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FRANCE: Party

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THE ANATOMY OF A DEVIATION

Summary: Roger Garaudy's rebellion against the conservative positions of the French Communist Party was precipitated by the Czechoslovak drama, but not caused by it. This paper traces the roots of Garaudy's deviation from Communist orthodoxy, showing that it represents a return to the neglected ideals of Marxist humanism. Moreover, Garaudy is not alone in his challenge to orthodox dogmatism: his personal reappraisal is, rather, a symptom of a wider tendency in European communism.

The "Garaudy affair" in French communism is worth a closer look for several reasons. The first reason is that there are still some chapters to come. Roger Garaudy's latest book (1) is not his last book. The second reason is that this is not just a crisis of French communism: it is an aspect and therefore an illustration of the crisis in world communism. The third is that this is an excellent demonstration of a classic distortion: the deviationists, in the name of purity, are charging a purist with deviationism.

(1) Toute la vérité, Paris, 1970.

Garaudy is accused of revising Marx and Lenin. He is guilty only of reviving Marx and Lenin. And he claims his revival is necessary because the revisionism has already taken place, at the hands of Stalin and his successors. Garaudy has a case. It emerges if his "deviation" is traced back to its distant roots.

But, first, establish Garaudy's credentials. His own party recognized his merits as a Marxist when it named him head of its Marxist Study and Research Center. The Soviet party accorded him the title of a Leninist when it put him in charge of producing Moscow's 38-volume, French-language edition of Lenin's collected works. So Garaudy is no dilettante.

The seed of Garaudy's "deviation" was planted, of course, by Nikita Khrushchev. Garaudy has said that the secret speech "shattered the sphere of crystal in which we had so proudly sealed ourselves." Shaken in his faith, Garaudy went off in search of "what was fundamental in both Marx and Lenin."

Man: The Missing Measure

His return to the sources convinced him that what had been "fundamental" in Marx and Lenin, what had been smothered by Stalin, was "humanism." Man had been absent from the Marxism-Leninism that the Stalinists had imposed. The stress of Stalinist socialism had been centered on the structures. Man had been present only as the powerless victim of his conditions. Garaudy started to argue for a return to the human "essence" of Marxism-Leninism. This was a dozen years ago.

Garaudy's initial formulations were oblique. He spoke as the professor of philosophy rather than the member of the Politburo. He said, for example, that the fundamental philosophical sources of Marxism had been Kant, Fichte and Hegel and not Feuerbach, Diderot and Spinoza. The average party member shrugged and turned to the sports page. But not Garaudy's fellow-philosophers. A subterranean argument flared up in the party. Garaudy was resurrecting the idealists, diminishing the materialists.

Garaudy started to sharpen his point. By 1965, the foundation of today's "deviation" was virtually complete, at least insofar as it concerns the senior branch of the faith. In From Anathema to Dialogue (De l'anathème au dialogue), Garaudy produced chapter and verse from Marx and Engels to support his argument that placed man at the center of Marxism. He said Marxism was not a set of laws in which "the future is already written": it was "a methodology" by which man could create his own history. This was "one of the master-theses" dominant in the early works of Marx.

The last statement, with its reference to the early Marx, brought Garaudy into open conflict with another of the party philosophers, Professor Louis Althusser, who in the early 1960's was defending a diametrically opposed interpretation of the scriptures. In a series of books and articles, Althusser was arguing that there was a clear and vital "rupture" in the work of Marx in 1845. According to Althusser, all the pre-1845 works were "pre-Marxist." It was only with "The Theses on Feuerbach" that Marxism as a science had been created. The early, "immature" works of Marx could be ignored. Man, according to Althusser, was still only "a support of the structures." Garaudy was reviving the young Marx and putting the emphasis on man. Althusser was erasing the young Marx and keeping the stress on structures.

The clash came before the "court" of the Central Committee at Argenteuil in March, 1966. After a three-day debate, the leadership handed down an interim judgment. Both men had gone too far, but Garaudy in particular should be careful. His stress on man came close to "volunteerism." His definition of Marxism as a mere method was "reformist."

This was not an academic debate. It went to the heart of the problem of de-Stalinization. For example, the Althusser thesis of a "rupture" in the thinking of Marx, located in 1845, had the effect of suppressing "The 1844 Manuscripts," which Stalin himself had barred from the collected works of Marx. It virtually eliminated the concept of "alienation," so embarrassing to the Stalinists, who had replaced the alienations of capitalism by the new alienations of their brutalized socialism. Althusser, in effect, "dehumanized" Marxism and thus, in effect, provided a rationale for dehumanized socialism. In contrast, Garaudy argued that the science of the mature Marx had to be applied with the humanism of the young Marx. Marxism was a scientific method of achieving humanistic ends. Man was not just a victim of his

economic conditions, the object of a process governed by an infallible set of "scientific" laws. That approach made man nothing more than "a marionette" to be "manipulated" by the parties.

Where does this dispute stand today? What position has the French Communist Party adopted? The party's latest look at Marx is contained in a late-1968 book, Karl Marx, Our Contemporary (Karl Marx, notre contemporain), written by former Central Committee member Georges Cogniot, President of the party's "Maurice Thorez Institute." This book is authoritative: it carries a preface of praise from party chief Waldeck Rochet. And it bears little resemblance to the Garaudy attitude.

For example, discussing the Marxist debt to classical German philosophy, Cogniot concedes a certain role to Feuerbach and Hegel, but nowhere in his 220 pages does he mention either Kant or Fichte. "The 1844 Manuscripts" are covered in two pages in the Cogniot book. The concept of alienation is briefly sketched, but with the restrictive rider that, according to Marx, alienation is a product of capitalism that disappears once private ownership is suppressed.

As for man's role in the Marxist analysis, Cogniot says that man does make his own history, but in doing so he is only obeying "the laws of historic movement." Communism is not the product of "reason" but "the objectively determined result of the real movement of history." The motive force of social progress is situated in the material foundations of society. The approach is still heavily "determinist."

Which Lenin?

Garaudy has clearly failed to budge his party on Marx. How has he fared on Lenin?

For years, the Stalinists have drawn advantage from approaching Marxism through the narrow gate of Leninism. Leninism, selectively applied, justifies a restrictive reading of Marxism. But, again, Garaudy returned to the source. In the early 1960's, he was already citing Lenin as one of the authorities for his humanist view of Marxism. He gradually developed this argument until he was able to write, in the 1966 book Twentieth-Century Marxism (Le marxisme du XXe siècle), that Lenin had uncovered the essence and the fundamental inspiration of Marxism -- the initiative of the masses.

At first, Garaudy's revival of Lenin took the form of a mere affirmation. He did not present his supporting arguments until the beginning of 1968. It was then that he brought out a slim pocketbook on Lenin intended for university students of philosophy (Garaudy is Professor of Philosophy at Poitiers University). This little-noticed work (2) contained 107 pages. Half was devoted to a Lenin biography, bibliography and quotation. The other half was an essay by Garaudy.

Just as he argued in his previous books for a revival of the early Marx, Garaudy in this essay called for a revival of the later Lenin (or, at least, his version of the later Lenin). He said that in his earlier years as a revolutionary leader Lenin had been strongly influenced by Karl Kautsky who in Garaudy's view was a "dogmatist" during this period. Kautsky's influence, he argued, was clear in "What Is To Be Done?", which Lenin published in 1902. "There is nothing specifically Leninist in these theses on the avant-garde party," Garaudy said. "The concept is that of Kautsky, and Lenin expressly underlined it. Therefore, nothing would be more false or more dangerous than to restrict oneself to this work in defining the Leninist concept of the party." If Lenin at this period placed the stress on discipline and centralism, "it was not a question of principle but of the need to conduct the fight in the conditions of illegality imposed by Tsarist repression."

A point Garaudy particularly opposed in the Kautsky-Lenin concept laid down in 1902 was the claim that "socialist consciousness" did not arise spontaneously within the working class but had to be instilled "from outside" by the party. His analysis was also critical of another Lenin work cherished by the Stalinists: "Materialism and Empirio-criticism," published in 1907. In particular, he said, Lenin's "theory of reflection" was outdated and lent itself to dogmatic manipulation.

According to Garaudy, Lenin was marked by Kautsky's concepts right up to 1914. It was only in 1915 that "the decisive moment" occurred in the developments of Lenin's philosophy. This was the year that Lenin, after re-reading Hegel, produced "The Philosophical Notebooks," a book which Stalin had barred from the collected works of Lenin, just as he had barred "The 1844 Manuscripts" from the collected works

(2) Lénine (Presses Universitaires de France).

of Marx. Garaudy found "The Philosophical Notebooks" of vital importance because it was here, he said, that Lenin had "re-evaluated idealism" and identified Kant, Fichte and Hegel among the fundamental sources of Marxism.

For the final decade of his life, Garaudy went on, Lenin's work was characterized by a close union of authentically Marxist dialectic and "permanent attention to all the signs of the historic initiative of the masses for whom the socialist revolution creates radically new conditions ... permitting each man and each woman to become the active subject and creator of a truly human history." This, said Garaudy, was "the essence of Leninism."

The 1968 essay went on to document the later Lenin's increasing stress on the initiative of the masses. For example, Lenin had said that the essential characteristic of the socialist state was "the accession of the workers .. to the daily task of managing the state." He had said that the role of the unions was "to defend the workers against their state."

Garaudy also examined the Leninist example in Can One Be Communist Today? (Pent-on être communiste aujourd'hui?), also published at the beginning of 1968. He produced texts to show that Lenin had been ready to accept "the peaceful struggle of the parties" (in the plural) in post-revolutionary Russia, that he had recognized the right in principle for a minority to criticize the policies of the majority, that he had held that socialism was not merely government for the people but also "government by the people."

This clearly is not the Lenin whose centenary is being celebrated this year by the Soviet party. Neither is it the Lenin recognized by the French Communist Party.

The French party view is again provided by Georges Cogniot, who shapes up increasingly as the "anti-Garaudy" of French communism. Last month, Cogniot produced a two-volume study on Lenin, which again bears the seal of party approval in the form of another preface by Waldeck Rochet.

Cogniot accepts "What Is To Be Done?" as pure Leninism. He also accepts it as the basic text on party organization. He says this work, together with the 1904 pamphlet, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," set the rules from which the communist parties today draw their inspiration. In particular, Cogniot endorses the principle that the party's role is to instil socialist consciousness into the masses "from outside."

The party study also covers "Materialism and Empirocriticism" at some length, supporting the controversial concept of "reflection" and stressing the importance of the book as a demonstration of Lenin's rejection of all idealistic attitudes and his determined support for materialism. By contrast, the crucial work in Garaudy's view, "The Philosophical Notebooks," is given only a few paragraphs in Cogniot's double-volume study of over 400 pages. In the same way, the historic initiative of the masses, which Garaudy considers to be the key concept, the very "essence" of Leninism, is virtually absent from Cogniot's analysis. It is mentioned, but in a passage where Cogniot offers, as a shining examples of the Leninist thesis in practice ... the Soviet Union of today.

Revision or Revival?

This is a very sketchy outline of an extremely dense debate but Garaudy's point is clear. He urges a revival of Marx and Lenin in their totality. He wants his and other parties to abandon the selective Stalinist "digest" of Marxism-Leninism. It can be argued that his approach is just as selective as Stalin's. Stalin stressed the late Marx and the early Lenin. Garaudy emphasizes the early Marx and the later Lenin. But Garaudy's approach can be defended. The method laid down by the post-1845 Marx has to be applied in the spirit of the pre-1845 Marx. It is a deviation to use only the means offered by the later Marx while ignoring the ends defined by the earlier Marx. Similarly, it is a deviation to freeze into a dogma the practices of the early Lenin, which were dictated by conditions, while erasing the preachings of the later Lenin, which represented what Lenin wanted to do as opposed to what he was forced to do.

But Garaudy has not founded his argument merely on the texts. Since "Anathema to Dialogue," he has insisted also on the context: the scientific and technological revolution. What the texts permit, this context demands.

Thus, the argument of man, victim of his condition becomes indefensible in a world where man, through his control of science, is increasingly the master of his conditions. The view of Marxism as an "absolute truth" becomes ridiculous in an era where the truth, as represented by the sum total of man's knowledge, is undergoing rapid and incessant expansion. And the view of Leninism as a fiat in favor of centralization becomes suicidal in conditions which make decentralization the sine qua non of economic progress and political effectiveness.

These positions of Garaudy all pre-date the drama of Czechoslovakia. They offer the complete explanation of his attitudes towards that event.

The model of socialism the Czechoslovaks erected during the Prague spring was the return to the fundamental that Garaudy had been urging. The aggression by which the Soviets stifled that model was the return of the Stalinist perversion that Garaudy had been opposing. Dubcek's successes showed the worth of the Czechoslovak model. Brezhnev's aggression showed the evils inherent in the Soviet system. This was all that Garaudy said in August 1968. It was only because his party refused to draw the lessons from this demonstration of the good and the bad that Garaudy started to go further. But the basis for his present positions is fidelity to Marx and Lenin.

Moreover, Garaudy is not alone. His personal reappraisal is a symptom of a more general movement in world communism. Garaudy is not a leader of this movement. He may not even be among its major figures. But he is representative of a distinct trend.

Thus, the debate on Marxist humanism attracted such people as Poland's Adam Schaff, Czechoslovakia's Karel Kosek, Italy's Umberto Cerroni.

Althusser's attempt to re-structure Marx was opposed by, among others, Stefan Morawski of Poland, Jorge Semprun of Spain and Cesare Luporini of Italy.

The need to draw conclusions from the technological revolution has been urged by, among others, Ernst Fischer of Austria, Rudi Supek of Yugoslavia and, of course, Radovan Richta and Ota Sik of Czechoslovakia.

The works of Lenin have been re-read beyond the Stalinist schema by Zdenek Mylnar of Czechoslovakia and Spanish party leader Santiago Carillo.

The problems of socialist bureaucracy have been tackled by such people as Andreas Hegedus of Hungary, Mihailo Markovic of Yugoslavia and naturally by almost every theoretician of the Prague Spring; and all these are only examples.

Maybe such people did not arrive at broadly convergent conclusions by way of individual research. Maybe the trend that exists is simply the result of an international interchange of ideas. But even that shows that those ideas are both communicable and convincing. This is worth underlining, since it is a battle of ideas that is underway. The Soviets gave a powerful argument to the Garaudys when they used force against Prague. And by the same action they admitted that they were fresh out of arguments themselves.

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