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An Old Trick With New Angles

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The warning of the Central Intelligence Agency that the new Communist tactics are to gain control of a country by parliamentary means comes a little late.

The Communists have been working from that angle for many years. In some well-known cases, as in Czechoslovakia, they have been successful. They have been working hard on the French and Italian parliaments ever since the war.

In the last French election, the Communists won 150 seats in the French National Assembly out of a total membership of 600. That gives the non-Communist parties a total majority of three to one, but there are so many such parties and they vote together so infrequently that the Communists hold a strong balance-of-power position in the Assembly.

So strong has that position become, in fact, that the present government, composed of the Radical Socialists, would find it hard to take any important action without the support or the abstinence of the Communists.

In Italy the Communists elected 143 members out of a total of 590.

Until last week the Italian Communists could almost always count on the solid support of Pietro Nenni's left-wing Socialists. Nenni is now making overtures to merge his splinter with the right-wing socialists led by Giuseppe Saragat.

Whether this will mean a victory for the right or left wing will depend on whether the coalition is dominated by

Nenni or Saragat. If the whole Socialist party turns to the right under Saragat, the Communists will lose a strong allied vote. If it turns left under Nenni, the result might be the opposite.

Indonesia is even more under the shadow of a Communist domination of its Parliament than France or Italy. The Communists in that country polled six million votes in the first and only election it has ever had. They have 15 per cent of the seats in the Assembly and hold some strategic posts in the government.

The state visit of President Sukarno to Russia is an indication of how much he respects this Communist bloc. Few other non-Communist heads of government except Nehru of India and Nasser of Egypt have made such formal visits to Moscow.

The Asiatic countries, as the Central Intelligence Agency says, are more subject to Communist influence through such channels than Western countries are, because the people are still new to parliamentary government and have not yet learned all the tricks of party politics. They are inclined to accept the Communist party as just another political party instead of the conspiracy that it is.

France and Italy, being more experienced, know the danger they are in. Indonesia does not. Hence, Sukarno's visit to Moscow may have some unexpected reactions in Jakarta.