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(World Communist Movement)



personal fidelity to the latter. He was, for example, the only /PCF/ leader at the time of the Hungarian tragedy [in November 1956] to express a more personal note in an article in l'Humanité: more than his colleagues, he stressed the depth of popular discontent and the responsibility of the Hungarian party and state leadership. As a realist, he understood that to change the party one had to become Secretary-General. And for a time his approach was to prove profitable. (6)

Despite these subtle shifts of emphasis, Thorez himself evidently had no doubts about Waldeck Rochet's orthodoxy. In 1961 the veteran leader designated him as his chosen successor by creating for him the new post of Deputy Secretary-General. At the party's next (17th) congress in May 1964, he became Secretary-General, while the aged Thorez assumed the new post of President two months before his death. With the death of Togliatti in August 1964 and the ouster of Khrushchev in October, winds of change were blowing in the communist world; and a bold national leader could have taken advantage of them, as Luigi Longo of Italy did in publishing Togliatti's Yalta Memorandum.

The prudent, patient Rochet was not such a man. Moreover, conservative elements in the leadership were too strong for him to take bold initiatives even if he had wanted to. One important factor was that at the 1961 congress a younger, tougher, up-and-coming apparatchik named Georges Marchais had been secretary for party organization; and his influence within the leadership increased markedly from late 1964, as the conservative (or pro-Soviet) elements tended to look to him as the man who could block Rochet's rather vague aspirations to a strategy of reform and leftist alliance. A good example of this was the internal crisis in 1965 and 1966 over the independent, divergent positions adopted by the Union of Communist Students (UEC), partly under the influence of Italian communist ideas. (7) At the UEC congress of 1965 an organizational counteroffensive led by Roland Leroy and Marchais produced the defeat of the student leadership, to be followed by a wave of expulsions and the return of the remaining students to traditional docility; but the party would pay for this Pyrrhic victory in May 1968.

On other levels, Rochet's reformist impulses had some effect, notably, it seems, in bringing about genuine debates within the Politburo. (8) Potentially more important was the Argenteuil Central Committee plenum of March 1966, when the PCF committed itself to complete cultural freedom and to political pluralism under French socialism, while at the same time a number of speakers

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(6) Ibid.

(7) See Richard Cornell, "Rebellion of the Young," Problems of Communism, September-October 1965, pp. 11-17.

(8) See Robrieux, Histoire Interieure du Parti Communiste, Vol. II, pp. 635-636.

exemplified a new internal pluralism by criticizing Politburo member Roger Garaudy, the leading champion of these ideas. In his closing speech Waldeck Rochet declared that "in the socialist society of tomorrow, the state should be secular (9); freedom of worship and religious beliefs should be guaranteed, like all other fundamental freedoms, against all persecution and administrative repression"; and these guarantees should include

freedom of thought, freedom of assembly and association, freedom to strike; and full political rights for the democratic parties in power, as well as for those who are in the opposition and accept and respect the laws of the new socialist state. (10)

Rochet's most notable contribution to the evolution of the PCF, however, probably lay in his efforts to bring about a leftist alliance with the Socialists. In late 1965 he swung the party behind the presidential candidature of a young (and at that time nonsocialist) politician named François Mitterrand, with whom he established a warm personal relationship. Unexpectedly, the alliance forced President de Gaulle into a run-off vote. The PCF was the stronger partner in the alliance (22.5% of the vote against 19% for the Leftist Federation); but within a few years, Mitterrand was to begin building a new Socialist Party, and by the time of Waldeck Rochet's death the PCF was quite clearly the weaker partner in a leftist regime.

#### Prague Spring

On the interparty level, Rochet presided over a reconciliation between the PCF and the Italian party, after years of open distrust and rivalry; personal meetings between him and Longo in May 1965 and May 1966 helped to improve relations. But the PCF never followed the PCI in undertaking any radical criticism of Soviet practices and policies.

Early in 1968 this basic pro-Soviet orientation was put to the test by developments in Czechoslovakia. The PCI backed the reforms from the first, and by March 1968 the French (and other Western CPs) had joined the Italians in sympathetic coverage of the Czechoslovak program of "socialist democratization." As awareness of the PCF's political stake in these developments grew, the French were led to go farther. In mid-July, as leaders of the five interventionist regimes were meeting in Warsaw to draft a coercive letter condemning the Czechoslovak reforms as "completely unacceptable," Waldeck Rochet flew to Moscow in the company of two PCI envoys, Gian Carlo Pajetta and Carlo Galuzzi. During the three-day talks, as an Italian spokesman later revealed, they warned "the parties concerned . . . that for us only a

(9) As used by Secretary-General Longo at the Italian CP's congress in January 1966, this concept means that the state should not be committed to any doctrine or philosophy, including Marxism-Leninism.

(10) See William McLaughlin, "Regionalism and Revisionism in Western Europe," Free World Analysis Research Report, RFE, Munich, 17 March 1966.

political solution was admissible and that any kind of armed intervention [would be] unacceptable." (11) A few days later the PCF Central Committee sent the CPSU a letter warning that "any kind of armed intervention [would be] unacceptable." (12) According to the well-informed ex-Communist Pierre Daix, Waldeck Rochet had already "obtained from Brezhnev his word as a Bolshevik that there would be no armed intervention." (13) It should also be noted, however, that on his return from Moscow Waldeck Rochet flew to Prague where (it was later learned) he lectured Dubcek on the folly of overdoing liberalization. In November 1969, when Waldeck Rochet's incapacitating illness had already begun, a PCF delegation visiting Prague handed over the protocol of these Rochet-Dubcek talks; and in early 1970 spokesmen for the Husak regime made it clear that this material was being used against Dubcek. (14) It was surely not Rochet but his successor who was responsible for this rather ignoble move.

The Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia in August 1968 was a severe psychological blow for Waldeck Rochet; and it may be that his political and physical decline can be dated to that brutal move. The party did, of course join in the Western communist chorus against the invasion; but it was significant that the Politburo's initial "reprobation" was somewhat toned down to the "disapproval" of the Central Committee. That negative judgment would never be withdrawn and was, in fact, reaffirmed on the 10th anniversary; but in marked contrast to the Italian and Spanish CPs the French party tacitly accepted the Soviet-imposed "normalization" of Czechoslovakia.

In a warm commemorative tribute, the long-time Paris correspondent of the PCI's newspaper has recalled how Waldeck Rochet had received Secretary-General Longo and Gian Carlo Pajetta at the end of August 1968 and joined them in expressing "unequivocal condemnation of the military intervention of the Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops." He suggested that that marked "the birth of the democratic conception of the process of socialist transformation in Europe and of relations within the communist movement that later was given the generic title of

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- (11) Giuseppe Boffa, in l'Unità, 10 September 1968.
  - (12) The sending of this letter of 23 July 1968 was confirmed and its substance indicated in an unsigned statement dated September 1 and published in the August-September 1968 issue of the PCF's theoretical journal, Cahiers du Communisme.
  - (13) Pierre Daix, Les Hérétiques du P.C.F. (Paris: Laffont, 1980), p. 242.
  - (14) See Kevin Devlin, "Rewriting Secret History: The PCF and Czechoslovakia," Free World Analysis Report No. 0583, RFE, 13 May 1970.



Eurocommunism." (15) Robrieux, emphasizing Rochet's role as champion and pioneer of the leftist alliance, went further (too far, one might think) in describing him as "the first and the only true [French] Eurocommunist." (16)

### End of a Brief Era

By late 1968 Rochet's deceptively promising leadership was already in its last phase. In June 1969 he and Marchais led a delegation to Moscow for the world communist conference, but on arrival he was taken to the hospital for a kidney operation. It was Marchais who spoke for the PCF, saying nothing about Czechoslovakia; he who was one of only three communist leaders allowed to hold a press conference in the Kremlin, the others being Husak of Czechoslovakia and Kadar of Hungary. Here, clearly, was the man the Soviets wanted to see heading this important Western party.

L'Humanité took 12 years to inform party members that "the first symptoms of an organic neurological disease," still unnamed, had been detected by Waldeck Rochet's doctors in October 1968. By the end of that fateful year, Marchais -- and, one can perhaps presume, the Soviets -- knew that the Rochet era was ending. As the party now admits, "a very grave disease finally removed [Waldeck Rochet] from all activity in November 1969." (17) Robrieux, citing a private party source, claimed that on learning of this, the Politburo decided to install a collective leadership for the