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●NON-RULING CPS: France

3 August 1971

### FRENCH COMMUNIST DISSIDENTS TO CONSOLIDATE?

Summary: The 10 June 1971 issue of Unir-Débat, organ of progressive present and former members of the French Communist Party opposed to its current leadership and political course, has announced tentative intentions to coordinate operations with the publication of the dissident Communist Initiative Centers, Initiative Communiste, in October. The common aims of these groups, their short-term and long-term goals are the subject of the following report.

Deputy Secretary General Georges Marchais concluded in his report to the French Communist Party's 19th Congress last February that "the preparation of the Congress has proved the health and profound unity of the Party." If intra-party dissent is a sign of good health, he is certainly correct; however, the claim of "profound unity" in the PCF's ranks must then be considered something of an overstatement. For almost 20 years, a dissident current has existed within the PCF pledged to democratically renewing the French Communist Party, and since 1967, the journal Unir-Débat has been the journalistic organ of those forces and of allied former Party members who have not given up the hope that French Communism can still be rescued from the ideological ghetto.(1) A recent issue of Unir-Débat indicates that the intra-party struggle for socialist democracy is about to take on wider proportions. Should its readership approve (in a democratic ballot), Unir-Débat will begin coordinating its operations in October 1971 with Initiative Communiste, the organ of a second (recently formed) dissident current in the PCF.

### Communist Initiative Centers

On 22 January 1971, a meeting took place in Paris formalizing the intention of French communist progressives to form Communist Initiative Centers (CIC) in Paris and the provinces. Among the 68 signatories of the petition initiating this action were such outstanding French Marxists as Roger Garaudy, Charles Tillon and Jean Chaintron, backed by the some 800 "militants" who had signed their December petition.(2) The CIC's were defined as

Groups at the base consisting of PCF militants, former members of this party and communist sympathizers who have no other party affiliation. What unites them: a similar estimation of the present situation in the communist movement, an equal will to struggle against "bureaucratic and authoritarian perversions" of socialism, but also the conviction that, for a long time, the PCF, [and] its militants will hold the key to opening or closing the door to revolutionary developments in France.(3)

Even this early statement indicated their proximity to the long-established semi-clandestine Unir-Débat group. Both have no interest in forming "factions" or a "new party," but see their task in effecting renewal of the revolution from within the PCF.

By March 1971, there were 27 CIC's in existence throughout France, encompassing "a total of 860 communists [who] have already agreed with a 'statement of intent.'"(4) Unir-Débat enthusiastically noted that "the very manner in which the problems are presented and the discussion is 'introduced' augurs well for the Leninist democratic process which will lead to the collective elaboration of the CIC theses."(5) This process included such provisions as autonomy for individual CIC's, democratic representation in a National Coordination Committee which is not, however, empowered to make decisions over the heads of the local organizations, and liberty for individual members to choose their own manner of agitation, complying with their own estimation of where they would be most effective.

The above-mentioned "theses," discussion of which has already been introduced by the National Coordination Committee of the CIC (6), deal with: 1) the French CP leadership's strategy of "advanced democracy leading to socialism," and 2) the problem of the present economic system in those countries advocating socialism, particularly the USSR. It hardly need be recalled that these two issues have been at the heart of Unir-Débat's thrust against the PCF leadership for years, and that

they reflect Roger Garaudy's stipulation of the crisis points in modern communism.

#### Unir-Débat "Rejoices in the Development"

By April 1971, Unir-Débat's enthusiasm and support for the CIC had become a focal point in its discussion. And logically so, for, as the April issue noted, "a goodly number of the communists, members of the PCF or not, who have backed the CIC's are activists in or subscribers to Unir-Débat." Far from expressing reservations about possible competition, the editors frankly stated that "we rejoice in this sort of common front," and began hinting that co-ordinated activity (especially of the two currents' publications) was being considered.

The June issue of Unir-Débat led off with an editorial confirming this development.<sup>(7)</sup> It opened with the news that "66 delegates of 31 CIC's had [at their first national meeting] decided to sponsor a monthly journal beginning next October," an announcement to which the Unir-Débat "could not remain indifferent." Its proposal: to transform Unir-Débat into a bulletin reserved for party members, "to support and coordinate their action within the PCF," while non-members (and members as well) would be encouraged to join forces with the fledgling CIC journal, Initiative Communiste. The bulk of the political, ideological and social discussion would be transferred to the latter publication, while Unir-Débat would concentrate on the technical intra-party aspects of the common struggle. The possibility that Unir-Débat would at some point cease publishing altogether is also noted. However, both publications stress that the decision is up to their readers. Should the majority prefer to retain both journals in their present form, they have agreed to consult on editorial and publication schedules. But, for the moment, "all our readers know, in advance, that the will expressed by the majority of comrades will be our law."

#### Current Content

Describing the planned CIC journal, Unir-Débat notes that it will be a "means of making known the line and the policy of the CIC, their analyses and propositions, as well as a place to discuss these orientations, that is, to reflect, debate and confront." In its latter function, it would be following Unir-Débat's long-established policy, as the 10 June 1971 edition exemplifies.

Included in its contents are a reprint of a lengthy "anti-normalization" document issued by Czechoslovak "communist militants" on the eve of the 14th Party Congress; a critical review of the



experiences of French Cultural Mission teachers in Vietnam; readers' contributions dealing with the problem of communism in the industrialized Western society; and several documents pertaining to PCF affairs. The most interesting of the latter, from the international standpoint, is signed by Jacques Courtois and entitled "The Two-facedness of the PCF Leadership," dealing with the Party's position on Czechoslovakia.

The two-facedness which Courtois bitterly criticizes refers to the PCF leadership's ambivalent position on developments in Czechoslovakia since 21 August 1968. On the one hand, the party disapproved of the armed intervention in Czechoslovakia; on the other, however, it has chosen not to take a critical stand on "normalization," thereby "upholding, in the international communist movement, methods which it pretends to disapprove of in party journals or meetings in France and in 'private conversations.'" In Courtois's opinion, the PCF's role in the 14th Czechoslovak Party Congress exposed its "hypocritical complicity" in normalization. While the Communist Parties of Great Britain and Spain declined to participate in the Congress on account of the censorship to which their messages would have been subjected, and while the Italian Communist Party protested in its party organ the suppression of its planned statement on the intervention and normalization (and published the statement for all to read), the French Party

[was] the only Western Communist Party of any importance to have admitted the fait accompli, to be made an accomplice of "normalization" . . .

In Courtois's eyes, the PCF's sending a low-level delegation (led by Arthur London's brother-in-law, at that) could not be interpreted as a reiteration of the party's critical stance on the events which led to Husak and normalization, because:

In effect every meaning was taken away from the choice of Raymond Guyot [as delegation leader], by the very fact of a text which he was assigned to read from the podium and which Marchais did not look over without arming himself with the Brezhnevist imprimatur. Neither the Husak clique nor the Soviet delegation, which managed everything from the wings, had to intervene on a text which had already been self-censured.

Comparing the French Party's approach to the Czechoslovak Congress with that of the above-mentioned Western Parties, Courtois concludes that

the attitude of the leaderships of the Italian CP, the Spanish CP, of the British CP . . . appears to conform more to internationalist duties and the principles adopted by the three world conferences of the communist movement.

Courtois's criticism is not, however, designed solely as an after-thought. Instead, he issues an appeal, based on the information contained in his article, to the PCF cells, conferences and debating meetings to "ask why the attitude of the leadership of our party is different from that of the Italian CP on this point." He proposes that a debate be launched throughout the party on the following "fundamental question":

Can one disapprove of the armed intervention in Czechoslovakia and, in the name of the communist principles of the independence of parties, be silent on the normalization, imposed by arms, which resulted from it?

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- (1) For further information on this group, see lg, "'A Communist Line for France': PCF Dissidents for Renewal of Party," CAA Research Report No. 0578, Radio Free Europe Research, 5 May 1970.
  - (2) "Les perspectives des 'Centres d'initiative communiste,'" in Politique Hebdo, 4 February 1971.
  - (3) Op.cit.
  - (4) Unir-Débat, 10 March 1971.
  - (5) Op.cit.
  - (6) The NCC drafts do not, however, "claim to be definitive, far from it, since the ideological commission of the CIC has insisted on drafting these documents in an interrogatory format in order to trigger totally free discussions and obtain all ideas on all aspects of the issues in question." Op.cit.
  - (7) Rene Garraud, "En Octobre, le Mensuel des C.I.C."
  - (8) Op.cit.