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THE ITALIAN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT PARTY, (U)  
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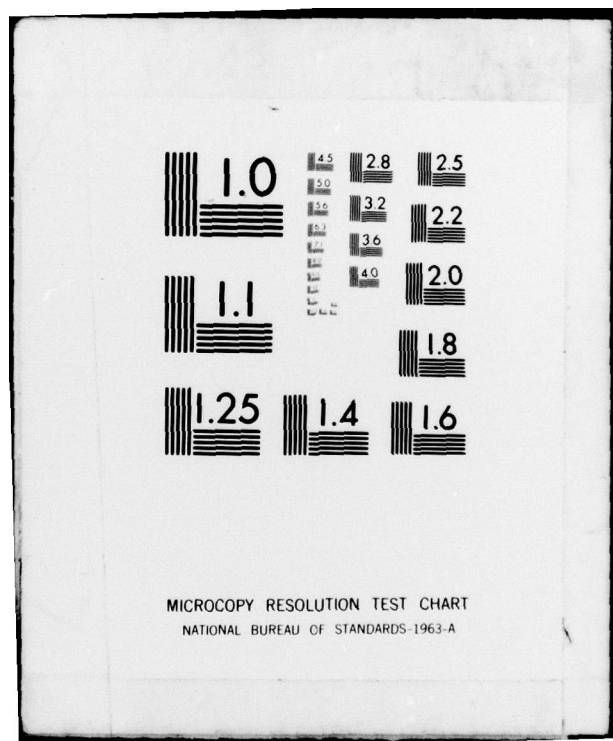
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CONFERENCE ON ITALY  
2 OCT 1975

My responses to the questions must inevitably give primary

focus to my area of competency, the Christian Democrat Party.

6 The Italian Christian Democrat Party

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The results of the June regional elections when combined with

the Christian Democrat failure on the divorce referendum and recent

survey responses indicate the presence of important changes in the

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party's political and electoral positions. The immediate direct effect

is to topple some center-left local governments, and, thereby,

to oust from office numbers of Christian Democrats. Of longer range

significance is the strong probability that an even weaker DC will

emerge from the 1977 national elections. Most importantly, however,

the results indicate a realignment of the Italian electorate that is

now under way: 1. Analyses of the vote and of survey responses show

that for the first time the DC did not receive a plurality of young

voters but was surpassed by both the Communists and the Socialists.

2. Attachment to the Catholic Church has declined as has the will-

ingness of those who maintain their religious beliefs to transfer

them into political deeds. 3. There is evidence of a weakening of

the DC's ability to attract women voters. Females now appear no

more likely to vote DC than do males. If these trends were to con-

tinue for the next decade, there would be little or no likelihood

of continued DC dominance over the government. They would not have

the votes to rule.

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Perhaps the fundamental question facing the leaders of the

party concerns the "inevitability" of these trends. Are there means

at their disposal to halt the loss of traditional sources of votes

and most importantly to make stronger inroads among the new voters?

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If we hypothesize that the behavior of political activists has determinant control over mass political attachments and voting decisions - an hypothesis with some empirical support, little evidence to the contrary and a strong theoretical rationale - then the political realignment can be halted, provided that party leaders and activists engage in sustained purposeful behavior to that end. There is indirect evidence from recent events that the lack of action as well as decisions to defend "unpopular" positions by DC and Church leaders may have contributed to the current state of affairs: Base and Forze Nuove activists were unwilling to work for the party's position on divorce and Church and party leaders have sought to relax the tie between religious and political positions. The heart of the problem is that the DC leaders have been unwilling to engage in sustained and purposeful action in the general interests of the party.

I have argued in published work that the Christian Democrat Party factions are the key actors in competitions for control of cabinet as well as internal DC positions and that the factions' competitive activities and goals may be used to account for the instability characteristic of both institutions. All but the two left-wing factions are best described as political clienteles (personalist groups, patronage groups). Together the personalist factions control 80% of seats on the DC National Council. As political clienteles they act according to the following behavioral rules:

1. Seek to control governing positions.
2. Strive to control more and "better" positions than previously held and defend those already controlled.
3. Act so as to further the career of the leader. Support him in his efforts to achieve "better" positions.
4. Seek to obtain goods of value to non-members only when the survival of the faction or party is at stake.

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The conjunction of these behavioral rules with the factor that cabinet positions are primarily distributed at the formation of cabinets has resulted in the following consequences: Each party faction will always be willing and act so as to dissolve a given cabinet when there is a chance to better the number or quality of positions controlled in the next formation and each party faction will seek to delay the formation of a cabinet until it gets the best bargain possible. In addition, the control of positions within the DC is viewed as both an object of competition and as a means to control governing positions. Positions in the government refer not only to cabinet and sub-cabinet level portfolios but to offices in the numerous governmental and quasi-governmental agencies.

The DC leaders will face the crucial issue of strengthening the party's electoral base as faction leaders: Their primary concerns are with their factions and it is through the factions that the party makes decisions. The crucial question then is whether the leaders will set aside their search for particularistic goals to act in the general interest. Are the incentives and means present sufficient to bring about a reorganization of the party's electoral machine? To be specific: If DC leaders will act to save the party only when they perceive their careers and factions to be at stake, do they interpret the current crisis as meeting those conditions? If they do, are there adequate personnel and organizational resources to revamp the party?

There is strong reason to answer in the affirmative to both questions. There are indications that the DC leaders are indeed afraid for their political lives and therefore are willing to overhaul the party. The selection of Zaccagnini as the new Secretary would support this position, and certainly the party leaders

are able to draw the short and long term consequences of recent elections. At the same time, the DC activists who lost or who fear for the future loss of their governing positions have a strong incentive to reinvigorate the party at the local level. Not to do so is to end their political careers. If so and given the validity of the argument that attributes to determinant control by political activists over voting behavior, then the DC will be able to solidify its dominant position at about 40% of the vote. They have the incentive and means to do so.

There are factors present, however, that lead me to doubt that this scenario will take place. Even if we presume that the leaders perceive the need to act in the general interest, given their primary concern for their own aggrandizement and the fact that they have operated in this manner for well over a decade, it is highly probable that each will fear that the others will take advantage of his acts in the collective interests and will refrain from doing so. There is danger attached to being the first to give up one's particularistic interests.

It is also the case that the DC leaders need not interpret the current crisis as severe enough to spell their political demise. We argued during the seminar that both the PCI and the PSI are beset by potential and actual divisions, and, therefore, that any attempt at a left-wing governing coalition would lead to splits in the parties. It follows that to sustain a cabinet the PCI and the PSI require much more than 51% of the parliament. They will not even come close to that portion of the vote in the near future. We also argued that the faction ridden PSI does not provide a major electoral threat to either the PCI or the DC. It follows from all this that at

least through and beyond the 1977 elections, and probably for a much longer period, no cabinet can form without the DC as the dominant partner. If so, and assuming that the DC leaders perform this same analysis, then they need not fear for their political lives. There is no one else to govern. They will not change their current behavior patterns, therefore, and will not act to revamp the party. While it is true that the probable consequence of this decision is for the party not to halt the political realignment and for it eventually to lose power, I see little reason to expect these particular leaders to be especially concerned about the long-term fate of the party. After all, they have been playing a short-term game for a long time, one whose limited particularistic goals is a major source of the party's current problems. There are very few personal incentives for these individuals to act in the long-term interests of the party: Fanfani, Rumor, Piccoli, Colombo and Andreotti have already conquered the heights of Italian political power and the best parts of their careers are behind them.

Within the DC there is another set of leaders with sufficient incentive but perhaps insufficient power to effect the necessary changes in the party. While the long-term demise may not directly threaten the top leaders, it most certainly endangers their lieutenants and the left-wing faction leaders. Given their more limited accomplishments and relative youth, their political careers require concern for long-term developments. In addition, the left-wing leaders have been more willing to act in the party's general interest. A victory of this cross-faction coalition with its leftist tint would also have an easier time making inroads among the young voters. Unlike the senior party leaders, these Christian Democrats have very strong incentives to break with the patterns of the past and to



reorganize the party.

The problem with this solution is that it was attempted at San Ginesio only to fall to Fanfani's return to power. Why argue that it will succeed now? 1. The stakes for these leaders are much higher. Their political careers almost certainly hang in the balance. Their defeat in 1973 was linked to center-right electoral gains the year before, but success in the 1977 elections will probably require a left-oriented campaign. Zaccagnini and the Morotei may be too weak to effect the transition within the party but perhaps with the support of someone like Bisaglia it could be done.

A major limitation on the DC's ability to halt the political realignment is its local-level organizational weakness. Activists compose at most 10% of the 1.7 million members and they work for the party only during election campaigns. The DC unlike the PSI and the PCI is not a mass political party. Problems of organizational weakness have also been exacerbated in recent years by the increasing separation between the Church and the party and the unwillingness of significant numbers of Church activists to work for the DC.

I argued above that Christian Democrats whose careers have been endangered by the party's electoral decline provide a potential source of local party activists. Are there elements within the Church that may also be used for campaign and related purposes? One obvious and potentially important source is the Comunione e Liberazione movement with its 60,000 claimed members, apparent passionate commitment to ideological principles and desire to work for the DC. Still the activation of large numbers of Catholics will require a firm decision by the Catholic hierarchy. It is impossible to be certain as to whether they will choose to help the DC, but let me suggest two



possible scenarios:

1. If the Church leaders view the DC loss of power as inevitable they may choose the following means to protect Catholic interests: an accommodation with the left based on a formal separation of church and state while at the same time proceeding to revitalize the Catholic social and political movements along ideologically pure lines. These movements would serve to protect the Church during the period of left-wing rule and to maintain their association with large numbers of the faithful as well as to prepare for the resurgence of Catholic political power.

2. If they prefer continued DC rule to an agonizing period of internal purification and possible danger while out of power, and there is no reason to assume otherwise, then they may be willing to lend personnel and organizational infra-structure to a coherent and well-directed DC drive to hold power. This effort would have to be based upon issues with which the Church could agree (or at least not on issues with which the Church could not agree). The last point bears emphasis. If the DC is to capture larger numbers of the young voters, there must be an increase in the number of the young with attachments to the DC as well as the Church. The party must also draw support from those without positive religious beliefs. Until the Church is able to increase significantly the numbers in the first category, the party will be hurt by the politicization of religious issues, as in the divorce referendum.

As I see it, the DC will succeed in maintaining the size of its electoral base, if it can accommodate a strengthened tie to Church activists with a party leadership in which non-Church associated elements are particularly strong.

My answers to the other questions must be briefer and even more speculative.

If the "Historic Compromise" is taken to mean the PCI sharing formal governing power with the DC, then its occurrence rests on the agreement of the DC and it is therefore neither "inevitable" nor destined to last very long if it occurs. It will occur if the political realignment proceeds to a point where the DC leaders can maintain governing control only with the agreement of the Communists. I doubt that PCI claims to responsible control over industrial workers and their party's crucial role in the economy are viewed by the DC leaders as sufficient grounds for entry into the cabinet. DC agreement will be forthcoming only when both parties near 35% of the vote. From this perspective, however, the "Historic Compromise" emerges as short-term solution. It is highly unlikely that PCI control of cabinet positions will strengthen the Christian Democrats. It will more likely lead to further declines by the DC and the success of a left-wing cabinet of the PCI and PSI with 60% of the vote. In sum, this is to argue that the DC will agree to the compromise only under severe political pressure.

Any analysis of the "Historic Compromise" must bear in mind its necessary and purposeful ambiguity of meaning. It is not at all certain whether it refers to a formal entry into the cabinet by the PCI or public consultation between the parties or some point between those poles. The time reference is also not clear: Is it meant to convey a long-term process which concludes with shared power with the DC or for that to precede a left-wing government dominated by the Communists? It is highly probable that no consensus exists within the PCI and that an attempt to accept one of the above or some other interpretation would divide the party. The varied meanings of the

phrase permit the different PCI elements to interpret it as they will, perhaps with varied emphases at different times. Even for Berlinguer it is not certain that while he now refers to an agreement with the DC that his long-term goals are not for PCI rule.

The tactical ambiguities also relate to internal differences over the PCI's "vocation." I have no firm conclusions as to what the long-term goals of the party are - or indeed if they have such goals. I would only indicate what I am certain that they are not: The PCI is not, as some might have it, a party that combines the ideals of Eleanor Roosevelt with the mythical efficiency of Robert McNamara. It strikes me as absurd to presume that this party, unlike all other parties, is solely or primarily interested in the best interests of all Italians, as defined in the terms of Western liberalism. In addition, and as LaPalombara commented at the San Francisco meetings, the real question is when and if they come to power, what will happen when they find large numbers of Italians unwilling to go along with their plans. Will they settle into a DC-like corruption or will they redouble their efforts to convince the recalcitrant? I do not know, but I suggest that it is folly to presume that they will not "turn on the screws."

Some final comments:

1. The future of the Liberal Party and the Right are problematic. For the DC to maintain power it must block large shifts of votes from the right to the left. Indeed, it is the 10% of the electorate that has voted for the right-wing parties that could provide enough votes to bring the PCI and PSI to 60%. To underline an argument that I used above, to the extent that voting decisions are crucially determined by the actions by party machines, rather



than the voter's ideological principles, that kind of swing from one end of the political spectrum is clearly possible. ;

2. I would argue that the declines in attachments to the Church are most importantly tied to weakened efforts by the clergy to maintain the Catholic sub-culture. In the Marxist sub-culture the parties have not weakened the efforts of integrating the masses within the movement and there has been no drop-off in attachment to the PCI. If so, then a reinvigorated effort by the Church might arrest the declines in religious practice.

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