

Report from Italy by Liliana Gorini

Andreotti's 'brutta figura' in Erice

Despite the foreign minister's assurances, no Soviet delegation showed up for the conference in Sicily on nuclear war.

It was supposed to be his political triumph, but it turned into a pathetic *brutta figura* (poor figure) for him before the whole world. Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti, known for his pro-Soviet and pro-Libyan sympathies, in numerous interviews and statements, had assured that this year's international conference on nuclear war at the Ettore Majorana Center in Erice, Sicily, would be visited by a "top-level" Soviet delegation.

Andreotti boasted that he got assurances of this from both former Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and from the current one, Eduard Shevardnadze, whom he met in Helsinki in early August. Shevardnadze had promised Andreotti a Soviet delegation of 12 scientists, led by Gromyko's son Yuri, and including two Nobel laureates and three vice-presidents of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

Not only did the Soviets not send any "top-level" delegation to Erice. They sent none at all. They did not even send a message of excuses. This forced Andreotti to read his pro-Soviet speech in front of the American delegation alone, and to go out of his way attempting to justify the Soviet absence.

"I would like to interpret the absence of the Soviet scientists," Andreotti proclaimed, "as a precaution due to particular circumstances, rather than as a step backwards in the scientific community's constructive wish for peace."

The "particular circumstances" mentioned by Andreotti refer to the mysterious disappearance of a Soviet diplomat in Rome and the internationally publicized disorders in Sicily.

"Andreotti is very smart," an Italian daily commented. "He tries to imply that it was because of the mafia that the Soviets did not come. But their absence can only be due to political reasons. This year, in Erice, as Antonio Zichichi said in his opening speech, the scientists knew that they were invited to work out concrete peace proposals." Professor Zichichi is the Italian scientist who hosts the Erice conference.

"Their absence is not important, because in the past they never contributed to the discussion, and their behaviour was never logical," commented Edward Teller, the scientist leading the American delegation to Erice. In his speech at the conference and in interviews to the Italian press, Teller emphasized, "The Soviets speak against the SDI, but they are ahead of us in the development of their own defensive systems." Teller revealed that the Soviets have already tested a powerful laser system in Sari Shagan and an anti-missile radar, which violates the ABM treaty, in Krashoiask.

While Soviet party boss Mikhail Gorbachov maintained an icy silence, President Ronald Reagan sent a message to the Erice conference, assuring that the SDI "is not aimed at reaching any superiority, but just to keep the strategic balance." Reagan confirmed

Teller's accusation that "the U.S.S.R. has today the only existing anti-missile system, and long ago launched an intense research program in many of the fields that the United States only now is starting to explore."

Even the sponsor of the conference, Prof. Zichichi, had to admit that the Soviets are avoiding being confronted with facts. "If they isolate themselves," he said, "they will have to take the responsibility in the eyes of the world for their lack of openness."

An odd detective story around the Erice conference seems to confirm, that the Soviets are not at all open to discussing the SDI. Soviet mathematician Vladimir Alexandrov, one of the few Soviet scientists who, two years ago in Erice, personally signed a call for exchange of information on SDI research, disappeared in late March in Spain. According to Edward Teller, Alexandrov "might not be alive."

"The news of his disappearance," Teller said, "filtered into the West thanks to his wife, who was very worried and phoned from Moscow to some Western friends of hers, asking for news about her husband." According to Teller, Alexandrov did not escape to the United States, as some have suspected.

In the beginning of August, another Soviet official, Vitali Yurtshenko, also disappeared, during a tour of the Vatican museums. Yurtshenko was to have taken care of the security of the Soviet delegation in Erice. The Soviets stick to a "no comment" attitude on these strange events.

As for the pathetic Andreotti, who dreamed of using his personal success with the Soviets at the Erice conference to launch his campaign to become Italian prime minister in September, forming a new government with the communists, this was probably the worst *brutta figura* in his whole career.