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FRANCE: Party

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GARAUDY, TILLON SEEK TO RALLY PCF OPPOSITION

(See end for summary)

Roger Garaudy, Charles Tillon and other former leaders of the French Communist Party (PCF) have launched a movement to rally "opposition" forces inside and outside the party through a network of "centers of Communist opposition." Their six-point "Declaration of Intent" has been published by the independent weekly Politique Hebdo, edited by the dissident Communist Paul Noirot. (1) Their aim is the revolutionary transformation and democratization of the PCF; but it is evident that there is disagreement among them as to whether this should be approached through action inside or outside the party.

According to Politique Hebdo, the declaration is the product of several months of discussion among "some hundreds of militants." Many of these are adherents of the Unir-Débat faction (itself composed of an "open" sector of former members and a "clandestine" sector of present PCF members). All of them supported the "Appeal to Communists" issued on 10 July 1970 by 28 former members of the PCF leadership (the signatories included Garaudy, Tillon, Jean Pronteau, Marcel Prenant and Jean Chaintron -- all formerly of the Central Committee or Politburo). The appeal denounced the PCF leadership's acceptance of "normalization" in Czechoslovakia, its maintenance of centralized discipline and the stifling of internal debate.

(1) "Ce que veulent les 'oppositionnels' communistes," Politique Hebdo, 31 December 1970.

Politique Hebdo notes that "a certain number of questions" have still to be settled by the leaders of the anti-Marchais alliance. Some of them, notably Garaudy, hope for a gradual transformation of the PCF from within, while "others, such as Pronteau and [Maurice] Kriegel-Valrimont, judge that such a renewal cannot be expected without a modification of the situation through outside factors, and give their attention to the evolution of ultra-leftist groups." Despite this strategic divergence, the commentary continues, all are agreed on one thing -- that their initiative should not lead to the formation of a small "dissident Communist Party," since, they say, this "would complicate the task of convincing others carried on by the comrades who continue to work within the ranks of the party." In the circumstances, one can understand that "for the time being they do not contemplate publishing the names of militants who join them."

The first point in the declaration makes it clear that the movement is in opposition to the Communist establishment not only in France but abroad. It affirms that "the crisis of the international Communist movement, due to the abandonment of the principles of communism and, as far as our country is concerned, the attitude of the PCF leadership, gravely compromise the chances of the socialist alternative."

Soviet, East European "Perversions"

The second point presents one of the key differences between these rebels and the PCF leaders -- their readiness to expose the failings of the bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes of Eastern Europe on a basis of principle, and not merely in defensive-dissociative reaction to such scandalous developments as the Polish disturbances or the Leningrad trial. The reference to Czechoslovakia reminds one that for many of these dissidents the moment of truth came on 21 August 1968:

Bureaucratic and authoritarian perversions -- of which the occupation and "normalization" of Czechoslovakia, manifestations of antisemitism and violations of socialist legality, notably in the USSR and in Poland, are the most recent expression -- disfigure and discredit socialism.

The leadership of the PCF remains silent about this situation, as it did earlier about the crimes of Stalinism. It thus persists in an alignment which leads numerous Frenchmen to doubt the reality of the perspectives of socialist democracy which it claims to seek for our country.

At the same time the party leadership is accused of being too conservative. The "ideological 'normalization' which it is attempting to impose on the PCF" prevents it from analyzing objectively not only the state of the international Communist movement but also political developments in France, so that it fails to "draw the lessons of May 1968" and to take account of the new possibilities for militant action, using "new forces" in addition to the working class. What the party offers militants is no more than "the practice of electoralism ... with no real prospects of fundamental political, economic and social transformation."

One sees the hand of Garaudy, however, in the balancing insistence that, while the present leadership is beyond redemption, the party still represents the great hope for revolutionary socialism in France:

The bureaucratic functioning of the PCF -- symbolized by the de-facto assumption of the secretary-generalship by a man discredited by his past and who is principally responsible for the present "normalization" of the party -- makes it impossible to solve these problems and find a way out of the impasse. So far, it is only through expulsions that the leadership has replied to the demands of militants for a true political debate.

Nevertheless, it is mainly in the tens of thousands of active militants of the PCF that the essential revolutionary force is to be found, a force capable of inspiring the struggle for socialism in our country -- on condition that it is enabled to play this role.

Call for Critical Debate

So far the declaration has offered analysis; with Point 5 it moves on to initiative. "Aware of the urgent need for an action of renewal," the authors call upon all comrades, "whether members of the party or not," to come together in pursuit of the following goals:

To impose discussion on the real functioning of the political and economic regimes of the countries which lay claim to socialism, and on the deep origins of the bureaucratic and authoritarian deformations, from the USSR to People's China;

To analyze the crisis of the international Communist movement and determine in what manner relations should be established between Communist parties so that, with real independence and freedom of criticism for all, their solidarity and proletarian internationalism may be strengthened;

To work out, starting with the Leninist contribution, what must be the [internal] structures of a revolutionary party in our time and in our country; what should be the nature of its relations with the mass organizations and with the working class; what means should be adopted to ensure the free confrontation of ideas and respect for democracy in the elaboration of the political line and in the election or dismissal of leaders;

To work out a revolutionary strategy on the basis of an objective analysis of present developments in the capitalist mode of production and the new contradictions which ensue on the national and international level.

The last paragraph of the declaration calls on like-minded "comrades of the party, those who are no longer members and non-party militants" to come together in "centers of Communist initiative" where they would undertake this preparatory work of analysis in an atmosphere "devoid of all sectarianism," joining theoretical discussion to militant action.

The existing network of open and "clandestine" cells which the Unir-Débat faction has built up since the mid-fifties form an obvious basis for such "centers of initiative." Politique Hebdo and its monthly companion, Politique Aujourd'hui, will provide a forum for public discussion. But it will be difficult to determine what headway this new challenge to the PCF leadership is making -- and that is one reason why Georges Marchais should be concerned about it.

Summary: Roger Garaudy, Charles Tillon and other former members of the PCF leadership have issued a six-point declaration calling on dissident Communists to work for "the renewal of socialism" through the creation of "centers of Communist initiative." Their manifesto is strongly critical not only of the "normalization" which Secretary-General Marchais is said to have imposed upon the PCF but also of the "bureaucratic and authoritarian perversions" which have disfigured socialism in the USSR and other East European countries.