

'Why the Soviet Union is worried by Europe's progress', from Corriere della Sera (5 September 1962)

Caption: On 5 September 1962, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera explains the reasons behind Soviet leaders' increasing concern over the success of the European Economic Community (EEC).

Source: Corriere della Sera. 05.09.1962, n° 198; anno 87. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Perchè i progressi dell'Europa preoccupano l'Unione Sovietica", auteur:Levi, Arrigo , p. 6.

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Why the Soviet Union is worried by Europe's progress

This progress belies, among other things, the Leninist principle of the inevitable fall of capitalism — How Khrushchev intends to react — Importance of rapid progress along the road towards integration

From our correspondent

Moscow, 4 September, evening.

The creation of the Common Market and the economic progress that it has brought about within western Europe worries the USSR and the Communist world for various reasons. There seem to be five main causes for concern:

(1) High levels of trade with the highly industrialised countries of the Common Market are needed if the economic development plans of the Communist countries are to be achieved; exports from those countries to the Common Market rose by 25 % between 1959 and 1961 and are continuing to grow; this trade is nevertheless threatened by the construction of the Common Market's external tariff barrier, which could cause major problems for the economies of the Socialist, and especially the satellite, countries' economies, which are already under pressure.

(2) The capitalist countries are now much better able to offer assistance to the non-aligned countries and to bring them within their political fold through long-term economic agreements; this means that it has become more difficult for the Communist countries not to lose ground in the 'aid war' that they are waging with the West.

(3) Neo-capitalism's evident ability to make progress while satisfying the well-being of the masses to an ever greater extent has undermined, and will in future further undermine, the Communist parties of western Europe, whose opposition to the Common Market was based on the most catastrophic forecasts, now proved untrue.

(4) Some fundamental principles of Leninist ideology, such as the inevitability of capitalism's fall, the unavailability of a gradual impoverishment of the masses, and the impossibility of resolving the escalating internal contradictions of the capitalist world, are out of kilter with today's picture.

(5) The policy based on these premises is also in doubt; there are doubts as well about the outcome of the 'peaceful economic war' which the Communists thought they could easily win. They now understand that they are facing a target which is not fixed but moving rapidly forward. The end result is that Khrushchev's very policy of peaceful co-existence is again being called into question, those Chinese revolutionaries advocating more violent methods of defeating capitalism are being provided with fresh arguments, and the ideological, as well as political, unity, of the Communist world is being sapped.

The reaction among Khrushchev's Communists to these many reasons for concern has been somewhat confused, but also very vigorous, demonstrating that they do not want to spare any efforts to bring the situation back into line with their own political ends and ideological principles. The decisions taken by the Council for Mutual Economic Cooperation (Comecon) at its sixteenth session in Moscow in the first few days of June this year have much to do with the first of the five points discussed above. The organisation (founded in 1949) was given a new executive with increased powers in order to coordinate the development plans of its member countries. The purpose of these initiatives was to make the economies of the Socialist, and especially the satellite, countries less dependent than they are at present on trade with the Common Market.

The appointment of various former leaders of *Gosplan* (the Soviet Novikov, the Czechoslovak Simunek, etc.) to the new Comecon executive shows the unprecedented authority that it is now wished to give this

body. After years of virtual inaction, Comecon now wants to be serious; the advantages that the Communist countries could obtain from a greater coordination of their economies (up to now divided by customs and currency barriers now unthinkable in western Europe) should not be underestimated.

Trying to make the Soviet bloc's economy more independent from supplies of industrial goods from the Common Market is not enough. The USSR and the other Communist countries are trying to protect their interests in other ways as well, in particular: (1) by proposing to call a world trade conference in an attempt to rally and coordinate the opposition to the Common Market that has emerged in various countries; (2) by brandishing the possibility of a direct economic cooperation agreement between Comecon and the Common Market.

Khrushchev can offer not just tariff and customs concessions, but also a vast multi-annual plan for trade, whose level could be set in advance, under which the trade agreements with the individual countries of western Europe could be merged into a single agreement with the Common Market. It should be noted, however, that 'inter-bloc', rather than bilateral, trade negotiations would substantially lessen the economic independence of the smaller Communist countries, and would make them more subordinate to the general plan, i.e. to Comecon, and ultimately to the Soviet economy. The Poles, for this reason, are not very keen on inter-bloc negotiations.

Khrushchev's proposed trade conference is not just intended to gain conventional protection for the economic interests of the Socialist countries, but it also has an obvious political aim, i.e. to place as many obstacles as possible in the way of exclusive trading and economic relations between the Common Market (and the West in general) and the non-aligned countries.

As regards the last three points mentioned above, we have already looked at the relative arguments in previous days when reviewing the conference of Communist economists in Moscow. This conference gave approval in principle to various stances typical of Togliatti's tactics as regards the position of the Communist parties on the Common Market: the fight will now be conducted with instruments that are not as crude as in the past, not through a head-on attack, but rather by attempts at infiltration from inside and resistance through the defence of national parliaments' prerogatives.

From an ideological point of view, the Common Market has undoubtedly caused a crisis in Leninism, whose advocates are now oscillating between realistic admissions of the vitality of neo-capitalism and totalitarian reaffirmations, with heads firmly buried in the sand, of the old dogma. This confusion was evident at the Moscow conference, which accepted facts that ran counter to the ideological stances held up to now, but did not make any serious attempt to change these stances.

We need to take note of some of the Communist criticisms of the Common Market, in particular of the repeated statements that the Common Market is unable to resolve the 'internal contradictions' of capitalism. While these views are undoubtedly being put forward in a rather exaggerated way, there is no doubt that any delay or failure along the road towards western integration will automatically be seen by the Communists as a victory: in the next few months, crucial for Britain's membership of the Common Market, this fact should always be borne in mind.

This brings us to the last of the five points listed above, i.e. to the 'Common Market's challenge to Khrushchev's policy'; we shall examine this in more detail in a subsequent article.

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