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2. OCT 1979

Your reference

Our reference

Date 25 October 1979

Dear Ronald,

PRAGUE DISSIDENTS TRIAL: ITALIAN REACTIONS

1. The Charter 77 trial and the sentences announced yesterday have evoked strong reactions from all shades of political opinion in Italy, including the PCI.
2. President Pertini captured the popular mood when he sent a telegram to President Husak on 22 October appealing for him to intervene in the trial in accordance with the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. (A rough translation of the telegram is attached.) Pertini has always laid great emphasis on the theme of liberty (he was of course himself for many years a victim of Fascist prisons) and it is not forgotten here that his first political action after being elected to the Presidency in July 1978 was to send a similar message to Brezhnev about the dissident trials which were then in progress in the Soviet Union.
3. The most interesting reaction from the domestic political point of view was that of the PCI. In an interview in the independent left-wing newspaper, La Repubblica, on 23 October (also reported in other papers, including the official PCI daily L'Unita) the PCI spokesman on international affairs, Pajetta, took a more forthright line than PCI spokesmen have taken on previous occasions on the subject of dissidents. Pajetta said that Italian Communists could not accept as valid a legislative process which branded political dissent as espionage. He added that it was "unfortunately neither a new nor an isolated occurrence that errors, affronts, and wrongs are being committed against human rights even in countries where the means of production have changed, and where there is not the excuse - if one can call it that - of defending privilege, the rights of ownership, the search for profit, and the needs of exploitation". Asked whether the laws under which the Prague trial took place were not an offence to socialism, Pajetta referred to the millions of people who believed and hoped that socialism offered a way out of the economic, social and moral crisis of capitalist society: "I do not think that acts such as those which have been, and are being, committed in Prague will encourage them in their action and their hopes". He concluded by saying that fundamental problems

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- 2 -

had not been resolved in Czechoslovakia which was why its government was forced to resort to coercion and threats in order to maintain a situation of relative stability.

4. After the sentences had been announced, the PCI published a communiqué on 24 October expressing the "sharpest condemnation" of the conduct of the Prague authorities and stressing the damage which violations of human rights in socialist countries caused to the image of socialism in the world. A translation of the full text of the communiqué is attached.

Yours ever,

Mark

M E Pellew

cc:
CCR Battiscombe Esq, EESD, FCO
Chancery, PRAGUE
Mrs K Colvin, Research, Dept, FCO



(TRANSLATION)

TEXT OF TELEGRAM SENT BY PRESIDENT PERTINI
TO PRESIDENT HUSAK ON 22 OCTOBER

"The trial which has begun in Prague of six intellectuals connected with the Charter 77 movement has forcibly struck the Italian people and induces me to appeal to you, in your capacity as President of the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia, for an intervention in conformity with the principles and dispositions of the Helsinki Final Act. I am confident that you will wish to contribute to the cause of détente and of a growing understanding and solidarity between peoples".



TRANSLATION)

TEXT OF PCI COMMUNIQUE PUBLISHED ON 24 OCTOBER

"The trial against Czech citizens charged with subversion and the penalties inflicted during the trial are serious and inadmissible facts. The PCI expresses the sharpest condemnation of the conduct of the public authorities in Prague and of every practice of persecution, administrative and penal, of the free manifestation of ideas, of criticism and political dissent. The PCI, consistent with its positions of principle, again confirms the necessity of respecting in all circumstances the liberty of citizens and of political democracy, and stresses that violations and affronts in this field which occur in countries which have rid themselves of capitalist exploitation cause serious damage to the image and the ideals of socialism in the world. The Italian Communist Party hopes that the Czech authorities will listen to criticisms and requests which have come from so many quarters in order that every practice of violation of democratic principles may be finally abandoned".