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**West European Communism After Stalinism  
Comparative Approaches**

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# Introduction

The historiographical field of communism has changed within the last decade. The bulk of the existing literature from before 1989 was written in the perspective of the Cold War, either with the implicit objective of ‘knowing the enemy’,<sup>1</sup> or with the aim to present sympathetic (‘solidaric’) images of communism, or to use the communist experience as a (negative or positive) example for other radical movements.<sup>2</sup> Much of this research has suffered from the large lacunas in the available source material, first and foremost due to the closed Soviet archives, and important issues – for example, the financing of world communist parties by the Soviet Union – were thus left to more or less inspired guesses.

These circumstances also marked the literature on communism in Western Europe written before 1989/91, and indeed some of the discussions during the 1990s. Although the historiographic picture differs from case to case and from country to country, some generalisations can be made.<sup>3</sup> ‘Sympathetic’ party histories were mostly written either by official party historians or by intellectuals ‘close to the party’. During the high tide of Eurocommunism, the late 1970s, a flood of overly enthusiastic books was published in English on the Italian, French and Spanish communist parties. An interesting category are those works by scholars who attempted to provide an ‘internal’ critique of communist parties, departing from the logic of the party’s own strategic aims.<sup>4</sup>

Most of these works are, nevertheless, still of value today, and a general feeling among scholars of communism is that newly opened archives usually do not cause a historiographic revolution, but rather re-direct and enrich our understanding of the topic. It remains the case, however, that pre-1989 literature on communism should be read on a different basis today. The passing of Soviet-style communism has made it possible to take a less emotional approach to the

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<sup>1</sup> For example the journal Problems of Communism (Washington).

<sup>2</sup> For a scholarly ‘solidaric’ account, see M.A. Kaplan, ed., The Many Faces of Communism. New York, 1978. The radical considerations on the communist experience ultimately dates back to Trotsky’s critique of the Soviet Union, revived in Isaac Deutscher’s The Unfinished Revolution of 1967. In the 1970s, corresponding with the ‘reconstruction/re-enactment’ of the Comintern traditions, the articles, pamphlets and discussions on the history of communism swelled into a vast stream of publications, now mostly forgotten. See G. Koenen, Das Rote Jahrzehnt. Cologne, 2001, pp. 257-316.

<sup>3</sup> A very interesting overview of the literature on the Italian and French communist parties in this perspective is to be found in: E. Aga-Rossi, G. Quagliariello, “Il comunismo in Italia e Francia: per una nuova storia comparata” in E. Aga-Rossi, G. Quagliariello, eds. L’altra faccia della luna. I rapporti tra PCI, PCF e Unione sovietica. Bologna, 1997, pp. 9-28. About the Northern parties, see Kommunism - antikommunism. Forskning i Sverige och Norden. Arbeterhistoria, 100 (4/2001).

<sup>4</sup> For example: D. Sassoon, The strategy of the Italian Communist Party. From the Resistance to the Historic Compromise. London, 1980.

subject. With the disappearance of the (real or imagined) Soviet threat in Western Europe, the heated debates about communists as a fifth column have lost their immediate political relevance. It is now possible to ask more sophisticated questions about the history of these parties, in particular regarding their relations with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).<sup>5</sup> The study of West European communism can now become a topic like any other: not without political content, but without the immediate connection to an on-going global conflict that it had during the Cold War.

The newly acquired historicity of the concept of communism also makes it more possible to avoid essentialist questions about the nature of communism. It is, in our opinion, no longer relevant to categorise communism in an essentialist way as progressive, undemocratic/democratic etc. , or indeed to find the ‘true character’ of communism. Rather, it is important to look at the developments of the communist parties over time and their dynamic elements. Or, in other words, how did the dogmas of Marxism-Leninism, democratic centralism, the vanguard role of the communist party and proletarian internationalism adapt (or indeed fail to do so) to the social and political changes taking place in Western Europe after World War II?

It is in this light that we have chosen to focus mainly on the 1960s. The changes that began at the 20<sup>th</sup> congress of the CPSU in 1956 affected the communist parties deeply in the longer term. Though ideological coercion increased with the invasion of Hungary in autumn 1956 and the anti-revisionist campaign of 1957, destalinisation could not be undone, nor could the Soviet Union return to the tight control of the Comintern years. The ‘long 1960s’ were a period of crisis within the world communist movement in terms of organisation and authority, as well as in the individual parties. The Sino-Soviet split and the rise of the New Left only increased the feeling of insecurity within the world of communism. This emergence of more centres of left-wing radicalism fundamentally changed the context of the communist parties and challenged them in new ways. The Italian communist ideas of Polycentrism and *allargamento* (enlargement), as described by Maud Bracke, were responses to this new situation.

Externally, the rapid economic growth and rise in income in the 1960s shook the ideological and social basis of many communist parties. Although some stubbornly held onto the theory of absolute impoverishment, it was clear that a social revolution led by the starving masses would not happen in Western Europe. A new strategy had to be developed to respond to new social realities, as is described in connection to the Swedish communist party in the article in this volume of Thomas Jorgensen. The development of the global relation between capitalism and communism from confrontation to détente required a change in

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<sup>5</sup> One of the first systematic attempts to publish, analyse, contextualise and translate documents from the archives of the former Soviet Union, was carried out by the *Cold War International History Project* based at the *Woodrow Wilson International Center of Scholars, Washington*, from the mid-1990s onwards.

the worldview of the western communist parties. Détente altered the prospects of revolution in the West, as the superpowers seemed to head for a *modus vivendi* on the European continent. At the same time the rise of the liberation movements in the Third World, personified in Mao and Castro, challenged Soviet ideas of ‘peaceful coexistence’ with the capitalist world from the Left. The communist parties, as the traditional bastions of radicalism, were forced to respond to these challenges in one way or the other.

Although we want to emphasise the dynamic elements of Western communism, there were undeniably also continuous elements which marked the identity of these parties throughout the period. All of the literature on West European communist parties, be it from a historical or social or political sciences perspective, has pointed at the double character of these parties, and the tension between their national and international belongings as a continuous element. On the one hand, nearly all these parties, until at least the late 1970s, defined themselves as part of the so-called world communist movement. At the same time the larger ones in particular, such as the French, Italian and Finnish, were an integral part of the domestic political life of their country. They had positions in national and local politics, in trade unions or in civil society, and were involved in alliances with other political forces. Interesting analytical frameworks have been proposed by authors who have tried to understand and conceptualise the *tension* between the domestic and international belongings of these parties. In this respect, still very useful today is the theoretical framework developed by the French historians, Stéphane Courtois and Marc Lazar, who introduced the twin concept of a ‘teleological dimension’ and ‘societal dimension’ in West European communist identity.<sup>6</sup> In this view, the teleological dimension refers to the utopia of world communism and the belief of taking part in a universal and historically necessary process. It includes those elements of the party’s identity which can be traced back to the initial Leninist project of communism: Marxist-Leninist doctrine, the concept and internal organisation of the vanguard communist party, the development of prescribed strategies and tactics. The societal dimension, on the other hand, includes those elements of the identity of the communist party which made it a part of its (national) society, its implant in terms of adherents and voters, its having assimilated national identity and culture. Both contributions to this working paper are attempts to expand and refine our understanding of this duality, departing from one of the two dimensions; while the article by Thomas Jorgensen analyses aspects of the national position of West European communist parties, the contribution by Maud Bracke investigates developments in some of their international orientations.

However, in our perspective, the national and the international should not be conceptualised as two analytical tools of the same nature for explaining the

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<sup>6</sup> *Dimension teleologique and dimension societale*. S. Courtois, M. Lazar, *Histoire du Parti communiste de France*. Paris, 2000, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., “Introduction”.

strategies and choices of the West European communist parties in the Cold War. Instead, we propose the following: As a constitutive element of communist identity, the dogma of ‘proletarian internationalism’ and the sense of belonging to a universal movement demarcated the mental structures of the West European communists. The practical correlation to this was the infrastructure of the ‘world communist movement’ which set boundaries on the range of choices at their disposal. Being part of the communist world and being subordinate to the Soviet Union and its global strategies implied that the range of policy choices was limited. There were simply things that could not be said, done or even *imagined*. Internationalism as a theory and myth, and the structures and rules of conduct of the ‘world communist movement’ can be seen as a fence that delimited a territory inside which one could operate, act, speak and think. Inside this territory, space for manoeuvre and a range of possible choices and flexibility existed.

The core question then comes down to the following: what were the changing ‘margins of manoeuvre’ that the West European communist parties and their leaders disposed of, and where did their limits lie? In his contribution, Jorgensen demonstrates the importance of agency, and how choices by individual leaders and leaderships mattered, even in the case of small parties. Bracke’s contribution shows that limited changes were possible even regarding the solid, old dogma of proletarian internationalism. Both articles are attempts to make visible the margins of manoeuvre or the ‘inside the fence’. Methodologically, we have chosen to do so, firstly, through comparative research or multi-party analyses; this approach makes the varieties of communism which have existed visible. Secondly, analyses of crisis episodes, such as 1956 and 1968, show how far change was possible. Moreover, both methods bring to light the limitations to variation over space and change over time. These limitations were due to the weight of a common identity, of an ideological heritage, of a shared basic set of mental structures and the practical constraints of the “ties that bind”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The phrase is taken from J.B. Urban, “The ties that bind: West European Communism and the Communist States of East Europe” in W.E. Griffiths, ed. The European Left: Italy, France and Spain. Lexington, Mass., 1979.

# Proletarian Internationalism, Autonomy and Polycentrism.

## *The changing international perspectives of the Italian and French communist parties in the “long 1960s”*

**Maud Bracke**

### **Introduction**

This article analyses some elements of the development of theories and practices of “proletarian internationalism”<sup>1</sup> as it was observed by the communist parties of Western Europe, in particular the Italian and French communist parties (*Partito comunista italiano*, PCI, and *Parti communiste de France*, PCF), over the “long 1960s”, the years 1956-1974.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, I will look at the ways in which the PCI and PCF conceived one element of proletarian internationalism, namely, relations between communist parties and modes of interaction and organisation inside the so-called “world communist movement”.<sup>3</sup> At the focus of attention is the question how and why the positions of the PCI and PCF on this aspect of internationalism converged and diverged in the time period at hand, and why. The issue of relations between communist parties was closely linked to other

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<sup>1</sup> For some preliminary remarks on the definition of proletarian internationalism, see below.

<sup>2</sup> As the two largest West European communist parties both in terms of membership and of electoral score throughout most of the Cold War, the French and Italian communist parties have been the focus of attention in most of the works on West European communism. They also represent a classic choice for a comparative study of communism. Essential here is M. Lazar, *Maisons rouges. Les Partis communistes français et italien de la Libération à nos jours*. Paris, 1992. For this article, I have made use of recently opened party records of the PCI and PCF, respectively to be found in the *Istituto Gramsci (Archivio PCI – APCI)* in Rome and the *Archives PCF (APCF)* in Paris. Additionally, I have made use here of the archives of the communist party of the former German Democratic Republic, the SED (*Zentrale Parteiarchiv, ZPA-SED*) kept at the *Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPMDB)* in Berlin; of the Dutch communist party CPN (*Archief CPN – ACPN*) kept at the *Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IISG)* in Amsterdam; and of the Belgian communist party PCB-KPB (*Archief KPB – AKPB*) kept at the *Documentatie- en Archiefcentrum van het Communisme in België (Dacob)* in Brussels. For some figures regarding the parliamentary representation of the PCI and PCF as well as their membership between 1956 and 1974, see the appendix.

<sup>3</sup> The classic phrase “world communist movement” was used after 1956 by those communist parties and groups world-wide that were loyal to the Soviet Union. It included socialist states (including China), out-of-government communist parties, communist parties operating clandestinely, and from the 1960s onwards, Marxist movements of national liberation. See L. Marcou, *Le mouvement communiste international depuis 1945*. Paris, 1980, Introduction.



dimensions of internationalism, such as the value of the Soviet Union as a model for communist parties world-wide and the defence of Soviet foreign policy interests. This is why the question at hand here, which might seem very specific at first sight, permits us to shed light on the broader development of the communist world in the long 1960s, and the position of the West European communist parties inside it.

The immediate context of this question is the problematic situation in which the West European communist parties found themselves as members of the world communist movement on the one hand and as political actors in pluralist democracies on the other hand. The wider context of this is the shift from Cold War antagonism to *détente* between the superpowers from the early 1960s onwards. To the West European communist parties, this shift had ambiguous effects: although domestically it helped them to escape their political and cultural isolation, internationally it raised questions about a Soviet commitment to the “advance of socialism” in the West. This context, common to all of the out-of-government communist parties in Western Europe during the Cold War, was an important reason for some of them to experiment with ideas of a special grouping of West European communism. If we conceptualise the development of the West European communist parties as taking place on three levels – the communist “bloc” level, the national level and the regional (i.e. West European) level – then the question here becomes: how did the West European communist parties attempt to construct a regional field of operation in order to overcome the tension between their domestic and international belongings?

This phase in the history of West European communism has in much of the literature been understood as the prelude to the Eurocommunist movement of the second half of the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> It has often been considered, simply, as one straightforward process towards greater autonomy from the Soviet Union and the world communist movement, and towards a more critical judgement on “really existing socialism”. I wish to offer here a different and a less teleological interpretation of West European communism and its internationalism during the long 1960s. Rather than a one-way process towards autonomy, a constant tension existed between party autonomy on the one hand and dependence on the Soviet Union on the other,<sup>5</sup> or between innovation and immobility.

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<sup>4</sup> Such works are, for example: P. Lange, M. Vannicelli, eds. The communist parties of Italy, France and Spain: Postwar change and continuity. Harvard, 1981; R.N. Tannahill, The communist parties of Western Europe. A comparative study. London, 1978.

<sup>5</sup> West European communist parties were dependent on the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War in an ideological, political and financial way. The main source of information on the funding by the Soviet Union is: V. Riva, Oro da Mosca. I finanziamenti sovietici al PCI dalla Rivoluzione d'ottobre al crollo dell'URSS. Milano, 1999. For some figures, see the appendix to this article.

Admittedly, there was a minimal *de facto* convergence of the internationalist positions of the PCI and PCF between 1965 and 1974, which in turn made a broader convergence of West European communism possible. However, their motivations for approaching each other on the issue of internationalism, differed considerably. This ultimately was to do with a different world-view and a different vision of socialism. In the wider group of West European communist parties, the PCI and PCF represent extreme cases in this respect. This, together with the fact that the PCI and PCF were undoubtedly the leading forces in this group, makes it possible to generalise upon West European communism as a whole here, departing from the two cases.

## **The transformation of internationalism in West European communism 1956-1968**

### ***Proletarian internationalism***

The old Leninist theory of proletarian internationalism had, inside the communist world from 1917 onwards, served to define communist identity and to theoretically legitimise loyalty towards the Soviet Union. A basic sentiment of international solidarity, was deeply interiorised not merely as an ideological choice, but also considered a historic necessity, according to the laws of (vulgarised) historic materialism. In theory, the obedience to proletarian internationalism for West European communist parties since their Bolshevisation in the 1920s, included the following elements:

1. The imagining of a world-wide socialist community (the so-called “world communist movement”), inside which specific forms of interaction and rules of conduct were observed by its components (the communist parties).
2. The profession and reproduction of the myth of the Bolshevik revolution, the Soviet Communist Party and the Soviet state, and the profession of their universal value as models.
3. The defence of the foreign policy interests of the “first socialist state”, the Soviet Union.

In practice, however, a constant tension existed between these elements of continuity and constraints on the one hand, and the need to change and adapt to their domestic political situation. This had already been the case in the inter-war period, when for example the French communist party entered into a Popular Front with non-communist forces. Similarly, following the second World War the Italian, French and some of the smaller parties entered coalition governments. These experiences did not lead to the weakening of these parties’ internationalism on Soviet terms, but they did generally go hand in hand with an opening of minds and a willingness to escape rigid world-views. The setting in of the Cold War in 1947, however, marked the start of a phase of domestic isolation for the West

European communist parties, characterised by a return to “orthodox” internationalist rethorics. During the period following the de-stalinisation in 1956, which is of interest to us here, the internationalism of West European communism generally developed in the following ways:

1. Towards not the denial of this special community or its own belonging to it, nor of its specific rules and loyalties, but a desire to *change* these rules into more egalitarian and democratic modes of interaction between all communist parties. This would leave greater autonomy to each individual party.
2. Towards not the denial of the relative and historic value of 1917 and of the Soviet state and its communist party, but of its universal model-value. This implied the search for other models, more suitable to advanced capitalist societies and pluralist democracies.
3. Towards not giving up Soviet foreign policy interests altogether, but making those to some extent subordinate to what were perceived as the national interests of the communist party in terms of its implantation in its own society and its relations with other political and socio-economic actors domestically.

The development of internationalism was an essential part of the broader transformation of West European communism after the disruptive effects of 1956. Generally speaking, all of the West European communist parties after 1956 evolved towards more reformism and more adaptation to pluralist democracy and towards giving up “orthodox” ideas of revolution and the nature of socialist society. This development resulted from the tension these parties experienced between international allegiance and subordination to the Soviet Union on the one hand, and adaptation to a domestic situation of pluralist parliamentary democracy and advanced capitalism on the other.<sup>6</sup> It was paralleled by a long but steady process of demystification of communist ideology, which was (unwillingly) initiated in the Kremlin itself with the demystification of Stalin in 1956. Although the direction of these processes were common to all communist parties in the West during the Cold War, the patterns and paces differed greatly.

A claim for more autonomy on behalf of some of the West European communist parties came to the surface in 1956, after the 20<sup>th</sup> party congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). It was both the result of the somewhat increased opportunities for free debate, and a response to the state of profound ideological disorientation in which the whole communist movement found itself from 1956 on. At the 20<sup>th</sup> congress of the CPSU, Nikita Khrushchev initiated three major changes: de-stalinisation, the strategy of “national roads to

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<sup>6</sup> Important theorisations on the “two worlds” inside which the Western communist parties operated, and their dual character that resulted from this are to be found in: S. Courtois, M. Lazar, Histoire du Parti communiste de France. Paris, 1995 (for the twin concept of *dimension téléologique* and *dimension sociétale*); D. Blackmer, A. Kriegel, The international role of the communist parties of Italy and France. Cambridge, 1975.

socialism” and the strategy of “peaceful coexistence” with the capitalist world.<sup>7</sup> Although all of these changes had the potential of being to the advantage of West European communist parties, their autonomy and their domestic positions, the effects were not straightforward. On the whole, the immediate effects on West European communism of the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU congress and of the de-stalinisation were the creation of a general state of bewilderment, the threat of a loss of identity and of a disintegration of existing power structures. Hence, the West European communist parties’ first reaction following the 20<sup>th</sup> congress, was mostly one of conservatism: partial denial or tabooing of what had happened, closing of the ranks, trying to limit the possible disruptive effects of the changes. However, after a couple of months, the attitudes of the West European communist parties in international matters, and of the PCI and PCF in particular, started to diverge. It was the start of a phase of tension and great differences between the PCI and PCF. Of all the West European communist parties, only those which had already initiated some elements of careful change before 1956, such as the Italian, Swedish, Spanish and Belgian ones, now took up the chance to continue this process.<sup>8</sup> The Italian communist party, PCI, went furthest in this respect. For the next decades to come, it always took the lead in trying to reform internationalism.

### ***The PCI, Polycentrism and autonomy***

The transformation of the PCI’s internationalism after 1956 occurred around two concepts -autonomy and Polycentrism - and in three phases. In a first phase, part of the PCI leadership, as an immediate consequence of the de-stalinisation set in in Moscow in 1956, started to question the internal organisation of the world communist movement. Long-term PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti, despite being deeply dissatisfied with the iconoclastic and abrupt way in which Khrushchev had proceeded, was ready by the summer of 1956 to call for dramatic change.<sup>9</sup> He published the official party-response to the de-stalinisation in the famous

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<sup>7</sup> There is a vast literature on the 20<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress and its effects on world communism. For our use here, I will only refer to: a general overview of the disruptive effects of the de-stalinisation on world communism in: H. Carrere d’Encausse, 1956. La déstalinisation commence. Brussels, 1984; a succinct but useful and interpretative overview of the effects of 1956 on the West European communist parties is: M. Lazar, “Unite et crises des PC ouest europeens 1947-1960”, Communisme, 1992, n. 29-31, pp. 29-43; a more general interpretation of the effects of the de-stalinisation on the Left in Italy and France: B. Groppo, G. Riccanboni, eds. La sinistra e il ‘56 in Italia e Francia. Padua, 1987.

<sup>8</sup> Lazar, “Unite et crises”, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> Two elaborate and interpretative accounts of the initial, hesitant reactions by Togliatti and the PCI leadership to the de-stalinisation are to be found in: M. Flores, N. Gallerano, Sul PCI. Un’interpretazione storica. Bologna, 1992, pp. 105-131; J.B. Urban, Moscow and the Italian communist party. From Togliatti to Berlinguer. Boulder, 1980, pp. 225-243. The full minutes of all the meetings of the *Direzione*, the PCI’s decision-making body, throughout 1956, are published in: M.L. Righi, Quel terribile 1956. I verbali della Direzione tra il XX Congresso del PCUS e l’VIII Congresso del PCI. Roma, 1996.

interview “Nove domande sul XXo congresso del PCUS” to the journal *Nuovi argomenti*.<sup>10</sup> Here, the Italian communist leader urged the Soviet leaders to investigate the more structural causes behind what he called the “degeneration of methods of leadership” under Stalin. This also implied a first distancing from the Soviet Union as a model for socialism. Togliatti would not have embarked on such a risky process as the partial demystification of the Soviet Union and its leaders, had he not seen an urgent reason for it. This urgent reason was the well-perceived need to increase the PCI autonomy *vis-a-vis* the Soviet Union and the oppressive structures of the world communist movement, in order for the party to develop its domestic strategies aiming at its coming to power in a more autonomous way.<sup>11</sup>

However, the way in which Togliatti foresaw the organisation of the communist world was not a loose confederation of communist parties with a high degree of autonomy. As he had deeply interiorised Marxist-Leninist thought and historical materialism, communism in his view ultimately could not be merely national. Instead, his vision was one of a world communist movement, which was regionally organised into clusters of communist parties and/or states.<sup>12</sup> Here Togliatti introduced the term Polycentrism.<sup>13</sup> In its initial and minimal interpretation, Polycentrism meant that communist parties with geo-political affinities should strengthen their ties and form sub-entities inside the world communist movement. These would jointly deliberate their domestic and regional problems and co-ordinate their domestic strategies. Between and inside these regional clusters of communist parties, relations should be egalitarian, i.e. there should not be a “guide party” or guide state. There would be no law-governed patterns for the development of socialism. This idea broke with Stalinist traditions

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<sup>10</sup> The interview is published in: “Palmiro Togliatti. Intervista a *Nuovi argomenti*” in PCI, ed. Il Partito comunista italiano e il movimento operaio internazionale. Roma, 1968, pp. 34-61.

<sup>11</sup> The question of whether the PCI was an autonomous or rather a Soviet-directed party has raised much controversy in the (Italian) literature. Recent literature tends to emphasise the importance of the ties with the Soviet Union and the world communist movement, and inserts this into a broader understanding of the political identity of the party. See a discussion of the literature from this point of view in S. Pons, “L’URSS e il PCI nel sistema internazionale della guerra fredda” in R. Gualtieri, ed. Il PCI nell’Italia repubblicana. Roma, 2001, pp. 3-45. It has also been emphasised recently that the party’s internationalism was not only damaging to its domestic position but also a source of domestic political capital, especially in the context of the Italy’s position in the early Cold War and the diffusion of sentiments of anti-Americanism. See, for example, L. Cafagna, C’era una volta. Riflessioni sul comunismo italiano. Venezia, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> See also D. Sassoon, The strategy of the Italian communist party. From the Resistance to the Historic Compromise. London, 1981, p. 99-102.

<sup>13</sup> To be sure, it was Khrushchev who had used the terms before him on the 20<sup>th</sup> party congress in 1956. Soon afterwards, though, the term was discarded from official Soviet texts. See: P. Togliatti, “Il ‘sistema policentrico’ e la via italiana al socialismo” in PCI, ed. Il PCI e il movimento operaio internazionale. Rome, 1968, pp. 62-81.

of international communist organisation, as under Stalin any type of bi- or multilateral contacts between communist parties had been banned as “faction forming”. In its maximal, strategic meaning, Polycentrism had far-reaching doctrinal implications: there was a specific West European path to socialism, different from the experiences in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe or Asia. The origins of this line of thought can be traced back to the writings of Antonio Gramsci during the inter-war period. In addition, a deeply-rooted (West) European superiority complex led to this way of thinking.

It is important to note that Polycentrism and autonomy, although often categorised together under the header of “New Internationalism” by the PCI itself at the time as well as in historiography, were in fact two very different things. The idea of a regionally based model for socialism (a West European one, an Asian one, ...) in its ultimate implications went counter to a strict notion of party autonomy. It was only a small step from the idea of regionally based co-ordination of communist strategies to a regionally defined pattern or even model for the “road to socialism”. Also the Soviet Union responded to the two claims in a different way. The strategic dimension of Polycentrism was more strongly felt as a threat by the Soviet Union – to its dominance over a tightly disciplined communist world and to an orthodox conception of proletarian internationalism – than a simple call for autonomy by individual communist parties was. This was because it directly challenged the “leading role” of the Soviet Union, and implied a limited form of criticism of the Soviet model, or at least the denial of its universality.

Due to explicit Soviet pressure, especially after the invasion of Hungary in October-November 1956, and to resistance from within the party, Togliatti needed first to advocate autonomy as an intermediate and more acceptable step.<sup>14</sup> It was to become a constant feature of the PCI’s “New Internationalism” up to the late 1970s, to permanently shift between the minimalist interpretation of Polycentrism and the maximalist one. The choice between the two was pragmatic, and would depend on the attitudes of the other West European communist parties (the PCF and in the 1970s the Spanish communist party, the PCE) and on reactions from the Soviet Union. Though the PCI leaders were compelled to drop the use of the term Polycentrism altogether until 1961, they took a series of initiatives with an implicit Polycentric character – at least in its minimalist meaning. Already in late March 1956, Togliatti requested to meet with the PCF leader Maurice Thorez secretly. It became amply clear that the two most powerful Western communist leaders disagreed on all the important issues concerning the organisation of the world communist movement, on the

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<sup>14</sup> Sassoon, The strategy of the Italian communist party, p. 100.

interpretation of Stalinism and on Khrushchev's innovations.<sup>15</sup> Yet two months later another, still secret, meeting took place. Though the atmosphere was friendlier, there was still obvious disagreement on all the major issues regarding internationalism as well as domestic strategies.<sup>16</sup>

In a following stage, Italian communist thinking on internationalism was transformed by the Sino-Soviet dispute, particularly in terms of the value of the Soviet Union as a universal model. The dispute rose in the late 1950s and developed into an open rift between the two world powers in the first half of the 1960s. Mao opposed Khrushchev's innovations, in particular the possibility of peaceful and parliamentary roads to socialism, and peaceful coexistence with the West. The dispute affected West European communism in a profound way and had a contradictory influence on the diffusion of ideas of autonomy, regional communism and Polycentrism. On the one hand, the Sino-Soviet dispute further undermined Soviet hegemony over the world communist movement and reinforced centrifugal tendencies, which created more independence for those parties seeking it. On the other hand, on the level of ideology and discourse, the Sino-Soviet dispute tied the West European parties more closely to the Soviet Union. There was little reason for West European communism to be on Mao's side in the ideological disputes concerning peaceful coexistence and the parliamentary road to socialism. Moreover, the Soviet communist party, often successfully, instrumentalised the "threat of Maoism" to limit the independence of the West European parties. This was possible at the time because Maoism represented a serious threat to the internal unity of all of the West European communist parties. This led the leaderships of these parties at times to refer back to "orthodoxy" and to the Soviet Union.<sup>17</sup>

The PCI, like some of the smaller West European communist parties, took the opportunity of the Sino-Soviet schism to claim its autonomy from Moscow. The Italian communist leaders cunningly understood that there were certain advantages to the deadlock situation of a permanent conflict but no explicit break

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<sup>15</sup> See the memoirs of an eye-witness to the meeting, G. Cerreti, Con Togliatti e Thorez. Milano, 1973, pp. 319-323.

<sup>16</sup> G.C. Pajetta, Le crisi che ho vissuto. Budapest, Praga, Varsavia. Rome, 1982, pp. 76-79. It should be noted that Western Europe was from the outset not the only geographical conscription for Polycentrism in the minds of the Italian communist leaders – the Mediterranean was another. The rapprochement to Tito's League of Yugoslavian communists from 1956 onwards was a very significant expression of this.

<sup>17</sup> The domestic position of especially the smaller parties was severely damaged by Maoist schisms. More or less important Maoist groups were excluded or left the party in Switzerland and Austria (1963), Spain (1964), Belgium (1964), The Netherlands and Portugal. In the PCF, a Maoist deviation was only to occur in 1966, while in the PCI internal proto-Maoist currents constituted a structural problem for party unity. For an overview, see Lazar, "Unite et crises", p. 38.

between the Soviet Union and China.<sup>18</sup> Although the PCI leaders repeatedly affirmed that they did not agree with any of the major Maoist theses, they equally emphasised that they were against any sort of official condemnation of Maoism by the Soviet-led communist world. They advocated doctrinal tolerance within the world communist movement, and, together with the Romanian Communist Party, successfully obstructed the Soviet plans to call a world communist conference in 1963 which was to publicly denounce Maoism.<sup>19</sup> As the PCI leaders had understood, the calling of such a conference would have inevitably introduced a new phase of ideological rigidity under tight Moscow control. In a document, meant to be privately addressed to Khrushchev and written in Yalta only a few days before his death in August 1964, Togliatti further elaborated his conceptions of “New Internationalism”.<sup>20</sup> He advised the Soviet leaders to demonstrate doctrinal tolerance *vis-à-vis* Maoist China and to recognise it as a regional centre of power with doctrinal hegemony over the smaller Asian communist parties. This was Polycentrism in its furthest implications.

In the early 1960s, Polycentrism took on a third meaning, namely the idea that the whole world was becoming Polycentric. This idea was a typical of the era of early *détente* between the two superpowers which set in in 1962 after the Cuban Missile crisis. The PCI leadership understood *détente*, de-colonisation, and the increasingly difficult relations inside the Western alliance, as expressions of the “phasing out of the military blocs”. In Europe, this “phasing out” was to be achieved through the creation of links between states, political parties and other organisations from both sides of the Iron Curtain, as well as through the loosening of ties of dominance inside both blocks. This analysis made it possible for some of the PCI leaders to revise the old negative stances on West European integration and the European Economic Communities (EEC). Giorgio Amendola in particular developed a new way of considering PCI’s political role in Western Europe and the EEC.<sup>21</sup> The aim was to make Europe an instrument in the “phasing out of the blocs”, by making it more independent from the United States in economic, political and military terms, and by increasing its contacts with Eastern Europe. The new perspectives on West European integration implied a careful critical distance towards Soviet foreign policies.

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<sup>18</sup> For a similar vision see W.E. Griffith, “The diplomacy of Eurocommunism” in R. Tokes, ed. Eurocommunism and *détente*. London, 1978, pp. 385-436 at 393.

<sup>19</sup> K. Devlin, “The role of the non-ruling communist parties in reforming internationalism” in L.L. Whetten, ed. The present state of communist internationalism. Lexington, 1983, pp. 21-74 at pp. 23-26.

<sup>20</sup> The document was published, against Soviet pressure, in party weekly *Rinascita*, and became known as the “Yalta Memorandum” or “Testament of Togliatti”. It is published in P. Togliatti, Opere scelte. Rome, 1965, pp. 1170-1181.

<sup>21</sup> Essential here is: M. Maggiorani, L’Europa degli altri. Comunisti italiani e integrazione europea. 1957-1969. Rome, 1998, chapters 4 and 5.



***The PCF's tacit conflict with the Kremlin: foreign policy interests and the ghost of the "social status quo" (1965-1967)***

From the mid-1960s onwards, the French communist party started to gain an interest in West European communist regionalism and, at least seemingly, converged to "Italian" positions on this issue. As the PCI leadership had done since 1956, also the PCF leadership, or at least part of it, now in 1965 started to feel the need for more autonomy for individual communist parties. At first sight, it might seem that the PCF leaders were simply influenced in this by their transalpine counterparts. Although the PCF was certainly exposed to the diffusion of the innovative "Italian" ideas, an emphasis on the direct influence would underestimate the strong anti-Italian sentiments that reigned in the PCF apparatus. Since the two "brother" parties had reacted in a very different way to the 1956 events, there had not been anything brotherly about their relations. Instead, open attacks against each other had occurred in both party presses on a regular basis between 1956 and 1964.

Rather, the PCF shifted to Italian positions regarding internationalism for tactical reasons. The PCF understood from the mid-1960s onwards that a rapprochement to the PCI could be a useful bargaining tool in its relationship with the Soviets. Behind this was the fact that the party went through a phase of hidden but very real conflict with the CPSU. The disguised but real conflict between the Soviet and the PCF leaders, should be understood as a genuine – though temporary, tactical and mostly hidden – transformation of the PCF's internationalism. It was the consequence of the French communist leaders' deep dissatisfaction with Soviet international(ist) policies on two major issues. Firstly, the French communist leadership criticised the Soviet leaders for not reacting firmly enough against "centrifugal tendencies" in the communist world, especially in the context of the Sino-Soviet rift. Secondly, the PCF leadership never fully accepted the policy of "peaceful coexistence" with the West as introduced by Khrushchev in 1956 and continued under Brezhnev. It felt that peaceful coexistence implied that the Soviet leaders no longer backed the carrying out of socialist revolution in Western Europe.

Both these forms of PCF criticism of the Soviet Union can be traced back to 1956. The PCF at first resisted any kind of change in internationalism after 1956, and its leadership was particularly irritated about the changes introduced by Khrushchev.<sup>22</sup> Two elements caused the PCF to re-align with Khrushchev in 1957: a bilateral summit meeting on which strong pressure was exercised on the French, and the invasion of Hungary. To the PCF leadership, the invasion of Hungary was a re-assuring proof that the Soviet Union was still prepared, despite

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<sup>22</sup> For the responses to the de-stalinisation in the PCF, see R. Martelli, *1956. Le choc du 20e congres*. Paris, 1982; see also Lazar, *Maisons rouges*, p. 311-313.

peaceful coexistence, to combat “the world imperialist conspiracy”, of which, in their perspective, the Suez crisis in the same year was another indication. However, it needed the Sino-Soviet rift and Khrushchev’s harsh crusade against Mao to make the PCF leaders fully accept Khrushchevism. Only Khrushchev’s anti-Maoist campaign made him, in the eyes of the PCF leaders, trustworthy as the defender of “unity” and “orthodoxy” in the communist world. The PCF’s attitude with respect to China, in the international-communist context, it could be argued, was exactly the opposite to that of the PCI. On a number of issues, the PCF’s stances *de facto* converged with the Chinese. Like the Maoists, the French communists felt an intuitive aversion to Khrushchev’s policies, the destalinisation and peaceful coexistence in particular. However, in contrast to the PCI, the PCF did not recognise any sort of ideological or political autonomy for China or any other party, as it opposed any kind of loss of “discipline” and ideological coherence in the world communist movement. While to the PCI, the best solution to the Sino-Soviet dispute was the ambiguous situation at hand, in which Moscow and Peking were openly at odds with each other but in which it had not come to a formal break, the PCF clearly hoped for an unambiguous excommunication of China and a revival of doctrinal rigidity.

In this context the PCF became the harshest defender of “unity” (a slogan which, in the early 1960s, meant rallying behind the Soviet Union against China) and of Khrushchev’s plan to hold a world communist conference which would officially condemn Maoism. The PCF considered it to be its own special task to make the smaller West European communist parties enthusiastic for the project. More generally, the PCF gave itself the special responsibility to safeguard the “centrist line” against the two threats of “left dogmatism” (Maoism) and “right revisionism” (the PCI in particular). This should be understood as the follow-up to its traditional self-understanding as the “*filie aînée de l’Eglise communiste*”.<sup>23</sup> Since the 1920s, the PCF had considered itself as a local centre of power in the communist world, and had indeed been burdened by the Soviets with special “responsibilities” with regard to the smaller communist parties of Western Europe, and later-on, Northern Africa. In return, its moral and intellectual power in the world communist movement had been significant. Hence, the fact that the PCF was naturally suspicious of the PCI’s Polycentrism was largely because it feared that this would upset the subtle and unofficial balance of power in European communism – or simply, that the Italians would become more influential in European communism than they were.

The PCF’s position regarding the Sino-Soviet conflict, more than an expression of loyalty to the Soviet Union, was ultimately an expression of faithfulness to an abstract vision of unity and orthodoxy. There was a point at which the PCF

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<sup>23</sup> This famous phrase is from Annie Kriegel.

would have defended “unity” (the coherence of all non-Maoist communist parties) even if the Soviet Union had not done so.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Khrushchev’s dismissal in late 1964 made the PCF leadership view their Soviet counterparts as unreliable and unstable allies. Like the PCI, the PCF sent a delegation to the Kremlin, asking for further explanations – which was an absolute novelty in the world communist movement.<sup>25</sup> Specifically, the PCF leadership feared that Khrushchev’s fall would mark the end of the anti-Maoist campaign, or worse still, that the new leadership would seek an armistice with Mao, above the heads of West European (or other) communist parties. The Central Committee meeting of November 1964 hinted at a new, relativist tendency in the PCF’s conception of internationalism: it was stated that the PCF and other communist parties did not need to give their approval of policy changes carried out by the Kremlin.<sup>26</sup> Herewith the PCF implied two things, in the subtle way proper to intra-communist communication: first, that it did not agree with these policy changes, and second, that looser forms of co-operation based on autonomy could be envisaged. Paradoxically, thus, a rigid position on coherence of the communist world and on doctrinal rigidity led the French communist leaders to criticise the Soviet Union.

A concrete illustration of the behind-the-scenes deterioration of PCF-CPSU relations from 1965 on can be found in the preparation process for the international conference, a plan which also the Brezhnev leadership, after some initial hesitation, resumed. By mid February 1965, the PCF had, like all the other parties involved, received the third version of the draft texts. These texts had been written by the Soviets after the last preparatory meeting in late 1964, and would serve as basis texts for the final resolutions. In a letter to the CPSU, the PCF expressed its dissatisfaction with these texts in an unusually blunt way. The complaint was mainly that the Soviets had not taken into account some of their amendments of the second version. The first of these was that peaceful coexistence should be mentioned more explicitly as an “essential task” of communist parties world-wide. Secondly, the PCF had objected against a statement which said that the organisation of bi- and multilateral meetings dealing with the issue of the conference, could be envisaged.<sup>27</sup> These two complaints are significant: they were code-language respectively for the “struggle against Maoism” and against the PCI’s Polycentrism. With these two points, the PCF seemed to insinuate that the Soviets were failing on both fronts.

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<sup>24</sup> Fejtö quotes from a “trustworthy private source” that new PCF Secretary General Waldeck Rochet in November 1964 had told Chou-en-Lai that even if the Soviet Union decided on a truce with China, his party would not go along with it. F. Fejtö, The French communist party and the crisis of international communism. Cambridge Mass., 1967, p. 192.

<sup>25</sup> Fejtö, The French communist party, p. 190.

<sup>26</sup> Fejtö, The French communist party, p. 196.

<sup>27</sup> Letter Guyot to Suslov, 28/2/65, in APCF, “Fajon”, 11 –“International”, box 1.

The PCF's position on the crisis inside the world communist movement and its critique of the Soviet Union, were very clearly expressed on the occasion of their refusal to co-operate in the preparations for a planned "world meeting of writers" in 1965. The meeting, as proposed in January 1965 by the East German SED and undoubtedly supported by the CPSU, would convene communist writers (or so-called *compagnons de route*) in Berlin and Weimar. While the PCF's refusal in itself was probably not strictly new in these matters, the argumentation which they put forward demonstrated a greater assertiveness regarding the party's own (perceived) interests, and a readiness to openly talk about (and exploit) divergences. As the SED delegate reported:

"The PCF is against the project, on the one hand because a broad attendance of parties cannot be guaranteed, on the other hand because all the present divergences on issues of cultural policy will come to the surface. The PCF considers that this is not useful for the present struggle of the West European brother parties".<sup>28</sup>

The second factor which made the PCF dissatisfied with the Soviet leadership, was the latter's policy towards France. It was on the issue of French foreign policy, at the crossroads of international(ist) and domestic interests, that the Cold War impasse in which the PCF found itself became sharply clear. As is well-known, from the early 1960s onwards, France under President de Gaulle took an increasingly distant attitude towards the Western alliance and the United States. This went hand in hand with an attempted rapprochement to the Soviet Union and an increased interest in Europe "from the Atlantic to the Urals". At least since 1958 there had been strong pressure from the Soviet leaders on the PCF not to antagonise de Gaulle in his foreign policy. Even more so, the PCF's support for de Gaulle's foreign policy, was considered in the Kremlin as the ultimate proof of the PCF's internationalist loyalty. Between 1958 and 1965, thus, the classic PCF portrayal of de Gaulle was one of a class adversary with opposed interests and motivations, who nevertheless "objectively" pursued a foreign policy "advantageous to the forces of socialism".<sup>29</sup>

This attitude for the PCF turned into a sort of "story of Isaac". Up to a certain point, the PCF had considered the French-Soviet rapprochement beneficial to its own domestic position, as it legitimised anti-Americanism and filo-Sovietism to a

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<sup>28</sup> "Die FKP spricht sich gegen die Durchführung aus, da einerseits nicht mit einer breiten Teilnahme gerechnet werden kann und andererseits alle gegensätzlichen Auffassungen auf dem Gebiet der Kulturpolitik in der Öffentlichkeit dargelegt würden. Die FKP ist der Meinung, das sei für den gegenwärtigen Kampf der westeuropaieischen Bruederparteien nicht dienlich." "Abteilung Kultur, Internationale Verbindungen, 12/1/1965", SAPMDB, ZPA-SED, DY 30/IV A 2/20, 457.

<sup>29</sup> See also A. Kriegel, "The French communist party and the Fifth Republic", in D. Blackmer, S. Tarrow, Communism in Italy and France. Princeton, 1977, pp. 69-86 at pp. 73-74.

wider audience. However, this development had now, from the PCF perspective, reached a point where Gaullist French and Soviet foreign policy interests became too strongly intertwined. To the PCF, de Gaulle now seemed to be “occupying” feelings of anti-Americanism and filo-Sovietism present in French society, which were traditionally PCF territory. At the presidential elections of 1958, for example, it had become clear that de Gaulle, with a strong anti-Nato discourse, had been able to recuperate many votes from the PCF. In the minds of the PCF leaders, this domestic problem got intertwined with a deeply-felt and older suspicion of the Soviet strategy of peaceful coexistence with the West. Where would rapprochement between conservative, Gaullist France and the Soviet Union leave the PCF and the chances for socialism in France? The PCF leadership started to entertain a great fear that the policy of détente and peaceful coexistence would develop into Soviet acceptance of what they called the “social status quo” in Europe. It was this insight which lay at the basis of the careful changes in the PCF’s international(ist) attitudes from 1965 onwards, in particular in terms of a critique of Soviet foreign policy. It should be noted that this critique, in contrast to the Italian communist critique of the Soviet Union, was one “from the left”: one motivated by a wish to see Soviet foreign policy being more aggressive *vis-à-vis* the capitalist world. However, the PCF leaders never raised this type of criticism of the Soviet Union explicitly, as it touched upon the very essence of communist identity and internationalism, namely, the question of whether it was still useful to be a communist in the West if the Soviet Union itself had given up on the revolution there.

The PCF leadership started to realise that, whatever “supportive” policy the Soviet Union demonstrated towards the West European communist parties in the context of the world communist movement, this would always be subordinate to its great power interests in the context of East-West relations, and its strategic choices, either offensive or defensive. In other words, the Soviet Union had, if not entirely given up, at least degraded revolution in Western Europe to a very low priority, preferring to focus on the defence of “what had been gained” in Europe. On top of this came the PCF’s frustration over the fact that, in the context of decolonisation, Moscow had shifted its attention away from Europe to Asia, Latin America and Africa. It was only at this point that part of the French communist leadership, the new leader Waldeck Rochet in the first place, understood that striving for autonomy inside the world communist movement was inevitable.<sup>30</sup>

That there was indeed a Soviet inclination towards the acceptance of a European “social status quo” never became so explicit as in 1965, when Moscow openly

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<sup>30</sup> The personal role played by Waldeck Rochet, who became General Secretary after Maurice Thorez’ death in August 1964, seems to have been very important in terms of the changes in domestic strategies as well as international orientations. See J. Vigreux, Waldeck Rochet, une biographie politique. Paris, 2000, pp. 249-257.

supported de Gaulle during the campaign preceding the presidential elections. At the high point of the campaign, *Pravda* published a series of articles supporting de Gaulle's foreign policy, while omitting any reference to the PCF and its domestic strategy whatsoever.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, press agency TASS published a statement of support for de Gaulle.<sup>32</sup> That this was an extremely bitter pill to swallow for the French communists became clear from an unusual, and in intra-communist relations very meaningful, reaction to it. A *Humanite* commentary objected to the "interpretation of the domestic problems in France by a foreign agency".<sup>33</sup>

In these circumstances the PCF leadership started to see the advantages in a tactical alliance with the PCI and how it could serve as a bargaining tool in its relationship to the Soviet Union. An additional motivation to start talking with the Italians was to increase "unity" in the communist world by getting the Italian communists involved in the world communist conference project.<sup>34</sup> In principle, the PCF's ambition was still to increase coherence in the communist world, but as long as the Soviet leaders were considered incapable of leading the movement with a firm hand and as long as they were too "benevolent" *vis-à-vis* the West, a certain level of party autonomy was needed. Moreover, as the diffusion and popularity of the PCI's new internationalist ideas among West European communism had become to some extent a *fait accompli*, the French communists needed somehow to work within this new situation. This did not signify that the PCF leaders had suddenly become enthusiastic advocates of Polycentrism. On the contrary, the PCF leadership remained wary of any kind of Polycentric tendency, as the *Bureau politique* internally concluded in early 1965:

"Bi –or multilateral meetings can be useful, but one should be careful that these meetings do not lead to other regional diversifications."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The PCF at that point was engaged in an election alliance with the socialist party FGDS and Francois Mitterand.

<sup>32</sup> This conflict of interests was somewhat similar to the one between the CPSU and the Spanish communist party (PCE) around 1967. The Soviet Union, while trying to normalise its relations with Franquist Spain, started to omit any reference to the struggle of the PCE against the dictatorship in international-communist documents (as e.g. the final resolution of the Karlovy Vary Conference in 1967).

<sup>33</sup> According to Fejtö, more explicit objections to the TASS communique had been debated by the PCF leadership but rejected. Fejtö, *The French communist party*, p. 200.

<sup>34</sup> As Jacques Denis, member of the *Bureau politique* told the SED leaders in January 1967. "Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Gen. Hermann Axen mit Gen. Jacques Denis, am 30. Januar 1967", 3 pages dact. SAPMDB, ZPA-SED, DY/30/IV A 2/20, 457, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> "Des rencontres bi- ou multilaterales peuvent être utiles, mais bien veiller que ces rencontres n'aboutissent pas à d'autres diversifications selon les régions du monde". APCF, *Bureau politique - Décisions* (BP), 11/3/65.

***Careful expressions of West European communist identity: the PCI-PCF rapprochement and the first regional conferences (1965-1967)***

From 1965 onwards the PCI and PCF sought regular contacts with each other, which was the necessary underpinning for a broader tightening of contacts between West European communist parties. The PCI was without any doubt the driving force behind the rapprochement. The Italian communists had rightly understood that it was impossible to bring about any kind of change in the world communist movement without the help of the French. Two private meetings between Waldeck Rochet and Luigi Longo were crucial. The first was held in Geneva in 1965, the second in San Remo a year later. It was decided to hold West European communist conferences on a regular basis. The first two of these conferences were held in Brussels in 1965 and in Vienna one year later.<sup>36</sup>

Although the importance of these conferences in terms of concrete outcome was limited, they are highly important to our argument here. This is so, firstly, because of the mere fact that they were held. They were an absolute novelty in international communist history and took place despite Soviet and East European pressures. This simple fact demonstrates that practices of internationalism were being transformed. In connection to this, the conferences, and the rather time-consuming preparatory processes preceding them, intensified or created a network of contacts between West European communist leaders. This was of particular importance to such smaller West European communist parties as the Austrian and Belgian ones, for which it now became more easy to express their positions in a more assertive way. Secondly, the meetings are interesting because of their limitations rather than their successes, as it was clear that positions converged only on a minimal set of issues.

On the Brussels and Vienna conferences, the careful start of a dynamic process came about. A network of contacts grew, and, especially in Vienna, an atmosphere of confidence and openness was created in which also the smaller parties could express their views in a more free way than they were used to. In my view however, the potentials of this early form of “Eurocommunism” as a tool for bringing about change in the modes of interaction inside the communist world, were limited from the outset. This can be read from the differing motivations among the parties attending the meetings. In terms of their motivations and international perspectives two groups of parties could be distinguished. Firstly, the “autonomist” parties conceived the conference as a way to affirm and reinforce their party autonomy in the context of the world communist movement. They saw the conference as a way of decreasing the influence of the world communist movement on their own organisations, and as a

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<sup>36</sup> There had been a first West European communist conference, in 1959 in Rome, but its importance was limited. Apart from the PCI no other delegation had been willing to conceive the meeting as anything more than an expression of allegiance to the Soviet Union.

loosely organised forum for free debate and exchange of views on shared problems. However, inside the autonomist group, two different tendencies existed – a situation which can be traced back to the tension between the notions of autonomy and Polycentrism mentioned earlier. Smaller North European parties such as the Dutch, British, Swedish and Icelandic ones, were only in favour of pure autonomy and not of Polycentrism in its strategic meaning. Their loyalty towards the world communist movement had become very low, but neither did they feel any loyalty for the construction of a West European communist identity, either inside or outside the world communist movement. In their eyes, this would again imply limitations to their autonomy as a party. On the other hand, the Italian and Spanish parties tended towards Polycentrism in its furthest strategic implications: the development of a regional model for socialism. This position was also shared by smaller parties such as the Belgian, Austrian and arguably the Swiss ones. These had traditionally been dominated by the PCF or PCI and had been tightly integrated into the world communist system, but had in recent years developed certain autonomist tendencies. They had to some extent started to develop ideas on a “European strategy” for socialism in the West, adapted to the electoral practices of pluralist democracies.

In contrast, the “traditionalist” parties did not want the conferences to lead to increased autonomy, but nevertheless took part in them to prevent centrifugal tendencies from growing. In other words, they participated in the regional conference in order to prevent them from going against “orthodox” policies. Besides the PCF, also the Danish, Norwegian, Luxembourg and Portuguese parties shared this position.

As far as the output of the conferences is concerned, the question of the modes of interaction between communist parties and the internal organisation of the communist world was the only issue on which the start of a change was noticeable. The debate in Brussels and even more so in Vienna definitely had a more open and “real” character than was customary at the world communist meetings, thanks in particular to the assertive and self-confident attitude of the Northern parties. They turned the fact of having some say in the procedure of the conference and its preparation into a condition for their participation. Some of the victories of the autonomist parties were the introduction of secret voting, and the fact that all parties wishing to do so could join in the drafting of the texts. An clear innovation was that the Vienna conference did not end its sessions with a final declaration. It should be noted, however, that it was precisely this unwillingness to impose conclusions that hindered the meeting from taking a clear stance with respect to their Eastern “brother parties”, and prevented new proposals from gaining more influence. This was to become a permanent characteristic of the meetings between West European communist parties.



It is clear, however, that both on the Brussels and Vienna conferences the PCF and to a lesser extent the PCI took on an autocratic style. For instance, it was the PCF which proposed the agenda for the Brussels conference: European security, the joint struggle against the Multilateral Force, the mobilisation for Vietnam and the mobilisation for democratisation in Spain. Waldeck Rochet, for example, also proposed that the representatives arrive some days before the actual conference – this clearly being an old communist habit of behind-the-curtains talks.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the PCF leaders regularly informed the Soviet East European communist parties of the proceeding of the West European conference preparations.

It should be assumed that the Brussels and Vienna conferences were viewed with suspicion by the Soviet Union and East Germany, and maybe by some other communist parties in Eastern Europe as well.<sup>38</sup> Throughout the following weeks, the East German SED tried to influence, to control or at least to keep a close eye on the dynamic process that had come about through the Brussels preparations. Erich Honecker himself sent the Belgian communist party a letter in which he asked that he might send an "observer" to the Brussels meeting. Another sign of this pressure was the request by the West German KPD (no doubt under SED pressure) to invite the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands - Westberlin*. Both these parties were notorious for being clients of the East German SED. As a consequence of all this, the Swedish and Dutch parties dropped out of the conference.

Were the Brussels and Vienna conferences an expression of growing autonomy on behalf of the Western communist parties, or was it a way for some of them, notably the PCF, to safely "neutralise" autonomist tendencies back into the womb of the Soviet-led communist world? Though I would argue that it was mostly the first, elements of the second were surely there, especially – though not only – in the position of the PCF. It is clear that the PCF conceived the regional conferences as a step towards greater unity of the world communist movement. The preparations for the Vienna conference coincided with the preparations of a pan-European communist conference on European security, which after a short but problematic preparation process was held in Karlovy Vary (Czechoslovakia) in April 1967. The PCF had been actively lobbying for the convening of such a

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<sup>37</sup> Letter from Waldeck Rochet to Burnelle, 12/5/65. IISG, ACPN, 1405.

<sup>38</sup> The SED received a detailed account of a preparatory meeting to the Brussels conference which was held in Ostende (Belgium), 1-2 December 1964, and attended by the six communist parties of the EEC countries. The report was anonymous, but obviously written by someone attending the meeting, most probably a member of the West German KPD – delegation. "Information", 5/12/1964, 4 p. dact. ASPMDB, ZPA-SED, DY 30/IV A2/20, 462.

conference since autumn 1965, hereby supported by the Soviets.<sup>39</sup> In unofficial talks during the Vienna conference, the PCF delegation discussed with its Italian counterpart the issue of a pan-European communist conference on security. The PCF would afterwards claim that “several parties have mandated us” to negotiate with the East European parties about the preparations of the security conference on their behalf.<sup>40</sup> From the PCF perspective, the Vienna meeting was meant to contribute to West European support for this, far more important, initiative.<sup>41</sup> Some months later, in a meeting with East German SED leaders, the PCF gave a detailed report of the positions of the West European communist parties regarding the pan-European conference on security, hereby amply referring to the Vienna talks.<sup>42</sup>

Also the PCI, *vis-à-vis* the East European brother parties, presented the Brussels conference as part of a dynamic process towards a greater unity in the communist world. As Luigi Longo told Hermann Axen, member of the Central Committee of the East German SED responsible for European policy in May 1965, shortly before the Brussels meeting:

“... the PCI considers another series of initiatives, that can reinforce the unity of the world workers’ movement, to be useful. Such an initiative could be the organisation of a conference of West European communist parties”.<sup>43</sup>

It is clear that the Italian communists, if they wanted to remain on good terms with the East German (or Soviet) communist party, could not have presented the regional conference in another way. Nevertheless, by presenting the conference as they did, they compromised it and in some ways *gave it* this meaning.

From the outset, the PCI’s commitment to the regional conferences as a vehicle for bringing about change in the world communist movement, was limited, as it

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<sup>39</sup> In October 1965, the French *Bureau politique* decided to “investigate the idea” for the conference. This was code-language for presenting their project to the Soviet leaders. Some days later, in a talk with Guyot, Ponomariov agreed on the schedule proposed by the former. APCF, BP, 26/10/65 and 28/10/65.

<sup>40</sup> Letter PCF to CPN, 12/10/66, invitation for the pan-European conference; ACPN, IISG, 419.

<sup>41</sup> “La conference regionale va contribuer a la preparation de la conference sur la securite europeenne”. Report Guyot quoted in APCF, BP, 18/5/66.

<sup>42</sup> “Vermerk über ein Gespräch des Gen. Hermann Axen mit Gen. Jacques Denis, am 30. Januar 1967”, 3 pages dact. SAPMDB, ZPA-SED, DY/30/IV A 2/20, 457, p. 3.

<sup>43</sup> “(...) hält die KPI eine Reihe anderer Initiativen für nützlich, die die Einheit der internationalen Arbeiterbewegung festigen. Eine solche Initiative wäre die durchführung einer Konferenz der westeuropäischen kommunistischen Parteien”. “Protokoll (Teil I). Aussprache zwischen den Gen. Albert Norden, Mitglied des Politbüros des ZK, Hermann Axen, Kandidat des Politbüros, und dem Gen. Luigi Longo, Generalsekretär der Kommunistischen Partei Italiens am 7. Mai 1965”, 10/5/65, Dr. Neubert, dact., 4 pages. SAPMDB, ZPA-SED, DY 30/IV A2/20, 504, p. 1.

tried out other ways to cause change as well. One of these was its proposal of *allargamento* or “enlarging” of the of the communist world. *Allargamento* was, especially after 1968, to become one of the central claims of the PCI in the communist world, but the party first proposed it in the context of the Brussels and Vienna meetings, without yet calling it thus. The idea was to invite non-communist groups – such as liberation movements from the Third World, peace organisations and socialist parties – to communist gatherings. The importance of this went far beyond the mere question of who to invite to a conference. *Allargamento* was conceived as a first step in making the world communist movement more pluralist, open, and to expand its influence in the West. In 1965, during the Brussels conference preparations, the PCI proposed to the PCF (and probably to other communist parties as well) to invite, among other the Italian socialist party PSI, the French socialist party, and the Algerian FLN.<sup>44</sup> Not surprisingly, the PCF opposed this. This being the case, the PCI leaders continued to advocate the *allargamento* on the world communist level. In bilateral contacts with East European communist parties, when asked about their position towards the (still pending) world communist conference project, the PCI leaders stated and re-stated that a minimal condition for their adherence to the project was the invitation of non-communist groups.<sup>45</sup> In July 1965, for example, the PCI leadership sent a copy of its latest Central Committee decisions to all East and West European communist parties, with particular reference to the episode on the world communist conference. It was re-stated that the conditions were not met for the conference to be held, and that “new types of collaboration” between communist parties should be sought. Also non-Marxist groups “with a firm anti-imperialist attitude” from Africa, Latin America and Asia, should be engaged in a debate and invited to the conference, it was said.<sup>46</sup>

### **The effects of the Czechoslovak crisis on internationalism (1968-1969)**

The convergence which had been taking place between the PCI, and PCF and a number of smaller parties in their joint struggle to expand their autonomy, came under strong pressure during the Czechoslovak crisis of 1968-1969.<sup>47</sup> The Prague

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<sup>44</sup> “Protokoll (Teil I). Aussprache zwischen den Gen. Albert Norden, Mitglied des Politbüros des ZK, Hermann Axen, Kandidat des Politbüros, und dem Gen. Luigi Longo, Generalsekretär der Kommunistischen Partei Italiens am 7. Mai 1965”, 10/5/65, Dr. Neubert, dact., 4 pages. SAPMDB, ZPA-SED, DY 30/IV A2/20, 504, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> According to what Moretti, an influential PCI-representative in Prague told the SED, Longo did so, for example, on occasion of his meeting in Prague with CPCz leaders on 16 and 17 November 1965. “Aussprache des Gen. Dr. Neubert, Mitarbeiter der Abt. Internationale Verbindungen beim ZK, mit den Gen. Moretti (Moranino), Leiter des Büros der Kommunistischen Partei Italiens in Prag, am 24 November 1965”. Berlin, 25/11/1965, Neubert, 4 pages dact. SAPMDB, ZPA-SED, DY 30/IV A 2/20, 504.

<sup>46</sup> Décisions of the Central Committee meeting, 7-9/7/1965. Published in *Unita*, 10/7/1965.

<sup>47</sup> By the Czechoslovak crisis I intend the following events taking place between January 1968 and June 1969: the Prague Spring or process of gradual liberalisation of the socialist regime

Spring and subsequent invasion of Czechoslovakia posed great challenges for the West European communist parties to develop their “front” inside the world communist movement. To some extent, they responded to this challenge in a way which was advantageous to their own autonomy. Indeed, for the first time in their history, the PCI and PCF during the Prague Spring undertook what could be called a “joint intra-party diplomacy”, in order to avoid their worst fear, namely a military outcome to the rising tension in the communist world. After the invasion of Czechoslovakia on August 21, 1968, they both, along with the majority of the West European communist parties, expressed their disagreement. It was also for the first time that any of these parties openly disagreed with a major Soviet policy issue.

However, while the Czechoslovak crisis create the possibilities for West European Polycentrism in the world communist movement, it at the same time brought to the surface where the limits of this lie, and what these were due to. Already during their infra-communist diplomacy in the Spring of 1968, but in an increasingly evident way after the invasion, the different motivations of the PCI and PCF became clear. Beyond a minimal set of common interests and positions, there was no agreement on more substantial issues: the value of the Prague Spring as an example for their own domestic strategy, how to relate to the Soviet Union after the invasion, how to position themselves *vis-à-vis* the process of “normalisation” or re-alignment of the communist world on Brezhnevian principles. In short, on the two remaining aspects of internationalism as defined in the introduction, no convergence took place. Thus, the Czechoslovak episode was an acute crisis which the convergence of West European communism, young and vulnerable as it was, did not survive.

### ***The Prague Spring and the “diplomacy of Eurocommunism”<sup>48</sup>***

As during the spring and summer of 1968 the tension inside the (European) communist world grew, the PCI, the PCF and most of the smaller West European communist parties realised that there were two issues on which they had a shared

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initiated by Alexander Dubcek and a number of leaders of the Czechoslovak communist party (CPCz); the invasion of Czechoslovakia by troops of the Soviet Union and four Warsaw Pact allies (without Romania) on August 21, 1968; and the process of so-called “normalisation” or enforced re-alignment of Czechoslovakia and of the European communist world as a whole under Soviet dominance up to the June 1969 world communist conference held in Moscow. For an archive-based analysis with emphasis on the international aspects see M. Kramer, “The Czechoslovak crisis and the Brezhnev Doctrine” in C. Finck, P. Gassert, and D. Junker, eds. 1968, the world transformed. Cambridge, 1998, pp. 111-171. For the decision-making process in the Soviet Union before and after the invasion, see K. Dewisha, The Kremlin and the Prague Spring. Berkeley, 1984.

<sup>48</sup> W.E. Griffith “The diplomacy of Eurocommunism” in R. Tokes, ed. Eurocommunism and détente. London, 1978, pp. 385-436 at 393.

interest. The first one was the preservation of the degree of autonomy in the world communist movement which they had acquired as a consequence of the destalinisation. This autonomy was acutely put under pressure by the rising tension in the communist world during the spring of 1968, by the invasion and by the process of “normalisation”. The second one was a shared concern for the image of (Soviet-style) communism in the West. This was especially so for the larger ones such as PCI and PCF, which, in the context of East-West détente, enjoyed a phase of expansion of their domestic support. They were engaged in political alliances and felt the positive effects of a general revived interest in Marxism in the West.

No agreement existed between the PCI and PCF on how to appreciate the Prague Spring. The PCI was more interested in the value of the Prague Spring as an example for its own domestic strategies than the PCF was. To express this, in early May 1968 PCI head Luigi Longo went to Prague to meet Dubcek and the main political and intellectual leaders. He was herein not only motivated by a genuine interest in the developments taking place, but also by a wish to “occupy” Dubcek and the Prague Spring in its domestic competition with other forces on the Left.<sup>49</sup> Also in the case of the PCF, domestic pressures from its partners on the Left, pressured it to take public stances on the Czechoslovak issue. During a private meeting with PCF leader Waldeck Rochet, Guy Mollet of the Socialist Party SFIO (*Section française de l'internationale ouvrière*) urged the former to “intervene in Moscow on behalf of the Czechoslovak Communist Party”.<sup>50</sup> But the PCF expressed little support for the Prague Spring itself, and most of its leaders were not very enthusiastic about the reforms taking place.<sup>51</sup> Rather, the PCF was concerned with avoiding a military outcome to the crisis, and more than the PCI did, it saw for itself a special role in mediating between the opposing parties, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia.

These motivations, common and separate, led both the PCI and PCF to start consulting each other on the Czechoslovak crisis. By June 1968 the leaders of the French and Italian communist parties (and possibly of some of the smaller ones as well) were more or less convinced that an invasion or at least a direct political

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<sup>49</sup> Parliamentary elections were to be held within a month. Longo’s trip to Prague was discussed by the party’s leading organ *Direzione* in the context of the election campaign, and listed among the main campaign initiatives. *Archivio PCI (APCI), Direzione (DIR)*, 29/4/68, 020.0638.

<sup>50</sup> Bartosek, K. *Les aveux des archives. Prague-Paris-Prague, 1948-1968*. Paris, 1996, p. 185.

<sup>51</sup> The PCF *Bureau politique* decided on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1968: “Devant le manque d’information sur les changements qui s’effectuent en Tchécoslovaquie, la direction de notre parti adopte une attitude prudente”. *Archives PCF (APFC), Bureau politique – Décisions (BP)*, 1/4/68. That the majority of the PCF leaders did not support the Prague Spring for its intrinsic value, is argued e.g. in P. Gremion. *Paris-Prague. La gauche face au renouveau et à la régression tchécoslovaques 1968-1978*. Paris, 1985.

intervention would take place in Czechoslovakia. In mid-July leaders of both the Italian and French parties met separately with Soviet leaders in Moscow. Galluzzi and G.C.Pajetta, two specialists in foreign affairs and high-ranking PCI leaders, met with Soviet leaders Suslov, Ponomarev and Kirilenko on July 16. Waldeck Rochet did so the same day and met with Brezhnev the following day. At both meetings, the Western communist leaders attempted at making their Soviet counterparts realise the negative effects a military outcome would have on the world communist movement as a whole. The Soviets, from their part, put pressure on the West European communists align with their own interpretation of the events in Czechoslovakia. Both the Italians and French, however, refused to sign a common statement proposed by the Soviets, in which they would have given up their support for Dubcek. Both delegations returned from Moscow with the impression that a military intervention was being prepared, and that there was not much left to be done about it.<sup>52</sup> Waldeck Rochet proceeded with his mediating campaign by meeting with Dubcek on July 19. It became clear now that the solution for the crisis which he had in mind was that Dubcek drop at least a great part of his reforms and give way to the bulk of the Soviet demands. He advised Dubcek to take “necessary measures”, in particular the re-installment of complete party control over the press. At the meeting, Waldeck Rochet did not so much tell Dubcek that he supported him, as made him feel where his support ended.<sup>53</sup>

### ***The invasion of Czechoslovakia, the dissent and the taboo on regional initiatives***

The majority of the non-ruling communist parties in Western Europe condemned the invasion of Czechoslovakia.<sup>54</sup> This was only possible as a consequence of the

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<sup>52</sup> Source for the Italian meeting: Report Galluzzi/Pajetta to Direzione, APCI, Dir, 17/7/68, 020.0798-0803. For the French meetings, see the records published in (Anonymous but Kanapa, J.), Kremlin-PCF. Conversations secrètes. Paris, 1984. pp. 51-73. Next to the records of the Rochet-Dubcek meeting, which became a matter of great controversy in France and Czechoslovakia, the book collects records of other international meetings and manuscripts by Jean Kanapa. Kanapa was head of the Foreign Department to the Central Committee, influential advisor to Waldeck Rochet, and present on all of the important international meetings at the time. The records of the Rochet-Dubcek meeting and of the Rochet-Brezhnev meeting are now also accessible in APCF, “Evenements en Tchecoslovaquie”, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>53</sup> The famous notes to the meeting taken by Kanapa, which in France became matter of great controversy, are to be found in: (Anonymous but Jean Kanapa), Kremlin-PCF. Conversations secrètes. Paris, 1984, pp. 51-73. The records of the meeting are now also to be found in: APCF, “Evenements en Tchecoslovaquie”, box 1, folder 5.

<sup>54</sup> The Communist party of Luxembourg, the West German KPD and the West Berlin SED supported the invasion, which was not surprising as in particular the latter two were highly dependant on the East German SED. The Portuguese communist party joined them after some doubt. The Greek and Cypriot parties were divided over the issue. In Eastern Europe, Romania (a Warsaw Pact member), Yugoslavia and Albania condemned the invasion. K. Devlin, “The

limited form of Polycentrism that had come about the preceding years. The invasion of Czechoslovakia and the events immediately following it intensified the contacts between West European communist parties.<sup>55</sup> However, the impossibility of a Polycentrist, common policy became evident immediately. A *common* PCF-PCI condemnation of the invasion was not possible, and neither was a regional West European communist conference, though both ideas were raised. Apart from the different motivations and visions on internationalism which lie behind their actions, this was also due to explicit Soviet (and East German) pressure, and, on another level, to a deeply interiorised taboo on faction forming.

The day following the invasion of Czechoslovakia, Luigi Longo and Waldeck Rochet met in Paris and published a very short statement which only communicated that the meeting had taken place.<sup>56</sup> The idea of a separate West European communist conference, which would express a series of common positions on the international situation, was mentioned but immediately discarded. According to Longo, it was the French who excluded a common initiative. But he himself also declared to the *Direzione* that “the moment for a common initiative has not arrived”.<sup>57</sup> Longo meant here that more information should be available on the attitudes of the Soviet Union, of the other West European communist parties, and of the Romanian and Yugoslavian parties.<sup>58</sup>

The PCF was the first Western party to be exposed to explicit Soviet pressure on the issue of a separate West European communist initiative, and was the first to capitulate to it. On 31 August, the French received a letter from Moscow, informing them that they had heard about preparations for a separate West European conference. It was made clear that this was out of the question.<sup>59</sup> The Soviets continued to obstruct the regional conference project by putting pressure on the Italians as well. They did so in a very blunt way when Secretariat member Armando Cossuta went to Moscow in mid-September. He was sent there by the PCI Politbureau several times, to find out if and under which conditions relations with the CPSU could be resumed, as the two parties had not had any contact

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new crisis in European communism”, *Problems of Communism*, November-December 1968, , pp. 57-68 at 60.

<sup>55</sup> Many communications between West European communist leaders took place during the days following the invasion. For example, the PCI headquarters had telephone contact with the French, Austrian, British, Swedish, Spanish, Finnish and Belgian communist parties, as well as with Romania and Yugoslavia. All reported in APCI, Dir, 23/8 to 18/9/1968.

<sup>56</sup> Pajetta, *Le crisi che ho vissuto*, p. 130. See also the account of this in: P. Robrieux, *La secte*. Paris, 1985, p. 125-127.

<sup>57</sup> Oral report Longo to the *Direzione*, APCI, Dir, 23/8/68, 020.0859 and 0905.

<sup>58</sup> For lack of space we cannot go into more detail here on the contacts which the PCI had during those weeks with Romania and Yugoslavia.

<sup>59</sup> CPSU to PCF, 31/8/68, in APCF, “Evènements en Tchécoslovaquie”, 2, 3.

since the invasion and as Soviet as well as East German presses had voiced blunt criticism of the PCI. This involved, first and foremost, the very delicate issue of the PCI's financial aid by the Soviets. As Suslov said: "We have been informed that you and the Austrians are preparing a separate conference. This is against us and we cannot accept it. This will be a motive for an irreparable break."<sup>60</sup>

### ***Towards a new modus vivendi. "Normalisation" and diversification on the 1969 world communist conference***

While the failure of the regional conference project shows the limitations of West European communist Polycentrism, the joint action of the West European communist parties for the obstruction the coming about of a new "permanent organ" of the communist world, shows its potentials. This episode can demonstrate how what was later-on to be called Eurocommunism only made sense as a lobby group inside the world communist movement. This happened in the context of the preparations to the 1969 world communist conference and of the wider re-stalinisation taking place in the Soviet-dominated communist world. At least the communist parties of the Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany and Hungary supported the idea of the organisation of a new permanent agency, in the tradition of the Comintern and Cominform. The first proposal for a permanent organisation was a Hungarian one. It was camouflaged as a commission, which would draft a text on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lenin's birth. Though they certainly did not oppose such a commemoration, all the autonomist parties understood that this commission, once installed, would gain more importance and would initiate a heavy ideological debate on Leninism. To avoid this, the PCF suggested that a text commemorating Lenin be drafted at the next plenary session in Budapest in March, and that it be left at that. The French delegation reported back to Paris at that point that "the parties of the five socialist countries are eager to have such a discussion, and we could even say, an ideological fight."<sup>61</sup> The compromise was accepted.

A second proposal, put forward by the Communist Party of the United States, was the organisation of an "International Information Agency for communist parties". Like the first proposal, it was really instigated by the Soviet Union. The French delegation had the impression that the project was at a rather advanced stage, and that financial means had already been provided. Thanks to the opposition of nearly all of the West European communist parties, joined by the Romanian, the Australian and some of the Latin American parties, this was rejected.

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<sup>60</sup> Cossuta, "Note sul viaggio a Mosca", 12/9/68, APCI, Dir, 020.0974. It should be noted that direct Soviet funding of the PCI diminished sharply after 1968 up to 1972, while funding of the PCF remained stable. See the annex to this article.

<sup>61</sup> Marchais's report to the Central Committee of 4-5/12/68. Published in *Humanite*, 5-6/12/68.



The World Conference of Communist Parties, which eventually took place in Moscow from 5 to 17 June, has been described in the literature as “the institutionalisation of diversity” in the world communist movement.<sup>62</sup> This is true only to some degree. Admittedly, the divergence of interests had become apparent. The Dutch communist party refused to attend the whole conference. The Romanian, Italian, Australian, British and Belgian parties restated their opposition against the invasion of Czechoslovakia and repeated all the earlier arguments. They did not, however, demand the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Czechoslovakia, which, again, shows a willingness to taboo the whole issue of Czechoslovakia.

The issue of intra-communist loyalty *in both directions* had become the heart of the matter for all those West European communist parties which still believed in the possibilities of “change from within”. Smaller parties such as the Belgian one also centred their interventions around this issue. Belgian party leader Drumaux stated that the chances for success of his party in the peace movement and the trade union struggle depended on a new development of internationalism. He almost explicitly reproached the socialist states for obstructing the domestic work of the West European parties – which for a small party certainly would have been impossible to do only two years previously.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, the Swedes, British and Norwegians did not subscribe to the final text as a whole. The Spanish made reservations to some parts of the final declaration. The Italians signed only one section out of four, on the “anti-imperialist struggle”. The meetings demonstrated how individual parties, if they wished to, could express their opinions, including critical ones of Soviet policy, more openly than beforehand. The Italian, Spanish, British, Belgian, Swiss, Australian, Moroccan, and other parties took advantage of this. They did so however on an *individual* basis, to different degrees and emphasising different aspects.

On the other hand, there were remarkably few contacts among the PCI, PCF or the other West European parties during the preparation process for the world conference, and no co-ordination whatsoever. The points on which these parties expressed dissent at the conference varied. The positions of the PCF and the PCI were light-years away from each other, which made any kind of “coalition policy” of West European communism impossible. From the Polycentric perspective, the situation now was worse than it had been a year earlier, when Rochet and Longo had consulted each other on the Czechoslovak issue. The PCI-

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<sup>62</sup> Devlin, “The role of the non-ruling communist parties in transforming internationalism”, p. 30.

<sup>63</sup> “Veillez donc à ne pas sous-estimer le mouvement dans les pays capitalistes, à ne pas lui compliquer la tâche”. Printed speech by party head Marc Drumaux, in: AKPB, Dacob, box “Mouvement communiste international”, folder “1964-1967-1969”.

PCE axis had been reinforced, but this was not influential enough to enforce a real change.

This became evident on the issue of *allargamento*. The PCI asked for the invitation of non-communist “progressive” groups and parties to the conference: peace movements, movements of national liberation, leftist groups. The *allargamento* was supported by the PCE but fiercely opposed by the PCF and the Soviet Union, and was now definitely discarded.<sup>64</sup> This was a demonstration of the extent to which the PCF had increased its intransigence, while at least until spring 1968 it had been willing to come to a compromise on this issue. In a meeting with Hermann Axen of the SED in January 1968, for example, PCF delegates Gaston Plissonnier and Jean Jerome had said that, while it should remain clear that the communist parties were the only vanguard forces of any broader progressive movement, it could be envisaged that some “national-democratic” parties (liberation movements) could be invited to the conference as observers.<sup>65</sup>

### **Internationalism, autonomy and Polycentrism after 1969**

After the Moscow conference, contacts between West European communist parties intensified. At first sight, this might point at the coming about of West European communist Polycentrism. The West European communist parties were granted more freedom in organising their own contacts: as far as the archives tell us, East European communist parties no longer attempted to interfere, as had been the case in 1965. Meetings and discussions on a regional scale became acceptable modes of operation inside the world communist movement. However, if we have a closer look at the character of the contacts among them, the limitations become clear. West European communist parties themselves seemed to have limited and circumvented their regionalist ambitions. The conferences were now generally considered as meetings which could lead to a fruitful exchange of views on similar domestic experiences, but nothing more than that. They were no longer meant to lead to the elaboration of a joint West European strategy for socialism, not even by the PCI. The communist parties no longer even actively tried to influence each other on this. Instead, an almost excessive fear of imposing a model or strategy on each other was noticeable.

Furthermore, there was a retreat from the “high politics” of the world communist movement and from sensitive issues: all issues related to internationalism in the broad sense were carefully avoided. This involved foreign policy, the Cold War

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<sup>64</sup> The PCF reproached the Italians for turning this issue into a “*baroud d'honneur*”. “Décisions de la commission préparative de Budapest”, APCF, BP, 27/3/69.

<sup>65</sup> “Vermerk über die Aussprache zwischen Gen. Axen, und den Gen. Plissonnier und Jérôme”, Abteilung Internationale verbindungen, Berlin, den 24. Januar 1968, 9 p. dact, p. 5. SAPMDB, ZPA-SED, DY/30 IVA 2/20, 457.

and détente, and the sensitive issue whether the Soviet Union still supported revolution in the West. Thus, the crucial question of how overall Soviet strategies matched with the domestic policies of the West European communist parties – which had been touched upon by some of the Western communist parties on the Moscow conference – remained unanswered. In short, little was left of the initial Togliattian idea of strategic Polycentrism.

### ***The PCI's retreat and the PCF's involvement***

The shift in character of the West European communist meetings is also reflected in the shift in attitudes of the PCI and PCF. The Italian communists seemed at this stage to have given up the idea of gathering together West European communism. To be sure, the party did continue to take part in the West European communist meetings and its leaders remained influential in the networks thus created. But the PCI increasingly considered West European communism as only one of several international frameworks in which it operated. On the one hand, it continued to be a part of the world communist movement, despite its growing criticism of the socialist countries. On the other hand, the party took a growing interest in the West European Left in a broader perspective. It intensified its contacts with the West German SPD, which it had initiated in 1967.<sup>66</sup> It also engaged in more or less regular discussions with other West European socialist and social democratic parties, not least the French socialist party. It increasingly preferred these over contacts with the “unreliable” PCF and the “insignificant” smaller parties. Doing so, it carried out its own *allargamento*, as this had proved to be unacceptable both in the world communist movement and in the context of West European communism. All this was part of its (West) European strategy which can be traced back to the ideas of the early 1960s and the reformist assessment that a socialist Western Europe could not be achieved unless communists took part in the process of European (economic) integration.

Inversely, after 1969 the PCF took more initiatives on the West European communist level. Immediately following the Moscow conference, its *Bureau politique* decided to “follow the situation inside the West European brother parties more closely” and to “intensify contacts with them”.<sup>67</sup> The French communist party now, more explicitly than in the 1960s, interfered in the policies of the smaller West European parties and tried to influence them. The Belgian communist party was the obvious target, and in late December the PCF decided to “make sure to develop our relations with this brother party”.<sup>68</sup> In late January, likewise, a delegation was sent to the Congress of the KPOe. It was not at all

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<sup>66</sup> Essential on this are several articles by Heinz Timmerman for the Berichte des Bundesinstituts für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien throughout 1973-1979; and Galluzzi's memoirs: C. Galluzzi, La svolta. Gli anni cruciali del PCI. Milano, 1985.

<sup>67</sup> APCF, BP, 20/6/69.

<sup>68</sup> APCF, BP, 28/11/68.

unusual to do so, but what was unusual was the attention with which the report of its delegate, Vieugeut, was read in the highest echelons. The *Bureau politique* decided that a series of “our publications” should be sent to Vienna.<sup>69</sup> However, the French communist attempts to instrumentalise the regional communist meetings for the sake of greater world communist “unity” no longer succeeded, due to the increased assertiveness of a number of smaller parties.

### ***The regional conferences of London (1971) and Brussels (1974)***

Many regional communist meetings took place from the early 1970 onwards, and two plenary conferences, in 1971 (London, organised by the CPGB) and in 1974 (Brussels, organised by the PCB). For the first time, all the West European communist parties were present, including the normally reluctant Dutch and Swedish ones. In terms of relations between communist parties, further advance was being made on these meetings. There was at the meetings and throughout the preparations a general preoccupation to create more egalitarian relationships between the larger and smaller parties. Especially the Dutch, British and Swedish parties emphasised this, and they seem to have been successful. The procedure of these meetings became more democratic and transparent, and the smaller parties now seemed to have more say than before. The language too changed: the heavy ideological *language de bois*, so typical of communist meetings, was gradually replaced by more transparent, modern ways of expression. The obligatory references to Marxism-Leninism too disappeared, as did the ritualistic repetition of some dogmatic phrases, such as the “danger of German imperialism”. The adoption of a common statement or conclusion was rejected on these meetings, and each party had a *de facto* veto.<sup>70</sup> However, the ambition to use the West European communist circle as an example for rules of conduct in the broader WCM, had now definitely disappeared. For example, when the PCI made a last attempt to put *allargamento* on the agenda, it was decided that this should be decided upon by each party individually.

The retreat from certain sensitive issues became evident in the choice of the conference topics. The theme for the London conference, “the struggle against monopolies”, included the wages struggle, the trade union policy, and the analysis of tendencies of concentration of capital in Western Europe.<sup>71</sup> The PCF had proposed as a theme “the existence of socialist states and their importance”, but this was not accepted. Instead, attention was shifted to “practical” matters of

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<sup>69</sup> APCF, BP, 30/1/69.

<sup>70</sup> See also H. Timmermann, “Die Brüsseler Konferenz der westeuropäischen kommunistischen Parteien vom 26-29 Januar 1974”, in Berichte des Bundesinstituts für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien, 1974, n. 10, p. 15.

<sup>71</sup> Letter of invitation from the CPGB to all West European communist parties, 20/2/70 in ACPN, IISG, 1335.

domestic strategy: alliances, reforms, etc... . A discussion developed, for example, on the policy on shop stewards, and communist militants in reformist trade unions. It became clear that no common position could be developed. A similar type of discussion took place on the Brussels conference in January 1974. The theme chosen was “the unity of the working classes and democratic forces”. The discussions were mainly about alliances with other parties and groups, and the problems which arose from them.

Also opinions on West European integration lay quite far apart between the parties. The PCI, PCE and PCB, on the one hand, took on a pro-European stance, while the British and Norwegian parties still adhered to the old conception of the EEC as an instrument of USA foreign policy. Through these debates, it became clear that these parties in the first place represented their countries. Georges Marchais of the PCF took on an intermediate and pragmatic position, stating that “Europe can be the best and the worst”.<sup>72</sup> Where the conference conclusions did provide elements of a common analysis of the crisis in Western Europe, these were worded vaguely and in old-fashioned language, for instance “the struggle against the concentration of monopolistic capital”. This type of language always gave proof of the lack of theoretical innovation and the absence of real programmatic alternatives to the old world communist movement-prescribed strategies.<sup>73</sup>

These discussions did in no way lead to the development of a West European model or strategy for socialism – the second dimension of internationalism. This was so firstly because of the very different domestic situations in which these parties operated. What came to the surface after having dropped some of the heavy ideological and discursive heritage, was the assessment that these parties had little in common with each other. First of all, there were three parties operating in illegality, two powerful parties constituting the main force on the Left, one party in government (Iceland), and a series of small parties. In ideological terms, there was still the cleavage between “traditionalist” and “reformist” parties, with some shifts: the first group included the French, Portuguese, Dutch, Austrian and Danish, the second the Italian, Spanish, Swedish, British and Belgian. What made matters even more complex was the fact that the cleavage “autonomist – loyalist” in international matters did not

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<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Timmerman, “Die Brüsseler Konferenz”, p. 19. As to the question whether the West European communist parties *should have* developed at least a common platform on how to deal with the EEC, I adhere to Timmermann’s argument that other party clusters in Europe, for example the Social Democratic parties, in this period successfully started to develop common analyses and strategies concerning the economic crisis in Western Europe, and that this was a positive development from the perspective of these parties themselves.

<sup>73</sup> The documents of the 1974 Conference are published in M. Steinkühler, Eurokommunismus im Widerspruch. Analyse und Dokumenten. Köln, 1977, p. 37-48.

coincide with the cleavage “traditionalist – reformist” in terms of domestic strategy. The Dutch communist party was the best example of this. While in international(ist) matters it took on a very autonomous attitude vis-à-vis the Soviet Union (more motivated by anti-Sovietism than by a genuine will to loosen ties of dominance within the world communist movement), it had very dogmatic and traditionalist positions in terms of domestic strategies.

In my view, however, the most important reason why no common ground could be found regarding a West European model for socialism, was the fact that no agreement existed on how to relate to the “real existing” models of socialism. For many parties (the PCF), the Soviet Union remained an important reference point, while for others, it became the example of “what is not to be done” (the PCI and increasingly the PCE). This went hand in hand with a tendency to taboo all issues touching upon the socialist countries, their model value, and their historical significance. This could not have been otherwise, as inside none of these parties (not even the PCI) a fully free debate on these issues was allowed.

### **Conclusions and outlook; the contradictions of Eurocommunism**

As between 1969 and 1973 East–West relations seemed to evolve into a pragmatic *modus vivendi* on a number of issues (at least in Europe and in terms of the arms race), the Cold War between the Soviet leaders and the most autonomist elements in West European communism seemed to be heading in the same direction. One reason for this was the latter’s pragmatic assessment that world communism in the early 1970s was going through an era of expansion. To list only some international events: 1973 saw the withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam, which was considered by communists world-wide as their victory; the same year the American bombing of Cambodia stopped; in 1971 communist China had been admitted to the United Nations.<sup>74</sup> This was paralleled, in most of Western Europe, by a phase of optimism and relative domestic expansion for the communist parties. It was mainly due, on the one hand, to their recuperation of residual radicalism of the late 1960s and the disintegration of the student movements; and on the other hand, to the economic crisis from 1973 onwards, which enhanced the critique of capitalism and provided Marxism-based analyses with new legitimacy.

Another reason behind the seemingly easy way in which the West European communist parties settled for a *modus vivendi* with the Soviet Union was that the ideas of autonomy and Polycentrism had now been accepted in the world communist movement in a minimal way. By this I mean, firstly, that West European communist parties by the mid-1970s had truly become more

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<sup>74</sup> Despite the enduring Sino-Soviet tension, the admittance of China to the UN was considered to be a victory for world communism by the Western communists and even in Soviet propaganda.

autonomous with respect to 1956. They now had more freedom to develop their own domestic strategies, which had for all of them been at least one motivation behind their desire to transform internationalism. Secondly, the regional dimension of Polycentrism had become a fact which the Soviet Union or any other “traditionalist” force in the world communist movement had to accept. Perversely, the fact that West European communist parties organised meetings amongst themselves had become by the late 1970s in Soviet propaganda a proof of their “revolutionary zeal” and adherence to world communism.<sup>75</sup> In this sense, West European communist parties, in the long term, did succeed in transforming some of the rules of internationalist behaviour inside the communist world. But a price had to be paid for this, namely, the definite abandonment of any maximalist of strategic ambitions of Polycentrism. This went hand in hand with the isolation of one element of internationalism - the internal organisation of the communist world - from the other two elements. As we have seen, the tactical alliance between the PCI and PCF only took place on the specific issue of changing rules of conduct inside the communist world, and no common ground existed on the issue of the model-value of the Soviet Union and the People’s Democracies, or the question of how to appreciate Soviet foreign policy in the context of the Cold War and the shift to détente.

After 1974, West European communist conferences continued to take place on a regular basis, up to the mid 1980s. Their character and objectives remained largely unchanged: a loosely organised forum for a more or less free debate on some limited issues concerning domestic strategy. They helped to bring about the Eurocommunist movement of the second half of the 1970s. Although I have not covered the era of Eurocommunism in the strict sense, I do claim that by looking at the developments in the “long 1960s” as we have done, a paradox becomes evident which Eurocommunism inherited and failed to ever resolve. Admittedly, there are many aspects of Eurocommunism which I have not touched upon, and which would be necessary to provide with a full-fledged analysis of the coming about of Eurocommunism in the late 1970s. I will only hint here at some of these: the international development of detente after 1975; the broad socio-cultural changes in West European societies after 1968; the influence of New Left ideas concerned with race, gender, ecology, and the communist responses to these; the enduring political crisis in Italy and the “strategy of tension”; and above all the domestic political position of the Spanish communist party after the end of the Franco regime. Nevertheless, I maintain that the tension between the conceptions of Polycentrism, autonomy and internationalism, as analysed above, provides for at least one reason why Eurocommunism did not establish itself as a lasting

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<sup>75</sup> Soviet foreign policy expert, Zagladin, in his book on the 1976 pan-European Communist Conference held in Berlin, wrote rather extensively on the 1974 Brussels conference and in a very positive way, even listing it among those events paving the way for the 1976 Conference. V. Zagladin, ed. *Europe and the communists*. Moscow, 1977, pp. 16-24.

alternative to Soviet-style communism as well as to West European Social Democracy.

The paradox might be outlined as follows. Eurocommunism as a *regional* belonging or allegiance sought to be qualitatively different from the “old” international/universal one. It was to be different in that the movement should not have a model, nor a guiding party or state, nor an institutionalised centre; there should be no overall dominant strategy and no law-governed patterns for the development of socialism. These refusals were no coincidence, but, as we have seen, were to do with the concrete historical development of the West European communist parties and their internationalism after 1956. Those parties claiming the label of Eurocommunism refused to propose a common programme on concrete political issues; they refused to develop a joint strategy for socialism in Western Europe or in advanced capitalist societies. They refused to theorise about themselves as a group, as (communist) parties “of a new type”. Their convergence on a number of international issues only had meaning inside the context of the communist world and of their joint struggle for more party autonomy. This was already the case in the 1960s; later also, Eurocommunism never lost its initial character of a lobby group inside the Soviet-dominated communist world.

Historically, the genesis of these contradictions can be summarised as follows:

- When PCI leader Palmiro Togliatti started to develop his ideas of “New Internationalism” in 1956, an implicit tension existed between the idea of autonomy and the concept of Polycentrism in its strategic meaning.
- There were strong Soviet (and East German) pressures against a West European “faction” and there was a willingness to respond to these. This was due to the political, ideological and financial dependence of West European communism on the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Especially for the PCF this was the case, but also for the PCI at crucial moments, as we have seen with respect to the question of the regional conference following the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.
- The PCI-PCF alliance was tactical and instrumental from the outset, and this remained so for both parties. When the PCF shifted to PCI positions on a number of issues concerning internationalism from the mid-1960s onwards, it did so departing from a very different view on how the world communist movement should be organised, how the Soviet Union should be viewed as a model and what foreign policy it should develop in Western Europe. The Italians for their part realised that it was difficult for them to enforce changes, even when backed by the Spanish, without support from the French. This became clear on the occasion of the preparations for the Moscow conference of 1969.



- There were fundamental differences among the West European communist parties in terms of their national experiences. This only increased in the early 1970s, when some parties (the French, Italian and Icelandic) discussed government participation, while others (e.g. the British and Austrian) became or remained marginal political forces. Important differences existed with respect to implant in the trade unions, relations with the Socialist or Social Democratic party, and relations with New Leftist groups. After 1969, as became evident during the regular meetings held between them, it continued to be the case that West European communist parties had little in common with each other beyond the fact that they were part of the world communist movement.

Deeper reasons for these contradictions should be sought in the teleological dimension of communist identity and its referring to a *world* movement, in which regional loyalty was always subordinate to and a function of international loyalty. For the West European communist parties, this was not only so in theory but also in practice. West European communist parties turned to each other only when they experienced their (“real” or symbolic) relationship with the Soviet Union as being problematic, and wished to re-bargain this relationship. In this case, intensifying contacts between West European communist parties (and doing so openly) was a suitable way of operating as a pressure group *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union and those communist parties in the East which opposed increased autonomy. It was a matter of tactics, intended as a threat and a demonstration of force, which had a specific meaning in a communist movement in which the old Leninist taboo on factions still had great psychological significance.

There was no need nor desire for communist parties to start considering Western Europe as a new level of international allegiance. Firstly, it could not replace the old international level of communist allegiance. It lacked the force of the heavy mythological tradition of Soviet-style internationalism, which had become for West European communist parties operating in a domestic context of increasing diversification on the Left from the 1960s onwards the main reason to maintain loyal reference to the Soviet Union and “real socialism”. Because communism in Western Europe lacked a “really existing” point of reference, it could not be constituent of a new myth system to replace the old. With this lacking, there was no other use for individual West European communist parties to let their own party autonomy be restricted by new models, the imposition of strategies, or tightly organised structures. Their domestic experiences were too different to allow for a “West European road to socialism” to be conceived. This would always remind the individual parties of those old, Comintern-like authoritarian habits, which had been from 1956 onwards the very motive behind their transformation of internationalism. As it was exactly the imposition of models and of a guiding party which had initially led many of the Western parties to

criticise the organisation of the communist world, the creation of a new model was particularly undesirable for many of them. To the West European communist parties in the 1970s, the desire to preserve their autonomy undermined the possibilities for a *movement* to come about. Thus, Eurocommunism ended up being a movement which refused to be one.

## APPENDIX I

Percentage of the vote for the PCI and PCF in parliamentary elections , 1956-1974<sup>76</sup>

	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965
PCI			<b>22.7</b>					<b>25.3</b>		
PCF	<b>25.6</b>		<b>18.9</b>	<b>15.3</b>			<b>21.8</b>			

	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974
PCI			<b>26.9</b>				<b>27.2</b>		
PCF		<b>22.5</b>	<b>20.0</b>					<b>21.3</b>	

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<sup>76</sup> Source: M. Waller, M. Fennema, eds. Communist parties in Western Europe. Oxford, 1988.

## APPENDIX II

Adherence figures for the PCI and PCF, 1956-1974<sup>77</sup>

	PCI	PCF
1956	<b>2 035 353</b>	
1957	<b>1 825 342</b>	<b>330 000</b>
1958	<b>1 818 606</b>	
1959	<b>1 789 269</b>	
1960	<b>1 792 974</b>	<b>300 000</b>
1961	<b>1 728 620</b>	<b>300 000</b>
1962	<b>1 630 550</b>	<b>318 000</b>
1963	<b>1 615 571</b>	<b>330 000</b>
1964	<b>1 641 214</b>	<b>330 000</b>
1965	<b>1 615 296</b>	
1966	<b>1 575 935</b>	<b>341 000</b>
1967	<b>1 534 705</b>	<b>350 000</b>
1968	<b>1 502 862</b>	
1969	<b>1 503 816</b>	<b>380 000</b>
1970	<b>1 507 047</b>	<b>380 000</b>
1971	<b>1 521 642</b>	<b>375 000</b>
1972	<b>1 584 659</b>	<b>390 000</b>
1973	<b>1 623 000</b>	<b>370 000</b>
1974	<b>1 658 000</b>	<b>430 000</b>

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<sup>77</sup> Source: Lazar, *Maisons rouges*, p. 389. For the PCF, some of the figures are estimations.

### APPENDIX III

Soviet funding through the “Assistance Fund” destined to the PCI and PCF, 1956-1974<sup>78</sup>

	PCI	PCF
1956	<b>2 500</b>	<b>1 200</b>
1957	<b>3 135</b>	<b>1 200</b>
1958	<b>5 200</b>	
1959	<b>5 200</b>	<b>1 200</b>
1960	<b>5 200</b>	<b>1 500</b>
1961	<b>4 000</b>	<b>1 500</b>
1962	<b>5 200</b>	<b>1 500</b>
1963	<b>5 000</b>	<b>1 500</b>
1964		
1965	<b>5 600</b>	<b>2 000</b>
1966	<b>5 700</b>	<b>2 000</b>
1967		
1968		
1969	<b>3 700</b>	<b>2 000</b>
1970	<b>3 700</b>	<b>2 000</b>
1971	<b>3 700</b>	
1972	<b>6 200</b>	<b>2 000</b>
1973	<b>6 000</b>	<b>2 250</b>
1974	<b>6 500</b>	<b>2 500</b>

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<sup>78</sup> Source: Riva, *Oro da Mosca*, pp. 46-65. Numbers are in 1 000 \$ (converted to 1999 value). These figures are estimations and only include direct financial aid. It should be kept in mind that there were other forms of funding, for example via commercial activities, or direct financial aid through other East European capitals.

# Split or reform?

## *The Danish and Swedish CPs facing the post-Stalin era*

### **Thomas Ekman Jørgensen**

The communist parties of Scandinavia were alike in many aspects: they were small, marginalised and doomed to live in the shadow of large and powerful social democratic parties. More so than in other European countries, the Scandinavian workers' movements were unified under a single social democratic leadership. Almost all trade unions were (and are) united in the framework of the 'National Organisation' (in both Denmark and Sweden called Landsorganisationen, LO), which negotiated for a majority of all employees.<sup>1</sup> Politically, the trade unions were closely connected to the social democratic party – in Denmark, Sweden and Norway by far the most powerful force in the political landscape. In this monolithic workers' movement, the small communist parties had very little chance of being influential. The social democrats perceived them as servants of Moscow and unreliable for the national working class. They explicitly labelled them as an enemy and worked to limit their influence on the shop floor. Against these difficult obstacles, the communist parties fought with their back against the wall to gain some pockets of influence within the workers' movement, but they remained marginal all through the post-war period.

One main reason for their marginal position was clearly their dependence on the Soviet Union and hence their vulnerability to events in the eastern block. On one hand, the connection to the international communist movement was a large part of the *raison d'être* of these parties; on the other hand it isolated them from political influence. From 1956, however, the world communist movement seemed to become less restricted. Destalinisation, the emphasis on peaceful coexistence and national roads to socialism – all launched at the 20<sup>th</sup> congress of the CPSU – challenged the communist parties to find a more independent course within the movement; a challenge that was not always welcomed by the cadres formed by 30 years of Stalinism. On the other hand, loosening the ties to Moscow could be seen as creating more possibilities for small parties like the Scandinavian ones. As the Left diversified in the 1960s with the rise of the New Left and the Sino-Soviet split, the possibility of an alternative to the Soviet line became even more relevant.

This article will focus on two different approaches to this challenge: that of respectively the Danish Communist Party (Danmarks Kommunistiske Parti –

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<sup>1</sup> In Denmark about 60% of the workforce was in a trade union around 1960, 82% of these were organised through LO. In Sweden, the figures are 70% and 74%, Bernhard Ebbinghaus, Jelle Visser, and Franz Rothenbacher, Trade Unions in Western Europe Since 1945. London, 2000

DKP) and, that of its Swedish counterpart, SKP (Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti). The DKP split in 1958 after two years of controversy over destalinisation and the invasion of Hungary, after which an independent – and very successful - socialist party was formed, and the ‘old’ DKP was almost eliminated. In Sweden, the SKP managed to avoid such serious confrontations by allowing a wide range of ideological differences within the party and attempting to form an independent policy from about 1962, a reform that culminated with the name change in 1967 from SKP to VPK (Vänsterpartiet Kommunisterna – the Communist Party of the Left).

The basic question thus is: what were the limits of reform and independence within the communist movement after the 20<sup>th</sup> congress of the CPSU?

The DKP and the SKP present the classic ‘most similar cases’ type of comparison, which means that the similarities are so many that it theoretically should be possible to find the decisive factors to explain their different development. Although this seems a rather mechanical point of departure, more in the style of positivist social science than history, it is a useful heuristic tool – rather than an ontological assumption – and a way of refining our basic question. Differences and similarities can be looked upon on the classic three levels of long, medium and short ‘durée’; the geographic factors, political-structural factors and the short-term changes and events in the political game.

On the geographical level, these are very different countries; Denmark being small, densely populated and highly cultivated, while Sweden is huge, with a population concentrated around dispersed administrative and industrial centres and the uncultivated forest dominating the landscape. Though this may seem of minor relevance, the logistic problems of the small parties could be decisive for their development and internal structure. While the DKP could maintain a fairly centralised control from their headquarters in Copenhagen and summon members from all over the country on short notice, the SKP had much more complicated logistic requirements – it was, as an illustrative example, only able to hold half the number of central committee meetings as their Danish brother party.

On the medium-term level of political culture, both countries were heavily dominated by social democratic parties, who set the agenda for the welfare state. Thus, as stated above, the main problem for both parties was their marginalized position within the workers’ movement. They held little pockets – or ‘bastions’ as they were called in the belligerent party language - of influence from where they could mobilise, albeit to a very limited degree. In Denmark, these pockets of influence were typically trade unions; typographers, bricklayers, sailors, dockers and shipyard workers (for some reason there is a maritime element in the recruitment) were traditionally communist. This was less so in Sweden, where the party strongholds were more regional, due to the Swedish industrial structure with big companies dominating local communities. Thus, the SKP could count on much local support in the northernmost region of Norrbotten with its traditionally

radical mining communities, in Gothenburg where Volvo had its main plant and in Stockholm.

In the short term, the parties represented opposites within the world communist movement. The DKP was extremely faithful to the Soviet Union and followed Moscow's every step – eventually splitting over the issue of independence - while the SKP from the 1940s sustained a political line of 'the Swedish road to socialism' and articulated its own agendas with respect to domestic policies and strategies.

Though differences exist on every level, the most striking ones are those of the very long and short term. With this in mind, the question could be refined to, first, looking at the different paths of the two parties mainly in the light of inner-party developments, secondly with attention to the different geographic and structural circumstances, and thirdly keeping in mind that the common problem of both parties was their marginalized position vis-à-vis the overwhelming political force of social democracy.

The comparison will be diachronic: the DKP from 1956 to 1958 and the SKP from 1962 to 1967. The reason for this is that the 20<sup>th</sup> party congress and the Soviet invasion of Hungary did not have immediate consequences for the SKP, which only began reforms in the mid 1960s, after the Berlin wall. Diachronic comparison is usually a difficult venture. However, since the main focus will be on the internal workings of the parties and on long-term factors, the problems of comparing different periods should be rather small.

### **How (not) to debate destalinisation: The DKP split<sup>2</sup>**

The 20<sup>th</sup> congress of the CPSU hit the Danish communists hard. The party had always had close connections with Moscow: many of its leading cadres had spent several years in the Soviet Union, spoke Russian and had good contacts within the Kremlin. The charismatic party leader, Aksel Larsen, had been to the Lenin-school and later, between 1925-29, had worked in Nizjnij Novgorod, while the chief ideologue Ib Nørlund had been in the Soviet Union in 1939 to translate the

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<sup>2</sup> This section is build largely upon documents found in the archives of the DKP in Arbejderbevægelsens Bibliotek og Arkiv (ABA) in Copenhagen and secondly upon secondary literature: The main work in the history of the DKP remains the biography of Aksel Larsen, Kurt Jacobsen, Aksel Larsen. En Politisk Biografi. Copenhagen, 1993, which includes a number of sources; personal archive of Aksel Larsen, interviews, newspapers etc, that have not been available to me. Hence, this work will be used in the following as a supplement to those sources I have had access to myself. Some sources have been printed in Jens Kragh, Opbrud På Venstrefløjen 1956-1960. Copenhagen, 1976, about the DKP split, and in Jens Kragh, Folkesocialisme. Udvalgte Taler Og Artikler 1958-60 Af Aksel Larsen, Mogens Fog, Kai Moltke, Gert Petersen, m Fl. Copenhagen, 1977. Aksel Larsen himself has written about the split in Aksel Larsen, Den Levende Vej. Taler Og Artikler 1956 1957 1958. Copenhagen, 1958, Aksel Larsen, Valget. Copenhagen, 1964 and Aksel Larsen, Aksel Larsen Ser Tilbage. Copenhagen, 1970, of course very subjectively. For more comments on literature, see also p. 58



*History of the CPSU(b)* into Danish. Larsen, together with other party officials, also felt a considerable personal gratitude towards the Soviet Union for literally saving their lives by freeing them from German concentration camps. Experiences such as these created a special bond with the Soviet leaders, which overshadowed any pre-war doubts about Stalinism.

When destalinisation began in 1956 at the 20<sup>th</sup> congress of the CPSU, the DKP had difficulty finding its feet. Already at the congress itself, before Khrushchev's famous Secret Speech had leaked to the western press, it was clear that something had changed. In stark contrast to earlier congresses, Stalin's name was only mentioned after several hours in the list of comrades that had passed away since the last congress.

Shortly after the congress, the Khrushchev's secret speech was leaked to the western media; here Stalin was explicitly and harshly criticised for his 'criminal violation of revolutionary legality' and described as a 'capricious, irritable and brutal' person – in stark contrast to the idealised image of the wise, brilliant statesman, which had been a main figure of Soviet propaganda for almost 30 years. The DKP was in a state of chock. Letters about the speech flowed to the central committee. They were mostly loyal to Stalin's memory; the accusations were 'slandorous', 'crazy' and 'insane monstrosities'. Some hesitated to believe the revelations, though a considerable minority took them seriously and consequently called for a new and more independent party line.<sup>3</sup> These views were largely echoed in the central committee itself: although no one directly distanced himself from the Soviet Union, many raised the question of how to avoid mistakes like the 'cult of personality', and wondered whether the trust in the Soviet Union had been too blind. Others continued to be true believers, like for example, the editor of the party daily, *Land og Folk*, Martin Nielsen:

“My trust in the Soviet Union and in the Soviet people has always been without bounds ... It is dangerous if doubt sneaks into our ranks. Soviet comrades think of a revision (opgør). This would lead to a weakening, it would lead to doubts about the victory in World War II ...”<sup>4</sup>

Some turned the criticism inwards and complained about the authoritarian tendencies in the party leadership and the bad atmosphere in the headquarters. All in all, the debate on destalinisation was still open; there were more questions than answers.

The debate continued in a confused manner during the following months, one question was whether, and to what extent, the western versions of the secret speech were true, and if they were, what the consequences might be for the DKP. Since the CPSU was silent for the whole spring, the party was all on its own – a rather unusual situation for a movement used to following the views of Moscow, rather than articulating its own – the leadership (except the rhetorically brilliant Larsen) found it difficult to articulate any opinion at all, and most, though not all,

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<sup>3</sup> Archive of the DKP, box 76 CK 1955/8-1956, “Centralkomitemøde 14.-15. april 1956”

<sup>4</sup> Archive of the DKP, box 76 CK 1955/8-1956, “Centralkomitemøde 14.-15. april 1956”, p. 3

remained silent. It must have been a great relief when the central committee of the CPSU June 30 finally passed a resolution on the cult of personality. The general feeling in the central committee was that now the correct analysis had been published, the debate could end at last. The official end of discussions was the national conference in late September, which in the spirit of democratic centralism was to give the common, binding guidelines for the party.

This stop-go attitude to debate was inherent to democratic centralism, the basic principle of which was that debate should be open until a common decision had been made, after which complete loyalty was demanded. Although the debate-part of it was seldom taken seriously, the unity of the party was a cornerstone of communist identity. Thus, a debate like the one about the 20<sup>th</sup> congress of the CPSU was deeply unwelcome, since it revealed ‘disunity’, and many longed for the ‘closing of the ranks’ at the conference.

Another factor, less connected with the ideology of communism, was the great strike of 1956. In the late spring, the failure of the trade unions to reach a satisfactory agreement with the employers led to a large number of strikes, which intensified when the social democratic government interfered on the side of the conciliatory centralised unions and employers organisations, against the majority of the union members. This meant a huge increase in communist influence on the shop floor. The DKP was the only alternative to the conciliatory line, and the party stood firmly against the combined forces of social democratic union and government. For the party trade unionists, the mass demonstrations and strikes were the big events of the year, and the ideological discussions annoying distractions from the ‘real work’ on the shop floor: Independence from the Soviet Union and destalinisation could not mobilise the workers; rather the party should talk about concrete problems.

The national conference was very critical of the party leaders, who were said to be too self-righteous, too centralistic and too dogmatic. The leadership answered to criticism in ambiguous terms like:

“The time has come to put the finger on the real problems. But we cannot keep on talking only about the errors ...”<sup>5</sup>

Aksel Larsen, though very active in the debate during the spring, now joined the demand for unity. Of course every member could have a say in the affairs of the party, but:

”There has to be discipline within the party. It cannot be an eternal club for discussion, where anyone can say or do as he pleases. When the party has decided a question, this decision goes for everybody, and then everybody works as hard as they can to turn it into concrete action, to carry it to the masses”<sup>6</sup>

The resolution that was passed at the conference looked as if the whole debate about destalinisation and independence towards the Soviet Union was put happily

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<sup>5</sup> Danmarks Kommunistiske Parti, Landspartikonferencen 1956. Copenhagen, 1956

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

to rest, and better forgotten. Although it took a lot of the internal criticism into account, it did not mention the debate about the 20<sup>th</sup> congress, but merely referred to the official resolution of the CPSU. The document wanted to look ahead, and was titled (with the usual pathos): “UNITE THE FORCES – for the victory of progress”.<sup>7</sup>

The conference resolution showed how little the DKP was ready to free itself from Moscow. Even though most members agreed in principle that errors had been made during the Stalin era, and that the party had been too uncritical of the Soviet Union, few were willing or able to take independent steps. However, according to his biographer, Kurt Jacobsen, Aksel Larsen was optimistic about a reform of the party away from Stalinism and towards “a broad, national, socialist party”.<sup>8</sup> The majority of the party, it seems, were simply happy to have gotten through a painful period of party disunity.

Peace and unity would only last for a short period before a second shock hit the world communist movement. Just a month after the national conference, an anti-communist revolution broke out in Hungary culminating in a bloody Soviet invasion.

The general reaction in Denmark was one of great anger aimed directly at the communist party. In a short period of time, it lost all the support it had gained during the great strike, and even more. Demonstrations were held in solidarity with the Hungarian uprising, and *Land og Folk* was attacked on several occasions: the most serious when a hand grenade was thrown through a window. For a second time in just a year, the party was split in two. The majority of the central committee, including Aksel Larsen, supported the invasion, while a minority of mainly intellectuals condemned it.<sup>9</sup> This time, however, the minority broke the party discipline by publishing their condemnation without the consent of the central committee in the ‘press of our adversaries’ (‘modstanderpressen’), as the non-communist newspapers were known. Thirty-six self-acclaimed intellectuals signed a petition to the party leadership asking it to condemn the invasion in Hungary. The petition was printed in the daily *Information* on November 6, four days before the upcoming meeting of the central committee. Aksel Larsen was furious! In his introductory speech at the meeting he directly attacked the petitioners’ position as intellectuals – never a completely trustworthy label in a communist party, always second to the worker:

“If you look at the names, you will notice that it is primarily the intellectuals that attack the party and its policies in the press. You can’t get around that this is thought provoking, that it cannot be a coincidence. You can’t avoid comparing this to the fact that it wasn’t the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Kurt Jacobsen, *Aksel Larsen. En Politisk Biografi*, pp. 456-57

<sup>9</sup> The situation was somewhat more complicated: there were two Soviet invasions, of which the first was criticised by the party. However, this was soon forgotten after the support for the second one.

Copenhagen workers, but students, young conservatives and the like ('KU-elementer') who began and carried out the demonstrations and hooliganism at *Land og Folk*...

the workers judge more soberly, they keep their calm and don't let themselves be terrorised into a blind fight against the communists. This is because the workers' class position, the belonging to the strongest class in society, the knowledge of the goals of this class, they stand more solidly, calmly, strongly.

The intellectuals ... do not have this basis of class, the emotion of class, the ideology of class for their support."<sup>10</sup>

The party trade unionists held similar, if not stronger views: the invasion should not pose a problem on the shop floor, only among the unreliable party intellectuals, "these people need to learn about class struggle!"<sup>11</sup>

One of the signatories, the schoolteacher Inger Merete Nordentoft, had a seat on the central committee, and soon the mood turned directly against her. Alone against the angry crowd, she offered to lay down her mandate. However, since she was not the one who had given the petition to the press, she kept her seat but was ordered explicitly by Larsen not to have any contact, personally or politically, with those who had leaked the petition.

This meeting clearly showed the main concern of the majority of the central committee, the party's representatives in the trade unions. They feared that the ideological discussions would obstruct the 'real' party work. After all, the unions and the influence on individual areas were the main channels of influence of the party, and dockers, typographers or bricklayers were supposedly not interested in the implications of Soviet foreign policies. They were interested in putting pressure on the, in their opinion, much too conciliatory social democratic LO.

Whether their interpretation was true or not is highly questionable. The petition of the thirty-six intellectuals was far from the only outcry from the members after the invasion. The central committee received 30 letters from different districts, of which 17 supported the pro-Soviet line, while 13 were, at times extremely, outspoken in the condemnation of both the Soviet Union and the Stalinist Rakosi regime in Hungary.<sup>12</sup> The critique thus went far beyond the small circle of party intellectuals.

The internal split became obvious at the next meeting, December 15-16 1956. Now the different wings began to take shape. A minority of the central committee now spoke openly about a sincere renewal in the style of the PCI and of the Icelandic party, which had begun to take a more independent course in the world communist movement. At the same time, the ultra-conservative wing – known as 'the hard core' – found its feet with Ib Nørlund emerging as the ideological leader. Whereas in earlier meetings, he had been remarkably quiet despite his role as ideological 'chief whip', he now stood up with a long and well prepared manuscript and gave his opinion on the controversies in the party:

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<sup>10</sup> Archive of the DKP, box 77 *CK nov. 56-nov.57*, "Centralkomitemødet 11. november 1956"

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

“We all know that this is not only about Hungary. The strife over the Hungarian question has sharpened the problems, but at the same time made them more concrete in a way that will hopefully have the advantage that they will bring us closer to a clarification. But the problems go further: to what could in brief be called the understanding of the 20<sup>th</sup> congress.

To me, it has been a major weakness that we in our discussions about the 20<sup>th</sup> congress have allowed too much space for doubts about socialism, about our socialist basis... Let us not forget that our movement was formed because others betrayed the socialist basis. Our party was created on an ideological basis, on the basis of Marxism in a struggle against revisionism, which attacked the very foundation of Marxism with platitudes about ‘antiquated dogmas’ and ‘changed conditions’”<sup>13</sup>

The hard core thus presented itself as the guardian of true Marxism-Leninism, fighting against deviations and doubts. Nørlund’s version of Marxism was undoubtedly influenced by his education as a physicist: Marx had revealed the working principles of capitalist society, and like the laws of physics, these did not change in different contexts, nor could they be antiquated. The world communist movement under the leadership of the Soviet Union was guided by this scientific knowledge, in contrast to the bourgeois who were driven by desire for profit or unscientific, emotional or moral considerations. In this universe, the condemnation of the Soviet invasion on ethical grounds was unscientific. This was not about individual feelings about right or wrong, a true Marxist had to analyse the events objectively and coolly in the light of class struggle – and then come to the conclusion that the Soviet Union had acted correctly.

The reformers found their ideological figurehead outside the party. Mogens Fog, a well known professor of neurology and a high-ranking resistance fighter during the war, was not a cardholder, although he was an active sympathiser of the party and a close personal friend of Aksel Larsen. After Hungary, he tried in a letter to convince Larsen that the invasion meant a definite break of trust in the Soviet Union and that the whole Bolshevik tradition had to be abandoned. According to Kurt Jacobsen, the correspondence with Fog convinced Larsen that it was not enough to reach compromises in order to retain ideological unity, but that rather the party needed a free and open debate.<sup>14</sup> Fog – as opposed to Nørlund – based his beliefs on an ethical foundation, rather than a scientific one. He thought that the ‘driving force’ of socialism was the promise of a better life for all people. If this ethical foundation was abandoned to power politics, even in the name of class struggle, socialism would lose its attraction; ethics were more important than correct Marxist analysis. In fact, Fog thought that it was time to revise Marxism itself in light of the changing society and Marxism’s ability to fulfil these ethical obligations.

For the hard core, this was pure revisionism, but because of Fog’s prestige, the party could not refuse to print his opinions. They were published in the

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<sup>13</sup> Archive of the DKP, box 77, *CK nov. 56-nov. 57*, ”Centralkomittemøde 15.-16. december 1956”, p. 11

<sup>14</sup> Kurt Jacobsen, *Aksel Larsen. En Politisk Biografi*. pp. 469-71

theoretical journal *Tiden* in the spring of 1957, together with another article written by Larsen, which was intended to refute Fog's ideas. However, Larsen's critique was very weak and half-hearted: instead of 'revision' he used the phrase 'bringing Marxism up to date', but apart from that he agreed on most of Fog's points – of course much to the dissatisfaction of the ideological purists in the hard core, who found Fog intolerably revisionist and irreconcilable with Marxism-Leninism.<sup>15</sup>

Besides these two ideological positions, there was a large third group, who did not care overly for the finer definitions of reformism or transgressions of true Marxism-Leninism. All they wanted was peace to carry on with the mobilisation in the unions. They hoped that if Hungary had reopened the discussion, maybe an extraordinary congress would finally close it. The reform wing also wanted an extraordinary congress to discuss the events in Hungary and the consequences for the party. Hence, it was agreed to schedule a congress for late January 1957 to bring some kind of clarity.

And so it seemed: The central committee was re-elected and a resolution passed, which on one hand underlined the right for each country to choose its own path free from foreign intervention (Larsen's idea), but made an exception in the Hungarian case referring to the threat to peace from the 'international reaction' – which was the official Soviet explanation. Although this was more or less in line with Khrushchev's concepts of 'national roads to socialism' and 'peaceful coexistence', it met resistance from the hard core. The old Stalinists were not comfortable with the new Soviet line, which introduced a softer view on the confrontation between capitalism and socialism. They were sceptical about adopting ideas of peaceful transitions to socialism and giving up the old dogmas of an inevitable war between the two camps. Actually, much of the reform wing – and certainly Aksel Larsen – were on some points ideologically closer to the Soviet Union of Khrushchev than the hard core, who stuck to belligerent Stalinism. However, the congress suggested that the differences could be bridged and practical work done:

“The congress showed unity in the party, now is the time for unity in the leadership”<sup>16</sup>

Once again, however, the hopes were in vain. The party had lost many of its members after Hungary as well as subscriptions to *Land og Folk*. The party finances were extraordinarily bad, and so was the mood. There was a longing for optimism and energy, something positive to build on after a truly *annus horribilis*. However, bad luck haunted the party, and in May 1957 general elections were held with a disastrous result for the DKP.

In comparison with prior elections the results did not look as bad as could have been expected, the Hungarian events taken into consideration – the party received

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 485-89

<sup>16</sup> Archive of the DKP, box 77, *CK nov. 56-nov. 57*, ”Centralkomitemøde 2.-3. februar 1957”, p. 3

3.1 % of the votes and 6 seats in parliament compared with 4.3% in 1953. Nevertheless, the party had not only taken a dip since the last election, but had lost all the support it had won during the great strikes. In this perspective, the result was catastrophic. At the central committee meeting after the elections, Larsen openly stated what he thought was the main reason for the defeat:

“[The results] force us to think seriously about the reasons for our decline, to find out what errors in our own policies and in our work have led to it

... I don't think that we have reached the necessary clarity in relation to the problems raised by the 20<sup>th</sup> congress of the CPSU and sharpened by events such as the Hungarian ones ... This is why I am of the opinion that we still need an ideological discussion”<sup>17</sup>

For the third time, the same problems were raised, problems which the vast majority of the party either found it best to sweep under the carpet or thought had been solved once and for all by the official resolution of the CPSU. Moreover, Larsen no longer occupied the middle ground in the reform question. The intellectuals who had petitioned in the debate over Hungary were either expelled or had left the party of their own will. The party leader now had only a few, scattered supporters in the leadership.

Despite this difficult situation, Larsen began to follow a more independent line, both in relation to the Soviet Union and to the rest of the party: he spoke publicly in favour of a unilateral stop of nuclear test by the Soviet Union and a demilitarisation of Denmark, both issues that had been discussed directly with the CPSU, which was firmly against. Not only did this go against the Soviet line, it was also a breach of party discipline, since neither of these suggestions had been approved by either the central committee or the politburo (forretningsudvalget).

With Aksel Larsen going his own way, it was clear that two fractions existed within the party: the reformers and the hard core, and that their differences were not going to be solved easily. Between them was the practical group of unionists, whose main concern remained the concrete groundwork. Together with the hard core, these formed a conservative majority, which opposed ideological discussions that would endanger the Marxist-Leninist foundation of the party and divert energy away from the really important tasks.

In the fall of 1957, the gap was widening. At the celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution, a declaration was signed by the major communist parties, which pointed at revisionism as the main danger for international communism. This strengthened the uncompromising attitude of the hard core. In December, Ib Nørlund met with the CPSU bureau of international affairs, headed by the conservative Boris Ponomarev, who explicitly warned him about the dangerous course of the Danish party.<sup>18</sup> With Moscow's assent, the conservative majority could launch a broad counter attack on Larsen and his few allies. According to the hard core, the declaration was the final, authoritative

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<sup>17</sup> Archive of the DKP, box 77, *CK nov. 56-nov. 57*, ”Centralkomitemøde 25.-26. maj 1957”

<sup>18</sup> Kurt Jacobsen, *Aksel Larsen. En Politisk Biografi.*, p. 508

statement on the issue of reform, and any diversions would be in conflict with the obligations of international proletarianism. Every time an argument broke out, the document was used as the conservatives' main ammunition. Larsen, now almost alone, stubbornly kept to his independent course.

In spring 1958, a battle was fought over the Yugoslavian party programme. Larsen wanted to go to Belgrade and learn from Tito's attempt to form a different kind of socialism, but met with severe resistance. The central committee refused to let him go, and sent a delegation of conservatives instead. At the debate after their return, there was very little support for the Yugoslavs. Even the reform-friendly Holger Vivike claimed that:

“The Yugoslav programme is bloody awful (ad pommern til) ... the CPSU is and must be the leading party in the world communist movement”

And Nørlund as usual pointed out that the foundation of the party's policies had to be the 1957 Moscow-declaration, not the Yugoslav programme. Aksel Larsen was growing desperate; he appealed – “with emotion in his voice (med bevæget stemme)” - to the conscience of the central committee, and repeated that the debate about the 20<sup>th</sup> congress was not over yet.<sup>19</sup> No one, however, was happy with the discussion, and one of Larsen's unionist allies, Carlo Hermansen, expressed his frustration thus:

“We should not have had this discussion. It is foreign events that lead to heated discussions”<sup>20</sup>

The meeting ended with an outburst from Aksel Larsen who shouted at Nørlund:

“You have been a demagogue from birth and you are still one today!”

The next day, he asked to be exempted from all duties to “study and think about the situation”.

His studies resulted in a ‘memorandum’ to the central committee, in which he underlined the absolute need for reform, debate and independence from Moscow. It was written in a frank and down-to-earth style, free from the phrases of communist language.<sup>21</sup> Critical remarks directed at the Soviet Union and a stubborn insistence on debate were unacceptable to both the hard core and the practical group. These provocations were amplified by the fact that the text was leaked to the social democratic daily, *Social-Demokraten*, and was printed a week before the central committee meeting – the same breach of trust and party discipline which had caused heads to roll among the ‘thirty-six intellectuals’. Larsen himself denied having given the text to anyone, and the leak was never traced. The discussion thus took place in a grim mood, with positions as firm as ever. Larsen insisted that:

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<sup>19</sup> The minutes are quite confused at this point, it seems that he was speaking very fast and emotionally. Archive of the DKP, box 77, *CK nov. 56-nov. 57*, “CK møde31/5-1/6”

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Printed in Jens Kragh, *Folkesocialisme. Udvalgte Taler Og Artikler 1958-60 Af Aksel Larsen, Mogens Fog, Kai Moltke, Gert Petersen, m Fl.* pp. 13-35



“It is not the disagreements in the party that causes decline, it is the causes of the disagreement itself”,

- “The answer lies in the declaration”,

the hard core replied.<sup>22</sup> Quite a few districts had given their opinion on the matter in writing. The majority asked for unity, peace and practical work, while a minority supported Larsen – not necessarily because of his wishes of reform, but because he was

“the only communist with a real popular appeal, and who people are still willing to listen to”,<sup>23</sup>

With all respect to Larsen’s popularity, though, it was clear now that the only way to get the party out of the deadlock was to get rid of the troublemakers. Larsen’s days were numbered.

The hard core now made a concerted effort to remove Aksel Larsen from any influence within the party. First of all, the conservative majority in the central committee could use the straitjacket of democratic centralism to silence Larsen and prevent him from speaking to the major districts and using his rhetorical talents to influence the election of delegates to the upcoming ordinary congress.<sup>24</sup> In addition to this, since the party apparatus was largely hard-core, it was possible for the conservatives to manipulate the elections and thus the congress itself. At the same time, the international movement put the thumb-screws on Larsen. On September 26 and 27 the Dutch party chairman, Paul de Groot, wrote two articles about ‘the Danish revisionism’, which condemned Larsen personally in strong words, describing him as a renegade to the communist cause and a tool of imperialism and international reaction. The articles were soon printed in Pravda as the official Soviet excommunication of Aksel Larsen. The ‘renegade Larsen’, as he would later be referred to in the world communist movement, was becoming the symbol of the revisionist threat.

The 20<sup>th</sup> congress of the DKP, held on November 1 and 2 1958, was a show trial for Larsen. He was only allowed 15 minutes to speak to an audience that had been handpicked by his adversaries. They had all received translated copies of de Groot’s article as well as a similar one, though marginally less hostile, by the Finnish general secretary, Ville Pessi. The Soviet guest, Pjotr N. Pospelov, gave an extraordinarily long speech about the progress of the Soviet Union, but, more importantly, he stressed the importance of the Moscow declaration of 1957, which condemned revisionism as an ‘ideological weapon of reaction’ and the Yugoslav party programme as being irreconcilable with Marxism-Leninism. He then emphasised internationalism as one of the most important elements of Marxism-Leninism and finally praised democratic centralism, which he

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<sup>22</sup> Archive of the DKP, box 77, *CK nov. 56-nov. 57*, ”Centralkomitemøde 23-24 august 1958”

<sup>23</sup> Archive of the DKP, box 77, *CK nov. 56-nov. 57*, ”Henvendelser fra div. afd. og distrikter til CK-møde 23. og 24 aug. 1958”

<sup>24</sup> Jens Kragh, *Opbrud På Venstrefløjten 1956-1960*. p. 40

underlined required tough discipline of both ordinary members and party leaders. As if these not-so-subtle hints to the Danish situation had not been enough, the official greeting of the CPSU praised the DKP for:

“In accordance with the principles of Marxism-Leninism forcing back the revisionist attack and the attempts by the revisionists to destroy the unity of the party”<sup>25</sup>

The position of the brother parties was more than clear: loyalty with the world communist movement required support for the conservatives.

None of the reformers were allowed to present their views in more than short comments, while the conservatives gave all the important speeches. Many of the former left the congress in frustration and Aksel Larsen made it clear that he would not even run for the elections. Thus, the new central committee was elected according to the wishes of the conservative majority. According to the traditions of communist party congresses, the old central committee had composed a list of people that they wanted elected, the delegates then had to remove a certain number of names from the list, which were then placed below a dotted line to separate them from the rest. As a result, the delegates voted almost identically, and the reformers were formally expelled from their positions.

Two weeks later, on November 16, Larsen was officially expelled from the party, and on November 22 he and a group of ex-communists began to form their own party, the SF (Socialistisk Folkeparti). The DKP had finally split, and from 1958 it was no longer the only left wing alternative to social democracy.

The new party chairman was Knud Jespersen, a docker from Aalborg. He was everything that Larsen was not, having all the virtues of a good communist. He was 100% working class, faithful to the Soviet Union and the principles of Marxism-Leninism, had participated in the resistance, had successfully led the 1956 strikes and even managed to keep some of the gains after Hungary, and – importantly - he was the optimist the party needed so badly. In these respects, he represented primarily the unionists, being a man of action rather than an ideologist. As a consequence of this lack of enthusiasm for ideological questions, he did not support the reform issue in the party; his usual contributions at the central committee meetings were that in Aalborg things were going fine due to hard work on the shop floor. The message seemed to be that if only the comrades elsewhere would get out to the workers, progress was possible.

This change represented the new distribution of forces in the party. At the first real central committee meeting after the congress (there had been a short formal one to elect the new chairman), the hard-core ideologists were beaten into submission. The unionists were not ready to accept the arrogant attitude of the old apparatchiks. Just after the congress, the daily *Information* reported that Ib Nørlund would be ‘thrown to the wolves’.<sup>26</sup> Though this was exaggerated, the

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<sup>25</sup> Archive of the DKP, box 11, *DKP's 20. kongres*, ”Danmarks Kommunistiske Parti. 20. Kongres. Sekretærprotokol”

<sup>26</sup> *Information* 3/11 1958

ideologists were hardly the winners of the struggle; internally they were being confronted personally with their sour and abrasive behaviour and certainly not treated as the winners of the conflict.<sup>27</sup> If anyone stood out as the winners, it was the practically orientated members, whose ideological conservatism was only second to their commitment to the work on the shop floors.

Their victory was short-lived, however, the 'purified' DKP was even less attractive to the electorate than it had been before the split. In the 1960 elections, the DKP was eliminated in parliament, while SF gained 11 mandates (6.1%). Soviet-style communism no longer played any role in Danish politics.

The conflict in the DKP has often been described as one of ultra-orthodox Marxists against reformists. Most writings on the subject are concerned with the ideological split between those who wanted a more independent and less rigid party, and those who stuck slavishly to orthodox Marxism-Leninism. This corresponds badly with the positions in the central committee, where many of those who later founded SF were actually quite conservative and not easily recognisable as reformers. It also ignores the large segment of the party who, like Knud Jespersen, had a traditional, communist identity, but was not engaged in ideological considerations. It seems more fruitful to keep in mind that communist parties such as the Danish one were not primarily bastions of intellectual Marxism, but working class parties, whose main task lay in the work places and in the unions. The conservative 'hard core' could win the struggle, because the reforms seemed to divert energy away from the 'real work' and towards impractical, abstract considerations.

How then could reforms be reconciled with this inherent conservatism of the working class basis? The history of the Swedish communist party shows another way of handling the issue of reform.

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<sup>27</sup> Archive of the DKP, box 79, *CK-møder 8/58-11/58*, "CKmøde 15.-16. november 1958"

## From SKP to VPK – de-Bolshevisation in Sweden<sup>28</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup> party congress of the CPSU was less of a shock for the Swedish communist than for their Danish counterparts. The official part of the congress, which contained concepts such as ‘national roads to socialism’ and ‘peaceful coexistence’, fit well with the line of the party since the dissolution of Comintern in 1943. Already in 1944, the party had embarked on the so-called ‘New Course’, which aimed at a peaceful transition to socialism adapted to the special Swedish circumstances. Though there had been some distancing from this line during the Cominform years, this had remained the basis of communist policies in Sweden. The party had actually never been particularly close to Moscow. Most of its cadres had been mobilised in the mining districts of Norrbotten or in areas with heavy industry, where they had gotten their schooling as well. In contrast to Denmark, the leaders had their knowledge of capitalism from mining shafts, saw mills and car factories, not from the lecture halls of the Lenin school. Tellingly, no one had been in the Soviet Union long enough to learn Russian. The main concern of the party was local and class issues, and internationalism proletarianism was a secondary issue.

When Khrushchev’s revelations about Stalin became known to the public, the reaction was remarkably calm and composed. The only one to call for a thorough debate was the young Carl-Henric Hermansson, who gave a long speech at the central committee meeting April 14-15 1956. Here he emphasised the need for an independent line from the Soviet Union, and he followed Palmiro Togliatti in stating that the cult of personality was not a question about “so and so many pictures of Stalin on the walls, and if we should keep the statues”,<sup>29</sup> but that rather the faults were to be found in the system itself. Even though he was quite alone in this, he met neither hard resistance nor castigation for his views. The party line was to copy the official Soviet explanations that the cult of personality

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<sup>28</sup> The Swedish literature on communism is much richer than the Danish one, the main work being Jörgen Hermansson, Kommunism Paa Svenska? SKP/VPK:s Idéutveckling Efter Komintern. Uppsala, 1984, which mainly deals with the ideological developments of the party, but builds on a very rich source material. Kent Lindkvist, Program Och Parti. Lund, 1982 focuses almost exclusively on the party programs on a descriptive level, Håkan Holmberg, Folkmakt, Folkfront, Folkdemokrati. De Svenska Kommunisterna Och Demokratifrågan 1943-1977. Uppsala, 1982 has a somewhat broader approach, but is nowhere as thorough as Hermansson. The anthology Sven E. Olsson, Från SKP Till VPK. Lund, 1976 is very influenced by its own time – it was published by a leftist journal – and is the most superficial work. In addition to this, many Swedish communists have written about the reform period in their memoirs, of course from a very partial perspective; Per-Olov Zennström, Z:s Bekännelser. Lund, 1977, Carl-Henric Hermansson, C H Minnen. Stockholm, 1993, Hilding Hagberg, Minnen. Stockholm, 1995, Hilding Hagberg, Socialismen i Tiden. Gothenburg, 1982 and Sven Landin, Uppbrot Från Stalinismen. Stockholm, 1973. In addition to this literature most of the below builds on the archive of the SKP/VPK, which is available at Arbetarrörelsens Arkiv och Bibliotek (ARAB) in Stockholm.

<sup>29</sup> Archive of the SKP/VPK, box A2:8, “Protokoll 1956-04-14- -15”

and the dogmatism of the Stalin era were mistakes which were now dealt with, and that the debate thus had ended on a positive note.<sup>30</sup> According to the memoirs of the party leader Hilding Hagberg, Hermansson's views could be excused by his youth and inexperience,<sup>31</sup> a remarkable tolerance (at least in a communist context), which would characterise controversies in the future as well.

The events in Hungary were dealt with in the same manner: the Soviet interpretation was repeated without deviation, but without any great enthusiasm, either. By an extraordinary stroke of luck, the elections 1956 were held just after Suez but before Hungary, so the SKP did not have to face an outraged electorate but instead registered a slight advance. The main issue of the day was the pension reform (the ATP), and it was to this that the communists directed most of their energy. As described above, the SKP was not overly international in its outlook; provincial seems to be the most suitable adjective. There was no doubt that solidarity with the Soviet Union was a key element of communist identity, but it worked on a level apart from everyday politics. This was partly because Sweden did not play an important role in the Soviet strategies for the cold war. It was geographically remote from the main front in central Europe and it was neutral; the status that the Soviet Union explicitly wanted for all Nordic countries. In this way, the neutralist agenda, which the brother parties in Denmark and Norway used against NATO, had already long been occupied by the social democrats. As a consequence, there was not much to mobilise upon on the foreign policy agenda. Moreover, the leaders themselves were often provincial to begin with. The SKP was a very regional party, and many of its leading cadres used the party as a platform for regional policies, especially in relation to Norrbotten and the problems of the periphery. Thus, there was not much basis for a grand-scale international agenda.

Some works on the SKP in this period try to explain why the party did not experience the same controversies over the 20<sup>th</sup> party congress and Hungary as the DKP did.<sup>32</sup> Seen in the European perspective the question should rather be asked in the reverse order, Denmark was in fact the only place in Europe, where the communist party actually split over the issue. Though the debate had serious long-term consequences for all communist parties, the Danish events remain peculiar to that party.<sup>33</sup> Thus, it could be said for Sweden that the party until the

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<sup>30</sup> Jörgen Hermansson, Kommunism Paa Svenska? SKP/VPK:s Idéutveckling Efter Komintern. p. 159

<sup>31</sup> Hilding Hagberg, Socialismen i Tiden., vol. II, p. 280

<sup>32</sup> Jörgen Hermansson, Kommunism Paa Svenska? SKP/VPK:s Idéutveckling Efter Komintern. pp. 159-60, Håkan Holmberg, Folkmakt, Folkfront, Folkdemokrati. De Svenska Kommunisterna Och Demokratifrågan 1943-1977. p. 83

<sup>33</sup> Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér, From Yalta to Glasnost. The Dismantling of Stalin's Empire. Oxford, 1990, pp. 56-57. This discusses the issue from a purely organisational perspective: many parties lost a large number of members, who became politically active individually (notably the CPGB), but only a few new parties emerged out of the internal communist struggles.

1960s stayed well within the confines of proletarian internationalism, as did most other parties: the SKP represented communist normality, while the DKP was the exception.

The events that set off the debate on reforms in the SKP were the Berlin wall and the local elections of 1962. Though the communists were thoroughly defeated (from 4.5% to 3.8%), the leadership tried to describe the elections as a victory for the working class, since the social democrats had gained more votes than the communists had lost. In *Ny Dag*, the young party member Bo Gustafsson replied sarcastically: “Another victory for the left, and we’re done for!”<sup>34</sup> A few days later, another article struck a similar note, giving the Berlin Wall as an explanation for the bad results.<sup>35</sup> Internally similar issues were brought up. Shortly after the election, Sven Landin (member of the programme commission) sent a letter to the central committee, where he warned about the fate of the brother parties in Denmark, Norway and Austria, and pointed at the uncritical attitude towards the Eastern Bloc:

“The lamentations in radio and tv about democracy in the Soviet Union under Stalin, about the events in Hungary 1956 as a conspiracy from abroad, the Berlin Wall as a wall of peace etc. point to that socialist internationalism has to be seen almost as a ... ritual”<sup>36</sup>

Carl-Henric Hermansson, too, saw the ties to the Eastern Bloc as the main obstacle to influence. In the central committee, he went as far as suggesting that “activities commissioned or paid by other parties or states should be stopped as soon as possible”.<sup>37</sup>

Instead of an outcry from the conservatives (as would have been the case in the DKP), the suggestion was taken quite seriously. In an interesting request from the central committee to the politburo, the party drew up the guidelines for international contacts: though the party still worked on the basis of proletarian internationalism and for ‘the mutual understanding between the parties and peoples’, the party correspondents should be told to report “both progresses and difficulties”, comrades travelling and working abroad should do so as private persons and not as party members, and the party schooling should focus on the Swedish circumstances and preferably take place in Sweden (and not in the GDR as was usual).<sup>38</sup> There was obviously a considerable understanding of the criticism from the party leaders, or at least a willingness to compromise on the matter. Most importantly, the criticism met with no serious resistance. It was printed in the daily press and taken seriously at the top of the party – in Denmark, in the unlikely event that such contributions were ever printed, this kind of criticism would have been interpreted as a breach of party discipline and would

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<sup>34</sup> *Ny Dag* 29/9 1962

<sup>35</sup> *Ny Dag* 2/10 1962

<sup>36</sup> Archive of the SKP/VPK, box A3:7, “Protokoll 1962”, ”Framstilling av Sven Landin och Yngve Johansson till CK-mötet den 6-7 okt”

<sup>37</sup> Archive of the SKP/VPK, box A2:11, “Protokoll 1962-11-02- -04”

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* “Beslutsprotokoll, Bil. 5”

most certainly have had serious consequences for the author. In Sweden, however, *Ny Dag* even created a common headline for the contributions, 'Forum for Debate' (Debattforum), to attract the attention of the readers.

One of the major points of criticism was the dominance of old men in the party ('Förgubbingen'). The SKP had split in 1929 in two wings: one that supported the Comintern and one that wanted to be an independent party (the Kilbom communists after the leader Karl Kilbom). The Comintern-party had been rebuilt mainly by a group of miners from Norrbotten and centred around the local communist daily, *Norrskensflamman* (The Northern Light Flame).<sup>39</sup> This group, known as the 'men of 1929', were still in charge and gave the party an atmosphere of worn-out phrases and immobile policies.

The election debate ebbed away and was silent during most of 1963, but as the preparations began for the party's 20<sup>th</sup> congress, scheduled for the beginning of 1964, criticism against the leadership was renewed. On September 3 1963, the central committee received a letter from 29 'young communists', which, though ideologically weak, aimed specifically at the failure to renew the party:

"Have we done all we could to carry through the necessary personal renewal at all levels? Should SKP make an example in the history of the Swedish popular movements and, in agreement with its general policy for democratisation, find a good way to continually renew the leadership?"

According to the 29, the party had to find new ways to articulate its policies in a relevant manner, which would attract especially the young electorate. They gave few concrete recommendations, but called for an 'extensive debate'.<sup>40</sup>

The reaction of the 'men of 1929' mirrored their image of aged immobility: chairman Hagberg's reply was a simple repetition of the classic phrases about 'a front of unity' and a 'united workers' movement', while he was silent about how this grand unity was to come about when the workers did not vote for the SKP.<sup>41</sup> The frustration of the opposition was certainly understandable.

Internally, the reactions against the criticism were still tolerant. When the central committee discussed the letter from the young communists, it was decided to let the politburo 'deal accordingly' with the signatories.<sup>42</sup> Hagberg, Hermansson and another less prominent member of the politburo (Gunnar Öhman) had a meeting with the authors of the letter and reported back to the central committee that: "It turned out that there were no political differences between us".<sup>43</sup> Again, the tolerance in the leading organs was remarkable. This being said, it is important to underline that the political differences were not as unbridgeable as in the DKP.

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<sup>39</sup> Håkan Holmberg, *Folkmakt, Folkfront, Folkdemokrati. De Svenska Kommunisterna Och Demokratifrågan 1943-1977*, p. 17

<sup>40</sup> Archive of the SKP/VPK, box A2:11, "Protokoll 1963-09-27- -29"

<sup>41</sup> *Ny Dag* 30/9 1963

<sup>42</sup> Archive of the SKP/VPK, box A2:11, "Protokoll 1963-09-27- -29"

<sup>43</sup> Archive of the SKP/VPK, box A3:7, "Protokoll 1963", "Till Centralkomitténs medlemmar...", p. 2

The young communists called for a policy that fit the Swedish reality; this had been the official line since at least the 1953 programme, which bore the title 'The Swedish Road to Socialism'. They called for renewal in the leadership. This was not a major point of controversy either. Since Hagberg's health had been declining for some time already,<sup>44</sup> a new and younger leader had to be appointed anyway. The leadership could thus easily discharge the criticism as superficial differences, and not essential issues.

Nevertheless, the debate continued throughout the winter of 1963-64. In *Ny Dag*, the issues were the same, though articulated ever more sharply. On one side, the reformers criticised the rhetoric of the party. The excuses for the injustices in the Eastern Bloc and the blaming the electoral defeats on 'anticommunist' propaganda simply hid the fact that the SKP was unable to obtain the trust of the Swedish worker, as long as the party associated itself with undemocratic regimes:

"Swedes today have both bread and peace and often a little more than just that. The Swedish worker right now believes he can afford to wait and see, if he suspects that certain human rights and freedoms would be neglected in a socialist Sweden"<sup>45</sup>

The development of Aksel Larsen's new SF-party, freed from association with Soviet communism, clearly inspired the criticism. The electoral success of SF showed that the electorate existed for a reformed communist party; SKP should not discard SF as a revisionist deviation, but rather as a sign that voters should be sought in the area between communist dogmatism and the conciliatory social democracy.<sup>46</sup> As the quotation above shows, the critique was also founded on the fact that the image of the poor and oppressed Swedish working class fighting against the capitalist was now outdated. The 1960s saw an unprecedented raise in the standard of living for the wage earners, and thus took away the possibility for the communist to mobilise on radical wage demands.<sup>47</sup> The party had to find new ways to make itself attractive to the voters.

As the opposition grew more explicit and articulate, different groups began to emerge. Usually, these are defined as four different factions: traditionalists, left opposition, right opposition and the modernists:<sup>48</sup> The traditionalists were mainly the 'men of 1929'. They had their base in Norrbotten around *Norrskensflamman*, and represented the Comintern tradition of the party. Sven Landin calls them Stalinists,<sup>49</sup> which is rather unfair. If they have to be given any such label, they were rather Khrushchevites; they stood for a peaceful transition to democracy

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<sup>44</sup> He was hospitalised three times in 1963 with pneumonia and thrombosis, Hilding Hagberg, *Socialismen i Tiden*, vol. III, p. 62

<sup>45</sup> *Ny Dag* 15/10 1963

<sup>46</sup> *Ny Dag* 1/11 1963

<sup>47</sup> Bo Stråth, *Varvsarbetare i Två Varvsstäder*. Gothenburg, 1982

<sup>48</sup> Kent Lindkvist, *Program Och Parti.*, pp. 62-73, Jörgen Hermansson, *Kommunism Paa Svenska? SKP/VPK:s Idéutveckling Efter Komintern.*, pp. 214-221 and Erik Tängerstad, *Att Organisera Ett Engagement. Om Tillkomsten Av Den Svenska FNL-Rörelsen*. Stockholm (unpublished manuscript), 1988, pp. 11-12

<sup>49</sup> Sven Landin, *Uppbrot Från Stalinismen*.



according to the Swedish, democratic traditions (Sweden's road to socialism) and peaceful coexistence between the blocs. The heritage from Comintern was not ideological, but one of identity. Their traditionalist view of a communist party was one devoted to proletarian internationalism, Marxism-Leninism and democratic centralism; the basic ingredients of a Bolshevik party, but with a strong workerist element that did not trust the educated and intellectual segments of the party. In the concrete political work, however, they were comparatively flexible, and concerned about workers' rights, and especially in local politics of the North.

The left wing opposition only emerged during the years 1962-1964, partly as a result of the Sino-Soviet split. It had its basis in the communist-dominated student organisation Clarté, where Bo Gustafsson (who had begun the debate in *Ny Dag*) defended Mao's emphasis on the armed revolutionary struggle against peaceful coexistence. Another base was the Gothenburg district, where Nils Holmberg and Knut Senander were leading figures. They both supported Mao's China and criticised the party leadership for abandoning the heritage of Lenin and embracing revisionism. If there was a Stalinist fraction in the SKP, it was to be found here: They could agree with other reformers that the ties to the Soviet Union had to be cut, not because of the lack of democracy, but because Khrushchev had become too soft.

The right wing opposition were in favour of a closer cooperation with the social democrats. Their main figure was Sven Landin, who had been a very outspoken critic from 1962. His agenda was to break completely with any undemocratic remains from the Comintern era, internally and externally. He believed that proletarian internationalism should be abandoned and the party should transform itself from a revolutionary vanguard to a normal democratic organisation.

The modernist group was destined to take over when the traditionalists retired. They were moderate reformers, both in comparison to right and left wing opposition. The main ideological inspiration came from the early New Left, especially the Danish SF, and reform-oriented communist parties, first and foremost the PCI: a common sense, humanist socialism freed from Bolshevik phrases. They wanted independence from the world communist movement, but remained firmly anti-capitalist and anti-American; they claimed solidarity with the Third World, but would not follow Maoist dogmatism. This 'third position' attracted some intellectuals because of its ideological freedoms, while it repulsed others with its theoretical eclecticism. Politically, it tried to reach the, supposedly, big group that found the social democrats too lenient, but was equally repulsed by Soviet communism.

The congress of 1964 was a victory for the reformists in general and for the modernists in particular. Hagberg had resigned as chairman shortly before the congress and there was broad support for Hermansson as his successor. In his last speech as functioning chairman, Hagberg struck a moderate and conciliatory note towards the critics:

“The open debate up to the congress has revealed mistakes, different opinions in some matters, a certain insecurity and lack of clarity, and it has mirrored international tendencies of a weakening discipline. A moving devotion to our party has been demonstrated. A general trait has been the will to correct real and imagined errors and make things better”<sup>50</sup>

In relation to the debated internationalism, he echoed Palmiro Togliatti’s view on polycentrism:

”In contrast to certain other parties, the SKP has not belonged to any international organisations for two decades and decides independently what tasks it will undertake ... [International] cooperation presupposes equal and independent relations between the parties and that no party can be presented as leading and other parties as led”<sup>51</sup>

However, he felt that the time had come to end the open debate and return to the normality of democratic centralism:

“... when everybody has been given the opportunity to say his opinion, we close the ranks and act as disciplined communists – then the democratic law of the majority takes effect, and is accepted by the eventual minority as the law of the party”<sup>52</sup>

Hagberg thus did not seem completely hostile to the reformists, although he stood firm on the communist traditions.

In this respect, Hermansson was a compromise candidate. There can have been no doubt about his position vis-à-vis the world communist movement – this must have been clear since 1956. On the other hand, he had not participated in the congress debate, but stuck to the party rules and only uttered his criticism internally, and he had a reputation as a good and knowledgeable Marxist (one of the few to have actually read the whole *Capital*). His merits were many: he had edited both the theoretical journal *Vår Tid*, and *Ny Dag*, been long time member of both the central committee and the politburo, and written extensive books on Swedish monopoly capitalism for party schooling. In comparison to most modernists, and certainly to Sven Landin and the right wing opposition, he seemed a suitable compromise – especially taking into consideration that none of the traditionalists were competent for the job.

When Hermansson took the chair as the new party leader to end the congress, however, he affirmed the modernist agenda:

“The debate will continue about important matters for our party. You only stop debating when you have one foot in the grave”<sup>53</sup>

Whether this was a rather distasteful hint at Hagberg’s recent health problems, or a statement against democratic centralism, there was no question that the modernists had taken the lead in the party. The break with the traditions of

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<sup>50</sup> Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti, För Vidgat Folkstyre - Mot Storfinansens. Stockholm, 1964, p. 26

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. This was certainly a concession to the critics. Hagberg had personally managed the economic support from Moscow to the SKP, and usually he was quite clear in his admiration for the Soviet Union and the CPSU.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 28

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p. 129

democratic centralism was just one reform to remove the Bolshevik elements and modernise the party.

This 'de-Bolshevisation' of the party seemed a well-planned offensive against all the key elements of the Bolshevik party-model: press, international relations, democratic centralism, and the traditional communist language.

Many of these reforms were already in the making, some even with the consent and participation of the traditionalists; as mentioned above, the economic support from the Soviet Union had been criticised internally before, and now the transfers stopped altogether.<sup>54</sup> Thereby, the new leadership removed the main direct tool of Soviet control. It was no longer possible for the CPSU to keep the SKP in line by threatening to cut the transfers. Now, the party was freed from any formal dependence of the world communist movement, but economically it was more vulnerable. The state support for political parties that was introduced in Sweden from the mid-1960s made up for some of the financial problems, but the new economic situation required other reforms.

One of the reforms that has been somewhat misinterpreted as a modernist break with the world communist movement is the closing of the party school in Bad Doberan in the GDR. Jörgen Hermansson sees this as a clear example of how the party tried to emphasise its independence.<sup>55</sup> However, the decision to close the school in Bad Doberan was actually taken before the congress. Already in 1962, there had been demands that the school be closed. In 1962-63 there had been complaints about drunkenness at the school.<sup>56</sup> In August 1963, Hagberg and Erik Karlsson (also a traditionalist) had proposed to the politburo that all schooling be moved to Sweden. The reason given was that it was too difficult and expensive to send to members on long courses abroad, and priority should be given to shorter courses in Sweden.<sup>57</sup> The actual decision to close the school was taken in September 1963, and was not a part of the modernist agenda. However, it shows the flexibility and pragmatism of the traditionalists: when the choice was between weakening the formal ties to the world communist movement and a practical solution to a concrete problem, pragmatism prevailed.

The restructuring of the party's international relations did not include a complete withdrawal from the world communist movement. Rather, the main goals were solidarity and independence. The party would participate in congresses of the

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<sup>54</sup> It is not clear who made the decision to stop the transfers. Given Hermansson's prior criticism of the transfers, it seems that the Swedes themselves took the initiative to decline the support. In any case, after 1964 the SKP no longer received any money directly, Lars Björlin, "Russisk guld i svensk kommunisme" in Morten Thing ed., Guldet Fra Moskva. Copenhagen, 2001, pp. 42-128, at p. 119, Valerio Riva, Oro Da Mosca. I Finanziamenti Sovietici Al PCI Dalla Rivoluzione D'Ottobre Al Crollo Dell'URSS. Milano, 1999, pp. 48-49

<sup>55</sup> Jörgen Hermansson, Kommunism Paa Svenska? SKP/VPK:s Idéutveckling Efter Komintern. p. 212

<sup>56</sup> Archive of the SKP/VPK, box A2:11, "Protokoll 1962"

<sup>57</sup> Archive of the SKP/VPK, box A2:11, "Protokoll 1963", "ALTERNATIV ifråga om studieverksamhetens organisering och upplägning"

brother parties and practical co-operation, in particular with the SED, continued.<sup>58</sup> There were also more or less informal contacts with other reformist communist parties, especially the PCI, which had been an inspiration to the modernists. At the Yugoslavian party congress in 1964, the delegations of the two parties had an informal meeting about closer relations between the SKP and the PCI.<sup>59</sup> The contacts seem to have been fruitful; at the following congresses of the SKP, the PCI greetings are among the longest and most detailed, showing great knowledge about Swedish developments. The Dutch party also showed interest in the Swedish reforms and sent a study-group to Sweden to examine the electoral strategies of the SKP.<sup>60</sup> The party thus definitely still belonged to and worked within the world communist movement, but it had the firm policy that this international cooperation should not be binding in any way – much like the later Eurocommunist ideas. For this reason, the SKP no longer participated in international communist conferences, where they would be asked to sign declarations as had been the case at the meetings in 1957 and 1960.

Delegations would, however, still be sent to other meetings, like the yearly Baltic Week in Rostock, where the agenda was less uniform, just as delegations and study-groups were sent to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

In addition to establishing this new position within the world communist movement, the SKP no longer limited its contacts to the family of communist parties. Hermansson also began to establish relations with socialist parties like the Danish SF and its Norwegian counterpart, and with the PSI and PSIUP in Italy.<sup>61</sup> The Danish SF had no doubt been a major inspiration for the modernists: the success of the party was an example that reform was a possible way out of the isolation on the political scene. On the other side of the Sound, the Danish SF could use the modernism in the SKP to strengthen their own position. In November 1964, when reforms in the SKP were clearly underway, SF took the initiative to arrange a common public meeting in Copenhagen about 'The Road to Socialism in the Nordic Countries'. Seemingly, the two party leaders, Larsen and Hermansson, soon established good personal relations: the tone in their letters changed quickly to an informal style, they used the 'du' instead of 'De' (informal pronoun for the second person), and called each other 'brother' and 'good friend'.<sup>62</sup> From now on, the party press of both SF and the SKP referred

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<sup>58</sup> Even the more dubious activities: in 1964, the SED for example asked the SKP whether a specific person who wanted to move to the GDR was a member of the party or in other ways known to the SKP? The SKP answered that he was not known to them, Archive of the SKP/VPK, box E1:42

<sup>59</sup> Letter from the PCI to the SKP, Archive of the SKP/VPK, box E2:4

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> The Norwegian SF was modelled after the Danish party, but came out of the social democrats and not the NKP.

<sup>62</sup> Archive of the SKP/VPK, box E1:42

positively and in detail to the other party. In contrast, the DKP was largely ignored.

This restructuring of international relations was thus not a clear step out of the world communist movement, but it did break with the disciplinary element of proletarian internationalism. International unity was no longer hailed as a hallmark of true communism, but rather each party should cooperate pragmatically and independently with whomever they wanted and without any ideological straitjackets in the form of common ‘guidelines’ or declarations.

Another big step away from Bolshevism was the reforms of the party press. Before 1964, the SKP press had been modelled after the usual communist standards: one main daily newspaper, *Ny Dag*, which commented on day-to-day events from a communist perspective, one theoretical journal, which came out about 10 times a year with in-depth articles from Sweden as well as from the brother parties in east and west, and some local papers, most notably *Norrskensflamman* in the northernmost districts. For a party the size of the SKP, this was far too expensive and only possible with financial aid from the Eastern Bloc and extraordinary collections among the rank-and-file. Now the party had declined the first type of funding, a reform of the press was unavoidable.

To lower expenses and broaden the audience, *Ny Dag* was made into a weekly, and *Vår Tid* abolished. At the same time the party began to support a formally independent leftist weekly, *Tidsignal*, to communicate with the New Left. This was the first major clash between the modernists and the traditionalists. Hagberg was himself a newspaperman and clung to the Leninist principle that the party daily should be the spark to light the revolutionary fire. He opposed the reform of *Ny Dag* and even more the planned reform of *Norrskensflamman*, which had been his political home in Norrbotten and had a great symbolic value for the traditionalists.<sup>63</sup> The fight about the centralised press was lost, but the traditionalists did manage to save *Norrskensflamman* through independent funding.<sup>64</sup> However, discussions about this northern daily and the refusal by the district to change it carried on through the fall of 1964.

The traditionalists were also irritated by the party support for *Tidsignal*. They found the New Left journal ‘phrase-revolutionary’ and frivolous; it was written by and for petit-bourgeois intellectuals, much too critical of the Eastern Bloc and, moreover, it indulged in discussion of – as Hagberg put it in 1968 - “... sexual acts, violence and other perversities”.<sup>65</sup> The old working-class traditionalist base did not support New Left views of bodily and sexual liberation. Its morals were deeply conservative and heavily influenced by the revivalist Puritanism, with which it had always competed in the North. Hagberg and allies had no

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<sup>63</sup> Archive of the SKP/VPK, box A3:7, “Protokoll 1964”, “Protokoll ... 29/10 1964”

<sup>64</sup> Most likely with support from the Soviet assistance fund.

<sup>65</sup> Hilding Hagberg, *I Marx-Lenins Anda*. Lund, 1968, p. 30

understanding for a press reform that gave money to these intellectual political and moral deviances, while it tried to shut down the organs of the working class. This hinted at the limits of reform; the modernists had considerable liberty, but had to be careful about removing the symbolic institutions of the communist party, which were at the very foundations of communist identity. In Sweden, the press had been historically more important than, for example international relations, while in the Danish case the international relations had been central. For this reason, these were the places attempts to reform met with serious resistance.

The modernists had a much easier task in their attempt to modernise the language of the party. This again was an attempt to remove the Bolshevik elements and give the party a modern and acceptable image to the Swedish public. Thus, the central committee was renamed 'Party Board' (Partistyrelsen), and that which remained of belligerent Comintern metaphors, like 'closed ranks' or 'frontline of the struggle', were for a large part abandoned. However, this type of language was not common in the SKP to begin with. Many of the expressions and metaphors of communist language were direct translations from Russian, and often sounded like 'newspeak' in Scandinavian, where the general tone of the language is much less high-flown.<sup>66</sup> Since Russian and the Soviet Union played such a relatively secondary role to the SKP, it is logical that 'Russianisms' would play a small role as well. The language of the SKP was therefore not a key part of the party's image, as it was in the DKP, and there was no resistance dismantling the few rudiments over left from the Comintern era.

Democratic centralism was an important issue for modernists. As Hermansson had stated already at the 1964 congress, continuous debate and exchange of opinions were more important than adhering slavishly to common decision and to 'closing the ranks'. Instead of the conspiratory secretiveness of the classic Bolshevik party, the SKP now tried to be a forerunner of openness to the public. The congress in 1964 had been the first Swedish party congress open to the press, and after the change of leadership, even the central committee – or Party Board – meetings were opened to invited guests. One striking example was a meeting in April 1965, where the leadership discussed strategies against low paid work. The discussion began with a round table debate with invited experts, who talked about various social and economic problems connected to the question of low pay. Such a revelation of party tactics and considerations to outsiders would have been unheard of in traditional communist practice, in the SKP, it was hardly questioned. At the same meeting, the committee for organisation put forward a suggestion for more experiments and more stimulation for debates in the local districts – without mentioning democratic centralism. Again, this step was much smaller than it seems, since open debates had been going on since 1962, and the

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<sup>66</sup> Morten Thing, "The Signs of Communism. Signs of Ambiguity" in Kimmo Rentola and Tauno Saarela eds., *Communism, National and International*. Helsinki, 1998, pp. 241-57

party discipline was extraordinarily sloppy by communist standards. While the new openness was certainly a break with prior party norms, this again met with little resistance. One probable reason is that the party was split into different fractions where neither had sufficient strength to use disciplined democratic centralism to keep the others down. Rather, everybody needed the openness to protect themselves.

The above reforms were mainly carried through in 1964-1965, but were not confirmed until the congress of 1967. As shown above, only a few of them were obstructed by the leadership. The modernists had seemingly taken over the agenda completely, building to some extent on reforms that were already in the making or using the impetus of success to drive the reforms beyond the framework of a communist party. They were aided by good electoral results in 1964, where the party more than regained the losses from the preceding years and winning 5.2% of the votes; the best result since the 1940s. In 1966 they made another advance to 6.4%, matching the success of the Danish SF. In the light of such successes, it was hard to criticise the new course. Indeed, the only ones to object to the modernist line were members of the left wing opposition, who expected a violent revolution and had no enthusiasm for parliamentary influence won by 'opportunistic deviances'; a true communist party kept to the true line of Marxism-Leninism until the revolutionary situation occurred, only then would the correct analysis and strategy of the party give it its natural role as leader of the revolution.<sup>67</sup> For the traditionalists, who had always condemned 'sectarianism' much more than revisionism or opportunism, this must have been more frightening than the modernist reforms.

Considering the range and scope of the reforms, it is surprising that the CPSU did not try to put pressure on the party, as it did in Denmark. There were several reasons for this. First of all, there was not much the CPSU could do to keep the party in line. The main means of pressure was the threat to withdraw economic support, and the SKP had already declined this of its own accord. There was of course the whole range of indirect 'recommendations' and the threat of being excommunicated from the international movement. But this was a time when Soviet communism was already losing ground to the Chinese competitors. It is likely that the International Bureau of the CPSU was unwilling to take risks and lose another member of the family. In addition, the allies of Moscow in the SKP themselves were not unanimously against reform, so they could not be used a means of pressure either. In other words, the historical moment for reform was right.

At the 1967 congress, the reforms were crowned with a completely new party programme. This was in some respects a retrospective project to put the reforms

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<sup>67</sup> This view was explicated in Nils Holmberg, Vart Går Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti. Gothenburg, 1965 – a publication that would have caused exclusion in most parties (communist or non-communist) but had little consequences in the SKP.

on paper. It was on the whole a very detailed programme, which briefly specified the party's worldview and ideological basis, after which it dealt specifically with the reforms that the party would carry through if it had the power to do so: Sweden should be turned into a socialist country through nationalisation and reforms, but always with the consent of the people and the parliament. Besides this, there were a number of suggestions to reform taxes, income policies, local policies etc. This was quite unproblematic; it pointed at traditional themes within Swedish communism, and did not depart from the prior line of domestic policies. The controversial points were on the pages that defined the party in general: its ideology and worldview. In the commentaries on the program from the local districts three issues were repeatedly raised: democratic centralism, Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism. Though there had been little criticism of the de facto abandoning of its principles, the fact that the word 'democratic centralism' was mentioned in neither programme nor statutes worried a great part of the members. The leadership, however, stood firm on the issue:

"The concept [democratic centralism] is understood and has been characteristic for an organisation with strong centralist tendencies"<sup>68</sup>

tendencies that the party wanted to leave behind.

The same went for Marxism-Leninism. In the programme, the party identified itself with socialism, but did not use the labels of traditional communist language. Again, some local districts were sceptical, believing that a communist party had to adhere to Marxism-Leninism. The Party Board explained:

"The term Marxism-Leninism once expressed the ability of the theory to evolve. Subsequently it was connected with dogmatism, pedantry, and a slavish adaptation of the written texts (bokstavträdsm). The term Marxism today gives a more clear expression of the role of theory as a guide for action"<sup>69</sup>.

Hence, the leadership would include Marx, but it made no references to Lenin.

Another big issue of contention was the treatment of the socialist countries. The programme had a passage that stated that:

"Socialism has meant industrialisation, economic and cultural change. In the large perspective, there have been negative tendencies parallel to the great leaps of progress. Big differences in income, inequalities in social positions, bureaucratic structures, violations of justice and curtailed debate of culture and society are contrary to the ideals of socialism"<sup>70</sup>

For a great number of members, this was to going far in the criticism of real socialism and was contrary to the obligations of a communist party. For the right wing opposition, however, it was not radical enough; instead of 'negative tendencies' (negative drag) it talked about a 'degeneration' (urartning) of

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<sup>68</sup> Archive of the SKP/VPK, box A2:13, "Protokoll 1967-05-04- -05", "PARTISTYRELESENS FÖRSLAG TILL YTTRANDE", p. 35

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p. 31

<sup>70</sup> Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti/Vänsterpartiet Kommunisterna, Samling Vänster i Svensk Politik, Gothenburg, 1967, p. 30



socialism in the Eastern Bloc.<sup>71</sup> In comparison with this view, the modernist wording seemed moderate, and the paragraph remained in the programme. International relations were, according to the program, made with “all those who work for national independence, peace, democracy and socialism”.<sup>72</sup> This was an uncontroversial and unclear wording, which used the language of the world communist movement, but also included independent groups.

The last big issue was the party name. The modernists wanted to make it clear that the party had left its Comintern past behind and now worked as an independent socialist party: maybe the party should even eliminate the word ‘communist’ altogether. The traditionalists were sceptical, although not unconditionally against; Hagberg suggested ‘The Party of Work’ (Arbetets Parti) and defended the possibility of a name-change before if his traditional constituency.<sup>73</sup> The result was a compromise, ‘Vänsterpartiet Kommunisterna’/VPK (The Communist Party of the Left), where the party changed the name to emphasise its reformed image, but still kept the word communism.

All in all, the controversial parts of the programme were those which aimed at abandoning the links to the traditions of communism; links that had already been abandoned de facto. These were themes that had more connection to the emotional and symbolic levels of communist identity than the concrete policies. They were elements in the party’s teleological rather than societal dimension. Hence, they could be given up in the daily workings of the party, but were difficult to expel from symbolic or ideological texts. To the rank-and-file, it did not seem to matter whether the party was actually Marxist-Leninist (the concept had barely any meaning any more, being embraced by Maoists and Soviet communists alike) or democratic centralist in practice, but on the symbolic level, it was imperative that these concepts were written in the programme.

Despite the reservations, the programme was adopted by the congress. The gravest immediate consequence was that the left wing opposition left the party, although they remained a marginal group. Generally speaking, the modernists had managed to carry through a decisive reform of the party. It had not, however, managed to unite the party around the reforms, and there was still a large minority which was at least emotionally attached to the communist ideology, communist symbols and the Soviet Union. In time this split would influence the development of Swedish communism significantly, but the changes made between 1964-67 could not be reversed. By 1967, the party had completed its transformation from a traditional Bolshevik organisation to a modern socialist party.

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<sup>71</sup> Archive of the SKP/VPK, box A2:13, “Protokoll 1967-01-27- -29”, ”Reservation: DEN VÄRLD VI LEVER I”, p. 2

<sup>72</sup> Sveriges Kommunistiska Parti/Vänsterpartiet Kommunisterna, Samling Vänster i Svensk Politik.

<sup>73</sup> Norrskensflamman, 28-29/12 1966

## Summary and conclusion

In the comparison of these two cases the main question is: how could the SKP survive and carry through a process of reform much more profound than the attempts that split its Danish brother party? Or, more generally, what were the possibilities of reform of a western communist party? In this particular case - as stated at the beginning - there were several factors which explain the difference in development; some long *durée* ones, like geography, and some medium *durée* ones, like the social democratic hegemony and short-term factors like the distribution of power within the individual party and the historical events that triggered the reforms.

The main similarity of the two parties was their isolation vis-à-vis social democracy in society and in the workers' movement. This was a lasting predicament, which influenced all strategic choices; how could the communist party mobilise sufficiently to get real influence? There was an obvious dissatisfaction with the social democrats among a significant segment of the workers, which could be mobilised in certain situations like the great strikes of 1956 in Denmark, or in certain areas like the northern periphery in Sweden. The problem was to keep and expand this influence as a stable basis for communist policies.

This common problem, however, had to be dealt with in completely different situations. The geography plays a role here: while the DKP was a small party in a small country, it could relatively easily maintain a centralist structure and tight control over the individual districts. The SKP, on the contrary, was a small party in one of Europe's biggest countries. In addition, the party strongholds were located separate corners of the land, often with different agendas, like those of the traditionalists in the north and the left wing opposition in Gothenburg. Perhaps Sweden was not simply too big for a communist party of that size, taking into consideration the demands for a communist party to have newspapers, a publishing company and a centralised, bureaucratic style of leadership. As a consequence, the SKP developed a fairly decentralised structure with few meetings of the central committee and a considerable space of manoeuvre for the local districts. While this cannot wholly explain the tolerance of the SKP versus the tough discipline of the DKP, it does at least provide a background for it.

The short-term factors offer several possible explanations for the two developments. These are of a very different character, though, since they have a much larger element of contingency; history, inner-party tactics and personal biographies play roles that are not easily put into a broader causal framework. They happened, mostly by chance, to define the development at the time, whereas they might have been completely irrelevant in other contexts.

The history and traditions of the two parties were quite different. For some reason, the DKP had a tradition of sending its leading cadres to the Soviet Union. This dates back to the 1920s, when Aksel Larsen had attended the Lenin school with Arne Munch-Petersen (who later died in a camp in Siberia). They knew

Russian, had contacts in the Kremlin and more attachments to the Soviet Union than the Swedes. In comparison, Hermansson - who was the theoretical figurehead of the SKP - had read the *Capital* with a friend from university on an island outside Stockholm.<sup>74</sup> His scientific education was gained when he worked as an assistant for the liberal political scientist, Herbert Tingsten. Hagberg had only been to the Soviet Union on short trips and had spent his formative years in the miners' union in Norrbotten. These people were certainly attached to the Soviet Union and the world communist movement, but they lacked the personal ties of their Danish counterparts.

As shown above, the distribution of forces within the parties was extremely important for the success or failure of the reforms. In the DKP, neither the hard core nor Larsen had the influence themselves to win the conflict. Larsen failed mainly because he did not convince the unionist bulk of the central committee and politburo that debate and reform was necessary; on the contrary he ignored their pleas for peace and continued to provoke new discussions. The hard core, though far from popular, managed to convince the practically minded majority that their calls for unity and 'closing of the ranks' would end the ideological debate. The fact that Larsen actually managed to take a large number of the unionists with him to SF shows that things could have gone differently had the cards been played in another way. In Sweden, the distribution of forces was possibly more uneven: here four different fractions played against each other. Though the modernists seem radical in the international perspective, they were actually moderate in comparison with the right wing opposition, just as the traditionalists were quite moderate themselves, certainly closer to the modernists than they were to the Maoist left wing opposition. The two camps could with relative ease find compromises between the right wing opposition's complete submission to social democracy and the Maoists' sectarianism.<sup>75</sup>

The point in time in the history of the world communist movement plays a part as well. When Aksel Larsen tried to reform the DKP, albeit quite moderately, it was still in the time of the Soviet monolith. Except for the Yugoslav question, there was only one communism, and it was led, defined and ruled by the CPSU. The Danish attempts to gain more independence have to be seen in this perspective. Even though leaders like Palmiro Togliatti of the PCI were attempting to carve out more space for their individual parties, Moscow still controlled western communism. When the CPSU had decided that Larsen had gone too far, they could exert pressure through the communist parties in Holland and Finland, they could summon the Danes for consultations and openly condemn Larsen at the DKP's own congress - all in the knowledge that they were the highest authority. By the 1960s, international communism had lost its monolithic structure. The

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<sup>74</sup> Carl-Henric Hermansson, C H Minnen.

<sup>75</sup> After 1968, the alliance crumbled and in 1977, the traditionalists split the party and founded their own communist party. However, it is problematic to write this history 'backwards' into the mid-1960s, when this conflict did not yet exist.

main blow was the Sino-Soviet split, which for the first time since 1917 established a real communist alternative to the Soviet Union; there were now (at least) two centres of international communism instead of one. Moreover, the leftist space that had been dominated by communism now had to be shared with new parties like the SF in Denmark and Norway, the PSIUP in Italy, the PSU in France and with the New Left intellectuals and social movements outside the parties. The partial distancing of the SKP from the world communist movement was hence far from a worst-case scenario of a Maoist takeover or complete independence. After all, they were still a part of the family, even with a modernist leadership.

All in all, the contingent short-term factors play a decisive role for the success or failure of reforms. These are random factors, which do not offer causal explanations in a mechanistic sense, but rather offer heuristic points of departure and suggest interesting aspects of the communist universe. They show that even far-reaching reform, which aimed at the very pillars of communism, was actually possible; that there were no fixed points where the party machinery would break down under the pressure of change. The seeming incompatible ideological contradictions between New Left modernism and Old Left traditionalism were not an obstacle in the practical, daily work of the party.

This is perhaps the most interesting point: the subordinate role of ideology in the development of communist parties. Even though ideology played a large role in party identity, its everyday implications were surprisingly small. The Danish discussion between the hard core and Larsen was ideological, but it was exactly this ideological, 'impractical' character that explicitly irritated the majority of the rest; a point which is further emphasised by the assault on Nørlund after Larsen's exclusion. In the SKP, reform passed easily, as long as it was not explicitly ideological. Marxism-Leninism could in practice be abandoned with little resistance, but there was widespread scepticism about omitting it from the program. Both cases show that ideology was more a decoration than an actual tool; it had a symbolic function, which could not be left out, but, on the other hand, it had little influence on the workings of the party.

Where Larsen tried to reform the DKP, he explicitly aimed at the party's symbolic, teleological foundation, and lost the battle to the conservative majority. The inherent conservatism of communist identity blocked a thorough re-orientation of the ideological profile. In contrast, Hermansson's step-by-step removal of Bolshevik traditions went easily, as long as the reforms only aimed at the societal dimension of the party. The resistance only occurred when the reforms had to be reflected in the programme, and thus influenced the teleological dimension. The possibilities of reform lay in this interplay between day-to-day flexibility and ideological conservatism.

## Conclusions

The main focus on both our articles has been the tension between the strategies and goals of different communist parties and the ties that bound them into a specific political and ideological order. How did the ‘societal dimension’ of the party in a certain political setting fit the common ‘teleological dimension’ of the world communist movement?

The close look at the individual parties reveals a rather diverse image. Despite their common offspring and ideology, the communist parties of Western Europe acted and thought in very different ways. In the 1960s, when communist parties had to adapt to a number of changes, they were already far removed from their origins in the Third International. They had different histories, party cultures and worked under different circumstances, which gave them each a specific and unique societal dimension.

The communist parties of Italy and France emerged after World War two as strong and coherent political forces, which were to play a crucial role on the political Left of their respective countries. Strengthened both numerically and mentally by their involvement in the resistance, at the outcome of the war they both the PCI and PCF at the outcome of the war gained around 20% of the vote and took part in coalition governments up to 1947. Despite their entering into a phase of domestic isolation and a rigid Stalinist mind-set during the 1950s, they managed to maintain relatively high election results as well as adherence figures (around 500,000 for the PCF, up to over 2,000,000 for the PCI).

In contrast to their southern brother parties, the Scandinavian parties were small and marginal. Their past was marked by the uneven struggle to wrest power from hegemonic social democratic parties. In Denmark, this struggle had resulted in small bastions among those unions that had more radical demands than the social democratic LO leadership. The party history was shaped by this fight and, because of its minuscule size, by the individual biographies of its leading cadres. These had been trained in the Soviet Union and had strong personal affiliations there. Even if there had been controversies with the CPSU in the 1930s, the experience of resistance, German concentration camps and liberation by the Red Army had convinced the leaders of the Soviet Union’s unique role in history. Hence, the DKP was marked by its trade union basis and the filo-sovietism of its leaders.

The SKP had no such experience. Rather, the formative experience of its members had been the harsh conditions of the mines above the Arctic Circle and in the big forests. Their political horizon was most of the time limited by their focus on the capitalist centre and its extortion of the

periphery. In this world-view, the Soviet Union had always been a distant, albeit important, model for socialism. After the dissolution of Comintern and during the Cold War, the policy of neutrality and the country's peripheral position softened Soviet pressure with Moscow's gaze focused at the NATO countries on the European frontline. All this gave the SKP its peculiar provincial outlook, more local and patriotic than internationalist.

All these differences make it problematic to talk about a specific 'West European Communism', and in practice they blocked the development of Eurocommunism as a political alternative within the world communist movement. However, it would be wrong to jump to the conclusion that these parties had nothing in common. First of all, what these parties had in common was the Cold War impasse as Soviet-aligned parties in countries affiliated to the Western alliance. The deadlock character of this situation became increasingly clear to them, and by the 1960s most of them found the mental and political space to reflect upon this in a more open way. But again, they responded to this situation in very different ways. Next to this, there were undoubtedly a number of binding ties, which restricted the individual party cultures and the concrete political possibilities. But, these ties worked as delimiting factors rather than generative ones. They were not essential categories, which defined and shaped party politics. They were internalised limits to what could be done, but not guidelines of what should be done.

Proletarian internationalism is an obvious example of such a limit. Though the PCI and the SKP/VPK had very different opinions from the PCF and DKP about the international obligations of internationalism, none actually questioned internationalism. Togliatti's Polycentrism and Hermansson's policy of independence both were conceptualised within the internationalist framework. They were questioning the individual party's role in the larger community, not the community itself. These differences surfaced at the big common meetings, but hardly interfered with the daily workings of proletarian internationalism. Greetings were sent by telegram at anniversaries, delegations still went to salute at congresses and the party headquarters would subscribe to newspapers from the Soviet Bloc.

Ideologically, the Soviet-inspired vulgate of 'Marxism-Leninism' served as another common denominator. However, the abstract character of the theory made it difficult to apply directly to concrete policies, especially in the context of pluralist democracies, advanced capitalism and post-materialist social protest. The main function of Marxism-Leninism was to give party strategy a scientific appearance in the form of the objective and correct analysis of the situation. It demonstrated that the party was the

force of the future, and despite present setbacks, it would inevitably lead the working class towards a new society.

These elements of communism did play a role at affirming a common identity, and, ultimately, a common understanding of the world and their own place in it. All this was constitutive in defining the teleological dimension of their political identity. This should not be confused with the elements that shaped the daily politics on the societal level. The common denominators were elements of identity, while the specificities shaped concrete politics. The teleological dimension was thus not just an instrumental fig leaf for conspiratory politics, nor was the societal dimension derived from communist teleology.

The 1960s saw a conflict between these two levels of belonging. On the domestic scene, the close attachment to the Soviet Union became a burden for the Western parties. In the late 1940s Soviet communism had been associated with victory over Nazi Germany, now it was connected to Stalinism and oppression in Eastern Europe. From the destalinisation and the invasion of Hungary in 1956, over the Berlin Wall in 1962 and to Prague 1968, the communist parties were repeatedly seen as representatives of an aggressive and oppressive system. Moreover, in the context of superpower détente, they started to realise that their loyalty to the Soviet Union was not necessarily mirrored by Soviet loyalty to the idea of socialist revolution in the West. Thus, for a variety of reasons they felt the need to distance themselves from the socialist states, while being at the same time limited in this by their communist identity and loyalty to Moscow. The ambiguities of Eurocommunism showed the difficulties of conceptualising a detachment from 'real socialism', in particular where the question of the Soviet Union and the East European People's Democracies as models for socialist construction, was concerned. The bulk of western communism remained in a position, torn between their domestic needs and differences and the restraints of their common identity.