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### DIFFICULT DAYS FOR THE FRENCH CP

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Summary: The French government's expulsion of 47 Soviet diplomats and officials accused of espionage has further weakened the political position of the French CP, the weaker partner in a Socialist-dominated government. Embarrassment was evident in the party's very failure to react to this development. Secretary-General Marchais promptly said that it would have no effect on the PCF's participation in the coalition government. The new austerity program, which the party must support in general while criticizing specific aspects, has also caused unrest in the communist ranks, and this has found expression in an internal document criticizing the leadership's attitude to the Socialist Party.

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The French government's expulsion of 47 Soviet diplomats and officials accused of espionage activities has highlighted the difficult position of the French Communist Party as the decidedly weaker partner in a Socialist-dominated coalition. The leading French newspaper sums it up crisply:

The expulsion of the Soviet diplomats has one positive significance in domestic politics; it frees M. Mitterrand, if that were necessary, from any suspicion that his freedom of action would be limited by his alliance with the PCF. (1)

The embarrassment of the communist leadership was abundantly demonstrated by its reaction -- or, rather, its lack of reaction. Secretary-General Georges Marchais happened to be in Athens for talks with Premier Papandreou when the news broke. Asked whether this development might lead to the withdrawal of the two communist ministers and two secretaries of state from the government, he replied (without, apparently, having consulted the rest of the party leadership): "Certainly not. We are participating on the basis of an agreement on the policy that the French people wanted in 1981, and we will continue to do so." He said that he had not been informed about the expulsions in advance and had no information about this "complex problem." Moreover, while other French newspapers commented at length on this dramatic development, the PCF's l'Humanité offered no editorial comment. Its report did, however, observe that the expulsions "threaten, unfortunately, to cause a grave deterioration in relations between the two countries in every field, and to damage the economic interests of them both, as well as the cause of peace and disarmament." (2) André Lajoinie, leader of the PCF's parliamentary group, said: "We are against all foreign interference, by secret services or others, from whatever side."

This mild expression of concern emphasizes the weakness of the PCF as a coalition partner and the political difficulties with which it is now coping -- for the roundup of Soviet diplomats with unconventional duties is merely the latest in a series of blows that the party has suffered in the past two years. The party's disastrous showing in the presidential elections of April 1981 and in the legislative elections that followed marked the failure of an essentially anti-Socialist strategy that the PCF leadership had adopted some four years earlier. The strategy that replaced it -- of participation in a leftist regime as the weaker partner -- had its own dangers and difficulties, however. It is hardly too much to say that they could enter the government only on the terms laid down by the victorious President Mitterrand, particularly with regard to foreign affairs. In this area, the President soon showed himself much more ready to criticize Soviet policies and resist Soviet pressures than his center-right predecessor, Giscard d'Estaing,

(1) Le Monde editorial, 7 April 1983.

(2) L'Humanité, 6 April 1983.

had been, as he showed by his firm stand on Afghanistan, Poland, and Western rearmament.

Mitterrand and his Socialist Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy have tacitly allowed the PCF to adopt divergent positions on some of these foreign policy issues: for example, by refusing to join the Socialists and other parties in demonstrations against the military takeover in Poland. The weight of embarrassing compromise lies heavily on the communist side of the uneasy alliance. This is particularly true of the thorny questions of defense and East-West military imbalances. At a press conference on February 23 Marchais claimed that the PCF had "made completely its own the policy of the French government" on defense and Euromissiles, adding that its goal was to have "neither Pershings and cruises nor SS-20s" (resisting the suggestion that this amounted to President Reagan's zero option). L'Humanité, however, has at least indicated disagreement with President Mitterrand's firm rejection of the Soviet demand that the French force de frappe (which the PCF stopped opposing only in 1977) be included with the British nuclear force in the Geneva negotiations. (3) Right-wing critics have an easy target when they point to the inconsistency between L'Humanité's enthusiastic support for the antinuclear Easter demonstrations in West European countries and the party's claimed commitment to the French government's defense policies. (4)

Austerity Program. Another source of difficulty for the PCF is the austerity program that Premier Mauroy and his Economics/Finance Minister Jacques Delors have just introduced, in the wake of the third devaluation of the franc since the Left came to power. The party publications have had to combine general support for the policy with criticism of specific aspects, in response to the widespread discontent among the masses, to whom the party looks for a revival of its much diminished strength. This dilemma is marked in a series of six articles in the latest issue of the party weekly. (5) In general, the communist line is that the policy of austerity is, indeed, necessary, but that it must be "improved and completed" by further measures to ease the burden on the poorer sectors while taking more from the wealthy. In doing so, the party not only edges back toward its traditional stance of speaking for the underprivileged and exploiting popular discontent, but also tends to present itself as the vigilant guardian of the "real change" that should accompany a leftist regime. Here there is a certain division of labor between the party and the communist-controlled CGT labor federation, with the latter taking a more militant stand. A member of the CGT secretariat, in an article

- (3) An editorial in L'Humanité of 4 April 1983 said of President Reagan's latest proposals that he had "forgotten to place in the balance one whole sector of his own strength and that of his allies," an obvious reference to the force de frappe.
- (4) See Charles Rebois, "Defense: The Double Game of the CP," Le Figaro, 5 April 1983.
- (5) Révolution, 1-7 April 1983.



in the party daily, has pointedly told French workers: "You have things to say to the government. . . . You have things to impose everywhere so that you may be heard, so that your claims may be brought forward and your aspirations take shape." (6)

If the hardening of the CGT's position speaks of discontent among the workers, the party's onerous efforts to reconcile its own political and ideological interests with participation in the government have aroused unrest within its own ranks. As Le Monde reports, (7) an anonymous group of "militants holding or having held important positions of responsibility in the party and in the trade union movement" has been circulating within the PCF a document that bluntly challenges the leadership's policies. The text is presented as a contribution to the discussion within the party on the disappointing results of the recent municipal elections, when the PCF lost control of 15 major cities; a Central Committee plenum on this subject will be held on April 19 and 20.

The leftist militants in question explained that they had been regretfully obliged to remain anonymous, "not wishing to be made to 'place ourselves outside the party,' in accordance with the original and antistatutory formula used nowadays." (8) Developing their criticism of the leadership's policies, they said that while the leftist government had some achievements to its credit, "the inadequacies and purely negative aspects are numerous," and the Mitterrand regime had failed to "govern truly on the Left."

The main target of the attack was the Socialist Party (PS), described as "fundamentally a reformist party, with all that implies with regard to leanings to the Right." In dealing with it, the PCF would indeed have to make compromises, "but without compromising ourselves." It should remain in government, but not at any price. Calling for a "free and open debate" within the party on these issues, the document pointedly cited a statement by Marchais's predecessor, Waldeck Rochet, rejecting the idea of "a gradual transformation of capitalism through the accumulation of partial reforms."

It remains to be seen whether there will be any significant response in the ranks of the party to this manifesto. Previous internal challenges to the leadership, from whichever flank, have not been particularly successful. Nevertheless, the anonymous collective document is one more sign, among many, that the PCF has more difficult days ahead of it.

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- (6) Louis Viannet, "It Is Not the Moment To Down Arms," l'Humanité, 5 April 1983.
- (7) Le Monde, 7 April 1983.
- (8) This was the measure used in the fall of 1981 against the dissident Communist Henri Fiszbin and other members of the anti-Marchais movement, Rencontres Communistes.