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FRANCE— TOWARDS A LEFT COALITION

At the request of ALR, a leading French communist reviews experiences leading up to the successes of the left in the recent elections in France. (In 1950, Henri Martin, a sailor in the French navy, was gaoled for five years for his opposition to the war in Vietnam. Mass protests secured his release in 1953.—Ed.)

IN THE RECENT ELECTIONS in France, the Communist Party gained a million votes and almost doubled its number of deputies (from 41 to 73). The grouping of left parties exceeded by 1,300,000 votes the number cast for the Gaullist party, which with 38% is in a minority in the country. The most important aspect of these elections is that the union of the parties of the left, approved by nearly 10 million French citizens, appears as the great force of the future, capable of assuring a democratic alternative to the personal power. Already, it is evident that the new composition of the Assembly will ensure a better hearing for the workers in their struggles.

The monopoly power obviously could not practise a policy of social progress, so that year after year all the non-monopolist social groups have been hard hit. Despite a growth of production by 60% and of labor productivity by 50%, purchasing power has fallen for a large number of workers. Moreover the Fifth Plan has led to the disappearance each year of 60,000 families of toiling farmers; while the concentration of capital also hits the workers and the small traders, and compels the small and middle enterprises to subordinate themselves to big capital in order to survive. A growing number of intellectuals find their aspirations to freedom and creative work in conflict with the authoritarian power, and with the law of profit.

In this situation the illusions engendered by the Gaullist power in 1958 have faded and new groups have come into action. The political parties representing these groups have been compelled successively to withdraw support of the Gaullist power and then to come out more and more strongly in opposition to it.

But the solutions put forward by these groups maintained the division amongst the left parties, and our central committee was able to show what the situation was, in posing the following question on April 1, 1965: "Will the outcome of the struggle against the personal power be a reactionary solution under other

forms, or will it be a genuinely democratic solution?" To take the latter path it was obviously necessary to bring about the active and loyal co-operation of all the left parties. It was necessary in particular to secure co-operation with the socialist leaders, who under the pretext of realism, of the need of allies, pursued their policy of class-collaboration. The candidature of Gaston Defferre for the Presidency of the Republic was openly based on an alliance with the right to assure a reactionary alternative.

It was a question then of helping the socialist workers solve the contradiction which existed between their aspiration to social progress, to socialism, on the one hand, and, on the other, the pursuit by their party of a policy of class collaboration, with no other outcome than to assist reaction to pursue its anti-social policy, and to maintain the capitalist regime. The way to achieve this was clearly stated by Maurice Thorez in December, 1962:

For the forms of the single front the great lesson of the campaign for the referendum and for the elections can be expressed in these words: No cut-and-dried plans, no inflexible demands, or rather one only which is valid both for us and for our eventual partners—to serve to the utmost the interests of the workers, the cause of democracy and peace. We must succeed in proving, little by little, that the fullest collaboration between communists, socialists and other republicans is necessary for the present, but that it will be equally so in the future, to ensure that we undertake the construction of socialism in the best possible conditions.

And corresponding to the effort to find in each situation the form most favorable to unity, our party in its 16th, 17th, and 18th Congresses set itself the task of reaching ideological agreement, of developing new theses on the possibility and the conditions for a peaceful passage to socialism through a plurality of parties.

In this manner we deprived the anti-unity forces of their argument that we wished to *pluck their feathers* pending the suppression of all the other parties. Similarly our flexible attitude contributed to rebutting another anti-unity argument, that we stood for 'all or nothing'.

Thus, in the referendum of 1962, as we were not able to make a common call with the socialists to vote no, our party launched the order of the day: "Let us march side by side and strike together against the common enemy." For the presidential election our quick decision in favor of a single candidate of the left, in spite of the absence of a common program, delivered a heavy blow to the ideas of a reactionary solution and strengthened the left. The unity brought about on this occasion made it possible to demonstrate the strength of the left, by presenting it as the only serious opposition. The attitude of our Party in promoting unity on this occasion, its loyal efforts to obtain a massive vote in support of the single candidate of the left, made a deep impression on the non-communist democratic forces. Also the efforts of certain leaders of the left federation to reach an agreement with the

Democratic Centre of Lecanuet created a sharp conflict in their own ranks.

The agreement of 20th December gave a decisive check to the trend towards an alliance of the right. The solutions developed by our party to put an end to the personal power, its actions to take at each point the steps forward that are realistic, its active participation in the actions directed against the policies of the Gaullist power, made it more difficult each day to justify anti-communist exclusiveness. More and more often, socialist workers found themselves at first side by side, then together with the communist workers, against the same enemy, an enemy supported on all these essential questions by the reactionaries who were posing as democrats and who were presented to the workers as allies.

This agreement was widely respected, since in 382 constituencies where the left was able to present a candidate on the second ballot, in 367 there was a single candidate of the left (187 Communist Party, 173 Left Democratic & Socialist Federation, and 7 United Socialist Party). Hence it is possible to envisage with confidence the prospect of putting forward a common government program.

These developments clearly illustrate the Leninist theory of compromise: in no case to reach agreements against the interests of the working class, under the pretext of sinking differences; but not to reject an agreement which provides the working class with allies to fight on a part of its program under the pretext that the whole program is not included.

The agreement provides for the nationalisation of armaments and of banks, and the democratic administration of national enterprises. Similarly it provides that in the matter of investment, priority must be given to housing, to national education, to scientific research, to public health. On the political level the common text declares: "The Gaullist regime must be eliminated. It is incompatible with democracy and constitutes the major obstacle to the extension of liberty, to economic and social progress and to the operation of a consistent policy of peace and disarmament." And it forecasts "the suppression or revision of the articles (of the constitution) utilised by the President of the Republic to impose personal power." In foreign policy, it is stated concerning Vietnam: "They (the two delegations) consider necessary the immediate cessation of American bombardment of North Vietnam, and the return to peace in this region by the application of the Geneva Agreements."

Hence, contrary to the allegations of the Chinese leaders, our policy of unity has not led to the abandonment of the heroic

people of Vietnam, but on the contrary makes it possible to throw new forces into the common action against the American escalation, and into support for the observance of agreements recognising the independence, unity and integrity of the territory of Vietnam.

Whatever disagreements there may be, there is evident in the development of these principal themes the possibility for the left to set in motion a government program, entirely logical and corresponding to the interests of the immense majority of our people. It is not, of course, a question of stopping at that point; and commenting on the current situation, Comrade Waldeck Rochet, General Secretary of the Party, declared:

We consider that the problem of the solution—democratic or Gaullist—is posed more sharply than ever, and for a future perhaps nearer at hand than the Gaullist leaders think. We do not consider, indeed, that the present National Assembly with its false majority can last until 1972, that is for five years. That is why our party considers that, while continuing to defend its democratic program, it must contribute to the strengthening of the left forces on the basis of a common program of government.

To gain a majority it is in fact necessary that the left parties do not appear only as a force capable of checking the personal power, but also as providing a durable alternative.

To check the Gaullist power in the immediate future and then to sweep it away, importance is attached to the development of struggles, be they for economic gains, for democratic liberties or for peace. It is indeed clear that in spite of the important role that the new parliament will play, it is the united action of the working class and the popular masses which remains decisive.

These common actions are envisaged by the agreement of 20th December, but they will take place all the more rapidly, as the independent activity of the Party develops amongst the masses. Indeed, recent events have again confirmed that the progress of unity is linked to the progress of our party: naturally enough, because our party is the party of the working class for whose interests it fights without compromise. When our party progresses it is a blow to anti-communist exclusiveness, and to disunity in the working class. In no circumstances then do we concede that unity could progress more quickly through the withdrawal of the party, for the contrary is true, as the facts prove.

The progress of our party is the greater as all its organisations struggle against sectarian trends and appear clearly as the best workers for unity, demonstrating also that our party is above all an instrument at the service of the working class, to assist it to realise its desire for unity. We are taking every possible step to hasten the closer unity which will inspire the masses and lead to a quick victory of the left as it becomes the pole of attraction for all democrats.