

'Unforeseeable developments' from Il nuovo Corriere della Sera (27 October 1956)

Caption: On 27 October 1956, the Italian daily newspaper Il nuovo Corriere della Sera sets out the reasons for the popular uprising in Hungary and expresses concern at the political future of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Source: Il nuovo Corriere della Sera. 27.10.1956, n° 254; anno 81. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Sviluppi imprevedibili", auteur:Gentile, Panfilo , p. 1.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/unforeseeable_developments_from_il_nuovo_corriere_della_sera_27_october_1956-en-ca384c8d-1195-4726-ae89-c959f7c9d8fe.html



Last updated: 12/04/2023

Unforeseeable developments

Although it is difficult to form a clear and definite opinion about the revolts that have broken out in Poland and Hungary, some points do appear to be beyond dispute. The causes of the discontent, which has been building under the surface for a very long time, can be summarised as follows:

(1) impatience with the leaders imposed by the Soviet Union, who have not won the hearts and minds of the people. In handling the Polish and Hungarian Communist Parties, the Soviet Union's sole concern has been to ensure that the leadership was loyal and absolutely obedient; it has paid no attention whatsoever to public opinion;

(2) economic discontent over the stripping of national assets in the interests of the ruling power. There is no doubt that, for ten years, Russia has been pursuing an imperialist policy of pillage in the countries under its influence; a secondary feature of Soviet planning has always been the coordination, or rather subordination, of the satellite States' resources for its own benefit;

(3) ideological pressures, arising from the fact that the Russian model was imposed without variations in all the subject countries. The pressures have been of various kinds. Thus, in a deeply Catholic country like Poland, the aim was to impose the same policy on religion as pursued by Russia within its own borders, ignoring the fact that the Catholic Church was not the Orthodox Church, which, from the days of the Czars, had always been a kind of nationally based State church. Efforts were also made to introduce collective farming in the rigid form adopted in Russia, without stopping to think that the bold experiments of *kolkhoz* and State factories were bound to have disastrous results and meet with stubborn resistance in countries with different customs and in different circumstances.

If we now consider these three factors together, we find that they have one fundamental feature in common: revolt against Soviet abuse of power. Ever since the world began, every country that was in a position to do so has been driven by the desire for power. As the famous German economist Friedrich List said, there will always be large nations and small nations, and large nations will always exercise a dominant influence on small ones. Nature, ethnic factors and history have never been egalitarian. So it comes as no surprise that when Russia — a great power by nature — entered the canon of western history, it should have asserted its own claims to hegemony over the nations that were geographically or ethnically within its sphere of influence. But there are ways and ways for large nations to prevail over small ones.

Stalin was undoubtedly a great exponent of the Russian desire for power. But his weak point was that he interpreted that desire in barbaric terms. A simple-minded man, prone to wild generalisations and abstract ideologies, he understood greatness and power as brute force and sought to establish an empire based on uniformity. He saw the world as a wide open space, ignoring the changes that centuries had wrought in older lands. Stalin was a latter-day despot but he was behind the times; far from looking to the future, he worked with outdated tools. The nationalist principle on which, since the 10th century, the European family has developed into so many irrepressible individuals, is now about to take its revenge on the reactionary Stalinist utopia.

Khrushchev seems to have no clear idea of what is happening. He would like to make concessions, as is now said, to different forms of socialism for different national circumstances. But on the other hand he is not yet prepared to forgo the right to exercise ideological control over the satellite States that the Soviet Union needs to retain. Wladyslaw Gomulka and Imre Nagy will be accepted so long as they consult and seek reconciliation with their Soviet masters. Any independence or autonomy that Khrushchev may recognise must be compliant. National freedom must keep within the boundaries defined by the Kremlin. The tenets of the wretched pseudo-doctrine that goes by the name of Marxist-Leninism must remain inviolate. There is as yet no clear idea, no awareness of the principles at stake on either side or how to reconcile them.

Stalin had his own implacable consistency and he knew what he wanted. His successors are groping in the dark. They have rejected the barbaric ideal of a uniform empire, ruled by terror, but they have not yet embraced the western ideals of freedom and independence. The habit of tolerance and understanding

implicit in those ideals is still too remote from their education and the climate of autocracy in which they were born and grew up. So the world of Eastern Europe seems to be adrift, at the mercy of unpredictable forces and unforeseeable developments.

Panfilo Gentile