

## **1982 Comiso**

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### **Summary:**

Pamphlet from European Nuclear Disarmament promoting a resistance campaign against the placement of 464 cruise missiles in the town of Comiso, on the southern coast of Sicily. Aimed at creating an effective protest, author Ben Thompson details the political and social background of the region, the anti-missile campaign that already exists, local opposition, and directions on how to get to Comiso to take part in any future protests. See also Thompson's unpublished description of the protest, "Diary of a Hunger Strike."

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Original Scan

# WORLD SPECIAL REPORT

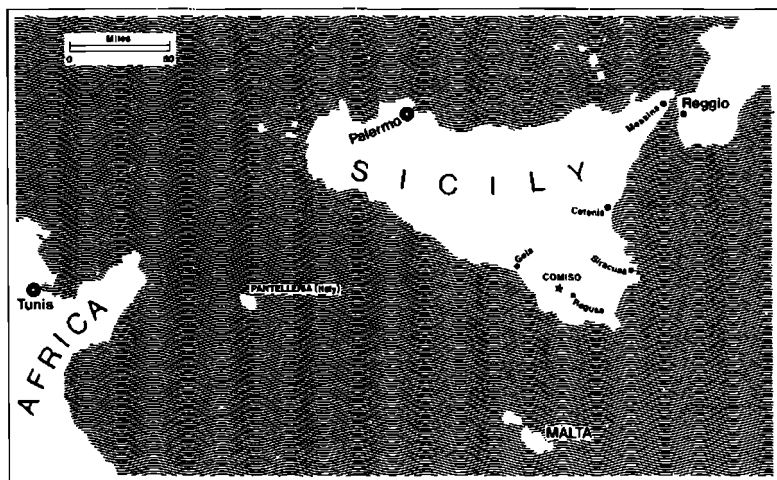


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## COMISO

Ben Thompson

i

### *THE PLACE*

Comiso is a medium sized town, of 27,000 inhabitants, situated near the Southern coast of Sicily facing towards Africa. In August 1981 it was announced that Italy's share of the 464 cruise missiles earmarked for Europe were to be placed here, at the nearby derelict airport of Magliocco.

Sicily's exposed position deep in the mediterranean basin has attracted the interest of military men since time immemorial. Although nowadays we naturally think of Sicily as a part of Italy, she has been occupied in her history by Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Normans and Spaniards, finally coming under the rule of Naples for about a century and a half before being liberated by Garibaldi in 1860 during the campaign which led to the unification of Italy. Archimedes was buried there at Syracuse; and at Gela, about thirty kilometres up the coast from Comiso is the tomb of the poet Aeschylus who is reputed to have died when a short-sighted eagle mistook his head for a rock and dropped a tortoise on it. Sicily has its own language, quite distinct from Italian and incomprehensible to Italians, which comprises bits of French, Arabic, Spanish and Italian. The local dialects vary so much, however, that Sicilians from different regions generally speak Italian to each other

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During the war years the fascist regime used special police powers to suppress the mafia, but after the occupation the Allies allowed it to flourish again, encouraging prominent mafiosi to take positions of power in local government as a baulk against the communist threat. These elements, fearful

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that Rome might compromise their power, raised a separatist army and attempted to force a breach with Italy. Although the attempt was unsuccessful, the predominance of the mafia was re-established, to become a permanent bane in the life of post-war Sicily. The mafia now carry out over 100 murders a year on the island, most of them arising out of internal feuds over the lucrative heroin trade. The killings go mainly unpunished, largely because of the rule of 'omertà' (underworld law of silence) which forbids recourse to the rules of authority. Sicilian society in general is rigidly structured and patriarchal, with great emphasis being placed on home life and the family. Something of the traditional attitude towards women in Sicily can be gathered from the fact that until after 1960, when the custom was first challenged in a court of law, it was regarded as quite honourable for a young man to forcibly abduct the girl of his choice and rape her, after which it was assumed that her only choice would be to marry him.

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*Comiso today*

The present day town of Comiso is relatively prosperous by Sicilian standards. Although the terrain is semi-tropical with clumps of huge 'figodindia' cacti dotted around an almost treeless landscape, the region is highly fertile. Vineyards abound, and large areas of land are cultivated under polythene cloches, producing early season fruits for export all over Europe. Although there is no heavy industry, a major source of employment is provided by the marble and granite sawmills, of which there are fifty-five. The products of these mills, as well as the early fruits are transported on to the continent by over 1,000 articulated lorries, mainly owned by their drivers. Unemployment is minimal, and educational facilities good. Politically, the town has a strong Communist Party vote (43%). Visitors coming into Comiso for the huge demonstration on April 4th saw 'No ai missili' written on the hillside behind the town in enormous sheets of agricultural polythene.

*THE BASE*

Mussolini used many sites in Sicily which are now being re-developed as part of NATO's southern flank. He had an ambitious scheme for using the island of Pantelleria to control the whole Mediterranean; his propaganda efforts on behalf of this island garrison were so successful that on June 11th 1943 the entire British 1st Infantry Division were sent on landing craft to invade the island, which promptly surrendered claiming to have run out of drinking water. A more effective outpost is now being prepared on Pantelleria in the form of one of the most powerful and advanced radar stations in the world, which will operate in support of the US Sixth Fleet in anti-submarine warfare operations. The airport at Comiso was also used by Mussolini, and the citizens of Comiso experienced aerial bombardment as a result. Magliocco airport was one of the first objectives of the US Seventh Army in the July 10th invasions, and the walls of the surviving airport buildings are said to bear still-visible pock marks from the American machine guns.

Sicily took on an especial strategic significance for the south flank of NATO with the expiry of Britain's military agreements with Malta in March 1979. A serious flaw in NATO's southern defences was discovered in July 1980, when a Libyan spy plane crashed after having overflowed Sicily and Calabria without being detected. The new radar station on Pantelleria, as well as others, on the island of Lampedusa as well as mainland Sicily are designed to strengthen the 'NADGE' (Nato Air Defence Ground Environment) network and eliminate such 'holes' in NATO's radar coverage in the south.<sup>1</sup>

## ii

The strategic position of Comiso at the southernmost tip of Italy points to a special feature of this site which could have great significance. Cruise missiles based here would penetrate a good 800 miles further south than any other cruise planned for deployment, to take in the whole of Morocco, Algeria, Libya and Egypt. In comparison, missiles based in West Germany would hardly touch Libya and Egypt. This means

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that the missiles in Comiso could be used either in a conflict in Europe, or a conflict arising from one of the flashpoints in the Middle East, a generous choice of two 'limited nuclear wars'. After the Gulf of Sirte incident, when aircraft from the US Sixth Fleet clashed with Libyan fighters during a dispute over the extent of Libyan territorial waters, Italians were awakened to the possible threat of involvement in a war emanating from this quarter. A cartoon in 'La Repubblica' showed a terrified Prime Minister Spadolini hiding behind his desk:

'I'm in favour of cruise, it's an extra defence against the Sixth Fleet.'

While Quedaffi's threats against the United States were treated with some derision, the idea that he might have a go at Magliocco didn't seem so far fetched.

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#### *Magliocco*

The site itself hardly looks like a promising location for a 'superbase' in 1983. The front of the base sports a fine iron gate suspended between massive concrete pillars and guarded by 'carabinieri', but the perimeter is bounded on three sides only, the back being quite open and accessible. Until recently farmers used to grow wheat on the airfield rather than let it lie idle, and there are still vineyards running right up to the unfenced rear of the base. Some demolition works have been going on in the base since April '82, but there's little sign of activity; one or two lorries trundling back and forth in the heart of the massive wasteland looking like dinky toys. As far as the local opposition have been able to discover there are no contracts so far issued to builders for anything resembling a cruise missile hangar, although large barracks are planned, and, according to an article in the newspaper 'Paese Sera'<sup>2</sup> there are plans for a hospital centre with 3,470 beds, for the exclusive use of US personnel. (Comiso itself has 120 beds for 27,000 people!) If this is true it could mean that Comiso has been surreptitiously lined up to play some other role, not yet announced, perhaps as a

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barracks for the Rapid Deployment Force. To confuse matters still further, Francesco Rutelli of the Radical Party, who has published one of the first comprehensive peace research manuals to appear in Italy<sup>3</sup> told me that he believes that some or all of Italy's 112 cruise missiles may in fact be installed elsewhere. He suggested four sites:

Aviano (near Vicenza); Camp Darby (near Livorno); Gioia del Colle (Bari) and the appropriately named Perdas de Fogu ('Stones of Fire') in Sardinia.

i

*POLITICAL BACKGROUND*

Italian politics works on a multi-party system, with parliament being controlled by whoever can form a workable coalition government. The post-war years have seen a large number of such coalitions, which often last only for a matter of months. However, the dominant force has always been the Christian Democrats, Italy's largest political party. The Communist Party (PCI) is second in size, and the Socialists third. At the moment (September '82) the government is a five-party coalition of Christian Democrats, Socialists, Republicans, Liberals and Social Democrats under the leadership of a Republican Prime Minister, Giovanni Spadolini.

The major political party which opposes the base is the PCI. Originally formed as a breakaway from the Socialists in 1921, this party is now about twice the size of the Socialist Party, and exerts a powerful influence even when not directly involved in the governing coalition. Although it was originally conceived of as a revolutionary party, towards the end of the war the PCI decided that there was no chance of achieving communism through revolution in Italy, and the then leader, Togliatti, joined the government and signed the traditional oath of allegiance to the king. The present PCI leadership stress their belief that every country should be allowed to develop its own form of communism without interference from foreign powers. This has led them into bitter confrontation with the Soviet leadership, with whom relations could hardly be worse. The PCI is thus a 'Eurocommunist'



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party rather than a Soviet communist one, in distinction to some other Communist Parties in Europe, for instance those in Denmark and West Germany, which still adhere to Soviet policies and promote peace movements affiliated to the World Peace Council. It might be fair to say that the position of the PCI on the installation of cruise missiles is broadly similar to that of the Dutch and Belgian Labour Parties. After preliminary debates in parliament in October and December 1979, when the ruling coalition approved the new missiles, the PCI asked the government to take the initiative of requesting NATO countries to postpone the decision for at least six months, to give the USSR time to consider a suspension of SS20 installations. There is a parallel with our own Labour Party also in that although the PCI have been responsible for mobilising enormous numbers of supporters at the big demonstrations in Rome and Comiso and elsewhere, they are still regarded with caution by many non-aligned peace movement activists, both for their failure to take a clear-cut unilateralist stance, and as a major parliamentary party which might turn out in the final analysis to be more interested in gaining power in government than in stopping the missiles. In this respect it seems that the quality of opposition to be found amongst local political leaders of the PCI varies considerably from region to region. I mention this because the major tension in the Italian peace movement arises from conflict between established parties of the traditional left and politically non-aligned groups, mainly adhering to pacifist traditions. Italy has a strong movement of conscientious objectors, which struggled hard for many years to win the right to opt out of military service. (Since 1972 it has been legal for young Italians to choose an alternative form of civil service, rather than bear arms, for their obligatory year of national service.)

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The political parties opposing deployment of cruise in Italy are the PCI, PdUP (Partito di Unità Proletaria), some small independent left-wing groups and the Partito Radicale. The Radicals, however, refuse to join a PCI dominated alliance, maintaining that the Communists' sudden interest in

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disarmament is hypocritical. The Partito Radicale is consistent in that throughout the '70s they campaigned actively against nuclear arms and against compulsory military service. Recently they organised a plebiscite in Avetrana, near Apulia, where 80% of the population turned out, and a stunning 98.8% voted against the construction of a nuclear power plant.

There is as yet no single unifying body in the peace movement in Italy. Peace activities have been carried out by a proliferation of local groups, some dominated by the political parties, others of a more pacifist or religious orientation. At the time of the large demonstration in Rome in October 1981 a group called the 'October 24th Committee' was formed, which is perhaps the nearest thing to a representative committee presently existing, but the breadth of its membership seems to prevent it from taking up clear-cut positions, and it has therefore tended to become a co-ordinating body for the organisation of large demonstrations, rather than a unified secretariat capable of operating on all political levels against nuclear re-armament. The Trades Unions have been fairly sluggish in offering support, although the local T.U. federation in Sicily now opposes the base. The Catholic Church has also been backward in offering support, with the exception of certain individual bishops. However, the Christian Workers Association (ACLI), with a majority of Catholic members, has consistently opposed the base, both in the Sicilian region and nationally. After the 11th October demonstration at Comiso their National Secretary, Domenico Rosato, wrote an angry letter to the management of RAI TV complaining that while the RAI news report was dismissing the demonstration as a Communist conspiracy the ACLI banner was passing right across the screen! Also worthy of mention is ARCI (Italian Recreational and Cultural Association), a nationwide organisation with over 1,000,000 members drawn from the left which operates courageously in many parts of Italy on a whole variety of issues, and has frequently given invaluable help to the peace movements.

These patterns operate in Sicily, broadly speaking, as elsewhere; however, although members of the Sicilian Regional Assembly generally follow party discipline in formal motions of the Assembly, there are many Socialists

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### *THE CAMPAIGN*

From 1952 until 1978 Comiso voted for a left-wing council with a Communist mayor. The present council, which is currently supporting the base, is a coalition of Socialists, Christian Democrats, Republicans, Liberals and Social Democrats, with a Socialist mayor. When the first rumours went around that Comiso had been chosen as a missile base (in April '81) this council voted unanimously in favour of an 'ordine di giorno' rejecting the base. However, after the official announcement party discipline prevailed and the Socialist mayor made an about-turn to support the base.

Shortly after the official announcement, on August 7th 1981, CUDIP (Comitato Unitario per il Disarmo e la Pace) was formed, with representatives from Comiso, Ragusa, Pachino, Catania and Palermo. The president of the Committee is Giacomo Cagnes, who was the mayor of Comiso for most of the twenty six year period preceeding the new administration. The first project which CUDIP undertook was to organise a demonstration at Comiso on 11th October. They expected about 10,000 people, and got about 35,000. The press was relatively uninterested, but the government were so alarmed that a month later they sent a high-ranking official of the Christian Democrat Party, complete with hired pop-group, to try and talk them out of it. About a thousand people turned up. The Hon. Piccoli compared the demonstrators to 'The geese of Capitol Hill, stupid beasts who cackle pointlessly'. CUDIP pointed out that it was the geese of Capitol Hill who, in 390 B.C. awakened sleeping sentries thereby saving Rome from being taken by the besieging Gauls. The Hon. Piccoli scratched his head and went home.

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### *Guidelines*

After the success of the October demonstration, CUDIP set up a permanent office in Palermo, with the aim both of

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developing a documentation centre, and also internationalising the campaign in Comiso by bringing it to the attention of the growing peace movements elsewhere in Europe. On December 6th members of CUDIP attended a working group in Brussels on 'local opposition to nuclear arms: the Comiso example'. It's worthwhile listing the conclusions of this working group here, because they have an important bearing on the way the campaign has run so far, and may run in the future:

- a) The peace movement should internationalise itself; exchange information; co-ordinate timetables for international demonstrations; develop adequate strategies for mass communications (getting the national press to report on events in other countries); practise international solidarity in situations of crisis.
- b) Above all it is important that the resistance should arise from the local population. Any activity or action in the locality should be co-ordinated together with them.
- c) Resistance must always commence in a non-violent fashion if we wish to leave open the possibility of following through to success. In Comiso this resistance, particularly in the final stages, must be internationalised to avoid being marginalised and suffocated as a purely regional conflict.
- d) To achieve the cancellation, or at least the suspension of the cruise missiles at Comiso is of great importance, not just for Comiso and for Italy, but for the whole of Europe.
- e) The petition for the cancellation of the base must be signed at an international level. The population of Comiso must know that they are not being isolated
- f) The movement at Comiso in Sicily needs a permanent office of information. The possibility of an international fund-raising effort should be investigated.
- g) It is essential that Comiso support committees should appear in Europe, not instead of the European peace movement, but as a part of it.<sup>4</sup>

*Above all it is important that resistance should arise from the local population.*

This point has been made to me many times in conversation with CUDIP members, both in Palermo and Comiso. The population of Comiso are by no means apathetic about the

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construction of the missiles base. Two-thirds of them signed the petition which called for the cancellation of the base. Press coverage of the campaign is now fairly extensive, even if frequently inaccurate. Everyone in Comiso has an opinion about the base, and the local propaganda battle is fierce. If there is an enemy here it is not apathy, but quiet despair; the feeling that this has been decided in Rome and that nothing can be done about it. Hence the importance which CUDIP attaches to the internationalisation of the campaign. Since there are so many local political conflicts in Italy, and so many strikes and demonstrations, they believe that the only way to make central government sit up and take notice, and at the same time relieve the people of Comiso of their feeling of isolation in confrontation with Rome, is to attract international solidarity and pressure. But this international support is not, and cannot be, a substitute for a well-organised local campaign. A problem arises here, because Italy does not have a single powerful umbrella movement such as, for example, CND in Britain. Hence there is a tendency for individual groups to arrange actions in isolation without co-ordinating their efforts with other groups. This obviously can lead to dissipation of resources, particularly when rival groups start trying to canvass international solidarity for their actions.

### iii

#### *Sources of Opposition*

There are several interwoven strands in the local opposition to the base. Of course the fear of becoming involved in another World War is a very important determinant. Sicilians with memories of the Allied air attacks on Palermo and Comiso were not amused when the 'Trinacria 2' exercise last November exploded hypothetical H-bombs over Palermo and Catania. Perhaps a more immediate source of opposition amongst this population (as yet largely uneducated in the niceties of 'counterforce' doctrines, etc.) is their fear of the effect which a large influx of US service people would have on their lives in terms of the importation of the drug trade, prostitution and organised crime into an area which has hitherto been mafia-free. A third very important determining

feature is the knowledge that the building of the base will involve the expropriation of large areas of highly fertile land. In Sardinia, for instance, bases once established have shown an alarming tendency to grow and grow, so much so that they have now swallowed up 9.2% of the island, and the authorities have taken to closing large areas of the coast to fishermen for months at a time so that naval exercises can be carried out with live ammunition.

If the Sicilian people now have to confront mafia interests in relation to the various construction contracts relating to the base, their dilemma is partly the result of an earlier struggle over land rights, in the late '40s and early fifties. At that time a fierce campaign of land occupations was carried on, mainly dominated by the PCI, in an attempt to break up an archaic form of land distribution persisting from the Roman occupation whereby large estates known as 'latifondi' were parcelled out to the peasant farmers at exorbitant rents by 'gabelloti'—middle men who were often also mafiosi. The result of the campaigns was the setting up of an agency for land reform, which, while not highly successful from the peasants' point of view, had the effect of persuading the rural mafia to sell up their country estates and move into the cities, putting the proceeds of the sales into urban activities such as building and the drug trade. For many Sicilians, the struggles against the mafia, and landlords and the missiles appear as parts of a single battle with roots going back into the nineteenth century and beyond. Latter-day poets who arrive in Comiso obsessed with the fate of Aeschylus are often not equipped to appreciate this immediately, which is why it is so important that activities carried out in the area should be co-ordinated with the local peace movement, who know the population they are dealing with, and not simply imposed from outside.

## iv

For the most part, the points outlined in the conclusions to the Brussels working group have been taken up with exemplary efficiency. Although the Dutchman Laurens Hogebrink, in a report on a visit to Sicily in October '81 described himself as 'the first representative of the new peace

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movement north of the Alps to visit Comiso,<sup>3</sup> the town has since been visited by representatives of the IKV (Dutch Interchurch Peace Council), CND, END, Pax Christi, Die Grünen, Le Cun du Larzac, SCAT and many other groups. Comiso support groups have appeared in many countries, including West Germany and Holland. A petition was launched, calling for the cancellation of the base, and on April 4th a second large demonstration attracted between 50 and 100,000 people, making it the largest demonstration seen in Sicily since the war.

The response of the authorities to the April 4th demonstration was to announce, a few days before the event, that a contract had been finally awarded for the clearing of the site at Magliocco, and that work would begin, officially, on April 5th. The night before the demonstration, 1,000 carabinieri spent the night at the base for fear of a preventative occupation by the protesters. Eventually the work was put back a few days, to allow people who had come from other parts of Italy to disperse.

Throughout April, peaceworkers all over Sicily collected signatures for the Comiso petition.

After months of silence, the decision of the Italian government to install cruise missiles in one of the most productive zones of Sicily has become official.

The opposition of the population and their legitimate representatives, never consulted, has been of no avail.

In the Paris Peace Treaty (1947), it is explicitly forbidden to use Sicily for military ends.

We ask that the decision to install missile bases at Comiso be revoked.

On April 29th, to intensify the campaign several members of CUDIP went on hunger strike. The day after they started their fast the head of the regional PCI in Sicily, Pio la Torre, was shot by the mafia in Palermo along with his driver Rosario di Salvo. At their funeral in Palermo on May 3rd his deputy and successor, Luigi Colajanni, pledged that the Sicilian PCI would carry on the struggle against the mafia and the missiles; Ninni Guccione of ACLI said 'Those whom in Sicily, try and spark off powerful new unitarian processes like

La Torre did, can now expect this sentence of death'. While the funeral was going on, members of CUDIP were passing through the huge crowd in the Piazza Politeama collecting signatures for the petition.

By about the beginning of June, the petition had reached its target of one million signatures. The hunger strike was called off after the strikers achieved their demand of audiences with the head of the Regional Assembly, Salvatore Lauricello, and Prime Minister Spadolini. So far only the audience with Lauricello has taken place, though it achieved little result since Lauricello himself is well known to be against the base and has expressed his views openly. The signatures were handed in to the Regional Assembly, and then taken to Rome by a deputation en route to the Brussels Convention. A special session of the Sicilian Regional Assembly was called, but disappointingly voted again in favour of the base. Twenty-nine deputies, including Lauricello, absented themselves rather than vote.

# i

## *THE MAFIA*

The death of Pio la Torre was a blow to the peace movement in Sicily. He had been a leading supporter and campaigner in the fight against the base since his return to Sicily to lead the regional PCI some eight months earlier. It's unlikely that his involvement with the peace movement was the primary motive for the murder. He was a dedicated opponent of the mafia, and had served on the anti-mafia commission in Rome. At the time of his death he was said to be preparing investigations into the bank accounts of suspected mafiosi, and it was mainly due to pressure from la Torre and the PCI that the Rome government had agreed to send a powerful new police chief, General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, to Palermo to lead investigations into the mafia.

As a Sicilian, born in Palermo just a few hundred yards from where he was murdered, la Torre had been involved in the land occupations in the early fifties, even serving a spell in prison as a result. Many newspapers, reporting on his death, made a connection between the date of his assassination and that of the massacre of Portella della Ginestra on the



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1st of May 1947, when peasants celebrating a recent left-wing election victory were machine-gunned by bandits on the orders of the mafia. It may not be too far-fetched to suppose that the choice of timing for the murder was intended as a deliberate warning to the new rapidly growing mass movement not to oppose mafia interests in the base. Crowds at la Torre's funeral chanted:

*La Torre has been killed, the missiles have already been fired.*

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The mafia pose real problems for the peace movement in Sicily, not just in terms of assassinations and direct physical threats, but because they can also make life difficult for anything or anyone that they don't like by means of 'ambiente', pressure applied through a complicated system of social contacts which can include the police, tax inspectorate, or local government. When a number of Sicilian peace groups decided they wanted to set up a peace camp near Magliocco airport they were unable to find a site because local farmers were too frightened to let them on the land; it was rumoured that some of them had been threatened with dynamite. Eventually the peace camp was set up in late July, in the nearby nuclear-free zone of Vittoria, 10 kilometres from the base.

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I was in Palermo on September 3rd of this year, and I went to visit an anti-mafia documentation centre called the 'Centro Giuseppe Impastato', after a member of the Italian new left who was killed by the mafia several years ago. The director of the centre, Dr Umberto Santini, took me afterwards to eat in an open air pizzeria owned and run by Impastato's brother Giovanni. While we were eating, two men came over to our table and told us that General Dalla Chiesa and his wife had just been shot in the centre of Palermo.

At his first meeting with journalists after he arrived to take up his new post Dalla Chiesa had recalled Pio la Torre's involvement in the land reform struggles over thirty years before, adding:

I also was there on those fields of Corleone, fighting banditry and the mafia.

Less than five months later, in a dimly lit square behind the Piazza Politeana he found himself following la Torre through the same doorway into history.

### *COMISO '82-'83*

Comiso has now become a prime focus of interest for the European peace movements, who believe that a victory here could make deployment of the new missiles in West Germany politically very difficult, thus perhaps holding up the missiles altogether.

The campaign on the ground in Comiso itself is still in a rudimentary stage of organisation. The peace camp has moved from Vittoria and found a temporary site in an olive-grove about half a mile from the base, and some non-violent actions have begun in an attempt to block traffic and obstruct the works. These have achieved some success; for instance the construction work on the site, due to start on September 1st had to be put back several days when the campers organised a sit-in. However, these actions have mainly involved young people from other parts of Italy and Europe, without much support from the local population. During the next year CUDIP will be appointing a full-time organiser in Comiso. Fundraising efforts are being stepped up, and funds are arriving from Comiso support groups in different parts of Europe and America. An appeal has been launched to buy a piece of land for a permanent international peace camp, though it is possible that owing to the difficulties of maintaining such a camp in the area the plan may eventually be commuted into the establishment of a peace centre in Comiso itself. Conditions for the development of a strong mass-movement seem good. The local population are fundamentally opposed to the base. They spend time in the streets and the piazzas talking to each other, they are curious of strangers. However, the organisational task of realising this potential is formidable. Before the September 1st blockade the peace campers arranged a meeting with some peasant farmers; none of them came. At the blockade itself there

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were only 200 people, about half of them foreigners. The town council have taken to describing the campers as 'pacifisti' and 'filosovietichi'.

Here also pressure and support from the international peace movements can have a helpful effect. We need to assist the Italian peace movement in its struggle to develop a unified structure, both by encouraging those peace workers in Italy who are currently working on the possibility of creating a CND type structure in that country, and also by locating the reliable and established local committees and suggesting that they act as clearing houses for actions planned on an international scale. In this way some of the diverse groups might be encouraged to co-operate more closely and much waste of time and effort could be spared.

A Comiso support group has been recently formed in the UK, and would welcome enquiries and support. Details from END.

### *GOING TO COMISO*

A member of CUDIP in Palermo once gave me an excellent single-sentence description of Sicily:

'Sicily is very far away', he said, 'and very expensive to get to.'

Palermo is further from London than Warsaw or Belgrade, or the Straits of Gibraltar. However, there is a good air link and many cheap flights operate for the benefit of Sicilians living and working in this country. It should be possible to get a return flight to Palermo or Catania for around £140, even in the high season. If at first you don't succeed, try again, because there are lots of charter firms operating them. END may be able to assist with advice. If going overland remember that Italian trains are very cheap (though unbearably crowded in high season). To take a bus to Milan or Rome and then travel to Catania by train would probably cost about £100 return. There are also ferry services to the island. Boats leave several times a week from Genova, taking 24 hours to travel down the West coast of Italy (cost about £20 each way for a foot passenger) and a daily ferry service leaves Naples each evening at 8.30 p.m., crossing in 10 hours

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to Palermo. There are regular shuttle flights from Rome also, cost about £65 return. Alitalia in London keep timetables, and take bookings for these flights. Up-to-date train and ferry timetables are kept by the *Italian State Tourist Department*, 201 Regent Street, London W1 (tel: 01-439 2311).

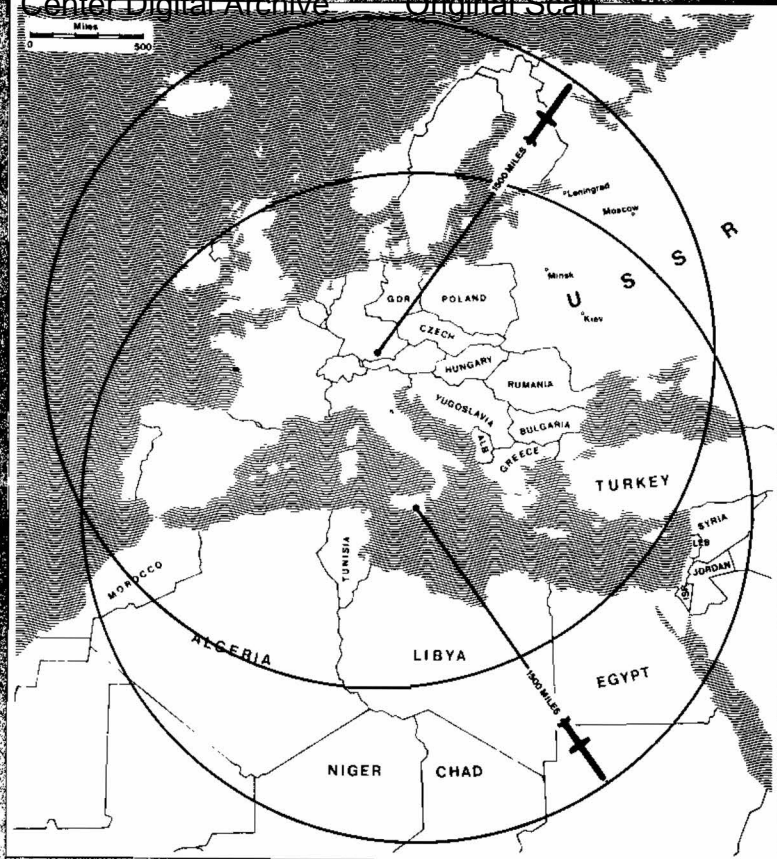
Buses run twice a day from Palermo Piazza Marina to Comiso, every day except Sunday and bank holidays; 6.30 a.m. and 2.50 p.m. The cost is about £3.50. Buses run from Catania, Piazza Patro Massimo at 10 a.m., 1.30 p.m. and 6.30 p.m., Sundays and bank holidays 1.30 p.m. only.

There may be a camp-site at Comiso or there may not; efforts are being made to continue the peace camp, but it is possible that hostile pressures may cause it to be abandoned. Best check the state of play with END in London or CUDIP in Palermo before going.

And finally, I have been asked to remind you that Comiso is a quiet town in an as yet unspoiled rural area which follows a traditional pattern of life which is quite alien to visitors coming from the insalubrious conurbations of Northern Europe. For a maximum of worthwhile contact and effective discourse with the local population, a minimum of hippy gear is required.

## NOTES

1. 'Stranamore-Lagorio in Sicilia'—Gianluigi Cortese *Pace e Guerra*, No. 3, January, 1982.
2. 'L'American compra la Sicilia per uso nucleare'—Franco Tintori, *Paese Sera*, 6 August, 1982.
3. 'Per il Disarmo'—Francesco Rutelli edizione *Gammalibri*, July, 1982.
4. Quoted from CUDIP bulletin No. 1, 'Elements for an analysis of the situation in Comiso', (available in English from END).
5. Memorandum on a visit to the new peace movement in Sicily, October, 1981, Laurens Hogebrink (IKV).



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