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## The Carter administration and the “communist question” in Italy. The political development and action, 1976-1978

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Jimmy Carter was elected President of the United States in November 1976. A few months earlier, the Italian elections marked an extraordinary result for the Italian Communist Party (PCI), and some of its members obtained institutional roles. During the electoral campaign, members of Carter’s entourage released declarations that seemed to prelude to abandoning the anti-communist veto posed by previous governments. For a year after the inauguration, the US administration maintained an ambiguous position. Nonetheless, on 12 January 1978, the United States reiterated its opposition to any forms of participation of communists in the Italian government. Drawing on a varied set of sources and analysing the role of non-state actors, including think tanks and university centres, this article examines the debate on the Italian “communist question” within the Carter administration and among its advisers. Such discussion will be placed within a wider debate that crossed America’s liberal culture.

**Key words:** Carter Administration, Eurocommunism, Cold War, American Liberalism, Italian Communist party, United States and Italy

In the elections of 1976, the Italian Communist Party (Partito comunista italiano, hereafter PCI) obtained the highest consensus of the post-war period. A few months later, General Secretary Enrico Berlinguer met his French and Spanish counterparts in Madrid, at the first public event of the Eurocommunist phase. Linked to the dynamics of détente and a reason for alarm for both Washington and Moscow, Eurocommunism represented the attempt to develop a European “third road” between Soviet socialism and social democracy, which had been under construction for some years thanks precisely to Berlinguer’s international protagonism.<sup>1</sup> In November 1976, Democrat Jimmy Carter was

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<sup>1</sup> See Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, Turin, Einaudi, 2006; Maud Bracke, *Which Socialism, Whose Détente? West European communism and the Czechoslovak crisis of 1968*, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2007 and Silvio Pons, Michele Di Donato, *Reform communism*, in Juliane Fürst, Silvio Pons, Mark Selden (eds. by), *The Cambridge history of communism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 151-177.

elected into the White House. His administration had to develop a strategy on Eurocommunism and — in particular — against its Italian derivation; the latter undoubtedly worried Washington most, given the concrete possibility of the PCI entering the government. Already during the presidential election campaign, future members of Carter's administration had given signs of discontinuity with the closure to Italian communists, which had marked the Nixon-Ford administrations. Their declarations raised both criticism and hopes in Italy and in the United States, where a debate about the evolution of Italian Marxism and the PCI's democratic legitimacy had been ongoing for about a decade.

The by now rich historiography of Carter's foreign politics, in particular on the American front, has dedicated little or no space to both the "communist question" in Italy and to Eurocommunism.<sup>2</sup> In fact, American politics concerning these matters have mainly been studied in the political historiography of Republican Italy, the latter being located precisely in the international dynamics imposed by the Cold War,<sup>3</sup> and more specifically in studies of Berlinguer's communist politics throughout the years.<sup>4</sup> The issue of American politics under Carter in relation to Italy has also been discussed in works devoted to the history of Italy-US relations, which are analysed within the broader frame of transatlantic relations — unavoidable, really, to understand the dynamics that marked the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> Although Eurocommunism is addressed in these studies, it isn't their main object of investigation. In fact, the studies that focus exclusively on the Carter administration's politics on Eurocommunism

<sup>2</sup> See Scott Kaufman, *Plans unraveled. The foreign policy of the Carter administration*, Dekalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 2008; Timothy P. Meiga, *The world of Jimmy Carter: US foreign policy, 1977-1981*, West Haven (Conn.), University of New Haven Press, 1994; Betty Glad, *An outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, his advisors, and the making of American foreign policy*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2009; Robert A. Strong, *Working in the world: Jimmy Carter and the making of American foreign policy*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University, 2000; John Dumbrell, *The Carter presidency. A Re-evaluation*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1995; Herbert D. Rosenbaum, Alexej Ugrinsky (eds.), *Jimmy Carter foreign policy and post-presidential years*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1994. For an analysis in Italian see Umberto Tulli, *Tra diritti umani e distensione. L'amministrazione Carter e il dissenso in Urss*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Guido Formigoni, *Storia d'Italia nella guerra fredda*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2016, especially pp. 492-518; see also Roberto Gualtieri (ed.), *Il Pci nell'Italia repubblicana*, Rome, Carocci, 1999 and Roberto Gualtieri, *L'Italia dal 1943 al 1992: Dc e Pci nella storia della Repubblica*, Rome, Carocci, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> On Berlinguer see S. Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*; Francesco Barbagallo, *Enrico Berlinguer*, Rome, Carocci, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> See Lucrezia Cominelli, *L'Italia sotto tutela. Stati Uniti, Europa e crisi italiana degli anni Settanta*, Milan, Mondadori, 2015; Umberto Gentiloni Silveri, *L'Italia sospesa. La crisi degli anni Settanta vista da Washington*, Turin, Einaudi 2009 and Umberto Gentiloni Silveri, *Gli anni settanta nel giudizio degli Stati Uniti: "Un ponte verso l'ignoto"*, "Studi Storici", Oct.-Dec. 2001, vol. 42, n. 4, pp. 989-1020.

remain few, and not even the most recent ones<sup>6</sup> — now supported by abundant archival sources — have developed much beyond the interpretations offered by Olav Njølstad and, especially, Irwin Wall, in their essays of 2002 and 2009 respectively. In his study, Njølstad claims that Carter’s Italian politics remained focused on the objective to stem the communists’ rise to power, in continuation with what had happened at the dawn of the Cold War. In his opinion, the Democrats followed the same line as the Nixon-Ford administrations but using different means, therefore remaining loyal to the principle of “non interference” in the internal affairs of other countries.<sup>7</sup> Wall, by contrast, highlights the presence of different opinions regarding the European “communist question” among members of Carter’s administration. Initially playing a waiting game, with the aim of verifying the extent to which the three Italian, French and Spanish parties would have evolved, they would subsequently have moved towards a more rigid position, due to the détente between the United States and the Soviet Union wearing out.<sup>8</sup> The above-mentioned works seem unanimous in stating that, either way, Washington nurtured no desire whatsoever to actively legitimate the PCI’s role in Italian politics. According to certain historiographical interpretations, however, some of the communist leaders of the time disseminated an opposite reading; they attributed a wrong meaning to the dialogue that had been established with a number of representatives of the *liberal* world,<sup>9</sup> several years back, and to some of their public stances.<sup>10</sup>

It is difficult to assess whether the PCI leadership was truly united in the development of a politically motivated strategy capable of approaching the élite

<sup>6</sup> See, among others, Frédéric Heurtebize, *Le Pêril Rouge. Washington face à l’Eurocomunisme*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2014 and Alessandro Brogi, *Confronting America: The Cold War between the United States and the communists in France and Italy*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina University Press, 2011, pp. 325-346. For a detailed reconstruction see also Riccardo Diego Portolani, *Stati Uniti e l’eurocomunismo 1976-1980*, Doctoral thesis, Università di Tor Vergata, discussed in the academic year 2013-2014.

<sup>7</sup> Olav Njølstad, *The Carter administration and Italy: keeping the communists out of power without interfering*, “Journal of Cold War Studies”, Summer 2002, vol. 4, n. 2, pp. 56-94.

<sup>8</sup> Irwin Wall, *L’amministrazione Carter e l’eurocomunismo*, “Ricerche di Storia Politica”, 2006, n. 2, pp. 181-196. The presence of different opinions within the administration also emerges from the ex-ambassador Richard N. Gardner’s memoir, and is mentioned in Silvio Pons, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, pp. 162-163. By now, historiography widely agrees on the different interpretation of the détente, namely as a “static” process for the superpowers and as a “dynamic” process for Europe. Among the many studies on this matter, see Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The rise and fall of Détente. American foreign policy and the transformation of the Cold War*, Washington D.C., Potomac Books, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> See Valentine Lomellini, *When hopes come to naught. The question of Italian communists’ participation in government and the failure of a particular strategy, 1974-1978*, “Journal of European Integration”, 2012, vol. 20, n. 2, pp. 233-244 and Valentine Lomellini, *The Pci and the Usa: rehearsal of a difficult dialogue in the era of détente*, “Journal of Modern Italian Studies”, 2015, vol. 20, n. 3, pp. 346-360.

<sup>10</sup> See, among others, Peter Lange, *What is to be done: about Italian communism?*, “Foreign Policy”, Winter, 1975-1976, n. 21, pp. 224-240.

overseas, or if certain individual proponents — albeit in important positions — were pushing in this direction, based on personal convictions rather than real shared strategies. What is certain is that, if there was a possibility that the project of “opening up” to the Italian communists could have political consequences for the United States, it was only with Carter’s entry into the White House — a short Democratic pause in 16 years of Republican rule. Various actors, all but united, sought to guide the Democrats in the way they handled the “communist question” in Western Europe. As suggested by the archives of the Trilateral Commission and the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), and also by Donald L.M. Blackmer’s personal archive, held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the network of people who tried — occasionally with success — to influence the politics of Carter’s administration is composed of different elements, on which we must place the proper amount of importance. In Italy, the debate on the “communist question” developed within liberal culture, which could very roughly be described in terms of a conflict between the most conservative and the most progressive fringes: the former sustained that, had the PCI remained outside the government, it could more easily have obtained a turn towards social democracy; among the latter, some argued that the very entry into government would have favoured such an outcome, whereas others claimed, instead, that the PCI was *de facto* similar to the parties of the European socialist Left. The liberals’ fragmentation in the 1970s, although by no means a novelty, was significant, since in those years the neoconservative turn was accomplished, which had consequences also for interpretations of European communism.

If we expand our perspective from the American sources to the PCI archives, held at the Fondazione Istituto Gramsci of Rome, the range of protagonists participating in the debate on the “communist question” in Italy widens considerably. These come to include a series of university centres, among which Columbia University’s Research Institute for International Change, as well as individual representatives of the academic world and of the think tanks that, in one way or another, attempted to insert themselves into the debate. In some cases, as the sources of the James E. Carter Presidential Library demonstrate, political scientists and politicians developed personal relationships that were not free from predominance and role inversions; at times, rather than a real relationship, there was a direct influence on the other’s way of acting and thinking. The picture that we have before us therefore requires a by no means easy balancing act.

Still today, when asked about the actual influence on Carter’s administration of those who sustained the necessity to abandon the PCI’s traditional “*conventio ad excludendum*” from government, the political scientist Robert N. Putnam — who had studied Italian communism at the start of his career and who became an American government consultant in 1977 — replies that it is

a “hard question”.<sup>11</sup> Focusing on the two-year period of 1976-1978, this article aims to reply to this question, or at the least seeks to develop more in-depth analyses as opposed to those that have thus far been advanced.

### **Prior to the election: the Trilateral Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations and the PCI**

Carter’s path towards nomination by the Democratic convention initiated in 1974. Harvard’s Sovietologist Zbigniew Brzezinski, also former electoral advisor to John F. Kennedy and advisor to Lyndon Johnson, asked Carter to join the Trilateral Commission, an informal network of entrepreneurs, political representatives, scholars and journalists from the United States (and Canada), Western Europe and Japan. The previous year, Brzezinski had helped set up the network together with his friend David Rockefeller, banker and heir to the powerful American family. The theoretical premises for the Trilateral’s creation resided in the conviction that, at a time when ideologies were losing their force and deindustrialisation of the most advanced economies was enhancing global interdependence, the guarantee of global equilibria could no longer be an exclusive prerogative of the United States. Rather, it became necessary to involve the other economically most developed, parts of global capitalism.<sup>12</sup> The entry into the Trilateral Commission allowed Carter to gain greater knowledge of foreign politics and to establish relationships with many of those who were to join his administration: the same Brzezinski became his National Security Advisor, Walter Mondale was nominated vice president, and Cyrus Vance Secretary of State.<sup>13</sup>

The Trilateral’s most famous report is probably “The Crisis of Democracy”, co-authored in 1975 by the French sociologist Michel J. Crozier, by the American political scientist Samuel Huntington and by the Japanese sociologist Joji Watanuki. A little over 70 pages long, this document analysed the capacity of democratic regimes to endure the ongoing economic crisis and social challenges that emerged in the 1960s. According to the rapporteurs,

<sup>11</sup> Robert N. Putnam, interview with author, 4 April 2017. Putnam’s works on the PCI include *The Italian communist politician*, in Donald Blackmer and Sidney Tarrow (eds.), *Communism in Italy and France*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976, pp. 173-220 and *Interdependence and the Italian communists*, “International Organization”, 1978, vol. 32, n. 2, pp. 301-349.

<sup>12</sup> On the foundation of the Trilateral Commission, see Dino Knudsen, *The Trilateral commission and global governance: informal elite diplomacy, 1972-82*, New York, Routledge, 2016, p. 29.

<sup>13</sup> See Vance’s account in Cyrus Vance, *Hard choices. Critical years in America’s foreign Policy*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1983, pp. 26-39. On the criticism of Carter’s poor experience in foreign politics, see S. Kaufman, *Plans unraveled*. A total of 22 members of the administration were part of the Trilateral Commission.

the main threat to democratic stability was no longer represented by national communist parties (neither in Western Europe nor in Japan) but by the radical phenomena that might emerge — and that were indeed emerging — in the fragmented socio-cultural context of the time.<sup>14</sup> In search of a spokesperson who could guarantee stability and control over the masses, the European section of the Trilateral Commission established a relationship with Sergio Segre, director of the PCI's foreign branch. We know very little about this relationship; some information is contained in the autobiography of one of the network's members, Richard N. Gardner, who was appointed American ambassador to Italy in 1977, and who played a fundamental role — as we will see further ahead — in the development of American politics regarding the PCI.<sup>15</sup> This is also implied by Dino Knudsen, although he doesn't cite any primary sources. Knudsen goes so far as to claim that the Italian party “became affiliated with the Trilateral Commission”,<sup>16</sup> where Eurocommunism was internally promoted by some of its members (including Gianni Agnelli) and inserted into a wider debate about the European Left. Segre met Brzezinski precisely on the occasion of a gathering organised by the Trilateral's European section, which took place prior to the American elections of November 1976. The future National Security Advisor informed Segre that Carter could not, for the moment, “push further ahead” in public declarations about the “communist question” in Italy, but that he was “open to discussion” and that, in any case, “the staff that surround him are following the course of Italian politics and of the PCI with great attention”.<sup>17</sup>

The Trilateral wasn't Segre's only interlocutor, though. A number of American liberals had started approaching him in 1973, including Professor Alan A. Platt, a scholar of American foreign politics in Italy<sup>18</sup> as well as a pupil of Roger Hilsman, former director of the Bureau of Intelligence Research (INR) in the State Department of Kennedy's administration. Platt also served as a State Department official and as advisor to Senator Edward Muskie, who would substitute Cyrus Vance as Secretary of State after the latter stepped down in 1980.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, Segre established a relationship with Joseph

<sup>14</sup> Michel J. Crozier, Samuel Huntington Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of democracy. Report to the governability of democracies to the Trilateral Commission*, New York, New York University Press, 1975, pp. 55-56.

<sup>15</sup> Richard N. Gardner, *Mission: Italy. Gli anni di piombo raccontati dall'ambasciatore americano a Roma 1977-1981*, Milan, Mondadori, 2004.

<sup>16</sup> D. Knudsen, *The Trilateral Commission*, pp. 149-150.

<sup>17</sup> Confidential note to Berlinguer from Segre, 24 September 1976, in Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del Partito comunista italiano, Note alla Segreteria, mf. 243, p. 427X, V bim. 1976.

<sup>18</sup> Alan A. Platt, Silvio Leonardi, *American foreign policy and the postwar Italian left*, “Political Science Quarterly”, Summer 1978, vol. 93, n. 2, pp. 197-215.

<sup>19</sup> Note for Berlinguer, G.C. Pajetta, Segreteria, 29 April 1975, in Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del Partito comunista italiano, Estero, mf. 204, p. 543, II bim. 1975.

LaPalombara, an Italianist and political scientist at Yale who was nominated as cultural *attaché* of the American embassy in via Veneto, and an “advisor to the Democratic Party” from 1976 onwards.<sup>20</sup> Other than institutional contacts,<sup>21</sup> in fact, for some time now Segre also maintained contacts with a network of academics and experts. In 1975, Stanley Hoffmann and Zygmunt Nagorski, the directors of the Center for European Studies at Harvard University and the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) — the think tank founded in New York in 1921 — respectively, invited Giorgio Napolitano and Segre to the United States for a cycle of conferences. The refusal of the State Department under Henry Kissinger to grant an entry visa (in accordance with the 1950 McCarran Act) meant nothing came of it. Nevertheless, the *querelle* drew the attention of the Italian and American press, which sided against the State Department’s decision, and encouraged a number of influential names on the American political scene to intervene. Kennedy’s former advisor, Arthur Schlesinger jr., called it an “absurdity”,<sup>22</sup> while the political scientist Richard Holbrooke — subsequently nominated as State Department advisor in Carter’s administration — argued, on the pages of “Foreign Policy”, that this represented a violation of the decrees regarding freedom of movement contained in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975.<sup>23</sup>

With Ford’s defeat and Carter’s entry into the White House, the possibility of a dialogue between the PCI and the United States seemed to materialise. The opening declarations and contacts liberal representatives established with the Italian party’s leadership were the outcome of a theoretic elaboration, which counted among its main protagonists precisely the CFR, the Trilateral and the university research centres, predominantly those in the north-east. In the mid-1970s, the CFR launched a research project on communism, in collaboration with the Bologna-based International Affairs Institute (Istituto Affari Internazionali, hereafter IAI), the most renowned centre for the elaboration of Italian foreign politics.<sup>24</sup> The premises of this project were similar to those that had inspired political scientists involved in the Planning Group of the American Political Science Association (APSA) a few years earlier. They were advanced, in particular, by the Italianist and State Department advisor as

<sup>20</sup> Note for Berlinguer, Chiaromonte, Napolitano, Peggio, 30 April 1976, in Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del Partito comunista italiano, Estero, mf. 228, p. 791X, II bim. 1976.

<sup>21</sup> For example, the Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy. V. Lomellini, *The Pci and the Usa*, p. 353.

<sup>22</sup> R. Brancoli, *Gli Usa e il Pci*, p. 24.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Holbrooke, *Dateline: a little visa problem*, “Foreign Policy”, Winter 1975-1976, n. 21, p. 247.

<sup>24</sup> On the IAI see Piero Graglia, *Altiero Spinelli e la genesi dello Iai: il federalismo, il gruppo de “il Mulino” e la dimensione internazionale del lavoro culturale*, in Daniela Preda (ed.), *Altiero Spinelli e i movimenti per l’unità europea*, Padova, Cedam, 2010, pp. 245-277.

well as a professor at MIT, Donald L.M. Blackmer;<sup>25</sup> the end of the communist movement's monolithic rule, and the attempts of Western European parties to free themselves from Moscow's control were by now irreversible, as events such as the Sino-Soviet dispute and the invasion of Czechoslovakia following the "Prague Spring" of 1968 had demonstrated. The interpretation of the latter incident was perhaps too bold, but it nurtured the conviction that it was necessary to study the relations between different communist parties more closely. A debate was launched within the CFR, which ran parallel to that of the APSA, and in September 1974 the proposal was made to form an ad hoc discussion group. Participants included Brzezinski, the historian and Sovietologist at MIT William E. Griffith, his colleague and future advisor to Carter Donald Zagoria, and Raymond Garthoff, a former State Department advisor.<sup>26</sup> Emblematic of the group's objectives was a meeting held in Bologna in November 1976, on the initiative of Cesare Merlini, the IAI's director and a Trilateral Commission member, co-organised with Zygmunt Nagorski, director of the CFR. On this occasion, an explicit request was made to include someone from the "Carter people" in the guest list.<sup>27</sup> The conference outcomes were summarised by Arrigo Levi, a journalist of "La Stampa", also member of the Trilateral's European section and a member of the IAI since its establishment, in the "Newsweek" issue of 6 December 1976.<sup>28</sup> Levi's article ended as follows:

To me, one thing seems clear: a refusal on the part of American officials to meet Western communist leaders or to allow them entry in the U.S. makes just about as much sense as it does for the ostrich to hide the head in the sand in times of danger.<sup>29</sup>

This pragmatic course of action, according to which a closure to any legitimation of the Western European communists — typical of American politics during the Nixon-Ford era — made little sense, seemed to prevail within the

<sup>25</sup> Donald L.M. Blackmer, Paper Presentation, 1968, American political science association (APSA), in Massachusetts institute of technology libraries, Institute archives and special collections, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Donald L.M. Blackmer Papers, Box 4, MC 715.

<sup>26</sup> Discussion group on intercommunist relations, 18 September 1974, in Department of rare books and special collections, Princeton university library, Public policy papers, Council on foreign relations records: Studies Department series, Box 210, Folder 3.

<sup>27</sup> In the end, they chose Richard Holbrooke, a "left-wing" liberal who collaborated with the State Department when it was directed by Cyrus Vance. Wilfried L. Kohl to Zygmunt Nagorski, 22 July 1976, in Department of rare books and special collections, Princeton university library, Public policy papers, Council on foreign relations meeting records, 1920-1995, Box 569, Folder 5.

<sup>28</sup> Préparation et Fondation de l'Istituto affari internazionali (IAI), Istituto affari internazionali: Comitato direttivo e soci, 15 February 1976, in Historical archives of the European union, Altiero Spinelli Fonds, AS 46, 01/05/64-03/02/66; The members list of the Trilateral Commission in 1973 is contained in Triangle Paper n. 1, Towards a renovated world monetary system, 22-23 October 1973, [http://trilateral.org/download/doc/world\\_monetary\\_system\\_19731.pdf](http://trilateral.org/download/doc/world_monetary_system_19731.pdf) (last accessed 14 June 2018).

<sup>29</sup> Arrigo Levi, *Consider the Ostrich*, "Newsweek", 6 December 1976, p. 15.



new Democratic administration. In an interview with the weekly magazine “Time”, published on 22 December 1976, Brzezinski confirmed that, although the United States and allied governments should not favour the communists’ rise to power in Europe, “the fact that Eurocommunism is heading towards destalinisation and, subsequently, deleninisation, is something very welcome”. He added that, in the long run, this process would have contributed to weaken “Soviet control” over the European communist parties.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, Vance — speaking from the pages of the weekly magazine “Newsweek” — noted that the communists’ entry into Western European governments could upset the relations between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe far more than it might destabilise the NATO.<sup>31</sup> Vance and Brzezinski’s positions on Eurocommunism were therefore similar: the détente started, or accelerated, processes such as those in which the PCI, the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) played a primary role. Its potentials therefore had to be exploited if the United States was to destroy the Soviet enemy in view of an attempt to assimilate these parties to democratic systems and avoid coming to a violent “confrontation”.

In the same year of the conference co-organised by the CFR, Segre published an article in the think tank’s official magazine “Foreign Affairs”, entitled *The Communist Question in Italy*. This wasn’t the first time that an Italian politician made himself heard in this magazine. The leader of the Italian Socialist Party (Partito Socialista Italiano, hereafter PSI), Pietro Nenni, had done the same — albeit after a period of stalling — during the political phase of the “opening to the Left”,<sup>32</sup> following the invitation in 1956 of the then director of “Foreign Affairs”, Hamilton Fish Armstrong.<sup>33</sup> William P. Bundy, the magazine’s new director, invited Segre to write the article, in a letter where he suggested that Segre should discuss the points that raised most doubts in him about his party’s role in Italian politics, focusing on the PCI’s foreign politics, in particular. Furthermore, Bundy was keen for Segre to include a brief historical excursus on the PCI as well as explicit references to the importance of Antonio Gramsci’s philosophy for Italian Marxism.<sup>34</sup> Segre’s piece seems to have respected these guidelines, which were quite reasonable in

<sup>30</sup> Rodolfo Brancoli, *Spettatori interessati: gli Stati Uniti e la crisi italiana, 1975-1980*, Milan, Garzanti, 1980, p. 158 and Bino Olivi, *Carter e l’Italia. La politica estera americana, l’Europa e i comunisti italiani*, Milan, Longanesi, 1978, p. 116.

<sup>31</sup> As Vance sees it, “Newsweek”, 13 December 1976.

<sup>32</sup> Pietro Nenni, *Where the Italian socialists stand*, “Foreign Affairs”, January 1962, vol. 40, n. 2, pp. 213-223. In that same year Altiero Spinelli had published a piece in the magazine. Altiero Spinelli, *Atlantic pact or European unity*, “Foreign Affairs”, July 1962, vol. 40, n. 4, pp. 542-552.

<sup>33</sup> Leopoldo Nuti, *Gli Stati Uniti e l’apertura a sinistra. Importanza e limiti della presenza americana in Italia*, Bari-Rome, Laterza, 1999, pp. 86-88.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from William Bundy to Sergio Segre, 18 December 1975, in Department of rare books and special Collections, Princeton university library, William P. Bundy Papers, Box 3.

light of the ongoing debate in the American intellectual panorama. The author took advantage of the occasion to clarify certain aspects of the “historical compromise” Berlinguer had launched in 1973. In his analysis of the communist strategy in foreign affairs, Segre insisted on the importance of supporting the détente and the integration of Western Europe, two objectives that could only be obtained if existing alliances remained in place. He mentioned the Soviet Union only once, when he recalled Berlinguer’s public criticism of Moscow in 1976, and he stressed that the PCI’s relationship with the United States was a healthy one, even if not without criticalities caused by attempted interferences in Italian internal politics, of which part of the American establishment had given evidence over time.<sup>35</sup> Segre had undoubtedly adapted his words to an educated and informed audience; for this purpose, he included not only quotes from Gramsci (five of a total of approximately 800 words),<sup>36</sup> but also continuous references to political representatives or famous exponents of the Italian, non-communist ruling class who had opened up to his party, such as Umberto Agnelli, Altiero Spinelli, Luigi Granelli, Francesco De Martino and Pietro Nenni.

During one of the presidential debates of 1976, Carter’s challenger, Gerald Ford, accused him of having “looked with sympathy” at a possible entry of the communists into the governments of the NATO member countries.<sup>37</sup> Carter limited himself to call his challenger’s statement “ridiculous”, and made an important observation, on suggestion of his collaborators. In the debate’s preparatory notes, his staff highlighted the fact that Eurocommunism wasn’t a real and unitary phenomenon but that, quite the contrary, various national parties existed with different political objectives. While not in favour of a communist party entering a Western government, the United States, the document continues, would have adopted a wait-and-see policy in this regard.<sup>38</sup> The novelty — which in reality ended up being insufficient in leading to a turn of the Americans — lay in the rejection of the “domino theory”, which had

<sup>35</sup> Sergio Segre, *The “Communist question” in Italy*, “Foreign Affairs”, July 1976, vol. 54, n. 4, pp. 691-707.

<sup>36</sup> It was precisely in this period that Gramsci’s oeuvre, which had already been translated into English some years before, started to exert fascination and to be disseminated. See David Forgacs, *Le edizioni inglesi di Gramsci*, in Derek Boothman, Francesco Giasi, Giuseppe Vacca (eds.), *Gramsci in Gran Bretagna*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2015; Keith Nield, John Seed, *Waiting for Gramsci*, “Social History”, 1981, vol. 6, n. 2, pp. 209-227; Frank Rosengarten, *John Cammett’s writings on Antonio Gramsci and the Pci*, “Journal of Modern Italian Studies”, March 2015, vol. 16, n. 1, pp. 195-210 and Leonardo Paggi, *Dear John, where is the world we lost?*, “Journal of Modern Italian Studies”, March 2015, vol. 16, n. 1, pp. 170-178.

<sup>37</sup> Gerald Ford Presidential Campaign Debate, 6 October 1976, available online at: [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=6414](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=6414) (last accessed 30 October 2014).

<sup>38</sup> Briefing Book, 28 September 1976, in James E. Carter Presidential library, Records of the 1976 Campaign committee to Elect Jimmy Carter, Dave Rubenstein’s Subject Files, Box 45, Briefing Book, 9/28/76 [1-2]. See also R. Portolani, *Stati Uniti e l’eurocomunismo 1976-1980*, pp. 83-84.

been applied to the expansion of communism in Europe: a reading shared by many political scientists, among which Stanley Hoffmann, to name the most famous one.<sup>39</sup> It stressed the differences between the various states “at risk” of communist influence, rather than highlighting what they had in common, thus allowing for a wider range of political strategies to be developed in a distinct way, based on national cases.

### **Gardner in via Veneto: the pressure to adopt an official stance**

Jimmy Carter was elected president of the United States on 2 November 1976. When the news of the Democrats’ victory in the United States spread, *L’Unità* published an article on the front page, entitled ‘Carter elected new American president. The will to change triumphed in the US’. A comment by Segre and a declaration by Berlinguer on the outcome of the American vote accompanied the article. For both, Carter’s presidency could represent an important change of pace, as well as the hope to develop “solid friendship relations with the great American nation”.<sup>40</sup> After all, the PCI had never been so close to entering the government; following the extraordinary results of the 1976 elections, the exclusively Christian Democratic government run by Giulio Andreotti had been made possible by the communist abstention, in exchange for a number of institutional positions.

When the new administration began nominating the diplomatic staff in Europe, the first ambiguities emerged from the wait-and-see policy that took inspiration from the “non-interference and non-indifference” principle. When they reached their respective headquarters, the ambassadors and their

<sup>39</sup> During a hearing before one of the House committees, Hoffmann clearly stated that Eurocommunism “did not exist and would never have existed”. Western Europe in 1978: Political Trends and U.S. Policy, Hearings before the subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the Committee on international relations house of representatives Ninety-Fifth Congress Second Session July 12, 17; and August 3, 1978. Printed for the use of the Committee on international relations, Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978, p. 77. Moreover, for Hoffmann, the growth of the Communist parties in Western Europe was more a problem for Moscow than it was for Washington. Stanley Hoffmann, *Primacy or world order: American foreign policy since the Cold War*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1980, pp. 82-83.

<sup>40</sup> *Dichiarazione di Berlinguer*, “L’Unità”, 4 November 1976; see, in the same edition, *Carter nuovo Presidente americano. È prevalsa negli Usa una volontà di cambiamento* and Sergio Segre, *I riflessi di una scelta*. See also *Jimmy Carter esclude interferenze contro i comunisti al governo*, “L’Unità”, 17 September 1976 and Antonio Rubbi, *Il mondo di Berlinguer*, Milan, Napoleone, 1983, p. 55. After all, the PCI had used similar tones during the electoral campaigns. See Alberto Jacoviello, *Kissinger non è tutto*, “L’Unità”, 5 May 1976; *Carter: “nessun muro contro l’Italia se vince il Pci”*, “L’Unità”, 4 May 1976; *Carter, Brown e Church concordati: è un “errore” la chiusura al Pci*, “L’Unità”, 2 June 1976; *Giudizi di Carter sul voto in Italia*, “L’Unità”, 24 June 1976; *Jimmy Carter esclude interferenze contro i comunisti al governo*, “L’Unità”, 17 September 1976.

collaborators found themselves having to answer politicians, journalists and public opinion about the new administration's stance on the "communist question". Nevertheless, thanks to different actors putting pressure on the State Department, it waited about two and a half months after Carter took office in the White House — on 6 April 1977 — before it publicly expressed itself on Eurocommunism. These actors included the new ambassador to Italy, Richard N. Gardner, who took up service in via Veneto in March 1977.<sup>41</sup> Gardner, a law professor at Columbia University and a Trilateral Commission member, had worked as a lawyer for companies of the likes of Fiat (this position allowed him to get to know Gianni Agnelli personally). He had various personal connections with journalists such as Arrigo Levi, Ugo Stille and Furio Colombo, with the President of the Bank of Italy, Guido Carli, and with one of the economists of the Club of Rome, Aurelio Peccei.<sup>42</sup> "L'Unità" called the choice of the new ambassador who was stationed in Rome "interesting", given his past experiences in diplomatic contexts, where he had contributed to develop a policy of "non-interference" in the internal affairs of other countries.<sup>43</sup>

When Gardner took office, the sole indication he had received concerning the "communist question" was that he should expand contacts with PCI representatives at all levels. These guidelines were issued by the State Department and regarded the countries with the most influential communist parties: Italy, France and Spain. In Rome, in addition to Segre, Luciano Barca and Giancarlo Pajetta, Emanuele Macaluso also started having regular contacts with the diplomatic official Martin Wenick, who had already been employed during John Volpe's mandate (1974-1976), and with the political secretary and director of the embassy in via Veneto, Alan Ford.<sup>44</sup> The strategy of expanding contacts wasn't a novelty in itself, nor was it in any way specific to the Italian situation.<sup>45</sup> It more likely represented a means of playing for time while analysing the single national contexts and trying to establish a collaboration with the

<sup>41</sup> Memorandum for the President, from Zbigniew Brzezinski, Swearing-in of Ambassador Gardner, 18 March 1977, in James E. Carter Presidential Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Country File, Italy, Box 38.

<sup>42</sup> R.N. Gardner, *Mission: Italy*, pp. 11-14.

<sup>43</sup> Gardner *rappresenterà gli Stati Uniti a Roma*, "L'Unità", 7 January 1977, p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> Sergio Segre cited in A. Rubbi, *Il mondo di Berlinguer*, p. 57; see also Michael Ledeen, *West European communism and American foreign policy*, New Brunswick and Oxford, Transaction Books, 1987, p. 79; R. Gardner, *Mission: Italy*, pp. 124-126 and Emanuele Macaluso, *50 anni nel Pci*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2004, p. 208.

<sup>45</sup> The first archival reference is dated 1973. Note to Berlinguer and Novella, from Sergio Segre, 9 June 1973, in Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del Partito comunista italiano, Estero, mf. 065, p. 1403X, IV sem. 1973; nevertheless, Luciano Barca and Antonio Rubbi had been meeting with diplomatic officials as of 1967. See Luciano Barca, *Cronache dall'interno dei vertici del Pci*, vol. II, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2006, pp. 601-603, and the reconstruction of Mario Margiocco, *Stati Uniti e Pci*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1981.

non-communist political forces of the various countries. In other words, Washington possibly hoped to have more time than it actually had so as to take a decision on the politics to adopt with regard to the “communist question”. In fact, from the very beginning, Carter’s administration was pressured to take a stance more rapidly; in March 1977, the Italian-American lobby — headed by an entrepreneur from the food industry, Jeno Paolucci — insisted on bringing Prime Minister Andreotti to the United States, precisely with the purpose of forcing the American government to make a public declaration on Italian politics.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, the Italian ambassador in Washington, Roberto Gaja, appears to have insisted that the Carter administration take a position on the PCI (expressing his disapproval of the communists entering the government).<sup>47</sup> At the same time, two influential conservative columnists of the *Washington Post* (Rowland Evans and Robert Novak) raised a controversy when they accused Gardner of having caused resentment among the DC leadership, following his encounter with the communist Pietro Ingrao.<sup>48</sup> In reality, he had received Ingrao in via Veneto in his institutional role as president of the Chamber of Deputies. Hence, to the background of the Carter administration’s silence on the Italian “communist question” even an — in itself irrelevant — incident prescribed by protocol could raise an uproar (nurtured also by part of the Italian press).

Gardner sent a formal request to Washington to intervene in the matter, but National Security Advisor Brzezinski merely suggested some possible replies that would appease the tensions. If the Carter administration hadn’t yet expressed itself on the “communist question”, Brzezinski wrote, this was because its politics regarding the PCI hadn’t changed from that of the previous administration. At the same time, though, the White House didn’t want to “cause embarrassment” to the Christian Democracy (Democrazia Cristiana, hereafter DC) by intervening directly in its support, an attitude that would not respect the guidelines of the “non-interference” policy set out by Washington.<sup>49</sup> Either way, about a week later, on 6 April 1977, the State Department’s spokesperson made a public statement about the American stance on Eurocommunism. He declared that the United States attributed “great importance” to its “capacity to work with the Countries of Western Europe on questions of vital interest”, but that these capacities

<sup>46</sup> Memorandum for Brzezinski and Bill Hyland, from David Aaron, 15 March 1977, in James E. Carter Presidential Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Country File, Italy, Box 38. The actual influence of the Italian-American lobby in the politics of those years remains a topic open for research.

<sup>47</sup> I. Wall, *L’amministrazione Carter e l’Italia*, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, *Carter’s Dilemma With ‘Eurocommunists’*, “The Washington Post”, 31 March 1977; see also R. Brancoli, *Spettatori interessati*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>49</sup> Memo to Richard Gardner, from Brzezinski, 31 March 1977, in James E. Carter Presidential Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Country File, Italy, Box 38.

[m]ight be weakened if similar governments were to be *dominated* [my italics] by political parties whose specific traditions, values and actions are unrelated to the fundamental democratic principles and shared interests that form the basis of our relations with Western Europe.<sup>50</sup>

Gardner read the text “in disbelief”,<sup>51</sup> and sent another memorandum, this time to the State Department, whose words he criticised for being too weak and ineffective for the Italian context.<sup>52</sup> In reality, the ambiguous wording of the April memorandum had been deliberate. In fact, when Gardner again rang the alarm bells, the State Department replied dryly and in a far less concerned manner than its interlocutor; in just two points, Vance’s telegram to Gardner explained that to speak of a communist party’s “dominion”, rather than of its “participation” in the government of any Western country, proved to be more functional to Washington’s politics at that time. The announcement made reference, indeed, to all the parties of Eurocommunism, not just the Italian case. The text therefore had “an intentional ambiguity, since it leaves the judgement of specific future events in our hands”.<sup>53</sup> The State Department suggested Gardner solve the situation by making it clear to Italian political leaders — “during private conversations” — that the United States did not support the “historical compromise” and that it would have done nothing to promote it.<sup>54</sup> In other words, the fact that the Italians — as the ambassador emphasised — did not consider the statement of 6 April a stance on the “communist question” on behalf of the American administration was precisely what Washington expected. In making this choice, contrary to what had previously been declared and as proof that the federal government’s politics were not coherent in this matter, Carter’s administration adopted the regional approach to the “communist question”. In view of the upcoming French local elections, while his government didn’t want to compromise the “non-interference” policy, at the same time it didn’t want to irritate the French President Giscard d’Estaing even further; the latter had asked Washington to express itself on a possible victory of the Left in France.<sup>55</sup>

To avoid tying his hands in one direction or another, for some months Carter continued to speak in vague terms. For example, when Vittorio Zucconi of *La Stampa* interviewed him during a press conference for European journalists,

<sup>50</sup> R. Brancoli, *Spettatori interessati*, pp. 180-181.

<sup>51</sup> R. Gardner, *Mission: Italy*, p. 88.

<sup>52</sup> Telegram to Department of State and Brzezinski, from Rome, 8 April 1977, in James E. Carter Presidential Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Country File, Italy, Box 38.

<sup>53</sup> Telegram from Secretary of State to Embassy of Rome, April 1977, in James E. Carter Presidential Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Country File, Italy, Box 38.

<sup>54</sup> Telegram from Secretary of State to Embassy of Rome, April 1977, loc. cit. a nota 53.

<sup>55</sup> Frédéric Heurtebize, *Washington face à l’Union de la gauche en France, 1971-1981*, “Revue française d’études américaines”, deuxième trimestre 2010, pp. 91-94.

at the end of April 1977, he reaffirmed that the United States preferred for NATO countries to be governed by democratic parties, and that no “totalitarian element” could ever become “influential or dominant”.<sup>56</sup> Once again he was thinking of the French case, where the Socialist Party (PSF) had three times the consensus of the PCF. What Carter always forgot to specify is what would have happened if his administration were to be confronted with Western government formations involving communist-led ministries. By avoiding this issue, the White House resident in fact left open the possibility to dialogue and collaborate, in the near future, with any type of government. Hence, the distinction between national cases resided not so much in the nature of the communist parties as in that of the other parties: whether the latter were capable of managing, from a position of power, the entry of Western communist parties into the governments of the respective countries.

### **Signs of dialogue, the CFR and the Research Institute for International Change**

In May 1977, the CFR organised a conference with Carlo Maria Santoro. As a historian, an expert in international relations and a member of the PCI’s economic commission, Santoro wasn’t new to encounters with the American intellectual world. Already in November 1976, when he was a regional councillor in the Veneto region, he had had the opportunity to travel overseas on a research trip and meet “men from the business world, university professors, bankers, some politicians, famous journalists”.<sup>57</sup> These had questioned him about his party’s positions, specifically its links with Moscow and the credibility of its economic politics. In a note to Berlinguer, Santoro underlined the fact that many of the people who gravitated around the CFR were critical of Kissinger’s politics on Eurocommunism, especially with regard to visas. In this sense, Carter’s election — according to the historian — could have marked a change of pace. He nevertheless warned not to be overwhelmed by easy and premature enthusiasm. Until that moment, the declarations of the new resident of the White House certainly hadn’t given much evidence of any significant opening up to the communists of Western Europe. More importantly, it was precisely because of the nature of the presidency that had only just taken office — “heir to that missionary and spiritual tradition that passed from Wilson via

<sup>56</sup> Jimmy Carter European Newspaper Journalists - Question-and-Answer Session, 25 April 1977, available online at: [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7435&st=&st1=](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7435&st=&st1=) (last accessed 4 July 2018).

<sup>57</sup> Letter from the Communist Party Veneto federation to Berlinguer. Venice, 9 December 1976, in Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del partito comunista italiano, Estero, mf. 281, p. 475X, VI bim. 1976.

Roosevelt to Kennedy and even Johnson” — that the United States couldn’t be expected to relinquish its role as world power, responsible as it was (viewed from a Wilsonian perspective) for the safeguarding of power relations in the global arena.<sup>58</sup>

After the leadership’s approval, Santoro participated in the conference the CFR organised in 1977. On his return, he sent the PCI’s administrative office a note in which he listed the peculiarities of the CFR’s invitation, offering a lucid and accurate analysis of the meeting. Thus, it was the first encounter to have an essentially political meaning (Santoro had been allowed to travel “as a communist” thanks to a waiver to the McCarran Act, granted by the embassy in Rome). It was organised by the CFR, which counted among its members a number of political representatives of the time, including Vance and Brzezinski. What is more, the majority of Santoro’s interlocutors on this occasion represented the economic and financial sectors of the American ruling class: the president of Morgan and Stanley, Frank Petito; David Lund, the economist that directed the Department of Commerce; and John Diebold, president of the consulting firm of the same name.<sup>59</sup> Despite the meeting’s positive outcome, Santoro complained that from the American side only “areal” readings of communism had emerged, rather than an analysis of the specific Italian case. The CFR’s interlocutors — much like the members of the administration, the industrials and the bankers Santoro met at the conference — tended to read Italian political events in light of their relevance in the Mediterranean area, or within the dialectic between East and West. Or further still, they would assimilate the PCI to European social democracies, utterly failing to grasp the peculiarity of the Italian political tradition vis-à-vis the continent it was a part and parcel of.<sup>60</sup> Whether it was to challenge Santoro or — what is more likely — to tackle the concern raised by the Union de la Gauche in France, in view of the 1978 elections, the traditional fear of communist contagion in Western Europe resurfaced once again.

The debate didn’t end here. Still in 1977, the communist Lucio Libertini travelled overseas and met certain “friends of Columbia University”.<sup>61</sup> This meeting was organised by Professor Seweryn Bialer, one of the best known American Sovietologists and director of the Research Institute for International Change

<sup>58</sup> Letter from the Communist Party Veneto federation to Berlinguer. Venice, 9 December 1976, loc. cit. a nota 57.

<sup>59</sup> Note to Berlinguer, Pajetta, Napolitano, Administrative Office. From Sergio Segre, 18 July 1977, in Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del Partito comunista italiano, Note to Administrative Office, mf. 299, p. 205X, IV bim. 1977.

<sup>60</sup> Note to Berlinguer, Pajetta, Napolitano, Administrative Office. From Sergio Segre, 18 July 1977 loc. cit. a nota 59.

<sup>61</sup> Note to Berlinguer, Pajetta, Napolitano, Chiaromonte, Administrative Office, in Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del Partito comunista italiano, Estero, mf. 298, p. 598X, III bim. 1977.



(a research centre affiliated with the City University of New York), which had been directed also by Brzezinski. Two State Department advisors also participated in the Columbia University meeting, as well as a columnist of the “New York Times”. On this occasion, Bialer suggested to Libertini that they should organise a series of research seminars, to be sponsored by Columbia University and the Gramsci Institute.<sup>62</sup> Bialer was convinced that the PCI had initiated the transition to a social democracy, and that it was in a more advanced stage than its Western European counterparts. Moreover, he stressed the ideological distinctions inherent in the currents and, specifically, the potential distance between the leaders’ moderation and the maximalism of part of the electorate. As he wrote in 1977, if the danger was that a social communist victory might unleash reactionary forces in Italy and strengthen the most “hard-line” positions among communists, it remained necessary to study the actual state of the debate within the PCI while continuing to observe the entire panorama of Italian parties.<sup>63</sup> His approaching the communist leadership was therefore part of a wider project that probably also represented an attempt to support the party’s more moderate section, in view of a transition to social democracy, at a point in which the dialogue between the European social democratic parties was becoming ever more intense, though not more effective or linear.<sup>64</sup>

Initially, Bialer’s proposal remained unheard, and it wasn’t until 18 January 1978 — after the publication of the State Department’s Memorandum, which I will discuss in the next section — that the PCI’s leadership returned to the issue. It was Libertini who put it back on the table, in a letter to Gerardo Chiaromonte: “the atmosphere has probably changed, certain things have taken a turn to our detriment. Still, if we want, we can try to use the channel that had opened”.<sup>65</sup> Apparently there were three meetings, held between 1978 and 1980, which brought together the leaders of the Italian and Spanish communist parties, in addition to exponents of the European social democratic Left, as well as representatives of Columbia, Princeton, MIT, the City University of New York, various research centres of the old continent and the IAI.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Note to Berlinguer, Pajetta, Napolitano, Chiaromonte, Administrative Office, loc. cit. a nota 61.

<sup>63</sup> Note to Berlinguer, Pajetta, Napolitano, Chiaromonte, Administrative Office, loc. cit. a nota 61.

<sup>64</sup> For an in-depth reconstruction of the relationships between the European social democratic parties and the PCI, see Michele Di Donato, *Il Pci e i rapporti con le socialdemocrazie, (1964-1984)*, Rome, Carocci, 2015.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from Libertini to Chiaromonte (Administrative Office) of 18 January 1978, in Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del Partito comunista italiano, Estero, mf. 316, p. 258, I bim. 1978.

<sup>66</sup> Antonio Bronda, *Sull’Europa tre giorni di dibattito alla “Columbia”, “L’Unità”, 3 October 1978*, p. 14. See also: Note from Ledda to Berlinguer and Pajetta, 28 January 1980, in Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del Partito comunista italiano, Lavoro, mf. 440, p. 912, I bim. 1980 and Letter from Ledda to Berlinguer, 9 May 1980, in Fondazione Istituto Gramsci,

Although the dialogue between a part of the American elite and the PCI continued, and even got stronger within the framework of debates among the European Left, any space for potential political implications seemed to have closed completely.

### **Towards the Memorandum of 12 January**

On 20 June 1977, in the midst of the Italian “national solidarity” season, the parties of the extended majority (i.e. including the PCI) signed a political agreement on a number of issues concerning the country’s internal affairs. To the Americans’ relief, foreign politics remained external to the agreement. Shortly after signing it, Andreotti travelled to Washington. As Italian prime ministers were accustomed to do, he went to “reassure” the American administration of the new government’s stability and Atlantic loyalty. In this specific case, Andreotti wanted to clarify that the political agreement wasn’t meant to legitimise the PCI’s institutional presence; on the contrary, directly involving the latter in governmental decisions was a strategy to weaken its social foundations.<sup>67</sup> It became evident that the positions within the State Department, which still followed a wait-and-see policy with regard to the “communist question” in Italy,<sup>68</sup> were different from those of the National Security Council (NSC), which was pushing for a definite closure.<sup>69</sup>

A similar debate was also taking place within the Trilateral; in 1977, the Trilateral Commission’s task force on East-West relations held a meeting in Bonn. The task force had been created in 1975, with the aim of providing the governments of the Western Bloc with the necessary analytical tools to establish relations with the communist countries, in the new political phase that seemed to be looming at the horizon. In fact, with Soviet activities resuming again in Africa, the détente seemed to be coming to an end. The Trilateral members therefore wanted to examine if, and how, the process of easing international tensions could resume again: they specifically focused on commercial flows between the two blocs; the concrete effects of the implementation of new human rights policies; the relations between superpowers and the coun-

Archivio del Partito comunista italiano, Lavoro, mf. 467, p. 895, III bim. 1980.

<sup>67</sup> Guido Formigoni, *L’Italia nel sistema internazionale degli anni Settanta: spunti per riconsiderare la crisi*, in Agostino Giovagnoli, Silvio Pons (eds.), *Tra Guerra Fredda e Distensione. L’Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni Settanta* (Conference proceedings, Rome, November and December 2001), vol. I, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2003, p. 292.

<sup>68</sup> Memorandum from Cyrus Vance to the President, 18 July 1977, James E. Carter Presidential library, National security affairs, Brzezinski Material, VIP Visit File, Italy: Prime Minister Andreotti, 7/26-27/77, Briefing Book, Box 7.

<sup>69</sup> Memorandum from Zbigniew Brzezinski to the President, 23 July 1977, in James E. Carter Presidential Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, VIP Visit File, Italy: Prime Minister Andreotti, 7/26-27/77, Briefing Book, Box 7.

tries of the so-called Third World; and the relations between the countries of the Trilateral, the United States, Western Europe and Japan, on the one hand, and communist countries on the other. In this regard, political developments in Eastern Europe and its governments' relations with communist parties in Western Europe had to be taken into consideration.<sup>70</sup> For the whole of 1977, the research group met in Bonn, Tokyo, Washington and Paris. Jeremy Azrael, of the University of Chicago, was the rapporteur of the July meeting, which was held in the United States. Scholars such as Alexander Dallin, Gordon Skilling and Donald Zagoria participated in this meeting, as well as Samuel Huntington — who acted as an advisor to the NSC — and various members of the American government, among whom Robert Hunter of the NSC's European Desk.<sup>71</sup>

During a subsequent meeting at the end of October 1977, David Rockefeller invited Gardner as well, though only as a listener. In fact, as prescribed by internal regulations, Gardner had stepped down from the Trilateral Commission the moment he was nominated ambassador to Italy. Although he had joined the meeting as an external listener, Gardner was allowed to speak. He expressed his concern about the NATO's hold in the eventuality of the PCI's entry into government, and severely criticised the draft on Eurocommunism that the German politician Richard Löwenthal (close to the SPD) had prepared for the meeting. In his memoir, the ambassador reported that Löwenthal's draft expressed the certainty that the French and Italian communists would have supported the NATO in case of a clash between the blocs. Since the latter reading received consensus among the Trilateral's members, Gardner thought it was appropriate to raise the issue and convey his doubts about this specific aspect. He wasn't the only one, though, to show his reservations about the tone of the first draft of the Trilateral's report; Gardner was joined by the Italian ambassador in Washington, Egidio Ortona, and a number of Republicans who had just entered the Trilateral Commission, such as Henry Kissinger, Bill Brock, Caspar Weinberger and George Bush.<sup>72</sup> If we look at the final version, published in 1978, it is clear that the pressure this mixed group put on the Commission sufficed to change the initial draft.

<sup>70</sup> Memorandum from Christopher Makins to Zbigniew Brzezinski, George Franklin, Charles Hech, 15 December 1975, in Rockefeller Archive Center, The Trilateral Commission (North America) records, Series 2: Task Force Reports/Projects; File: Report #15: An Overview of East-West Relations, East-West TF – memos, correspondence, 1973, 1975, 1976, FA420, Box 109, Folder 1267.

<sup>71</sup> East-West Experts' Meetings, Wash. D.C., 28-29 July 1977, in Rockefeller Archive Center, The Trilateral Commission (North America) records, Series 2: Task Force Reports/Projects; File: Report #15: An Overview of East-West Relations, FA420, Box 109, Folder 1265. The European archive of the Trilateral Commission, which is held in Paris, is not accessible to scholars.

<sup>72</sup> R. Gardner, *Mission: Italy*, pp. 157-159.

Published in the form of a pamphlet, the report now contained a description of the economic conditions of France and Italy, which were judged — according to an old frame of mind — essential elements for an understanding of the electoral force behind the two countries' communist parties, followed by an analysis of their political programmes. The PCI, the report sustained, had repeatedly condemned the Soviets' politics ever since Chruscev's government. Likewise, the PCF too had distanced itself from the Soviet party model, albeit with some delay. The PCE and the Japanese Communist Party were added to the group. All these political formations had moved away from the Leninist party model as well as from the "proletarian doctrine", committing themselves to defend individual freedom and democracy. In sum, there was no reason to believe that they wouldn't have remained faithful to their commitments if they had gained positions of power.<sup>73</sup>

Although the Trilateral didn't doubt the development of Western European communist parties, it nevertheless had reservations about the stability of both the NATO and the European Community in the eventuality communist representatives entered the French and Italian governments. This was not so much because of the PCI's and PCF's political programmes; rather, there was a possibility that — in the fragile context of European political integration, threatened as it was by the economic crisis of the 1970s — the Soviets might take the opportunity to infiltrate the continent via communist formations they remained connected to, albeit less than previously.<sup>74</sup> The Trilateral thus returned to a "Cold War-like" analysis, based on the assumption that the true key to a stable world balance resided in the economic conditions of the old continent. As we have seen, various people held different views, including Löwenthal; as an ideologist of the SPD, he was trying to facilitate the dialogue between European social democracies and the PCI.<sup>75</sup> However, a new and varied coalition had emerged, which involved conservatives and that part of the liberals that had won the debate.

Ambassador Gardner continued to publicly support the policy of rigidity, up to the point that it became Washington's official policy.<sup>76</sup> After the PCI had opened the crisis by claiming seats in the government, and following the positive response to this request by Ugo La Malfa of the Italian Republican Party (Partito Repubblicano Italiano, hereafter PRI), Brzezinski decided to intervene.

<sup>73</sup> Jeremy R. Azrael, Richard Löwenthal, Tohru Nakagawa, *An overview of East-West relations. Report of the Trilateral task-force on East-West relations to the Trilateral commission*, Triangle Paper n. 16, 1978, p. 20.

<sup>74</sup> J.R. Azrael, R. Löwenthal, T. Nakagawa, *An overview of East-West relations*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>75</sup> M. Di Donato, *I comunisti italiani e la sinistra europea*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>76</sup> F. Heurtebize, *Le péril rouge*, pp. 264-265 and Leo J. Wollemborg, *Stelle strisce e tricolore. Trent'anni di vicende politiche fra Roma e Washington*, Milan, Mondadori, 1983, pp. 262-265.

He sent the following warning message to President Carter: “The Italian situation is continuously worsening [...] and the Christian Democrats’ willpower to keep the communists away from any direct intervention in institutional affairs is weakening”.<sup>77</sup> On 9 December, following a meeting of the NSC, it was therefore decided that the time had come to express a stronger and clearer position on the Italian question. Gardner, who had supported this solution, appears to have been its main coordinator. In a meeting with Andreotti on 12 December 1977, Gardner expressed his concerns about the Italian political and economic developments, and asked the prime minister’s opinion on the strategy the United States ought to adopt; in particular, he asked if Andreotti deemed it necessary for the American government to make a public declaration on the PCI’s role in Italian institutions. Andreotti replied that Washington’s position was sufficiently clear. If anything, he suggested Gardner invite the Italian-American representatives of the Congress of the United States to make public statements in this respect, following the example of the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, Joseph Califano, a few days earlier.<sup>78</sup> Notwithstanding Andreotti’s disapproval, Gardner decided to persist in the direction he had chosen to take. It was a delicate historic moment, and the risk of the PCI’s direct involvement in order to solve the government crisis was becoming ever more concrete, considering the opinions that were circulating among certain representatives of the DC, the PSI and the PRI.<sup>79</sup>

From early January onwards, the American ambassador started sending telegrams to Washington where he stressed the need for President Carter to take a public position on the PCI. According to Gardner, the White House had to make its disapproval of any kind of communist involvement in the Italian government known, and should ask the members of the Italian-American caucus within the Congress to publicly express their opinion on the matter.<sup>80</sup> The ambassador also phoned Robert E. Barbour of the State Department’s Western European Affairs office, in order to uphold his cause. Contrary to his interlocutor, who deemed an explicit declaration to be “beyond current political limits”, Gardner believed that it was necessary to make an official statement. Additionally, he requested that the following words be included in the text:

<sup>77</sup> F. Heurtebize, *Le péril rouge*, pp. 266-267.

<sup>78</sup> Telegram from Rome to State, 13 December 1977, in Central Foreign Policy Files, created 7/1/1973-12/31/1979, documenting the period 1973- 12/31/1979, Record Group 59, Electronic Telegrams, 1977. Claudio Gatti, *Rimanga tra noi, L’America, l’Italia, la “questione comunista”: i segreti di 50 anni di storia*, Milan, Leonardo, 199, p. 170.

<sup>79</sup> Alberto Rapisarda, *Governo di crisi? Solo Fanfani ha fretta*, “La Stampa”, 12 December 1977; Gardner also describes a meeting he had with Fanfani, in which the DC leader was very explicit about the necessity to grant the PCI more space by allowing PCI-related “technical” ministers to enter the government. R. Gardner, *Mission: Italy*, pp. 178-181.

<sup>80</sup> Telegram from Rome to State, 5 January 1978, in Central foreign policy files, created 7/1/1973-12/31/1979, documenting the period 1973-12/31/1979, Record Group 59, Electronic Telegrams, 1978. See also F. Heurtebize, *Le péril rouge*, pp. 270-272.

“every further step made to include the PCI in the governmental process would be received negatively, and would have a negative impact on our relations with the NATO alliance”.<sup>81</sup>

Gardner’s pressure on the American government added to the criticism part of the national press was directing at Carter’s foreign politics. The resident of the embassy in via Veneto recalled — in the journal *Businessweek* — that in autumn 1977 Brzezinski was subjected to “a trial” made up of accusations of various nature, including that of not taking to heart the threat of the Western European Left.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, the general attitude of the United States had stiffened with regard to the Soviet Union, especially in view of the choices the latter made and which were gradually demonstrating the fragility of the bipolar détente. For Washington, an unequivocal public statement about the communists’ entry into government was becoming necessary. In the United States itself, conservatives, on the one hand, and neoconservatives, on the other, had managed to reawaken American public opinion in view of the alleged communist threat in Western Europe. In first instance, ex-president Ford picked the matter up again; he predicted disastrous situations in which Eurocommunist parties tried to grasp power, and openly criticised Carter’s actions during a public speech at Westminster College (in Fulton, Missouri), which recalled the language Winston Churchill had used in his famous “Iron Curtain speech”. This time, however, the “curtain” closed off the area all the way from the Adriatic to the Atlantic.<sup>83</sup> Ford, whose arguments would soon also be reiterated by Kissinger, was backed up by the neoconservative press, especially the journal “Commentary”, where the Georgetown University professor Michael Ledeen published numerous harsh articles that condemned the “liberal softness” towards communism.<sup>84</sup>

In January 1978, in the midst of the government crisis, Gardner decided to go to Washington and personally intervene before the members of the State Department, White House, NSC, the US Departments of Defence and Treasury, the Joint Chief of Staff and the CIA, so as to arrange a public declaration on Italian politics. The necessity of making a public statement was no longer in doubt. During an official visit to France in early January, Carter had already told the Palais de Congrès of Paris that “it is precisely when democracy is faced with difficult challenges that its leaders must give proof of determination in resisting the temptation to seek solutions in non-democratic

<sup>81</sup> Telegram, 6 January 1978, in National archives and records administration, Records General 59, Records of Warren Christopher 1977-1980, Box 18.

<sup>82</sup> R. Gardner, *Mission: Italy*, pp. 116-118.

<sup>83</sup> Graham Hovey, *Ford urges firm stand against West Europe’s Reds*, “The New York Times”, 30 October 1977.

<sup>84</sup> I. Wall, *L’amministrazione Carter e l’eurocomunismo*, p. 11; Ledeen’s articles were also published in the Italian press. Achille Albonetti, *Gli Stati Uniti e il Pci da Kissinger a Carter*, Rome, Circolo Stato e Libertà, 1980, p. 21.

forces”.<sup>85</sup> It is likely that Carter made this statement to please President Giscard D’Estaing in view of the upcoming general elections in March.<sup>86</sup> To remain in silence before the Italian developments would have been interpreted as an approval of the formulation of whatever decision taken by the DC and the parties involved in the government agreement in force as of 1977. It was necessary to clarify what the United States hoped for Italy; there was a danger that the DC would allow “technical” ministers close to the PCI into the government — even if they were not officially part of the government — in order to solve the crisis. The idea of expressing a preference for new elections, in the hope to see communist consensus diminish, was soon abandoned as the DC leadership was against it. The only option was to make a statement but to avoid accusations of interference in the internal affairs of another country, and in doing so involving other European partners as well. As Gardner informed Congress of the established procedure, the State Department’s spokesperson, Hodding Carter, was charged with the task of releasing the public statement.<sup>87</sup>

On 12 January 1978, Hodding Carter publicly read the text that had been agreed upon the previous day during a meeting of the Presidential Review Committee — one of the committees Brzezinski had set up in order to address foreign politics. By giving voice to the State Department’s official position, Carter expressed the American administration’s disapproval not only of the PCI’s “dominion” in the government, but also, and more generally, of any form of communist “participation” in the Italian government:

We believe it is our duty to clearly express our point of view to our friends and allies [...] Our position is clear: we are not in favour of a similar participation and we would like to see communist influence in the countries of Western Europe diminish.<sup>88</sup>

This version of the earlier statement of 6 April 1977, revised and corrected following recent events and the change in balance of power within the administration, was partially directed at the DC, partially at Carter’s opponents in the United States. Nevertheless, the day after its publication, Ford and Kissinger participated in a TV programme broadcast on the American channel NBC, where they stated that they saw “a lot of communism and not much Europe” in the old continent as a result of Carter’s passiveness on the matter.<sup>89</sup> The

<sup>85</sup> Jimmy Carter, “Paris, France remarks at the Palais des Congres.”, 4 January 1978. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American presidency project*. Available at: [www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29883](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29883) (last accessed 10 July 2018).

<sup>86</sup> Frédéric Heurtebize, *The Union of the Left in France, 1971-1981: a threat to Nato? The view from Washington*, “Journal of Transatlantic Studies”, 2011, vol. 9, n. 3, pp. 244-246.

<sup>87</sup> Presidential Review Committee Meeting, 11 January 1978, in James E. Carter Presidential Library, Donated Historical Material, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Subject File, Meetings, Box 24, PRC 12, 4/14/77.

<sup>88</sup> The text of the statement can be found in R. Gardner, *Mission: Italy*, pp. 201-203.

<sup>89</sup> R. Brancoli, *Spettatori interessati*, pp. 222-223; B. Olivi, *Carter e l’Italia*, p. 126.

message directed to the DC, by contrast, hit the nail on the head; Andreotti's diplomatic advisor, Umberto La Rocca, expressed his resentment to Gardner, explaining how both he and the prime minister felt the statement would have fuelled the debate on Washington's interference in Italian politics.<sup>90</sup> The United States, however, now wanted to detach itself from a controversy it had no interest being involved in, even more so given the internal debate that was affecting Carter's administration. Conservatives and neoconservatives teamed up with fledgling groups such as the Committee on the Present Danger in order to accuse the Democrats of being excessively "soft" with regard to the expansion of communism. While the United States was negotiating a new agreement on the limitation of arms with the Soviet Union (Salt II), Moscow had resumed its expansionist policies in Africa. The growing Soviet influence in Somalia and Ethiopia (and the clashes between opposite factions fuelled by the USSR) had caused the United States reason for concern about the Horn of Africa, as well as internal disagreement among members of the administration: Vance wanted to address the issue by keeping it limited to the territories and actors involved, whereas Brzezinski remained convinced about the necessity to challenge the opponent on a wider scale, for example by linking the Salt agreement terms to a retreat of Soviet forces. In the deadlock the federal government found itself in, the "communist question" in Western Europe became the piece in a bigger puzzle and a further element of fragility of Carter's foreign politics. From 1978 onwards, the president embraced Brzezinski's conviction and decided to harden his position on the Soviet Union, thus completing the process of normalising the relations with China and Vietnam that the Nixon administration had initiated.<sup>91</sup>

## Conclusion

With the Memorandum of 12 January 1978, the Carter administration put an end to the ambiguous politics on Eurocommunism of previous years, and asserted a clear and unequivocal position on the matter. The statement was the endpoint of a debate that had been ongoing for a decade and was part and parcel of a more general (and profound) revision of liberal culture, which was being challenged by (neo)conservative and progressive pressures. With regard to the politics concerning the "communist question" in Italy, on the

<sup>90</sup> Note from Umberto La Rocca to the president, 13 January 1978, in Archivio Storico Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Fondo Giulio Andreotti, Pratica 323, Stati Uniti, Sottoserie 2, Personalità, Richard Gardner, b. 598.

<sup>91</sup> On the different positions held within the process of normalisation of relationships with Vietnam see, among others, Steven Hurst, *The Carter administration and Vietnam*, New York, St. Martin's, 1996; on China see S. Kaufman, *Plans unraveled*, pp. 129-138.



one hand there were those who sustained “opening” positions towards the PCI, in the belief that early Cold War anti-communism was by now out of date. They also acknowledged that Italian Marxism had managed to set in motion certain reforms and that, if it received support (for example by entering the Italian government), it could contribute to the transition towards a social democracy. This conviction explains the meetings organised by the CFR and, later on, by the Research Institute for International Change, along with the CESPI and the Institute for international political and economic cooperation (Istituto per la cooperazione politica e economica internazionale).<sup>92</sup> On the other hand, there were those who — although Berlinguer’s transformation of the Italian Communist Party had convinced them — were not willing to grant the communist party a political space; rather, they trusted in the control of Italy’s economic ties and in the intervention capacity of other European governments to keep the party out of institutions, as the internal debates of the Trilateral Commission demonstrate. In between these positions, finally, there were those who didn’t deem a transition to social democracy necessary for a legitimation of the PCI in Italy; not by chance, the supporters of a similar position weren’t involved in politics, and their interference fuelled the debate even if they had little chance of changing Washington’s political line.<sup>93</sup>

In the end, the second of the two positions prevailed, for four reasons. First of all, the lack of an agreement about the strategy to adopt in relation to the “communist question” in Italy (and in Western Europe) created a void that was filled by the only actors who seemed truly interested in developing a political line on Italy: the embassy in Rome, directly involved in diplomatic decisions and current political controversies, and the National Security Council, its counterpart in Washington. Secondly, internal developments within Italian politics meant that a part of the DC’s leadership resigned itself for the first time to partially relinquish the traditional anti-communist veto, while another part — which could certainly benefit from an American connection — was decidedly inclined to conserve it. Thirdly, in relation to the internal political debate in the United States, a varied coalition — composed of representatives of the Italian-American community, of the former State Secretary Kissinger and, especially, of the ever more influential neoconservatives — insisted that the Carter admin-

<sup>92</sup> These meetings continued until 1980. During the last meeting, held in Rome, the topic of discussion was the European Left’s approach to the issue of security on the continent. Letter from Ledda to Berlinguer, 9 May 1980, in Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del Partito comunista italiano, Estero, mf. 467, p. 895, III bim. 1980. The minutes of the meeting are included in CESPI: Seminar on international relations, in Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Fondo Giorgio Napolitano, Documentazione 1978-1989, b. 10, fasc. 186.

<sup>93</sup> One example was Peter Lange, who was admonished twice for the inconvenience of an article he had published in “Foreign policy”: first by Washington, under the Ford administration, then by the American embassy in via Veneto, under the Carter administration. Peter Lange, interview with author, 12 May 2017.

istration expressed Washington's disapproval of the legitimization of the communists' role in Western Europe. A fourth and central reason was the international political context, marked by the end of *détente* and by the relaunch of a politics of "confrontation" — also in an ideological sense — between the United States and the Soviet Union.

On 16 March 1978, the day the Andreotti IV Cabinet obtained confidence, Aldo Moro was abducted by exponents of the Red Brigades; Italian terrorism thus again became the Americans' main focus of attention. Indeed, as Guido Formigoni has highlighted, 1978 politically defused the "communist question".<sup>94</sup> Subsequently, some Italian communist leaders continued to cross the Atlantic in order to confront themselves with large university audiences and small groups of experts. Giorgio Napolitano's first, famous trip took place precisely in April 1978, and was followed by a very similar visit four years later, when Ronald Reagan had already taken office in the White House.<sup>95</sup> The CFR and the academic community that had established relationships with a number of communist leaders still considered the PCI a theoretical point of reference for the European Left, but the purely political issue of the role the communists had to play in Italy had, in the meanwhile, been solved. If there had been any need to reaffirm Washington's position in this regard, the Memorandum of 12 January 1978 counted as a guideline.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Guido Formigoni, *L'Italia nel sistema internazionale degli anni Settanta*, in A. Giovagnoli, S. Pons (eds.), *L'Italia repubblicana nella crisi degli anni Settanta*, p. 297.

<sup>95</sup> See the account in Giorgio Napolitano, *Dal Pci al socialismo europeo. Un'autobiografia politica*, Bari-Rome, Laterza, 2005, pp. 159-169. On his second visit see Note from Napolitano to the Administrative office and the Department of international politics, 11 May 1982, in Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del Partito comunista italiano, Estero, mf. 512, p. 1903, anno 1982 and "Relations between Italian Communist Party and the Soviet Union"; 30 April 1982, in Department of rare books and special collections, Princeton university library, Public policy papers, Council on Foreign Relations Meetings Records, Box 494, Folder 13. Santoro, instead, returned to the Council on Foreign Relations three times, between April 1978 and 1979. See Eurocommunism after the French Election, Eurocommunism #1, CFR; 3 April 1978, in Department of rare books and special collections, Princeton University Library, Public policy papers, Council on foreign relations digital sound recordings, Box 736; Eurocommunism: Hope or threat for the West; 28 April 1978, in Department of rare books and special collections, Princeton University Library, Public policy papers, Council on foreign relations digital sound recordings, Box 736. and "Communist party and the Italian political system"; 30 October 1979, in Department of rare books and special collections, Princeton University Library Council, Public policy papers, Foreign relations meetings records, Box 488, Folder 6.

<sup>96</sup> During the visit of the new Prime minister Cossiga to the United States in 1980, Brzezinski asked the president to continue making reference to the statement made on the PCI in 1978. Briefing Book, Memorandum from Brzezinski to the President, 24 January 1980, in James E. Carter Presidential Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, VIP Visit File, Italy, Prime Minister Cossiga, Box 8.