

## Note on the Swiss Communist Party 1963-67

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September 1963 reports of pro-China militants having broken away from the Swiss Labour Party [the PdA] began to circulate. The Reuter report named as secretary –general of a rival Swiss Communist Party Gerard Bulliard (1927-2009) formerly secretary of the (French-speaking) Vevey region until he had been expelled for distributing pamphlets giving the Chinese view on the breach with the CPSU.

In Vevey, two activists, Gérard Bulliard and Lucien Monnet, announced the birth of a Communist Party of Switzerland favourable to the Chinese theses - The Swiss Communist Party - PCS was created on September 1, 1963 by Gérard Bulliard, described as an organizer of boxing fights, having returned from a trip to Albania the previous month.

The attempt to minimise the significance the break from the revisionist Swiss Labour Party as the “act of a few political dreamers” was undermined in media reports that noted,

*“ It is easily understandable that the Communist Secretary strives to minimize as much as possible this split in the party. In the ranks of the “Chinese Party” nevertheless we find a certain Lucien Monnet, who at one time had been a cofounder of the Labour Party of Vevey, and a certain Mr Bulliard, who had been secretary of this very Communist Party of Vevey, and Raymond de Coulon, who had been an influential member of the Communist Party of Biel. The following which these two party men in Vevey have gathered is also not inconsiderable, since in this city, which for a long time has provided the Labour Party with party leaders of repute and a numerous following, at least one third of the registered Communists have deviated to the Peking line.”<sup>i</sup>*

The previous January 18<sup>th</sup>, the PdA's Basel-based paper, *Vorwärts*, for German-speaking Swiss communists had acknowledged the existence of a current of opposition when party meetings were held to hear a report on the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Italian Communist Party at which the Chinese were openly attacked. While the party leadership clearly took the side of the CPSU it was often by reprinting the statements of the Italians, commending the "great contribution" the Italians were making to the removal of "profound differences" in the international communist movement and the confusion created over Sino-Soviet differences. Although the PdA drew most of its support in the French-speaking cantons, it was influenced by the Italian party thinking arguing in its French language paper *La Voix Ouvriere* "Polycentrism is necessary; it does not weaken internationalism but is on the contrary the condition of a real internationalism, not formal, but profound." (November 22 1964)

Internal dissidence was supposed to have been strengthened by the existence of the Chinese embassy in Berne, regarded as the centre for the distribution throughout Western Europe of Sino-Albanian publications. Distribution of these texts were grounds for expulsion from the PdA.

With the open break the Swiss communists became the second formation, after the Brazilians, of a rival party emerging due to the Sino-Soviet polemics. Grippa's group in Belgium claimed to only represent the Brussels Federation although was soon to establish the *Parti Communiste (marxiste-léniniste) de Belgique*. As in Brazil, the secessionist group in Switzerland took a name abandoned by the Moscow-orientated party, and the Swiss Communist Party was born.

Resuming the title of the Party which had been banned by the Federal Council at the start of the Second World War, Bulliard was quickly joined by Nils Andersson, founder of *Editions de la Cité*, but he left the PCS in January 1964 and founded and led the Lenin Center, which later formed the Organization of Communists of Switzerland.

First national conference of Swiss Communist Party was held in January 1965 at Vevey, on the north shore of Lake Geneva, near Lausanne. It launched a monthly mimeographed journal called *L'Étincelle* (The Spark) and passed a resolution attacking Khrushchev and other modern revisionists and praising the "resolute and principled stand of the Chinese Communist Party".

The local media reported that the new party had attracted about one-third of the PdA members in Vevey, and was well-established in Bienne and in student organisations, particularly in Lausanne<sup>ii</sup>

The PCS (Communist party of Switzerland) was reported to be operating several front groups including

*“the Groupes de jeunesses progressistes suisses, or Group of Swiss Progressive Youth, led by John sauter , and a trade union called the Federation generale des travailleurs de Suisse, or General Federation of Workers of Switzerland.”*

Within a year the tiny Swiss Communist Party had shifted from a militantly pro-Chinese position to a more neutral stance, even making cautious overtures to its parent body. Early in 1964 the PCS newspaper *L'Etincelle* carried an article questioning the formulation that “imperialism was a paper tiger”. It said, “We think that that is wrong. Lenin always said that one should never underestimate the adversary...It is wrong to maintain as do the Chinese comrades that socialist society would exist after an atomic war. It is wrong and dangerous” (September 1964).

Critical attitudes towards China hardened with apparently “severe reservations” around the events of the Cultural Revolution. By August 1965, *L'Etincelle* carried an attack “*on romantics with pro-Chinese leanings, sectarians and intellectuals*”, a reference to the Lenin Centre and did not at the same time attack “*Soviet revisionists.*” At its First Congress held on September 5-6 1964, the PSC then, regarded agreements between the United States and USSR as “ignoble fraud”.<sup>iii</sup> In the spring of 1966, a renewed line bitterly critical of the Chinese and pro-Chinese supporters in other countries (especially the Grippa group in Belgium) accompanied an open call for collaboration with the old Moscow-aligned Swiss Labour Party.<sup>iv</sup>

A right-wing political observer suggested,

*“its temperamental Secretary-general, Gerald Bulliard, discovered that the Chinese were, in fact, supporting a rival faction, grouped around the periodical Octobre. He promptly swung round to anti-Chinese positions (remaining anti-Soviet), and has since continued to indulge in ideological gymnastics and inter-factional intrigues, displaying at present an unrequited affection for Fidel Castro; the most constant factor in his political peregrinations is a visceral anti-semitism.”*<sup>v</sup>

Tensions within the PCS saw Gerard Bulliard in Vevey, expelled by an "Extraordinary Congress" on May 29, 1966. He was to continue his activities, from September 9, 1966, under the name of Parti Populaire Suisse – PPS.

There was a public reversal from the new line bitterly critical of the anti-revisionist stance expressed in *L'Etincelle* in the March, as the September issue #22 revealed a return to a total pro-China alignment as Pierre Charles took de facto control from founder Bulliard. However the damage to the organisation was already fatal.

The Swiss Press Review and News Report<sup>vi</sup>, designed to influence the news agenda and presentation, had satirised the apology and reversal of the PCS:

“..after having renounced Khrushchev, condemned the Swiss Labor Party (of the Moscow camp) and denounced Mao...having launched itself along the “Rumanian Way,” halfway between Moscow and Peking. Hadn’t the comrade-secretary of the Party denounced “the luxurious Chinese embassies in Europe” and rejected the label of “pro-Chinese embassy in Bern”? Wasn’t it he who wrote: “We don’t approve of the Paper tiger issue...We don’t approve of the cult of personality...We don’t approve of the support which the Chinese comrades accord to certain adventurers..” or, again: “To be Marxist-Leninist doesn’t mean to be pro-Chinese”?

On the eve of its third Congress the PCS issued an appeal “to all the former comrades who, for diverse reasons, became separated from us, or that we separated from us.”

“We must make amends for our errors, the injustices committed against certain comrades in Switzerland and elsewhere, and it is for this that our Party starts again from its beginning, so to speak, that is to say that it will never again deviate from the line adopted at the time of its creation. It will be necessary for the leadership of the PCS to be vigilant, to analyse facts better, to learn to steel itself, to accept advice, to act correctly. A fierce class struggle must be organized, concrete actions should lead the workers of the city and the country to respect us.”

“Finally, we declare that we have studied for a long time the case of the Communist party of Belgium and we have taken unjust, unfortunate, anti-revolutionary positions in regard to it. Further, analogous fault have been committed against our Marxist-Leninist comrades in France, Italy and above all COMMUNIST CHINA.”

### Far Right infiltration

While the anti-Semitic politics of the PPS Parti Populaire Suisse seems clear from the start, the question of whether Bulliard was a deceived naive or an agent of the extreme right from 1963 is not settled. Although the circumstantial evidences does build up: Italian investigators named Bulliard as an informer for the Servizio Informazioni Difesa (SID) Italian Secret Service when investigating right-wing terrorism around the Galido phenomenon in 1996.<sup>vii</sup>

“GERARD BULLIARD, former secretary of the pro-Chinese Swiss Communist Party, in contact with the SID from March 1967 to July of that same year, he proposed itself to provide the Service with news on the activities of the pro-

Chinese parties in Switzerland and in other European countries, with particular reference to ITALY.... had attended the planning meeting for the foundation on 22-10-1967 in TURIN of the Clandestine Marxist Leninist Revolutionary Front.”<sup>viii</sup>

What is clear is that Far Right infiltration under the direction of an alleged press agency, the Lisbon-based Aginter Press, sought to use the solidarity activities of Swiss Maoists to penetrate, disrupt and destroy the anti-colonial armed resistance in the Portuguese colonies in Africa<sup>ix</sup>.

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## REFERENCES

<sup>i</sup> The Pro-Chinese Communists in Switzerland. *Neue Zuercher Zeitung*, Foreign Edition #306 (Zurich) November 7<sup>th</sup> 1963 p13.

<sup>ii</sup> *Neue Zuercher Zeitung* February 19 and June 15, 1964

<sup>iii</sup> *Le Monde* October 3, 1964

<sup>iv</sup> L’Etincelle #18 March-April 1965

<sup>v</sup> Kevin Devlin, New Left Opposition to Swiss CP. Radio Free Europe Research October 7, 1969

<sup>vi</sup> Quoted in “*Propagandist’s Guide to World Communist Affairs* 27 September-24 October 1966, distributed by the Central Intelligence Agency. Further reading: *Worldwide Propaganda Network Built by the C.I.A.* New York Times Dec. 26, 1977

<sup>vii</sup> Daniele Ganser (2004) *NATO’s Secret Armies: Operation GLADIO and Terrorism in Western Europe*. London: Routledge

<sup>viii</sup> SPECIAL CARABINIERI OPERATIONAL GROUPING  
Criminal proceedings against Rognoni Giancarlo and others. Rome, July 23, 1996.

<sup>ix</sup> On the matter of collusion or manipulation see separate research note.