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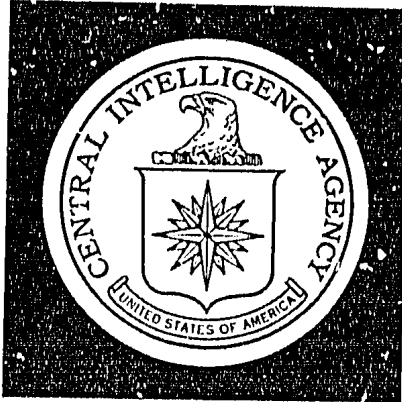
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**Secret**



BOARD OF  
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## SPECIAL MEMORANDUM

*The Dilemma of the French Communist Party*

84

**Secret**

25 July 1968  
No. 17-68

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

25 July 1968

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 17-68

SUBJECT: The Dilemma of the French Communist Party\*

1. Assailed from both left and right for diametrically opposite reasons, the French Communist Party has experienced two of the most painful months of its history. Ever since the May-June riots and strikes, the student activists, many younger workers, and intellectuals inside and outside the Party have continued to accuse it of sabotaging the revolution, underestimating both the power of the student movement and the nature of labor unrest and, in effect, of "saving" the Gaullist regime. Attacking from a different direction, the more liberal Communists and many members of the non-Communist left have criticized the Party leadership for inopportunistly advocating a "popular government," objecting to Mendès-France as a potential interim prime minister, and insinuating that the Party would demand key ministries in any leftist government. Their argument is that these tactical errors gave the Gaullists

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"evidence" they needed during the elections to claim that the Party was fomenting insurrection and plotting another Prague coup. The Gaullists' accusation was highly exaggerated: the Party did in fact flirt momentarily with a revolutionary line, but it quickly and openly disassociated itself from those advocating violence and disorder.

2. In any case, the Party's vacillation satisfied no one and contributed to its losses at the polls. The elections were a severe setback. Not only did the Party's percentage of the total vote decrease (20.03 percent, down from 22.51 percent in 1967), but it polled over half a million fewer votes than in 1967. As a result, the Party lost all six of its seats in Paris, eight of its seats in the Paris suburbs, and even 12 seats in traditionally leftist districts in the south. Nationwide, its parliamentary representation was cut from 73 to 34. Even more significantly, about 600,000 voters who voted for leftist (including Communist) candidates on the first ballot did not do so on the decisive runoff ballot a week later. When faced with a clear choice between a Gaullist and a Communist, thousands of Communist voters as well as non-Communist leftists chose the Gaullist. Clearly, the Party's "unity of the left" strategy had been ineffective with many normally leftist voters.

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3. In his report to the Central Committee on 9 July, Party Secretary Waldeck Rochet not unsurprisingly defended the Party's (and his) past tactics and its continued alliance with the Federation of the Left. He insisted that no revolutionary situation had existed in May, despite the claims of "leftist groups led by irresponsible and confused elements;" he reiterated the need for a "government of democratic unity within the framework of legality;" and he declared that "Gaullist power must be replaced by a government of democratic union born not of subversion (sic), but of the . . . democratically expressed will of the people." Waldeck Rochet concluded that the most pressing danger for the Party was "leftism." Underlying this conclusion was the fear that a more revolutionary line would carry with it the risk of the Party's destruction -- the Indonesian example was cited specifically -- or its rejection into political isolation.

4. Rochet's analysis is probably correct, but it is of small comfort to either Party conservatives or liberals. Events since May have demonstrated that the alienation of the extreme left has not been compensated by gains on the moderate left. To the extreme left inside and outside the Party, the Party is fast

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becoming bourgeois and irrelevant; to the moderate left the Party is still Stalinist and subservient to the USSR. Actually, the Party has nowhere to go, as Rochet's report implicitly admits. It is therefore likely to stay on dead center as long as possible.

5. Under present Party leadership the PCF is unlikely to espouse the programs or embrace the leaders of the Unified Socialist Party (PSU) and the assorted Trotskyites, Castroites, Maoists, utopians, and nihilists who compose the various extremist leftist groups. The Party nevertheless is highly sensitive to being outflanked on the left and will make every effort to recuperate its losses among students and younger workers through heightened propaganda and intensified recruitment drives. Doing this and preserving its fragile links with the Federation of the Left are likely to prove an increasingly difficult tightrope act even for the practiced gymnasts of the French Communist Party.

6. The Federation as presently constituted may solve the Communists' problem by conveniently falling apart or letting its frayed links with the Communists quietly disintegrate. It too is beset by internal strife and its survival in its present

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form is by no means assured. Many of the non-Communist leftists who lost blame their electoral defeat on the Federation's alliance with the Communists. Even those who won only because of Communist support have been distressingly ungrateful to the Party. The authority and prestige of Francois Mitterrand, president of the Federation and principal architect of the alliance with the Communists, have been severely impaired by the election results. He stands a good chance of being removed as president in the months to come; if he goes, the alliance with the Communists will be threatened even more than it is now. Since Party strategy is based on unity of the left, this development could jeopardize Waldeck Rochet's position as Party secretary.

7. In the meantime, events in Prague have given the Party leadership another cross to bear. The struggle between liberals and conservatives there could force the French Communist Party to cross the Rubicon in broad daylight, i.e., openly to oppose one side or the other and thereby take a stand for or against the Soviet Union. A clear anti-Soviet stand undoubtedly would help the Party with both extreme (but anti-Soviet) and moderate leftists in France. Moreover, some Party members

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were "liberals" even before Dubcek and company emerged; others are smarting under Soviet criticism of the Party showing in the elections and resent the Soviet Union's ambiguous attitude toward de Gaulle's regime. These men probably would favor open support of Dubcek even if it meant open repudiation of the Soviet Union's position. Their weight in the Party would be strengthened if Dubcek succeeds in maintaining his program.

8. There is as yet no firm evidence that the present leadership of the Party would support the Dubcek regime if it came to a showdown with Moscow. It would be out of character for Rochet and the leadership of the French Party directly to oppose the Soviet Union on so vital an issue -- although there is of course always a first time and this could be the occasion.

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Rochet's unsuccess-

ful call for a conference of European Communist parties to discuss Czech developments most likely was designed to gain time, lower everyone's temperature, and placate the Soviets sufficiently to persuade them not to intervene. Unless the Soviet

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Union intervenes militarily in Czechoslovakia or blatantly provokes internal subversion, however, it appears unlikely that the French Party would do anything more than make anodyne statements about "separate roads to socialism" and the "independence of national Parties."

9. In any event, the fundamental problem confronting the Party would remain: can revolutionary or at least class rhetoric coexist with a reformist program and a desire to reassure the middle class? Can such tactics succeed in giving the Party at least a share of political power in a modern, industrialized country? The present Party leadership professes to believe that the negative answer of the June elections was due to special circumstances -- de Gaulle, anarchists, and violence -- and that under "normal" conditions the answer would be "yes." They may be right, but right or wrong they have no alternative to their present policy -- especially since changing it means condemning themselves. If the moment of decision forces itself upon the Party, the choice would be painful. Retention of the rhetoric virtually insures political irrelevance, but its abandonment would transform the Party into something like a Social Democratic Party. The historic significance of this decision

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and the internal turmoil it would entail make it almost certain that the Party will contrive to avoid making it until forced to do so. Among Rochet's prayers these days must be at least these two: that the Gaullists remain as inflexible toward their opposition as they were before May, and that Dubcek proves to be more flexible toward his than he so far appears to be.

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Chairman

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