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POLITICAL LESSONS: ITALY AND CHILE

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I thought that presentation was vintage Schlesinger. It was very good to hear directly from the man who played the leading role in changing Washington policy regarding the Italian center-left. I was particularly fascinated by Arthur's account of how he became involved in Italian affairs. Those of us who love Italy and are concerned with its past, present, and future are very glad indeed that he did become involved. I wish that I had known Koestler; his books influenced me greatly in my youth. And as I read the opening pages of Arthur's remarks to us this morning, I recalled once again what I consider to be one of the best observations by Karl Marx: "We are all accidents of history." That is the way I see myself and everyone else. So I suppose it was only natural that Arthur Schlesinger's account would cause me to reflect on how I became involved with Italy.

Many years ago I was an undergraduate at CCNY (where Arthur now presides at the Graduate School). Growing up on the sidewalks of New York, I went to CCNY because it was free, and I attended the Evening Session because during the day I was working full-time as a bank teller. CCNY was then one of the more radical colleges in this country. Every night you could find three groups of students arguing and debating in the basement: the Socialists, the Stalinists and the Trotskyites. I did not have much time, but occasionally I would ask questions, moving from one group to another. Looking back on my life you might say this was Operation Head Start. After seven years of night school, I received my degree.

Soon after passing the Foreign Service exams and joining the career

diplomatic service, I was assigned to Warsaw as third secretary. Poland was a great university for me. Under the Soviet-imposed dictatorship there, practically everyone was strongly anti-Communist, including most of the government people I met. And Poland was the most pro-American country I have ever known, more pro-American than the United States. Poles saw themselves as caught between Germany and Russia, while we were protected by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Talk about accidents of history! There was a Polish joke that "God watches out for little babies, drunks, and the United States of America." Another Polish joke explained the difference between capitalism and socialism: "Capitalism is the exploitation of man by man. And socialism is vice versa." I left Warsaw feeling that if there ever was a collapse of the Soviet empire it would start in Poland. I was right on that one.

After Poland, I attended a year of Russian-language training at Columbia University, then served two years in Moscow, followed by four years on the Polish desk, back in Washington. By that time I was requesting an assignment in the free world, preferably in a country with a large Communist party. I was very lucky to be sent to Rome as first secretary. And that is how I became involved in Italy.

As Arthur has already said, when I arrived in Rome in late 1957, our embassy shunned contact with the PSI. I had expressed a special interest in covering the Italian Left, and I proposed that I talk with the Socialists (along with the left-of-center Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and Republicans, of course). Among other things I pointed out that the combined Communist-Socialist vote was growing, and that it might soon begin to approach a majority. I also said I was sure the Communists did not want us to develop a dialogue with the Socialists. My request was granted. So, in February 1958, I called Riccardo Lombardi to seek an appointment. We met for coffee at the Parliament, where Lombardi was a deputy. After some polite exchanges, Lombardi asked whether my visit reflected a change in U.S. policy. I replied that I had just arrived in Rome and was trying to meet as many Italians as possible. Many years later following his death, friends of Lombardi told me that, at the time of this first encounter, he had suspected that I was with the CIA. I was not, and never have been. In any event, our friendship flourished and we had many conversations, which I carefully reported to Washington.

Then my relations with the PSI expanded rapidly, although of course not all Socialists were responsive. Two of my main contacts were Paolo Vittorelli and Giovanni Pieraccini. I debated day and night with my new

Socialist friends, arguing that if they were sincere about helping Italian democracy and the working class they should distance themselves from the Communist party and enter the democratic area of Italian politics. I promised that by so doing they would greatly influence State Department policy and contribute significantly to the development of Italian democracy.

Fortunately my wife, Aleta, and I, along with my mother, had a conveniently located apartment in Rome, and it soon came to be an open house for advocates of the center-left. There was very encouraging progress in Socialist public statements and actions. I even began to receive phone calls (sometimes late at night) from Nenni's friends, asking my opinion of public statements they were thinking of recommending for him. Of course they did not automatically accept my views. Occasionally it was suggested that I should meet with Nenni. I would have welcomed that, but I was under embassy orders not to do so, and so I politely declined.

Frankly, one of the greatest surprises in my relations with the Nenni Socialists was their ignorance of the United States. I did not know one PSI leader who had been here, and some of their questions about this country were startling. Let me give you an example. At one point I felt the progress in our relations was so encouraging that it would be useful to invite a leading Socialist for a visit to the United States, as a guest of our government. I suggested Vittorelli. That was no problem for our embassy or the department, and Paolo was certainly enthusiastic. But the day after I invited him he returned to my office, rather concerned, and said that Nenni had ruled he could go to the United States on two conditions: (1) that if he were invited to speak in the United States, he could accept; and, (2) that if he wanted to criticize the United States upon his return to Italy he could do so. I stared at Vittorelli for a moment and then replied that both conditions were fine with us, and that if he would like reliable details about some of the problems and defects in U.S. daily life, I would be glad to supply them before his departure. Vittorelli thought his visit to the United States was a great success, and so did I. Then we invited more Socialists, and they came—without negotiating prior conditions.

Of course, as many of you know, these were difficult times in Italian domestic politics. I will never forget one afternoon during the Tambroni government of 1960, when the Christian Democrats were dependent on MSI support in Parliament. The Communists were hoping to split Italy between the Right and the Left, with the conservatives, neofascists, and the United States on one side, and the democratic Left, the Socialists,

and the Communists, supported by the USSR, on the other. On this occasion the Communists had organized a massive rally against the government, and they slowly moved forward toward the police lines, singing and shouting. Suddenly there were shots, and the police cars charged. The demonstrators fled but, after an instant of panic, I thought it best to just stand alone in the street. As the police came hurtling past, I could see what had sounded like shots was the police banging their sticks on the sides of their cars. There were fights and arrests, of course, but I was lucky and walked away unharmed. Those were exciting days.

As Arthur had indicated, this was also a hard time in the embassy, and sometimes I felt isolated. But it helped to know there was some support back in Washington. One of the most dependable Washington advocates of the center-left in those days is here with us today, Dorothy Zaring, along with her husband, Joe Zaring. Dorothy was in the research side of CIA, and an articulate proponent of dialogue with the Socialists.

When my four-year tour of duty in Rome ran out, I was transferred back to the department, where I soon met Arthur Schlesinger, a major step forward for me. Once Averell Harriman had saved me from being "selected out," it was possible to cooperate with Arthur, even though I was no longer officially involved with Italian affairs. We were in close contact; my Italian center-left friends kept coming to Washington, I would take them to the White House to meet Schlesinger, and the dialogue flourished. Arthur continued to play the key role in Washington. Kennedy talked with Nenni in July 1963, and in November 1963 the Socialists entered the government, in large measure thanks to the efforts of Arthur Schlesinger.

Are there any lessons to be learned from all of this? Well, before I try to answer that, let me tell you briefly of a sequel to my Italian experience. Soon after returning to the department, I was assigned to Latin American affairs, where I had begun my career. One of the first countries that caught my attention was Chile, where the Socialist party was in close alliance with the Communists and, once again, there was no Socialist contact with us. I urged that we initiate a dialogue with the Socialists, but to no avail. Eduardo Frei of the Christian Democrats was elected president in 1964 and the Communists and Socialists remained in opposition. Then in 1970, Salvador Allende won a fair election and the Socialists and Communists came to power. In 1973 Allende was overthrown by a military coup, and thousands of Chilean refugees came to the United States. I was soon immersed in the Chilean exile community, including Socialists of various

viewpoints. Meanwhile, we were making progress in the department in recommending a higher priority for human rights in our foreign policy, and our Human Rights Bureau was created. The human rights issue was a major factor in our support for Chilean democracy, while distancing ourselves from the Pinochet dictatorship and improving our relations and dialogue with the Chilean democratic opposition. I was convinced that there would be no transition to democracy in Chile without the cooperation of the democratic wing of the Socialist party. And I pushed my Socialist friends hard, urging them to reject Leninism and to take an honest and consistent position in favor of democracy and human rights in their visits to the State Department. When they did that it had a very favorable impact, not only in Chile but also in the United States. Chile returned to democratic rule in 1989 and the Socialists are now in the government.

The stories of Italy and Chile are far from identical, of course, but the similarities are startling. Could the Chilean tragedy have been avoided if there had been a dialogue with the Socialists? What would have happened in Italy if there had been no dialogue with the Socialists? We will never know. But I think both the Italian and Chilean stories call attention to the importance of dialogue and distinguishing between the democratic and the antidemocratic left. I emphasized both of those themes during my visit to Santiago, Chile, as a guest of the Chilean government, and certainly both themes are relevant here today.

Well, with those comments, and in that perspective, perhaps it is best for me to simply conclude by saying that, considering everything, including what *might* have happened in Italy thirty years ago, we were all lucky to have had Arthur Schlesinger in Washington as the defender of Italian democracy.

Thank you, Arthur.