



British Consulate General

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Our reference INF 011/3

Date 16 July 1980

19 JUN 1980

Dear Mark

The Consul General has asked me to send you the attached notes of a conversation with a PCI official and one assistant editor of L'Unita on election prospects.

Yours ever,

Peter

P H P Thompson

at 11.76



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15/5

Dr. Giancarlo Bosetti and Signor Luigi Corbani.

Dr. Giancarlo Bosetti, news editor of the Milan edition of 'L'Unita', invited me to lunch today to meet Signor Luigi Corbani of the provincial secretariat of the PCI.

Signor Corbani is a member of the council of the comune of Cinisello Balsamo which has had an absolute Communist majority since 1952. "Strange" remarked Bosetti "that a comune with that advantage should look such a mess". "Typical journalist's superficiality" said Corbani. "All you see of Cinisello are the factories and big blocks of flats along the main road as you hurry out of Milan. The centre of Cinisello is well ordered and pleasant. The social services are very good. There is a great amount of cultural activity and, what is perhaps surprising, religious activity - and it is not confined to the many Catholic churches, there are several flourishing Protestant communities including those of the Waldensians and Jehovah's Witnesses." As another example of Cinisello's superiority, the Communist councillor added: "Cinisello has one of the highest proportions of owner-occupiers in the country. Sixty-two per cent of the families own the house they live in."

Conversation turned to election prospects. Corbani said that the Christian Democrats had intended to fight the election on two main issues: terrorism and financial mismanagement by Left local governments. For the first they had printed many thousands of posters to be displayed throughout the country. The posters said: "Have you ever heard of a Christian Democrat Terrorist?" They were printed before the judicial enquiry into the alleged terrorist activities of one of Donat-Cattin's sons and were subsequently pulped.

On the second issue the PCI was responding with figures from local government balance sheets to show how extensively public service deficits had been reduced and even eliminated. This was not perhaps an immediately effective line to take. Charges of maladministration got more attention than the refutations. This was not only because most of the press and independent television stations tended to welcome news that embarrassed the PCI. But because accusations, which were generally of a sweeping character, were more easily assimilated than the necessarily detailed answers.

In Milan and other big cities in the North, Corbani said, the PCI/PSI administrations had a fairly impressive record. They had for example reduced the huge public transport deficit in Milan while extending the metro and improving the services in other ways. In the South the story was not so good. Wasteful methods



of administration had been largely eliminated and substantial economies had been made in other ways. Services had been bettered. But some of the local administrations which the Left had gained, for example Naples, had proved to be in too bad a way for the cure, for which PCI first-time voters had hoped, to be effected within five years. It was probable that some of the PCI/PSI administrations in the South would be defeated. It was also probable that in the same area the MSI, which was not associated with either Left or Christian Democrat administrations, would make gains, attracting a sort of desperation vote.

Both Bosetti and Corbani thought that the Left would retain control of the Milan city and provincial councils and the Christian Democrats, the regional council. It was probable that the Communist vote would be less than in 1975 but greater than in the political elections of 1979 (even though the PCI generally polls less well in the administrative than the political elections). The PCI expected to get a share of the votes which in 1979 went to the Partito Radicale (which is not contesting the local elections in Milan), but the lion's share would probably go to the PSI.

One election result Bosetti and Corbani gave as certain was a strong revival, in Milan, of the Liberals. They thought that on the evidence of the way voting went in the European elections the PLI might get as much as 10 per cent of the Milan poll - mainly at the expense of the Christian Democrats. In the 1975 administrative elections the PLI share of the Milan vote was 1 per cent, so the predicted advance would be fairly sensational. Milan had, however, a strong Liberal tradition, and the poor showing of the party in 1975 and 1976 was caused by the transfer of much of the potential Liberal vote to the DC out of fear of the Communists. Now that it was thought that the Communists had lost the ascendancy the anti-Communist vote was likely to be more widely distributed, to the advantage of the PLI and the other 'lay Centre' parties.

*Peter Thompson*  
P H P Thompson  
12.5.1980

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