

to Mr Fergusson AUS EO
Private Secretary on arrival.

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I agree tho, the President was pretty incorrect in what he suggested! 4/19/00

NOTE OF A CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT PERTINI AT THE
QUIRINALE ON 11 OCTOBER 1980.

1. President Pertini said that Forlani had called during the morning to report progress, having spent 2½ hours with Berlinguer. He had received assurances of a softening on the part of the PCI. Evidently they realised they had gone too far. Pertini was particularly critical of Berlinguer's conduct outside the gates of FIAT factories, inciting occupation. It reminded him of the 20's. He recalled that in the early days of his government Cossiga had kept in fairly close touch with Berlinguer, their being related. But then the PCI had gone off the rails. He did not explain what would keep them on the rails in future, except that their conduct recently had been visibly excessive. He confirmed that it had been the Donat Cattin affair that had laid Cossiga low and he had never recovered. He did not have the necessary strength of morale to stage a comeback. He was tired and now sick. (He would probably not be able to play his part in the State Visit.)
2. As regards the other facets of the crisis, the DC had apparently put their house in order - though how long it would last was a question: there were too many personal animosities. The Socialists, always liable to splits like the Labour Party, had rallied round Craxi who had done well to get rid of Signorile. It was too early for Craxi to be Prime Minister. The President as a Socialist could not risk launching him unless his success were guaranteed. (He remembered Craxi in short trousers ...). The deal with Longo seemed to be all right. There could be a 4-party government. Forlani had been a good choice.
3. There was still a problem over the Liberals. The Republicans would probably refuse to have them. Perhaps they would remain outside but in abstention. The Radicals did not matter.
4. Forlani had been extremely reluctant to take on the task but Pertini had insisted. He had undertaken to keep on Colombo (this in strict confidence). The

DC slate had been Forlani, Fanfani and Piccoli, whereas the previous time Pertini had chosen Cossiga off his own bat and even in the face of some DC criticism.

5. As regards timing, prospects had lengthened since we last spoke. Now it looked as if Forlani would spend the next three days dealing with the problem of the Liberals and consulting again the four parties of the likely coalition on details of the programme (domestic and foreign affairs). He could be ready to lift his reserve at the end of the week - but not on unlucky Friday the 17th! So if it were Saturday the oath could be taken on Sunday and the new government in position thereafter. There seemed little danger of conflict with the State Visit arrangements (save that Colombo would substitute for Cossiga if he were still ill, as seemed likely).

6. Pertini spoke strongly of the undesirability of secret voting, and of the disgraceful performance of the franchi-tiratori. He mentioned the importance of settling the FIAT affair in which he was taking a personal interest. (It is clear that this will affect the PCI attitude.)

7. There was some talk of Anglo-Italian relations on familiar lines. In Belgrade he had spoken warmly to Herr Schmidt of Mrs Thatcher. Schmidt was boorish, as was Genscher. Giscard was haughty. The idea of a Franco/German directorate was anathema.

8. He was very worried about Iran/Iraq and the danger of the conflict spreading. He had been relieved to be able to leave Jordan out of his tour - it would have been embarrassing to call there at this time. Both Iran and Iraq needed an acceptable mediator. (It seemed as if he was asking himself whether there was a role for Italy.) He was also concerned about Libya - a veritable arsenal. He would not be asking Ghaddafi to Italy.

9. He spoke of his impressions of China (and Hong Kong) on familiar lines, and particularly of his unscheduled free-for-all talks with students, who were well informed and asked questions about e.g. the Moro affair and the American hostages in Iran.

10. We discussed wartime experiences in familiar terms.

11. The President was in very good form. His staff say he has been like this since the crisis began. He claimed he withstood the 16-hour flight back from China better than any of the "youngsters" on the plane. He looked forward to the State Visit and assured me again that The Queen would receive a very warm welcome.

M 12. None of the above should be quoted to anyone in Rome, though I have drawn on it for a telegram to the FCO. Neither should the fact that I had this lunch with the President be revealed to anyone outside or indeed within the Embassy beyond those who know already

13 October 1980

Arculus
(R Arculus)