

*Copied
John Davies
Douglas Hurd
Diana Elmy*

NOTES OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE RIGHT HONOURABLE MRS M THATCHER MP
AND ONOREVOLE ALDO MORO, CHAIRMAN OF THE ITALIAN CHRISTIAN
DEMOCRAT PARTY, SATURDAY, 25 JUNE 1977

Also present : Right Honourable John Davies MP
John Stanley MP
Mr A M Layden, British Embassy, Rome

After initial courtesies, Mrs Thatcher explained that the main reason for her call on Signor Moro was to promote closer relations between the Conservative Party and the DC; it was important in the run-up to the direct elections for the European Assembly that the truly democratic parties of Europe should work more closely together. Ultimately Europe would be politically divided between the Communists on the one hand and the Democrats on the other. The two could not co-exist. Those who believed in democracy must present a united front against those who wanted to extinguish all political thought except the Communist creed.

Mrs Thatcher thought that the programmes of the two parties were very similar. Certainly there were various historical, cultural and traditional differences but there was much common ground; now was the time to emphasise this common ground.

She explained that the word "conservative" did not have the same connotation in English as in Italian; Signor Moro explained in turn the historical background to the Italian use of the term "popular" when applied to a political party. Mrs Thatcher and Signor Moro agreed that both their parties had substantial support from all classes of society.

Mrs Thatcher then went on to propose that, since the Communists and Socialists had gone rather further towards supporting their operations by international co-operation, the democratic parties might be at a disadvantage if they did not increase their own international co-operation. She suggested that before the European direct elections, some kind of general statement of the
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principles which the democratic parties of Europe hold in common might be useful. Such a statement would of course be in addition to the national manifestos of the individual parties. It should be positive in tone, since she had the feeling that too much of modern political discourse tended to be expressed in negative terms. The statement should in fact set out the individual positive things for which all the democratic parties of Europe stood.

Signor Moro thought this was a good idea, and also said in general terms that he hoped contact and co-operation between the European Christian Democratic and Liberal parties and the Conservative Party would increase : he felt that as contact and mutual understanding grew, a formula for putting this process into an institutional framework would emerge naturally. Mrs Thatcher at this point mentioned the European Democratic Union. Signor Moro had not heard of it, and Mrs Thatcher undertook to send him some papers about it, stressing that despite its name, it was more an alliance than a union, and that it would remain flexible enough to accommodate parties with widely differing views on many questions.

Mr Davies then raised the question of increasing co-operation between the Young Conservatives and the Christian Democratic Youth Movement. He had brought a letter from the YC President which Signor Moro agreed to pass to the Political Secretary of the Christian Democratic Youth Movement. Mrs Thatcher made the point, with which Signor Moro agreed, that the young tended to be very European-minded indeed; their idealism was not fettered, as that of the older generation tended to be, by certain unhappy memories of the past.

Mrs Thatcher then asked Signor Moro about the current Italian situation, offering the view that the Christian Democrats seem to have been dealing with great skill with very difficult problems. He said it was certainly a difficult period. The Christian Democrats had now been in power for more than 30 years, since their main opponent was a strong Communist party which had so far been rejected by public opinion. He stressed that it was the people, not the DC, who had kept the PCI out of power all this time. Thus a

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situation, which would be unthinkable in the UK, had arisen, in which the same party governed the country for more than 30 years. The DC had done so in collaboration with various other parties, from the Socialists to the Liberals, in different coalitions, and had thus been able to keep the PCI at bay throughout.

In recent years, however, the popular aversion to the PCI had diminished, for several reasons. In the first place there was a general tendency in a democratic system for people to feel that a change in the governing party would be a good thing. Secondly, the PCI had been adept at presenting itself to the electorate more and more convincingly as a democratic, inter-class and even pluralist party. Thirdly, it was easier for them to appeal to the electorate as a result of the international process of detente between East and West. Thus they had gradually come out of their previous isolation, and increased their share of the popular vote.

Before the last election a strong attack had been mounted against the DC by all the other political parties in Italy, and by several influential forces, such as the press and media which had previously stood against the Communists. The international press had given the Communists much help in the election campaign.

Mrs Thatcher interjected at this point ^{that} one reason for this was the quality of the PCI public relations effort abroad. They seemed always to provide impressive speakers, with a good command of the local language, at influential academic and other fora, such as the British Chatham House. The DC, for whatever reason, did not seem in the past to have produced such able apologists abroad, so that foreign opinion tended to hear one side of the story only.

Signor Moro accepted this criticism; he agreed that since the party had been in government continuously it had tended to concentrate its dealings with foreign countries on official channels, and had failed to project itself as a party.

Signor Moro went on to describe the situation in Italy after the 1976 election. The DC had by good fortune emerged as still the largest party, with about 40% of the electorate. The Communists had had about 35% and in between were the other parties which in

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the past worked with the DC. The DC had hoped that it would be possible to set up another alliance with these former allies but they had refused. The Christian Democrats were therefore faced with the alternatives of either dissolving Parliament again immediately and having a fresh election, or setting up the present anomalous structure in which the DC ruled alone and was able to do so by the abstention of all the other parties including the Communists. They had had to choose the latter alternative since another election would have been a traumatic experience given the difficult economic situation and the problem of law and order. So while there was no political alliance between the DC and the PCI, and the Christian Democrats certainly had no intention of setting up such an alliance, they were obliged to consult the Communists on parliamentary procedures and policy. They were therefore giving the Communists greater political space. They did not like doing this, but were obliged to.

Mrs Thatcher asked if in the present situation the Communists could force an election whenever they wished. Signor Moro said he thought they could, but so could the DC and it was by no means clear who would gain. In local elections the DC had at least held their ground, and he thought the Communists would be at least as concerned as the DC, and probably more so, at the prospect of an early election.

Signor Moro went on to say that he recognised the personal sincerity of certain of the present Communist leadership, and in particular of the PCI Secretary, Berlinguer. He felt that Berlinguer and others genuinely wanted their party to be fully independent of the CPSU. But it was different with the rank and file. Communism in Italy was not simply the views of the present party leadership : it was part of a world force, and it would be dragged along in the wake of the world Communist movement in general.