

'How the Italian Communist Party sees the Common Market' from L'Unità (24 March 1957)

Caption: On 24 March 1957, the Italian Communist daily newspaper L'Unità criticises the process of European integration and sets out the position of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) on the European Economic Community (EEC).

Source: L'Unità. Organa del Partito Comunista italiano. dir. de publ. Lajolo, Davide. 24.03.1957, n° 72; anno XXXIV. Milano. "L'opinione del PCI sul Mercato comune", p. 1; 6.

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Message from the leadership

How the Italian Communist Party sees the Common Market

The Common Market and Euratom Treaties are the result of a policy that seeks to divide Europe into two military blocs

For the present, the agreements on the European Common Market and Euratom have been concluded among the governments; the country will now have to be informed of them and the Italian parliament consulted for its view. They do, however, pose significant and serious problems for the Italian people that will need to be tackled in a very clear-sighted manner and with a sense of responsibility. For several years to come, our nation's future may be shaped by the approval and content of these agreements.

There are, clearly, objective reasons why the current prospects for Western European economies are uncertain and a matter of concern. In the situation that has arisen following the Second World War, the collapse of the colonial system and the creation of a large socialist market, the states of mainland Western Europe have found themselves at a severe disadvantage in relation to the United States of America and the Soviet Union. They are already unable to compete with America, and the problem is becoming worse because of the prospects offered by current technical progress, the wide-scale introduction of automated production processes and the industrial use of atomic energy. The tendency to try to resolve the current situation and pave the way for a better future by expanding limited national markets and using new forms of international economic cooperation, therefore, is both understandable and reasonable.

The working classes cannot, in principle, be opposed to this tendency, even though, at present, it is occurring in a world divided into two camps, where there exist side by side a system of socialist states, countries still dominated by capitalism and the new free states established by peoples who have thrown off the yoke of colonialism. Economic, political and social progress depends, to some extent, on adopting new approaches and new forms of cooperation in order to mitigate and overcome the current restrictions and difficulties of the national economies. However, if this is to succeed in today's circumstances, the following conditions have to be met:

- (1) Starting from the existing situation in Europe and the world, we need to seek to create broader-based and better organised economic cooperation among all the countries of Europe, without exclusion and without discrimination. The current division into military blocs must cease, and a new policy of co-existence, détente and peace set in place.
- (2) The economic and political development of the new states that have emerged from the former colonies must be encouraged and not hindered; in other words, all forms of domination and colonial exploitation must be curtailed.
- (3) The individual countries of Western Europe must be left free to secure their own political and social progress by transforming their economic structures, stemming the endless power of the major capitalist monopolies and adopting effective measures to raise the standard of living of industrial and agricultural workers.
- (4) Countries that are more economically vulnerable — such as Italy, to a great extent — must not suffer serious damage or be put at risk. Nor should they, to all intents and purposes, be deprived of their independence because the interests of the major capitalist monopolies of industrially more developed and powerful countries are allowed to take precedence over their legitimate national concerns.

At a time when we are entering the era of the industrial use of atomic energy, moreover, it is in the interest of every country, and of Italy in particular, to prevent a situation in which the new forms of energy are in the hands of a private monopoly or a group of stronger powers that would ration the other countries and more or less openly exploit the new energy for the purpose of blackmail, intimidation and warmongering.

The substance of the Treaties that are to be signed shortly has yet to be revealed. But what we already know from the various governmental declarations suggests that they are taking no account of these requirements. Consequently, they are failing to present the right solution to the problem of achieving more extensive cooperation and hence the broader development of the range of economic activities of the countries of Europe. Quite the opposite: under the mask of progress towards a new, more extensive form of economic unity, the Treaties conceal serious dangers for all of the peoples of Europe, particularly the structurally weaker countries.

To begin with, we must condemn the fact that both Treaties are the expression and instrument of a policy that seeks to divide Europe ever more deeply into two opposing military blocs. The Treaties are in fact directly linked to the Atlantic Pact and the Western European Union. They are based on the premiss, and subject to the condition, of West German rearmament, and furthermore their goal is to allow West Germany the possible military use of atomic energy. They do not promote a process of détente, nor are they directed towards peaceful co-existence among countries with different social systems; they do not contribute to European security and peace. Rather, they tend to reinforce not only the political division of Europe but also the divide between European and world markets. Western European states, whose economies would gain huge opportunities for new development from specific measures of rapprochement and cooperation with the countries of the socialist world, will once again be at the mercy of the competition and dominance of powerful US capitalism.

This basic failing is compounded by the fact that the countries linked by the new Treaties, including Italy, will be committed to supporting and defending the colonial regime that French imperialism is seeking to maintain over some of the peoples of North Africa, by waging unjust and bloody war on them. In that respect, the Treaties are contrary to the national interest, which requires that Italy should be supporting and not hampering the great independence movement of all colonial peoples, and particularly the Mediterranean Arabs.

Secondly, the powerful forces of the capitalist monopolies will dominate the so-called economic community that is to be established in Western Europe. Those private capitalist monopolies will enter into agreements with each other to control the larger market available to them. That will boost their profits; it will place the strongest groups in a privileged position — the West German operators foremost among them — and the intermediate players will be squeezed out. Above all, it will not allow technical progress to generate an overall improvement in workers' living conditions. Social inequalities will be made worse; the gap and tension between the countries with weaker economies and those with more developed economies will increase.

We can also be sure that the new organisation will exert strong pressure to prevent individual countries pursuing an economic policy incompatible with the interests of big capital. In Italy, the effect will be that the structural reforms provided for in the Italian Constitution, designed to secure a gradual transformation of the economy in the interest of the working classes, will not be implemented.

Finally, it is already clear from the little information we have that, when the Common Market Treaty was drafted, pressure from the large capitalists at home and abroad meant that the interests of both Italian agriculture and less developed industry were sacrificed. There was a failure to take proper account of the serious and real threat that the whole of the Italian economy, save for a few large monopolistic sectors, is to be turned into one vast depressed zone, with serious implications for very many Italians.

We Communists must therefore mount a far-reaching campaign of information, criticism and condemnation regarding these Treaties throughout Italian society. The aim of the campaign should be:

(1) To oppose the policy of bogus Europeanism contained in the Treaties by a democratic socialist policy, geared to international détente, peace and economic development. The current restrictions and difficulties facing Western European countries should be resolved through new forms of economic cooperation encompassing all countries, including the socialist countries, in a new climate of détente. This should be founded on bringing military blocs and occupation to an end and establishing peaceful co-existence.

Recent proposals by the Government of the Soviet Union offer real opportunities for contacts, discussions and agreement. They also open the way for Western Europe to catch up in the atomic field by benefiting from the huge progress the socialist world has made there.

(2) To condemn Italy's inclusion in an imperialist and colonialist political and economic bloc; to call for solidarity and close ties of friendship and cooperation with the new Arab, African and Asiatic states, and with all peoples struggling against colonialism.

(3) To condemn Italy's economic enthrallment to the large foreign and Italian capitalist monopolies and call instead for a democratic policy for the reform of economic structures, opposition to the private monopolies and the nationalisation of energy resources and state intervention in order to guarantee not only technical but also social progress, that is to say, a continuing improvement in the living conditions of the working classes.

(4) To mount specific criticism of the individual sections of the Treaty and propose, in parliament and to the public, the kind of amendments that will protect the interests of those parts of the national economy under threat from the dominance of capitalist monopolies and a misconceived foreign policy.

Communists believe that, if the Common Market Treaty is signed, all the organisations of the working classes and rural workers — and trade unions in particular — will have to take on new responsibilities. It will be necessary to protect workers' wages, their standard of living, their living conditions and social welfare rights in new circumstances, in the face of better organised and more pugnacious employers and the problems consequent on the expected movements of the workforce from one country to another.

In addition, workers' union and political freedoms will have to be vigorously defended, drawing on international contacts and movements. It is already clear that large employers and governments intend to exploit the workforce in some countries — in particular Italy, where there is mass unemployment — in order to cut wage levels, reject social welfare measures, make the whole labour movement retreat and worsen the living conditions of workers throughout Western Europe.

Aware of the need for technical and economic progress, it is for the working classes and those in the vanguard to offer an alternative to a policy that, though it speaks of 'Europeanism', keeps Europe divided and so thwarts the necessary cooperation between economies and states. This alternative policy genuinely extends the areas of economic and political progress, moves towards peace and transforms the structures of every country to make them democratic and socialist.