

## THE FRENCH LEFT

# Communists pressuring Socialists

**T**HE FRENCH LEFT, WHICH HAD EXPECTED to win in next March's elections, may be in trouble. On September 15, a summit meeting among the Communists, Socialists, and left Radicals broke up when the Socialists and Left Radicals refused to agree with Communist demands for revising the left's Common Program. The Communists were reported to have wanted to raise the number of nationalized companies from 227 to 729, and also to have sought veto power over the future government's policies.

Bernard Moss, author of the recently published *Origins of the French Labor Movement* and of series on the French left for *In These Times* (Jan. 26-Feb. 16) explores, in a new four part series, the rift between the two parties. Moss recently returned from a year in France.

By Bernard H. Moss

In all good marriages, say the counselors, the frank and open discussion of differences can only strengthen the alliance. This summer, following the brief honeymoon of the municipal elections, French Communists and Socialists were again accusing each other of disloyalty to the Common Program, which after five years was being updated to suit new conditions.

Conservative enemies, who have had little to cheer about this year, suddenly took heart and predicted that the couple would separate before giving birth to a new government next March. Personal friends of the couple, who have always deplored their lack of affection, were again disheartened. But the public at large—at least 53 percent of them—more philosophical for having witnessed previous quarrels, continued to endow the left with its confidence, trusting perhaps in a mutual compromise to strengthen the alliance.

Competition and conflict has been an integral part of left unity since 1972. Within the framework of a conflictual alliance, the Communists have been the party of movement, Marxist rigor, and working class struggle; the Socialists, despite leftist rhetoric, the party of moderation, theoretical flexibility and the broad class front. While the Communists have mobilized the industrial working class, the Socialists have reached out to those middle class and middle-of-the-road groups, who, whatever their dissatisfaction with the regime, could never bring themselves to vote Communist.

Moderates are willing to vote left because they feel secure that the Socialists will check any Communist tendency toward absolutism. Communists can support Francois Mitterand because they believe their pressure will save him from class collaboration. Only within the framework of such an alliance, devoid of true fraternity, can the left advance towards democratic socialism.

## End of illusions.

Originally, the new Socialist Party had dreamed of becoming something else, a truly democratic party of the working class that would either replace or merge with the Communists. Drawing upon the new left energies of May-June 1968, it adopted the slogans of "autogestion," self-management and participatory democracy and welcomed recruits from the new left Unified Socialist Party (PSU) and the French Democratic Workers' Federation (CFDT).

Spurred on by the young intellectuals of the CERES, it announced it was more radical than the Communists. While the Communists talked of the union of the French people and the new democracy, it was building a class front that would break with capitalist organization and division of labor and proceed directly to a society of autogestion. It was challenging the Communists at the workplace in order to build an autonomous mass movement outside their control. As

## SPECIAL REPORT

### Disunited Union of the Left may wage separate campaigns

By Diana Johnstone

PARIS, SEPT. 28—The leaders of the French Socialist and Communist parties today sent their militants into battle for the union of the left—firmly disunited.

Mobilizing their members to pass the buck for last week's breakdown of negotiations to update the 1972 Common Program between the Communists, Socialists and Left Radicals, PSF leader Francois Mitterand and PCF leader Georges Marchais each proclaimed determination to defend unity, all alone if necessary.

At a press conference at the National Assembly, Mitterand called his party a "resolute and enthusiastic" champion of unity determined to maintain its partnership with the Communists against the right, implying that the absence of agreement on a Common Program could not change this course. At a mass rally on the north side of Paris, Marchais promised a cheering, overflow crowd that the Communist Party would never abandon the union of the left.

But six months before the Parliamentary elections, both parties seem to be getting ready to campaign separately—without a common program.

#### "It all fits."

The surprise rift has dismayed and disheartened countless supporters of the union of the left. But the largely youthful crowd of Communist militants who flocked to cheer Marchais seemed almost relieved and happy to be cut loose from Socialist allies they obviously distrusted.

Mitterand's bid to inspire confidence as a leader above parties and platforms has obviously exacerbated chronic Communist suspicion of a pending sell-out. He seems unaware that only a precise program could allay deep and growing suspicion in the PCF rank and file of an imminent socialist "betrayal" of the working class.

Under the heading "it all fits," the Communist newspaper *l'Humanite*

today noted on its front page that Mitterand was about to hold talks with West German Social Democratic Chancellor Helmut Schmidt—who last year unabashedly disclosed what it called "scandalous plans" made at the Puerto Rico summit of advanced capitalist nations to interfere in Italy's internal affairs to keep Communists out of government.

Mention of Schmidt's name at tonight's rally produced a chorus of boos and hisses. Marchais noted that Schmidt's economic policies were no different from those of French Prime Minister Raymond Barre, requiring sacrifices from the working class to preserve profits.

Asked about *l'Humanite's* comment on his trip to Germany, Mitterand could not resist a crack that brought groans from journalists at his press conference: "If the left wins, some people shouldn't be put in charge of issuing passports." Mitterand's taste for this sort of jibe at assumed dictatorial tendencies of communists is a clue to his shortcomings as a uniter of the left.

Non-partisan leftists are baffled that their hopes might be dashed by quarrels over a common program they would accept one way or another, just so the left could get together and win.

Since the PCF called for the updating which turned into a Pandora's box, it is having to mount a major campaign to show that the PSF has backtracked since 1972. It is stressing that the nationalization it seeks is necessary quantitatively to change economic policy and is qualitatively more in keeping with the "self-management" supposedly advocated by the Socialists.

Meanwhile, the tiny far left parties, the PSU and the Trotskyist LCR, are complaining that the entire negotiations have been carried on over the heads of working people. They are calling for broad discussion at the base to impose unity on the leaders of the quarreling parties.

against its "economistic" rivals, it would attract a younger generation concerned about quality of life issues—ecology, urbanism, feminism and local control.

The past year has seen the end of illusions in the Socialist Party. Since the big influx of 1974, membership has actually stagnated around 160,000. Its social composition is still predominantly upper middle class—professionals, functionaries and professors. None of the leaders and only an estimated 7 percent of the members are working class. The workplace sections, which hardly compete with the Communists in activism, are concentrated in schools, post offices and hospitals.

The CERES, the most Marxist and militant wing, has barely held its own, while toning down its rhetoric about the autonomous movement of the masses. Autogestion has been relegated to the distant future or minor cooperative sector. Militant trade unionists and the pure anarchist spirits of 1968 have resigned, denouncing the new technocracy in command.

Internal democracy itself has suffered. While the statutes allow for the representation of all currents on leading bodies, debate has hardened around majority and minority factions that are not very strong on participatory democracy.

The majority is composed of a coalition of left politicians, who, tired of a lifetime of factional struggles, are bent on winning and assuming ministerial posts with grace and dignity. Held together by the Communist alliance and a loose Marxian ideology, they are also bound in their admiration for the synthetic genius of Mitterand, who with the help of young experts, makes all the important decisions.

The minority CERES is run by a handful of young theoreticians, whose original blend of Marxism, lacking a material base, tends toward the abstract and rhetorical, especially when they refuse to challenge the infallibility of Mitterand. In the choice between an elitist Marxism and ideological fuzziness, the vast majority of Socialists—some say 80 percent—remain outside of the discussion. They, too, are held spell-bound by left unity and the charisma of Mitterand.

#### Socialist and middle class.

Despite or perhaps because of these obvious flaws, the party continues to surge ahead as the leading party of France. Its electorate of over 30 percent is practically a mirror image of French society with some overrepresentation of white collar and middle strata. As a primarily electoralist party dedicated to socialism, it is truly a party of a new type, a party that is no less socialist because it is middle class and no less middle class for being socialist.

Following the June congress at Nantes Mitterand is more than ever in command, a truly remarkable leader who combines rare political skill with a profound humanism (see *ITT*, July 6). Brilliant, mordant and reflective, Mitterand is one of the finest products of French parliamentary politics and the egalitarian tradition. Originally a simple democrat, he has had to learn about socialism from young university graduates only because he saw that the struggles for social justice in France had to be waged by a united Left.

The two time Presidential candidate, a skillful orator and debater with a mocking wit and abiding faith, has won his place as the most respected leader in France. Having won his place, he is now preparing to assume responsibility for a Left government that, to borrow a CERES phrase, will "neither betray nor perish."

#### Artistic fuzziness.

Under the difficult circumstances of a

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Georges Marchais, Communist Party head

Fransman



## AFRICA

# Ogaden Somalis oust Ethiopians

By Roger Mann  
Pacific News Service

**W**ERDER, ETHIOPIA—Abdillahi Mohammed, a bearded, toothless shopkeeper, stood in the doorway of his now shelf-bare mud and wattle shop in this dusty trading town, whose center has been reduced to ashes by Ethiopian artillery fire. "The past few weeks have been better than all of my 65 years under Ethiopian occupation," he said, "because finally I am secure and my family is safe from Ethiopian harassment. No, I'm not afraid they will come back."

From windswept village to windswept village in the Ogaden, the semi-arid southeastern part of Ethiopia inhabited by ethnic Somalis, the fiercely emotional, well-armed people tell similar tales.

The long-struggling Ogaden Somalis—who say they never recognized Ethiopian sovereignty or considered themselves Ethiopian in any way—claim to endorse fully and to identify with the insurgent Western Somalia Liberation Front (WSLF).

In what has become the first full-scale war between independent African states, the Ethiopians were driven out by the Somalis during ferocious battles in July ending 80 years of military occupation. Only a near miracle or massive foreign assistance, it is now apparent, will give Ethiopia's beleaguered regime enough muscle to regain this occupied third of its country.

## Somali annexation likely.

It wasn't easy for the Somalis to drive the Ethiopians out of the Ogaden. But the locals are now so well armed that an Ethiopian return will be many times more difficult. Every nomad has a gun and even 20-year-old girls carrying Soviet AK-47 assault rifles are being mobilized into people's defense forces.

The WSLF takes credit for the victory, but in fact it has been fully aided by the Somali government. When pressed, any Somali will admit that the Ogaden will probably be annexed by Somalia when the fighting stops.

It is difficult to tell where the WSLF ends and the Somali army begins. Because Somalia continues to claim its army is not involved, the government makes great efforts to blur the distinction. But in Dire Dawa two Somali soldiers said they were from the regular Somali army and a downed MIG near Jijiga had clear Somali markings.

The Somalis are fighting their "holy

The Western Somalia Liberation Front is trying to end 80 years of Ethiopian occupation in the Ogaden. If they succeed, as is now likely, they will urge that the Ogaden become part of Siad Barre's Somalia.

war" more for the allegiance of the Ogaden people and their right to participate fully in the Somali nation than for the barren territory itself. Despite the possible existence of some oil, probably uneconomical to extract, the blistering harsh land has little economic or strategic value.

The proud Ogaden Somali nomads say they are fighting a war of national liberation because they were colonized by the Ethiopians during the last century just as the Italians, British and French colonized other parts of their nation. And in the Somali capital of Mogadishu, as well as in the Ogaden, there is a remarkable spirit of Pan-Somali nationalism.

By most definitions the Somali nation already includes Ogaden and, in fact, a large portion of Somalia's political and military leadership, perhaps 20 percent, is Ogaden born. Even President Siad Barre has family there.

"That boundary has never meant anything to us," said Ali Goni, a gray-bearded WSLF political leader. "As nomads, when we search for water and grass for our goats and camels we don't go through customs and immigration, and when we want to send our children to school or get a passport we have always gravitated towards Mogadishu and not Addis Ababa."

"We are Somalis," said Bashir Mohammed, another WSLF political leader. "And even if the Ethiopians had kept their promises and had given us schools, hospitals, roads and local autonomy, we still would fight them because



Somali leader Siad Barre

they are colonizers and our heritage and heart is in the Somali nation."

## Ethiopia adamant.

With a third of their land and perhaps their whole national existence at stake, the Ethiopians are unprepared to cede any of their country. The Ethiopian government blames any grievances the Ogaden Somalis may have on the insensitive rule of the late Emperor Haile Selassie, who was deposed three years ago, and on the Somali government, accused of permanently stirring unrest in the Ogaden as a prelude to the present military action.

Faced with another secessionist movement in the northern province of Eritrea, Ethiopia is now at a juncture where national disintegration seems entirely possible. With Jigjiga now fallen to the Somalis, the war has entered its most crucial stage.

The major battlefield is now shifting to Harar and Dire Dawa, Ethiopia's fourth and third largest cities. And if Dire Dawa—a major air, rail, fuel storage and manufacturing center—should fall, Ethiopia would then be without a frontline bulkhead from which to attempt to reconquer the Ogaden. The war would be virtually over.

Soviet and Eastern European armaments are currently pouring into Addis Ababa by air. The hard-fighting Ethiopians are well armed, but three years of revolution have thinned out the ranks of

experienced military officers. The country's two new army divisions and the hastily trained people's militia are no match for the well-disciplined Soviet-trained Somalis, who are fighting to realize their shared dream of a unified Somali nation.

The Soviets have all but abandoned the Arab-backed Somalis, formerly their closest friends in Africa. It is quite clear they now side with the Ethiopians. But with the possibility of an Ethiopian defeat growing greater, the Russians are trying to keep their foot in Mogadishu's door for as long as possible. Having until recently held the commanding power position on the strategically situated Horn of Africa, the Soviets could easily wind up without significant influence in the region.

The U.S. has also done some diplomatic flip-flops in the area. After first announcing its willingness to supply arms to Somalia—a move that could alienate many other African nations that view the Somalis as waging a war of aggression—Washington has at least temporarily backed off on arms sales. This could give Ethiopia a brief reprieve. Yet so far the Soviets have refrained from the massive commitment that could turn the tide.

*Roger Mann, a Nairobi-based correspondent for the Washington Post and Pacific News, has just returned from the Ogaden war zone, the only correspondent to visit both the Ethiopian and Somali sides.*

## THE FRENCH LEFT

# Socialists/Communists

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Giscardian Presidency, Mitterand believes that a Left government can only survive if it achieves a broad consensus of the people. This imposes a special obligation on the Socialist Party, the partner of moderation and flexibility. Only it can win over the hesitant middle-of-the-road voter who, dissatisfied with the present regime, is still skeptical of the Common Program and mistrustful of the Communists. Only it can reassure small business interests and prevent panic selling; only it can neutralize the hostility of conservative opinion and discourage subversive activity. Only it with its international connections can secure the benevolent neutrality of European and German Social Democracy, a vital asset in the contest with imperialism.

To achieve this consensus, Mitterand, the consummate politician feels he must

appeal to people as they are rather than as the Communists might like them to be. To do this, he needs a free hand, a certain "margin of improvisation" and "artistic fuzziness" on the issues.

These considerations explain the conservative posture he took during his televised debate with Premier Raymond Barre and his attitude toward the CERES and the current negotiations with the Communists. Rather than assuming his accomplished role as tribune of the people, Mitterand decided to use the long-awaited debate as an occasion to demonstrate his economic competence. In a type of argumentation directed at the technocratic class, he would show that he could manage the economy better than "the best economist" in France. Tripped up by Barre in a clever reversal of the student teacher role, he not only lost the debate on technical

points, but caused dismay among his working class supporters.

His refusal of a dialogue with the CERES at Nantes was the culmination of a long internal campaign against the one group that could put his judgment into question. Since the CERES, which he labelled "crypto-Communist," did actually agree with the Communists on most issues, any compromise with them would only compromise his own negotiations with the Communists. By attacking the CERES on grounds of factionalism, he could cover up the real issues and secure a free hand in his dealings with the Communists.

## Unity in combat.

For the Communists, educated in the tactics of the united front, unity has always been a combat. During the negotiations in 1972, they fought hard to extend nationalization and social reform against stiff Socialist resistance. Later, in 1974 when because of their electoral successes the Socialists began to waver on the program, the Communists launched a public polemic that checked these separatist tendencies. This summer they again took their case to the people in an effort to move the Socialists leftwards.

Without constant pressure they fear their partners will always be tempted by strictly reformist solutions. The struggle against them may cause momentary dismay and even bitterness, but in the end, as in 1974, it can raise the political level of the alliance, the degree of conscious commitment to radical reform, and actually enlarge its base of support.

Placing little faith in the force of reason, the Communists rely on the mass pressure as the best instrument of persuasion. Through the CGT, the major labor confederation, they have brought more moderate unions into the struggle against capitalist austerity. Aiming at the industrial working class, they are recruiting at the fastest rate since the Liberation and, in a minor way, drawing some Socialists to their side. With the onset of the economic crisis that has ended prospects of middle class mobility, it has become possible to involve many middle strata elements, normally favorable to the Socialists, in the mass movement. So far, however, their combative tactics have failed to move the Socialist Party itself.

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