

'The Czechoslovak crisis and Europe' from Le Populaire (10 September 1968)

Caption: On 10 September 1968, the French Socialist daily newspaper Le Populaire speculates on the geopolitical repercussions of the Czechoslovak crisis and regrets the absence of a joint reaction by the Six over foreign policy.

Source: Le Populaire. 10.09.1968. Paris: Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO). "La crise tchécoslovaque et l'Europe", auteur:C., P.

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The Czechoslovak crisis and Europe

Are we moving towards the end of peaceful coexistence?

Is world peace threatened by the events in Eastern Europe?

These are the questions being asked by an anxious public which, apart from its everyday concerns, is contemplating the prospect of a Third World War with justifiable terror.

Responding to those concerns requires not only a cool head and vision, it also requires many ideological prejudices to be put aside.

To date, the policy of the powers-that-be has been to engage in extreme anti-Communism at home and, at the same time, move closer to the Soviet Union at the expense of France's traditional, Western alliances. This blatant contradiction might have paid off in electoral terms, but now, after the events in Czechoslovakia, it puts our country in an ambiguous position internationally.

In fact, the détente of recent years rested on the combined efforts of two men, John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev, who, understanding the mortal dangers of another world war, staked everything on closer ties between America and Russia. Both were convinced that the rest of the world would follow suit.

Clearly, the Vietnam War, on the one hand, and the attack on Czechoslovakia, on the other, threaten what were thought to be solid achievements.

Does this mean throwing in the towel after the first punch and resigning ourselves to a worsening situation that, in time, could lead to a major conflict?

I do not know how far the Russians are prepared to go in forcing their satellites to toe the line. However, the psychological impact of their attitude and the resultant loss of prestige in the world should cause them to proceed with caution, at least we may hope so. The Americans, meanwhile, are demonstrating restraint, and President Johnson's warnings to the USSR are of no direct military consequence.

The regrettable fact is that, in such tragic circumstances, Western Europe, of which France is a part, is not saying a word. Everyone is well aware that it is playing no role whatsoever. But, because of its geography, it is the most affected by the Czechoslovak problem, and it would be the first to be threatened if a global conflict broke out.

This failure results from the fact that, because of France, the Europe that was etched out in the Treaty of Rome has no political weight, and, while it has difficulty in reaching agreement on the price of an agricultural product, it is totally incapable of reaching any agreement at all in terms of a common foreign policy. It is deeply divided, in particular, about the future of the Atlantic Alliance and whether it serves any purpose. As a result of endless brainwashing, the French have become anti-American and anti-British. They are finding it rather difficult in the current context to remain pro-Soviet. Our partners in the Six and Britain are each playing their own game, since they cannot be associated in a joint action.

The upshot is that Europe is impotent in the face of these events. It depends on the wisdom of the two Great Powers and the determination, which we imagine that they share, to avoid the worst. But Europe is incapable of taking any initiative, although, with its economic and political weight, it could play a decisive role, if only it were united.

To the extent that the game is now being played without Europe, it is also being played without France which, under the banner of independence, will be faced with a *fait accompli*, whatever form that might take, without having been able to have its say or having helped to avoid the catastrophe.

C. P.