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NON-RULING CPs/12

FRENCH CP: Party  
Foreign  
relations

26 August 1968

## THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY WEATHERS THE STORM

Summary: Any suggestions that the PCF seems to have backed down from its first criticism of the CPSU are proved wrong by the latest pieces in L'Humanité which suggest that there is a distinct gap between the CPSU's policies and Leninist principles.

With crisis comes turbulence. Not even the French Communist Party, as strongly committed to the principle of democratic centralism as it is,<sup>1</sup> could prevent a certain amount of confusion from creeping into the early statements made by its members on the Soviet intervention into Czechoslovakia.

The PCF's first Politburo statement determinedly pronounced the PCF's "reprobation" of the invasion, and ignored Soviet suggestions that it had taken place at the behest of unnamed Czechoslovak party and government leaders.<sup>2</sup> The second comment by the Party came in the aftermath of an extraordinary meeting of the Central Committee and this one seemed to back-track on the earlier positions taken. The intervention was "disapproved" but the PCF still insisted that they would continue to work for the strengthening of "the fraternal friendship links that have always united us with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union."<sup>3</sup> It appeared that the larger Central Committee contained sufficient staunchly pro-Soviet members to dilute the Party's opposition to the Warsaw Pact's invasion of a Socialist ally.

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1. See the reaffirmation of this principle in L'Humanité, 10 July 1968.
  2. L'Humanité, 21 August 1968.
  3. L'Humanité, 22 August 1968.

Since the, however, Etienne Fajon and Georges Marchais, two Politburo members of the PCF, denied that the second statement could be interpreted to reduce the impact of the first. As Fajon wrote in a L'Humanité editorial: "Our party has informed the fraternal parties concerned, at a proper time, of its opposition to any military intervention. It has taken a series of initiatives in consequence. It disapproves the intervention and it has said so with complete clarity."<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the reasons for such disagreement while serious "do not, however, efface fifty years of history." Marchais affirmed: "There is absolutely no difference between the assessment contained in the Politburo declaration and that of the Central Committee resolution."<sup>5</sup>

In the event, the two subsequent statements issued by members of the French Communist Party, official in that they have both been printed in the party organ L'Humanité, suggest that Marchais and Fajon were probably right. Differences of opinion undoubtedly exist within the leading body of the Party, nuances of tone may therefore differ depending on which Party body is issuing a statement, but the political line the PCF is taking on the issues at stake cannot be questioned. The latest statements have in effect been even more concrete in their condemnation of the Soviet leadership than the initial Politburo declaration.

Yves Moreau, one of the deans of L'Humanité, writing for the newspaper in its Sunday edition, began his piece by describing the affection he held for the Soviet Union. He reminded his readers that as "a militant communist for more than thirty years, nothing can be forgotten, nothing shall ever be forgotten of what we owe the country and the Party of Lenin."<sup>6</sup> In so doing he captured the emotional quandary in which most members of the PCF must find themselves as adherents of a political body which has drawn its life-blood from "the party of Lenin" for decades. Yet precisely by referring to the CPSU as "the Party of Lenin" Moreau emphasized that today the PCF could no longer subscribe to the policies of the Kremlin leadership for "the military intervention in Czechoslovakia was a break against the principles which we as communists consider fundamental: the respect of the sovereignty and the independence of each country, the respect of the free determination of each communist party." [Emphasis supplied]

On 26 August the PCF drew the consequences of its analysis; if principles had been violated, the only resolution of the

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4. L'Humanité, 24 August 1968.

5. Ibid.

6. L'Humanité, 25 August 1968.

conflict which would accord with normal inter-party relations would appear to be a return to the status quo ante. The Party, having criticized the CPSU and its allies, now for the first time committed itself to proposals for a resolution. These moreover, did not merely suggest that the talks in Moscow should lead to a compromise acceptable to both parties, a formulation used by some other non-ruling parties, they incorporated steps which were clearly in opposition to Soviet interests. The statement, issued as a Politburo communique, said that the PCF hoped the talks in Moscow would produce a positive solution. It continued:

By a positive solution, the Politburo means an agreement comprising before everything else the normalization of the situation in Czechoslovakia within the framework of the sovereignty of the Czechoslovak government and Party and their international obligations. This implies the withdrawal of the forces of intervention.<sup>7</sup>

In an accompanying editorial signed by Rene Andrieu, it was noted that "the military intervention has been a terrible mistake, whatever may have been the intentions of those who decided it. The question now is to avoid the worse..."

The worse one may assume is not only further bloodshed in Moscow, it is also the creation of a situation in which the PCF will find it necessary to disassociate itself completely from the current Soviet leadership. Certainly the PCF must already feel itself betrayed. One reliable report has suggested that the reason the PCF was able to adopt such a strong pro-Czechoslovak position before intervention was that Waldeck-Rochet, on his trip to Moscow earlier in the month, had been assured by the CPSU that there would be no intervention.<sup>8</sup> If the PCF finds itself in a situation in which its advice has gone unheeded, and its leaders have been double-crossed then, of course, it will be easier to swing the hesitant members of the Central Committee into line against Brezhnev's party. Such a contingency must already be envisioned. For the time being, however, Rochet and his comrades presumably hope against hope that a temporary resolution of the crisis will prevent them from having to admit to an even greater gap between the role of the Party as defined by Lenin and the acts of a Party as performed by Brezhnev et al.

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7. L'Humanité, 26 August 1968.

8. Nicholas Tomalin, The Sunday Times, 25 August 1968.