

## Report from Italy by Liliana Gorini

### Can the Communists topple Craxi?

*Angry over Italy's "rush to Washington" in support of U.S. defense strategy, they may have the opportunity in a new scandal.*

**T**he official visit to the United States of Italian Defense Minister Giovanni Spadolini was not yet complete when the Italian Communist Party began a "Watergate"-style campaign to topple the Craxi government. After the statements in favor of U.S. beam-weapon development by Spadolini, who met with Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and President Reagan, and after the announcement that Prime Minister Bettino Craxi would meet with Reagan on March 5, the Communists accused the regime of starting a "rush to Washington."

However, other grounds were chosen to demand the government's "impeachment." An artificial scandal exploded toward the end of January: a meeting in Paris between the present labor minister, Gianni De Michelis, and the fugitive Italian terrorist, Orreste Scalzone. Scalzone has been sought by Italian authorities for various crimes, including the 1978 kidnap-assassination of former Premier Aldo Moro.

The scandal exploded when President of the Republic Sandro Pertini leaked to the press a confidential letter to Craxi in which Pertini demanded De Michelis' resignation because of his meeting with Scalzone. The "confidential letter" is now the talk of the nation, and its publication provoked a series of protest messages back and forth from Palazzo Chigi, seat of the Italian government, to the Quirinale, seat of the President.

A few weeks earlier, at a conference on the postwar Communist lead-

er Palmiro Togliatti in Rome, Pertini had proposed that Togliatti's mistress, Nilde Iotti, a Communist leader who now heads the Chamber of Deputies, become the next President of the Republic! He was so concerned to give publicity to the De Michelis/Scalzone scandal that he kept bringing it up during his state visit to Spain, astonishing his hosts when in the middle of a visit to the Prado museum in Madrid, he started shouting: "I am an honest man, I would never shake hands with a terrorist."

There is, of course, nothing wrong in demanding the resignation of a minister who entertains relations with fugitive terrorists. But the fact is, the Italian Communist Party, which not only entertains relations, but also supports terrorists, is using the fight between Palazzo Chigi and the Quirinale to demand Craxi's impeachment. "Nixon was impeached for his lies," they announce. Craxi should be impeached, too, for declaring, "There is no De Michelis case."

The Communists do not hide the fact that America's Strategic Defense Initiative is the real cause of their anger. They have repeatedly attacked Spadolini, "who stopped criticizing the 'Star Wars' strategy of the United States," and also attack the government for sticking to its decision to station U.S. missiles in Comiso, Sicily, despite the decision of the Belgian government to postpone their installation.

In an editorial in the Communist paper *L'Unita*, editor Emanuele Ma-

caluso took the opportunity offered by the De Michelis/Scalzone controversy to list all of the possible causes of a government crisis in Italy: the scandal itself; the freeing of SS Nazi war criminal Walter Reder, sent to Austria where he was welcomed as a hero, provoking a government crisis there; the terrorist train massacre two days before Christmas—the Communists accused the state of covering up fascist terrorism, because it had warned of a revival of left-wing terrorism a few days earlier; unemployment; and the snow emergency in Italy.

While the Communists blame the government for terrorism, Defense Minister Spadolini in New York accused the French authorities of safehousing terrorists. Paris still refuses to extradite 150 Italian terrorists now in France. "My judgment on the French policy in this connection is very harsh," he said. "Paris shows an excessive toleration toward the Italian terrorists." Spadolini also asserted that "France hosts a terrorism multinational."

The issue was also raised by Interior Minister Oscar Luigi Scalfaro in discussions with French Justice Minister Pierre Joxe. Scalfaro pointed to the role of the Italian terrorists in the assassination of French defense ministry official General Audran, his nation's NATO coordinator, and reminded the French that "there are supranational terrorist centers" abroad which use terrorism "as a way to conduct war." Speaking at the opening ceremonies for the academic year at the Police School in Rome, the interior minister called for a stricter coordination between the United States and Europe in the fight against terrorism and drugs, emphasizing the collusion "between right-wing terrorists, left-wing terrorists, criminals, and drug smugglers."