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Western Europe Review

25 October 1978

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WESTERN EUROPE REVIEW

25 October 1978

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Italian Communist leader Berlinguer

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The Italian Communists and the Soviets--More Diversity than Unity

Italian Communist leader Berlinguer's trip in early October to the USSR, France, and Yugoslavia produced an upbeat communique in Moscow that hid deep disagreements with the Soviets on Italian domestic and international problems. In Paris, Berlinguer and French Communist leader Marchais agreed not to disagree too much on issues related to the first direct elections for the European Parliament in June. Berlinguer apparently used his stop in Yugoslavia to review his Moscow experience with Tito and to explore the chances of opening party relations with the Chinese Communists.

Much remains unclear about the Italian leader's unusual trip--in recent years Berlinguer has gone to Moscow only for ceremonial occasions

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While the Italians intend to redefine Leninism to suit themselves, Berlinguer wanted to reassure the Soviets and especially Ponomarev that his party would not go so far as to discard democratic centralism or break with Leninism.

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The Moscow meeting was, at best, a modest success for Berlinguer. The communique, which appeared to back Berlinguer's domestic course, was only possible because Vadim Zagladin, deputy chief of the Central Committee's International Department, did not want to indicate the failure of Berlinguer's mission.

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Berlinguer told the press afterward that "divergencies persist on certain essential aspects of the concept of socialism We were able to illustrate to our comrades not only our concept of an original Italian road to socialism, but also our viewpoint on the problems of socialism in the world." One of these problems is China. The Italians would like to establish party-to-party relations, if the Chinese agree. Berlinguer wanted to assure Moscow this would not be an anti-Soviet act, but [Redacted] the Soviets refused to discuss the matter.

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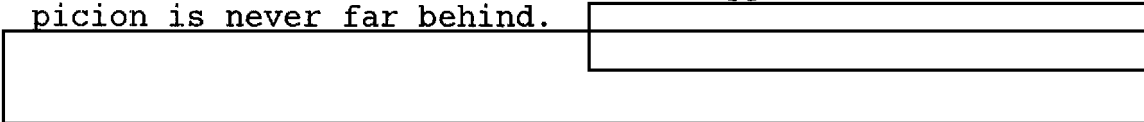
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Berlinguer's meeting with Tito at the old leader's retreat at Igalo produced a communique warmly applauding Berlinguer's "third way." Tito will presumably seek to broker Italian Communist relations with the Chinese party.

Berlinguer's trip appears to represent another step in the slow deterioration of Italian Communist relations with Moscow. The contradictory policy pursued by the Italians--autonomy from the Soviets mixed with a strong desire for polite and diplomatic relations--has again collided with Moscow's suspicion of a policy that is slowly but increasingly diverging from the aging Soviet leadership's ideas of orthodoxy. In this relationship, Soviet appreciation for Italian tact and desire for correct relations sometimes takes the upper hand, but suspicion is never far behind.



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Canadian Byelections: Setback for Trudeau

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's ruling Liberal Party, trounced in last week's byelections, faces the prospect of an uphill fight in next year's national election. The results of the byelections reflect voter concern over the continuing poor state of the economy, antipathy toward Trudeau, and the low priority accorded national unity--the issue that is Trudeau's strong point. Trudeau, whose party continues to hold a majority in parliament, has acknowledged the setback but insists his leadership of the Liberals is not in jeopardy.

The Liberals won two of the three seats contested in Quebec, their traditional stronghold, but lost all 12 byelections in English Canada. The Liberal Party machine suffered from infighting over nominations and slow starts in several Ontario districts. Even so, the loss of all seven seats contested in this key province--largely interpreted as "Trudeaphobia" on the part of the voters--shocked the Liberals. It both strengthened voices in the party calling for Trudeau to step down and fueled media speculation that he might do so. Such speculation appeared regularly through the summer as Trudeau continued to delay national elections in the face of poor Liberal showings in the polls.

Trudeau, however, has repeatedly denied that he will resign. Following last week's byelection losses, he reaffirmed his determination to stay on and said he would work to regain public confidence before the general election, which must be held next year. So far, the hierarchy of the party backs him. This support could diminish, however, if there is little or no improvement in Liberal popularity in Ontario in the next few months.

The Prime Minister is counting on two factors to bolster Liberal fortunes before general elections. He expects the economic package introduced this fall to provide an image of fiscal restraint and budgetary responsibility--an image that will bring the Liberals in

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line with the conservative mood now prevalent across Canada. So far it has elicited little enthusiasm from the public, but Trudeau thinks that may change by the end of the year.

Trudeau also hopes the beginning of the separatist Parti Quebecois referendum campaign will significantly heighten voter concern about national unity. National unity is Trudeau's strong suit, and he is widely believed to be the man best able to hold Canada together. The Prime Minister has heavily stressed the need for constitutional reform, arguing that economic uncertainty flows from political uncertainty and that the Canadian economy cannot achieve its highest level until the problem of national unity is solved. Trudeau's popularity soared following the separatist victory in Quebec two years ago, which raised fears over the future of Canada. A Gallup poll taken in September, however, showed only 6 percent of those queried were most concerned about national unity, while 76 percent were primarily concerned about unemployment and other economic problems.

Trudeau feels strongly that he should remain in office until he resolves the problem of Quebec separatism. He has rebounded from low popularity ratings several times during his 10 years in office and is unlikely to resign before general elections unless his Liberal Party colleagues overwhelmingly demand it.


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Greece: Results and Ramifications of Local Elections

The recently concluded two-stage local elections in Greece produced no clear indication of national trends. Leftist opposition candidates won in most of the larger cities and towns; the results elsewhere were mixed, as local issues and personalities prevailed over national political slogans.

Background and Results

Greek local elections involve the mayorships and municipal council seats of 264 cities and towns and some 5,800 villages. Because the political system is highly centralized, opposition parties tend to portray these elections as a plebiscite on the performance of the government in Athens. In addition, the majority voting system used at the local level compels them to work out alliances and pre-electoral agreements on candidate slates. The effect of this is a kind of "ganging up" on the party in power. The latter generally limits itself to containing the damage, often by minimizing the political character of the elections.

This combination of factors enabled the opposition parties to sweep the 1975 elections, but the opposition did not fare so well this time, largely because of bickering between the pro-Soviet Communist Party and Andreas Papandreou's Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). Thus, while the opposition won in such large cities as Athens, Piraeus, and Salonika, government-supported candidates and even some on the far right did well in many of the smaller towns and villages.

Athens a Test Case

The most heated contest was in Athens, where the government-backed candidate won a 42-percent plurality in the first round on 15 October. In the runoff on 22 October, however, he was defeated when the pro-Soviet Communists--whose candidate, the composer and erstwhile Eurocommunist Mikis Theodorakis, had received 16 percent

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of the vote in the first round--reluctantly lined up behind the candidate backed by a Papandreou-led coalition of Socialists, Eurocommunists, and some centrists. The coalition's man wound up with 57 percent of the vote.

The Athens contest was important not only because it is the capital and largest city, but because the parties' showing there in the 1977 national election approximated their performance countrywide. It was thought that the race in the capital would reveal shifts in voter preference. In particular, the breakup of the Union of the Democratic Center, PASOK's predecessor as the main opposition party, had raised the question whether that party's supporters would shift toward Papandreou or toward Prime Minister Karamanlis' moderately conservative New Democracy Party.

Karamanlis and Papandreou Vie for Centrist Vote

As it turned out, support for Karamanlis' party remained stable in the Athens voting. Its candidate finished with 43 percent of the vote in the second round, just one percentage point more than the party received in last year's parliamentary election. Elsewhere the results were similar. This could mean that Karamanlis, who has brought centrists into his government in an effort to preempt Papandreou and compensate for rightist defections from his own party, has not succeeded in attracting significant numbers of centrist voters. It is, however, too early to say this with certainty. For example, some centrists may have lined up behind the government, but their vote may have been offset by abstentions among the government's traditional supporters who are unhappy with recently enacted austerity and antitax evasion measures.

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Karamanlis' apparent lack of success does not necessarily mean that large numbers of centrists swung

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behind Papandreou. The aggregate first round tally of his coalition in Athens--40 percent--was only three percentage points more than the vote received by the same four parties in 1977. And while it is difficult to determine whether PASOK's own vote increased over the 23 percent it garnered last year, it seems unlikely that Papandreou gained more than a few percentage points. In any event he, like Karamanlis, is said to be unhappy with the election results.


The election made clear that, while Papandreou is willing to talk about cooperation with the pro-Soviet Communists--if only to appear supportive of opposition unity--he continues to believe that actual cooperation would further antagonize the military and would hamper his quest for power. For Papandreou, as for Karamanlis, the center continues to hold the greatest attraction as a source of new support. Recent stirrings by some prominent centrist personalities, however, suggest that the center, or at least a good part of it, may yet re-emerge in a political party strong enough to deprive Papandreou or Karamanlis of a clear-cut victory in the next general election.

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UN Economic Commission for Europe: Update on Status of Brezhnev's Proposals

The UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) continues to have problems with Soviet President Brezhnev's call made in late 1975--not long after the signature of the Helsinki agreement--for pan-European conferences on energy, transportation, and the environment. The Soviets have not gotten as much propaganda mileage from this effort as they had anticipated, but there has been a clash within the Western camp on tackling the problem of transboundary air pollution. At the ECE plenary in April that subject was cited along with low-waste/nonwaste technology as a likely item for the agenda of a high-level meeting; the ECE's senior advisers on environmental problems were instructed to make "every effort" to complete preparations for holding such a conference next year.

ECE Executive Secretary Stanovnik, a Yugoslav citizen, is in Washington today for consultations. He is a firm proponent of action leading to an East-West environmental conference under the auspices of the ECE, regarding its convocation as an indicator of support for the Helsinki accords. Stanovnik opposes Western delaying tactics but seems equally unhappy with Soviet efforts to make propaganda points.

The Nordic states are promoting a draft framework agreement on transboundary air pollution that includes a call for controls on, and eventual reduction of, sulphur emissions. Several members of the EC Nine have employed delaying tactics at meetings of the senior advisers, citing a need to await a review of current efforts to establish an air pollution monitoring system for Europe. The French, in opposing the Nordic proposal as "premature," have privately noted the high sulphur content of their imported oil.

Soviet domestic media and propaganda outlets have claimed that the West European industrialized states are reluctant to clean up the continent's environment. The

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Soviets, aware of the disarray in the Western camp, appear prepared to push air pollution as an agenda topic at a high-level meeting. Not unexpectedly, the proposal of the Soviets and their allies for action is much less far-reaching than the Nordic one; it would have the ECE merely store, collate, and report country-originated data.

After some prodding by the US, the Nordic States have stressed to Moscow the need to make meaningful emissions data available. Soviet officials may meet with representatives of several Western states in Oslo late next month to attempt to find a compromise. Dzherman Gvishiani, Deputy Chairman of the Soviet State Committee on Science and Technology and Premier Kosygin's son-in-law, has confided that the Soviet military must be involved in deciding what information can be provided, alleging "indirect military considerations" in revealing sources of pollution.

Brezhnev's other conference proposals, especially that on transportation, have made little headway, and are unlikely to do so at least until after the timing and content of an East-West conference on the environment have been resolved.

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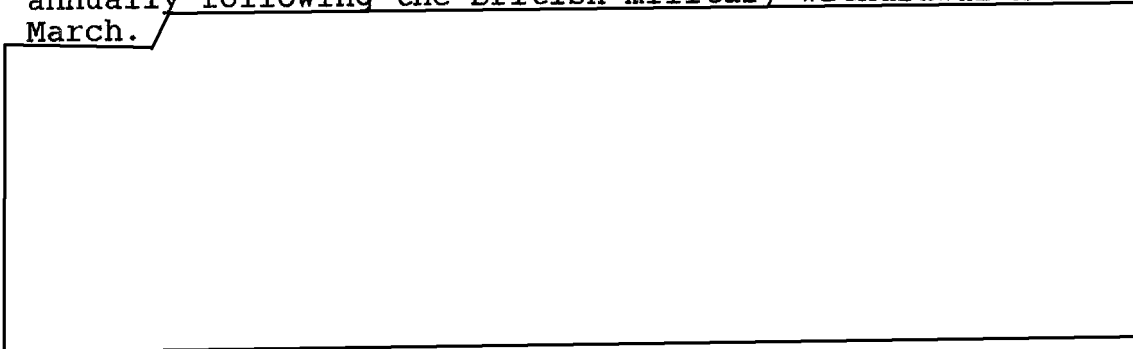
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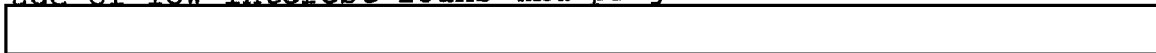
Malta: In his latest speech Prime Minister Mintoff again threatened that Malta will cooperate closely with Libya if France, West Germany, and Italy do not provide direct grants to help offset the \$70-80 million Malta will lose annually following the British military withdrawal next March.

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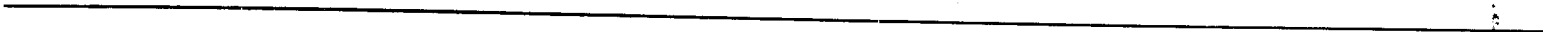
The Italians are now trying to work out an arrangement in which the West Europeans would agree among themselves on an aid package, consult the Libyans, and then approach Mintoff with a joint offer. The Italians have found the French skeptical, and anticipate a wary response from the West Germans. But Rome hopes to sell the idea as a way of coping with Mintoff's practice of playing off one side against the other. Now that the West Europeans have a better understanding of Mintoff's "Libyan option," they will probably increase pressure on him to drop his demand for budgetary aid and to negotiate instead a package of low-interest loans and project assistance.

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