

BY BAG

FROM PARIS

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TEL NO 121 SAVING TO FCO OF 21 DECEMBER 1979

REPEATED FOR INFORMATION SAVING TO UKDEL NATO, BONN, BRUSSELS,
THE HAGUE, ROME, WASHINGTON, MOSCOW

MY TEL NO 980: TNF MODERNISATION: FRENCH ATTITUDES

1. Over the past week, the French Communist Party have mounted a major campaign against the NATO agreement on TNF modernisation. The full weight of the PCF machine has been mobilised. The Party daily l'Humanité has devoted its front page and editorial comment to the subject for several days, publishing blown-up photographs of the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In conjunction with the Communist CGT Union and over a dozen pacifist and other fringe political groups, the PCF organised a protest march in Paris on 20 December, in which about 10,000 people are reported to have participated (80,000 according to l'Humanité). The National Assembly also debated (and rejected) on 20 December a censure motion put down by Communist Deputies which described the NATO decision as likely to lead to an escalation of the arms race, increased international tension and FRG control over sophisticated nuclear weapons. The PCF motion accused the French Government of being "accomplices" in NATO's decision and prepared to see Europe and France transformed into "a nuclear battlefield for the benefit of the United States and the FRG".

2. At the outset of this campaign last week, the PCF called on the French Socialist Party to associate themselves with it. The Socialists' initial response was to point to the inconsistencies in the PCF's position in calling for joint action on an issue in which France was not directly involved, while failing to respond to Socialist calls for cooperation on domestic issues of more direct concern to the French electorate. They also emphasised the Soviet Union's responsibility in provoking NATO into the TNF decision by deploying the SS20. After several days in which the debate between the two parties degenerated into the sort of slanging match which has typified Socialist-Communist relations since the breakdown in their alliance two years ago, the Executive Committee of the Socialist Party decided neither to support the PCF censure motion nor to participate in the protest march. The Socialist statement pointed to the absence of any consultation before the PCF proposal was launched, the Communist refusal of joint action on other subjects and the background of hostile PCF attacks on the Socialist Party. "The Socialist Party does not", the statement said, "come running when the Communist Party blows the whistle". The PCF have described the Socialist decision as clear proof that they are closely aligned with Washington and the Elysée.

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3. As reported in paragraph 3 of my TUR on French attitudes to TNF modernisation, the PCF have supported the Soviet line more aggressively than on any other political issue in recent years. It is not easy to deduce the Communists' motives for this, since there was little likelihood of whipping up popular opposition to nuclear weapons on the TNF question. It does not directly involve France and there is a wide national consensus in support of France's own nuclear forces. The Communist Party's motivation is probably to be found in a combination of the following factors:-

- (a) It saw a chance of embarrassing the Socialist Party on the question of nuclear weaponry. The Communist Party is probably not interested in the possibility of an electoral victory by the Left in the 1981 Presidential elections and more interested in doing anything which damages the Socialist Party, puts strain on it and consolidates the Communist electorate.
- (b) By giving the Socialists little choice but to reject the Communist call for support against TNF modernisation, the Communists have added Defence to the other issues on which to attack their former allies.
- (c) The PCF's campaign fits in with a probable need to bring the Party closer to Moscow after a period of keeping a certain distance, at least in appearances. They have much to gain in material terms from better relations with Moscow. Given the importance which the Soviet leadership attach to the TNF issue (and the pressure which they will certainly have exerted on the PCF), this was an ideal occasion for the PCF to demonstrate willingness to follow Moscow's line. Pravda has given a sort of blessing by publishing an article by Gaston Plissonnier of the PCF Secretariat criticising the Socialists.
- (d) In attacking TNF modernisation while not wavering in their support for France's own nuclear forces, the PCF leadership may also have hoped to silence any dissidents in the Party who remain unhappy with the Party's 1977 decision to support France's independent nuclear capability. By ensuring that the PCF's commitment to this policy is not in doubt and by attacking the Government and the Socialists for allegedly supporting US and German nuclear objectives, the Communists can pose as more resolute defenders of French independence than other political parties.

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