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Your reference

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Dear Margaret,

Here is the report on the elections which I promised to send you. They resulted in little change. Though the Socialists did not do very well, except in Milan - in fact they generally lost ground compared to the results of the 1975 administrative elections - they have been treated as victors by most political commentators, including Communist ones. This is because of notable PCI losses in Milan and Bologna.

Yours ever,

Peter

P H P Thompson

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THE ADMINISTRATIVE ELECTIONS IN LOMBARDY, EMILIA, AND  
BOLZANO AND TRENTO.

1. Trends Revealed by the Results.

Before the election, party officials and the newspapers said that it would turn more than previous ones on national and political rather than local and administrative issues. This did not seem to happen. If anything there were signs of more interest than formerly, in so far as there was any interest in the election at all, on local matters and personalities. The big preference votes for the Communist Mayors of Turin and Naples and the Socialist Mayor of Milan, with a correspondingly strong endorsement of their parties, in some contrast to the trend of voting generally, were among these signs.

The electors did not, on the whole, respond to the attempts of party speakers and journalists to invest the election with a crucial significance for the survival of the government and the direction of future national policy - historical compromise or Centre-Left anti-Communist coalition. The electors withheld their vote in greater numbers than hitherto (despite the admonitions of the episcopate and all parties except the Radicals and Anarchists); or expressed, by the division of their favours along lines now traditional, a preference for as little change as possible. This conservatism, however, had more than local

political significance in that it endorsed the Communists where they were traditionally strong and penalised them where they had more recently arrived in government through their exceptional thrust in 1975; with the result that they lost enough ground to invalidate their intention of arbitrating now on the government's future, but not enough to impair their credibility as a major political force potentially capable of doing so at some other time.

The Donat-Cattin case did not have the damaging effect on the Christian Democrat vote that some Christian Democrats feared. Communist zeal in pursuance of further parliamentary enquiry looked to some like a hounding of Cossiga and probably counteracted much of the bad impression made by Donat-Cattin.

## 2. Winners and Losers in Lombardy and Emilia

The election results in Lombardy and Emilia were much as forecast. The Christian Democrats did moderately better than in the administrative elections of 1975 but rather worse than in the political elections of 1979. The Communists failed to keep their 1975 gains but by a smaller margin than many of them had expected. They were for the most part marginally down on their 1979 figures, but so little as to encourage them to claim they had stanchd the haemorrhage.

The PSI did very well in Milan, thanks to the PSI Sindaco, Carlo Tognoli, who based his speeches on the undeniably good record of his PCI/PSI administration - no scandals and plenty of practical improvements. The PSI increased its share of the poll in Milan by nearly 5 per cent and got 4 more seats on the city council. Elsewhere it was much less successful.

The Liberals did not make the spectacular come-back which commentators in other parties had predicted, but they increased their share of the poll, by one or two per cent, in every province of Lombardy and Emilia - and were the only party to do so. This increased the number of seats they hold on the councils of the provincial capitals and provinces from 30 to 42. The biggest increase of any party. The other minor parties - PSDI, PRI and MSI all suffered a small decline. The several local parties were a complete fiasco; the one reputed to be a dangerous rival to the PLI - it was led by a former mayor of Milan, On. Bucalossi, got even fewer votes than a freak entity called the Rock Party.

### 3. Extreme Left Success in Bolzano

In the autonomous provinces of Bolzano and Trento the elections concerned communal councils only. The one surprise in the results was the good performance by the Nuova Sinistra (a party to the Left of the PCI) standing for the first time. It won 4 seats in Bolzano and 2 in Trento. It also got 2 in Merano and 1 in Vipiteno (places in Bolzano province with a strong German-speaking majority). Its success has been ascribed to the resentment of Italian workers at the segregation policies of the SVP.

### 4. Few Changes of Local Government

The minor losses and gains of votes are not likely to bring about any changes of government, except in some of the smaller centres and possibly in the Milan Provincial Council. The Regional Government will continue to be a Centre Left coalition in Lombardy and a PCI/PSI one in Emilia. Of the provincial capitals Bergamo, Brescia, Como, Sondrio and Varese will have DC/lay party (possibly also PSI) coalitions, Milan, Bologna, Ferrara, Forli', Modena, Parma, Reggio Emilia and probably Piacenza will continue to have PCI/PSI coalitions. How the

Cremona and Mantua giuntas will be formed depends on the local PSI. In Cremona the PCI and DC have 15 seats each and the PSI with 6 could give either the governing majority. In Mantua the PCI have five more seats than the DC and though arithmetically a Centre-Left giunta would be formed, with the one Liberal councillor, a PCI/PSI one is more likely.

##### 5. Socialists Treated as Victors despite Losses

A curiosity of the election results was the general disposition to accord moral victory to the Socialists. In every province of Lombardy, except Milan, their share of the poll compared to that of the previous administrative elections of 1975 went down, the fall varying from 0.1 to 4.4 per cent. In the seven provinces of Emilia in which elections were held they improved slightly on their 1975 performance in four of them, and lost to a rather greater degree in the other three: Modena, Reggio Emilia and Parma. A gain of 0.1 per cent in Bologna, where the Communist share of the poll fell from 49 to 46 per cent, emboldened them to claim, somewhat tentatively, the office of Sindaco. The Communists dismissed the claim with kindly words.

It was the Milan result, the big exception to their general regression in Lombardy and Emilia which brought the Socialists the respectful consideration of pundits - including some Communist ones - looking for the winners. In the election for the Milan city council the PSI got 4.8 per cent more votes than in 1975 and increased its representation from 12 seats to 16. The Communist representation fell from 25 to 22. That of the Christian Democrats (22 seats) remained unchanged, though their vote fell by 0.5 per cent. In the Milan Provincial Council election the PSI advance was less marked: 1.8 per cent, which was not enough to increase the number of its councillors. In

the Provincial election the PSI did not enjoy the advantage of having the outgoing Sindaco, Carlo Tognoli, as its leading candidate. Tognoli got the highest number of preference votes in the Milan election - 57,145 - a record for a PSI candidate in Milan.

#### 6. DC Mistakes

Both the PCI and the DC did worse in Milan than elsewhere in Lombardy, and the PCI did considerably worse than the DC: its share of the poll went down by 3.9 per cent in the Milan city election and 3.3 per cent in the Provincial election.

The big surprise in the DC results was the failure of Massimo De Carolis to get re-elected. When he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies in 1976 with the immense preference vote of 156,000, it seemed certain that he would become, locally and nationally, a dominating personage of the Right wing of the DC and a power within the party generally. This has not happened. Instead he has suffered a steady decline in prestige and influence. An early truculence of manner and recklessness in argument seems to have set powerful members of the party hierarchy against him. His quarrel with one of his most influential supporters in Milan, Indro Montanelli, eroded his local power base.

The DC failed to regain its pre-1975 position of being the major party in Milan. It failed by less than a thousand votes. But that it did fail, and that the PCI, despite a loss of 70,000 votes, retained this position had a depressing effect on DC morale.

It was probably a mistake for the DC to have made the former prefect, Libero Mazza, its leading candidate. By tradition there exists a conflict of interest, and in consequence probably of mentality too, between the local representatives of

the central government and the representatives of local government. In Milan this contrast is sharpened by a customary lack of sympathy for most aspects of Rome other than the artistic and historical. Though there was a Centre-Left city administration when Mazza was Prefect relations between the two lacked cordiality. Mazza's Vice-Presidency of Liquigas, which failed with some resonance a couple of years ago, may also have told against the DC choice.

#### 7. PSI as Arbiter

As on other occasions the PSI has emerged as the arbiter of government. The decision as to which coalition it will favour locally - Left or Centre-Left - rests with the local party. It is of course a decision that is influenced and often determined by the recommendations of the central committee. Craxi's position has been greatly strengthened, in Lombardy as well as nationally, by the election results and the PSI is likely in consequence to take an even more critical attitude towards the PCI than it did after the 1979 election. This, however, does not mean that it will opt for a Centre-Left administration wherever it is arithmetically feasible. It is so in Milan. But the leading PSI candidate, Tognoli, though a keen disciple of Craxi, made it clear before the election that, whatever the result, he would not take office in a Centre-Left administration. He did not wish to be known, he said, as a Sindaco for all seasons. He fought the election entirely on the record of his PSI-PCI administration, and increased its joint representation in the council, the loss of 3 Communist seats being more than counterbalanced by the gain of 4 Socialist ones.

#### 8. Future Administrations in Milan City and Province

A PCI-PSI giunta with support perhaps from individual councillors of the PRI or PSDI, and enjoying at least the non-opposition of

the extreme Left (PDUP and DP which have 3 seats) is the probable form of administration for Milan city. The Province may get a Centre-Left giunta. The Provincial Council has very little political weight now that the Region is fully functioning, and a Centre-Left administration might in consequence be a concession to the DC, that the PSI could make with comparatively small damage to its relations with the PCI. On the other hand, though the DC gained a seat in the Milan provincial elections, all the most important communes in the province returned Left majorities, so a non-Left administration at the Centre would be something of an anomaly.

#### 9. Communist Difficulties

The losses of the Communist party, though less than many Communist feared they would be, have left the party in an awkward position. Its junior partner in the administration in Milan has gained in prestige to an extent that will make coexistence more difficult than hitherto. A conciliatory approach is called for - not only towards the Socialists but also, for the sake of stability in the continuance of the Left giuntas in Milan and other places (Piacenza, Mantua and Cremona for instance) where a Centre-Left alternative is, theoretically at least, a possibility, towards the PRI and PSDI and even the PLI. But at the same time the fact that the party has done better in an election after a return to opposition and all-out attack in the pre-national Unity style, than it did in 1979 after three years of moderation and quasi coalition with the DC, has strengthened the anti-Berlinguer element in the party which is led by the Milan PCI deputy Cossutta and is said to number some forty per cent of the membership. Cossutta and his followers are regarded as Stalinist and an increase in their influence is likely to make Communist collaboration with other parties more difficult to achieve; especially as Cossutta is the member of the PCI Central Committee responsible for relations with local government.



#### 10. Apathy and the Radicals

Nearly seven million of the electorate (slightly over 16 per cent) abstained from voting or spoiled their papers. This was much more than in any post-war election. The number of abstentions (4,893,690) was twice as many as in 1975. The proportion of invalid votes was highest, not as one would imagine in the South, but in Piemonte (7.9%). It was lowest in Emilia (4.5%), and this was no surprise for the ruling Communist party has diligently instructed the electorate for the past thirty years on how to avoid spoiling the voting paper and the importance of not being an absentee, and of course of putting the X at the head of the voting list where the PCI is invariably to be found.

The Radical Party claimed, unconvincingly, that the record number of non-voters was a result entirely of their campaign against voting and therefore represented the support they would have had if they had taken part in the election. On the other hand it is probable that the Socialists' backing of the Radicals' referendum campaign brought a good many erstwhile Radical votes to the Socialist candidates.

P H P Thompson

25.6.1980