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Italy

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

PERSECUTION AND PURGES

Persecution of foreign nationals

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Foreigners

PROPAGANDA

Anti-Western
Lies

Italian Reaction To Release Of William Oatis

SOURCE ROME: ROME News Bureau

DATE OF OBSERVATION: 18 May 1953

EVALCOMMENT: This is a very interesting account of Western newspaper reaction to the release of William T. OATIS, who was sentenced on 4 July 1951 to 10 years imprisonment in CSR for espionage.

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The release of William OATIS attracted a certain amount of interest in Italian circles, but not nearly so much as it would have done under normal circumstances. Italy is in the throes of a violent political campaign, and most stress in the press these days is given to local affairs, polemics regarding the "Mostra dell'Al di là" (Exhibit of "Over there"), the denunciations of Bishops and priests for allegedly violating electoral laws by preaching against Communism, etc.

Most of the papers limited themselves to carrying Press Agency dispatches, with the customary slanting, according to the bias of the particular paper in question. Attached is a collective representation of the ROME papers of Sunday, May 17.

(Over)

IL TEMPO, Independent Daily, carries a dispatch from FRANKFORT, with headline, "OATIS Tells his Odyssey," and the sub-heading reads, "Press conference of the journalist-Special Psychological methods to force confessions for crimes never committed." The article itself is limited to a description of the background of the OATIS case. The article stresses that OATIS, when being interviewed stressed that he did not wish to make any statement of a political nature. There is no editorial comment.

The Communist "L'UNITA", instead, while carrying substantially the same story, somewhat abbreviated, carries head as follows: "OATIS denies the lies regarding his 'Torture', and goes on to list the following questions and answers:

"By what methods were your confessions obtained?"
In reply, OATIS referred the reporters to the records of the trial, and said, "I was neither tortured nor drugged. The treatment I received was good. I prefer not to talk about this business."

When asked if he knew why he had been liberated, OATIS replied, "I don't know. But they told me that a letter from my wife to the Czechoslovak president did more than anything else."

"L'UNITA" goes on to say that OATIS fended off other questions and said he did not wish to discuss political problems, and when asked if he intended to repudiate his confession, he replied, "This is a personal question and I shall not answer it." The brief article closes quoting ZAPOTOCKY as saying he was motivated by a letter from Mrs. OATIS.

The Philo-Communist, Socialist paper, "AVANTI", carries a brief article, beginning with a resume of the announcement of Radio PRAGUE giving the news of the release of OATIS. The article is entirely factual, and there is no editorial comment in the paper.

From the "IL QUOTIDIANO", the paper of the Italian Catholic Action, from the daily, "IL POPOLO," organ of the Christian Democratic Party, and the Communist paper, IL PAESE."

(Over)

All carry much the same. None of the ROME papers have carried any editorial comment.

Italian official news agency, ANSA, has the following to report on the OATIS case:

"A roundup of the articles carried in the Sunday papers on the subject of the distension in international affairs cannot omit a mention of the latest occurrence which some observers tend to interpret as a conciliatory move by the Eastern Bloc: The liberation of the American journalist, William OATIS, whom the Czech government had accused of espionage and condemned to ten years' imprisonment.

"L'UNITA", referring to the particulars of the liberation of OATIS adds no comment and limits itself to reporting the declarations of OATIS and of the Czechoslovak President when granting the pardon.

"IL GIORNALE DELL'EMILIA, of BOLOGNA, in its correspondence from PARIS writes that the liberation of OATIS naturally had a not-able echo in those French political spheres who are showing themselves constantly more and more anxious to resume talks with the East. This is not, however, the opinion in more responsible circles, for whom the new Soviet move is purely and simply considered another work of propaganda.

"From NEW YORK, "LA NAZIONE," of FLORENCE, writes that the liberation of OATIS constitutes undoubtedly the last, in order of time, of the conciliatory gestures from the Communist countries towards the West, but, according to the views of the American State Department, this is a gesture too general in its scope to deserve having attributed to it any political value. LA NAZIONE writes that the Communist Powers, seeing that the United States have not appeared to be impressed by the pressure of public opinion nor by the Western government designed to diminish the frigid caution with which the Americans have reacted to the moves towards distension, are trying to give the Americans more reason to open discussions. They (the Communist powers) realize that a meeting on the highest level hangs on a string, and that it depends on themselves whether or not that string breaks."

End.