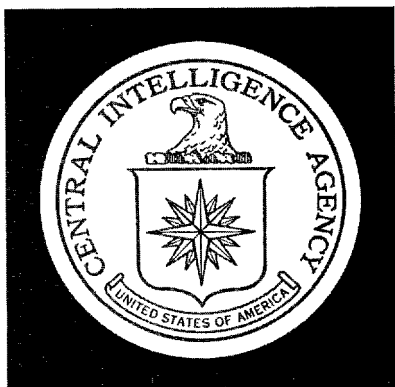


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Special Report

One Year of Popular Front Government in Finland

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ONE YEAR OF POPULAR FRONT GOVERNMENT IN FINLAND

Finland's popular front government--a coalition of Communist and non-Communist parties--is now a little more than one year old. Despite some internal strains among the four parties over domestic economic policy, there is every indication that Prime Minister Paasio's coalition will stay in power until the next parliamentary election in 1970. This arrangement, aside from being a departure in Finnish political patterns, is having an impact elsewhere in Scandinavia, notably in Sweden. Moscow has praised the tactics of the Finnish Communists as a model to be followed by all Western European Communist parties in order to enhance their "respectability" and attract non-Communist voters.

The Social Democratic Party (SDP) was charged with forming a new government, following the Finnish elections in March 1966, in which it won the largest number of seats in parliament. During the ensuing protracted negotiations it became clear that sizable elements in both the Social Democratic Party and the heretofore dominant Center (Agrarian) Party were prepared to consider cabinet cooperation with the Communist-front, Finnish People's Democratic League (SKDL), which had been in effect barred from public office since 1948. In the view of the non-Communist parties, cooperation was desirable not only to ensure stability in Soviet-Finnish relations--always a consideration in Finland's domestic politics--but also to make the Communists share responsibility for the unpopular domestic economic reforms the new government would have to undertake.

The SKDL was thus assigned three minor cabinet portfolios, of which two are held by acknowledged members of the Finnish Communist Party (FCP) itself. In order to reassure those who opposed Communist representation in the government on security grounds, the Social Democrats and the Center leaders reorganized one of the ministries headed by a Communist and transferred some of his responsibilities. The Communists' eagerness to participate in the government was evidenced by their relatively passive acceptance of the terms for cabinet cooperation laid down by the non-Communist parties.

The arguments of those favoring Communist participation for domestic political reasons appear to have been justified. Finland's economic problems required strong, corrective measures which had been all but impossible to push through parliament because of opposition

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from the Communists, who made political capital of the sacrifices such measures would require from the people. Now, however, government spending has been curtailed, and an austerity budget and a related tax bill have been hammered out and pushed through parliament by the coalition parties. This goes some way toward stabilizing the economy, but the government still faces difficult problems in view of the continuing inflationary trends and the economic recession developing since late 1965.

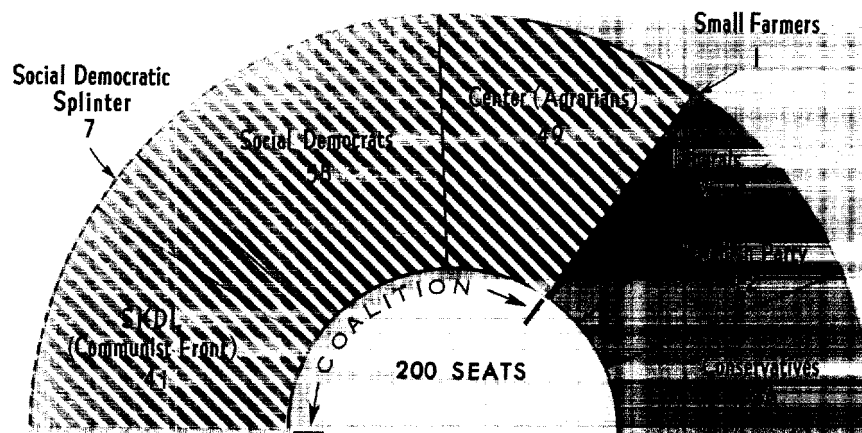
Impact on Communist Party

Participation in the government and association with its policies during the past year aggravated dissension at all levels within the FCP and the SKDL over the merits of remaining in the government. Frustration has increased among the Communists as a

result of setbacks in municipal by-elections last fall. Traditional-minded hard-line elements (Stalinists) in both parties want to pull out of the coalition because they think the concessions made to the non-Communist parties amount to "selling out the working classes." On the other hand, the old fashioned doctrinaire concepts espoused by these elements has exasperated the liberals in the Communist party who are insisting on an updating or reinterpretation of classical Communist dogma.

Probably a majority in the FCP/SKDL favors the moderate strategy advocated by SKDL chairman Ele Alenius--who is also associate minister of finance--to stay in the government and oppose or slow the adoption of measures that would be unpopular with the electorate. Alenius' ultimate aim is to broaden areas of cooperation with the Social Democrats in

Following March 1966 elections



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order to achieve the long-term Communist goal of joint political action between the two parties.

In order to allay the persistent doubt of the public at large over the wisdom of cabinet cooperation with the Communists, liberal elements in the FCP have been pressing the party formally to renounce force as a means of achieving "socialism" in Finland. They wish instead to emphasize the peaceful nature of the transition. The liberals also favor publicly committing the party to the concept of a genuinely multiparty system. A new draft party program was recently submitted which incorporates the peaceful transition thesis. The draft is expected to be reviewed and approved by the FCP central committee early in the fall. The Communists' ultimate object was expressed by FCP vice chairman Salomaa in a speech at East Germany's party congress on 21 April, in which he said: "Finland has one of the largest Communist parties in the capitalist world as well as a strong social democracy. The crux of the matter is therefore the merger of these two main forces."

Such a "merger" is not likely to be achieved anytime soon, however, given the history of embittered relations between the two parties and the traditional Social Democratic antipathy toward the Communists and Moscow. The Social Democrats still vividly remember their exclusion from office for eight years because of President Kekkonen's domestic politicking and his desire to avoid risking Soviet disapproval

as long as allegedly anti-Soviet elements led the party. A large body of opinion within the Social Democratic Party remains unrecconciled to cabinet cooperation with the Communists. This element was persuaded to go along with the coalition arrangement only because it provided the one means by which the Social Democrats could emerge from political isolation.

Implications for Social Democrats

These attitudes among the Social Democrats have somewhat altered, however, as a result of their participation in the government. The hard line which the Social Democrats have traditionally followed in their relations with the FCP has become less clear, and their attitude toward the question of establishing party-to-party relations with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) is changing.

As far as the domestic scene is concerned, there seems to be little likelihood that the Social Democrats will agree to meaningful cooperation with the FCP in the trade union field or in an electoral alliance. There is the danger, however, that over a period of time the lines between the two parties may become blurred. This might make it more difficult to maintain party discipline and could have an adverse impact on the Social Democrats' electoral prospects.

With regard to relations with the CPSU, the position is different. Until fairly recently

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the Social Democrats were among Moscow's favorite whipping boys, but this has changed following the departure of the more militantly anti-Soviet elements from the Socialist leadership and the decision of the Social Democrats to play a leading role in the popular front government. Moves are now in train to establish direct contacts between the Social Democrats and the CPSU. Prime Minister Paasio in his capacity as party chairman is scheduled to head a party delegation to Moscow in the fall, ostensibly to implement the notification given by the SDP secretary general to a meeting last March of the Socialist International Bureau in London. The statement said that the Social Democratic Party intended "to open contacts, on the party level particularly, with the Soviet Union."

This visit is likely to be greeted with mixed feelings in Finland as well as among the Social Democratic parties of Western Europe, which expressed concern at the London meeting. The Finnish Communists, for their part, probably believe that this step will bring the Social Democrats closer to political cooperation. At the same time, however, the FCP will hardly welcome the prospect of having to share with the Social Democrats the "party-to-party" channel between Helsinki and Moscow which it has heretofore monopolized.

The Western European Socialist parties will continue to have misgivings, but are not inclined

to oppose, recognizing that the Finnish Social Democrats must make a contribution to keeping Finnish-Soviet relations on an even keel because of their prominent role in the government.

Moscow's Attitude

The role of the CPSU in the Finnish situation is consonant with Moscow's general strategy of encouraging the development of cooperation between Communists and Social Democrats in "a total front of all progressive forces."

In Finland, this approach has resulted in some loosening of Moscow's reins on the FCP/SKDL. Soviet party officials maintain that the importance of assuring Communist representation in the Helsinki government far outweighs whatever frustration and temporary setbacks this involves for the FCP. The visit to Finland last November by a high-level Soviet delegation, including Suslov and Ponomarev, was probably intended to bolster FCP morale and strengthen the position of the faction which favors continued participation in the government. This move was further underscored by the return visit to Moscow in early June of an FCP delegation which met with top CPSU officials. The ensuing joint communiqué prompted the Helsinki non-Communist press to remark that the Finnish Communists were again--as during a similar visit in 1965--acting like official government spokesmen rather than as members of a political party.

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Various other Soviet officials have suggested that the Finnish experiment might have wider implications, and they have indicated that it has been the subject of some controversy in CPSU circles. Some officials have gone so far as to suggest that the days of CPSU intervention in the affairs of fraternal parties in Western Europe are over. They also disclaim the old concept of FCP dictation to Finland's other "socialist" parties and continue to urge the FCP to cooperate with non-Communists.

From all these indications it seems fairly clear that there are elements in the CPSU which still oppose the popular front strategy and that Finland is serving as an important testing ground. Presumably the reasoning is that if the Finnish experiment weakens and divides the Social Democrats, then the position of the Communists in the government will necessarily be strengthened. To this extent, developments in the Finnish situation could influence the future direction of CPSU policies and tactics.

This popular front theme was strongly endorsed by Brezhnev himself at the recent conference of European Communist parties at Karlovy Vary, Czechoslovakia. He urged the Western European parties to enter into coalitions which they need not necessarily dominate. The FCP was singled out for praise for having achieved participation in this type of government.

Impact in Scandinavia

The Finnish experiment is being watched with considerable interest in Sweden, where the Communists are divided into conflicting hard-line and liberal factions similar to those in the Finnish party. The situation there is further complicated by a conflict in the governing Social Democratic Party between older, moderate elements led by Prime Minister Erlander, and a youthful more radical faction which favors cooperation with the Communists.

Despite the weakness of Erlander's minority Social Democratic government, and the threat of defections to the Communists from the party's left wing, Erlander has so far rejected Communist proposals for cooperation in next year's parliamentary elections. There is still a possibility, however, that he may alter this position at the special party congress scheduled for this fall.

Changing political alignments on the left are also evident in Denmark, and to a lesser extent in Norway. Until recently it seemed that Denmark might be the next Scandinavian country to adopt a popular front government. Prime Minister Krag has a number of political problems, not the least of which is the declining popularity of his Social Democratic Party. He has in consequence been maneuvering with the far left Socialist People's Party (SPP), with which he concluded an agreement last March on parliamentary cooperation. The principal

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obstacles to a more formal arrangement remain the SPP's opposition to Denmark's membership in NATO and to accession to the EEC, and no compromises on these issues are in sight.

SPP leader Aksel Larsen, however, lost ground at a recent special congress of his party to a faction which is dissatisfied with SPP-SDP cooperation. This faction gained a majority on the SPP main board, and has eight members in the parliamentary group. Defection of any three of these would wipe out the SPP-SDP majority, a prospect threatening the parliamentary cooperation agreement between the two parties. The possibility of a coalition government has become even more remote.

In Norway, where the Labor Party, the Norwegian Socialist People's Party (SPP), and the Communist Party constitute the leftist opposition to Prime Minister Borten's coalition of "bourgeois" parties, no sentiment for a popular front arrangement has emerged. As in Sweden, the leadership of the Labor Party--Norway's Social Democratic equivalent--is strongly anti-Communist, although there is some pressure for cooperation with the SPP in order to stem defections by Labor's radical youth element.

Outlook

Judging by reactions in Scandinavia, the "peoples' front"

tactic currently being stressed by the CPSU is having some success. At the Karlovy Vary conference the Soviets emphasized that these fronts should include not only Western European Communist parties and other parties on the left, but also youth elements, labor activists, social democrats, intellectuals, center groups, and even religious organizations. This policy is aimed at enhancement of the respectability of the Communists, and is also likely to lead to further blurring of distinctions between Communists and Social Democrats.

Although the Soviets emphasized that circumstances peculiar to each country must be considered, the popular front approach benefits from the general decline of Social Democratic electoral strength throughout Scandinavia over the last few years. Even though some Social Democratic parties are suffering more defections to the right than to the left, the "bourgeois" parties seem unable to cooperate to take advantage of this. Given the long history of rivalry and antagonism between the Social Democrats and the Communists, it is understandable that the Social Democratic leadership in these countries regards the latest Communist united front tactics as posing a far more serious threat.

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