

MAURICE KRIEGEL-VALRIMONT

Interviewed on the 14th July 1987 at his residence in Chateauneuf-Val-de-Bargis. The following is based upon my notes during the conversation which lasted for about one hour before dinner and one hour after. The conversation roughly followed a scheme of questions which I had sent to K. beforehand.

(Note: K. was born in Strasbourg, in 1914. He entered the Jeunesse communiste (of the PCF) in the 1930ies and militated in the CGT during the Popular Front. He engaged himself in the war-time Resistance, was arrested and imprisoned, but succeeded to flee from prison, and became successively a leader of the Mouvements unis de la Résistance. In the spring of 1944 he acted as the representative of M.U.R in COMAC, the supreme command of the military activity of the French Resistance. On this one should see the important publication of Les archives du COMAC (Ed. Minuit 1964) edited by K. himself.)

I ANTI-FASCISM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE

Anti-fascism was our central concern during the years before the war. In my youth I used to carry the sign of the broken rifle, le fusil-brisé, which indicated the spirit in which I became an anti-fascist. There is of course a connotation of the latter with the struggle for peace; but anti-fascism was really at the centre of everything. "Le noeud c'est l'anti-fascisme".

We knew about the Moscow trials. At that time I lived in Strasbourg. However, if we would have stopped with our struggle because of the trials, only Hitler would have benefited.

The significance of the struggle of masses of people against fascism, and in the Resistance movement, should be underlined. This created a new balance of forces in France. Thus de Gaulle did not leave office in 1946 because of party politics but because of the relation between social forces which had emerged during the mass struggle.

The bomb was dropped on Hiroshima before the cessation of hostilities. This is why the facts about it were obscured.

The content of the Stockholm Appeal (1950) was true. It said that the American atomic bomb monopoly was the principal danger - there existed an "imbalance of terror".

Within the Stockholm movement Abbé Boullier coined the phrase "le combat des mêmes contre les mêmes" (i.e. "the struggle of the same against the same"). In fact, one could trace a continuation of the social

dynamic of the struggle against fascism within the Partisans of Peace after the war. There were different peace campaigns and initiatives. But the frictions between Thorez and Tillon, for instance, were of minor importance. The hegemony of the PCF in the peace movement was total. Thus, when Tillon was replaced by Casanova as the PCF's special functionary for the peace movement, nobody said a word about it. Yet there was an enormous difference between those /like Tillon/ who had actually fought in the Resistance and those /like Thorez/ who were just applying the policies of Stalin. During a whole period the aspirations which were born out of the resistance, in opposition against de Gaulle, corresponded to the line of the Party leadership. The rising international tension /the beginning of the Cold War/ brought a change in this respect. It resulted in a process of political differentiation and in efforts to remove the resistance fighters from the important functions within the party.

I myself continued to occupy the post as leader of the Press Bureau of the PCF. I also was a member of the Central Committee and of the Bureau politique.

The political perspective of the ex-combattants was dominated by the idea of a Leftist popular union. In order to stop the colonial wars, for instance, our main task should have been to gather a real popular majority for a new political course. This was never achieved. Hence the victory of de Gaulle. Somewhere, Marx has written, actually about France, that "le solo de la classe ouvrière est un chant funebre". /The policy of Thorez, applying Stalin's directives, became "a solo of the working class"./ But the men of the resistance had this in common: to create a real majority for a change.

I will give some examples of this difference between the line of the party leadership and the line of the resistance. In 1954 I was suddenly assigned with the task of contributing an article on peace in Indochina for the revue "For a Lasting Peace, for People's Democracy". This was because Molotov had told Thorez that it was now possible to enter into collaboration with Mendès-France. As a side-effect of this it became possible for me to publish such an article in such a forum.

In 1956 I was elected for the Parlement from Meurthe. The Party lost those elections, but our campaign in Meurthe was quite successful. Our campaign was conducted under the slogan of the People's Front, clearly against the party directives.

I'll also mention a conversation which I had with Waldeck-Rochet in 1958, just after de Gaulle's return to power. Waldeck said he agreed that it was our, that is the Communists', own fault that de Gaulle had taken the power, because we had voted for Guy Mollet's repression in Algeria in 1956.

The dogmatism of the Stalinists is the only real problem which has stood in the way of a continuation of the Resistance.

II THE LEAGUE AGAINST THE STRIKE FORCE

I left the PCF immediately after the Casanova affair. The political situation in France/at the beginning of the 1960ies/ was characterized by complete division. Mollet and other Socialists participated in the first government of de Gaulle. The PCF was totally isolated.

On foreign policy the Left had no common viewpoints whatsoever; all commentators agree on that.

Together with Jean-Pierre Vigier, Jean Pronteau, Marcel Prenant and others I took the initiative to make contacts with André Blumel (who had been chef de cabinet under Léon Blum), Bernard Lavergne (a prominent jurist), Jules Moch, Jean-Paul Sartre, Vercors, Montaron (from the Témoignage Chrétien), Oriou (of the Socialists) in order to prepare action against the nuclear strike force. I wrote the manifesto¹. We addressed this initiative to all organisations on the Left, including the trade unions. All of them gave a positive response and participated in the League. The list of signatories of the manifesto given in Jules Moch's book does not yet comprise any names from the trade unions.

Moch was a friend of Francis Perrin, the director of the Commissariat à l'énergie atomique. I contacted Jules Moch for this very reason. Thus it was to become evident that no Socialists were for the Bomb. The Socialists in the League also comprised Fugier and Gerard Jacquet (the director of the journal Le Populaire).

The Bomb, for us, was de Gaulle. We were looking for the weak spot of de Gaulle, and for the conditions that would make a real majority possible. At the time, we were not convinced that de Gaulle would have a future as a political leader.

We set up a bureau of which I was a member. I was its General Secretary -this title was chosen as a humorous remark on the corresponding post within the PCF. The PCF, by the way, sent Pierre Villon as their representative.² He was later to be replaced by Francois Billoux. The Treasurer of our League was Alfred Kastler, the scientist.

There were far more than ten thousand adhesions to

¹ Appel pour la création de la force de frappe, reprinted as an appendix in Jules Moch: Non à la force de frappe, R.Laffont, Paris 1963. - This Appeal was mentioned several times during the above conversation.

² Of the three men in the COMAC who formed the military leadership of the Resistance, two were Communists, namely Villon and Kriegel-Valrimont. (The name of the third person was Devogués.- de Gaulle's representative in COMAC was Chaban-Delmas.)

the League. In the PCF, Waldeck understood the importance of this organisation. He used to help me in this action. We arranged two large demonstrations, one in Boulogne Billancourt and another in the Parc des Sceaux. Several tens of thousand persons came to the latter demonstration. The popular response to the initiative of the League showed the existence of a profound opposition against the nuclear strike force.

The League can in effect be seen as an early moment in the formation of what was to become the Union of the Left in the seventies. The intrigues among the Socialists resulting in Mitterrand's candidature for President in 1965, was one of the reasons for the League's disintegration. (If Mitterrand did speak against the strike force and its testing at Mururoa, it was only because everybody in the Left did such speeches at the time.) Another and more fundamental reason for the subsequent failure of the League was this: the PCF and the Socialists tacitly agreed on not continuing their active support because they became afraid of a process of their unification "from below".

III A POINT. ON THE PCF'S CHANGE IN 1977

The PCF's endorsement of the strike force in 1977 was a move of purely tactical significance. In Kanapa one finds the effort to search for a common base, for tactical purposes. The fact is that Mitterrand and Henu already had accepted the strike force. Kanapa wanted to remove one of the obstacles from the way to tactical unity with the Socialists. Of course it was a case of opportunism.

IV THE ATOMIC BOMB AND MILITARY THEORY

Napoleon had many followers. The great military theoreticians like Clausewitz, Lenin have to some extent inspired my thinking, especially the clausewitzian idea of war as a continuation of politics by other means. During the resistance it became clear that the urban guerilla is a relatively efficient way of warfare. It stresses the importance of the relations of force.

The nuclear weapons signify a rupture in the relations of force because the future of the human species is endangered. The balance of terror is a reality. Therefore, priority must be given to guaranteeing the existence of the species. The nuclear means must be removed from the relation of forces. The search for a way to suppress the nuclear arms is the base on which any serious policy must rest. After Chernobyl measures of security have to be given priority. There must be a democratic control - I am convinced that a majority of the French are for democratic control.

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