

“One Hundred Years of Italian Democratic Socialism, 1892-1992”

While writing my book, *Renewing Italian Socialism: Nenni to Craxi*, published by Oxford University Press in 1988 (Italian translation: *Da Nenni a Craxi: il socialismo italiano visto dagli USA*, SugarCo, 1991) I had occasion to interview prominent Socialist leaders, including President Sandro Pertini, Giuliano Amato, Valdo Spini, and others. As I finished my work I got the idea to organize an international symposium on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), founded in Genoa in 1892. My hope was to bring together the most important Italian and American scholars who had worked on Italian socialism, and, where possible, protagonists who were or had been important in the movement. I thought that a good venue for the conference would be the John F. Kennedy Library, where I had done extensive research in the archives for a chapter in my book on the American role in the coming of the center-left in Italy, “Neo-Socialists and New Frontiersmen.” The most important personage in this story from the American side was Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., whom I had gotten to know well while writing the chapter. In addition to Schlesinger, other protagonists who had served in the State Department and at the American Embassy in Rome during the period were interested in participating.

I approached the JFK Library and it readily agreed to become a partner in the endeavor by hosting the symposium. At the same time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the person of Ambassador Guido Martini, University of Massachusetts Boston Chancellor at the time, Sherry Penney, and Ambassador Roberto Falaschi, then Consul General of Italy for New England, strongly supported the project with economic and administrative help

The International Symposium opened on March 18, 1993 and ran for three days until March 20, during a typically frigid Boston spring.

The meeting took place during a very troubled period in Italian history: “Tangentopoli.” The PSI became the main target of the various investigations into corruption during the proceedings. Daily—if not hourly—changes took place in the country and in the party, preventing several protagonists who had planned to attend from arriving. Every day brought new and startling developments that shook the meeting and stimulated discussion behind the scenes. In the end the Socialist Party did not survive, and, ironically, the only large-scale conference that reflected on the hundred-year history of perhaps the most crucial movement in the history of contemporary Italy took place in Boston, Massachusetts.

I am happy to say, however, that the symposium managed to be objective in considering the entire parabola of the movement, in an atmosphere of calm reflection, far away from the scene of battle in Italy during an age that had not yet gone digital. In the absence of email, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media, news traveled much slower than it does today—although it seemed rapid at the time—allowing rumors to ripen with more style.

In this way, the conference unfolded in historical circumstances and became a piece of history itself. The then President of the Boston City Council, Thomas Menino, kicked off his campaign to become Mayor of the city in a prestigious setting; he went on to serve for a record five terms. I innocently suggested that he ask the advice of the politicians present at the symposium for his run, but perhaps they should have asked him for advice. Italian and American scholars and protagonists confronted each other having as their background the unfolding of a central crisis in the history of the Italian Republic. Many of the Italian participants have ceased to be protagonists, and some participants have left us, but their images and their reflections remain with us in the fourteen videotapes that have now been digitized.

In 1996, I published the acts of the conference (*Italian Socialism Between Politics and History*, University of Massachusetts Press), but these recordings will allow viewers to understand the history of the subject in much more depth, and they will be seen online worldwide. Young scholars can see protagonists deliver their findings, ponder questions from the floor, and respond to them. They can watch important statements being made spontaneously from the floor in response to the opinions of Italian and American scholars. They can learn about ideas and behind-the-scenes developments. In short, the images allow viewers to attend the symposium, to watch the dialogue as it developed, learn, and, in a sense, participate in it.

I would like to thank the Historical Archives of the Chamber of Deputies for accepting and digitizing the videotapes that I have donated, and especially the persons who invited me to deliver my “Lezione Magistrale” and who made the digitization possible: Dr. Paolo Massa, Director of the *Archivio Storico*; Dr. Mario Di Napoli, *ceremoniere* of the Chamber of Deputies; and Professor Giuliana Limiti, who has pioneered the development of Archival Studies in Italy.

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