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DISCUSSION

Results of the 1951-1952 Local Elections. In these elections, which were held generally in Northern and North Central Italy in 1951 and in Southern Italy in 1952, the center parties increased their control over local administrations. A 1951 election law made it politically rewarding for the parties to form linked lists, and three such lists were, with local exceptions, presented: (a) a leftist list of Communists, Left-Socialists, and small independent groups; (b) the center list of Right-Socialists, Republicans, Christian Democrats, and Liberals; and (c) a right-wing list of Monarchists and Neo-Fascists (MSI). Through its linkage with the smaller moderate parties the predominantly Christian Democratic (CD) government carried most of the important northern cities and Rome. In Southern Italy, however, where the Christian-Democrats drew a heavy vote in 1948, the extremes gained control of certain key local administrations. Naples, Bari, and a number of other Southern cities went to the right, while all three major Italian naval base cities (Brindisi and Taranto in the south and La Spezia in the north) remained Communist.

More significant, however, is the general loss of popular vote by the center parties as compared to the 1948 national election (see Tab A). The two parties now composing the government (Christian Democrats and Republicans) received only 38 percent of the vote, compared to about 51 percent in 1948. On a nation-wide basis, the Christian Democrats won numerically about 1/3 less votes than in 1948. The numerical vote of the other three center parties fell off to a lesser degree but their percentage of the popular vote remained substantially unchanged. However, even if the votes for the Right-Socialists and Liberals (who originally participated in the government formed after the 1948 elections) were added to those of the present two government parties, the total would still be a little less than 50 percent compared to about 62 percent in 1948. The Communist-Socialist Left got about 35 percent of the vote (31 percent in 1948) and gained roughly 500,000 votes. The greatest increase was in the vote received by the Neo-Fascist/Monarchist right which got about 11 percent, compared to 5 percent in 1948 (with most of the substantial increase going to the Neo-Fascists). The increases in both rightist and Communist votes were achieved largely in Southern and South Central Italy.<sup>3/</sup>

<sup>3/</sup> In the 1952 Sicilian communal elections the three-way split between extreme left (30 percent), Christian Democrats (31 percent), and extreme right (21 percent) which occurred in the 1951 regional elections, was more or less re-affirmed.

Significance of the Local Elections. Although the 1951-1952 elections were only local and provincial, they were understood to be of national significance and, despite numerous qualifying factors, the results roughly indicate the national political trend. The chief result is that the Italian democratic center appears to have lost the substantial popular majority it received in the 1948 elections, and to be approximately balanced by the forces of the extreme left and right.

Several factors contributed to the sharp losses of the Christian Democrats. In 1948, the threat of Communism was considered so great that anti-Communists gave their vote overwhelmingly to the CD, on the grounds that the anti-Communist vote should not be split. By 1951-1952, although the Communist threat was considered much reduced, many anti-Communists who had voted for the Christian Democrats in 1948 were still dissatisfied with the government because it had not drastically curbed Communist activities. They no longer felt it necessary or advisable that a single party, especially a Catholic one, should monopolize anti-Communism, and accordingly cast their votes for the rightist parties. The reaction of propertied interests and their clientele, especially in Southern Italy, to such limited land reforms as have been effected, nationalist reaction to the loss of the Italian colonies and failure to regain Trieste, and nostalgia for the melodramatics of Fascism probably also contributed to rightist gains. On the other hand, the De Gasperi government's inability, despite marked progress in other lines of economic policy, to reduce substantially Italy's chronic unemployment caused substantial losses to both left and right. The same is true of the fear of the growing influence of Catholic Action on the CD party. The government's go-slow approach to the agrarian question undoubtedly also contributed to this loss.

Likelihood of New Political Alignments. The current trend away from the center will almost certainly lead De Gasperi and his party to take measures to avoid defeat in the national elections. They will probably attempt to do so by broadening the government's political base, and by taking more vigorous measures against the extremist parties. De Gasperi could broaden the base of his government in any one of three ways: (a) by a left-center coalition embracing the fellow-traveling Left-Socialists as well as the Right-Socialists and Republicans; (b) by reconstituting the 1948 center government, which included the Right-Socialists, Republicans, and Liberals; and (c) by a right-center coalition embracing the Liberals and Monarchists and possibly the Republicans.

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De Gasperi's choice between these alternatives will be largely influenced by the composition of the Christian Democratic Party and its sources of support. The party encompasses a wide range of social, economic, and geographical interests, some of them sharply opposed to each other. The essential common characteristics of the party are its anti-Communism and Catholicism, and we believe that these forces will continue to hold the various party factions together. The CD's major source of support is the Catholic Church and its powerful lay political organization, Catholic Action. With the exception of the Communists, Catholic Action is probably the best organized extra-governmental group in Italy. In contrast the CD party itself is poorly organized and overlaps considerably with the Catholic Action groups. Luigi Gedda, the head of Catholic Action, is a man of energy and ability whose authoritarian tendencies have brought him into conflict with De Gasperi on occasion, and who favors a broadening of the government to the right. Before the recent elections Gedda urged that the CD align itself with the right in order to win the touch-and-go Rome elections. De Gasperi opposed such an alignment and was justified when the center ticket won. On the other hand the strength of Catholic Action and the fact that the balance of power within the CD parliamentary group probably lies with the right-center, gives these elements a restraining power over De Gasperi's actions.

We believe that any proposal that the CD form a coalition with the left-wing Socialists would probably be opposed by these right-wing groups. Moreover, although left-wing Socialist leader Nenni recently raised the possibility of separating his party from its long-held Communist association and entering the government, we cannot estimate whether this is more than a tactical maneuver on Nenni's part.

On the other hand, De Gasperi will probably not favor early creation of a right-center coalition with the Monarchists, because Monarchist strength does not yet appear sufficient to compensate for the loss of at least Right-Socialist support which would probably follow such a move. De Gasperi would be wholly opposed to any coalition which would embrace the Neo-Fascists, who so far compose the bulk of extreme right-wing strength.

Therefore, we believe that the reconstitution of a balanced center coalition by bringing the Right-Socialists and Liberals back into the present Christian Democratic-Republican government is almost certainly the course which will be preferred by De Gasperi and which will be attempted by him. While the Right-Socialists and Liberals might be willing to join the government before the national elections, it is more likely that they would prefer not to enter the government until after the elections.

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However, in view of the trend toward increased rightist strength, the CD will probably make continuing efforts to prepare the ground and leave the way open for a later shift to the right should this become necessary. The Christian Democrats will almost certainly attempt to split the present rightist alliance between the Monarchists and Neo-Fascists, since it is improbable that the CD would ally with the Neo-Fascist MSI. Such efforts could well prove successful despite the failure of an earlier CD effort to split off the Monarchists prior to the recent elections in Southern Italy. Since then, ex-King Umberto has expressed displeasure at continued Monarchist alliance with the MSI. Moreover, the Neo-Fascists of the Salo Republic tradition in the North are opposed to an alliance with the Monarchists of the South.

Other Factors Influencing the Next Election. Aside from the fluidity of the Italian political situation, there are a number of other variable factors which make the outcome of the next elections extremely difficult to predict. We believe, for example, that Italy faces an unfavorable economic outlook for next year. Further economic deterioration would intensify social conflict and benefit the extremist parties, especially the Left. Because of the importance of the Trieste issue to all shades of Italian public opinion, failure to resolve the issue prior to the elections would also heighten popular dissatisfaction with the government and benefit the nationalistic extreme right. On the other hand a solution on Trieste favorable to Italy would benefit the government by demonstrating its ability to protect Italian interests. However, the extremists will undoubtedly attack almost any feasible solution, maintaining that it involved "unnecessary sacrifices."

Another factor which will influence the elections is the extent of government action to restrict the Right and Left extremes. We believe that De Gasperi, encouraged by the strong anti-Communist stand of Pinay in France and faced with the necessity of strengthening his position in the next elections, will take some such action. Parliament has just approved an anti-Fascist law, which can be used to greatly restrict the activities of the Neo-Fascists. Also under consideration is a revision of the penal code to provide penalties against anti-democratic activities of either the right or left. Finally, the government is considering some revision of the present proportional representation system of voting to improve its chances of retaining a majority in the Chamber.

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Probable Timing of the National Elections. We believe that the national elections, now scheduled for the spring of 1953, will probably be held at that time, despite various suggestions to advance them to the fall of 1952. The CD party is unlikely to yield to such pressures; it will probably desire to have as much time as possible for political maneuvering to strengthen the coalition, to pass and implement the proposed anti-extremist measures, and a new electoral law, and to achieve a successful solution of the Trieste problem.

Probable Outcome of the Elections. We consider it unlikely that the present center coalition, especially the CD, will regain the degree of popular support obtained in the national election of 1948. The government's difficulties over the past five years in coping with Italy's deep-seated socio-economic problems, especially that of unemployment, as well as increasing concern in some quarters over the Church's political influence, will limit its popular support. At the same time, the good organization and popular appeal of the Communists have not been effectively countered, and we believe that their vote will not be significantly reduced. More important, this continued Communist threat, together with the national frustration over Trieste and the apprehension of propertied interests over further economic reforms, will probably lead to a continued increase in the strength of the extreme right. Even though the MSI may be outlawed, the political interests it represents will remain a highly vocal minority force.

Nevertheless, we believe that as a result of De Gasperi's efforts to broaden and strengthen his government, the four center parties will probably obtain a narrow majority sufficient to form a new center coalition government.

However, this government will probably find itself severely hampered by its narrow majority and its lack of political homogeneity. Such coalitions in the past have not worked together effectively because of conflicts between clericals and anti-clericals and diverse socio-economic views. Defection of any one of the four parties would probably be sufficient to overthrow the government. Under these circumstances, and particularly if the Monarchists had gained substantially in the elections, we believe that the CD party would move to create a new right-center coalition, probably CD's, Liberals, and Monarchists. Such a shift to the right would accentuate the polarization of Italian political life and would be considered by the left-wing parties as a serious threat. It might have major repercussions affecting Italian social and political stability.

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The Political Future of De Gasperi. De Gasperi himself may oppose any such move to the right, and if it takes place he might step down as Prime Minister. His retirement for reasons of age or health (he is now 71) is also possible, although we consider this unlikely. His most likely successors appear at present to be Piccioni-- the CD Deputy Prime Minister or Gonella--the Secretary General of the CD party, in that order.

Impact of a Change in Government on Italy's Foreign Policy. The advent of a more right-wing Government probably would not lead to any basic shift in Italy's foreign policy. Italy would remain a firm NATO supporter, and would not for this reason alone reduce its present rearmament effort. However, a rightist government probably would be more nationalist in outlook, would insist on greater recognition of Italian interests, and might be less enthusiastic in regard to European integration, EDC, etc.

"TAB A"

(Italian Party Strength in 1948 and 1951-1952 Elections)

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TAB "A"

## Italian Party Strength in 1948 and 1951-1952 Elections\*

<u>Party</u>	<u>1948 National Elections</u>		<u>1951-52 Local Elections</u>	
Neo-Fascist (MSI)	527,000	2.0%	1,693,000	6.9%
Monarchist	729,000	2.8%	1,009,000	4.1%
Liberal	998,000	3.9%	929,000	3.8%
Christian Democrat	12,505,000	48.4%	8,688,000	35.5%
Republican	651,000	2.5%	607,000	2.5%
Right-Socialist	1,825,000	7.1%	1,792,000	7.3%
Left-Socialist	-	-	2,888,000	11.8%
Communist	8,099,000	31.4%	5,239,000	21.4%
Pro-Communist Indep.	-	-	509,000	2.1%
Other Parties	475,000	1.8%	1,112,000	4.5%

\* These figures do not add fully to 100 percent because of rounding.  
They include Sicily but exclude Aosta, Trento, Bolzano, and Trieste.