

Report from Italy by Liliana Gorini

Moving toward the SDI

The Vatican, and the Italian government, are showing every sign of lending full support to Reagan's beam-weapon program.

The leading institutions of Italy, the government and the Vatican, are moving in the direction of endorsing of President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative.

A few days before Reagan's inaugural speech, on Jan. 13, the official newspaper of the Vatican, *Osservatore Romano*, published a front-page editorial on "The Shield and the Sword," asserting, "The pragmatic research of a method of mutual security different from the balance of terror is politically understandable and desirable."

The *Osservatore Romano* editorial's cautious endorsement of defensive beam-weapon development followed a series of other important articles on this issue, one by the American scientist Edward Teller and another by the Italian scientist Antonino Zichichi, both in the Rome daily *Il Tempo*, emphasizing the moral character of a defensive strategy counterposed to the immorality of the balance of terror.

A few hours after Reagan's inaugural speech, Italian Defense Minister Giovanni Spadolini gave an interview to the Italian dailies *Il Resto del Carlino* and *La Nazione* to explain his upcoming meetings in Washington with Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and President Reagan on the role Europe can play in the Strategic Defense Initiative. After rejecting any "neutralistic and third-way temptation," the Italian defense minister said: "The present push for technological innovations lays the basis for a future in which, perhaps, nuclear weapons will no longer be necessary. The focus

of my discussions in Washington will be the space contest to which the U.S. is presently committing itself with a pioneering spirit. Its aim is to defeat nuclear weapons with non-nuclear weapons, to free humanity from the psychosis of terror and from the permanent spectre of a nuclear holocaust."

After their meeting, Weinberger told the press at the Pentagon that "Spadolini is a close friend of mine" and "I am happy to say that we fully agreed on each point." Answering a question from the Washington correspondent of *L'Unita*, the paper of the Italian Communist Party, who complained that the Italian government is supporting "star wars," Spadolini asserted, "One cannot be more Russian than the Russians," and if the Soviets break off the Geneva negotiations just because of the SDI research program, "world opinion would be against them."

Such support for Reagan's Mutually Assured Survival is not universal in Italy. The Italian Communist Party immediately launched a campaign against "Star Wars" and against Spadolini's and Prime Minister Bettino Craxi's trips to the U.S.A. (Craxi will meet with Reagan on March 5.) The Italian Communists were soon joined by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, led by the Brazilian Carlos Chagas, who convoked all the main Soviet anti-SDI spokesmen as well as such fans of Mutually Assured Destruction as Pugwash members Viktor Weisskopf and Richard Garwin for a conference on "Space Armaments" at the Vatican Jan. 21-25.

The aim of the conference, which informed U.S. sources say is only the first in a series of Soviet-inspired initiatives to try to stop the SDI, was the publication of a final document on the "Catastrophic Consequences of an Eventual Star War"—similar to the document on the catastrophic consequences of a nuclear war which was prepared by the Pontifical Academy and the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1981.

As the president of the Pontifical Academy, Chagas had to admit in a press conference, "The view of the Academy does not necessarily reflect that of the Vatican." This statement, perhaps the only scientific truth pronounced in connection with this closed-door meeting, was fully confirmed on the final day of the conference itself, when the Vatican's *Osservatore Romano* published a long article on "Star Wars: The Word from the Scientists," in which neither Pugwash nor Soviet "experts" are quoted. Rather, Prof. Gianpietro Puppi, a physicist at Bologna University, and Prof. Vittorio Canuto, a NASA expert, are cited. Both scientists denied that Reagan's SDI can be called "Star Wars" because, as they put it, "it does not introduce weapons in space, but simply wants to use space as a control system for the Earth systems." Or, as Professor Canuto explained, it would be impossible to identify a missile from Earth due to the curvature of its surface, and hence, the necessity of space-based detection, at minimum. "The idea," the professor said, "is certainly good and morally healthy."

Osservatore Romano's Carlo De Lucia introduced the interview by denouncing "journalistic inaccuracies" which had previously prevented any understanding of the Strategic Defense Initiative.