

British Propaganda and Berlinguer's Communists: The Information Research Department's Last Stand?

SIMONE BATTAGLIA*

Abstract:

The article aims to analyse the approach of the then Labour government, and especially of the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office, to the so-called 'Communist question' and in particular to the potential entry, around the mid-1970s, of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), then led by Enrico Berlinguer, into the government area. The analysis, in addition to documentary sources, is mainly based on three interviews conducted by the author with David Lipsey, then political adviser to the Labour Foreign Secretary Tony Crosland, David Owen, himself Foreign Secretary after the sudden death of Crosland, and John Kerr, then Private Secretary to two Permanent Under-Secretaries for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (the equivalent of the Italian secretary general). The interviews, preceded by a brief introduction, are reported in full and accompanied by a critical section.

Keywords:

Italy; Communist question; United Kingdom; Foreign Office Information Research Department; oral sources

Introduction

This article serves as an introduction to three interviews, conducted by the author between September 2023 and March 2024, with: The Lord Lipsey (David Lipsey), political adviser to the Labour Foreign Secretary and prominent party intellectual Tony Crosland from April 1976 onwards, The Rt Hon. the Lord Owen CH (David Owen), Foreign Secretary himself after Crosland's death (19 February 1977) and until Margaret Thatcher took office (4 May 1979), and The Lord Kerr of Kinlochard GCMG (John Kerr), from 1974 until 1979 Private Secretary to the Permanent Under-Secretaries for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Tom Brimelow (albeit briefly) and Michael Palliser.

* *Dipartimento di Metodi e Modelli per l'Economia, il Territorio e la Finanza* – Sapienza Università degli Studi di Roma

Created peers in more recent years¹, although, at the present time, Kerr remains the only one to sit on the benches of the British House of Lords (in fact, Lipsey passed away in July 2025, while Owen has retired in August 2024), all three in the 1970s – but especially Owen as Foreign Secretary – held significant positions within the then-known Foreign and Commonwealth Office (henceforth referred to as the Foreign Office), thus exerting a more or less decisive influence on the conduct of British foreign policy; the period was precisely that of the Labour governments of the 1970s, and in particular that of Jim Callaghan, Labour Prime Minister from April 1976 to May 1979 and successor in office to Harold Wilson (1974-1976).

Owen, in particular, prior to holding the post of Foreign Secretary, had been, among other things, Minister of State at the Foreign Office during the Crosland tenure (more specifically, from September 1976), as well as Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Defence from July 1968 until June 1970 (Edward Heath's victory over Wilson). As Callaghan explains in his memoirs, the appointment as Foreign Secretary was due to Owen's previous experience in the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office; moreover, the Prime Minister «had heard good accounts of his work at the Foreign Office». At that juncture, the government was «going through a difficult time electorally» and, wanting to avoid «a Cabinet reshuffle of the same faces», Callaghan opted for «someone entirely fresh and young whom they [the press and others who were already picking Tony's successor] had not thought of»². Furthermore, it is notable that, at 38, Owen was the youngest Foreign Secretary since Anthony Eden, and as the 'matinée idol' of the Labour Party certain to cut a dash³. In any case, immediately after Crosland's stroke (13 February 1977) he had «look[ed] after the Department [Foreign Office]» at the Prime Minister's request and also attended the Cabinet meeting on 17 February, while Crosland was in a coma; two days later, Crosland died and, on 21 February, Owen was told by Callaghan that he would have been appointed Foreign Secretary, which – he reported in his autobiography – made him «stunned»⁴.

Lipsey, for his part, had been a member of the General and Municipal Workers' Union (GMWU) Research Department from 1970 to 1972 before his appointment as political adviser to Crosland. Brought up in the ranks of the Labour Party, at the time of his appointment to the Foreign Office he was only twenty-eight years old; already in 1972, however, he had begun to work for Crosland: the latter, during the years of opposition to the Heath government, had held the positions of shadow Environment Secretary and then, since the Labour victory in 1974, Secretary of State for the Environment. We could therefore describe the relationship of trust between

1 Lipsey in 1999, Owen in 1992, and Kerr in 2004. See *Parliamentary career* information for each of them in House of Lords section of UK Parliament website: <https://members.parliament.uk/member/2492/career>, <https://members.parliament.uk/member/992/career> and <https://members.parliament.uk/member/3708/career> respectively (last accessed 7/7/2025).

2 See J. Callaghan, *Time and Chance*, Collins, Glasgow 1987, pp. 447-448.

3 F. Carr, *David Owen: Foreign Secretary, 1977-79*, in K. Theakston (ed. by), *British Foreign Secretaries since 1974*, Routledge, London-New York 2004, pp. 93-114: 93.

4 D. Owen, *Time to Declare*, Penguin Books, London 1992, pp. 261-262. On his foreign secretaryship, see the above-mentioned F. Carr, *David Owen*, cit., pp. 93-114.

the two as more than solid⁵. What is more, the work of a privileged witness like Susan Crosland (née Watson), American-British journalist and author in the early 1980s of a celebrated biography of her husband Tony Crosland, reveals the reciprocity of their relationship⁶. On the other hand, it should also be emphasised that, as has already been pointed out in the literature, memoir sources should generally be handled with extreme caution, all the more so in the case of Lipsey's, which report the impressions of a twenty-eight-year-old educated in the ranks of the Labour Party who found himself catapulted, with «no great international acquaintanceship» and with only a few notions of geography and a knowledge of history that stopped in 1939⁷, to the top of the Foreign Office⁸. However, this does not detract from the fact that, given his close relationship of trust with Crosland, Lipsey's testimony is precious and can offer interesting avenues for research on British foreign policy and Italy in the 1970s. To give one example, the Foreign Secretary's «tendency» – Kevin Jefferys wrote in his Crosland's biography – was precisely that of relying «on outside advisers such as David Lipsey in preference to his reading official briefs», and not, of course, without arousing the resentment of some of the «civil servants»⁹.

On the Foreign Office management side, there is an interview with John Kerr, who worked for about five years – from 1974 to 1979 – as Private Secretary to two successive Permanent Under-Secretaries for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Tom Brimelow and Michael Palliser¹⁰. In those years, by his own admission, he did not basically get «any real insight into Anglo-Italian relations», but rather specialised in «UK relations with the Soviet Union, the US and the EEC»¹¹. Nevertheless, together with David Lipsey, in his own words, Kerr «had to work hard to smooth relations»¹² between Foreign Secretary Crosland and Permanent Under-Secretary Palliser. The two, as we read in Lipsey's autobiography, «were not naturally bosom pals for

5 In his autobiography, moreover, Lipsey dedicated meaningful words to Crosland's death, testifying indeed to his attachment to the formidably intellectual Foreign Secretary. See D. Lipsey, *In the Corridors of Power: An Autobiography*, Biteback Publishing, London 2012, p. 109.

6 See S. Crosland, *Tony Crosland*, Coronet Books, London 1983, pp. 246, 322. We also read that, although Crosland thought «of [his] Private Office as family» and «felt personal concern for them», the terms of the relationship «were set by him». And, except with Lipsey and Margaret Turner, «he drew a boundary round himself which the sophisticates of Private Office were very hesitant to cross». Ivi, pp. 269, 323. Moreover, see also Ivi, p. 399.

7 D. Lipsey, *In the Corridors of Power*, cit., p. 89.

8 See D. Vignati, *Keep calm and carry on: la Gran Bretagna e le elezioni italiane del 1976*, in «Ventunesimo Secolo», 43, 2018, pp. 120-121.

9 K. Jefferys, *Anthony Crosland*, Richard Cohen Books, London 1999, p. 200.

10 In more recent years, he himself would serve as Permanent Under-Secretary (1997-2002). For more details of the different stages of his career, see *Lord Kerr of Kinlochard GCMG (formerly Sir John (Olav) Kerr) interviewed by Malcolm McBain on 6 January 2004*, in University of Cambridge, Churchill College, Churchill Archives Centre (hereafter CAC), British Diplomatic Oral History Programme (hereafter BDOHP), DOHP 98, <https://oa.churchillarchives.libnova.com/view/1613> (last accessed 7/7/2025). A brief biographical profile is contained in *Lord Kerr of Kinlochard*, in Imperial College London website, <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/about/introducing-imperial/our-people/our-leaders/lord-kerr-of-kinlochard/> (last accessed 7/7/2025).

11 See the Author's interview with The Lord Kerr of Kinlochard GCMG, February-March 2024, via email.

12 D. Lipsey, *In the Corridors of Power*, cit., p. 96.

reasons of inverse snobbery on the latter's part»¹³. In the interview Kerr, with regard to a Crosland meeting with Kissinger, spoke of his own «annoyance, and Palliser's, at Crosland refusing to work on other dossiers while he diligently prepared for his meeting with Kissinger»¹⁴. Palliser himself in his speech at the Crosland Memorial Meeting (February 1997) – held exactly twenty years after his death – referred to the fact that Crosland always hesitated to make a decision until he fully understood all the details, adding that «he was not always easy to approach» and «that to some of his officials he seemed overly cautious and a shade dilettante». But, according to him, as time passed and he grew accustomed to the topics and the office's speedy and effective methods, he actually began to relish the job¹⁵.

Historiography has pointed out not for nothing that, in his very first period as Foreign Secretary (as also testified by Susan Crosland), Tony Crosland devoted himself primarily to familiarising himself with the mechanisms of the ministry and that, at least as far as the Italian problem was concerned, in the absence of indications from the Foreign Secretary, the bureaucracy acted as a substitute for politics. As Susan Crosland herself pointed out, unlike Callaghan and Owen (respectively Crosland's predecessor and successor at the head of the Foreign Office) he «had engrossed himself for twelve years in Britain's domestic policy. As far as he was concerned, he didn't know anything about foreign affairs»¹⁶. British diplomacy therefore enjoyed a wide margin of autonomy in defining the possible lines of action in relation to the Italian crisis, which was then precipitating, with the ascertained end of the centre-left and the early end of the legislature in sight¹⁷. Daniela Vignati, an Italian historian, has also highlighted the contrast, as in the Lipsey's autobiography, between Crosland's progressive leanings and the Foreign Office's prevailing conservatism, strong anti-communist sentiment, and proclivity to appease the United States¹⁸. Those were the years of the so-called communist question, which became central in the mid-1970s with the spread of the conviction about the strength of the Italian Communist Party (Partito comunista italiano, PCI) and the inevitability of its imminent entry into the government area, apparently confirmed by the outcome of the local elections of 15-16 June 1975¹⁹, as well as by the same open-minded and dialogue-oriented attitude of part of the Christian Democrats (Democrazia cristiana,

13 *Ibidem*. In the book, Lipsey defined Kerr as his «other special chum». Right before, he briefly discussed the figure of Ewen Fergusson: the latter, a long-time diplomat, served as Principal Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretaries Callaghan, Crosland, and Owen from 1975 to 1978.

14 See the Author's interview with The Lord Kerr of Kinlochard GCMG, February-March 2024, via email. Furthermore: «We were wrong: he had his priorities right».

15 See M. Palliser, *Foreign Secretary*, in D. Leonard (ed. by), *Crosland and New Labour*, Macmillan, Basingstoke 1999, pp. 99-103: 99-100.

16 S. Crosland, *Tony Crosland*, cit., pp. 323-324; D. Vignati, *Keep calm and carry on*, cit., p. 121; furthermore, see again D. Lipsey, *In the Corridors of Power*, cit., pp. 87, 89-90. More generally, about the Crosland tenure at the Foreign Office and his personality, see O.J. Daddow, *Anthony Crosland: Foreign Secretary, 1976-77*, cit., pp. 67-91.

17 See again D. Vignati, *Keep calm and carry on*, cit., p. 121.

18 Ivi, p. 120.

19 See the data in G. Crainz, *Storia della Repubblica. L'Italia dalla Liberazione ad oggi*, Donzelli, Roma 2016, p. 199; also G. Formigoni, P. Pombeni, G. Vecchio, *Storia della Democrazia cristiana. 1943-1993*, il Mulino, Bologna 2023, pp. 338-339.

DC) – which was also in a deep crisis²⁰ – and of the Italian Socialist Party (Partito socialista italiano, PSI). The leitmotif thus became the fear of a communist overtake at the expense of the DC in the upcoming political elections²¹. «On the political side», in the words of Martin Morland, First Secretary at the British Embassy in Rome, «the Communist Party of Italy was the main interest to London»²².

At least until 1979, and from the mid-1970s onwards, the communist question received significant international attention, both from Washington and from the major European partners. The British, for their part, in the immediate post-war period had already been the first in the West to equip themselves with an organic propaganda policy – exemplified by the Foreign Office's Information Research Department (IRD) – and remained important actors in this field despite the gradual decline of their international position. The IRD, more specifically, had been founded at the beginning of 1948 «to collect information concerning Communist policy, tactics and propaganda and to provide material for our anti-Communist publicity through our Missions and Information Services abroad»²³; the context was that of the adoption of a new propaganda policy abroad by Clement Attlee's Labour government (1945-1951), in reaction to the break with the USSR and the increasing bipolarisation of international relations. A high-risk context par excellence, Italy immediately represented one of the main targets of the IRD²⁴. Nevertheless, as will be seen more clearly later, in the face of the historical compromise (compromesso storico) and the political parabola of the communist leader Berlinguer – secretary of the PCI since March 1972 – the British position was more than articulated.

Certainly, as mentioned above, there was no lack of strong reasons for conflict be-

20 See F. Malgeri, *La Democrazia cristiana nella crisi degli anni settanta*, in «Italia contemporanea», 227, 2002, pp. 219-234.

21 However, this did not happen: in the 1976 parliamentary elections, the DC and PCI took 38.7% and 34.4% of the vote respectively. However, this did not detract from the fact that, faced with a de facto polarised political scenario, the expression 'two winners' (dei «due vincitori») was soon coined. See G. Formigoni, *Aldo Moro. Lo statista e il suo dramma*, il Mulino, Bologna 2016, pp. 311, 334.

22 Martin Robert Morland, *CMG interviewed by Malcolm McBain on 24th January 2006 in London for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme*, p. 17, in CAC, BDOHP, DOHP 100, <https://oa.churchillarchives.libnova.com/view/1707> (last accessed 7/7/2025).

23 G. Gwinnett, *Attlee, Bevin, and Political Warfare: Labour's Secret Anti-Communist Campaign in Europe, 1948–51*, in «The International History Review», 3, 2017, p. 430.

24 For more details, see M. Di Donato, R.D. Portolani, *Il Foreign Office e la stampa italiana*, in E. Taviani, G. Vacca (a cura di), *Gli intellettuali nella crisi della Repubblica. 1968-1980*, Viella, Roma 2016, pp. 333-352; A. Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-53: The Information Research Department*, Routledge, London-New York 2004; H. Wilford, *The Information Research Department: Britain's secret Cold War weapon revealed*, in «Review of International Studies», 3, 1998, pp. 353-369; L. Smith, *Covert British Propaganda: The Information Research Department: 1947-77*, in «Millennium: Journal of International Studies», 1, 1980, pp. 67-83. The IRD, among other things, also had relations with NATIS, the Atlantic Alliance's information service: see L. Risso, *Propaganda and Intelligence in the Cold War: The NATO Information Service*, Routledge, London-New York 2014, pp. 31, 35-37, 42-47, 111. By the Foreign Office itself see *The IRD: Origins and Establishment of the Foreign Office Information Research Department (1946-48)*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Historians, Library and Records Department, «History Notes», Issue 9 [August 1995], <https://issuu.com/fcohistorians/docs/historynote9> (last accessed 7/7/2025).

tween the political side and the Foreign Office bureaucrats. In May 1977, to give just one example, Owen dismantled the entire operation of the Information Research Department in spite of the will – and it would have been strange otherwise – of its director, Ray Whitney (later a Conservative MP)²⁵; moreover, Owen's style in running the Foreign Office has been widely criticised²⁶. At the time, according to various commentators, including investigative reporters from the left who uncovered the IRD's existence in 1978²⁷, the department's strong anti-Communist stance had become a source of embarrassment for the government. This ultimately led them «to rid the Foreign Office of this Cold War relic». Conversely, some right-wing Cold Warriors believed that the IRD «had been closed by Labour as a 'sop' to the left-wing of the party»²⁸.

Even within the Foreign Office, however, there was extreme secrecy about both the operations and the very existence of the IRD (which did not prevent it from becoming one of its largest departments)²⁹, so it seems rather implausible that Labour's left-wing currents could have made it a political battleground. On the other hand, it is also true that, as noted in the literature, there was considerable tension between the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the party, where, after 1970, the left became much more significant³⁰, and the Cabinet. Motions expressing disapproval of certain aspects of government foreign policy were routinely approved at NEC meetings. Moreover, according to Tom McNally, Callaghan's political advisor, the Labour Party's International Committee was becoming increasingly radical. The constituency parties were also moving towards the left, adding further strain³¹ – not by chance, in direct response to Labour's leftward turn, David Owen chose to defect from the party in March 1981 and co-founded the Social Democratic Party (SDP) with William Rodgers, Roy Jenkins, and Shirley Williams (the so-called Gang of Four), and together with them, he became its leader³². Documentary sources held at The National Archives of the UK (Kew Gardens, London) show, for example, how in the second half of 1976 some constituency Labour parties (CLPs) – in this case, those of Brighton, Hackney Central, Wokingham and Camden St. Pancras North – had lashed out at the British Labour Government's participation in the Big Four summit in Puerto Rico (27 June 1976), the subject of which had been nothing less than the possible counter-moves to be taken in the event of a PCI entry into govern-

25 See D. Owen, *Time to Declare*, cit., pp. 347-348.

26 F. Carr, *David Owen: Foreign Secretary, 1977-79*, cit., p. 94.

27 We are speaking of David Leigh and Richard Fletcher: see D. Leigh, *Death of the department that never was*, «The Guardian», 27 January 1978; R. Fletcher et al., *How the FO waged secret propaganda war in Britain*, «The Observer», 29 January 1978.

28 See G. Gwinnett, *The Demise of the Information Research Department in 1977: The End of Political Warfare in the UK?*, University of Warwick, PhD thesis, 2021, p. X, <http://webcat.warwick.ac.uk/record=b3518318> (last accessed 7/7/2025).

29 See M. Di Donato, R.D. Portolani, *Il Foreign Office e la stampa italiana*, cit., p. 335.

30 A. Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, Macmillan, Houndmills 1997, p. 181.

31 See R. Vickers, *The Labour Party and the world*, vol. II, *Labour's foreign policy since 1951*, Manchester University Press, Manchester-New York 2011, p. 111.

32 See for all D. Blackburn, *Facing the Future? David Owen and Social Democracy in the 1980s and Beyond*, in «Parliamentary Affairs», 4, 2011, pp. 634-651. In the article, among other things, Blackburn questions the influence indirectly exerted on the SDP by Crosland: see *ivi*, pp. 636 ff.

ment³³. We know, however, that the United Kingdom had been, among the Big Four, the most reluctant to proceed in a similar direction. The then Foreign Secretary Crosland had then reiterated to the CLPs that there «had certainly been no decision to this effect at the Puerto Rico Conference, as the Washington Post alleged [West German Chancellor] Schmidt to have said». Moreover: «I have made the view of Her Majesty's Government on this matter abundantly clear. Our policy is one of absolute non-interference in Italian domestic politics»³⁴. This, however, did not detract from the fact that he managed to build a particularly close relationship with the US Secretary of State Kissinger, who wrote to Crosland as he was leaving his post in January 1977, saying that «In less than a year, we have established an intimate, constructive and rewarding friendship»³⁵.

In the run-up to the meeting, Lipsey, for his part, had emphasised that, although possible Communist participation in government was by no means risk-free, the British Labour Government should not have shown «itself to be overtly hostile to minority Communist participation in a broad coalition Government in Italy» and that if the Communists had been given «enough rope» they may have proved «themselves innocent» or, otherwise, hung «themselves»; rather, if HMG had embarked «on a lynching operation», it would have been its «democratic credibility» which was «damaged, not theirs»³⁶. As partly mentioned, Crosland in those months had

33 See the letters from Marylyn Hill (Brighton Labour Party Secretary) to Crosland, 24 August 1976; from Stanley Clinton-Davis (Hackney Central Labour MP) to Crosland, 1 September 1976; from Robert Draper (Wokingham Labour Party Secretary) to Callaghan, with a copy to Crosland, undated [September 1976], in The National Archives, Kew Gardens (London, hereafter TNA), Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors (hereafter FCO) 33/2951. Regarding the Labour members of Camden St. Pancras North, see the letter from Jenny Little (Labour Party's International Secretary) to Crosland, 21 December 1976, in TNA, FCO 33/2952. It should be specified, however, that this was not a separate summit, but rather a restricted meeting held only between the United States, West Germany, France and, indeed, the United Kingdom shortly before the official start of the G7 (27-28 June). See for all A. Varsori, *Puerto Rico (1976): le potenze occidentali e il problema comunista in Italia*, in «Ventunesimo Secolo», 16, 2008, pp. 89-121; Id., *Dalla rinascita al declino. Storia internazionale dell'Italia repubblicana*, il Mulino, Bologna 2022, pp. 368-384; but also, more specifically, Id., *L'Italia nelle relazioni internazionali dal 1943 al 1992*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1998, p. 187 and R. Gualtieri, *L'Italia dal 1943 al 1992. DC e PCI nella storia della Repubblica*, Carocci, Roma 2007, pp. 186-187. On the crisis of the so-called southern flank, see M. Del Pero, V. Gavín, F. Guirao, A. Varsori (a cura di), *Democrazie. L'Europa meridionale e la fine delle dittature*, Le Monnier, Firenze 2010.

34 See the letters from Crosland to Marylyn Hill (Brighton Labour Party Secretary), 15 September 1976; from Crosland to Robert Draper (Wokingham Labour Party Secretary), 21 September 1976; from Roy Hattersley (Minister of State at the Foreign Office, on behalf of Crosland) to Stanley Clinton-Davis (Hackney Central Labour MP), 8 September 1976, in TNA, FCO 33/2951. Rather, there is unfortunately no trace of any letter or note of reply to Little; in any case, it is safe to assume that either Crosland, or someone on his behalf, did respond either in view of Little's position or for reasons evidently of political expediency. The reference, however, was to statements made by Schmidt to the Associated Press agency, and reported the following day by «The Washington Post», according to which the United States, West Germany, France and Great Britain agreed not to grant economic aid to Italy if communist exponents were to join the government. As was obvious, the affair caused a huge stir in Italy. A. Varsori, *Puerto Rico (1976)*, cit., pp. 111-112.

35 R. Vickers, *The Labour Party and the world*, cit., p. 111.

36 See the note, entitled *Italy*, from Lipsey to Fergusson, and copied to Kerr, 18 May 1976, pp.

been questioning the nature of Berlinguer's communists, about whom in his view there still remained «great ignorance», as well as the possibility of their entering government. In a handwritten note from late spring 1976, we read that, in the event they formed «a coalition» with the DC but from a minority position, there would be more advantages than disadvantages. On the other hand, in the case of a «big success» in the elections, i.e. «above 35% and above the C[hristian]D[emocrat]s», there would be no advantage, but rather: «(i) violent US reactions; (ii) risk to NATO defence secrets; (iii) risk to Italian membership of NATO; (iv) the disturbing effects on France, Spain and Portugal; (v) the threat to democracy in Italy, especially given that a hardline Stalinist alternative still exists». It can be deduced, therefore, that the real critical element, according to Crosland, was certainly not the Berlinguerians and the line imprinted by the new secretary, but rather the permanence of extreme fringes in the PCI; not for nothing, in the case of a result equal to or below 30% (in fact, «a major defeat»), there would have been «a revolt of the hardliners because of the failure of new tactics». The PCI, to conclude, was defined by Crosland as a «thoroughly indigenous Party, unlike those in Eastern Europe», and he recognised its own theoretical and intellectual inspiration in it, thanks above all to the work of Antonio Gramsci³⁷.

1. *Author's interview with The Lord Lipsey, September 2023, House of Lords, London, UK*

[Lipsey]: This story³⁸ really starts post the Second World War, when the Foreign Secretary was a Labour but very anti-communist man called Ernest Bevin, who had been the General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union [TGWU]. Bevin was persuaded to set up a thing called IRD, which stood for internal research department, which was designed to be Foreign Office's off-the-record deniable but nevertheless active opponent of communist propaganda. And of course, at that period in the Cold War, that was a relatively simple step to take³⁹. And now we leap forwards, 'cause I didn't know anything about the years in between.

1, 4, in TNA, Records of the Prime Minister's Office (hereafter PREM) 16/978.

37 The handwritten note is as follows, titled *P.C.I.*, undated [early June 1976], in the London School of Economics and Political Science Library (hereafter LSEL), Archives and Special Collections (hereafter ASC), *Crosland; Charles Anthony Raven (1918-1977); politician* fonds, *Members of Parliament: Ministerial series, Foreign and Commonwealth Office* file, CROSLAND/5/13. The quotations are taken from the typewritten version, rendered in a more discursive form, in all probability, by Crosland's Private Office: *P.C.I. (Italian Communist Party): Notes by the Secretary of State*, undated, attached to the note from Fergusson to Hattersley's Private Secretary and copied, among others, to Kerr and Lipsey, *Communist Participation in the Italian Government*, 9 June 1976, in LSEL, ASC, CROSLAND/5/13. Moreover, as evidence of previous remarks about Crosland's working method, it reads in Fergusson's note that, over «the Whitsun period», the Foreign Secretary «spent some time clarifying his ideas about the problem of Communist participation and our reaction to it», following which he wrote down the above-mentioned notes.

38 The reference is to the Foreign Office's Information Research Department and, more generally, to British anti-communism.

39 Bevin in fact, at least at first, was very sceptical about proceeding in a similar direction; nev-

I arrived at the Foreign Office in April '76. And that happened because I worked for Tony Crosland as what was called Special Advisor, and that meant not a civil servant, but a political advisor to help with political matters. I had been working for him for four years by that stage, most recently when he was Secretary of State for the Environment. I knew quite a lot about housing policy and transport policy, but absolutely nothing about foreign policy. But he still took me with him. One or two pieces of background to this. It's the rise of Berlinguer. It was underway by that stage. And unlike most of the Foreign Office, Crosland did not have a closed mind on Berlinguer or indeed on Italian communism. He had studied Gramsci and Berlinguer very much spoke the language of Gramsci. And I wouldn't say he was convinced, but he was very intrigued by this development in communist thinking.

I've read a lot about Crosland and its intellectual framework, unlike most diplomats and ambassadors who were instead more pragmatic.

Yes. He was essentially a political philosopher. He'd written his great book, *The Future of Socialism*, in 1956 and *Socialism Now* in 1972⁴⁰. That's what he did. And that was not the common state of mind of the most top Foreign Office people. I'm not even sure how much they realised that could be an issue for him. They were so sure, you know, communism bag out. And so I think it came as quite a shock that he wasn't absolutely willing to go along with this⁴¹.

ertheless, by December 1947 – remember that the IRD was founded in early 1948 –, the determination of senior Foreign Office officials to push him toward a more wide-ranging anti-Communist campaign finally saw rewards. See G. Gwinnett, *Attlee, Bevin, and Political Warfare*, in «The International History Review», cit., pp. 429-431. Moreover, it has been noted in the literature that, at least in the original plan presented by the Foreign Secretary, British propaganda should have had a social-democratic connotation and propose, especially to Europeans, a progressive alternative model to that of the USA. See M. Di Donato, R.D. Portolani, *Il Foreign Office e la stampa italiana*, cit., p. 336. Rather, others argue that, once Bevin was convinced of the necessity of the path indicated to him by senior Foreign Office officials, he presented the anti-Communist offensive – thus the IRD – to the cabinet as a complement to the projection of an alternative, and therefore of «a “Third Force” between US capitalism and the Marxist-Leninist system» only to «appeal to more left-wing ministers such as Manny Shinwell and Nye Bevan». G. Gwinnett, *Attlee, Bevin, and Political Warfare*, cit., p. 430. In any case, it must be said that a key role in the affair – thus in the elaboration of the new UK propaganda policy – was played by the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office Christopher Mayhew; according to Lyn Smith, «the IRD was his ‘baby’ and he was proud of it». L. Smith, *Introduction*, in C. Mayhew, *A War of Words: A Cold War Witness*, Bloomsbury, London-New York 2021, p. ix. Andrew Defty has detailed how it was Mayhew who imagined the concept of the Third Force and thus submitted it to Bevin; in Defty's opinion, it was from Mayhew that the catalyst for Bevin's acceptance of a new propaganda policy had come. A. Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-53*, cit., pp. 50-52. Moreover, in his own words: «It has been suggested that the “Third Force” concept may have been merely a “device to win ministerial support”. This does not appear to have been the case». Ivi, p. 51.

⁴⁰ The latter was actually published in 1974; C.A.R. Crosland, *The Future of Socialism*, Jonathan Cape, London 1956; Id., *Socialism Now and other essays*, ed. by D. Leonard, Jonathan Cape, London 1974.

⁴¹ As we have already seen in the Introduction, Crosland's intellectual background sometimes made his relations with the Foreign Office bureaucracy difficult, starting with his Permanent Under-Secretary Palliser. And although there was obviously a wide-ranging debate within the ministry on the attitude to adopt towards communism, and in this specific case towards Italian communism,

What were the UK's foreign policy priorities at that time? Specifically, what was the British foreign policy towards Italy?

Well, I mean, Italy wasn't the top of the foreign policy. Agenda until this came along EU policy, which was much more central, and EU enlargement. Crosland was very interested in the relationship with the US, and he had a close personal relationship with Kissinger. I remember it, there generally isn't a huge change of agenda when the Foreign Secretary changes. His predecessor, Jim Callaghan, was Prime Minister and, by then, he knew a lot about foreign affairs. And I would say Crosland broadly followed Callaghan's preset agenda.

So, Italy was not very much considered, was it?

Well, it wasn't much considered at all, I would say. I mean, we were very interested in the relationship with France for obvious reasons. We were very interested in the relationship with Germany. Italy was not up there with those powerful European powers⁴².

What kind of relationship did Crosland and Callaghan have with Guy Millard (1974-1976) and Alan Campbell (1976-1979), both ambassadors in Rome?

Well, I didn't meet Millard, 'cause he was before my time⁴³. Crosland did not do a visit to Italy during that period. When the subject we were going to talk about came up, he asked me to go to Italy and talk to Italian politicians. And I was guided not actually by Campbell, but by the then First Secretary in the British Embassy in Rome, Martin Morland, very bright man. But I wasn't mixed in with the ambassador.

How were Italian Communists considered inside the Labour Party?

The Labour Party's foreign department was then under what you might call neo-Communist or new Communist control. It was run by a lady called Jenny Little, now deceased. A leading figure in it was a man called Alec Kitson who was a transport general official, and it was essentially fellow travellers of far left, wherever they might be⁴⁴. And as I said already, I think Crosland was not of that school, 'cause he

the general framework was fundamentally anti-communist which, in certain cases, was difficult to reconcile with Crosland's more analytical approach.

42 If it is true that, for a good part of the 1970s, Britain and Italy shared a common destiny of struggling through crises – they were, after all, the two 'sick men' of Europe –, it is equally true that, in the Community setting, the much longed-for Anglo-Italian partnership did not materialise. Moreover, more generally, the British have always perceived themselves to be a nation of greater strength than Italy: in literature, not for nothing, there has been talk of «the usual British tendency to downgrade Rome's stance in Europe and in the world». G. Bentivoglio, *The Two Sick Men of Europe? Britain and Italy between Crisis and Renaissance (1976-1983)*, Peter Lang, Brussels 2018, p. 18.

43 Actually, Millard was ambassador to Rome from June 1974 to September 1976 and Lipsey was Crosland's political advisor from the time the latter took office as Foreign Secretary (April 1976).

44 In any case, as correctly noted in the book – unlike what Lipsey himself declares in the interview –, Little was International Secretary of the Labour Party (1974-1987), while Kitson, for his part, was the former Chairman of the International Committee as well as, naturally, a member of Labour's National Executive Committee (1968-1986), and Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour

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had read Gramsci. He was totally anti-Soviet communism, but he had read other schools of communism and was intrigued by them. And so he didn't belong to that school. I knew nothing about it until I got involved in it.

Were there differences of opinion in the Foreign Office about Italian Communists?

Gosh, I think there were. IRD was a Cold War outfit, prepared to do anything it thought it could get away with what it saw as hit its role of fighting communism worldwide. Its head in those days was a man called Ray Whitney. Ray Whitney went on to become a Conservative MP. But insofar as they could do anything anti-communist, they would, and wherever possible, not referring it to ministers in case ministers objected. I think it was a second Foreign Office. And then there was Michael Palliser, who was the Permanent Under-Secretary. Permanent Under-Secretaries are not politicians. Palliser was a very strong Catholic and I have always believed that his attitudes were shaped by his Catholicism. The Pope was anti-Berlinguer, so I suspect Palliser was, and so there was quite a tradition there⁴⁵. I can't prove that, but I think there was quite a sort of Catholic anti-Communism there. I don't think there was a pro-Berlinguer faction, unless it was the Secretary of State and myself.

I think I tell the story then of when we asked Ray Whitney to write a brief about anti-apartheid South Africa, and instead he wrote «South Africa, the threat from communism». Affable bloke with a one-track mind⁴⁶.

What did Crosland and you think about the other Italian political parties, especially the Christian Democrats? And what about their leaders?

Well, you're really stretching my memory there, and I don't remember talking about it, but essentially Italy had a long record of economic and perhaps political failure up to then, which is why Berlinguer was in the position he was. And so we didn't feel very attracted to Andreotti – I can remember –, didn't feel very attracted to him continuing in power because we wanted a strong Italy. And it wasn't at all clear that he was going to lead the strong Italy. I mean, the Italian Communist Party was a powerful organisation, and given the direction in which Berlinguer was leading it, surprisingly united, but as the DC as I remember it was all over the place, had quarreling factions and not able to provide government for Italy.

Party Foreign Affairs Committee in 1975-1976. With regard to them, see D. Lipsey, *In the Corridors of Power*, cit., p. 94.

⁴⁵ More generally, on the figure of Palliser, as well as especially on the years as Private Secretary (1966-1969) of the then Prime Minister Wilson, see J.W. Young, *Michael Palliser*, in A. Holt, W. Dockter (ed. by), *Private Secretaries to the Prime Minister: Foreign Affairs from Churchill to Thatcher*, Routledge, London-New York 2017, pp. 97-117.

⁴⁶ Lipsey, moreover, noted in his memoirs: «We did not object to this work, crude though some of it was. What we objected to was the underlying assumption that there was only one force opposing Britain's foreign policy interests in the globe, and that was communism». D. Lipsey, *In the Corridors of Power*, cit., p. 93.

I would like to show you this note written by Crosland about the PCI⁴⁷.

I've never seen this note before. Not knowingly. What was the date of that? Do you remember?

There is no specific date. However, in a letter from Ewen Fergusson, Crosland's Principal Private Secretary – sent with the typewritten transcription to Hattersley's Private Secretary and copied to you and Kerr, among others – he says it was drafted by Crosland over «the Whitsun period», thus in early June; in any case, before the Italian elections [20-21 June 1976].

Which I think again, is around the time probably of my note to him on the subject⁴⁸.

Has Callaghan ever pressed Crosland, particularly regarding the FCO's stance towards Italy and the Communists? If yes, how, and, more importantly, why? Did Callaghan and Crosland share the same vision about that?

I don't know they had the same vision, but I should think it was a nuance their difference. For the Prime Minister, a very hostile policy on Italy would be just another downside on his relationship with the Labour Party, which was important to him. I think Callaghan was a more natural anti-communist than Crosland, and more at least different in roots of his anti-communism, less intellectual, more trade union, visceral, you know, that's what his guts felt. But I certainly don't think this came up between Number 10 and the Foreign Office directly.

Have you ever received pressure from Washington regarding your policy on the PCI?

Well, when the Foreign Office began to wake up to the fact that their Foreign Secretary didn't necessarily share their set of anti-communist prejudices, they very much changed their line. They said «Yeah, he may be fine Berlinguer, he may be fine, but we will annoy the Americans». So their cast of argument was «Oh, well, you'll only turn Kissinger against us. That's why we must oppose the PCI». I'm not sure that Crosland entirely bought that, and I don't think there was any direct pressure from Kissinger, but that was what it was used for as a substitute saying «can't have communists».

Around mid-May 1976, on behalf of Crosland, you prohibited the Foreign Office Information Research Department from using and disseminating its paper, titled The Italian Communist Party, for propaganda purposes, since, among other things, «the Secretary of State had not yet decided on the line to take regarding the current political situation in Italy»⁴⁹. It has come to my attention, thanks to a letter written by Raymond

47 The reference is to the above-mentioned note (P.C.I., undated [early June 1976], in LSEL, ASC, CROSLAND/5/13) referred to in footnote 37.

48 Lipsey refers to his own note – previously mentioned in the Introduction (see footnote 36) – titled *Italy* and addressed to Fergusson and copied to Kerr on 18 May 1976, in TNA, PREM 16/978.

49 Also cited by Di Donato and Portolani in their paper, it offered, based on the past experiences of international communism, a series of answers and arguments to unmask the truth behind the PCI's democratic claims. The entire paper, in essence, read its history and organisation in terms of tactical duplicity, and sought to offer a paraphernalia of arguments and useful material to support

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*Whitney, head of IRD, to Martin Morland, Counsellor and Head of Chancery [which might equally be a First Secretary] at the British Embassy in Rome. In that message, Whitney expressed concern that IRD might not be able to use the PCI paper as they had intended. What do you remember about that?*⁵⁰

We weren't going to let Whitney have free-range on that. It was absolutely clear even to him. He was a devious man, not a nasty man, and was doing everything he could and was very prepared to defy ministerial instructions to do it. I think it was very fair that I, we stopped him.

Recently declassified Information Research Department documents show that a senior IRD official, called Heulyn Dunlop, visited Rome from 17 May to 24 June 1976. Did Crosland authorise her mission?

I've never heard of her. I knew nothing of any such visit⁵¹.

this thesis. See M. Di Donato, R.D. Portolani, *Il Foreign Office e la stampa italiana*, cit., pp. 349-350. The paper, in fact, is the following: *The Italian Communist Party (PCI)*, May 1976, in TNA, FCO 168/7750. Divided, in turn, into three parts (*History, Party structure and doctrine, NATO and the EEC*), it also includes three annexes containing: a chronology of the main events in the party's history (the first), general elections' results to Chamber of Deputies since 1945 (the second) and a list of the main PCI personalities as well as members of the Directorate and Secretariat (the third). The paper belongs to that category of material, mainly of a propagandistic nature, carefully disseminated by the IRD in a non-attributable form among those who were deemed to be able to exert influence in their national sphere. These, in turn, were invited to use it in their own public activities (without of course any reference to the IRD or the UK), thus ensuring that the material found its way into information circuits; moreover, the reasons for non-attribution were easily understood: see, for example, the memorandum *The status of IRD papers*, undated [December 1973], in TNA, FCO 168/6951. It states, among other things, that disclosure «of HMG's consistent use of fictitious imprint would, of course, be highly embarrassing – apart from the fact that the whole standing and position of the Department within the Foreign Office would have to change drastically». *Ibidem*. Far from being mere pawns, in any case, the IRD contacts were evidently free to use (or not) the material received at will. M. Di Donato, R.D. Portolani, *Il Foreign Office e la stampa italiana*, cit., p. 338. Although, unfortunately, we do not have all-encompassing documents that serve as a summary of the entire production of the Information Research Department, a rather detailed overview (albeit undoubtedly partial and relative to that specific period) is contained in *Use of I.R.D. written material*, March 1964, in TNA, FO 1110/1738, and also in *Material produced or distributed by Information Research Department*, undated [March 1964], in TNA, FO 1110/1738. Both memoranda are attached to a letter from Leslie Glass (then Assistant Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office) to Ambassadors, Ministers, and Chargés d'Affaires stationed in countries targeted by IRD propaganda, 25 March 1964, in TNA, FO 1110/1738.

50 The reference is to Whitney's letter to Morland, *IRD paper on the PCI*, 19 May 1976 (enclosing M. Rutherford's article, *Foreign Office fears on Italy*, «Financial Times», 18 May 1976), in TNA, FCO 168/7750.

51 We cannot say the same of Crosland with absolute certainty. In any case, on Whitney's proposal – see, among others, Whitney's letter to Millard, *The PCI and the Italian elections*, 5 May 1976 (with the memorandum *IRD reconnaissance visit to Italy*, attached), in TNA, FCO 168/5751 –, Dunlop was in Rome during the above-mentioned period (with the exception of 26 May when she visited Milan) with the aim, at least initially, «to undermine the credibility of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), in the run-up to the elections». However, fearing a possible unravelling of the operation, her «chief occupation became one of monitoring the Italian press»; nonetheless, «in the event, things turned out much better than expected». The quotations are from the *Introduction and summary* section, pp. 1-2, of Dunlop's report, undated [late June-early July 1976],

In Italy some years ago, a debate arose over the then just-declassified Foreign Office document titled Italy and the Communists: Options for the West⁵². It was written by the Planning Staff for an informal internal meeting organised by Alan Campbell, who was at that time the Deputy Under-Secretary and Political Director, handling European affairs, and also attended by some high representatives of the Ministry of Defence (April 1976). The document, among other things, examined the possibility of using subversive methods to prevent the PCI from coming to power. However, even though the Planning Staff ruled out a coup d'état, they simultaneously requested the British government to urge the Italian government to implement robust measures against the Communists. By the way, a scholarly paper (in Italian, unfortunately) stated that, upon reading the report, you and Crosland opposed it⁵³. What do you remember about it?

I don't remember anything more than that seems to be an accurate report of where we stood. I'm sorry. I think it appears in this, in the documents we've got⁵⁴. I don't remember anything in detail about it. No.

Finally, we come to 1977, when David Owen, Crosland's successor as Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, closed the Information Research Department.

Yeah, IRD was abolished by David Owen. And I wasn't consulted, I was David Owen's political advisor for two days. So when he did this, I wasn't still at the Foreign Office. I was at Number 10⁵⁵. But I would've strongly supported his decision.

I do think we mostly have covered the useful ground that there is to cover and there's a clear difference between the IRD wing of the Foreign Office, if you like, and the Foreign Secretary. And if anything, I was a bit further along that spectrum than the Foreign Secretary, 'cause he'd come from an anti-communist background more than I had. And the fact the IRD was abolished. I think there's largely a consequence of this whole series of events. They forfeited the confidence of successive ministers by not appearing to be very interested in what ministers thought, more

sent attached to Dunlop's note to Joy, Truesdale, and O'Connor Howe (IRD functionaries), as well as to Whitney, 2 July 1976, in TNA, FCO 168/5752. The visit was clearly along the lines of the operations undertaken by the IRD, in spite even of the Foreign Secretary's own caution and circumspection, to contain the communists in the run-up to the elections.

52 It has indeed received widespread attention by the press: see for all F. Ceccarelli, *il Golpe Inglese*, «La Domenica di Repubblica», 13 gennaio 2008; M.J. Cereghino, G. Fasanella, *Il golpe inglese*, Chiarelettere, Milano 2022 [edizione originaria 2011], pp. 307-330; F. Ceccarelli, *Il Golpe inglese, Londra vs Roma nelle trame della Guerra Fredda*, «la Repubblica», 20 settembre 2011.

53 More specifically, regarding the genesis of the memorandum *Italy and the Communists: Options for the West*, as well as the reactions of the Foreign Secretary and Lipsey, see for all D. Vignati, *Keep calm and carry on*, cit., pp. 115 ff.

54 The reference is to a list of documents on Italy that Lipsey kept with him, also indicating their contents and chronological references.

55 The statement evidently contains a hyperbole: we know that he would in fact only leave the Foreign Office roughly around the end of June. See on this the letter from David Goodall (Head of the Western European Department) to Alan Goodison (Minister at the British Embassy in Rome), *The Italian Communist Party*, 28 June 1977, in TNA, FCO 33/3205. The IRD, however, would have been closed in August, therefore, as Lipsey correctly noted in the interview, after he had left the Foreign Office as political adviser to the Foreign Secretary. See G. Gwinnett, *The Demise of the Information Research Department in 1977*, cit., p. 161.

interested in what Alun Chalfont thought. So, they were not very successful in attending their institutional position, I would say. In the end, I don't know, but I don't think that Alun Chalfont would've fought very hard to save them in the end because it was bad business from his point of view⁵⁶.

Are you seeing Owen or speaking to David Owen?

Not today, but I did email him, and it looks like we'll be meeting at the end of November.

He's got an amazingly good memory, unlike me, so he'll remember this. He was the junior minister at the time. So he was, then he was involved in these discussions, before he was promoted to become Foreign Secretary. And on like the end of IRD, he'll remember more about it. I have discussed it with him. Owen is a lot more fierce on some of this, on the IRD and other things, than I was.

For example, the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme's interview with Ewen Fergusson does not include very positive evaluations of Owen – at least in terms of his approach as Foreign Secretary⁵⁷.

They hated Owen. The Foreign Office hated Owen. Crosland was very straightforward and polite, and Owen was much more direct. Owen's bearing made it clear that he didn't have the high regard for them that they had for themselves. So, I mean, Ewen Fergusson was a not insubstantial figure who played rugby for Scotland, but treated them all fairly roughly. Owen's right. He was the boss. But he didn't attract great love, whereas Crosland was a source, at least, of fascination if not a lot of love⁵⁸.

56 An ardent anti-communist, Heulyn Dunlop described one of his articles in «The Times» on Italy and NATO as one «of the single most debate-provoking contributions to the anti-PCI campaign». See previously cited Dunlop report, undated [late June-early July 1976], p. 7, enclosed with Dunlop's note to Joy, Truesdale, and O'Connor Howe (IRD functionaries), as well as to Whitney, 2 July 1976, in TNA, FCO 168/5752. The article in question: *Communists in Italy are the same as any others*, «The Times», 24 May 1976. Upon leaving the Labour Party just before the second 1974 election – he had only joined it in 1964, once he had become Minister of State –, Lord Chalfont campaigned, not for nothing, for Christopher Mayhew, who had recently joined the Liberal Party.

57 See *Interview with Sir Ewen Fergusson GCMG conducted by John Hutson 2nd December 1998*, pp. 12-13, in CAC, BDOHP, DOHP 35, <https://oa.churchillarchives.libnova.com/view/1533> (last accessed 7/7/2025).

58 In any case, unlike what Lipsey recalls in the interview, even Crosland, according to Fergusson, had his sometimes difficult traits. Ivi, p. 12. Nevertheless, it has already been mentioned in the Introduction how Owen's style of government in the Foreign Office was not at all well received, quite the contrary. See, in this sense, in addition to Fergusson's testimony, also those, albeit with different nuances, of Alan Campbell, Kieran Prendergast (Assistant Private Secretary to Owen, a number two Private Secretary) and Stephen Wall (also Assistant Private Secretary to Owen, but as number three Private Secretary), as well as Denis Healey, Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1974 to 1979: *Sir Alan Campbell: Interviewed by Jane Barder 19/1/96: Typed by Jeremy Wiltshire 10/6/96*, p. 35, in CAC, BDOHP, DOHP 2, <https://oa.churchillarchives.libnova.com/view/1435> (last accessed 7/7/2025); *Sir Kieran Prendergast KCVO CMG interviewed at his home in Lincolnshire on Tuesday 10 July 2012 by Malcolm McBain.*, pp. 17-20, in CAC, BDOHP, DOHP 137, <https://oa.churchillarchives.libnova.com/view/1693> (last accessed 7/7/2025); *Sir Stephen Wall, GCMG, interviewed by Thomas Raineau (Université de Paris-Sorbonne): Part 1. Tuesday 14 Decem-*

And I think they recognised that Crosland had a very fine mind. And as you saw from that memory, you just showed me. You know, it's a very remarkable piece of analysis for a serving politician.

2. *Author's interview with The Rt Hon. the Lord Owen CH, November 2023, via email*⁵⁹

What were the UK's foreign policy priorities at that time? What about British foreign policy towards Italy?

To ensure Italy remained a friend within the European Union and NATO. On a personal note this was easy because Italy was my father's favourite country. He had fought as a doctor in the British Expedition Force in 1939 and then in North Africa, Sicily and Italy until the forces reached Rome in 1944. He then spent the rest of the war until late summer as head of a convalescent hospital in Rome and loved every minute of his stay so much so we returned as a family on many occasions. It was a sadness that democratic Italy was so interested in Eurocommunism but I felt it was never likely to take hold if we engaged in dialogue and debate. In effect one needed to take Italy seriously, not dismiss their debates and hope the flirtation with communism would be a transient phenomenon⁶⁰. I do not think Italy lost its federalism

*ber 2010. 11.15am. London, The Wolseley; Part 2. Tuesday 28 February 2012. 3.00 pm. London, The Wallace Restaurant, pp. 13-18, in CAC, BDOHP, DOHP 136, <https://oa.churchillarchives.libnova.com/view/1789> (last accessed 7/7/2025); D. Healey, *The Time of My Life*, Penguin Books, London 1989, p. 458. On the other hand, however, it must also be said that the tone used by Campbell in his autobiography, published in 1988, appears different from that of the interview, evidently conditioned, unlike Healey, who was already a leading figure in British politics, by circumstances and understandable reasons of expediency – in fact, Owen was still active in the political arena at the time: see A. Campbell, *Colleagues and Friends*, Michael Russell, Salisbury 1988, p. 131. In the BDOHP, however, there is unfortunately no interview with George Walden, Fergusson's successor as Principal Private Secretary to Owen: nevertheless, he discussed it extensively in G. Walden, *Lucky George: Memoirs of an Anti-Politician*, Allen Lane, London 1999, pp. 172-188. In his memoirs, however, Lord Owen confirmed the problematic work relationship with part of the top staff in the ministry: see D. Owen, *Time to Declare*, cit., pp. 265-266.*

59 The interview, initially scheduled for 21 November 2023 in London, was then conducted via email for strictly personal reasons of Lord Owen.

60 In line with what has been said, also one of his texts from 1978 in which an entire chapter, as the title suggests, is dedicated to communism in Western Europe: according to him, «for anyone concerned about human rights» there were at that time «few questions requiring a more urgent and considered answer than how to deal with the communist party in Western Europe». D. Owen, *Human Rights*, Jonathan Cape, London 1978, p. 53. While rejecting the definition of 'Eurocommunism' – «There are grounds for deep scepticism that any such unified phenomenon exists» –, he made it clear that «[e]voking fear, implying that we will not accept them as partners in NATO and the EEC if they win elections in their countries is the worst possible response. It undermines our own commitment to accepting the verdict of the ballot-box. [...] We will not be able to combat communism without first attempting an examination of the nature of communism in Europe and analysing its weaknesses, particularly its democratic basis». From his perspective, the challenge, which was «an extremely serious one», was «to democrats in general but to democratic socialists in particular». Ivi, pp. 70-72. He also devoted a Cambridge lecture to Eurocommunism, and to Italian communism in particular (November 1977) – which faithfully reflects what was later published

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during this debate and perhaps it deepened nor should it lose its focus; there is an inner logic to it. And I hope Italy's understands better because of the debate why the recent referendum decision in the U.K. was to leave the EU but not Europe⁶¹.

How has the Foreign Office – and British politics, in general – perceived Italy's role in the international arena?

On federalism, which many of your diplomats favoured in my time, I robustly argued against for us but in favour for you. Eventually after a book I wrote called *Europe Restructured*⁶² calling for a change in the architecture of Europe whose ideas were rejected I voted to leave. My Europeanism has not changed; we have Italian cousins on my wife's side through American links and a month ago we celebrated in Milan with 27 family members present for my wife's cousin's 90th Birthday.

Why did you close the Foreign Office's Information Research Department?

Because one should not interfere or spy on fellow members of the EU which is a relationship fundamentally of trust.

What was your relationship with Alan Campbell, the British ambassador in Rome from 1976 to 1979?

Excellent in all respects and we have a friendship because of mutual friends⁶³.

During your time at the Foreign Office, how did you handle the Communist advance and the significant terrorist and economic challenges that Italy was dealing with?

We helped behind the scenes in every way we could.

[Owen, a few days later]: Dear [author's name]

I didn't do justice to what I would have said had we been able to meet about my decision to close down the IRD department which was already being considered by Tony Crosland when he so sadly died.

Bilateral relationships with Italy matter and even though the UK is no longer in the EU Anglo-Italian relations are still special.

When I closed IRD I made it clear that MI6 would remain able to investigate

in the aforementioned volume –, as well as an interview with «The Guardian», taking «a sharply different line both on those on the left who advocate[d] wholesale cooperation with the Eurocommunists and from Sir Harold Wilson's advice [...] that Labour should [have] “shun[ned] them like the plague”». H. Pick, *Dr Owen plays a waiting game*, «The Guardian», 8 December 1977; see also G. Bentivoglio, *The Two Sick Men of Europe?*, cit., pp. 89-90. Lastly, it should be noted that the text of the Cambridge lecture is present in D. Owen, *Communism, Socialism, and Democracy*, in «The Washington Quarterly», 2, 1978, pp. 4-15.

⁶¹ The reference is, of course, to the 'Brexit' referendum of 23 June 2016, on which occasion Owen sided with Leave.

⁶² There are several editions of the same work: see D. Owen, *Europe Restructured: The Eurozone Crisis and its Aftermath*, Methuen, York 2012; Id., *Europe Restructured: The Eurozone Crisis and the UK Referendum*, Methuen, York 2015; lastly, Id., *Europe Restructured: Vote to Leave*, Methuen, York 2016.

⁶³ See footnote 58 about this.

aspects of Italian policy in that there has never been any limitation on MI6's right to follow intelligence leads on countries with which we have exceptionally good relations. But this arrangement under MI6 was accompanied by serious safeguards, not only about any information discovered but a much reduced possibility that it would ever become public. So I was not excluding the collecting of information about Italy any more than I would exclude any other country, some even closer to us than Italy. What I did not want to do was to have spying on Italy or any other country from an earmarked department within the Foreign Office which carried none of the overarching accountability of MI6.

I hope this helps you.

Regards

David Owen

3. *Author's interview with The Lord Kerr of Kinlochard GCMG
February-March 2024, via email*

[Kerr, in response to my interview request and following my brief introduction]:

Dear [author's name],

It's no inconvenience: no need to apologise. But I'm afraid I can't help.

I was indeed Michael Palliser's Private Secretary during the period you are studying, but that didn't give me any real insight into Anglo-Italian relations. The only episode I recall is Foreign Secretary Crosland's successful effort to persuade Henry Kissinger that the Italian Left, and in particular the Communist Party, were not agents of the Kremlin (I think I remember that Crosland gave Kissinger a tutorial, and a reading-list, beginning with Gramsci). But, rather shamefully, what I remember most vividly was my annoyance, and Palliser's, at Crosland refusing to work on other dossiers while he diligently prepared for his meeting with Kissinger. We were wrong: he had his priorities right.

I expect your talks with David Owen and David Lipsey were productive. But I fear a talk with me wouldn't be. 50 years ago, mine was a very minor role compared to theirs, and my recollections of policy debates at that time are nearly all about UK relations with the Soviet Union, the US and the EEC, because these were my personal specialisations. I wish I had known more, and focused more, on Italy; but I fear that only came much later, when I was fortunate enough to get to know Giuliano Amato, and then Mario Monti.

So coming to London to talk to me would be a waste of your time. I'm sorry.

Yours ever

John Kerr

[Kerr, following my request for authorisation to publish his interview]:

Dear [author's name],

Very good of you to reply. Yes, of course, feel free to make whatever use you can of my message. I only wish I had more recollections to pass on to you. I in fact knew that Crosland was right when he reassured Kissinger that the Italian Communist Party was not a subservient agent of the Kremlin. I was serving in the UK Embassy

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in Moscow in autumn 1968, when the world communist movement was summoned there to approve the August overthrow of the Dubcek government in Prague; and I remember admiring in Pravda the dissident speech of the Italian party's representative. Only the Italians (and Romanians) were brave enough to denounce the Soviet military intervention. I was surprised that Pravda printed their remarks. They certainly proved Crosland's point⁶⁴.

Yours sincerely
John Kerr

Simone Battaglia
(simone.battaglia@uniroma1.it)

64 In June 1969 – and not in the autumn of 1968, as Kerr recalls – the World Conference on Communism met in Moscow, where the PCI, in the words of Silvio Pons, was the only one among «the most important parties» to insist on «the “Czechoslovak question”». S. Pons, *La rivoluzione globale. Storia del comunismo internazionale 1917-1991*, Einaudi, Torino 2012, p. 361.