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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

CONSEQUENCES OF COMMUNIST
ACCESSION TO POWER IN ITALY
BY LEGAL MEANS

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CONSEQUENCES OF COMMUNIST ACCESSION TO POWER IN ITALY
 BY LEGAL MEANS

SUMMARY

1. At the request of the National Security Council Staff, we estimate herein the consequences of Communist accession to power in Italy by legal means.
2. Even if there had been no resort to force to prevent the Communist-dominated government from entering office, there would be a strong possibility of an early attempt to prevent by force the consolidation of its power. The Communists, however, would probably win the civil war resulting from any such attempt.
3. The Communists would be particularly anxious to avoid provoking a civil war. Their policy would be one of outward conciliation and quiet infiltration until their control of the armed forces, police, and national administration had been consolidated. By processes made familiar in Eastern Europe, Italy would be eventually transformed into a totalitarian police state.
4. Even a Communist-dominated Italian government must do all in its power, short of political suicide, to maintain commercial relations with the West and to avoid a denial of US dollar credits. The Communists would not withdraw Italian participation in the European Recovery Program, but would resist any US attempt to supervise its execution. From a strictly economic point of view, Italian participation is not essential to the success of the Recovery Program.
5. Italian Communist capabilities to support Communist action in neighboring countries would not be appreciable. It is unlikely that the armed forces of Italy, as a Satellite State, could ever be of value for purposes other than the maintenance of internal security. From Italian bases, however, Soviet air and naval forces could effectively close the Sicilian Channel and endanger shipping throughout the Mediterranean. Fighter escorted bombers could reach North African targets from Algiers to Derna and could cover all of France except Brest and Cherbourg.
6. The advantages to be derived from a consolidation of Communist control of Italy would be such that the Kremlin would be likely to adopt a general policy of detente in order to facilitate that development. If, however, this policy failed to prevent Western intervention in a possible Italian civil war, Communist parties in the West would be directed to create the maximum disruption and diversion by strikes, disorders,

Note: The information in this report is as of 17 February, at which time it was submitted to the member agencies of the Interdepartmental Advisory Council for coordination.

The report has the concurrence of the intelligence agencies of the Departments of State, the Army, and the Air Force, the latter two acting only with respect to its military aspects.

The Office of Naval Intelligence does not concur in this paper. Its position is as follows: "ONI is not prepared to underwrite the detailed speculative predictions derived from the assumption. The situation presented by such an assumption would be fluid and could eventually take one of many paths which at the present time cannot be clearly charted."

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and sabotage. While supporting the Communist regime, the Kremlin would be careful to permit neither the USSR nor the Satellite States to become so definitely committed as to incur serious risk of direct collision and war with the Western Powers.

7. The fear which Communist control of Italy would arouse in Western European and Mediterranean countries would be more likely to stimulate resistance to Communism than to induce submission. These nations would call on the United States for greater aid and for military guarantees of their independence and territorial integrity.

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CONSEQUENCES OF COMMUNIST ACCESSION TO POWER IN ITALY
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ASSUMPTION

1. For the purposes of this estimate it is assumed that a Communist-controlled government has actually taken office in Italy by legal means.

2. Within the foreseeable future the assumed situation could occur only as a result of a People's Bloc victory in the election scheduled for 18 April 1948. At least a month must pass between that election and the inauguration of a new government. Even if the People's Bloc were to win at the polls a majority of the seats in the National Assembly, its actual accession to power might be prevented by falsification of the returns or by force. It is assumed, however, that a People's Bloc (Communist-controlled) government has actually been installed in office.

DIRECT CONSEQUENCES

3. THE POSSIBILITY OF CIVIL WAR.

Even if there had been no resort to force to prevent the installation of a Communist-dominated government, there would be a strong possibility of an early attempt to prevent by force the consolidation of its power. Such an attempt would be handicapped by lack of cohesion and leadership among militantly anti-Communist elements in Italy and by Communist administrative control of the Armed Forces, Carabinieri, and police. However, an anti-Communist insurrection, if it occurred prior to an effective purge of the Armed Forces and the Carabinieri, would be favored by the probable piecemeal adherence of such units of those forces as were in a position to do so. The Vatican would probably give covert support to the movement, but would not take sides officially against the government until, in the initial disorder, ecclesiastical persons and property had been subjected to mob attack (as in Spain in 1936). At the outset the conflict would be between the organized militants of the extreme Right and Left, the mass of the population being dismayed and bewildered. Eventually the masses could be aroused to pillage and violence by whichever side held the local advantage.

4. THE OUTCOME OF CIVIL WAR.

In the event of civil war in the circumstances envisaged above, the Communist-dominated Government could probably retain an effective general control of all Italy north of the Rome-Pescara line and of the Adriatic coast from Pescara to Bari, inclusive. It might also hold the Taranto naval base, and Messina, Catania, Siracusa, and Agrigento in Sicily. Either side might prevail in the initial struggle for the possession of Rome. Elsewhere in Italian territory the anti-Communist forces would gain initial control.

The anti-Communist insurgents would not only fail to overthrow the Communist-dominated government: they could not hold the area under their initial control without immediate and substantial foreign aid. As the probability of a Communist victory in the civil war became apparent, however, secession movements would develop in Sicily and Sardinia. If the Communists in the Sicilian cities had meanwhile been subdued, it is possible that the anti-Communists could succeed in holding the two islands.

5. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ABSENCE OF CIVIL WAR.

Having won an electoral victory, the People's Bloc would wish to exploit its advantage by political means and would be particularly anxious to avoid provoking a civil war in which it would have little to gain and much to lose. Its Communist leadership would seek to be all things to all men: more Catholic than the Vatican, more solicitous of middle-class interests than the bourgeois parties, more jealous of national sovereignty than the neo-Fascists. Palmiro Togliatti has already proved himself adept and persuasive in this sort of duplicity. The People's Bloc would not take office as a Communist government, but as a coalition of popular parties devoted to democracy, national sovereignty, and peace. The prime minister would probably be a non-Communist, possibly Pietro Nenni.

Behind the scenes, however, the Communists would exercise effective control. As in the original coalition governments of Eastern Europe, they would demand and receive the ministries of control such as those of the Interior, Justice, Communications, and Defense. There would follow a discreet, but rapid, Communist infiltration of the armed forces, the police, and the national administration. The time required to complete the transition might be a matter of months or of years, but the end would be a fully developed police state under open and exclusive Communist control.

6. COMMUNIST CONTROL OF THE ITALIAN ECONOMY.

The Communists, in power, would seek to integrate the Italian economy with that of the USSR. They could not afford, however, to forego commercial relations with the West or to alienate dollar credits in excess of those earned by exports.

The economies of Italy and the USSR are in many respects complementary. Italy possesses facilities and skills required to produce goods needed by the USSR and the Satellite States, such as motor transport, electrical equipment, other machinery, and textiles. The USSR and the Satellite States, in turn, are relatively well supplied with products needed by Italy, such as cereal grains, coal, lumber, cotton, petroleum, manganese, and chromium. For the time being, however, the area presently under Soviet control could not deliver as much as half the coal, petroleum, and cotton required to maintain the current level of Italian industrial production. Moreover, Italy would remain almost entirely dependent on the West for essential imports of scrap iron, steel, and steel products, and for the tungsten, vanadium, and molybdenum required for fine steel and armaments production. Italy must also depend on the West for fertilizers required to maintain domestic production of foodstuffs.

If Italy were denied imports from the West except such as might be earned by exports from production supported only by available Eastern economic aid, the result would be severe economic hardship. Except for a brief interval of reduced rations attributable to administrative lag, emergency provision of foodstuffs from the East would permit the maintenance of Italian rations at the current level. In the course of a year, however, industrial production would decline to about half the current level, with a consequent increase in unemployment. Thereafter a gradual recovery might occur, but after another year the level of production could be no more than 75 percent of what it might have been under the European Recovery Program. These consequences would be unacceptable for internal political as well as economic reasons. Even a Communist-dominated Italian government must therefore do all in its power, short of political suicide, to avoid a denial of US dollar credits.

7. FOREIGN POLICY.

Communist control of Italian foreign policy would insure its immediate subservience to the basic objectives of the USSR. For both internal political and economic reasons, however, a Communist-dominated government would seek to avoid an abrupt severance of existing Italian relations with the West. There would, of course, be immediate professions of friendship with the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and other "democratic" states. The advantages of friendly association with the East would be attested by beneficial trade agreements, Yugoslav concession of Trieste to Italy, and Soviet sponsorship of Italy for membership in the United Nations and for trusteeship over the former Italian colonies in Africa. These benefits, gratifying to the Italian people, would enhance the popularity of the Government and further the consolidation of Communist control. While capitalizing its relations with the East, however, the Government would demand of the West the fulfillment of all commitments made to its predecessors and even more of the same benefits.

8. THE EUROPEAN RECOVERY PROGRAM.

This attitude toward the West would be exemplified particularly in the policy of the new Italian Government with respect to the European Recovery Program. Although the Italian Communist Party is a member of the Cominform, it is even now permitted to follow a special variant of the Cominform line regarding the ERP. It is not opposed to a substantial US contribution to Italian economic recovery—indeed it feels that Italy is properly entitled to more aid from the United States than it is scheduled to receive. It is critical of De Gasperi's "subservience" to US "imperialism," however, and jealous of any infringement of Italian sovereignty which could be attributed to the Program. The Communists in office would not withdraw Italy from participation in the ERP. They would be critical of the "inadequacy" of the assistance received (in contrast to the "generosity" of the USSR) and they would resist any US attempt to control the administration of the Program as an infringement of Italian sovereignty. If US aid to Italy were continued, the Communists would seek to gain for themselves and the USSR the credit for any consequent improvement in the Italian economic

situation. If further US aid were withheld from Italy, the Communists would seize the opportunity to convict the United States of "dollar imperialism" and of implacable hostility toward Italian "democracy" and independence. In either case, Communist control of Italy would be strengthened.

From the strictly economic point of view, the participation of Italy is not essential to the success of the European Recovery Program. The elimination of Italy from the Program would permit increased allocations of foodstuffs, fertilizers, chemicals, coal, oil, and scrap iron to other countries.

9. ITALIAN AID TO NEIGHBORING COMMUNISTS.

The ability of a Communist-dominated Italian government to support Communist activities in neighboring countries (especially in France, Spain, and North Africa) would not be appreciable. The passage of couriers and of light supplies and equipment into France would, of course, be facilitated, but no considerable contribution of manpower and bulk supplies would be possible, both for logistical reasons and because for some time all the resources of the Italian Communist Party would be required to maintain and exploit its position in Italy.

10. THE MILITARY POTENTIAL OF ITALY AS A SATELLITE STATE.

The existing Italian military establishment has no significant capabilities except in relation to internal security. It is strongly anti-Communist in tradition and sentiment. The first concern of a Communist-dominated government would be to neutralize the insurrectionary capabilities of the armed forces by a purge of the high command and a redistribution of units, to be followed by a complete political reorientation through further purging and indoctrination. In view of the delicacy of the internal political situation, the latter phase of this process would have to be accomplished gradually, in order not to provoke insurrection. Until the process had been completed the Italian armed forces would be not only without external military capabilities but also an actual danger to the internal security of the regime.

Eventually, the political reliability of the armed forces having been assured, an effort would be made to increase their military effectiveness. The USSR would assist in their reequipment and training, but only to the extent necessary to create an effective local auxiliary force of limited capabilities. It is doubtful, in any case, whether the Italian armed forces, under Communist control, could ever be of value for purposes other than the maintenance of internal security. If Mussolini, in twenty years, could not create forces willing to fight with determination for empire in the Mediterranean, it is unlikely that the Communists could create, from the same material, forces more willing to fight the Western Powers at the bidding of the Kremlin.

11. SOVIET MILITARY CAPABILITIES FROM ITALIAN BASES.

Through Communist control of Italy the USSR would gain potential access to bases in Italian territory. From such bases Soviet air and naval forces (the latter

primarily submarines) could endanger shipping throughout the Mediterranean and could effectively close the Sicilian Channel to traffic. From the Catania airfield complex in Sicily, Soviet bombers with fighter escort could range as far east as Derna, Crete, and the Aegean; from Cagliari in Sardinia, they could reach westward to Valencia and beyond Algiers. North Africa, between the limits indicate, would be subject to such air attack.

Although a Soviet ground offensive westward or northward from North Italy would be hindered by the barrier of the Alps, fighter-escorted bombers from that area could reach most of that part of France beyond range of similar attack from the Soviet Zone in Germany. Only Brest and Cherbourg would be beyond their reach.

EFFECT ON SOVIET STRATEGY AND POLICY

12. IN THE EVENT OF A PEACEFUL TRANSITION.

The advantages to be derived from a consolidation of Communist control of Italy would be such that the Kremlin would seek to avoid action likely to jeopardize that prospective development. With a view to minimizing the US reaction and the possibility of US suspension of essential economic aid to Italy, the USSR might well take the initiative to ease the general international tension, assuming an attitude of goodwill and sweet reasonableness without actually yielding on any essential point. This attitude, if it did not deceive US policy makers, would at least render their position more difficult by influencing public opinion and tending to put on them the onus of any continuation of international tension.

In consonance with this policy the Communists would move circumspectly to consolidate their control of Italy, and the Communist parties in other countries would be directed to exercise equal care to avoid provocations and allay antagonisms. For the time being, Communist activity would be directed into legitimate political channels and, even so, would not be pressed too vigorously, except for propaganda exploitation of the Italian example of a popular front for peace and democracy.

13. SPECIFIC MEASURES IN SUPPORT OF ITALY.

While following the general policy indicated above, the USSR would probably adopt the following specific measures in support of the Communist-dominated Government of Italy:

a. Economic support of selected Italian industries within the limits of Soviet capabilities. (See paragraph 6.)

b. Support of revision of the Italian Peace Treaty on terms advantageous to the new government, with particular reference to a division of the Free Territory of Trieste between Italy and Yugoslavia, giving Trieste to Italy. US and British opposition to this solution would manifestly be resistance to expulsion from their own "imperialist" stronghold in Trieste.

c. Support for the admittance of Italy to membership in the United Nations. The United States and United Kingdom, having hitherto supported the admittance of

Italy, could not reverse their position without exposing hostility toward Italian "democracy."

d. More insistent advocacy of Italian trusteeship over the former Italian colonies in Africa. The Western Powers could not oppose this solution without exposing both their hostility toward Italian "democracy" and their own "imperialist" ambitions. Acquiescence, however, would permit a Soviet lodgment in Africa.

14. IN THE EVENT OF CIVIL WAR.

If Communist accession to power in Italy should provoke a civil war (see paragraph 3), the Kremlin would seek to support the Communists to the maximum extent consistent with avoidance of a general war, and at the same time would seek to prevent Western support of the anti-Communists by means of a nonintervention formula similar to that of the Western Powers with respect to the Spanish Civil War. If that tactic succeeded, the USSR might still pursue a general policy of detente (paragraph 12) pending consolidation of a Communist victory in Italy. If it did not, the Kremlin would call on Western Communists to prevent or curtail Western intervention in Italy by exertion of their utmost capabilities for disruption through strikes, disorders, and sabotage, but avoiding armed insurrection. In any case, the Kremlin would be careful in Italy (as in Greece) not to permit either the USSR or its Satellites to become so definitely committed as to incur serious risk of direct collision and war with the Western Powers.

REACTIONS ELSEWHERE

15. GENERAL.

The assumed Communist accession to power in Italy would be significant not only as the first actual extension of Communist (Soviet) territorial control (except in China) since the conclusion of World War II, but also as the first instance in history of a Communist accession to power by popular suffrage and legal procedure. So unprecedented and portentous an event must produce a profound psychological effect in those countries threatened by Soviet or Communist aggression and still striving to retain their freedom.

Moreover, whereas in Eastern Europe Communism had overrun lands long in dispute between the East and West, in Italy Communism would have taken possession of the most ancient seat of Western Culture. In particular, devout Catholics everywhere would be gravely concerned regarding the safety of the Holy See.

Communist control of Italy would bring the power of Russia to the shores of the Mediterranean for the first time in history, and that at the point best suited for command of that Sea. The strategic implications of that development would be appreciated in all Mediterranean countries and in Great Britain.

The fear of Communism and of Soviet aggression which these considerations would arouse would be more likely to stimulate resistance than to induce submission. Lacking confidence in their own powers of resistance, however, the nations of Western Europe

and the Mediterranean would call upon the United States for greater aid and for military guarantees of their independence and territorial integrity.

16. THE UNITED KINGDOM.

The British Government would regard a Communist accession to power in Italy with grave concern, as threatening both the strategic position of the Western Powers in the Mediterranean and the political stability of Western Europe. The British would wish to join with the United States in a prompt and vigorous program of combined counteraction. They would urge greater US economic support and military guarantees for Western European and Mediterranean countries. The British would also initiate staff consultations with the older Dominions, and would probably secure their support. British demobilization would be suspended and British naval and air units in the Mediterranean would be reinforced. The development of a strategic position in Africa would be expedited. The adoption of these measures would increase British dependence on the economic and financial support of the United States.

17. FRANCE.

The accession of a Communist-dominated government to power in Italy would revive in France an acute sense of Communist menace and so would favor the fortunes of De Gaulle. His political appeal requires also, however, a pronounced lack of confidence in the existing regime. If, at the time, the French public lacked confidence in the eventual success of the Schuman Government's economic program and in its ability to cope with the new situation, the Government might fall, in which case De Gaulle would come to power. If, on the other hand, there were a reasonable prospect of economic improvement and the Government's action to control Communist exploitation of the new situation were prompt and vigorous, it would probably retain sufficient public confidence to withstand the shock of a Communist advance to the French frontier.

In the absence of civil war in Italy, the French Communists would presumably be directed to restrict themselves to political action, in consonance with over-all Soviet strategy (see paragraph 12). In the event of civil war in Italy, however, they would probably be directed to exert their utmost capabilities for disruption through strikes, disorders, and sabotage. This policy would be intended to prevent Western intervention in Italy by neutralizing France and diverting the United Kingdom and the United States, even at the sacrifice of the French Communist Party. The French Government could eventually suppress the French Communists, but meanwhile the Communists would have won the Italian civil war and the economy of France would have been seriously damaged.

18. AUSTRIA AND WESTERN GERMANY.

Communist accession to power in Italy might convince the Austrian Government that it was expedient to reach an understanding with the USSR. It would not have that effect on the political leaders of Western Germany. If the Vatican appeared to be

endangered by the turn of events in Italy, there would probably be a strong anti-Communist reaction among the Catholic populations of Austria and Western Germany. If communications through Italy to Austria were interrupted the resultant increased strain on the German transportation system would have serious economic effects.

19. SPAIN.

The accession of a Communist-dominated government to power in Italy would revive Spanish memories of the Civil War and would cause Spaniards of all shades of political opinion (except the few genuine Communists) to rally against the Communist menace. The only practical rallying point would be Franco, whose position would be greatly strengthened by this tendency. Franco would exploit the threat to Western strategic interests in the Mediterranean to seek an escape from political isolation into close political, economic, and military relations with the Western Powers.

20. FRENCH NORTH AFRICA.

Any marked change in the Mediterranean area would have a disturbing effect on the unstable situation in French North Africa. Communist accession to power in Italy would facilitate, in some degree, Communist infiltration of the Italian population in Tunisia. The European population of North Africa is generally anti-Communist, however, while the North African nationalists are interested in exploiting the divisions and distractions of Europe for their own, not Communist, purposes.

21. LIBYA.

The idea of an Italian trusteeship might appeal to the Italian population of Tripolitania, but the idea of a Communist regime would not. The Arab majority would resist by force of arms the reimposition of an Italian regime of whatever political coloration. The British military occupation would remain secure.

22. EGYPT AND OTHER ARAB STATES.

Communist accession to power in Italy and consequent Soviet penetration into the Mediterranean would alarm the Arab governments. Normally, in fear of the USSR, they would turn to the United States for support. If, however, the United States were continuing to support the partition of Palestine, an Arab rapprochement with the USSR might well occur. The Arabs would have no illusions that any Soviet support which they might receive in their own conflict with the West would be disinterested. They might hope, however, that the USSR's need for Arab support in its conflict with the West would be such that the USSR would desist from efforts to undermine the existing order in the Arab States so as to facilitate their realignment. This eventuality is contemplated, not only by Arab extremists, but even by responsible elements. The existing Arab Governments, however, would be unlikely to follow such a course unless compelled to do so by overwhelming popular reaction.

Although not generally receptive to Communism, the long-established Italian communities in the Arab States would serve as channels of Italian Communist infiltration.

Most of the 50,000 Italians in the Arab States are concentrated in Egypt, where they constitute the second largest foreign colony. They are fairly well integrated into Egyptian national life, and are generally conservative and anti-Communist. More susceptible to Communist agitation would be the 600 Italian ex-prisoners employed in the Dhahran oilfield in Saudi Arabia.

23. GREECE.

Communist accession to power in Italy would have a disheartening effect on the Greek people, already discouraged by the endless struggle with the Communist-led guerrillas. There would be no large-scale defections to the Communist cause, however, since the division between Communists and anti-Communists has already been sharply drawn by civil war. The old bitterness against the Italian people (which all but died out after the Italian surrender) would revive. It is just possible that there might revive with it a spirit of Greek patriotism like that of 1940, which might lead to greater political solidarity in the face of national peril and to more effective collaboration with US officials in Greece. The sense of greater danger would certainly lead to demands for increased US support and possibly for US military intervention.

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