

Report from Italy by Umberto Pascali

'We don't want to end up with toys'

Craxi agreed to support the American beam-weapon program and its economic spinoffs.

Every European government has been forced into a deep reflection on the Strategic Defense Initiative program. It is clear that nobody wants to be stuck in 10 years with technologies that are just toys." This statement was made by Prime Minister Bettino Craxi at a press conference in Washington after a meeting with President Reagan on March 5. Craxi was responding to a question posed by *EIR* concerning the economic spinoffs resulting from the SDI.

President Reagan told the press that Craxi "assured me of Italy's full understanding of the program's objectives, and we agreed on the great potential benefits this research effort could provide. We firmly agree that now is the time for alliance solidarity. And our goal remains the reduction and eventual elimination of the means of aggression, nuclear and conventional."

Craxi's endorsement of the SDI did not please the U.S. press, which downplayed or distorted the outcome of the visit. The *New York Times* buried its coverage in the back pages of the paper March 6, headlined "Italian Leader Avoids Outright 'Star Wars' Endorsement." The *Washington Post's* reporter at the press conference asked whether it would not be better to forget about the SDI and thus preserve peace with the Soviets.

Yet the issue of the economic benefits of the SDI was a leitmotif of Craxi's speeches and statements in the United States. At the White House, Craxi said: "I am convinced that the

fundamental objective of the United States remains the defense of peace. President Reagan assured me that this objective will be pursued with the SDI, from whose research program we can obtain mutual benefits in the scientific and technological field."

And in his press conference: "It is clear that such a gigantic research program will greatly increase the number of technological discoveries for civil and productive use."

Craxi insisted: "Our European computers and technologies will be just toys when the U.S. has developed its program. And remember, a technology is a technology and thus can be used both for peaceful and military uses."

A senior U.S. administration official, in a background briefing to reporters, stressed, "The President assured Prime Minister Craxi that the administration had every intention to work closely with the allies as the research program on Strategic Defense progresses."

Craxi, in turn, assured Reagan "that the Italian government, as have other governments who have spoken to the Soviets, took a common position. . . . Craxi was in a sense telling the President, 'Well, stick to it. Do try to get your arguments across in your conversations with the Soviets.'"

Other major items on the agenda, the U.S. official reported, were terrorism and the war on drugs. "Both the Italian prime minister and the Italian foreign minister said that there was a clear link between drugs and terror-

ism. This met with agreement from the President and others on the American side."

President Reagan told the press that the two leaders were committed "to improve our coordination against narcotics. . . . Our common fight against terrorism is another area of close cooperation, and Italy deserves accolades for its courageous struggle against terrorism."

Craxi also underlined that there would be no decoupling of the European allies from the United States. "There is no conflict, for us," he said to a joint session of Congress, "between Europeanism and Atlanticism. We consider the relations of friendship and cooperation between Europe and the United States as indissoluble and permanent."

"There is in American history a great tradition of the defense of the principles of liberty," he said. "It has its strong roots in the conscience of your country. Many European politicians erred in their estimates of what the United States would do in the face of the First and then Second World War. Theirs were shortsighted calculations. They did not understand just how attached the American democracy was to the democracy of the old world, which had been an inspiration for America from its very birth as a Nation. . . . All freedoms are united; an offense to one is an offense to all of them."

The question now is whether Craxi will be able to keep up this support for the SDI and the United States, resisting the threats of Moscow and Henry Kissinger—who may try to give him the "Moro treatment" (see *Kissinger Watch*). Or will he join his foreign minister, Giulio Andreotti, whose line is: If you want to deploy the new weapons, first we must get the o.k. from Moscow.