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TO FCO SAVING TELEGRAM NO 15 OF 25 SEPTEMBER 1979
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ROME TELNO 326: ITALIAN POLITICAL SITUATION

1. The resumption of political activity after the August summer break has shown all the main political parties more than usually uncertain about the direction in which their political relationships are moving.
2. The Christian Democrats (DC) are still fundamentally divided about whether to move towards an anti-communist alliance with the Socialists or whether to seek to re-establish some sort of relationship with the Communists in a parliamentary majority of "national solidarity". The DC Party Congress, at which these issues are expected to come to a head, has now been postponed from December until the last week of January (and could well be delayed further). The Communists (PCI) for their part have been giving conflicting signs about how they intend to play their new role of opposition. In his article in the party theoretical weekly Rinascita on 24 August (Rome saving telno 13, not to all) Berlinguer appeared to be endorsing his earlier promises of "constructive" opposition. But he took a much harder line in his closing speech at the PCI "Festival of Unity" rally in Milan on 16 September, when he promised that the PCI's opposition would be "tough and combative". Meanwhile the Socialists (PSI), far from moving further towards the DC, appear to have come to some understanding with the Communists at a meeting between delegations led by the two Party Secretaries, Craxi and Berlinguer, on 20 September after which they issued an obscurely worded communique stating that a better relationship between the PCI and the PSI could force the DC to drop its prejudices against both of them.

3. In more detail, developments in each of the main parties over the last few weeks have been as follows:

DC

- (a) The DC National Council met in Rome from 4/7 September. The main outcome of this meeting was Zaccagnini's announcement that at the forthcoming Party Congress he did not intend to offer himself for re-election to the Party Secretaryship. This provoked a flurry of speculation about possible successors. Andreotti, Piccoli and Forlani were the names most often mentioned, though some observers believe that Andreotti may be holding himself back in readiness for the Presidency of the Republic if Signor Pertini dies during his term of office. Behind the contest for the Secretaryship lies the whole question of the DC's future relations with the PSI and the PCI. Zaccagnini, in his speech to the National Council, argued for the re-establishment of some sort of dialogue with the PCI. (Andreotti, who did not speak at the National Council, stands for much the same position.) This line provoked a sharp public riposte from the PSI Secretary, Craxi, to the effect that if the DC continued to maintain the rift between themselves and the PSI there could be no prospect of stability, governability, change and progress. The former Foreign Secretary, Forlani, and the Party Vice-Secretary, Donat-Cattin, both spoke at the National Council in favour of an alliance with the PSI, while De Mita (leader of the left-wing "Base" faction, which supports the Zaccagnini line) launched a bitter attack on Craxi. At the DC's "Festival of Friendship" rally in Modena from 10/16 September Cossiga (who also comes from the "Base" faction) aligned himself openly with Zaccagnini. No final positions have yet been taken up by the party factions; but the coming months are likely to see more than the usual amount of jockeying for position in the DC in the run up to the Party Congress.

PCI

- (b) Apart from the joint PSI/PCI communique of 20 September, interest has mainly focussed on Berlinguer's speech on 16 September (para 2 above). The main theme was that the PCI's function was not to rescue the capitalist system but to open the way to a new and better society. He said little about the historic compromise, and defined Euro-communism as "an effort to open in Western Europe a way of Socialist transformation based on full respect for democracy and all liberties". He strongly defended democratic centralism as a system which set the PCI apart as more democratic than other parties (a change of tack from his Rinascita article in August, when he sought to argue that democratic centralism was a feature which the PCI had in common with other parties). He did not refer specifically to his recent visit to the Soviet Union, but said that while the PCI would not simply follow the Soviet model it also refused to make opportunistic concessions ("against the wishes of millions of workers") to those who systematically denigrated the Socialist countries. All this, together with his remarks about the tough line the PCI would take in opposition, represents a considerable hardening as compared with other recent statements by Berlinguer. But this is thought to relate more to the occasion on which the speech was delivered (when it was natural for him to give some rousing slogans to the party faithful) than to any change that may have taken place as a result of his recent holiday in Moscow, when TASS gave an account of his meeting with Brezhnev full of praise for the Soviet Union.

PSI

- (c) The PSI took the initiative in calling the meeting with the PCI on 20 September (para 2 above). It is not clear exactly why Craxi is apparently now flirting with the Communists in this way when recent tendencies in the PSI have been more towards forging an alliance with the DC. But Craxi may have felt that a counter-balance was necessary to hold his party, which still has a strongly pro-Communist left wing, together. (There have, for

example, been signs of disagreement recently between Craxi and his Vice-Secretary, Signorile, who comes from the traditional left wing of the party.) At all events the meeting seems to have been a success for Craxi, at least in the short-term, in the sense that the PSI have now collectively buried the hatchet with the PCI with whom they have had bad inter-party relations for some time. There is also now at least a framework of a tactical understanding between the two parties whereby the PSI would support the PCI's claim to enter a government of national unity in exchange for PCI support for the PSI's claim to have the Prime Ministership of such a government. But the longer-term significance of this PSI/PCI understanding remains to be seen. There is no question, at least for the foreseeable future, of a common programme of action of the left against the DC. For the time being the PSI will continue to support the Cossiga government with its abstention as before, while the PCI remains in opposition.

4. In this confused political situation the Cossiga government's weakness is its strength. There is no obvious alternative in sight. With the PCI in opposition, Cossiga has nothing to lose by being tough; and the Socialists, who have the power to bring the government down by withdrawing their abstentions, will be reluctant to do so while there is nothing to put in its place. Cossiga's Ministers have made a generally businesslike start, and Cossiga himself is both determined and capable. Many people now think that his government may last rather longer than was at first thought likely - perhaps into the spring - though it is fragile and therefore accident-prone.

ARCULUS

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