

Munich, February 27, 1964 (Free World Analysis / Kevin Devlin)

According to Giuseppe Boffa, the well-informed Moscow correspondent of the Italian Communist Party daily Unità, Sino-Soviet relations are about to take yet another turn for the worse. In a dispatch in the paper's issue of February 25 he reports that a massive Soviet reply to the latest series of Chinese attacks is now "inevitable," and can be expected "within a few days."

The first part of Boffa's article is devoted to the Albanian seizure of some of the former Soviet Embassy buildings in Tirana, denounced by Izvestia on Monday. This episode, he comments, would not be surprising in itself, in view of the "open hostility" of the Albanian leaders towards the USSR, "if it were not also a symptom of a new deterioration of [Soviet] relations with China, a country with which Albania acts in close accord and from which it receives complete support."

"Harsh Reaction"

Moreover, the seizure of the embassy building is not the only such symptom, for "the news from Peking merely confirms this extremely grave state of affairs." Boffa goes on to mention, among other indications of worsening Sino-Soviet relations, the People's Daily/Red Flag article of February 4, "The Leaders of the CPSU Are the Greatest Splitters of Our Time." This and other recent Chinese attacks, he explains, have not yet been published in the Soviet press, but have reached Moscow "through various channels." The February 4 article in particular "has already provoked a harsh reaction, at least in the circles which have access to this information." Then there was Mao-Tse-tung's statement to French parliamentarians, in which he prophesied the fall of Khrushchev, describing him as a "paper tiger" -- "a label which in the past Peking applied only to imperialists and reactionaries." Here Boffa mentions Mao's reference to a "third world" to be composed of China, France, West Germany, Italy and possible England, and remarks that "this idea had already been developed, after the opening of diplomatic relations between Paris and Peking, in a solemn People's Daily article which invoked the prospect of an international front against the two atomic powers, the USSR and the United States, now lumped together in a single condemnation."

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All this is interesting enough, but scarcely sensational in these polemical days. But Boffa has kept his "well-informed" punch-line for the concluding paragraph:

"All this will not, perhaps, precipitate the Soviet reply -- [but] only because this is already close at hand (prossima) and inevitable. It would seem that for their part the Chinese and their supporters want to do all they can to make [this reply] as harsh as possible. What it will be in reality, we shall know within a few days."

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