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Your reference

Our reference

Date 26 February 1979

Dear Harborne,

PSDI VIEWS ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION

1. The Italian Social Democrat Party (PSDI) has only 15 deputies in Parliament. But because it is one of the parties of the "five-party majority" it has an influence out of proportion to its size, and its Party Secretary, Pietro Longo, is included in most of the inner consultations about the formation of a new government. You may therefore be interested in the following account of a lunch which James Adams, Bob Marshall (Information Officer) and I had on 23 February with Longo, Mauro Ferri (responsible for PSDI party organisation) and Giampiero Rolandi (of the PSDI newspaper "L'Umanità").
2. Longo said that La Malfa had little chance of succeeding in his attempt to form a government. He was following the same path that Andreotti had tried and failed (ie re-constitution of the five-party majority) but the margins were even more limited for him than they had been for Andreotti. The Christian Democrats could not afford to give Berlinguer a single inch of ground if they did not even have the Prime Ministership. The only kind of La Malfa government that the Christian Democrats could accept would be one with themselves inside and the Communists outside. This the Communists could not accept, so the attempt was doomed to failure. Longo reckoned that the La Malfa attempt would last for about another 10 days. He thought that we might then see Fanfani given a mandate to form a temporary government to take the country into the European elections in June, when Longo thought that there would probably have to be national elections as well.
3. On the possibility of elections, Longo said that all the parties would hang back till the last possible moment since nobody wanted to appear responsible for provoking them. But assuming that elections, if there were to be elections, would take place on the same day as the European elections (the Socialists being so firmly against holding them earlier) the critical period for a decision would be around the end of March, ie 70 days before 10 June. This was because the dissolution of Parliament had to

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take place between 70 and 50 days before elections (I have not net been able to check the facts, but this is what Longo said).

4. Longo also predicted that the Communist Party Congress, scheduled for 20/25 March, would be postponed. This was because the Communists, according to Longo, would rather not go into an election with their hands tied by a Congress. The same point has also been made recently in the Turin newspaper "La Stampa", which is usually well informed about Communist affairs, though we have not seen it elsewhere.

5. Longo spoke very firmly against the Communists, whose international policies, he said, proved that they were still unacceptable as partners in an Italian government. This is in line with previous statements by the PSDI in which they have shown themselves to be the most publicly outspoken against the Communists of all the former partners in the five-party majority. (Incidentally Longo let slip the fact that he had been invited to the American Ambassador's house that evening: no doubt the Americans are encouraging the PSDI to stick to their line).

6. Longo did not say much about the PSDI's relations with the PSI, which had been regarded as one of the questions at issue when Longo rather suddenly took over the Party Secretaryship from Romita last October (see my letter of 13 November to Pat Kenwick). But the way he referred throughout lunch to "we two Socialist parties" suggests that he does indeed regard himself as closer to Craxi than Romita had been (para 2 of that letter).

7. Incidentally Longo and his colleagues pointed out that the last time a mandate to form a government was given to a non-Christian Democrat was not in 1945 (as we had stated in our telegram no 117 of 22 February, taking our cue from the press) but in May 1947, when the independent pre-Fascist President of the Council, Francesco Nitti, made a brief and unsuccessful attempt between two De Gasperi governments.

Yours sincerely,
Mark Pellew

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