

Report from Italy by Leonardo Servadio

Bettino Craxi drops Atlanticist mask

The Italian premier attacks the Reagan strategic ABM defense plan, as magistrates close in on his mob links.

Italian Socialist Premier Bettino Craxi—hailed during his recent White House visit by President Reagan as a great political leader—has thrown away his Atlanticist mask and explicitly attacked the Reagan beam-weapons defense policy. On Jan. 20, addressing the joint meeting of the Brandt and Palme commissions in Rome, Craxi invoked the “growing consciousness of the absurdity of a military race that has reached space and seems to be stepping toward the stars” and then lashed out rhetorically: “Is it really possible to eliminate the state’s vulnerability under a military profile? Beyond a certain limit, the arms build-up stops having a defensive aim and takes on a threatening one instead.”

The point is not so much that Craxi’s position was exactly like that of his Swedish counterpart Olof Palme, chairman of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues that goes by his name, who told the international press in Rome that Reagan’s program is “dangerous” and must be fought. The fact is that the Palme Commission itself was exposed in those very days throughout the European press as a KGB initiative, channeled through the recently arrested Norwegian spy Arne Treholt.

So Craxi has lined up with Moscow. Anyone doubting it should read the Italian Communist Party paper’s gushing coverage of his speech: “The premier found words he didn’t have other times . . . a criticism of the ‘star wars’ projects being talked about in Washington . . . an implicit polemic

against the logic of the ‘Reagan Doctrine.’”

Aside from the fact that Craxi—a crony of Henry Kissinger and the Trilateral Commission which put him into power—has never been a supporter of Reagan’s policies, what drove the Italian premier to such an apparent “turn” from his studied Atlanticist profile?

During the last period, Craxi has been inundated with scandals which have undermined the very existence of his government. Fearing that the growing new alliance of the Communist and Christian Democratic parties might overturn him, Craxi opted to line up with the pro-Soviet policies of his Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti. In the span of few months Italy has turned pro-Syria, pro-Libya, and pro-Iran, going full tilt toward a European and Italian “neutralism”—decoupling from the U.S.A. and appeasing the Soviets.

Craxi’s foreign minister, the formerly “pro-NATO” Christian Democrat Andreotti, answers criticisms by insisting he is following the policies of the State Department of the Vatican, which is indeed pursuing a dangerous appeasement policy not unlike that of Kissinger, Palme, and the Trilateral Commission, a policy marked by rejection of beam defense and hostility to President Reagan.

With Craxi’s Atlanticist loyalties debunked, it is long overdue for the White House to wake up to what the Italian premier really is. In Italy, Craxi is known for political gangsterism, his

shady connections to the organized crime world of Milan, his links to drug and weapons smuggling, and his affinity to left-terrorist groups. But until recently, he succeeded in keeping the proof out of public view.

In the city of Trento, near the Austrian border, a courageous investigating magistrate Carlo Palermo has been probing the international arms-and-illegal-drugs traffic for three years. Investigation of dope smuggling led Palermo to identify the big shots in the ranks of the Nazi International, the P-2 Masonic Lodge, and Eastern and Western intelligence services behind this dirty business. His inquiry brought to light a massive exchange of drugs for arms—also known as the “Bulgarian Connection,”—creating major problems for the KGB and its allies in the West.

When Palermo interrogated Ferdinando Mach, the top financier of the Italian Socialist Party and a close aide of Bettino Craxi, and accused Mach of weapons smuggling, Craxi sent down orders to immediately kick Palermo out of the magistracy. Craxi told the press on Feb. 3: “In the face of an inconceivable hypothesis on my links to international smuggling of arms and money, an absurd and strongly offensive hypothesis, I reacted at once by taking court action.”

An “inconceivable hypothesis?” It was Craxi’s own press attaché, Vanni Nisticò, who testified about Craxi’s meetings with Licio Gelli, grand master of the illegal P-2 lodge, in Craxi’s own house, meetings which Nisticò said were aimed at creating an alliance between Craxi and the Christian Democrat Andreotti. That aim has now been reached. If Craxi indeed has such connections to the former Mussolini secret-police agent Licio Gelli, no hypothesis about him is really “inconceivable.”