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### PCF SEEKS TO CLOSE RANKS AT 19TH CONGRESS

(See end for summary)

The 19th Congress of the French Communist Party (PCF), which takes place in the Paris suburb of Nanterre from February 4 to 8, is clearly intended by the leadership to be a congress of consolidation. Since the last congress in January 1967 the PCF has passed through one of the most crucial periods of its half-century history, suffering setbacks in some sectors, holding its ground or making gains in others.

The "May Revolution" of 1968 exposed the PCF as a non-revolutionary force, not only unwilling to undertake a direct assault against the bourgeois system but actively combatting the "adventurist" students and the minority of young workers who sought to do so; as a result, it still reserves some of its harshest polemics for such "ultra-leftist" movements -- Maoists, Trotskyists, "New Left" groupings and the small but militant PSU party.

### Impact of Czechoslovakia

Still recovering from this domestic upheaval, and from the Gaullist triumph in the June 1968 elections, the PCF was faced with the Czechoslovak crisis, which put to the test its most hallowed tradition -- unswerving solidarity with the Soviet Union. Like other West European Communist parties, the PCF had a strong political stake in the Czechoslovak

reforms, and in mid-July Secretary-General Rochet and two emissaries of the PCI flew to Moscow to warn the Russians that, as an Italian spokesman later put it, "for us only a political solution was admissible, and that any kind of armed intervention [would be] unacceptable." (1) When the invasion took place, the PCF promptly expressed its "disapproval," and for months continued to give active aid to the Czechoslovak progressives in the prolonged political struggle which followed, through repeated criticism of the military intervention -- "wrong not only according to our opinion but according to our law, the law of the Communist parties of the whole world," as one party spokesman put it. (2)

However, as the passing months made it clear that a gradual but relentless process of "normalization" was being imposed on the Czechoslovak nation, this criticism became somewhat muted and less frequent. The PCF would not reverse its stand on the intervention -- it has, indeed, reaffirmed it from time to time, up to the eve of the present congress (3) -- but in the course of 1969 it became increasingly clear that, unlike some other West European Communist parties (notably the Italian, Spanish, British, Swiss and Swedish), the PCF preferred to let sleeping dogs lie, and to emphasize its traditional solidarity with the CPSU rather than its support for the cause of Czechoslovak reform.

Yet this solidarity was no longer unconditional. The PCF now gave priority to its own domestic political interests and (as its reaction to the invasion had shown) was not prepared, as in the Thorezian past, to sacrifice them to the shifting dictates of Soviet policy. In his speech at the Moscow Conference of

(1) G. Boffa, "Come è maturato il nostro giudizio contro l'intervento," L'Unità, 10 September 1968.

(2) André Wurmser, "Le mois tragique," France Nouvelle, 15 September 1968.

(3) See for example, the pre-congress statement by Central Committee member Marcel Zaidner in L'Humanité of 12 January 1970: Zaidner stressed that the party's position on the intervention had been taken "not out of motives of domestic opportunism but on a basis of principle."

June 1969 Waldeck Rochet declared emphatically:

The Communist parties are independent and have equal rights. As has been repeatedly said, there can be no "dominant" or "subordinate" parties, and there are none; there can be no "center" or "centers" directing the activities of the Communist parties, and there are none.

Every party determines and must determine its policy and forms of activity in complete independence, on the basis of Marxism-Leninism and with due regard for national conditions. (4)

### The Rebels

Declarations of independence, however, were not enough to end the unrest caused within the party by the events of 1968 -- the May "revolution" and the August invasion. In October 1968 the leadership suppressed the party organ Démocratie Nouvelle as it was about to publish a special issue on Czechoslovakia -- evidently because it was excessively anti-Soviet. Later in the same month the Central Committee censured and "silenced" Roger Garaudy, Politburo member and leading intellectual, because of his independent denunciations of the Russians (5) (while at the same time accepting the resignation of Thorez's widow, Jeannette Vermeersch, who objected to any criticism of the USSR).

(4) International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties (Moscow, 1969), p. 118.

(5) In October 1968 Garaudy published La liberté en en sursis -- Prague 1968 (Freedom Deferred), a collection of texts by Czechoslovak reformers, with a polemical preface in which Garaudy denounced the invasion as "a crime against hope, a crime against socialism, a crime against the future." Later in the same month he published Pour un modèle français du socialisme, the updated version of an earlier work (April 1968) Peut-on être communiste aujourd'hui? The new version replaced passages praising the Soviet Union with criticism of a society "where the people ... are kept in absolute ignorance of events, and where the basic organizations of the party have only the role of executing directives from above."



But neither incident ended there. A few months later members of the editorial collective of Démocratie Nouvelle joined a group of non-Communist intellectuals to produce the first issue (January 1969) of a new review, Politique Aujourd'hui, dedicated to free, uninhibited discussion of the problems of socialism -- rigorously intellectual, anti-dogmatist and given to trenchant criticism of Soviet doctrine and policies, particularly with regard to Czechoslovakia. After repeated fulminations had been ignored, the party leadership suspended or expelled the comrades engaged in this heretical venture. As for Garaudy, he accepted censure for his breaches of party discipline and undertook to avoid them in future -- but "without renouncing ideas which I hold to be true." A year later, as "normalization" proceeded apace, he broke silence, first in an interview given to the Yugoslav Komunist and then, more decisively, in a new book, Le grand tournant du socialisme, (6) which represented a codification of his challenge to the PCF apparatus in particular and to dogmatist communism in general, in the name of socialist humanism and intellectual freedom.

The book began and ended with the same defiant declaration: "Il n'est plus possible de se taire" -- "It is no longer possible to keep silent." In his introduction Garaudy claimed that he had been obliged to publish Le grand tournant because "for more than three years my suggestions have never been able to break through the closed circle of the Politburo and the Central Committee" (page 15). What was needed was "a profound transformation" of the PCF -- a genuine democratization which would allow full and free debate, and a new relationship between the base and the leadership. Above all, the PCF must declare clearly that "the socialism which we wish to build in France is not that which Brezhnev is imposing on Czechoslovakia" (page 281).

#### Garaudy Pilloried

If Garaudy had been content to condemn the invasion of Czechoslovakia, while repeating his earlier calls for a free dialectic of ideas, emphasis on socialist humanism and dialogue with the Catholic Left, the leadership might -- just possibly might -- have tolerated

(6) Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1969.

this fresh breach of discipline for the sake of the progressive image which Garaudy had done so much to build up. But his combination of attacks on the PCF apparatus with even more radical attacks on the whole Soviet system was unpardonable. Denouncing this "neo-Stalinist" system -- its lack of or limitation of basic freedoms, censorship, authoritarian bureaucracy, imposition of its own norms and interests on other regimes and parties, etc. -- he declared that Brezhnev had gone beyond Stalinism when "Soviet tanks stifled the Czechoslovak Communist attempts to seek a model of socialism corresponding to the requirements of a highly developed society." (page 127) In discussing other regimes he also broke with the party line: while showing particular sympathy for the Yugoslav experiment in democratization and workers' self-government (pp. 172-231), he noted that "the Cultural Revolution cannot be condemned in principle" (p. 164) and referred to Brezhnev's "blind and hateful" attacks against the Chinese. And what was the PCF to make of a Politburo member who expressed the hope that "one day the present [Soviet] ruling team may be swept aside, and that there may begin a renewal which would restore to the October Revolution its true visage and its force of appeal?" (p. 170).

In October the Central Committee duly condemned Garaudy (the Politburo having done so a month earlier in connection with the Komunist interview). This marked the beginning of a campaign against him which came to dominate preparations for the congress -- the thousands of section, cell and federation meetings, the pre-congress "tribune" in L'Humanité, France Nouvelle and other party organs. As could be expected, the overwhelming majority of those comments published were strongly critical of Garaudy, but some individual voices were raised in his defense, notably that of the Communist deputy and mayor, Fernand Dupuy. (7) Moreover, Garaudy himself was allowed to expound his deviant ideas, albeit briefly, in L'Humanité (2 January 1970). It was stated that "two brief passages" had been removed, with his

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(7) France Nouvelle, 14 January 1970, pp. 7-8. Of course, the attacks on Garaudy were not only far more numerous but also authoritative; see, for example, the long article by Antoine Casanova and Francis Cohen, La Nouvelle Critique, January 1970, pp. 32-54.

agreement, because they were "in contradiction to the norms which should govern relations between fraternal parties." What was left included a charge that the Party had presented only a travesty of his views, with quotations out of context, and passages like this:

There is nothing anti-Soviet about proving that Stalinist practices (first of all) and (second) the military intervention in Czechoslovakia tarnish ... the fair image of the October Revolution, the aims of Lenin and the prospects of socialism in France.

#### Debate and Discipline

This unprecedented publication of "heretical" views was no doubt designed to refute the thesis that the PCF was in need of democratization (although one eminent observer suggests that the principal aim was to "unmask those militants who would approve of his analysis"). (8) But it was also a sign that something had changed in the PCF, or at least in the problems that it had to face. This was also suggested by the fact that the pre-congress "debate" was more like a true debate this time than ever before. The letters and local resolutions published in the party organs (about 130 in L'Humanité alone) contained an unprecedented number -- though still, of course, a small minority -- of dissenting or deviant views on many other subjects besides Garaudy: the role of intellectuals and students, religion and relations with Catholic workers, left-wing unity, the "French model" of socialism, etc.

Among these questions was Czechoslovakia -- which was barely mentioned in the Congress Theses published in mid-November, (9) but was the subject of three

(8) (8) Raymond Barrillon in Le Monde, 4 February 1970.

(9) The Thesis said at one point that the PCF had always cooperated closely with the CPSU, "including the period after it expressed its disagreement with the military intervention in Czechoslovakia." (L'Humanité, 15 November 1969).



letters in L'Humanité. Of these, the first two, published together on January 9, were polar opposites. One demanded that the Congress declare the intervention justified and renounce the PCF's criticism of it; the second demanded that the congress formally condemn the "aggressors." The third, by Central Committee member Marcel Zaidner, magistrally chided both. Firmly rejecting anti-Sovietism, he affirmed that the PCF had been right to welcome post-January attempts to "correct errors committed in the past"; right also to give warnings about certain dangers in Czechoslovakia; right to warn the Soviet leaders against any military intervention in the CSSR; right to propose a European communist conference to ward off the danger of invasion; right to regret that the French proposal for a conference was rejected; and, finally, right to "disapprove the military intervention." (10)

Although this limited debate represented only the iceberg tip of ferment in the lower ranks of the party, there was in fact little chance that it would find expression in a genuine confrontation at the Nanterre congress. The subtle and effective mechanism described by the late dissident Communist Jean Baby in his book, Critique de base (Paris, 1960) would see to that. Cells and sections had to vote en bloc for or against the Theses (which included, in Section 5, a rejection of Garaudy's views without naming him, and amendments from the base would be filtered through a pyramidal structure, with final screening by a congress commission on which the PCF leadership had a built-in majority. There would be no substantial changes in the agreed official line.

But there would be concern about the PCF's political prospects. Here, again, the picture has changed radically since the 18th Congress four years ago. At that time the PCF had finally concluded an electoral agreement with the non-Communist Left. This led to a relative victory in the elections of March 1967, when the alliance took more than 45% of the votes on the second round, while the Gaullists (who could gain only a bare majority of seats) took 42% and the Democratic Center a mere 7%. But the May disturbances, the June elections and the August invasion of 1968 together put an end to the precarious alliance. Duclos's good showing (21%) in the presidential election of June 1969 was meager

(10) L'Humanité, 12 January 1970.

consolation for the failure to achieve the alliance on which the PCF's strategy has been based for years, and the response to its appeal of January 8 for another attempt to reforge Leftist unity has not been encouraging. Certainly the "common platform" for which the now-ailing Waldeck Rochet was striving in 1965-66 is farther away than ever.

The PCF remains a major political force, organizationally by far the strongest in France, commanding the loyalties of one-fifth of the electorate. But the conservative temper of its leadership have not only estranged it from the progressive Communist parties of Western Europe; (11) it has also prevented it from adapting itself flexibly to the needs of the times. A congress of consolidation and normalization will not solve the PCF's deeper problems.

Summary: Its 19th Congress finds the French CP in a much more difficult situation than that which it faced at the last one three years ago. The trials which resulted from the events of 1968 -- the May "Revolution" and the August invasion -- are not over. The party will not withdraw its criticism of the invasion, but its emphasis on "normalization" through solidarity with the CPSU has alienated militants for whom Czechoslovakia remains a touchstone. Among these is Roger Garaudy, who will doubtless be disciplined for his challenge to dogmatist Communism, but whose seminal influence will not thereby be ended. Domestically, the PCF finds itself the major opposition force -- but as far as ever from its goal of a leftist alliance which it would dominate.

Kevin Devlin

- (11) On the eve of the congress the British CP organ published a sympathetic review of Garaudy's book, Marxism of the Twentieth Century (Morning Star, 4 February 1970, by Chris Myant); L'Unità, (1 February 1970) published a report by Augusto Pancaldi noting the importance of Garaudy's intervention on "problems of primordial importance,;" the Spanish CP organ, Nuestra Bandera had earlier published statements by Garaudy which L'Humanité had refused to print.