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**The Influence of the Socialist International in the Foreign Policies of the Italian and Spanish Socialist Parties during the late 1970s and 1980s: Latin America**

Luciana Fazio

UNIVERSITY  
OF MIAMI



**Vol. 21, No. 9  
Paper Series  
June 2021**

**Published with the support of the European Commission**

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# The Influence of the Socialist International in the Foreign Policies of the Italian and Spanish Socialist Parties during the late 1970s and 1980s: Latin America<sup>1</sup>

Luciana Fazio\*

The specialized literature has insisted that the eighties were a decade of rapprochement between Europe and Latin America. This involved factors such as the democratization of the Iberian countries and those of Latin America, the conflicts in and the pacification of Central America, changes in the world economy, and erosion of import-substitution models and their replacement with other more open ones, advances in the process of European Communities (EC) integration and fissures that appeared in the Cold War scheme, which created conditions for more autonomous international relations<sup>2</sup>.

Indeed, if one thinks about the times of great rapprochement, it is necessary to reflect on the 1980s when the EC made, for the first time, truly political attempts to connect with the other side of the Atlantic. By exploring this in depth, it is possible to notice strong efforts made by European social democracy and therefore, by the Socialist International (SI), since the late 1970s (of course, facilitated by the convergence of socialist governments in Europe) in supporting developing countries and in particular Latin America. Furthermore, the international context at the time made this easier and encouraged Latin American interest in Europe rather than in their traditional ally, i.e. the United States.

Thus, this article aims to briefly discuss how the Socialist International somehow contributed to the definition of the Italian and Spanish foreign policy towards Latin America during the late 1970s and 1980s and therefore, to the design of a Community policy on the other side of the Atlantic. Indeed, the Spanish socialist government -PSOE (with Felipe González) and the Italian socialist government -PSI (with Bettino Craxi) structured foreign policies with respect to Latin America based on the guiding principles of the SI both in the European and in the transnational sphere, where parties and organizations operate. The importance of this topic is that on this basis, a new stage was constructed in the relations between Europe and Latin America that

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\* Luciana Fazio: PhD in *Politics: History, Theory and Science* (LUISS Guido Carli University, Rome, Italy). Her research interests include contemporary international history, globalization and the relationships between Europe and Latin America from a comparative and transnational perspective. Luciana holds a Master's degree in Contemporary History and a Bachelor in History from the Università degli Studi di Firenze (Florence - Italy). In 2018, she was a Visiting Scholar at the University of Miami- European Union Center, USA.

<sup>1</sup> This paper comes from my PhD dissertation, entitled "The Socialist International and the Design of a Community Policy in Latin America During the Late 1970s and 1980: The Case of Spain and Italy". The thesis was defended on 23 July 2020 at LUISS-Guido Carli University (Rome). I am truly grateful to my supervisors (Maria Elena Cavallaro and Giovanni Orsina) and academics for their support during this process, especially for their advice in terms of literature review and time availability for helping me facing some questions that raised during this process. Special thanks to Professor Joaquin Roy for his support, kindness and hospitality during my visiting exchange program at the University of Miami. Many thanks to the interviewed people for their much-needed help to fill the gaps in terms of sources.

<sup>2</sup> Loth Wilfried (2014). "States and the Changing Equation of Power". In Iriye Akira and Osterhammel Jürgen (Eds), *Global Interdependence. The World after 1945*, USA: Belknap Press, pp. 127-172

remains in effect today. Furthermore, the study of the period of great rapprochement (1980s) matters to identify key factors to overcome the current “routinization” (stalemate) of their relations. Indeed, it is important to rethink these relationships “to balance” the power that “sovereign” countries (those currently dominate the international scene, i.e. USA, China, Russia, etc.) have in the world today. In this sense, both regions share common positions to promote greater interdependence in the world. As the political scientist Zaiki Laïdi claims, both Europe and Latin America require a strong multilateral system “to survive” on the international level and to contrast such “sovereign” actors. Therefore, both should aim to construct a new world order based on “shared sovereignty” and ruled by specific norms (since they do not trust in “power politics”) in such a way as to balance the world system. They really need joint action.<sup>3</sup>

The election of the Italian and Spanish cases relies on the fact that the Spaniards (in first place) and the Italians were the ones who contributed to establish a real and concrete Community policy towards Latin America. With the Spanish accession to the EC, Madrid somehow became a sort of “liason” between both regions while Italy mainly acquired a supportive attitude towards the initiatives developed by Spain on the other side of the Atlantic. Moreover, for Spain, Latin America represented a political capital, which enabled Madrid to increase its “prestige” within the EC and could favor the quick internationalization of the Spanish economy. Additionally, even if the Mediterranean was the most important political action area for Italy, it has historically been close to Latin America. This, however, does not mean that they were the only ones who were interested in Latin America. For example, Portuguese, German and Nordic Social Democracy played a key role in establishing transatlantic contacts and the French socialist government was very sensitive in regard to Latin American matters (e.g. the Franco-Mexican initiative that recognized the FMLN-FDR movement as a legitimate force in El Salvador)<sup>4</sup>.

To do so, this text will be structured as follows: firstly, this writing will consider the “internationalization” of the SI; secondly, this text will analyze the influence of the SI in the definition of the Italian and the Spanish foreign policy towards Latin America and therefore, this section will also consider the design of the EC policy towards the other side of the Atlantic. To the development of this research, this study used notions provided by transnational history and comparative history, which are not understood as opposing approaches. Indeed, beyond depicting the socialist transnational networks (e.g. the links between the SI, the parties and the European and Latin American governments), this research examines and compares the policies developed by the PSOE and the PSI towards Latin America. It is worth underlining that transnational history is conceived here as a “point of view” that complements other perspectives and therefore it should be combined with historical comparison<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Laïdi Zaiki (2004). “¿Sobrevivirá Europa en la globalización? *Estudios Internacionales*, 37, 146, pp. 105-115 doi:10.5354/0719-3769.2011.14546

<sup>4</sup> The SI supported the Franco-Mexican initiative, condemned the Napoleon Duarte’s military Junta and the USA involvement. Likewise, the SI reaffirmed its full support for Guillermo Ungo, political head of the FMLN-FDR. “Declaration du Bureau de L’Internationale Socialiste sur Le Salvador, September 25, 1981”. Fondazione Craxi, (F.1 Sz.1 S.10 Ss.5 F.3 L.2 D1), Rome.

<sup>5</sup> Kaelble Hartmut (2017). “Comparative and Transnational History”. In *Ricerche di Storia Politica*, Special Issue; Haupt Heinz-Herard and Kocka Jürgen, “Comparison and Beyond: Traditions, Scope, and Perspectives of Comparative History”. In Haupt Heinz-Herard and Kocka Jürgen (Eds.) *Comparative and Transnational History. Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*, New York-Oxford: Berghahn Books; Saunier Pierre-Yves (2013). *Transnational History*, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

## The “Internationalization” of the SI: Latin America

As is well known, the overcoming of the SI Eurocentric character (typical since its re-birth in 1951) occurred once the German Willy Brandt was appointed President of the SI in 1976. One can say in fact that at the time the power of the SI was reexamined. The SI became a tool to improve international relations as well as a mechanism to overcome the political stalemate that the European social democracy was suffering<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, the International was considered as a mechanism by which the European social democracy could be strengthened. Why? The main reason relied on the fact that the SI implied an active and large international network. In this context, cooperation between European parties and external ones began to thrive. The European social democracy looked for parties with similar purposes because finding organizations with their same traits could not be possible abroad.<sup>7</sup> Common features, in fact, were identified in some of the Third World’s parties. As a result, the SI began to play a more active role in that direction.

Moreover, one of the strong points of the SI was that it was a meeting point between different forces that encouraged the exchange of ideas and the establishment of contacts between parties and people from all over the world. This network contributed to raising awareness about problematic issues (inequality, violation of human rights, etc.) around the world and to strengthen ties of friendship (e.g. between Craxi and González) and personal contacts between prominent leaders.

Within this context, Craxi and González strived to establish international relations in order to increase their national power and legitimation. As a matter of fact, the relations acquired during the 1970s allowed them to obtain greater international recognition, prestige, and knowledge, which was translated into media impact and, hence, more local votes. Moreover, this *modus operandi* impacted the external projects and goals of the SI member parties. The latter started to use the same rhetoric employed by the SI in terms of foreign policy. In other words, the SI goals were included in the SI members’ foreign projects as the political pamphlets or leaders’ speeches have revealed<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that as the SI was a transnational network of parties and organizations, the dialogue was two-sided.

That said, during the 1970s a turning point was experienced. Both Europe and Latin America looked to reach greater autonomy despite the bipolar structure devised by the Cold War. Thus, the European social democrats, without denying the influence of the United States, became more proactive and had an autonomous orientation in the region. The SI started a political offensive (through missions, conferences, study groups etc.) in Latin America to create a political field of action/direct intervention and networks of specific relations at an equal distance from the vicissitudes of the Cold War and from the US policies in the region.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, the U.S. support

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<sup>6</sup> Pedrosa Fernando (2012). “La redefinición de la agenda socialdemócrata entre la crisis del petróleo y el fin del socialismo real (1973-1992)”, *Colección*, N. 22, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Kreisky to Brandt and Palme (15/04/1975) and Letter from Brandt to Palme and Kreisky (25/05/1975) In Brandt Willy, Kreisky Bruno and Palme Olof (1977). *La Alternativa socialdemócrata*. Spain: Editorial Blume, pp. 161-162 and 181-184.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, see: the PSOE Resolutions 1976, 1979, 1981, 1984. PSOE electoral programs 1979,1982,1986; XLI PSI Party Congress in Turin (March 30, 1978). XLII PSI Party Congress in Palermo (April 23 and 27, 1981) -just to name a few.

<sup>9</sup> Löwy Michael (1999). “La social-démocratie en Amérique Latine”, *Matériaux pour l’histoire de notre temps*, n° 54. Regards sur l’Amérique latine 1945-1990, p. 28.

for the authoritarian regimes in Latin America represented the main point of disagreement between the European social democracy and the “colossus of the North”.

Although the SI explicitly refrained from discussing the foreign policies of Latin American countries, one of its most important objectives was to keep them out of the East-West confrontation as Pentti Väänänen (Secretary General of the SI 1983-1989) has pointed out for the case of Nicaragua. Thus, it could be said that to some extent the SI “tried” to present itself as a “third way” vis-à-vis the bipolar order. However, the SI did not attempt to spread anti-Americanism and neither wanted “new Cubas”. They simply believed that the Social Democracy would offer the right alternative to communism and to the radical left.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Europe feared an escalation of the U.S.-USSR confrontation in Central America. This situation could exacerbate the tensions in Europe (Euro-missiles). For this reason, besides the SI’s postulates of solidarity, security was at the core of the discussion. Furthermore, quoting Fiamma Lussana, during the 1970s and 1980s, Latin America became an interesting “observatory” that captured the attention of the European parties because apart from underdevelopment, poverty, and inequality, the socialist hope persisted over time in the region. This constituted an area where socialist principles could be applied but, above all, this was the place where the possibility of a “socialist path” continued to be feasible.<sup>11</sup> Hence, during the 1970s the interest of the SI in Latin America significantly increased. Why? After a period of low activism (1950s and 1960), the European social democracy started to be interested in the continent (in particular after the overthrow of the Chilean Salvador Allende) by becoming a sort of benchmark for them.

### **The SI in the external policy of Craxi and González towards Latin America**

One can say that one of the strong points of the SI was that it was a meeting point between different forces that encouraged the exchange of ideas and the establishment of contacts between parties and people from all over the world. This network contributed to raising awareness about problematic issues (inequality, violation of human rights, etc.) around the world and to strengthen ties of friendship and personal contacts between prominent leaders. As said, both González and Craxi took advantage of this network to build up their international linkage, to identify international benchmarks (e.g. Willy Brandt and Olof Palme), and to increase international prestige that in turn contributed to enhancing their weight and legitimacy at national levels.

In Spain, for instance, the SI helped the Spanish Socialist party in building international contacts prior to coming to power<sup>12</sup>. In this way, the PSOE and notably González became an important benchmark on the other side of the Atlantic. Quoting Wolf Grabendorff, the interest of the SI and the PSOE in Latin America were complementary since on one hand the PSOE requested the support of the SI to renew its contacts with Latin America and on the other, the Spanish socialist party, being directly involved in the successful democratic transition of the Iberian country,

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<sup>10</sup> Väänänen Pentti (2014). *The Rose and The Fist*, Helsinki: SYS Print, p. 92.

<sup>11</sup> Lussana Fiamma (2004). “Il confronto con le socialdemocrazie e la ricerca di un nuovo socialismo nell’ultimo Berlinguer”. *Studi Storici*, 45. N. 2, p. 485.

<sup>12</sup> At this respect, the CIA stated: “We believe that the Spanish and Portuguese parties have grown in stature recently because of the role their leaders have played in developing contacts for the SI outside Europe”. CIA. *The Socialist International: Its Organizations and Activities*. March 1983 (CIA-RDP84S00555R000100160001-5), 3.

became a sort of masterpiece for the SI project, namely the Latin American democratization.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, it should also be noted that given the cultural affinities with Latin America, Spain would become an effective and real interlocutor in the eyes of the SI. Within this context, the SI prepared several missions headed by González and some of the PSOE members. Others were personal journeys that González made in the region.

Thus, Felipe González was often in charge of Latin American issues because of his proximity, interest, and knowledge about this region. Not only did he represent the SI several times in meetings and matters related to Latin America, but he was also called to prepare reports in order to keep the SI informed and was often consulted on all aspects that involved Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>14</sup> Hence, it can be said that González acted as an interlocutor between the SI and Latin America, visited the region several times allowing him to enhance his knowledge in this area, established links with these territories, and gained prestige and international recognition.

Hence, it should be remembered that Felipe González, as Vice President of the SI, was involved in Latin American affairs and played a fundamental role in the Spanish transition itself. His objective was to promote democracy inside and outside Spain, a strategy that was known as “new Spanish diplomacy”.<sup>15</sup> With the aim of promoting democracy in Latin America, the Spanish Socialist government launched cooperation policies towards the region and promoted social democratic values such as democracy and the protection of human and civil rights.<sup>16</sup> Thus, this shows once again that the SI became a meeting point and a benchmark for both the PSOE and Latin American related parties. As a matter of fact, under the PSOE administration, the Latin American policy of Spain achieved a continuity and intensity as never before. In this sense, the SI played an important role in the construction of the PSOE external position as well as in the definition of some of its international objectives (foreign policy) that the Spanish action in Latin America revealed.<sup>17</sup>

In Italy the SI also played a key role. As a matter of fact, during Craxi’s Secretariat, the SI regained a prominent role inside the PSI policy and the SI endorsement also acquired relevant significance for national affairs. According to Francesco Gozzini, Craxi “rediscovered” the relevancy of the international dimension for the PSI after a period in which it had been subordinated to national issues. Craxi understood how the PSI participation in the international arena would be fruitful for improving its own image and its own role in national matters as well as for playing a more active role in the international stage, which would mean greater international

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<sup>13</sup> Grabendorff Wolf (2003). “International Support for Democracy in Contemporary Latin America: The Role of the Party Internationals”. In Whitehead Laurence (Ed.) *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas*, Oxford Scholarship Online, p. 213.

<sup>14</sup> For instance, González represented the SI at the meeting in Granada (23-24 July 1981). Telex from Bernt Carlsson to the PSOE (3 June 1981). From the SI Archives, International Institute from Social History, Amsterdam, box 1172. Likewise, Carlsson asked the PSOE to represent the SI at “the Seminar on the Uruguayan Case in the Context of other Dictatorships in Latin America (Barcelona, 5-7 June 1980). Telex from Bernt Carlsson to Felipe González (5 June 1980). From the SI Archives, International Institute from Social History, Amsterdam, box 1171.

<sup>15</sup> Grugel Jean (1995). “España y Latinoamérica”. In Gillespie R., Rodrigo F., Story J. (Eds.) *Las relaciones exteriores de la España democrática*, Madrid: Alianza Universidad, pp. 108-208.

<sup>16</sup> Arenal Celestino (1994). *La política exterior de España hacia Iberoamérica*, Madrid: Editorial Complutense, p. 102.

<sup>17</sup> Blasquez Vilaplana Belén (2006). *La proyección internacional de un líder político: Felipe González y Nicaragua, 1978-1986*, Sevilla: Centro de Estudios Andaluces, pp. 82-83.

recognition and legitimacy<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, Craxi really believed that the Italian problems could not be solved within the national borders and he considered foreign matters extremely linked to domestic issues. Hence, the SI became a point of reference for the socialist party and for addressing some of Italy's affairs<sup>19</sup>.

Craxi's interest in foreign matters came to light at the XLI PSI Party Congress (Turin, March 29-April 3, 1978) since in his speech (*La pace è il problema dei problemi – Peace is the problem of problems*) he put special emphasis on the international dimension. For instance, he stressed the benefits of belonging to the SI for a new worldwide solidarity as well as for increasing global understanding and greater cooperation. Furthermore, he claimed that the PSI's external action should work on two levels: inside both the SI and Western European framework, and also developing bilateral actions outside the SI frame.

As a matter of fact, he wanted to launch a peace offensive at the global level, to spread worldwide solidarity, to fight against imperialism in name of democracy and on behalf of human rights, to work for development cooperation and equality all over the world, and to plan a joint action in order to solve common matters<sup>20</sup>. Thus, he was in line with the "new" postulates of the SI. These principles became part of his rhetoric; in fact, they would be mentioned in his next speeches<sup>21</sup>. As a result, the Secretary of the Italian Socialist Party encouraged internationalism both inside the PSI and in international/multilateral platforms.

Hence, the external dimension became a paramount issue of Craxi's policy. In addition to lending legitimacy to the PSI, the contacts with the European socialism contributed to devising their own policy away from the DC (Christian Democratic Party) and PCI (Italian Communist Party). Thus, he aimed at launching a credible policy in line with Western social democracy.

That said, issues such as the protection of human rights, ensuring freedom, international solidarity, development cooperation, and democracy were some of the principles that the PSI tried to promote in Latin America, often in close collaboration with the SI. The Third World entered into the PSI rhetoric<sup>22</sup>.

## Final Remarks

Besides the friendly ties that González and Craxi established among them, they shared similar experiences, e.g. their appointment as party secretaries, the ideological shifts inside their

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<sup>18</sup> See Gozzini Francesco (1979). "Prefazione". In Craxi Bettino and Accardi Claudio (ed.). *L'internazionale Socilista*, Milano: Rizzoli Editori, p., 12.

<sup>19</sup> Pini Massimo (2006). *Craxi. Una vita, un'era politica*. Milan: Oscar Mondadori, p.106.

<sup>20</sup> Speech of Bettino Craxi ("Per un nuovo internazionalismo") at the XIII SI Congress, Geneva, November 26-28, 1976. In Craxi, *L'Internazionale*, 37-39. The original copies (in typescript and in handwriting) and the French version are available in Craxi's archive: Fondazione Craxi (F.1 Sz.1 S.10 Ss.1 D.1), Rome.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, see Craxi's speech at the SI Congress held in Vancouver in 1978 or the speech held during the Congress of the European Socialist Group (1979). In Craxi, *L'Internazionale*, 57-73 and 87-96.

<sup>22</sup> The USA also noted Craxi's interest on the Third World. Indeed, in a CIA's record we can read: "Although we would not expect major shifts in the main lines of Italian foreign policy, Rome would probably be a more prickly ally under Craxi, particularly on matters involving the Middle East, North Africa, Latin America, and the Third World". CIA, *Italy's Socialists: The Major Role of a Minor Party*. March 1983 (CIA-RDP84S00555R0001001500005-2), iv.



own parties, the challenge to face strong communist parties, the personalization of their leadership, the coming to power almost at the same time, and the importance that both leaders gave to the international dimension. Moreover, they were able to grasp in time the transformation that social democracy and the crisis of the welfare state had experienced in the 1970s (they possibly also learned by the “errors” or delays made by the Socialists from Northern Europe) and were able to adapt to it by even breaking with the traditional path of their own parties. Furthermore, their own national situation and position led both leaders to look for a change and therefore a rupture with the past. It is here that the international dimension assumed a relevant weight for them by providing them support, legitimacy, as well as a reference point. Thus, this renewal process led them to come to power in the 1980s.

Among the issues that Craxi and González shared, it is possible to point out their interest in Latin American matters. Of course, these interests were expressed in different manners and they had different impacts in their own international policies. At this point, it is also important to bear in mind that, among other things, the PSOE became a powerful and majority party inside Spain while the PSI was always the “third party” in Italy (even when Craxi came to power). This obviously implied that the efforts made by the PSI outside Italy have been mainly developed at party level, and therefore that they had a limited impact in terms of public policies. At the government level, most of the Italian initiatives were carried out within the Community’s framework. Indeed, since the 1960s Italy tried to expand and improve the Euro-Latin American relations by proposing itself as a sort of “liaison” between both continents. Nevertheless, with the Spanish accession to the EC, Madrid somehow “assumed this task” while Italy mainly acquired a supportive attitude towards the initiatives developed by Spain on the other side of the Atlantic.

Having said that, however, it is also important to bear in mind that joining the EC implied that Madrid had to respect the Community’s directives. Thus, the maneuverability of Spain inside the Community (which was not a political institution) ended up being extremely limited, and therefore González’s endeavors could go no further. Notwithstanding, it is undeniable that important advances were carried out and they led to a greater and real rapprochement between the two regions.

In regard to the PSI, it is undeniable that the SI had contributed to the party’s internationalization by providing the spaces for enhancing its international contacts. Craxi, in fact, understood that in order to succeed, the PSI would have to change its course. As a matter of fact, the political state of things in Italy (the DC and the PCI were the strongest parties) and its immobility would not allow the PSI to thrive if it did not reshape itself. Hence, Craxi strived for the party’s renewal and within this context the international dimension acquired great relevancy. As said, Craxi looked for international support and legitimation in order to increase his “weight” at the national level and to renew the party. Thus, he attached importance to the SI’s action and activities by sharing many of the SI principles (e.g. defense of human rights, democracy, development, and the North-South order). Indeed, most of them were the same principles advocated by the PSI during the time of Craxi’s secretariat.