

MUNICH, 15 November 1971 (CAA/X)

Brezhnev's visit to France draws attention to some of the problems facing the West European Communists.

The first reports in August of an impending high-level Soviet visit to France suggested that both President Podgorny and Mr Brezhnev, the party General Secretary, would be going to Paris. But the official announcement revealed that Brezhnev alone would lead the Soviet delegation at the end of October—thus setting the unusual precedent of a party leader reciprocating the visit of a Head of State (President Pompidou was in the Soviet Union in October, 1970), as well as confirming Brezhnev's prominent rôle in Moscow's current diplomatic offensive. Throughout October, Soviet Press comment made much of the deepening ties between France and the USSR, claiming in particular that the two countries were already in close harmony on such topics as the need for a European security conference. Winning support for the early convening of this conference was clearly a major aim of Brezhnev's trip.

Within the ranks of the French Communist Party (PCF), opinions are probably more mixed about the visit. It might show the Soviet party leader as a world statesman dedicated to the "search for peace", but it also underlines Moscow's readiness to do business with a bourgeois government rather than support local Communists in opposition. Nevertheless, the French Communist Press put a better face on the visit than it had on President Pompidou's Soviet tour (which it largely ignored), and on October 6 the PCF Political Bureau greeted it as an event of "very great importance", at the same time claiming that the French "people" hoped that their government would take further steps towards closer co-operation with the USSR in the interests of peace and security. The PCF's main concern in recent weeks, however, has been to assert its own potentialities as a ruling party—notably with the publication in mid-October of its 200-page "Programme for a Democratic Government of Popular Union". A more symbolic gesture was the party's move two months earlier to a new six-storey building designed by

pto

the architect, Oscar Niemeyer. This was clearly intended to enhance its image as a streamlined, forward-looking political body.

Presenting the new programme to the Press on October 11, Georges Marchais, the PCF's acting Secretary-General, said the aim was not merely to adapt capitalism or to "chatter about Socialist self-management", but to abolish capitalist property and to ensure that the working class and its allies exercised full power by giving them control over the management of their affairs. Without the Communist Party there could be no real social or economic progress, he asserted; and it was because of the party's awareness of its national responsibilities that it had launched this major initiative of "national significance", designed to bring about the formation of a government of "popular union" in which the Communists would have the place they deserved.

Remedy for isolation

The appeal for a united left-wing front in France is a familiar plank in the PCF's platform, dictated by the party's awareness of its isolation and of the prospect of an indeterminate period in opposition unless it joins forces with other groups. At the 12th Congress in 1950, the veteran PCF leader, Maurice Thorez, introduced a programme of "national revival" designed to attract the widest possible support. The Communists' latest document is more confident in tone, as well as longer and more comprehensive in the remedies it puts forward for France's alleged ills. But as in past schemes, the party's remoteness from the realities of power is apparent in its ambitious promises and the lack of detail on the cost, though some measures for financing the policies are mentioned in section four.

Reflecting Moscow's current domestic priorities, the PCF declares that raising living standards must stand in the forefront since "nothing is further from the notion of a really popular policy than that the transformation of society should lead to austerity". Thus an undertaking is given on economic expansion, while the ordinary worker is wooed with promises of a freeze on rents and some prices, a 40-hour week, a minimum wage of 1,000 francs a month, the construction of 700,000 new homes a year and free parking—or transport to work paid for by the employer. A hint of where some of the money would come from for this blueprint was given in proposals for much heavier taxes on large fortunes and profits and the abolition of fiscal privileges for unearned income. But despite

live

a pledge that a Communist government would extend nationalisation of the big industrial and banking groups, the document states that an important private sector would remain—a point clearly intended to reassure small shopkeepers and the many other owners of small businesses. On agriculture, too, the programme stresses that the party's "new policy" would give priority to helping small and medium farmers, as well as promoting co-operation.

In foreign policy, the defence of France's national sovereignty and independence are given prominence and there is a tacit endorsement of the present government's attitude to world monetary questions in the pledge to control foreign exchange and other external financial operations. But the programme goes further than any other French party in demanding the country's disengagement from all military pacts, above all withdrawal from NATO, the abolition of its nuclear *force de frappe* and new efforts to create a truly "democratic and peaceful" Europe through a collective security system. The PCF states that it will not seek a unilateral break with the Common Market, but undertakes to work for a revision of the Rome Treaty in order to "democratise" the EEC institutions and for "much broader co-operation with all countries without discrimination"—presumably referring primarily to the Soviet bloc. In general the programme says little about relations with Communist States, possibly because the PCF leaders favour the government's current policy of friendly relations with these States and prefer to avoid provoking speculation about whether Brezhnev's doctrine of limited sovereignty would apply to a Communist France.

Similarly, although Marchais was candid in explaining that the aim was to establish an "advanced political and economic democracy" as the first stage to building Communism in France, he glossed over the question of whether the process could be halted or reversed once started. The programme says that the President should continue to be elected by universal suffrage, but would no longer be able to assume special powers in an emergency; all parties could act freely within the framework of the law, while free elections and a plurality of parties would always form part of a French democratic system. There was a warning, however, that the active rôle of the workers in political life would give the government and the parliamentary majority the "necessary force" to overcome the resistance of "reaction". Finally, the French voter is assured that freedom of expression, of association, of worship and of informa-

tion would be fully guaranteed—though the frequent breaches of citizens' rights in the Soviet Union reported by the dissidents underline the gulf between constitutional guarantees and reality under a Communist régime.

The emphasis laid by Marchais and other PCF spokesmen on their rôle as political "unifiers" and their denial of any desire for a monopoly of power are specifically geared to their campaign for a united left-wing front, notably through a common programme with the new Socialist Party (PS) formed last June out of the old SFIO party led by Alain Savary and M. Mitterrand's *Convention des Institutions Républicaines*. At that time, the Socialists agreed to reopen the dialogue with the Communists, but Mitterrand warned that his programme would not be ready until early 1972 and that no final agreement could be reached until the PCF gave adequate assurances about its attitudes to sovereignty, democratic liberties and free elections. While reiterating that the Left needs the co-operation of the Communists if it is to come to power, Mitterrand has shown no eagerness to work for closer ideological ties with the PCF or to commit his party to a common platform with it—one effect of which would be to make other alliances more difficult for the Socialists. At a Press conference on October 14, he commented that the PCF had still failed to define its concept of democratic life within a Socialist society. A week later the Socialist Party's Executive Bureau defined its own criteria for unity of the Left. Noting that its programme would not be ready before the party's National Convention in March, 1972, it regretted the present attitude of the Communist Party which it saw as harmful to union.

Referendum problem

In Italy, too, the sincerity of the Communists' professed allegiance to democratic principles is a major point at issue in the attitude of the Socialist Party (PSI) to co-operation with the PCI, though there is no immediate prospect of a united front while the Centre Left government (which includes Socialists, Christian Democrats and Social Democrats) survives. However, the whole question of political alliances has again come to the fore with the preparations for the Presidential election on December 9. In particular, the dispute over the advisability of submitting the Divorce Bill passed last December to a referendum (which could abrogate the Bill) is being reflected in the choice of Presidential candidates. The Communists hope that the referendum issue can be removed from

leese

the electoral campaign, mainly it would seem because they prefer to stand alongside the Christian Democrats as defenders of family life and the Church and to demand changes in the divorce law (thus sabotaging a referendum) rather than join the other lay parties in defending the Bill at all costs.

More generally, the danger of a campaign geared to the referendum is that it might upset the uneasy alliance between the Christian Democrats and non-Communist Left which sustains the Centre-Left administration and helps to maintain democracy in Italy. By a large majority the Socialists voted at the end of their Central Committee meeting on October 9 to continue to co-operate with the Christian Democrats in a Centre-Left coalition. But they also demanded that it should accept constructive support from the Communists (in order to avoid a threat from the Right) and be ready to seek "new balances"—apparently meaning a more active Communist rôle alongside the government. Earlier in the month, the National Council of the Christian Democrat Party had formally ruled out any alliance with the Communists and renewed its commitment to the coalition, naming Republicans, Social Democrats and Socialists as "essential components of the alliance".

The Social Democrats reacted to the PSI's recommendation with an olive branch from their Chairman, Mario Tanassi, who appealed to the Socialists in an interview with the magazine *Epoca* to try to find a bridge between the two parties (which split in 1968) in order to maintain the coalition, at least until the 1973 general election. He assured the Socialists that he did not favour their replacement in the coalition by the Liberals and said he would not accept a minority Christian Democrat government or seek any advancement in the date of the election. So far there has been no response from the PSI. Its own proposal, however, brought a speedy welcome from the Communists, who see it as a move in the direction of an alternative government of the Left which they have long been demanding. Knowing that there is no prospect of enlisting the Social Democrats in a united front, they have directed their efforts towards a "broad alliance" embracing all "progressive forces", both lay and Catholic, and centring on the "working class"—i.e. the Communist Party. Repeating this theme on October 10, the party newspaper *L'Unità* said that the PSI's vote confirmed the country's desire to take a step forward and the underlying tenacity of the Socialist tradition. But the Communists' awareness of their unpopularity as political partners was reflected in *L'Unità*'s denial that the PCI aimed to revive the old idea of a "popular front" and in its attack on the veteran Socialist leader, Pietro Nenni, for reminding Italians of the unhappy history of Socialist collaboration with the Communists in the past.

llw 14/8/78