

**Effie Pedaliu, *Britain, Italy and the Origins of the Cold War.*
Useful Hints for Future Scholarly Investigations
by Claudia Nasini**

Effie Pedaliu's 2003 book *Britain, Italy and the Origins of the Cold War* analyzes the British Labour Government's contribution to the post-war reconstruction of Italy. The book focuses on five areas addressed in five chapters. That is, the prosecution of Italian war criminals; the reconstruction of the Italian armed forces; the Italian elections of April 1948 and Italy's institutional role in Western security arrangements and participation into NATO.

From the prospective of my research, which focuses on the peculiarities of British involvement in Italy (mainly via SOE) during WWII and the immediate post-war, particularly Pedaliu's chapters on the post-war Italian armed forces and on the General election of 1948 are particularly worthy of further consideration in view of some significant amendments that I would recommend.

The book is one of the few monographs covering a rather important yet still neglected period of Anglo-Italian relations. These are namely the years between 1945 and 1949 when the peninsula was pondering on its future international collocation. The volume highlights the two main threads of the British Labour Government's foreign policy in this span of time. Firstly, Britain's attempt to prevent the spreading of Communism in Italy. Secondly British effort to project her influence in the Mediterranean basin in a way that would enable her to compete with both the US and the USSR in that strategically important region.

One of the main strongpoints of the volume is that it delves into the pivotal biennium of 1945-1947 highlighting the extent to which the wartime legacy still strongly affected post-war Italy. In this respect the book represents the first attempt to show how the WWII Anglo-Italian connections endured beyond the end of the conflict both in the military/security forces circles as well as in the strictly political context. British influence via these two Italian vectors nurtured and protected Italy during the critical time the United States was beginning to contemplate its responsibility as a superpower. On the other hand, the book also claims that from early 1947, the progressive encroachment of bipolarity in the dynamics of international relations put the Anglo-Italian ties to a severe test. The Americans, in fact, in their effort to strengthen Italy as a

bastion against the westward Communist advance, tended to by-pass Britain's initiatives in the region¹.

The volume is overall an important milestone in balancing traditional historical accounts. Especially Italian historians, in fact, have claimed that Labourite Britain's foreign policy towards Italy, after 1945, remained prevalently a "negative policy" like during the Conservative-dominated war years: i.e. aiming to contain and contrast the strengthening of Italy and its influence in the Mediterranean².

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The second chapter, *The Reconstruction of the Postwar Italian Armed Forces*, explains why after 1945 Britain considered it important to cultivate close ties with Italian Army and police forces circles. It also provide an analysis of some of the reasons that contributed to frustrate a stronger development of these connections.

According to Pedaliu there were three prevalent factors which pushed Britain to action in Italy. Firstly, it was needed in order to maintain "law and order" inside the country against the supposed PCI's subversive threat. Furthermore, a British enforcement effort was considered necessary to protect the peninsula's frontier along the Northern-Eastern border from neighbouring Yugoslavia. The widespread British perception of international events also played an important part in directing British policy-makers. In fact, Togliatti's supposed bid for "internal" power and Yugoslavia's "external" attack were interpreted in Britain as a "by-product of an orchestrated Soviet campaign to wear down the West, rather than two distinct problems"³. Finally, the participation in the reconstruction of Italian armed forces was considered as a means for preserving British influence in post-treaty Italian affairs. It would "bolster British position vis-à-vis the ascendancy of American power in the

¹ E.G.H. Pedaliu, *Britain, Italy and the Origins of the Cold War*, Basingstoke-New York, 2003, "Introduction".

² Among the partly biased interpretation in this sense see, for instance, L. Nuti, *L'esercito italiano nel secondo dopoguerra, 1945-1950. La sua ricostruzione e l'assistenza militare alleata*, Roma, Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore Esercito, 1989, *passim*.

³ E.G.H. Pedaliu, *op. cit.*, p. 39. Pedaliu adds: "Since Yugoslavia was not able to take on the West single-handedly, the British concluded that it would not dare use force against Italy to resolve territorial disputes without having first secured the prior agreement of Soviet Union [...] thus the Italo-Yugoslav rift over Italy's north-eastern border was soon identified as a potential 'flashpoint' between East and West. This perception was intensified by the continuing Greek Civil war and the fear of Communist expansion into the Western sphere it engendered".

region and Soviet encroachment”⁴. A more mundane corollary to this political involvement was the desire to make Italy a “client state” of the British arms industry through procurement.

British considerations also reflected previous Britain's deep involvement in Italy during the co-belligerency when the task of reorganizing the post-armistice Italian armed forces and police for the *Regno del Sud* (Southern Kingdom) had already fallen on British shoulders. This enforcement had been particularly implemented through the “British dominated” MMIA (Allied Military Mission to the Italian Army) under the tutelage of Major General L. Browning.

Overall this involvement in the peninsula reflected the foreign policy pursued by the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin. Britain's first rank standing in the Mediterranean, along with its preeminent influence in the adjacent Middle East, was traditionally associated with its *status* as a world power. Consequently, considerations on involvement in Italy were vital ones such as: “the security of the imperial lines of communication, the preservation of the Empire and the safe access to oil supplies” (p. 42).

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As early as in mid-1945 the British had tried to involve the Americans in the task of the reorganization of Italian armed forces in order to partly share some of the financial burden of the task. Yet, the Americans until the second half of 1946 showed a reluctance to be drawn in any commitment. After some months of intense discussion in London concerning the size and equipment of the Italian *interim* forces (which should not prejudice the eventual shape of the military clauses of the Peace Treaty), in spring 1946, the British Government opted for action. The best way to provide assistance was thought to be through the attachment of missions to the Italian armed and police forces – as a continuation of the close relationship fostered within the MMIA⁵ – which would provide training, technical advice and equipment.

According to Pedaliu, the British “long term aim” was to have a mission per service and to preserve them *in situ* even after the signing of the Peace treaty.

⁴ E.G.H. Pedaliu, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁵ On the Anglo-Italian collaboration through the MMIA see the highly appreciative opinion towards British aid in the volume by General Mario Montanari, cfr. M. Montanari, *Politica e strategia in cento anni di guerre italiane*, Vol. IV, “La guerra di Liberazione”, Roma, S. M. E. Ufficio storico, 2010, p. 100 and fl.

Since December 1945 the British Government had tried to obtain the go-ahead from the Italian Prime Ministers, Ferruccio Parri (June 1945-December 1945), for sending the missions. Parri, however, had then expressed the same concern that in mid-1946 the new Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi posed to the British. Apparently both the Italian Governments deemed themselves not in the position of accepting military advisors consisting of “British-only” representatives since the leftist parties (PCI and PSI) within the coalition Government would reject any foreigner missions which did not also include the Soviet ally. Furthermore, the Italians did not want to antagonize the USSR before the signing of the Peace Treaty.

By February 1946, the Foreign Office – prevalently its Western Department – had become very concerned about the ability of Italian police forces to be able to uphold law and order inside the country. The Attlee government thus decided for the insinuation of a “covert” British police mission in Italy. The mission was attached to the still existing MMIA and entrusted with advising and training both the *Carabinieri* (the militarized arm of the police) and possibly also the *Pubblica Sicurezza* (the civil police service).

In May 1946, military review reports revealed the condition of “deterioration” of Italian land forces passed to Italian control in December 1945. Pedaliu stresses that the state of deterioration was due to the fact that most of the equipment of the Italian army came from indigenous forces or from the Allied “disposal agencies” (that is, allied weaponry left behind in 1945) and was made of obsolete material. In any case, by summer 1946, it was obvious that should the Communists mount a challenge the Italian army would not be in a position to contain it. Furthermore, Italian administrative elections showed that if the PCI and PSI were to combine their forces they might gain power in Italy. Elections also revealed a dramatic increase in PCI membership (p. 46).

The security situation worsened through the autumn 1946 when the economic crisis produced a lot of social turmoil and unrest. Yet, De Gasperi continued to refuse the sending of British missions. Apparently, according to Pedaliu, the main reason behind Italian continuing refusal, beyond the opposition of the leftist parties, was the final version of the Peace Treaty which in Italy had engendered hostility towards Britain deemed responsible for not having shielded the country. Although efforts were made by the Foreign Office to appease the Italian politicians (i.e. the six-month Foreign Minister Pietro Nenni) the situation did not improve. Nor did it see any advance with 1947.

Conversely, at that point, the Foreign Office’s resolute decision to submit to the Italian Government a formal proposal for the reequipping of the Italian Air forces produced some positive outcomes. Bevin’s scheme, concerted in accordance with the British Air Ministry, was in fact put in action through the

summer and autumn of 1947 when London started providing Italy with Spitfire aircraft and equipment. Nevertheless, even the implementation of this agreement was not a straight forward affair. The Air Ministry's original scheme was in fact a mixed plan, that is, an assistance package including both free and chargeable elements. As Pedaliu explains, the Italians, "while willing to absorb the cost-free elements of the British scheme, were rather reluctant to incur the costs of those elements which required payment". (p. 53). As a result the improvement of Italian air forces was limited. Despite the difficulties, Britain's interest in Italy continued and supply of British aids to the peninsula persisted (p 53). Probably also in consideration of this attitude, when in October 1947 the new Italian Foreign Minister, Carlo Sforza, visited London he assured Bevin of the Italian Government's new disposition in accepting British missions. Yet, contrary to what announced by Sforza, in May 1948 the Italian Government notified Bevin with the final rejection of any foreigner military advisor for Italy. From then on, as Pedaliu concludes, the sporadic visits of Italian officers, belonging to both the armed and police forces, for periodic training courses in Britain was the last vestige of the Anglo-Italian military cooperation.

An Appreciation of the Second Chapter on the Italian Armed Forces and its interrelation with British Support

Overall Pedaliu's volume correctly identifies the factors that frustrated British attempts with the Italian military: the presence of the PCI in all Italian Governments until spring 1947; the impact of Britain's own financial problems; and finally the change of policy in the US after 1946, when the new American engagement in the Mediterranean afforded De Gasperi the confidence to reject British-only missions.

The volume is a thoroughly researched monograph on the British Government archives. Particularly the Foreign Office documentation includes papers of several different departments which are investigated in depth. On the other hand, more scant is the official documentation from Italian Archives addressed in the volume. In particular the whole British involvement with the *Carabinieri* is addressed in general terms and it does not allow for important post-war Anglo-Italian ties to emerge.

A preliminary analysis of the Italian Army's Historical Archives (AUSSME in Rome) has revealed the existence of further significant documentation not covered in the book. Included in this Italian documentation particularly noteworthy are the files in AUSSME, Fondo I3 busta 119. This is a large folder on the activity of the allied MMIA in Italy between 1943 and 1947. This documentation, which cover the period of the insinuation of "covert" British

police missions into the MMIA (from February 1946), could shed some light on how, after that date, the Italian authorities dealt with the issue of reorganizing both its police forces, the *Carabinieri* and the *Pubblica Sicurezza*. Some important hints on the role played by the British “covert” police officers might be contained in this folder. This is not a secondary issue in order to appreciate the continuation of British influence on Italy aside from official governmental decisions.

During WWII Britain put a lot of emphasis on the important “containment” role that the *Carabinieri* could play in Italy to guarantee the respect of the law and to prevent social unrest. In fact, as Pedaliu herself admits, since the immediate end of the war, Britain was willing to tolerate some breaches to the *interim* provisions of the Italian Peace Treaty concerning the Italian police forces. These included personnel of the *Carabinieri* above the fixed ceiling limits and the arming of the *Pubblica Sicurezza* to such a degree that it possessed more firepower than the British counterpart. As a matter of fact, the British had exerted a very strong influence on the Italian *Carabinieri* since the early phase of the Allied Military Administration of Italy when the *Carabinieri* had been reorganized in Southern Italy under British tutelage. In fact, the *Comando Arma Reali Carabinieri dell'Italia Liberata* (Italian Command of Royal Carabinieri of Liberated Italy) was re-established in Bari in November 1943 in order to help the Allied Military Government to maintain public order. The command of the *Carabinieri* was under the control of the Civil Affairs Division of the Allied Control Commission, a division that throughout the whole course of the war remained under British command.

The story of the *Carabinieri* (CC.RR.) was one of not easy relations with the Fascist regime which was suspicious of these armed forces because of their strong allegiance to the Italian House of Savoy rather than to the State. The main historian of the Allied Military Administration of Italy, British historian Charles R.S. Harris, recalls how after 1943 the problem of maintaining public order in the liberated areas of Italy was soon solved by the re-organization of “mobile squadrons” of *Carabinieri*⁶. The latter during the Allied advance in occupied territories, moved forwards with the “spearhead” Civil Affairs officers while larger *Carabinieri* detachments followed behind. The duties of these police forces consisted in reorganizing the local police, posting Allied proclamations and reporting on issues (from mines to movements of suspected individuals) which might be dangerous for the armies as well as for the population. In this respect, they were a useful support to both the allied Military Police and Field Security Service units. As Harris affirms “Indeed it would be hard to over-

⁶ C.R.S. Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy, 1943-1945*, London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957, pp. 156-157 and fll.

estimate the contribution made by the *Carabinieri* under the leadership of the AMG Public Safety officers for the prevention of unrest” (p. 158). In order to fulfil their task, mobile squadrons of *Carabinieri*, sometimes amounting to 2000 officers, were trained and equipped in Sardinia and soon their “ceiling limit” as fixed by the armistice agreement was breached and enlarged. (p. 162 and fl.). When in November 1943 the *Carabinieri* were reconstituted in Southern Italy, Badoglio entrusted their command to Giuseppe Piéche, a former *Carabinieri* general who in the Thirties had served in the counterespionage “Bonsignore” Division of the Italian SIM (Italian Secret Military Intelligence). The headquarters, initially located in Bari, moved to Rome in July 1944 after the liberation of the capital.

The important aspect, which is not mentioned in Pedaliu’s volume, is the role of General Piéche within the *Carabinieri* and how he maintained a rather prominent role in Italian internal security affairs even in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. His position even increased in importance in coincidence with the disbandment of Italian SIM after the beginning of 1945. On that date the Allies by and large disbanded SIM partly as a consequence political pressure from Italian Resistance which deemed SIM has being constituted by former Fascists. Although the General Chief of Staff of the Italian army was allowed, under certain restrictions, to preserve an internal Intelligence section (*Ufficio I*), the vacation of the national intelligence organization lasted until 1948. On the other hand, it would be inaccurate to assert that Italy lacked an intelligence apparatus during those almost three years. On the contrary, there is some preliminary evidence from several chronicles that during that time several Italian representatives, generally holding posts within the Ministry of Interior, played a prevalently intelligence role. Among them, certainly Giuseppe Piéche exerted his influence on the maintaining of “law and order”⁷. In 1946, within the Italian Ministry of the Interior (under democratic socialist Giuseppe Romita as we shall discuss later) a division called *Servizio Protezione Civile and Antincendio* was established, again entrusted to the command of General Piéche. According to some accounts, never confirmed by a thoroughly researched study, Piéche in that capacity, in coincidence with the administrative elections of June 1946, was responsible for the dismissal of almost the totality of the former Partisans whom at the end of the war had joined the civil police (*Pubblica Sicurezza*)⁸. These Partisans had been enrolled in the *Pubblica Sicurezza* under pressure from the Italian CLNs

⁷ See in particular on this G. De Lutiis, *I servizi segreti in Italia*, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1998, p. 54 and fl.

⁸ On this specific aspect see A. Vento, *In silenzio gioite e soffrite. Storia dei servizi segreti italiani dal Risorgimento alla Guerra Fredda*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 2010, p. 286.

(the Partisan leadership) but Piéche decided to replace almost the totality of them with professional personnel. In other words, Piéche substituted the “ideologically suspicious” ex-Partisans with more reliable personnel. Furthermore, Piéche’s *Protezione Civile* established its own representatives in every *questura* (civil police headquarters).

Later, in 1948, Piéche continued his “public safety” activity in accordance with another re-established division of the Ministry of the Interior (at that time under the Italian conservative Luigi Scelba) called *Servizio Affari Generali e Riservati* entrusted to the *questore* Gesualdo Barletta. According again to another rather apocryphal account, Barletta was the person whom after the beginning of the Korean War had suggested Allen Dulles that the American Government should request Italy to declare the illegality of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and consequently suppress it⁹. For Italian historian Mario Del Pero the Minister of the Interior, Scelba, refused the American suggestion of banishing the PCI on the assumption that the provision would inescapably precipitate Italy into a civil war¹⁰.

Several other quite apocryphal accounts on the other hand affirm that also General Piéche was at long in contact with both the American and British intelligence services in the post-war. Italian scholar Andrea Vento (one of the few who has addressed the history of Italian intelligence although without examining SOE and OSS archives) affirms that Piéche in the mid-Forties was in contact with James J. Angleton, Earl Brennan, Henry Tasca and other American “Cold Warriors” participating in organizing the containment of Communism in Italy.

Yet, one might wonder if it is not strange that after all the effort made during the co-belligerency in order to reorganize the *Carabinieri* along British lines, the British should suddenly withdraw their assistance to them in favour of an American all-embracing interventionism.

In other words, the preservation of British influence on Italy through the *Carabinieri* and the Ministry of the Interior deserve further investigation.

In this respect, again a preliminary investigation of the AUSSME archive in Rome has brought to light some documentation of interest. In particular, AUSSME, Fondo I3 contains a folder on the Allies’ policy regarding the Italian police and armed forces until November 1946.

At the same time, the aforementioned folder on the MMIA covering until the end of 1947 could also be of interest.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ M. Del Pero, *The United States and ‘Psychological Warfare’ in Italy, 1948-1955*, in «The Journal of American History», vol. 87, n. 4, Mar., 2001, pp. 1304-1334.

Finally the files on Italian SIM contains many references to the Italian *Carabinieri* after the end of the war, i.e. AUSSME Fondo SIM, 1st Division.

Furthermore, an investigation in the Italian *Archivio Centrale dello Stato* in Rome is also important concerning the activity of both the abovementioned Divisions of the Ministry of the Interior between 1946 and 1948, that is, the *Servizio Protezione Civile* under Giuseppe Piéche and the *Ufficio Affari Generali e Riservati* under Gesualdo Barletta.

Furthermore, another aspect of WWII Anglo-Italian cooperation is important as a possible source of important post-war reflections. This form of cooperation again involved a large number of *Carabinieri*. It started in 1943, when after the re-organization of SIM in Southern Italy, the Allies realized that their counterintelligence activities, normally entrusted to MI6 (alias, *Field Security Services*) and SCI (Service Counter Intelligence) needed the support of the Italians.

As early as in November 1943 a unit formed of prevalently (but not exclusively) former Italian counterintelligence personnel was enrolled in a battalion named 808° Bt. CS (Counterintelligence) and put in duty under allied control. The battalion was attached to the British 8th Army and operationally accountable to the British command. It depended only administratively from the Italian SIM's counterintelligence division (alias "Bonsignore") located in Brindisi and later in Rome. In December 1943, an identical battalion was created and attached at the 5th Army but again under British operational control. The personnel were entrusted to support the counterintelligence work of the Allies neutralizing possible spies and political agitators as well as saboteurs of the allied war effort. Furthermore, the Italian personnel were also in charge of seizing and putting to trial members of the enemy secret services (German or Italian Fascist Republic intelligences). In this respect, their activity was very profitable since the 808° Bt. CS personnel was well acquainted (also through SIM's records) with both the Nazi intelligence as well as with all the several Italian underground political movements and possible agitators.

According to a preliminary study by Italian scholar Gabriella Pasqualini the 808° Bt. CS was highly considered by the Allies and accomplished a lot in the security field¹¹. For this reason, in September 1944 the British decided to fully integrate the 808° Bt. CS personnel in their organic of war and consequently 69 officials and 931 privates of Italian nationality became in all

¹¹ M.G. Pasqualini, "Brevi note su alcuni aspetti dell'amministrazione militare anglo-americana in territori liberati dell'Italia dal 1943 al 1948", in *Military Conflicts and Civil Populations. Total Wars, Limited Wars, Asymmetric Wars*, ACTA (34th Congress of the International Commission of Military History), Vol. 1, Roma, 2009, in particular pp. 433-434 and *passim*.

respect fully-fledged British soldiers¹². Nor did this enrolment cease with the end of the war. In fact, when in 1945 the Allies, as already mentioned, decided to disband the Italian SIM they decided to preserve the 808° Bt. CS and to continue to employ the by-then British battalion in counterintelligence task under the command of the AFHQ in Italy¹³.

A preliminary investigation of National Archives and Records Administration (from now on NARA) in Washington DC, has shown that documentation concerning the 808° Bt. CS is today available in the United States (in the OSS Archives) since copies of the battalion's reports were routinely sent to both London and Washington¹⁴. Apparently only in summer 1946 the 808° Bt. CS was returned to the Italian Ministry of War for operational control¹⁵.

One of these reports (dated March 1946) traced in the OSS archives illustrates the several functions that the battalion covered for the Allies. They continued to seize and interrogate former Nazi spies (in the sole month of March they arrested 40 suspected individuals)¹⁶. They supported the Allies in controlling and contrasting the activity of Yugoslavia's intelligence agents in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region¹⁷. They extensively reported on the Italian public opinion both concerning their major source of dissatisfaction (i.e. goods shortage; monetary inflation and popular reaction to Peace Treaty clauses) and on their attitude towards the Italian Government activity (legislation concerning the institutional referendum on the fate of Monarchy in Italy; regulations concerning the authority of the Constituent Assembly as well as the relations with the Vatican)¹⁸. In other words, the 808° Bt. CS reports allowed the Allies, prevalently the British, to have an extremely reliable and updated view on the general situation of Italy.

In sum, after the end of the war the bulk of the surviving Italian intelligence, i.e. its counterintelligence division, continued to operate in Italy under strong British tutelage. Although the British might have been antagonized by several Italian post-war political factions/politicians in continuing to maintain an official tutelage on Italian armed forces, it cannot be said that the British influence in fact ceased with the end of the war.

¹² Ivi, p. 432.

¹³ Ivi, pp. 435 and fl.

¹⁴ Cfr. NARA, Rg. 226, E. 108 A, b. 272, f. jzx – 7740, Ministero della Guerra, Stato Maggiore Regio Esercito, 808° Battaglione Controspionaggio.

¹⁵ M.G. Pasqualini, *op. cit.*, p. 433.

¹⁶ NARA, Rg. 226, E. 108 A, b. 272, f. jzx – 7740.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

Finally, a further investigation of the British involvement in the strengthening of the Italian police forces, in compliance with selected Italian interlocutors, might shed light on several ambiguous episodes during the immediate aftermath of the war.

In this respect, for instance, this persisting dialogue with the British might better explain the attitude of Italian Socialist politician Giuseppe Romita in charge of the Ministry of the Interior from December 1945 to July 1946. Several of Romita's decisions during his term in office have remained unclear for the Italian historical debate which has often found a discrepancy between Romita's socialist leaning and his ministerial action. For instance, in the spring of 1946 Romita's compliance with Piéche's decision of removing the former Partisans from the *Pubblica Sicurezza* and substituting them with more professional, alias "ideologically non-suspicious" personnel. One might wonder if British Labour concerns on the loyalty of Italian police forces infiltrated by ex-Partisans did not influence to some extent Romita's decision.

Also a further similarly enigmatic aspect might be clarified. According to some accounts in fact during the aftermath of the war, there was a prolonged contention between the Italian Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of the Defence concerning the use of the material from the Allied "disposal agencies", namely, weaponry, vehicles and scraps. Some military historians have claimed that this was due to the fact that the Ministry of the Interior, entrusted to a Socialist like Romita, wanted to prevent the strengthening of the Italian Army traditionally considered dominated by right-wings Italians if not ex-Fascists. Differently, for Pedaliu: the "Italian government was so pressed for the few resources it had or had been given by the Allies, that it poured these into civil rehabilitation and not military use"¹⁹. Unlike what Pedaliu affirms, it is perhaps plausible to affirm that the Minister of Interior, alias Romita, needed the material from the "disposal agency" also for other tasks rather than exclusively for civil rehabilitations. Among these, under possibly firm and reiterate British suggestion, there was the necessity to provide the *Carabinieri* and *Pubblica Sicurezza* with the equipment that would allow them to guarantee public order and law.

In conclusion, the analysis of British role in the enforcement of internal security in Italy deserves a further investigation.

There is preliminary evidence of the Labour Government's ability to overcome some forms of domestic opposition and perpetuate his influence on the peninsula in this area. This was probably mainly achieved by the British through a constructive dialogue with selected interlocutors within the Italian

¹⁹ E.G.H. Pedaliu, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

non-Communist forces. This dialogue deserves a further investigation not only because it illustrates how this activity was of vital importance to the eventual pro-Western orientation of Italy (prior to the American commitment) but also because it encompassed a rather larger political spectrum than previously assumed, i.e. it included strands of the Italian Socialism which possibly encompassed Pietro Nenni himself.

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“The British Way to Socialism: British Intervention in the Italian Election of April 1948 and its Aftermath” chapter analyses the Labour Government involvement in Italy, prevalently between early 1947 and 1948, in order to ensure that the non-Communist Italian political forces were able to win the General Election. According to the author the degree of action undertaken in Italy by Labour was impressively “breath-taking” and “ferocious” especially when confronted with the by then overall retrenchment of British foreign policy²⁰. Firstly, in fact, as Pedaliu affirms, by 1948 the British were considering a significant contraction of their action in the Northern shores of the Mediterranean. Secondly, Britain had also already accepted to play a prevalently supportive role to the Americans in Italian affairs²¹. Yet, Pedaliu indicates that there were both strategic and ideological considerations at play in Labour Britain’s impressive intervention in Italian elections. First of all, it was meant to safeguard the last vestige of British influence on the strategically important peninsula. At the same time, a more incisive British action was considered important in order to make Italy safe from Communism and in so doing also safeguarding Britain’s interest in enhancing a political transformation within Italy. The latter, from an ideological point of view, would allow for the emergence in Italy of a real “democratic socialist” party based on the ideals of the British Labour’s way to Socialism²². In sum, the bigger the Social Democrats were to become in Italy, as opposed to maximalist Socialists aligned with Moscow, the greater the influence the Labour Government could assert through its connection with those forces on the peninsula. In general this interpretation was in line with the idea that Labourite Britain was better placed than the Americans in being able to offer European countries a “more attractive ideological alternative” to Communism²³.

²⁰ Ivi, p. 59.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*.

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According to Pedaliu, Bevin's assumption concerning the feasibility of a political transformation of Italy, or rather of Italian Socialism, was based on the set of tools that Labour Britain was able to mobilize. That is, not only the apparatus of the British state but also several Labour Party departments (especially the International one under the charismatic leadership of David Healey) and single Labour representatives which had a long history of relations with the Italian Socialists counterpart. On the other hand, Pedaliu enumerates another tactic of intervention adopted by Bevin right before the 1948 election, that is, the repeated British attempt to push the De Gasperi Government into adopting a restructuring of its action "to tackle the chronic and complex problems of poverty, ill-distribution of wealth and lack of agrarian and social reforms"²⁴. The latter were the main issues that were seen at the root of the appeal of Communism in Italy. Yet, Bevin was aware that any official British initiative to influence Italian domestic policy had to be followed by a series of informal manoeuvres in order to achieve optimum results. In fact, the British tactic was influenced by "Bevin's firm belief that the most productive course was to encourage and capitalize on developments taking place within the Italian body-politic"²⁵.

After the June 1946 election for the Italian Constituent Assembly (where the proved Communists quite strong) and the October 1946 reconfirmation of the wartime "Unity of Action Pact" between the PCI and the PSI, the anti-Communist forces both in Italy and in Britain became positively alarmed. There was enough evidence that the coupling of forces by the Leftist parties could enable the PCI to gain power in the Italian Parliament. As a result of these alarming events, at the beginning of 1947 there was a split, the so called Palazzo Barberini schism, within the Italian Socialist movement which until then had encountered the unconditional support of the Labour government. The old Italian PSI separated into two political bodies: Nenni's PSIUP (*Partito Socialista di Unità Proletaria*) aligned with Moscow and Saragat's PSIL (*Partito Socialista dei Lavoratori Italiani*) which instead refused this association with the Soviet Union. PSIL eventually changed its name to Italian Democratic Socialist Party, PSDI, in 1951. The Italians endorsing Saragat's secessionist line encompassed several influential post-1940s Italian politicians as well as Giuseppe Romita (the abovementioned 1946 Italian Minister of Interior and later leader of the PSDI).

The Palazzo Barberini split had two important outcomes for Italy, one in the domestic sphere and another in the international realm. As a consequence of

²⁴ Ivi, p. 60.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

the schism, the Christian Democrats leader and Prime Minister De Gasperi felt stronger and decided to engineer the “exclusion crisis of May 1947” which was resolved with the Leftist parties - PCI and PSIUP - being evicted from government²⁶. In the international setting, the Socialist split determined a realignment of Labour government’s policy towards the various Italian groupings. In fact, as Pedaliu claims, Labour Britain redirected its Italian policy, until then aiming to detach Nenni from the Pact with the Communists, towards encouraging non-Communist elements within PSIUP to break ranks with the Nenni and join Saragat. On the other hand, as the author recalls, other developments were still to influence the British conduct in the second half of 1947. Firstly, the bitter realization that Saragat’s secessionist faction lacked any mass-based support among the Italian Socialists. Secondly, also the quasi-revolutionary state of the Italian internal situation, as a consequence of the exclusion of the Left from government, influenced British action. Togliatti in fact retorted to what political scientists have termed as the “strategy of *doppiezza* (duplicity)”. According to the latter, while still prevalently claiming willingness to reach power through democratic means (alias the ballot-box), Togliatti on several occasion also fomented social protest igniting popular strikes and revolutionary aspirations. Togliatti’s threats coupled with the inclusion of the Italian PCI in the newly founded Soviet Cominform (Communist Information Bureau) in September 1947 generated an almost hysterical climate among the non-Communists Italian and British.

From then on, as Pedaliu stresses, British efforts concentrated on ascertaining ways to undermine the strength of the PCI. Once it was assured, via the Foreign Office Research Department (FORD), that the main source of support for the PCI came from its dominant position in the Italian trade union movement (where the Communists had succeeded in winning all the top posts), Bevin recommended that Communist activities within the CGIL (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*) must be closely monitored. At the same time, Bevin officially declared that the Labour government and Party condemned Communism, instead encouraging “Italian socialist resistance to it”²⁷. As Pedaliu’s own analysis suggests, therefore, until the beginning of 1948 there was still an attempt on Bevin’s part to advocate a “Socialist unity” in the continent to counter the threat of Communist advance.

According to the author, what drove a final wedge Between Bevin and Nenni was the Czech coup of February 1948. Pedaliu claims that after the Czech coup, Bevin’s policy changed from a previous goal of “precipitating changes within Italian Socialism” to a more aggressive action aiming to build up Saragat

²⁶ See on this in particular P. Craveri, *De Gasperi*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2006.

²⁷ E.G.H. Pedaliu, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

and Lombardo as “the only alternative for democratic socialist voters”²⁸. Consequently, “the British government took steps to legitimize the Palazzo Barberini split and ensure that the Saragat faction was treated by the Labour Party, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) as well as the international Socialist movement as the real Socialist Party of Italy”²⁹.

In fact, as a consequence of the British-led campaign, Nenni’s collaborationist line was publicly and overtly repudiated by the whole international Socialist movements on two subsequent public occasions. The first time, it occurred in March 1948 during the meeting of the Socialist Parties of the 16 countries participating in the European Recovering Program (ERP). On that occasion, after the TUC invited an Italian CGIL grouping (which unlike the majority of the Union decided not to turn down the invitation), Nenni’s delegates within the union group were heavenly contested over both their policy of rejection of the Marshall Plan and their association with PSIUP. On a second occasion, the following April, during a meeting of the Committee of International Socialist Conference (COMISCO) Lombardo and Saragat were welcomed by all their peers whereas, in compliance with Labour Party indication, Nenni’s delegates were again isolated and condemned for their links with the PCI. Finally, Pedaliu recalls how immediately after that second meeting, two outstanding Labour figures, like David Healey and the Secretary of the Labour Party, Morgan Phillips, were dispatched to Rome to continue their propaganda campaign against Nenni. The goal of the mission was to identify Nennite-Socialist members who, after the condemnation experienced at COMISCO, might be finally resolved to sever their links with the PSIUP and side with Saragat. Furthermore, Pedaliu also adds how, once back in Britain, both Healey and Phillips publicly endorsed Saragat and instead rejected Nenni’s PSIUP which was enabling the Communist to gain power in Italy. Healey and Phillips’ initiative, according to Pedaliu’s, had “a general positive impact on the Italian ‘democratic socialist’ vote”³⁰.

Finally, Pedaliu discusses the visit of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Jowitt, to Rome from 2 February to 5 March 1948. Although the visit was made in a private capacity, the author claims that it had a significant impact because, when meeting with important Italian personalities, Jowitt “let it be known, beyond any doubt, that the Nennite PSIUP had the profound disapproval of the British Labour government and movement. [...] the visit signalled to the Italian government that the Lombardo-Saragat grouping had the indubitable support

²⁸ Ivi, p. 70.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 72.

of the British government”³¹. Meanwhile, the British government also continued in its efforts aimed to convince De Gasperi (prevalently via the British Ambassador Victor Mallet) of the necessity of progressive reforms. As the author recalls, the persistent lack of action in this sense was putting Bevin in a very difficult position at home. Every time in fact Bevin advocated help for Italy at the British Parliament a plethora of complaints emerged accusing the Foreign Secretary of defending an “Italian government with reactionary leanings” one which was “contrary to the principles of a social democratic country like Britain”³².

An appreciation of Chapter Four on the Exchanges between British and Italian Socialist credo between 1945 and 1948

After a careful analysis of the chapter it seems conceivable to agree with the impression that in 1948 the same American official observers verbalized. As Pedaliu reveals, the United States uttered serious concerns regarding Bevin’s attitude towards the Italian election. Especially the State Department, which at that time lamented on several occasions that Bevin’s position towards Italy was too “subtle and anodyne” and that “Britain could do a lot more to influence the outcome of the elections”³³.

Pedaliu asserts that Bevin’s “ferocious” and nevertheless “low-profile” action towards the Italian Socialism was informed by one main concern. As the Secretary often retorted to the Americans, a higher-profile interventionist line could backfire against the British government, since it could be exploited by the Communist propaganda as a sign of gross interference in Italian domestic affairs. Consequently, as again Pedaliu affirms, Bevin favoured a more “behind the scenes” action where an endorsement of the Saragat-Lombardo faction was to come from the whole international socialist movement rather than just from the British government.

What still remains unconvincing is the whole timing of Bevin’s action towards the Italian Socialism.

According to Pedaliu until the beginning of 1947 the Labour government worked to precipitate changes within the Italian PSIUP, or, in other words, convincing Nenni’s party to break with the Communists. Later on, given the lack of results in this sense, Bevin decided to put all British weight in support of the Saragat faction. Yet, one might wonder why, given the fact that the Palazzo Barberini split occurred at the beginning of January 1947, the British

³¹ Ivi, p. 67.

³² Ivi, p. 68.

³³ Ivi, p. 70-71.

Government preferred wait until one month before the General Election of April 1948 to repudiate the PSIUP. The repudiation, on the other hand, was not even straight-forwardly formulated by the Labour Government or Party but delivered to the Nenni-led party and followers via the intercession of the International Socialist movement. Pedaliu justifies the British delay in assuming a final position towards Nenni's PSIUP through two main observations. First of all, Pedaliu puts a lot of emphasis on the impact that the Czech coup had on prompting the ultimate formula of British policy towards Nenni. Secondly, the author also stresses the influence of Bevin's personal view and the Foreign Secretary's unquestioned ability to formulate the official foreign policy of the country. Pedaliu, in other words, by and large presents the British decision to boycott Nenni in February 1948 as a straightforward consequence of Bevin's ultimate decision.

On the other hand, whereas the ascendancy of the Czech coup on the post-February 1948 British line towards the Italian PSIUP can be a plausible satisfactory explanation for a definitive adjustment of policy, to by-pass all the Labour Party's internal debate, as Pedaliu tends to do, over an important issue such as the unity of continental Socialism makes the final thesis of the author less convincing. As scholar Richard Stammers has demonstrated, when extending the approach beyond Ernest Bevin and the Foreign Office and studying mid-Forties British foreign policy within the broader context of the Labour Party as a whole, a different picture often emerge³⁴. As Stammers affirms: "The Attlee government's foreign policy was not merely a product of ministers' ideas and the influence of the Foreign Office. Britain's foreign policy position throughout this period owed much to the influence of the Labour Party's peculiarities, traditions, debates, rivalries, personalities and ideology, and how these interacted with international developments"³⁵.

In particular there is evidence that on Labour Britain position towards the unity and strategy of the International Socialist movement in 1948 Europe, Bevin had quite little free room for manoeuvre with respect to the rest of the Labour Party. On the contrary, during the previous biennium Bevin had been heavenly criticized on several occasions for his choices of foreign policy which had been deemed as in fact against the socialist credo. Consequently, the decision to repudiate Nenni's PSIUP did not happen without extensive intra-party squabbles and even open and entranced opposition³⁶. In other words, even in February 1948 the "Keep Left" militants within the Labour Party still

³⁴ R. Stammers, *The British Labour Party and the Emergence of Bipolarity 1943-1949*, University of Cambridge PhD dissertation, February 2002.

³⁵ Ivi, "Introduction", p. IX.

³⁶ Ivi, chapter VI and VII, in particular p. 279 and fl.

had a certain degree of capacity in inhibiting Bevin's political action and continuing to restrain his inherent disposition to move "ferociously" against Communism by-passing inherently Socialist concerns³⁷.

On the other hand, following Pedaliu's own line of reasoning, if Bevin's policy concerning Nenni was so much influenced by the events in Prague, is it still possible to attribute to the Foreign Secretary's action towards the Italian maximalist Socialism, even prior to the 1948, the tenacity and persistence, the ferociousness, that she instead claims it undoubtedly had? Is it still possible to agree with Pedaliu when she affirms that Bevin had a "breathtaking" interventionist attitude towards pre-General Election Italy?

Or rather, is it not possible to assert that Bevin's foreign policy, either for internal party constraints or out of personal conviction attempted until the very end to comply with the dogma of the unity of International Socialism hoping to use it as an ideological lever to sever the links between the largest part of Nenni's PSIUP and the PCI? Also in consideration of the small following of the Saragat's grouping (as early as in January 1947 at the General congress of Italian Socialists the PSLI emerged as an extremely weak faction) the only chance for Labour of having a "British-like way to Socialism" in Italy still rested on the possibility that sooner or later much larger numbers of Italians than those militating with Saragat would decide to cast their vote against Moscow.

Finally, one might wonder if the idea, that emerges from the Pedaliu's reasoning is plausible, i.e. that an expert top union leader such as Bevin would unreservedly entrust to Saragat (considered by the Secretary "a vain intellectual"³⁸) and his followers (which lacked any overall mass-based support from voters) the task of igniting in Italy those social democratic reforms that the country so much necessitated. Is it accurate to maintain with Pedaliu that the Labour leadership deemed Saragat's PSLI as realistically in the position to be able to infuse a reformist approach in Italy against the conservative encroachment of Southern landowners and Northern industrialists so dominant in the Italian governments by 1948?

One might similarly wonder whether Bevin's political viewpoint (and tactic) towards the Italian Socialism in effect shifted during the course of the 1946-1948 period, but presumably far less than claimed by Pedaliu. From the author's final analysis it in fact emerges that Labour Britain was by 1947 forced to put its political weight behind Saragat and consequently to limit her action to backing the victory of the Christian Democrats. On the other hand, what the author did not discuss are the important consequences of the policy that she attributed to Bevin. Limiting the British action to building of Saragat's Party as

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ E.G.H. Pedaliu, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

a possible coalition ally for the Italian DC would mean to voluntarily relegate Britain to a completely subordinate position to the Americans in Italy. In fact, in the absence of any substantial mass-based social democratic representation in the Italian government the Labour British influence on Italian affairs was soon destined to be overcome by the entrenchment of capitalist America siding with the Christian Democrats.

The final outcome depicted by Pedaliu seems quite negative if one considers the geostrategic importance that historians (and also Pedaliu) ascribe to post-war Italy in the mid-Forties British strategy in the Mediterranean region and in Western Europe. It seems even glummer when this strategy is measured against the overall project that historians (and again also Pedaliu) attribute to Bevin in 1946: that is, the wish of transforming London into the Mecca of European Social Democratic forces.

The distance between the initial aspiration of Bevin for Social democracy in Europe and what Pedaliu affirms to be the Foreign Secretary's goal in April 1948, bring one to wonder if instead Bevin did not still nurture some further future hope of advancement for the progressive forces of the peninsula rather than simply, and unreservedly, supporting the foreseeable entrenchment in power of the over-conservative and equally "ideologically suspicious" Christian Democrats. Might it be possible, as among others also historian Sean Greenwood claims, that Bevin still had the European "Third force" option in mind even after the Prague events and prior to the Italian General Election³⁹? Possibly Bevin's mid-1948 adaptation of the original "Third force" ideal was to some extent more moderate than the one of 1946 which exclusively envisaged the alignment of purely socialist European countries. This softening also caused by the by then large involvement of the United States in European economic affairs. On the other hand, even in this supposed later adaptation of his strategy – one that G. Warner has termed the Bevin's "dumb-bell" concept of Atlantic relations⁴⁰ - Bevin presumably still saw and wanted Britain to remain the pivotal country as well as nurturing aspirations for this British-led bloc being able to pursue a foreign policy somehow independent of both the American allies and the Soviet antagonists⁴¹.

A more careful analysis of the British government's and Labour Party's involvement with the Italian Socialism might better clarify if in the case of the

³⁹ S. Greenwood, *Britain and the Cold War, 1945-1991*, London, Macmillan, 2000.

⁴⁰ See G. Warner, "The Labour Governments and the Unity of Western Europe", in R. Ovendale (ed. by), *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments, 1945-1951*, Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1984, p. 79.

⁴¹ R. Stammers also claims that the "Third Force" option was still alive within part of the "Soft left" and the whole "Hard left" of the Labour Party even in 1949. Cfr, Id., *op. cit.*, *passim*.

Italian election of 1948 Bevin was still pursuing a distinct foreign policy from that of the United States. If Bevin still felt as possible and desirable - even after the Czech coup and also thanks to it - the distancing from the PCI of a much larger part of Italian Socialism than the one represented by the PSLI. This wish, on the other hand, was something that surely necessitated an extremely prudent (and then therefore "low profile") British foreign policy in pre-General Election Italy. On the fulfilment of this hope rested not only the possibility of a truly social democratic evolution for post-war Italy but also of a Labourite-like electoral alternative to the Christian Democrats bloc. A larger non-maximalist Italian Socialism was in fact presumably considered as much better ideologically equipped than the members of the Italian DC to prosecute a profitable dialogue between Italy and Labour Britain. The two parties would in some way strengthen each other and might have been presented internally and internationally as a valuable alternative to both Stalinization and Americanization.

In conclusion, a further investigation of specific archives seems desirable in order to better appreciate the possible subtleties contained in Bevin's Italian policy for 1948. In particular the Labour Party Archive at the Museum of Labour History in Manchester is certainly a valuable source. It contains the papers of the International Department and thus of its International Secretary David Healey. Similarly, documentation of the Labour Party's Secretary Morgan Phillips is also deposited in Manchester. This Archive might contain important information concerning the visit to Rome of the two Labour leaders before the General Election and also details of their exchanges with the several groupings and exponents of the Italian Socialism.

The Trade Union Congress Library at the University of Northern London, which also contains documentation related to foreign affairs, might possible retain further information on British action towards the CGIL and Nenni's and Saragat's delegates during the two abovementioned Socialist conferences of early 1948.

Finally, it seems also important, on the one hand, to further investigate relevant Foreign Office's papers on British official contacts with Italian Socialist members between 1946 and 1948 (i.e. with Nenni in his capacity of Foreign Minister as well as possibly with Saragat and Lombardo) and, on the other, to compare and contrast these sources with documentation on the same issue contained in the Italian PSIUP archives (since 1986 collected at the ACS, Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma) at the Italian PSIL Archives and Saragat's collections held at the Filippo Turati Foundation in Florence.