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NATTA ON THE YALTA SETTLEMENT: "NOT IMMUTABLE"

by Kevin Devlin

Summary: Alessandro Natta, Enrico Berlinguer's successor as head of the Italian CP, said in an interview that "the Yalta frontiers" should not be considered immutable and that European countries, both East and West, should have more autonomy from the two superpowers. He also reaffirmed his party's commitment to West European unity, which should include a common foreign policy, a single currency, and a common defense policy. On domestic issues, he hoped that the PCI would achieve governmental power as part of "a new alliance [based] on a new program."

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In the first long interview given to a noncommunist newspaper since he succeeded Enrico Berlinguer as Secretary-General of the Italian Communist Party, Alessandro Natta has affirmed the PCI's hope of achieving (shared) governmental power as part of "a new majority [based] on a new program"; stressed the importance for that program of the market economy and private enterprise; and declared the party's commitment to work for a politically united Western Europe, with "a common foreign policy, a single currency, and a common defense policy inspired by [the desire for] disarmament and reciprocal security." Perhaps, however, the most interesting part of the interview¹ conducted by Eugenio Scalfari, editor-in-chief of the independent daily *La Repubblica*, came toward the end, when Natta was asked about his attitude to the post-Yalta division of Europe into East and West.

Scalfari raised the question in connection with a recent incident, when remarks by Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti about the danger of a resurgent "pan-Germanism" and the desirability of two German states continuing to exist--remarks

made, incidentally, during a discussion at the PCI's annual Festival of *l'Unita*--evoked an angry protest from Bonn. The editor-in-chief referred to this issue as "the problem of the two Germanies and the Andreotti 'scandal.'"

Natta thought that to call the incident a "scandal" was going too far, adding: "But we certainly find some passages in Andreotti's remarks on this subject questionable." Scalfari seized upon this hint to make a provocative query: "Do you want to call into question the Yalta frontiers?" Natta replied:

For goodness sake! The balance [of power] in the world is still based on that agreement after 40 years. Andreotti is perfectly right in recalling that the frontiers established at the end of the war cannot be put at stake. Where discussion should begin, however, is when [Yalta] seems to codify a perennial condition of immutability and especially when it seems to imply that it is better for countries, whether they are oriented toward the West or toward the East, not to undertake autonomous initiatives with respect to the two superpowers.

More Autonomy, East and West

In challenging the idea that the Yalta settlement involved "a perennial condition of immutability," Natta was not suggesting that any changes should be made: since the mid-1970s the PCI has officially opposed what it calls any "unilateral" change in the East-West balance of power in Europe, on the grounds that the destabilizing effect of this would increase the risk of war. What he seemed to have had in mind as desirable was rather a diminution of the East-West dichotomy in Europe--a loosening of the respective alliances that would allow more autonomy to the member states. This was made clearer in the second part of his answer (although the relevance to the PCI's domestic political strategy was, understandably, not mentioned):

We know quite well that the major responsibility for the maintenance of peace and a return to the policy of detente and disarmament lies with the United States and the Soviet Union; but we nevertheless also attach great importance to the initiatives that Italy can take, and could and should have taken, with regard to disarmament in Europe. If anything, we have had to deplore the lack and inadequacy of such initiatives on the part of Italy. This being our position, it would be strange if we were not in favor of the East European countries having the same autonomy. Our attitude toward China also confirms what I am saying.

At that point the interviewer brought him back to the question of the two Germanies. Natta said that the PCI wanted to see a constant improvement in relations between the two German states. That was why it had criticized those in West Germany who had opposed Honecker's planned visit to the West, "just as we

manifested our concern over the polemics on the part of the Soviets, aimed at preventing that visit. We have been completely consistent in all this."

West European Unity

Asked what the most important instrument for implementing the party's policies was, Natta responded with a remarkably strong commitment to the cause of West European unity but without mentioning the EEC as such:

We hold that Europe is of fundamental importance--Western Europe as a political unit. This is a decisive card to play. On this, our commitment will be without reservations from now on.

Scalfari drew him out further by remarking that a united Europe meant "a single foreign policy, a single currency, a single system of defense." Was that what the PCI wanted? Natta accepted the challenge:

My reply is [that we want] a common foreign policy, a single currency, and a common defense policy inspired by [the desire for] disarmament and reciprocal security. In the program that the PCI proposes to the forces of development and renewal, in Italy and on the international level, the European question will henceforth be one of the fundamental points.

Another question dealt with Secretary-General Natta's recent, unexpectedly strong attack on the Vatican document criticizing aspects of "liberation theology": in his speech at the *l'Unita* festival he charged that the document's "distorted and distorting" presentation of Marxism was an obstacle to the mutual understanding needed to build world peace. When Scalfari referred to this as "your polemic with the Pope," Natta demurred: such a thing had never entered his head. Moreover, as a political force to which many Catholics belonged and one accustomed to taking all political orientations into account, whatever their source, the PCI had often given public support to the Church's stand on the peace movement or the struggle against drugs and the Mafia.

This does not, however, mean that we must remain silent when the Pope tackles the problems of legislation on abortion or on divorce or on the school system in a way that, as it seems to us, does not correspond to the present needs of society and of the state and provokes dissent among wide masses of believers and many of their pastors. It is the same when he tackles the theme of Marxism. . . .

The PCI had, in fact, criticized not the Vatican document's condemnation but rather its distortion of Marxism.

What concerns us most is that this document has taken a political stand and not simply a doctrinal one; and the objective--I should say the target--of the message was not only, and not so much, the East European countries but rather the liberation movements of Latin America. This is a matter of concern to us, as it is, moreover, to vast numbers of Latin American Catholics: the faithful, members of religious orders, priests, bishops, and cardinals.

New Alliances

Dealing earlier with domestic politics, Natta had said that although the PCI overtook the Christian Democrats in the recent European elections to become Italy's electorally strongest party, it did not have the presumption, indeed the stupidity, to believe that it could manage on its own, without allies. For the Communists, however, the important thing was not the line-up of alliances but the agreed programs on which they were based. The present ruling coalition, he claimed, had shown that it had no program; but when asked about his own party's program, he offered only vague generalities:

We are for a policy of economic development, of profit [incentive], of investments, of the creation of jobs; we are for a radical change in the policies covering public expenditures, withdrawing resources from wasteful, unproductive or superfluous sectors to divert them to investments and job-creation. Austerity for development and transformation--that has been our line since Berlinguer's day.

This program, he said later, implied cooperation with "healthy" private enterprise. Similarly, he recognized that the free play of market forces was "a measure of economic efficiency and efficacy," although a degree of social control was also needed for the common good.

Rejecting the idea of a pan-party "government of national solidarity," such as the PCI had vainly urged in the late 1970s, he said that the ultimate objective was "a new majority [based] on a new program": a coalition in which all forces concerned would be equal partners and that would be supported by the mobilization of the public. This was the only road on which Italy could move toward "development, competitiveness, new technology, scientific research--in short, toward the future For us, the future means justice as the real foundation of liberty."

Once more, political adversaries could, and no doubt would, seize upon the vagueness of this rhetoric. At one point the interviewer remarked that, in his opinion, "neither the government nor the opposition has concrete programs that the electors can assess and on which they can make their decisions." Natta replied, a little lamely perhaps, that the government, being in power with a strong majority, had the obligation to put its commitments into practice, whereas the PCI, in opposition, could

only put forward proposals and, in parliamentary confrontation, try to get at least some of them accepted.

In this connection it might, however, be said that Secretary-General Natta's primary purpose in granting this interview was clearly not to present a detailed political program but rather to present himself as the new leader of the Italian Communist Party--an image-building exercise. In this respect he has acquitted himself well; but these are early days, and Alessandro Natta has still to show how well he can cope with the challenges of leadership.

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