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Your reference

Our reference 014/5

Date 5 March 1979

Dear Peter,

LOCKHEED BRIBES TRIAL

1. As you will have read in the press, the verdict in the long-running Lockheed bribes trial was announced on 1 March. Mario Tanassi (Social Democrat), who was Defence Minister between 1970 and 1972 at the time when the bribes for the purchase by the Italian Air Force of 14 Hercules C-130 aircraft were said to have been handed over, was sentenced to 2 years 4 months imprisonment. His predecessor as Defence Minister, Luigi Gui (Christian Democrat), was however acquitted. Various lesser personalities involved in the affair were also given prison sentences: among these the two Lefebvre brothers, who were the main intermediaries for the payments, received sentences of 2 years 4 months and 2 years 2 months respectively, and General Fanali, who was Chief of the Air Staff at the time, was given a suspended sentence of 1 year 9 months.

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2. If you wish to look up the political background to the trial, you will find it described in our Saving telno 4 of 8 March 1977 (supplemented by our telno 153 of 11 March 1977). Parliament decided at that time to impeach both Gui and Tanassi before the Constitutional Court, after the Committee of Inquiry had narrowly decided in January 1977 that there was no case for Mariano Rumor (Christian Democrat Prime Minister at the time of the bribes) to answer. The Constitutional Court started on the case in April 1978, and after 10 months of hearings and 23 days of recess the verdict has now finally been delivered.

3. After all this time the political impact of the verdict, which was more or less on the lines expected (though many people thought that Gui would be convicted as well as Tanassi), had largely been discounted by press and public opinion. It certainly would have been regarded as a scandal if both ex-Ministers had been acquitted. But as things are, the balanced verdict of one conviction and one acquittal for the two ex-Ministers has generally been well received - except of course by the Social Democrats, who have condemned the sentence passed on Tanassi as a "political crime". The Christian Democrats are naturally

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delighted that their man has got off - though the acquittal probably does not in fact do much to remove the dirt which has rubbed off on their party over a period of years as a result of the Lockheed investigations. (It is widely said that Gui was merely saved by the accident of a government change just at the moment when the bribes became due to be paid; and Tanassi has claimed that he himself did no more than finish off what Gui had started.)

4. The Communists have not sought so far to make much political capital out of the verdict. But the general line of their comments has been that this is the end of the era in which Ministers and high officials can be regarded as untouchable; and this line has been echoed with approval elsewhere in the non-Communist press. This is the first time in the history of the post-war Republic (and in fact the first time in Italy since 1908) that an ex-Minister has been sent to prison - though everyone knows that there has been no shortage of corrupt Ministers. The general feeling is that whatever effect the verdict may have on the immediate political situation - and for reasons explained in paragraph 3 above this is not likely to be very great - it is an important warning of the need for greater accountability and higher moral standards in public life.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Pellew

M E Pellew

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