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SPECIAL REPORT

INDEPENDENT TENDENCIES OF COMMUNIST PARTIES IN NORTHERN EUROPE

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INDEPENDENT TENDENCIES OF COMMUNIST PARTIES IN NORTHERN EUROPE

Scandinavian Communists have for some time shown an inclination to assert their independence from Moscow as the surest way of improving their domestic image. In Denmark deep dissatisfaction over subservience to the USSR has led to mass defections and the establishment of a neutralist Socialist People's Party. Norway too has a recently formed Socialist People's Party which has captured the allegiance of many Communists dissatisfied with their former party's declining membership and voting strength. In the Communist Party of Iceland there has been mounting talk of introducing more democracy into party organization and modifying dogma in the interest of developing a broader political base. The Swedish Communists unabashedly campaigned in last fall's elections as a purely national party. Even in Finland, where the Communist Party is very strong and controls almost a fourth of the seats in the parliament, there has been a great deal of criticism in party circles of the old guard's unquestioning acceptance of the Moscow line.

Inhospitable Climate For Communists

The main consideration impelling Scandinavian Communists to pursue an independent line is that Communism is identified as a Russian movement. For historical reasons, Scandinavians are, by and large, both hostile to and suspicious of the Russians. Another powerful factor in the Nordic countries is their relative prosperity, which pointedly undercuts the appeal of Communist blandishments.

Recognition of these realities, together with dwindling party membership and failures at the ballot box, eventually persuaded the more imaginative party leaders that the only remedy is to push for greater independence from Moscow. Events in the international Communist movement such as the Sino-Soviet dispute and the removal of Khrushchev provided additional impetus for the expression, in various forms, of this wish for autonomy. Pressure for greater freedom, however, has not brought on unmixed blessings, judging by the intraparty fissures it has opened.

Finland

The Finnish Communist Party, which has about 52,000 members, campaigns in elections as the Finnish People's Democratic League (SKDL). In the last

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general election--February 1962 --SKDL polled over 500,000 votes and won 47 of the 200 seats in the parliament. The Communists also have a strong following in the labor movement, where their party commands the allegiance of about 60 percent of Finland's largest union, the 166,000-member Confederation of Finnish Trade Unions.

Last October, however, the SKDL lost ground in communal elections, including its balance-of-power positions in the big cities of Turku and Tampere. These setbacks brought a great deal of criticism of the party leadership from lower echelons. The Khrushchev ouster ten days later, and the speedy acceptance of it by the Finnish Communist Party leadership, added fuel to the fire kindled by the elections, and brought into the open the question of subservience to the Russians. FCP Secretary General Ville Pessi has been under constant attack for his defense of the new Soviet leadership.

In addition, the Soviet party itself was sharply criticized at a 20 October meeting of the FCP's central committee. The CPSU was assailed for lack of democracy, the critics asserting that barbarism still exists in the domestic politics of Russia and that the change in the Soviet hierarchy had nothing to do with promoting socialism. Many middle-echelon members of the FCP went so far as to demand a change in their own party's leadership before the next FCP conference.

It seems doubtful, however, that the more independent-minded Finnish Communists will be able to effect any radical and sudden change in party leadership, although Pessi said that he would relinquish his position if a majority of FCP members demonstrated a loss of confidence in his leadership. Nevertheless, restlessness among rank-and-file party members and the middle echelons has become so pronounced that the old guard may feel obliged to make at least a token accommodation to their wishes.

Sweden

The Swedish Communist Party last January chose Carl Henrik Hermansson as its new party chairman. Hermansson, 46, is an intellectual, a skilled debater, and a man of considerable personal charm. He is also a "nationalist" Communist, and his election signaled the initiation of an effort to make the party more palatable to Swedish voters by loosening its ties with Moscow.

The Swedish Communists still line up with the Soviets on such themes as the threat to peace posed by West German rearmament and the need for establishment of a Scandinavian nuclear-free zone, but their party's domestic program has lost much of its doctrinaire coloration. Marxist jargon about class warfare has virtually disappeared, and on such questions as nationalization, social justice, improved working conditions, and higher living standards for workers, the party's platform

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is only a shade more radical than programs of Sweden's ruling Social Democratic Party which now are 20 years old. Hermansson not only professes to accept the Swedish parliamentary system, but also rejects the example of the "people's democracies" as unsuitable for Swedish conditions.

The course set by Hermansson paid some dividends in last September's national elections. Previously, the party held only five of 232 seats in the lower house of the parliament. In the balloting, however, it surprised most observers by winning 5.2 percent of the vote and increasing its representation to eight seats.

Denmark

The small Danish Communist Party (DKP) of about 5,000 remains Moscow oriented, but this is not a true reflection of the attitude of Danes of Communist persuasion. In 1960 most of the DKP's erstwhile supporters threw this support to the Socialist People's Party (SFP), which had been founded by former DKP chairman Axel Larsen. In the parliamentary elections that year, the SFP, which rejected any Soviet link in favor of a pacifist-neutralist stance, captured 11 of 179 seats, while the DKP lost all five of its former seats. In the 1964 elections, the SFP held its own by retaining ten seats, and the DKP was again shut out.

Much of the SFP's appeal seems attributable to the personality of its leader and only really prominent figure, Axel Larsen. The SFP is essentially a national Communist party in outlook, but retains its Marxian and working class roots. By insisting that it believes in perpetuating a multiparty political system, the SFP is at loggerheads with the Communists. Similarly, its economic policy is broader and more tolerant than the Communists' even though it does favor much more nationalization of the Danish economy than now exists. Only in certain foreign policy areas does the SFP advocate policies corresponding to those of the Soviet Union.

Norway

From a high of 35,000 in 1945, the Norwegian Communist Party's membership has dropped to somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000. In the parliamentary elections of 1961 its percentage of the vote dropped from 3.4 to 2.9 percent and it lost its only seat. Communist fortunes continued to decline in the 1963 local elections. This loss can be attributed in some degree to the establishment of Norway's Socialist People's Party which, although it split off from the dominant Labor Party, still drew off the support of a great many Communists weary of Soviet influence in their own party.

Many bona fide Norwegian Communists have also indicated a desire for independence from Moscow in party affairs. One

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of their leaders, Reidar Larsen, editor of the party newspaper Friheten and possibly the heir apparent to the party chairmanship, has predicted that future relations among the world's Communist parties will "respect the independence and equal rights of the parties without any superior authority to interfere in their internal affairs." Larsen has been advocating this kind of liberalism in the international Communist movement for some time, presumably in hopes of stemming the tide now running strongly against his party. He is said to be attracted by the successful measures in this regard adopted by Sweden's Communists. Larsen can be expected to continue to make use of the current turbulence in the domestic and world Communist movements to press for greater nationalism in Norwegian Communist Party affairs.

Iceland

Although the Icelandic Communist Party has a membership of only about 1,000, its position in the country remains formidable because of its great influence in the labor movement. In national elections, it merges its party lists with those of the Communist-controlled Labor Alliance, which holds nine of the 60 seats in the parliament. The cooperation of the opportunistic Progressive Party has allowed the Labor Alliance to retain the chairmanship of the powerful Icelandic Federation of Labor as well as a majority of seats on its executive board.

Hannibal Valdimarssen, the federation's pro-Communist chairman, has called for developing the Labor Alliance into a broadly leftist political party with the aim of attracting new support from labor and farm elements in existing parties. Although the consensus of opinion is that Valdimarssen will not be able to launch a new party at this time, it is noteworthy that his proposal provided for the exclusion of those elements which would wish to remain loyal to Moscow.

Suggestions have been put forward by leading members of the Communist Party itself to develop a broader leftist political grouping centered on the Labor Alliance. These suggestions also emphasize the need of maintaining a high degree of independence from the USSR.

The Soviet Attitude

From the viewpoint of Soviet leaders, this trend among the Scandinavian parties toward greater autonomy and identity with other national socialist parties is not wholly disadvantageous. In fact, the USSR has encouraged these Communist parties to widen their contacts with non-Communist groups in an effort to secure a broader popular base. Moscow is well aware of the fact that these

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parties, by ceasing to be the mere instrument of a foreign power, will gain in the long run a new respectability in their own countries. There is no indication that any of the Scandinavian parties advocate a position which is fundamentally opposed to broad Soviet foreign policy interests. It is the successful advancement of these policy goals which remains of paramount concern for the Soviet Union and is in effect the real touchstone of its relations with the Scandinavian Communist parties. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

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