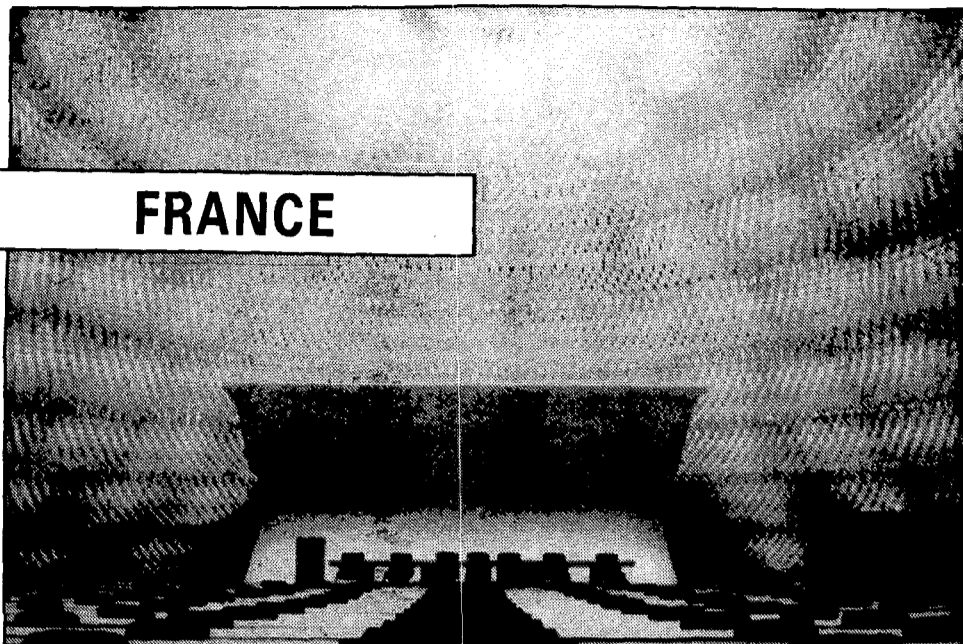


## FRANCE



A house divided: the French Communist Party Central Committee meeting room in Paris.

## An ill French Communist Party may find remedy in 'renovation'

By Diana Johnstone

**S**CENES OF THE WINTER OF 1987: ON A COLD day in January, a mobile "restaurant du coeur," or soup kitchen, was parked in the market square in Pont-à-Mousson, a steel town in the eastern French region of Lorraine. With more and more people out of work, there were plenty

of customers for the free food. But the town's right-wing mayor, Bernard Guy, ordered the unsightly thing towed away.

The dynamic young Communist mayor of the neighboring village of Blénod, Michel Bertelle, 39, took the matter to heart. Rushing to the scene, Bertelle angrily tried to stop the "heart restaurant" from being towed away. In vain. Still upset, Bertelle suddenly

fell dead of a massive coronary.

Bertelle was one of the most outspoken of the "renovators," as critics of the French Communist Party (PCF) leadership currently call themselves. After the PCF fell below 10 percent of the vote in elections last March, Bertelle addressed a letter to the PCF Central Committee demanding the immediate convocation of a special party congress to "update our party's orientations, practices and leadership."

Bertelle's death raised a delicate political problem. For his post as mayor of Blénod, he was succeeded by his deputy, another renovator. But a special election has to be held next month to fill his seat on the regional council in the Lorraine department of Meurthe-et-Moselle. The local party nominated Alain Amicabile, who in 1985 was excluded from the Central Committee for his renovating tendencies. The PCF leadership balked at endorsing the heretic, but did not dare run a rival candidate.

So in the March election, Alain Amicabile will be running as "the candidate of Communists" rather than as the candidate of the PCF. This is a first, which renovators see as significant for the future of their movement.

Unlike the challenges to PCF leadership in the late '70s, the "renovator" revolt is not mainly a matter of Paris intellectuals. Critical intellectuals have already left in droves, and the Paris region has long since been taken in hand. Most of the Communist Party's Paris region troublemakers are already outside the party, waiting to see what may happen to revive the sort of party they could want to work in.

**Provincial putsch:** The current revolt is brewing out in the provinces, among the party's own full-time militants, who see their party's very survival threatened by its leaders' stubborn persistence in error. Criticism is particularly strong in the regional federations around the cities of Limoges, Nancy, Montpellier, Toulouse and Brest, and in cer-

called for a "cultural revolution" in the party.

Marchais's failure was confirmed last March, when the PCF's nationwide score sank below 10 percent, compared to more than 20 percent in the '70s. In contrast, Rigout's Haute Vienne gave the PCF 20.9 percent.

The renovators wanted to call a congress immediately to analyze the reasons for the PCF's steady decline and change course. But Marchais was ready with the official explanation for the PCF's poor showing: it was a result of the "general drift rightward of the electorate," expressing a profound movement of society. This is the "major obstacle we shall continue to be up against," Marchais told a post-election meeting of the Central Committee last March 25.

Society is drifting fatally to the right, leaving the PCF like a rock exposed by the outgoing tide, petrified and unmoving. This grim vision is preached with special conviction by the editor in chief of the PCF daily *L'Humanité*, Roland Leroy.

But suddenly last December, thousands of students were out in the street forcing the conservative government to back down. Leading renovator Pierre Juquin was enthusiastic: "The idea that French society has drifted to the right is completely contradicted by reality," he observed. The student movement was followed by a wave of militant strikes. The PCF, bracing itself against "society's drift to the right," did not know how to relate to these unexpected events.

**Renovation or liquidation?** Pessimistic and defensive, the PCF has ceased to contribute to political debate in France. The sudden student and worker movements showed that "society" has not accepted the "drift to the right," the gospel of American competitive free enterprise as preached over the media. But what else is there? The demand for a political alternative implicit in the student and worker revolts emboldened the renovators to challenge their party's paralytic leadership.

Marchais hastened to put them down. In a TV interview on January 14, Georges Marchais said the "renovators" should really be called "liquidators," because they were out to liquidate the party.

This Stalinist language set off anger among the renovators and provided newspaper cartoonists with some obvious jokes about Marchais purging Gorbachov as a party "liquidator." Marcel Rigout wrote a vigorous protest.

On January 27, the Central Committee met in Paris and backed Marchais with a resolution accusing the renovators of aiming to "liquidate what is most essential in the Communist Party." Claude Poperen, a lifelong militant in the CGT labor union at the Renault factory in the Paris suburb of Billancourt, resigned from the Central Committee in protest. A short time later, Rigout sent word from the Limoges hospital where he was undergoing an eye operation that he too was resigning from the Central Committee.

**A hard blow:** Although both men stayed in the party, and Rigout remains in parliament, their resignations were a worse blow to the party's self-image as a party of the working class than protests from intellectuals. Poperen represents the PCF's labor base, Rigout its roots in rural radicalism.

One of the Central Committee's last re-

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By Hillel Schenker

TEL AVIV

**I**S MORDECHAI VANUNU—THE MAN WHO LEAKED the Israeli nuclear weapons secret—a hero? A small group of Jewish and Arab students at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem think so. They issued a proclamation declaring: "Dear Vanunu, We're With You." Judy Zimit, his American girlfriend, compares him to Daniel Ellsberg, while his brothers Asher and Meir Vanunu say that "he did what he did for ideological reasons."

On the other hand, former member of Knesset Michael Bar-Zohar has accused Vanunu of being "the greatest traitor of the 20th century." And the Israeli government? All it did, apparently, is to send an agent to entice him off the British Isles and to kidnap him. Israel then, apparently, held him without public acknowledgement in an Israeli prison for several weeks, until public pressure—and fear of a court order—forced the government to reveal his whereabouts. It now refuses to allow Vanunu to have face-to-face meetings with his girlfriend or his family, for fear that he will reveal state secrets.

Why all the fuss? One would think that something big like the future of the world was at stake. Perhaps it is.

**Nuclear Israel:** Mordechai Vanunu, as readers of the October 5 edition of the *Sunday Times* of London discovered, and by now most readers of the world's media have learned, is "a 31-year-old Israeli who worked as a nuclear technician for nearly 10 years in Machon 2—a top-secret underground bunker built to provide the vital components necessary for weapons production in Dimona, the Israeli nuclear research establishment." The *Sunday Times* story, which was accompanied by pictures whose authenticity was verified by British scientists, asserted that Israel now ranks as the world's sixth-largest nuclear power, after America, the Soviet Union, Britain, France and China. The *Times* quoted nuclear scientists who believe that Israel has "at least 100 and as many as 200 nuclear weapons."

Actually, the news wasn't so new. For years it has been assumed that Israel was just "the turn of a screw" away from having nuclear weapons. Even the numbers weren't new. In *Two Minutes over Baghdad*—a book written in 1982, telling, as the cover blurb put it, "the true story of the daring destruction of the Iraqi nuclear plant"—authors Uri Bar-Joseph, Michael Handel and Amos Perlmutter noted that, "although there are different appreciations of Israel's nuclear capacities, the latest CIA reports estimate that the number of operational warheads it owns is around 200." Soon after the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, on Oct. 8, 1973, in a situation regarded as "critical to Israel's security and existence," the authors reported, "there are indications" that then-Defense Minister Moshe Dayan "gave an order secretly to put in combat readiness, for the first time, Israeli-made Jericho SS missiles, carrying nuclear warheads, as well as Kfir and Phantom bomber fighters equipped with nuclear devices. Altogether, 13 Israeli-made nuclear weapons were put on alert."

If this was so, said the authors, "it was the first time Israel had fulfilled her nuclear option." They also noted that "Israeli sources denied any rumors concerning this particular atomic alert."

The major new dimension that Vanunu added to that in the book was the fact that he had worked in the heart of the Israeli nuclear center for 10 years and had apparently taken pictures to back up his story.

# Vanunu affair sparks protests against nuclear bombs in the Middle East



Mordechai Vanunu, the man who spilled the beans on Israel's atom bomb.

The Israeli government's response to the October 5 *Sunday Times* story came the following day when then-Prime Minister Shimon Peres declared at the weekly cabinet meeting that "Israel's policy has not changed and Israel will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the region." He added that "the government is used to sensational articles on the nuclear research center in Dimona, and it prefers not to respond to them."

Normally, such a statement would signal

## It's not easy to arouse Israeli public concern about nuclear dangers, but evasion is becoming more difficult.

the end of the affair, and the clamor would soon die down. But this time was different. Vanunu wouldn't simply disappear from the public conscience. Pressure from family, friends, lawyers, the media and an independent judicial system forced the government to admit that it was holding Vanunu in an Israeli prison. For the last few months, the Israeli public has been treated to a "Vanunu festival." Although the Israeli print and electronic media tend to be quite good, in the Vanunu case they have leaned toward sensationalism. Was he a misfit? A homosexual? Impotent? These are just some of the "important" questions dealt with by the media.

But beyond the sensationalized *People* magazine/*National Enquirer*-type journalism, the fact that the Vanunu affair has remained in the headlines has also kept the nuclear issue itself on newspapers' front pages. Attorney Amnon Zichroni, who is defending Vanunu, said the most important issue at stake is not the personal fate of his client, but the dangers inherent in the potential nuclearization of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

**Anti-nuclear agitation:** While nuclear proliferation is a major public concern in Europe and the U.S., it has barely been on the agenda in Israel and the Arab countries. Israelis' preoccupation with past scars and present socio-economic and conventional security problems has limited the impact of previous attempts to try to raise the public's consciousness about the dangers involved in the potential nuclearization of the Mideast.

In 1986 a non-partisan independent "Israeli Committee for the Prevention of Nuclear War" was established to struggle against the production, acquisition, proliferation and use of nuclear weapons; and to struggle against the nuclearization of the Mideast and to turn it into a nuclear-free zone.

Taking advantage of public interest in the

## ISRAEL

Vanunu affair and the concern felt by the public in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, the committee organized a public event in Tel Aviv on February 1 entitled "Mushroom over the Mideast?" An overflow audience heard five prominent speakers—a historian, a labor leader, a physician, a physicist and a kibbutz educator—call for an open public debate on Israeli nuclear policy. The event was chaired by Dan Sagir, a correspondent for *Ha'aretz* (the *New York Times* of Israel), who was recently one of three foreign correspondents expelled from South Africa for reporting too accurately about the apartheid regime's repression.

The evening's discussion centered not on the accuracy of Vanunu's story, but on the implications of the potential nuclearization of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Reserves Col. Meir Peil, one of Israel's leading military historians, warned that the day was soon coming when the nuclear danger would pre-empt the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the primary concern of the Israeli peace movement. He warned that a Mutually Assured Destruction deterrent policy was impossible in the Mideast, adding that if "two or three nuclear bombs were dropped on the Tel Aviv area, that would be the end of the Zionist dream, no matter how many bombs would be dropped on the Arab world. He said, "We have to be the first to call for the denuclearization of the region and to sign the international agreements for regulation of nuclear installations."

The most unexpected speaker of the evening was Yerucham Meshel, the moderate former secretary general of the Histadrut (General Federation of Labor). Clearly influenced by the degree of concern about the nuclear question expressed by the trade unions in New Zealand, Australia and many European countries, Meshel called upon the

Histadrut to take an active role in educating the public to the dangers of the nuclear age.

Dr. Ernesto Kahan, who is chairman of the Israeli branch of Physicians Against Nuclear War as well as the new Israeli Committee for the Prevention of Nuclear War, said that if each of the people present mobilized five people, and they mobilized five more people, "we would soon have a mass Israeli anti-nuclear movement."

The public evening was not the only sign of a growing Israeli interest in the nuclear question. The dailies *Davar* and *Ha'aretz* have followed *Al-Hamishmar* in publishing a series of articles on the nuclear question, and two Israeli political journals, *Politika* and *Alternativa* are scheduled to devote entire issues to the problem. Noted *Jerusalem Post* military correspondent Hirsh Goodman has called for an end to the "Israeli ostrich policy" about the nuclear question.

Despite this activity, it's not easy to arouse public concern in Israel about the dangers lurking over the nuclear horizon. Given the legacy they bear of past and recent traumas, most Israelis are probably quite comfortable with the idea that Israel is presumably the only country in the Mideast with a potential nuclear option.

A spate of recent headlines may begin to change this feeling. An *Al-Hamishmar* headline on January 25 read: "Assad Hints: Syria Is Working to Gain an Atomic Bomb!" In an interview given by Syrian President Assad to a Kuwaiti newspaper, he stated, "Many sources confirm that Israel has the ability to manufacture and use atomic bombs, and Syria has begun to act in a number of different ways in order to face this danger." Another headline in *Ma'ariv* on the same day stated: "Iran Is Planning to Manufacture Nuclear Weapons." And in a talk at Tel Aviv University on January 21, Italian Defense Minister Giovanni Spadolini warned, "Nuclear blackmail might be nearer than we think because simplified nuclear technology is within reach of terrorist groups and their state sponsors."

Clearly it is becoming harder and harder to evade the fact that the volatile Mideast is teetering on the nuclear threshold. □

Hillel Schenker is *In These Times*' Israel correspondent.

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