RIVAL SWEDISH COMMUNIST DELEGATIONS IN MOSCOW: "OFFICIAL" CP PROTEST

By Kevin Devlin

Summary: The Swedish Communist Party (VPK) has protested to the CPSU over the presence at the 60th anniversary celebrations in Moscow of a rival Swedish communist delegation, representing a pro-Soviet splinter party, the APK. The protest says that by inviting this "small sectarian group," which broke away from the VPK in March 1977 after more than a decade of factionalist struggle, the CPSU has violated the principles of interparty relations laid down at the East Berlin conference in June 1976. The CPSU also invited to the celebrations two other pro-Soviet splinter parties, in place of the official communist parties of Australia (independent) and New Zealand (pro-Chinese).
The image of international communist solidarity and harmony under exemplary Soviet leadership, which the CPSU obviously sought to present during the 60th anniversary celebrations, has been marred not only by the Soviet refusal to allow Santiago Carrillo of the Spanish CP to deliver his prepared speech from the rostrum, but also by an interparty clash over the Soviet invitation of rival Swedish communist delegations. One of these represents the "official" Leftist Communist Party (Vaensterpartiet Kommunisterna -- VPK), long noted for its independence and now classified as one of the "Eurocommunist" parties. The other represents a pro-Soviet splinterparty, the Communist Workers' Party (Arbetarpartiet Kommunisterna -- APK), which broke away from the VPK in March. (It should perhaps be added that, to complete the communist spectrum in Sweden, there is also the Marxist-Leninist Swedish Communist Party -- SKP -- which in 1973 took over the original title of the VPK.)

According to various reports from Stockholm, (1) VPK Chairman Lars Werner, who headed his party's delegation to the celebrations, handed over to the CPSU on November 3 a strong letter of protest against the presence of the rival delegation. The letter expressed "astonishment" that the CPSU had established interparty relations with "a small sectarian group which has broken away from the VPK." The invitation to this splintergroup to take part in the anniversary celebrations was bluntly described as "a violation of the principles governing co-operation between communist and workers' parties, as affirmed by the Berlin Conference in 1976." The protest added that if these principles were not fully respected, co-operation between the VPK and the CPSU would be "impaired." It is not yet known how -- or if -- the CPSU has replied to this formal protest.

The formal split in the Swedish communist movement earlier this year came suddenly and rather unexpectedly after more than a decade of factional struggle between a progressive-independent majority and a conservative-pro-Soviet minority. At successive congresses it had been demonstrated that the pro-Soviet could command no more than a quarter to a third of the membership. (2) It did, however, have areas of local strength, notably in the northern mining province of Norrbotten -- where it produced at Lulaea the party's only daily newspaper, Norskensflamman (Northern Lights) -- and in the cities of Goeteborg and Malmö. For many years Norskensflamman had steadily

(1) See the reports in Dagens Nyheter of 4 November and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung of 5 November 1977.

(2) At the VPK congress in 1975 the present leader of the APK, Rolf Hagel, ran against Lars Werner for the chairmanship; he obtained 74 votes to Werner's 162.
criticized the "opportunist" VPK leadership and with equal steadiness supported Soviet policies on all occasions (including the invasion of Czechoslovakia, which the majority leadership condemned with particular vigor). Toward the end of 1976 Chairman Werner displayed a tougher attitude toward the conservative rebels by intervening in local power struggles, and having some people expelled. Nevertheless, many observers could see no convincing reason why the split should have occurred at that point, after the factional struggle had already dragged on for a decade of "unpeaceful coexistence."

**Soviet Backing?**

It was widely assumed that the pro-Soviet faction would not have taken this step without the covert approval of the Soviets. One of the best-informed students of the Scandinavian Left wrote: "Moscow has evidently come to the conclusion . . . that the prospects for 'taming' the Eurocommunists are extremely slight, and that it should therefore place its bets on groups that are indeed small and sectarian but also 'true and loyal.'" (3)

Some estimates suggested that about 7 per cent of the original party membership had joined the new splinterparty. It did at least get two of the VPK's seventeen deputies -- Rolf Hagel of Goeteborg, head of the APK, and Alf Loevenborg, Editor of Norskenflamm -- so that from the first it was represented in parliament.

Whether it would continue to be so represented was another matter. The fact is that the split represented a serious political setback not only for Swedish communism but for the Swedish Left in general. Under Swedish electoral law a party must have at least 4 per cent of the total vote to be represented in parliament. Before the elections of September 1976 the Communists, with 19 seats, had in effect kept the Social Democratic Party in power. In those elections, however, the Socialists and the VPK both suffered slight losses and together lost their overall majority, while the center-right parties gained enough to form a coalition government. The VPK vote stood at 4.7 per cent -- enough, as noted, to give it 17 seats, but getting uncomfortably close to the 4 per cent "hurdle." A public opinion poll taken shortly after the split gave the VPK 2.5 per cent of the total and the APK only 0.5 per cent -- which indicated that neither would clear the hurdle, and consequently made it less likely that Olof Palme's Socialists would return to power. (4)

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Splinterparty soon began to appear. In April the Polish agency PAP reported the formation of the APK in favorable terms, noting that the new party was based on "Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism," and that it wished to establish "close links with all the fraternal communist parties of the world on the basis of the documents of the Berlin Conference." (5) In May both the VPK and the APK celebrated rival versions of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the original Swedish CP. The CPSU did not send a delegation to either — but sent greetings telegrams to both, which in the circumstances was viewed as an affront to the VPK.

Such signs of Soviet favor for the Swedish splinterparty — like the energy which the Kremlin has expended in bringing about the recent "normalization" of relations with the formerly independent Dutch and Norwegian CPs — must doubtlessly be viewed against the background of Soviet concern over the ideological challenge of Eurocommunism. It also means the controversial extension to Europe of a divisive policy which the Soviets have in the past applied more unobtrusively to Oceania. At the 25th CPSU Congress, and again at the current anniversary celebrations, Australia was represented not by the independent Australian CP but by a pro-Soviet splinterparty, the Australian Socialist Party, and New Zealand not by the (pro-Chinese) New Zealand CP but, again, by a pro-Soviet splinterparty, the Socialist Unity Party.

The fact that none of the three splinterparties concerned has the faintest prospect of becoming a serious factor in the domestic political situation is evidently beside the point, as far as the Soviets are concerned. From their viewpoint it is evidently much better to have foreign communist parties that are "right though slight," rather than ones that are "wrong and strong."

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