Unclassified E.O. 12356 Section 3.3/NND No. 785016

ACC 10000|125|402 132/PAT LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

OCT. 1944 - DEC. 1944

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

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Closed Oct. 20, 1945

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19 DEC Recd 132

HEADQUARTERS ALLIED COMMISSION
APO 394
LOCAL GOVERNMENT SUB COMMISSION

SECRET

AC/45/LG

Tel: 478107

SUBJECT: Local Government Elections.

18 December 1944

TO : Addressees as below.

1. Pursuant to the direction of the acting VP, herewith copy No. 9 of "Memorandum as to the desirability and possibility of holding local government elections in Italy at present", for your information.

2. Please acknowledge receipt on the attached form.

R.R. Temple Capt.

for E. C. B. SNIDER
Colonel
Director
Local Government Sub Commission

EBS/pcc
Copy to: Civil Affairs (att: of Col. White) (3)
Legal
Public Safety
Public Health
Mons. & F.A.
Education
Patriots
Displaced Persons

SECRET

HEADQUARTERS ALLIED COMMISSION
APO 394
LOCAL GOVERNMENT SUB COMMISSION

COPY NO. 9

M E M O R A N D U M

AS TO THE DESIRABILITY AND POSSIBILITY OF HOLDING LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS IN ITALY AT PRESENT

(I) PRELIMINARY

1. It has always been understood to be a part of the functions of the Allied Commission not only to secure the abolition of the Fascist local government structure, but to substitute for it a system distinctively democratic. Considerable experience along these lines was gained from the operations of AMGOT in Sicily. On the basis of what was done there, orders were issued last January for the establishment by Allied Military Government of local authorities in occupied provinces and communes. With the transfer of Southern Italy to the control of the Italian Government, that Government continued the AMG system by a Decree of April 1944.

2. The Orders and Decree provided for the re-establishment in part of the local government system contemplated by the pre-Fascist law of 1915. In the absence of any possibility of elections at that time, the elective communal and provincial councils were not re-established. The standing executive committees and the executive and presiding heads of the local authorities were re-introduced on the basis of appointment by the Prefect.

3. It was made clear in both Orders and Decree that this legislation was purely temporary.

4. The temporary local government structure thus contemplated has been established almost in its entirety throughout Italy behind the battle line.

5. The next development was the promulgation by the Italian Government of a Decree of 28 September 1944 for the compilation of electoral lists, which Decree revived the law of 1919 on the subject.

(II) POLICY IMPLICATIONS IN THE ABOVE

6. It is obvious that the Decree of April has contemplated a further step in the democratization of Italian local government; i.e. the establishment of elective local authorities and the holding of elections for them. The 1915 system was partially adopted as being the readiest democratic system to hand; but its adoption did not imply that the elective local authorities provided by it were the particular ones ultimately contemplated.

7. In fact, the Italian Government have this Autumn established a commission of experts to study and make recommendations on the whole administrative system of the Italian State, including local government.

8. If, therefore, local government elections are to be contemplated in the near future, it is necessary first to decide what local government

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7. In fact, the Italian Government have this autumn established a commission of experts to study and make recommendations on the whole administrative system of the Italian State, including local government.

8. If, therefore, local government elections are to be contemplated in the near future, it is necessary first to decide what local government bodies are to be elected. The final and permanent form of Italian local government must obviously rest on the will of the Italian people freely expressed. Presumably, this can only be expressed through some form of national legislature or constituent assembly.

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9. On the other hand, (subject to advice on their status) it can be argued that the present Government could produce a pattern of elective local authorities which would be acceptable as a temporary measure, by continuing the process implicit in the Decree of April, i.e. by re-constituting and re-establishing the Communal and Provincial Councils for which provision is

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made in the law of 1915. Such a course may give an air of permanence to a system which is not intended as to be, and inevitably to some extent prejudge or affect the subsequent action of the Italian people through their legislature (whatever form the latter may eventually take). Neither is it to be assumed that a system enacted 29 years ago is necessarily going to meet even the temporary needs of the country in the vastly changed circumstances of today. For instance, a considerable body of informed Italian opinion is interested in the development of a system of regional autonomy, the repercussions of which upon the existing system of provinces and the 1915 system of Provincial Councils cannot be foreseen.

10. It is also not to be overlooked that the Italians may wish to apply the elective system to the selection of public individual functionaries, and/or to the corporate consilliar bodies so familiar in the United States and the British Empire. They may regard the American practice of electing the Mayor directly as a good model and even desire to reform the institution of the Prefect on some such lines, if not abolish it.

11. The foregoing indicates that 'local' government cannot be entirely divorced from the National "structure" and suggests the extent of the high political principles involved. The need for serious and careful study of the problem by the Italians and the vital necessity of avoiding hastily improvised schemes is obvious. It is to be borne in mind, however, that with the adoption of the Decree of April 1944, it was understood that the Italian people would be entirely free at some future date to carry out such radical reforms in their local government system as they thought fit.

(III) PRACTICAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROPOSAL

12. If the foregoing observations are held not to influence the present problem or that such problem is capable of solution, it would be necessary to give consideration to the following points:

(1) Electoral lists or registers must first be compiled. As stated above, a Decree for this purpose has been issued. It appears however, that the compilation of the lists will take many months, in some provinces considerably longer than in others.

(2) The scattered state of the population, for example, prisoners of war, refugees, those bombed or shelled out of their homes, members of the Italian armed forces. (The Decree of September makes provision for the registration of such people but there is no provision for absentee voting).

(3) Transport and communications. If communal elections are to be held, these difficulties will be great, especially if elections are held in the winter.

(4) Lack of material, e.g. paper, printing services, ballot boxes or urns, etc.

(5) The lack of qualified staff. There have been no true elections in Italy since 1926 at the latest. Trained State and local civil servants are in extremely short supply.

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(IV) POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROPOSAL

13. Assuming that the practical difficulties enumerated above could likewise be overcome or at least overlooked, consideration should be given to what the possible results of the holding of local government elections in Italy now would be.

14. In the first place, it is uncertain whether these elections would produce a real expression of the popular will. The practical difficulties above-mentioned in themselves would militate against this. A more serious

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factor however, is the state of politics in the country generally:

(1) The victory at the election would go to the best organised party or body and not necessarily to the most representative one.

(2) The appearance of popular support thus created in favour of particular parties or organisations will influence in advance the eventual settlement of the new Italian constitution. Whether this is done by constituent assembly or by referendum, all taking part in the process cannot fail to be affected by the results of the preceding local elections.

(3) Parties may therefore feel it of vital importance to win the clearest possible victory at the local elections so that such elections might precipitate just those disorders that they are intended to avoid.

(4) There is a possibility that local government elections will be accompanied by a measure of disorder which may possibly even continue afterwards. Many factors suggest this including the following:

(a) Political passions are running high.

(b) Hunger and lack of necessities of life strengthen the tendency.

(c) Little confidence is felt in the ability of the Italian functionaries who will be in charge of the elections either to conduct them independently or properly.

(d) Subject to the opinion of the Public Safety Sub-Commission who are of course better able to judge, the words and numbers of the forces of public order may not prove adequate to control the situation.

15. It is, of course, one of the primary functions of the Allied Commission to maintain order in the rear of the forces and -- again subject to the views of the Public Safety Sub Commission -- it does not appear that either the Italian Government or the Allied Commission could guarantee that order if local government elections were held.

16. The disorders consequent on an election might be looked upon with a lenient eye as having at least a constructive object. Rioters would at least be rioting in order to obtain the local government they desire and not in order to force the authorities to provide food or boots from some unspecified but presumably existent source. There appears to be a military and a political element on this. From the military standpoint all disorder in a country which is a theatre of operations and a source and base of supply is objectionable, no matter what its purpose. Politically, all attempts to apply force to the settlement of questions of government are the negation of democracy, no matter how laudable the object. The example of Greece adds point to this observation.

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15. It is, of course, one of the primary functions of the Allied Commission to maintain order in the rear of the armies: and -- again subject to the views of the Public Safety Sub Commission -- it does not appear that either the Italian Government or the Allied Commission could guarantee that order if local government elections were held.

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(7) POLITICAL ASPECT OF THE PROPOSAL

17. The holding of local government elections should raise the prestige of Italy by making it the first European country to get back to the basis of modern democracy. Even if the elections cannot be held till next summer (see para. 12 (1) above) an announcement now that they were to be held would have an immediate effect. (As to being the first in the field, [illegible] indication has been observed in the press that this branch are considering local elections in February.)

18. The elections would provide an outlet for the political feeling of the average Italian and may be a useful safety valve and a preventative of disorder.

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19. They would give some sort of basis to Italian political parties, in that it would not then be said with absolute truth that they were "not hampered by having been elected by anyone". It is not suggested that the elections would prove anything as to the extent to which a political party represents Italian opinion. On the contrary there is sound reason to believe that the elections would not express the popular will--see para. 14 above. But the results would at least provide a measure of sorts which could be treated as a guide of the relative strength of parties. At present there is none.

20. The announcement that local elections were to be conceded should raise the prestige of the Allies as a corollary proof of the character of their intentions towards Italy. The announcement would stand out in relief against the present situation in Greece and illustrate what could be done there - and in other countries - were it not for the threat of disorder.

(VI) PARTIAL ELECTIONS

21. The foregoing observations are based on the assumption that the elections contemplated would be held (a) throughout liberated Italy and (b) simultaneously in all communes, provinces or such other local government areas as may be determined. It might be thought desirable however to limit elections either to a part only of the country or to a certain class of local authority.

22. As to territorial limitation, it is fairly obvious that elections could not be held in the areas under the control of AFHQ and 8th Army. Not only would the practical difficulties enumerated in section III be at their highest but the C-in-C could be expected to take strong objection to the diversion of the energies of AMG officers, Italian functionaries and the population generally away from tasks of military importance.

23. These objections have not quite the same force in Military Government Territory under Regional Control though they are still undoubtedly present. On the other hand, in this territory, where Allied officers are governing directly, is to be found the best chance of the elections being really free and independent. In all Military Government Territory however--whether under Regional or Army control--it has to be considered whether elected local authorities would prove satisfactory instruments. If the Prefectural Juntas are to be substituted by some elective institutions, there might be something in this; but if only communal and provincial councils or similar bodies are envisaged, there is little reason to believe that their elective basis would override any serious tendency to go contrary to Allied wishes. Moreover, if the 1915 law is adhered to, the executive heads (Sindaci in communes and Presidenti in provinces) and the standing executive committees (Giunte Comunali and Deputazioni Provinciali) would continue; and the law gives to these institutions such a wide measure of authority independently of their councils as would be sufficient for Allied purposes.

24. As to Italian Government territory, a suggestion has been made that in the first place elections should be limited to certain selected areas, the advantages being that such an experiment would show how elections would work in the rest of Italy and that police reinforcements could be brought into the experimental area sufficient to cope with any disorder. One difficulty is to

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22. As to territorial limitation, it is fairly obvious that elections could not be held in the areas under the control of A.F. 5th and 8th Armies. Not only would the practical difficulties enumerated in section III be at their highest but the C-in-C could be expected to take strong objection to the diversion of the energies of A.C. officers, Italian functionaries and the population generally away from tasks of military importance.

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24. As to Italian Government territory, a suggestion has been made that in the first place elections should be limited to certain selected areas, the advantages being that such an experiment would show how elections would work in the rest of Italy and that police reinforcements could be brought into the experimental area sufficient to cope with any disorder. One difficulty is to find a suitable area. Sicily or Sardinia are open to the objection that the elections would turn upon the issues of separation or autonomy. Calabria and Lucania are too backward; Apulia never has ordinary government and its fascist organisation is still believed to exist. Lazio and the Abruzzi are too much influenced from the capital to be fair specimens. The four Campanian provinces would seem to offer the best field.

25. The overriding objection however is that none of the political advantages enumerated in section V could result from such a minor and apparently purging concession. On the contrary, so open a declaration of mistrust in the capacity of the Italians to work democratic machinery might

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do untold harm all round.

26. As to limiting the elections to a certain class of local authority, it has been suggested that they might be held in (a) cities of 50,000 population or more or (b) towns of 20,000 population or over and those of less population that are provincial capitals. Statistics are given in the Appendix.

27. It is true that this suggestion would also enable a concentration of the forces of public order and that it is in the larger towns that the practical difficulties enumerated in section III are likely to be most easily overcome. On the other hand, the probable objectionable consequences described in section IV are most likely to result in just such centres of population. Moreover, the political dangers alluded to above in para. 25 are as real in the case of a limitation to a class of authority as they are in the case of limitation to a given area.

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27. It is true that this suggestion would also entail a concentration of the forces of Quelin order and that to the larger cause this additional difficulty encountered in social ITI are likely to be used against ourselves. On the other hand, the probable objectionable consequences associated in acquiring IV have made likely to result in just such outbreak of opposition. However, the political dangers attended to above in part. 25 are in the case of a distribution to a class of military is they are in the case of distribution to a given area.

A P P E N D I X

Local Government areas in liberated Italy as at 10/10/44.

Type of local authority (1)	Military Government Territory under Army Control (2)	Regional Control (3)	Italian Government Territory (4)	Total (5)
Total Provinces	4	11	36	51
Total Communes	155	474	2,595	3,224
Communes of 50,000 pop. and over	7	6	16	29
Communes of 20,000 pop. and over and Provincial capitals if of less population	13	29	111	153

NOTE (1) For the purposes of this table it has been assumed that

(a) the whole of the following provinces is in our hands:-

LUCCA
PISTOIA

(b) no part of the following provinces are in our hands:-

BOLOGNA
RAVENNA

NOTE (2) The city of ROME is included among the appropriate figures in col. (4)

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