – *L'Unità* – stressed

“the value and the meaning of the fighting positions of reliable cultural and democratic people committed to defending the principles of freedom and tolerance”.

The positions of Lange or Kogan became the undeniable point of reference for criticizing the attitude of the Ford Administration, emphasising the existence of “another America”, which was more sensitive and open to the “need of socialism”.³⁵

Some members of the PCI – especially the journalists who attended as observers of the Party in Washington – warned Italian communist leaders to be cautious in considering the attention of such US groups: Carlo Maria Santoro openly talked about a “mistrustful kindness” by these American political actors, due to doubts about a possible fallback by the PCI to pro-Soviet positions, in a situation of crisis of international relations.³⁶ Steve Hellman, one of the US intellectuals who worked on the PCI, in our recent interview commented:

“The PCI leadership badly overestimated the influence of US intellectuals, and also misunderstood, due to projecting what it would have liked to see onto reality, the way the US political system operates”.³⁷

The Italian communist leaders probably were not so naive as to believe that American intellectuals could change the way of the US foreign policy. They probably assumed that the development of international relations and détente, jointly with the influence of the professors’ group, could condition the domestic Italian situation. During the US Presidential campaign, contacts with some key members of Carter’s entourage made Italian communists understand that they would pave the way for a more positive attitude toward the PCI.

34. The strange formula meant that the PCI – being the second party of the country in the elections in 1976 – allowed the government to survive thanks to its votes although it did not take part directly in the government. See S. COLARIZI et al. (eds), *Gli anni Ottanta come storia*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2004, pp.119-184 and 190-191. See also IFG, APCI, MF 280, Notes by Corsini, 08.11.1976, p.375.

35. *L'Unità*, 18.01, 23.03 and 16.05.1974.

36. IFG, APCI, MF 0281, Notes by Carlo Maria Santoro, 09.12.1976, pp.476-478.

37. Interview with Stephen Hellman, 20.09.2010.

Foreign Affairs, Brzezinski and the Role of the L'Espresso Group

In 1975-1976, we could mention at least two occasions when the US-PCI cultural connection became a more political one. Drawing closer to the Presidential elections in the US, the Democratic Party began to show its concern about foreign political actors. Zbigniew Brzezinski – who would become in a few months the National Security Advisor during the Carter presidency – was the key character in the development of such a relationship for two reasons: first, he was one of the most prominent analysts of *Foreign Affairs*, the review which shaped – as we have argued – the PCI as a democratic and trustable force in the US and abroad the idea. Second, because Brzezinski established a close link with the *L'Espresso* group, led by the eminent publisher Arrigo Benedetti, owner of the homonym magazine and of the new-born newspaper *La Repubblica*, the journal that was destined to become a main point of reference in the opinion making of the progressive Italian electorate.

In January 1976, Mauro Calamandrei – the official correspondent of *L'Espresso* in Washington – reported to Segre a message from Brzezinski: the Polish-born politician believed that it was the best time to open a public debate, in Calamandrei's magazine, about the policy of the democratic candidate Carter dealing with Italy and, particularly, the PCI. The main idea – already arose during 1975 – was to open a debate with two or three Italian communist leaders.

Brzezinski – Calamandrei continued – would make known that American democrats had a different position, compared to the republicans, towards the PCI and its participation in the Italian political life. In this doing, Brzezinski would have been able to bring together positive positions emerged on the press, in the academic field as well as within the Congress and the Department of State.³⁸

Such a kind of proposal did not come out of the blue: during 1975, Brzezinski was interviewed and published articles a couple of times in *L'Espresso*.³⁹ The magazine actively contributed to shape the image of a substantial change in the US political arena towards the PCI, sometimes even announcing meetings between Italian communists and American politicians that had never happened.⁴⁰ The magazine stressed also very much the development of pro-PCI positions in the US ruling class, particularly among members of the Democratic Party. In another interview, Brzezinski had the chance to denounce the foreign policy of Kissinger, a “nineteen-century” strategy based on the obsession to maintain unchanged political equilibria. A democratic government – said implicitly Brzezinski – would have changed key elements of the US foreign policy: the attitude towards the PCI was one of them.

Openly criticizing the US Ambassador John Volpe, Brzezinski declared:

“Let's take the case of the PCI. A smart foreign policy could not ignore the reality of a Party that reached the consensus of a third of the electorate. I do not believe that the US

38. IFG, APCI, MF 0212, Confidential note by Sergio Segre, 09.01.1976, pp.306-307.

39. *L'Espresso*, 23.02 and 27.04.1975.

40. This is the case of a meeting on August 1975 between Segre and Ford: *L'Espresso*, 17.08.1975.

government has to encourage this or that party [...]. The most essential thing is to have a long-term strategy and one of the principles of such a strategy must be strengthening democratic institutions. With regards this, the democratization of the PCI should be encouraged".⁴¹

Benedetti was not the only matchmaker between the PCI and the American Democratic Party: as Segre has pointed out during our interview, the well-known Fiat entrepreneur Gianni Agnelli played a similar role, informing the PCI of his talks in Washington and introducing Italian communist leaders to those of the Democratic Party.⁴² This aspect clearly emerged during an official dinner with Senator Edward Kennedy, where Segre took part. On the eve of the US elections, Kennedy repeated the official position of the Democrats about the PCI. The United States would evaluate its developments on the basis of four elements: attitude towards the EEC, behaviour towards NATO, approach regarding the United States and the democratic institutions. Agnelli put forward the idea of a meeting between Kennedy and Napolitano but the first refused, arguing that he did not want to put Carter in trouble. But the way seemed paved: as Kennedy mentioned during a meeting in autumn 1976, his visit in Italy meant "the actualization of the availability [of the US Democrats] to communicate and open a dialogue" with the PCI.

Such a talk seemed to corroborate Italian communists' feeling that something was changing in Washington. Segre – the main contact both for the US and the SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) – believed such an attention was not merely due to tactics played during the electoral campaign. On September 1976, just two months before American elections, Brzezinski made a strong impression on Segre. Once more, they met during a dinner organized by Agnelli and, remembering their previous encounter, they openly talked about relations between the PCI and Carter group. Segre commented:

"Today he [Brzezinski] could not push himself too far, but he is a man open to dialogue and to news; in any case, his staff follows carefully Italian political developments and the position of the PCI".⁴³

Conclusions

Did Italian communist leaders truly believe that the US policy could change towards them? Did they really believe the US intellectuals were able to modify the American foreign policy regarding communists' participation in the government? Were these hopes the outcome of a naïve understanding of the reality?

41. *L'Espresso*, 19.10.1975.

42. Interview of the author with Sergio Segre, Rome, October 2009.

43. IFG, APCI, MF 280, Confidential notes by Segre, 13.11.1976, pp.397-398 and 24.09.1976, pp. 427-428.

As far as we can see from archive documents, Italian communist leaders did not become US fans: in public statements, the PCI clearly claimed the end of the US interferences in the political affairs of the peninsula, refusing the idea that it had to give evidences of its democratic credibility.⁴⁴

However, interviews and documents show that they assumed that their chances to get into government were strongly related to their ability to show their independence from Moscow in particular on foreign policy.

Therefore, in Italian communists' analysis, the dialogue with the professors' club was part of a wider strategy, a kind of "Westpolitik" that the PCI developed to re-set its position in the international arena (and, consequently, in the domestic).

Jointly to the dialogue with the "other America", détente and a replacement of the US administration in office could change their political fate, giving the chance to get into government, following the way of the opening up to the PSI in the late 1960s. Such hopes were strengthened by the first declarations of the new elected President Jimmy Carter and by enthusiastic comments of the Italian communist observers in Washington.⁴⁵

In the end, all these hopes came to naught: the well-known US State Department's declaration of January 1978 clarified that the newly elected President would not change American policy regarding a possible participation of Italian communists in the government. The sunset of détente and the growing opposition to this openness in the US domestic context (namely by the conservatives and the US-Italian community) led Carter administration to a more cautious fall-back.⁴⁶ Domestic events then contributed to isolate the PCI: the kidnapping and murder of the main Christian Democrat interlocutor, Aldo Moro, the end of the government of "solidarietà nazionale" with the negative votes about the Italian adhesion to the Economic Monetary System and the euro missiles crisis, among the most important factors, re-shaped the Italian political situation.⁴⁷

The PCI's chance was already over and Italy had to wait for the 1990s to have its first Leftist Prime Minister.⁴⁸

44. *L'Unità*, 23.03.1976, p.1.

45. L. COMINELLI, *L'Italia sotto tutela. Stati Uniti, Europa e crisi italiana negli anni Settanta*, Le Monnier, Firenze, forthcoming.

46. F. HEURTEBIZE, op.cit., pp.110-111; U. GENTILONI SILVERI, op.cit., p.206; A. BROGI, op.cit., p.344.

47. About the consequences of the Euromissiles issue in the Italian Left situation: M. GERVASONI, *La guerra delle sinistre. Socialisti e comunisti dal 68 a Tangentopoli*, Marsilio, Venice, 2013, pp. 86-93.

48. S. COLARIZI, M. GERVASONI, *La tela di Penelope. Storia della Seconda Repubblica*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2012, pp.109-110.