

Report from Paris by Joelle Leconte

Communists heading for a break?

Attacking Mitterrand's defense policy is just the latest provocation by the Moscow-run French party.

There are plenty of indications that the Socialist-Communist coalition ruling France will soon break up, and it is the Communist Party (PCF), famous as the most subservient in Europe to Moscow, which is pushing provocatively toward that point. Moscow is not pleased with the support President Mitterrand has given to the deployment of the U.S. Euromissiles and his staunch opposition to the peace movement.

In a televised national address on Nov. 16 on national defense and security, the French President said that the strategic crisis, "the gravest since Berlin and Cuba," arose when the Soviets deployed their intermediate range missiles, the SS-20s. Why, he asked, did the Soviets destroy the existing balance by deploying the SS-20s? "The answer is clear: the leaders of the Kremlin . . . hope, by creating two different threats, to succeed one day in splitting Europe from the U.S.A."

As for the "peace movement," Mitterrand observed that the time for "pacificism" had come and gone in 1977 when the Soviets deployed the first SS-20s. He again ruled out including France's independent nuclear deterrent, the *force de frappe*, in arms-control talks between the two superpowers as Moscow has demanded. "I don't accuse Moscow of wanting a war, but the Soviet Union is presently in a situation of force which is closer to war than to peace."

On Nov. 19, the general secretary of the PCF, Georges Marchais, took to the front page of *Le Monde* to reply, with a proposal to abandon national

sovereignty, a statement against the constitution of the Fifth Republic, and an attack on the credibility of the national determination to defend France. The Marchais tirade was also a challenge to Mitterrand's deep personal sense of his role and his power.

Marchais reiterated the PCF's demand for the inclusion of the French strategic forces in the superpowers' disarmament talks. He said that the decision to use France's nuclear weapons must not lie solely in the hands of the President.

The showdown on strategic policy highlights a clash building since early November. PCF central committee member Georges Valbon resigned as chairman of the Charbonnages de France, the national coal mining board, citing disagreement on industrial policy. The communist trade union CGT immediately held strikes in this sector to protest the government policy of abandoning the heavily subsidized coal mines in regions of France already hit by heavy unemployment. Possibly explosive social upheaval is on the horizon.

There are numerous other small, but accumulating, signs that the PCF is going for a break: Public exchanges between the PCF and the Socialist party have gotten nastier. Though the PCF has chalked up electoral defeat after defeat in municipal balloting, because the PCF was caught red-handed in electoral fraud, Marchais dared to blame the failure on the Socialists, because, he said, "the government had not kept its promises to the people." The Socialists, who had avoided at-

tacking the Communists for vote fraud, took the gloves off and blamed the PCF's vote-stealing practices for losing the mayoralties in the Paris suburbs. But they have not gone so far as deciding they can make it without the Communists.

Enjoying an absolute majority in the National Assembly, the Socialists could in principle do without the Communist alliance, although it might create some social unrest in the context of the present austerity policy of the government. To keep the country together in face of these pressures, they would have to work through a potential stabilizing alliance with other forces, forces partly expressed by the support given in November by the French Bishops' Conference to the principle of the French nuclear deterrent. The only effective way would be to pull together a new and original coalition of forces around the strategic and economic national driving force of a policy for beam weapons defensive system for France and her weakened European partners.

In such a new coalition, the World War II collaborators of General de Gaulle who have backed President Reagan's beam defense policy would play a seminal role. It was to undermine such potential that Jacques Vergès, the communist lawyer of the Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie, dropped a political bomb by blaming the death (in 1943, while prisoner of Gestapo officer Barbie) of Resistance figure Jean Moulin on high-level betrayal from *within* the Resistance. The "revelation"—a lie disproven by numerous witnesses' accounts that Moulin was brutally tortured by Barbie in prison—was intended to demoralize those Frenchmen who want to put up a fight against Nazi-Soviet domination today, by discrediting the World War II Resistance.