

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

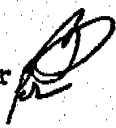
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INFORMATION

May 6, 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger 
SUBJECT: Italian Divorce Referendum

On May 12, Italian voters will decide whether or not to uphold or abrogate a 1970 law that made divorce legal in Italy. The outcome of the referendum can be expected to have a major impact on Italian political developments.

The referendum campaign has driven a wedge between the Christian Democrats who are campaigning hard for cancellation of the law, and their coalition partners, the Socialists, Social Democrats and Republicans, who are urging retention of legalized divorce.

The split in the coalition over divorce comes at a time when the parties are already at loggerheads over economic issues. Prime Minister Rumor's coalition had been in office only eight months when it fell apart in early March over economic policy differences between the Socialists and the Republican Party. Rumor hurriedly patched together the current government, but the refusal of the Republicans to accept any cabinet posts indicates that the parties made no progress toward resolving their dispute over economic priorities. Rumor's coalition is widely regarded as a stopgap affair contrived to get the country through the divorce referendum.

The Communist Stake. Communist leader Enrico Berlinguer had been pushing since October for an "historic compromise" between his party and the Christian Democrats -- a clear bid for admission to the national government. Berlinguer thus tried to get Christian Democratic leader Amintore Fanfani to go along with a plan to cancel the referendum in order to avoid an open battle between the two parties. Fanfani's refusal to cooperate, however, gave substance to the concerns of more militant Communists who doubt the wisdom of Berlinguer's search for a modus vivendi with the Christian Democrats.

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2

It is unlikely that even a major Communist victory in the referendum would lead to their immediate participation in the government. More probable alternatives include: a) an all-Christian Democratic caretaker government to preside until the dust settles; b) the eventual reforming of the center-left coalition (both the Christian Democrats and Socialists have stressed during the divorce campaign their desire to continue governmental collaboration); c) the outside possibility of a "technocratic" government designed to deal with the country's severe economic problems.

Elements of the Italian military are probably concerned over the potential for increased Communist influence but are not now proceeding with any concrete plans for action. This might change, however, if it appeared that the Communists were on the verge of winning a major government role in the immediate future.

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