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SUBJECT: The Disillusionment of a Communist

This ~~(dispatch)~~^{re} is a report on several recent conversations between an officer of this Consulate General and a militant Marseille Communist. While these conversations disclosed little factual information concerning the Communist Party in Marseille, they revealed, in personal terms, the gradual disillusionment of a militant Communist and evidenced the ideological crisis through which he is presently passing. These conversations also indicated that, while the Socialist Party does not appear to the disillusioned Communist as a possible alternative to the CP, there is a definite sentiment among certain disillusioned Communists favoring creation of an independent French Communist Party. It is impossible to estimate accurately the number of French Communists who today find themselves in a position similar to the one occupied by the subject of this dispatch, but this writer is convinced, on the basis of his contacts among local militants, that subject is but one of many Communists in the area who are becoming increasingly disillusioned with their party. If this conclusion is correct, it is believed that the causes of this individual's disillusionment and the factors underlying his ideological crisis are of particular interest.

Biographical Sketch of Subject

Subject is today the secretary of one of the most important and most active Communist cells in Marseille, and is also a particularly active member of the CGT union. He joined the Communist Party in 1932 and fought for two years in the Spanish civil war as a member of the International Brigade. In 1939-40 he served as a sergeant in the French armored forces in Colonel de Gaulle's regiment. During the German occupation he was arrested as an active Communist and deported to a concentration camp in Germany. Liberated by American troops in the spring of 1944, he was cared for by the American Red Cross for three months before returning to France. Following his return, he was employed in a number of manual occupations, working for the past four months as a freight handler at the Marseille railroad station. He resumed his role as a Party CGT militant as soon as he returned to France, and in 1950 he visited the Soviet Union in a group of twenty-seven French militants invited to the USSR as guests of the government. On 4 June 1952 he participated in the strike ordered by the CGT and on 5 June was fired from his job by the Marseille director of the railroad company for having participated. On 6 June he found a job as a waiter in a restaurant and is now employed as such.

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Subject is married and has two children. Judging by his remarks, he is devoted to his family, and the welfare and happiness of his wife and children appear to be his chief concerns in life. Although he enjoyed but a limited formal education, subject is surprisingly well informed on many subjects, especially recent and current international events. He has attended at least one Communist political training school but has certainly not succumbed to all aspects of the Party's political doctrination. He speaks Spanish and Italian in addition to his native language and reads the anti-Communist press as well as the Party press.

Reasons for Joining the Communist Party

Subject joined the CP in 1932 in the belief that the CP was the one party devoted to the betterment of the workers' lot. Believing that it is natural for an individual to join the political party which he feels best represents his interests, he chose the CP as the single party dedicated to the defense of the laboring masses. As the son of a manual laborer, he was conscious from his earliest youth of the continuous struggle between the conflicting classes of French society, and in the CP he found the "voice of the oppressed, the defender of the exploited, and the spokesman of humanity." As a member of the CP, he considered the French capitalists, more especially the "200 families" as France's greatest enemies and he found enormous satisfaction, pride and party justification in the social benefits gained under the Popular Front Government. When the International Brigades were formed for the Spanish civil war, he joined for "motivations of idealism" in the belief that they were the defenders of "liberty, humanity and the best interests of the greatest number of peoples."

Reasons for Joining the CGT

Although the CGT was the only significant union organized for manual laborers in 1932 and thus subject had no choice in choosing one or another union, he joined the CGT in the belief that it represented the same principles and was devoted to the pursuit of the same objectives on the syndicalist level as did the CP on the political level.

Subject's Early Disillusionment

Subject experienced his first disillusionment with the CP during the civil war in Spain. As a practicing Catholic, he was shocked by the barbaric and "unnecessary" attacks upon church property and religious personnel. He observed that Communists were the principal instigators of these attacks, and for the first time he found himself in opposition to one of his party's practices. He was also upset by what he termed "the Soviet looting, the Soviet exploitation of the foreign volunteers, and the Soviet attempt to control all aspects of the war." When he returned to France at the conclusion of the war, he returned with minor but definite misgivings regarding what he believed were the Soviet Union's attempts to dominate and manipulate

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foreign communist parties. Until this time he had accepted Moscow's leadership of international communism, more especially Moscow's direction of the French CP, for he felt that the French CP benefited from the support and leadership it received from Moscow and he believed that the interests of the French CP and the Soviet CP were identical. However, on the basis of his experiences in Spain, he began to wonder if Moscow's leadership of the French CP was really in the best interests of the French party.

Further Disillusionment

When the second world war commenced in September, 1939, subject was called up for duty in the armored forces. As a "Frenchman first and a Communist second," he rejected the CP's denunciation of the war and accepted France's participation in it as being entirely correct and justified. His patriotism made it impossible for him to follow the Party policy on the war and once again he began to question seriously Moscow's directives to the French CP. While his thinking on this issue undoubtedly has been influenced by subsequent events, subject today states that in the autumn of 1939 he clearly realized for the first time that Moscow's orders to the French CP were not always in the latter country's interests.

Subject suffered further disillusionment at the time of France's liberation, for although in Germany at the time, he learned enough upon his return to appreciate the extent of the summary executions and killings which were carried out at the time of the liberation by the CP in the name of the Resistance. He recognized that many totally innocent people were killed solely for reasons of politics and personal vengeance and he realized that the CP was responsible for many of these executions.

Subject's confidence in the CP revived considerably during the years 1945-1946 when the CP was represented in the French government. He took satisfaction in the fact that his party was an active participant in the government and he believed that the program advocated by this party was in his best interests and in his country's best interests. De Gaulle's trip to Moscow and the resultant French - Soviet pact did much to restore subject's credulity in the harmony of interest between these two nations. The French CP's policy during these years was not flagrantly anti-National and neither the party's subservience to Moscow nor the latter's utilization of the former for its own purposes were glaringly obvious.

However, the CP's anti-national policy became more evident to subject following the party's exclusion from the government, and the serious strikes of the autumn of 1947 revealed to him the dangers inherent in the manner in which the CGT was both controlled and exploited by the CP for political purposes. The manner in which these strikes were ordered also revealed to him how the French CP itself was directed from Moscow. As a militant syndicalist, subject went out on strike in the autumns of both 1947 and 1948, but the political

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motivation of these strikes and their eventual failures shook his confidence in the CGT and left in him the seeds of doubt as to the wisdom of this union's policy. While he recognized the reasons which prompted the creation of the Force Ouvriere union and while he was partially sympathetic to these reasons, he was not tempted to join the FO for, as a militant unionist, he believed that a schism among the unionized workers would only serve to weaken labor's influence and he preferred to remain in the CGT in the hope that reforms would be carried out within this union which would prevent its future exploitation for political purposes.

Final Disillusionment

Subject's disillusionment with both the CP and the CGT reached its climax on 4-5 June 1952. He struck on the 4th, and on the 5th he was dismissed from his job as an employee of the national railroad company. Considering his attitude toward the CP and the CGT, more especially considering his attitude toward the strike call, it is difficult to understand why he did strike. He recognized that the strike call was motivated by purely political considerations, and for this reason alone he did not approve of the strike. Again, he was reasonably certain that the strike would fail for he knew that many of his fellow CP - CGT members were equally unenthusiastic about striking for purely political reasons, and perhaps questionable ones at that. He argued against this strike with his superiors in both the CP and the CGT, but while some of them indicated that they personally were inclined to agree with him, they emphasized that orders were orders and as they had been instructed to strike, they must strike. Subject's CP section secretary argued that the arrest of Jacques DUCLOS and Andre STIL marked the commencement of the government's program to dismember the CP and that if these arrests were not vigorously protested, the government would be able to pursue this program unhindered, with the final result that the CP would be rendered impotent. On the other hand, the departmental secretary of the CGT argued that the right to strike was an inherent right of the French worker and that anyone who refused to follow the orders of the departmental union was an anti-syndicalist. Thus, although he disapproved of the reasons for this strike and although he expected the strike to fail, subject went on strike. Today, subject finds it difficult to explain why he did strike and merely states that "as a disciplined militant I felt it my duty to follow the orders issued by my superiors."

When fired from his job the day after he struck, subject went immediately to his superiors in both the CP and the CGT and asked them to help him find another job. Neither the party nor the union did anything to help him, and in the end it was his Catholic parish priest who found him another job. Subject returned a second time to both the party and the union to try to borrow the money needed to buy the necessary clothes for his new job. Again, neither the party nor the union would help him. It was thus with deep bitterness that subject remarked to the writer, "At last I have come to realize how the French

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CP and the CGT are exploited according to Moscow's wishes and in turn how I, a French worker and syndicalist, am exploited by the leaders of my party and my union."

Causes of Disillusionment

The forementioned account is a brief chronological record of subject's disillusionment. The causes of his disillusionment, which of course are of greater interest than the mere record of his disillusionment, can be summarized as follows:

CP's anti-Nationalism

Subject came to realize that the French CP was a traitorous and subversive party inasmuch as part of its program was betraying France's national interests. As a patriot who is a Frenchman first and a Communist second, he opposes the party's continuous efforts to strip France of her military defenses and the party's vilification of the French force's in Indo-China and Korea. In this respect, it is of interest to note that while he dislikes De Gaulle for many reasons, he considers De Gaulle as France's "first resistant" and respects him as such. Similarly, while he admires THOREZ for all that he has done for the workers and considers him the champion of the working class, he regards him as a traitor to his country who should have been shot for desertion in time of war. Subject takes particular exception to Thorez' oft-quoted statement that French Communists will never bear arms against the Soviet Union, and states that he, like many other Communists, would not hesitate to take up arms against the Soviet Union if this country attacked France. Remembering his own regiment's lack of arms in 1939, subject states that he approves the North Atlantic treaty as a defensive treaty and approves all of France's current efforts for rearmament. In this respect, he also approves of the installation of American bases in France.

CP's Deceit

Subject came to realize that much of the CP's propaganda was based on lies and deceptions. As examples of the Party's mendacity, he cited the Communist claim that the United States was engaged in bacteriological warfare and the Communist contention that the United States and South Korea provoked the war in Korea. He stated that while many of the Party functionaries realized that these charges were false, they nevertheless continued to support them publicly.

Desire for Peace

Subject came to realize that the Soviet Union is actually the greatest threat to world peace. In this respect he cited the Korean and Indo-Chinese wars as but two examples of Soviet aggression and mentioned such incidents as the recent Soviet attack on an "Air France" plane as further evidence of Soviet hostility and

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intimidation. The Soviets have made the workers of the peace,"
he states.

Visit to the Soviet Union

Subject came to realize that the Soviet Union was not "The workers' paradise" that it professed to be and the Communism which exists in the USSR today is in fact "Stalinism," a totalitarian form of government which has little resemblance to Marxist socialism. Subject's trip to the USSR in 1950 as a guest of the Soviet Union was unquestionably one of the major factors of his disillusionment, for while he was impressed by some of the things which he was shown, he was more impressed by the things he was not permitted to see. "It was a herded tour," he comments; "we were shown the new workers' quarters but we were not allowed to inspect the old quarters, even though we could often see them in the distance. The bit of the rural life which I saw on our trip from Moscow to Leningrad was a particular shock. The best comment I can make on the tour is to point out that of the men on the tour whom I know, at least half of them have since left the Party."

CP's Subservience to Moscow

Subject came to realize that the French CP was but a subservient tool in the hands of the Soviet politbureau. As he stated in his own words, "As a cell secretary, I take my orders from the section secretary, who in turn receives them from the federal secretariat. The secretariat receives its orders from the Central Committee, and the latter receives its orders from Moscow. I did not object to the French CP's dependence upon the politbureau as long as I believed in the harmony of interests between the French CP and the politbureau, but it has long since become evident to me that the orders of the politbureau are often detrimental to both my party and my country. The French CP has become a captive party directed by a foreign power for this power's own ends, and I refuse to remain subservient to this totalitarian and authoritarian power in those instances where I recognize that this power's orders are opposed to my interests." In this respect, subject cited the Party's overnight change of attitude toward German rearmament, pointing out that this change was dictated by the politbureau for the benefit of German Communists and to the detriment of French Communists. Again, he pointed out that while he personally admired Pinay and approved of the majority of his program to date, he, as a CP member, was instructed to denounce everything Pinay had attempted and achieved.

CP's Atheism

Subject came to realize that the CP was essentially atheistic. As a "believer," if not a communicant, who is married to a devout Catholic, subject has become increasingly upset by the CP's attacks on the church throughout the world. His objections to the Party's

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atheism reached their height when the Party recently criticized him for permitting his children to join the Catholic church. Subject believes that the church and politics are two separate matters and he believes that one can be both a Communist and a Catholic.

CP's Exploitation of Labor Unions

Subject came to realize that the CP's exploitation of the CGT for purely political purposes was detrimental to the union and to labor in general. He points out that the CGT lost much of its membership and influence as a result of the politically inspired strikes of 1947, following which the Force Ouvriere union was created, and attributes the present schism in French union labor entirely due to the CP's attempts to exploit the CGT for political purposes. He cites himself as an example of but one worker who has lost his job as the result of having been exploited by the CP.

Subject has not yet withdrawn from the CP nor has he left the CGT. In his own words, he is "thoroughly fed up with the Sovietization of the French CP and the latter's domination and exploitation of the CGT" but he is nevertheless reluctant to leave either group for he does not believe that any other political party or union offer satisfactory alternatives. In this sense, he regards the Socialist party as a bourgeois party and he believes that the Force Ouvriere union is generally ineffective. Subject considers himself a "militant worker" and as such he is unwilling to give his allegiance to any political party which he does not feel is entirely devoted to the workers' interests. Similarly, he is reluctant to join what he still regards as a schismatic union, and while he is sympathetic to the motives which underlay the creation of the Force Ouvriere, he clings to the idea that the founders of the Force Ouvriere should have remained in the CGT in order to fight out within the CGT the issues for which they left the CGT.

Subject is obviously undergoing a tremendous ideological crisis. Whether or not he remains in the CP, time alone will tell. He says that he will remain in the Party, at least for the moment, although he flatly states that he is through as a militant and disciplined functionary who is ready to follow blindly the party's orders. In summarizing his political philosophy, he commented: "I am a Communist, but I am not and never will be a Stalinist." When the writer suggested that subject was in a position quite similar to the position in which Tito found himself just before his break with the Cominform, subject was quick to agree with this analogy. He stated that there were many Communists in France who felt as he did and that there was a considerable if yet unmobilized sentiment among elements of the party for establishing an independent national Communist Party. Although he was reluctant to discuss the matter in detail, subject admitted that he and some twenty other Communist functionaries in Marseille had been studying the possibilities of creating an independent workers' party which they had tentatively named the Partie

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The story of subject's disillusionment with the Communist Party is scarcely an original one nor is it, in his instance, a particularly significant one. However, if it is accepted that subject is but one of many French Communists who are presently undergoing this process of disillusionment and disaffection, subject's story is of interest as a case study of the ideological crisis which certain members of the French CP are passing through.

An analysis of the causes of this disillusionment and disaffection should certainly be of interest to anyone concerned with the further defection of the French worker from the Communist Party.

Heyward G. Hill
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American Consul General

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