

'After Stalin' from Le Monde (6 November 1956)

Caption: On 6 November 1956, the French daily newspaper Le Monde strongly condemns the intervention of Soviet military forces to control the Hungarian uprising and expresses concern at a possible revival of the Cold War between the East and West.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. BEUVE-MÉRY, Hubert. 06.11.1956, n° 3 666. Paris: Le Monde. "Staline dépassé", p. 1.

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After Stalin

It is with amazement and indignation that the world learned of the Soviet army's massive intervention in Hungary at a time when the negotiations on troop withdrawals that were being conducted between Mr Nagy's representatives and those of the Soviet GHQ seemed to be going smoothly. Thus, the uncertainty about Moscow's true intentions that it had left in the air until the last moment were nothing but tactics intended to secure a dishonourable victory. The disproportion in material force was too obvious.

The obvious question is: who in the Soviet capital was responsible for the intervention? Did the 'moderates' give in to the others? Or, on the contrary, did the Communist leaders come to unanimous agreement to avoid – by way of bloody example – the break up of their bloc? At present, we cannot predict the repercussions that this event will have on Soviet politics, nor whether it will lead before long to an extensive reshuffling of the leaders. The only hint that Western observers have been able to obtain in Moscow is that the Kremlin felt that it was the right time for confrontation, given the Suez Canal Crisis. Too preoccupied by that crisis, the West would barely have the means to retaliate; they could only voice a pro-forma protest, while the Afro-Asian countries, all the more angry at the Franco-British intervention in Egypt, would forget about the Soviet action in Hungary all the more rapidly since they needed Moscow's support.

Yugoslavia's attitude is even more surprising. Of course, the Titoist regime has remained completely loyal to Leninism. From its point of view, the incidents in Hungary had overstepped the established boundaries of destalinisation. Not only Stalinism but also everything that represented the people's democracy had been eliminated, and the direction of the new regime was fairly predictable. After having opened the door to anti-Communist democrats and proclaimed its neutrality, would the Hungarian Government not swing even more to the right and take a clearly anti-Soviet stance? Moreover, since it came into power at the collapse of the Bela Kun regime, would not counter-terror follow in the wake of the terror that held sway during the Rakosi-Gero regime? These are questions that come to mind. Be that as it may, by imposing its own solution under atrocious conditions, the Soviet army provided a remarkable interpretation of the principle of non-alignment on which Marshal Tito had founded his international policy and with which the Kremlin had finally sided on 20 June. Stalin himself had not dared to resort to such sanctions against the people of Yugoslavia in 1948.

It would seem that the new Kadar Government also wants to denounce the errors of the past, that it is not at all a return to the Rakosi-Gero regime and that the Russian army intervened only to prevent a victory of 'reactionary forces'. In short, Mr Kadar would take things up from where they left off on 22 October and satisfy the Communists, who were demanding a certain amount of internal liberalisation: put an end to the popular uprising and find a 'Gomulka-type solution'. But the conditions are completely different. Mr Gomulka held out against Russian pressure; and only afterwards did he crack down on the anti-Soviet demonstrations.

As for détente between the two blocs, Moscow may just have dealt it a mortal blow. While a heavy silence envelopes the Hungarian capital, with the 'Budapest Uprising' still fresh in their minds, many people recall the 'Prague Uprising', which marked the beginning of the Cold War and accelerated the arms race between the two blocs.