## Notes on...Partido Communista Revolucionario PCR

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## PCR \* Revolutionary Communist Party

A small anti-revisionist grouping developed within the Communist Party of Chile (PCCh) centred on the Espartaco Editioness, a publications distribution company established in March 1962 that shared offices with the New China News Agency. The emergence of Chilean anti-revisionists Marxist-Leninist was later placed in the context of shared political perspective:

"The political relations between first "Spartacus" and then the RCP, and the Communist Party of China, were born of an identical understanding of the principles of Marxism-Leninism and in their common defence against present-day revisionism."

Espartaco (Spartacus) distributed Chinese material, and the Spanish language edition of Peking Review – *Pekin Informa* – the first edition appeared in March 1963. The group itself produced a newssheet, *Combate*, and a review journal, *Principios Marxista-Leninistas*.

1963 saw the accelerating mutual accusations and condemnation between the parties with Chilean revisionist denunciation of "Chinese deviation". The PCCh

led by **Luis** Alberto **Corvalán** Lepe (1916–2010) expressed support for the positions of the CPSU, and wrote in a letter to the CPC in February 1966, that:

"..the position of your party concerning the problem of peaceful coexistence has been joyfully welcomed by the Trotskyists and other renegades of the revolutionary movement." ii

As for the Albanians, they were accused of promoting the "perils of factionalism" and "bourgeois nationalist sentiments". iii

The anti-revisionists tried to develop the line struggle inside the CP of Chile, after founding the Spartacus Editions, publishing a large part of the documents of the Great Polemic (at that time, the Chinese letter "in 25 points" and its nine comments were practically prohibited reading for party activists). Halperin observed of the group,

"Although one or two of them had some standing in Santiago leftist artistic and intellectual circles, none of them held any rank or position in the Communist Party. In October 1963 they were expelled from the party." iv

As soon as they were expelled by the revisionist clique, far from abandoning the propaganda task they had started, Comrade Velasquez (party name of David Benquis) and others formed the Spartacus Group.

There were close relations between the group and their Chinese allies evident in a rapid visit to Beijing in 1964 and a meeting between the leaders of "Spartacus" and Mao Tsetung himself, who encouraged and supported their plans to build a genuine communist party, and towards this end gave them valuable advice. Among this advice: "Do not mechanically copy the experience of China or of another country; struggle against any tailist tendency and use your own heads, applying Marxism-Leninism to the concrete conditions of your country." vi

Anti-revisionists coalesced around this Grupo Espartaco /Spartacus Group at a pivotal point in the international polemics in September 1963 following the expulsion of known sympathisers from the PCCh and its youth organisation. The group was reinforced by addition of pro-China militants, mostly ex-PCCh, from another far left organisation – Revolutionary Vanguard – that split in 1964. Vii

The origin of the Revolutionary Vanguard reach back to during the clandestine period of the Chilean CP, organizations such as the "April 2 Movement" and

later the "Anti-imperialist Resistance Movement", led by Luis Reinoso, would develop. The latter, together with the National People's Vanguard, founded in 1958, and the National Marxist Vanguard, founded in 1960, form the Marxist Revolutionary Vanguard (VRM), of Maoist alignment, in 1962. The following year the Socialist Youth Federation of Concepción and Santiago, sectors of the Communist Youth of Chile and the Trotskyist Revolutionary Party would join.

Due to the political differences between the diverse group that formed the VRM, part of the former socialist and Trotskyist militants were opposed to the leadership, calling it "sectarian" and "Stalinist", they form a faction that would organisationally evolve into the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR).

The Valparaíso senator Jaime Barros Pérez Cotapos, who resigned from the PCCh, joined the Spartacus Group late in 1964. After a visit to China the following September, he was prominent in the transformation of the Spartacus Group acting as the nucleus, attracting others to founding the PCR – Partido Communista Revolucionario – Chile's main organisational representative of anti-revisionist Marxism-Leninism led by David Benquis and Jorge Palacios until its demise fourteen years later.

Prior to the founding conference in May 1966, local and regional meetings discussed the main political resolution that reiterated support for the CPC's views regarding the international situation. It also challenged the neutralist stance taken at the time by the Cuban party headed by Fidel Castro, which had an influence in leftist circles in Chile. The PRC reinforced its international profile with a delegation at the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Party of labour of Albania held in Tirana in November 1966 viii, and favourable coverage in *Peking Review* in the summer of 1966.

The formation of the Partido Communista Revolucionario had involved the Spartacus Group [Espartaco], the anti-revisionist members of the original VRM, joined by revolutionary militants who had broken individually with the PCCh. Matt Rothwell, in his study of the Chilean artist José Venturelli, a vocal supporter of Maoist China, described the organisation as: "almost entirely of urban communist activists and intellectuals who sympathized with Chinese positions but who commanded no significant mass base in their own right, the PCR struggled to establish areas of

work in the shantytowns of Santiago and in the countryside, to which it gave great weight in line with Maoist doctrine promoting a rural-based revolution in Third World countries." ix

The seemingly close relationship and political support shown to the PRC gave rise to the familiar rumours of the organisation being subsidised from China to maintain its organisational infrastructure.

José Venturelli, expelled from the Chilean Communist Party in November 1964, returned to Chile in 1966 and became involved in Chilean revolutionary politics on a day-to-day basis for the first time since 1951, having been previously based in Havana and Beijing. He had been regarded as part of China's informal diplomatic machine. Jorge Palacios, a leading member of the PCR, later claimed that Venturelli was a member of the Chinese Communist Party as well as a member of the PCR, a secret known only to the highest leadership of the PCR. Palacios feels that Venturelli's loyalty to the Chinese Party was greater than to the PCR, although there was no conflict between the two until 1973. On arrival in Chile he was made part of the leading secretariat of the PCR. In that capacity, he played an active role in propagating the PCR's line despite his role on the PCR secretariat, he was also prone to absences that Rothwell speculates would not have been tolerated from most other militants.

The PCR condemned the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 by Warsaw Pact troops in defence of "existing socialism". Clearly the PCR endorsed the Cultural Revolution, in January 1969, *Peking Review* devoted a full page to commentary from the PCR's paper, *Espartoc*.

An interview with the American Progressive Labour Party given in February 1969 to *Desafio* and reproduced in its journal *World Revolution* #2, repeated its opposition to the electoral strategy pursued by the revisionist and social democrats:

"They spread the false hope that by obtaining more votes than the reactionaries, the latter will agree "pacifically" to turn over power and cease to exploit people."

The call of the PCR in the election of 1970 was to abstain from voting for any of the candidates including the socialist senator Salvador Allende whose Popular Unity (UP) government took office at the end of 1970.

While the PCR continued to oppose and depreciate the UP regime for its reformist path and the revisionist influence within it, the PCR reportedly lost some membership disorientated in the euphoria and conflicts engendered in response to the bourgeoisie's resistance. During the Popular Unity government, it advocate the political independence or vigilance of workers against any deception or abuse, remaining a critical attitude, supporting positive measures for the people and attacking the negative. It develop the strategy of taking the UP reforms to their maximum limit, promoting the popular struggle. The critical and independent attitude of the PCR was said to have deprived it of massive support from the masses, who were dazzled by some reforms of the Allende government or were following the various UP parties, subject to Cuban or Soviet influence.

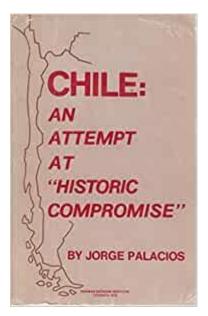
Sino-Chilean relations improved under Allende. Allende's move to recognise the People's Republic of China was a contributory factor in that process of improving relations. The (1973) 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist party of China received greetings from General Secretary Attamirano of the Socialist Party of Chile, as well as a longer political message from PCR. \*

Relations amongst the Chilean left meant there was a closeness among opponents. Palacios recalls a personal memory of Allende when seeking the release of party militants shortly after the UP electoral victory. Allende passed him in the corridor, turned to Palacios:

"You just came to congratulate me," he said jokingly. "You as always clueless. In this election in which they did not support me, I won. "And he added: "And I was thinking of appointing you ambassador to China to get you as far away from the country as possible.... I took it as a joke." xi

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Domestically on the far left, the PCR confronted the Castroite MIR, with its well-publicised militant actions, land seizures, factory occupations, and a series of bank and supermarket robberies. The PCR matched the radical rhetoric but had neither the communication reach nor effectiveness in action. In *Chile: Attempt at "Historic Compromise"* Jorge Palacios discusses the views and activities of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Chile all during the period of Allende's Unidad Popular government.



Jorge Palacios' book argued that the PCR opposition to the UP experiment was "fundamentally correct Marxist-Leninist position" as it continued to point out the reactionary nature of the "C" P leadership, which had a decisive influence in the UP, the opportunism of its politics and limits of the state capitalism of Allende's Unidad Popular programme.

It argued that as decisive will be the "attitude towards the masses...the opportunities this government and the parties supporting it offer to the proletariat, the exploited masses and to all the revolutionary sections of our society to broaden, deepen and develop their

struggles and to channel them towards the conquest of all the instruments of power."

The warning was against precisely what the elected UP authorities sought in its reformist navigation of the crisis of power), the attempt to channel and block the struggle of the masses and promote "class conciliation" by giving the illusion that they were in power and that their problems could only be solved from above. Such a political course would serve to "strengthen and consolidate the system of exploitation and to survive by adapting to the rules laid down by the enemies of the people." When only one side respects the constitution it is an uneven contest. The PCR argued "To build socialism, it is not enough for the means of production to be in the hands of the state. It is also necessary for the state to be in the hands of the proletariat. This is not the case in Chile." These arguments, Palacos note, "opposition to the revisionist plan of "peaceful road to socialism" is long-standing; as an open public difference, it dates back to 1963."

In a snapshot of political sway in a portion of working class opinion, in May 1972 elections Chile's major union organisation, CUT had its leadership elected for the first time by secret universal vote, all political tendencies with popular representation, organised in unions of workers, white-collar employees and campesinos, took place. The results from a base of only 25 percent of the active working population and probably only 10 percent of the wage earning peasantry, starkly demonstrated some of the difficulty facing the PCR in its attempt to get its voice heard at a time of bourgeois insurrection. In the contested results,

"Popular Unity parties won 68.8 percent, Christian democrats and "independents (a mask for the National Party) 27.6 percent, MIR (with Christian left support) 1.8 percent, Popular Socialist Union (left splinter from the Socialist Party) 1 percent, Revolutionary Communist Party (Maoist splinter from the Communist party) 0.7 percent. That is, forces opposing the program pushed by Popular Unity won more than a quarter of the organised workers' votes." xii

PCR participation in the CUT elections of 1972, obtained some 6,000 votes. A fall out from the experience saw a split in the Central Committee and a breakaway separating from the PCR with militants linked to the mass organisations in a group called the Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Communist Party (PCR-ML) led by Luis Bernal and Robinsón Rojas.

The military coup of September 11<sup>th</sup> 1973 was not a surprise to an organisation that had for years maintained that revolution would come to Chile only by armed struggle and people's war.

The PCR leadership had not been alone in pointing out the danger of a coup d'etat "a chronic disease in Latin America"; it was not unknown for U.S. imperialism to use the local armed forces to impose its interests in what was regarded as its backyard. The PCR agitated for Allende to arm the masses who supported him. As Allende did not do this, the PCR also went ahead and tried to organize its own supporters to arm themselves to defend the regime in the event of a coup. However politically the PCR had not been able to reach out and communicate or prepare most Chileans for the events of that September. Despite these preparations, armed resistance did not materialize on any significant scale when the time came.

For its part, the PCR-ML was hit hard by the dictatorship due to the open work it did within the working masses, its mass leaders falling into prison, leaving many of its cadres in exile. In Chile Luis Bernal kept the organization and made some of the exiled militants return to the country. Around 1979-1980 the dictatorship reinitiated the repression of the Party, capturing some of the members of the Central Committees, which with the subsequent death of Luis Bernal led the militancy to drain away from the Party, politically disappearing from the national sphere.

The PCR ceased to exist as a party domestically, there had been a split in 1979 resulting in the (pro-Albanian) Accion Proletaria led by Artes, another grouping of

militants would break from AP and refound itself as the Communist Organization Recabarren in 1985.

Released from prison, between 1983-1984 Edmundo Bavestrello, tried to rally former militants of the PCR-ML, which proved impossible due to the refusal of some or because it is impossible to contact others. He joined Proletariat Action in 1985 but quickly took a leading position in the formation of the Recabarren Communist Organization (OCR). xiii

Like the rest of the Left, there was an underground existence that followed for the PCR, publishing copies of its paper *El Pueblo*, and weakened by state repression and internal dissention. Many militants were protected by the fact that its clandestine norms had been maintained but its main leadership cadres went into exile, the option forced upon many Chilean leftists.

In exile, PCR-ML militant, Róbinson Rojas, maintained his <u>academic pursuits</u> in development economics, authored a critical study, *China: a revolution in agony*/ <u>China: una revolución en agonia (1978)</u> on the post-Mao changes and <u>The murder of Allende And the end of the Chilean way to socialism</u> (Harper and Row, New York, 1975).

The PCR in exile politics was overshadowed by the MIR Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria / Movement of the Revolutionary Left better organised and known within the broader solidarity movement. It had a radical student base strongly influenced by the Cuban experience and the icon appeal of Che Guerava. The old Chilean Communist Party in exile could draw upon the solidarity network based on trade union connections of the pro-Soviet left.

However the PCR did become increasingly active internationally, its profile raised by the activities of its party secretary Jorge Palacios including a U.S. tour by Palacios with the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA promoting the analysis in his book, *Chile: Attempt at "Historic Compromise"*. Also, perhaps more conscious of its lack of public profile, in exile, PRC militants of the People's Front / El Frente del Pueblo produced a monthly publication for ANCHA, Chilean Anti-Fascist News Agency, in Spanish, French, German, Italian and English, used by friendly and fraternal groups. xiv

Former PCR militant Eduarto Artes acknowledges the courage of comrades in confronting the post-coup dictatorship, however he is frank in his analysis of the organisation in this period. Despite all its insights,

"...the process of cooptation and destruction caused by the electoral 'victory' of the UP and its 'peaceful path' also weakened it [the PCR] greatly and caused it great internal divisions, leaving it with little influence among the popular masses and almost isolated from the great fervor and the existing class confrontations" xv

Palacios personal opinion was that:

"While the PCR unquestionably played the role of proletarian vanguard on the ideological level, it did not succeed in doing so on the practical level; that is, in grounding its ideas in a powerful mass movement." Although he refers to the role of the PCR in the peasant struggles led by the PCR -headed Netuain Mapu and as delegates to union congresses, the organisation did not adequately publicise it activities in the struggles in the factories detailed by Palacios.

This he attributes to "various manifestations of sectarianism in the concrete political activity of the PCR and in some of its tactical formulations"

• The target of attack not always centred on the main enemies of the Chilean people.

Given the dominant anti-revisionist positions of the PCR, an all-too common error among such parties was the political error of mechanically transplanting the international positions and rhetoric of the Communist Party of China. This was evident early on as noted in a CIA briefing for propagandists from March 1966 that:

"Pro-Chinese Communist splinters from most of the countries of South America reportedly held a clandestine conference in Santiago, Chile, at the beginning of March. Reported as violently anti-Cuba and anti-Soviet in tone, though final resolution omits Cuba and makes Soviet revisionism the main enemy (above U.S. imperialism), to be fought to the end and without quarter. xvi

This attitude led to the serious mistake in characterising the main imperialist enemy of the Chilean revolution, after all U.S. yankee imperialism was dominant in Chile.

 The exposure and attacks on the opportunist "C"P leadership did not correspond to the level of understanding of the masses, and a clear distinction not always made between leaders and rank-and-file they mislead.

- Often the necessary ideological struggle was confused with practical actions and those who disagreed were shunned with a lack of more active contact with the rank and file of other forces.
- An error was made in not having cadres openly representing the Party on a national level, not only for such contacts but to break the blockade and conspiracy of silence around the RCP, an essentially clandestine organisation that had not adopted the open style of work fully conscious of the temporary nature of bourgeois democracy.
- The necessity of creating broad fronts on a national scale diluted the party's activity and ability to win over ideologically and politically members influenced by bourgeois ideas.

Working amidst the euphoria and illusions of the UP victory and reformist gains, disorientated some members and the fierce hostility aimed against the Allende government by common enemies engendered a defensive attitude at a time of polarization of forces. Complications in the response was that leading Intellectuals of the PCR had long-standing comradely relations with Allende, he had sponsored the Spartacus commemorative meeting of October 1964 for the founding of the People's Republic of China.

Changes in China's foreign policies led to some internal dissension within the organisation fed by and alienated by the seemingly friendly attitude of the Chinese state to the Pinochet dictatorship.xvii

In April 1974, Deng Xsiao-ping made his famous address to the United Nations, the PRC later revealed that "At our first meeting with the CPC following the speech of Deng Xsiao-ping, in August 1974, we made a severe criticism of his opportunist international line. Without a reply to our arguments, the only response we were given was to be told, with the greatest cynicism, that "this is the international line of Chairman Mao". \*\*xviii\*\*

Rothwell notes, a delegation from the PCR, which did not include long-time friend Venturelli, held a bitter meeting with representatives of the CCP in Beijing at the beginning of 1975, and this was the last contact between the two parties. In 1977 the PCR released a public letter denouncing the Chinese government for recognizing Pinochet. xix Party leader Palacios recollected,

"Our relations with the Chinese Party began shortly before the start of the Cultural Revolution and were broken - due to the "inexplicable" attitude of said Party towards the military coup in Chile "xx

The OPEN LETTER TO THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA noted that: "condolences sent by former Prime Minister Chou En-lai to the widow of ex-President Allende, in which he expresses his "sorrow and indignation" at his death, without passing any judgement on his murderers and without mentioning the tens of thousands of workers who were massacred, tortured and imprisoned by the fascist military. News items on various aspects of the repression in Chile appeared only during the month of the coup d'etat and were reported without any commentary or opinion."

This response was contrasted with past experiences "during the Proletarian Cultural Revolution — China consistently practiced a revolutionary international policy against the revisionists. This was the era in China during which one could attend large mass meetings of support for the anti-imperialist struggles of the world's peoples or numerous artistic performances which reflected these struggles, and during which one found propaganda for these struggles on your radio and in your magazines and periodicals. This was the era when Chinese publications reproduced material from the Marxist-Leninist parties regarding their own countries, in which the marionettes of imperialism, the fascists, the racists and the reactionaries like Ne Win, Mobutu and others, were denounced as such, and the traitors to Marxism such as Tito were exposed."xxi

"Naturally, the masses of the Chilean people, knowing of our former political relations with the CPC, ask us for an explanation of your attitude of friendship and cooperation with its hangmen and torturers, an attitude which we cannot explain from a revolutionary point of view and which we are not inclined to justify, because it is profoundly opposed to our resolutely anti-fascist policy and to the very principles of Marxist-Leninist international policy."xxii

The initial alignment of the PCR on the international stage was with the much smaller and isolated burgeoning pro-Albanian constellation of parties, initially attracted by the Party of Labour of Albania's critical policies of the Three Worlds theory. Represented at the 1976 7th Congress of the PLA, the PCR had co-signed the Joint Declaration of Latin American Marxist-Leninist parties.

The following year 1977, Chilean delegates attended and spoke at the various pro-Albanian internationalist rallies in Europe:

- The KPD/ML 3rd Congress rally, February 1977 in Ludwigshafen;
- at the Internationalist Meeting in Athens, March 14, 1977;
- the April 17 Internationalist rally in Rome organised by the Communist Party of Italy (M-L); and
- May 17 Grand rally of proletarian internationalism held in Campo Pequeno in Lisbon at the closing of the 2nd Congress of the Portuguese Communist Party (Reconstructed).

The views of the PCR had some international reach: December 1977 saw the publication of the critical <u>Open Letter</u> from the Revolutionary Communist Party of Chile to the Communist Party of China. XXIII The Spanish edition was initially published in December 1977 of El Pueblo, Issue No. 93, and was subsequently published in French by Ediciones marxista-leninistas. The English text published by The Norman Bethune Institute, was printed by the Bainites' People's Canada Publishing House Toronto, Canada.

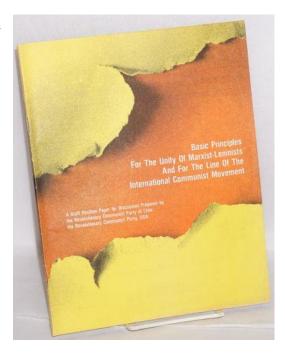
1978 saw the PCR at the Montreal Internationalist rally of the CPC(ML) in April 30<sup>th</sup> 1978, and the CPC(ML) related printing house published in Spanish, documents of the PCR, including the seminal analysis published the following year 1979, Chile: An Attempt at Historic Compromise -The Real Story of the Allende Years, by Jorge Palacios. However by the year's end a new edition was published by Banner Press, Chicago, November 1979, reflecting a major shift in the political alignment of the PCR.

## "A call to unite the forces defending Mao"

In exile of the late 1970s to 1981 the PCR of Chile sought to help regroup the international communist movement, and thinking through the implications of events in China after the rise to power of Deng Xiaoping and his pro-capitalist politics.

The alignment with Albania was temporary; the PCR retained its maoist orientation, involved in the efforts to establish a regroupment of parties disillusion and critical of the successor of Mao Zedong. In July 1980 a Joint communique from the Revolutionary Communist Party of Chile and the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA was issued as "A call to unite the forces defending Mao" xxiv

The PCR Chile also plays an important formative role in the regroupment of Maoists after 1976 presenting, in the view of an admirer, a form of communist thinking and politics that was marked by its both creative and fiercely revolutionary character. A few of the PCR's writings have been broadly



Basic principles for the unity of Marxist-Leninists and for the line of the international Communist movement (1981) Chicago: RCP Publication

available. In the crucial period around 1980, the PCR (and its leading figures in post-coup exile in Europe) actively helped regroup Maoists internationally, in the project that would give rise to the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement.

The PCR were among thirteen signatories in the autumn of 1980 "To The Marxist-Leninists, the Workers, and the Oppressed of All Countries" issued to rally support to reconstruct the international unity of Marxist-Leninists. They drew up a joint declaration, a draft position paper for discussion, with the American RCP, published January 1, 1981 in English, French and Spanish language editions and setting forth, "Basic Principles for the Unity of Marxist-Leninists and for the Line of the International Communist Movement".

The following May, in the first of two editions of *A World to Win* before the founding of RIM, the PCR contributed an article, not surprisingly given its own history, on "Some Particularities of contemporary pro-soviet revisionism". By the time a second article condemning the coup in Poland was published in May 1982, the organisation was no longer functioning.

The **Revolutionary Internationalist Movement** (RIM) as an international Communist organization was founded in March 1984 by various Maoist organisations around the world. RIM's foundation was in Paris, when the leader

of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Chile, and Avakian, the leader of the Revolutionary Communist Party of the United States was also in exile in Paris, contributing to a decision made on the founding location for security measures. However, the first edition (new series) of *A World to Win* in 1985 carried a generic article on "street battle in Santiago" and the Partido Communista Revolucionario de Chile was missing from a listing in issue four of twenty-one participating parties and organisations of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement from March 1984. \*\*XVI

Further reading:

Archive material from PCR Chile

http://www.archivochile.com/pp/pcr.html

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iii Alexander, Robert J. (1998) *International Maoism in the Developing World.* Westport: Praegar publishers pp81-93

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>™</sup> Halperin 1965:244

V David Benquis, "comrade Velásquez" in the period of bourgeois democracy, "comrade Ernesto" during the fascist military dictatorship, or "the skinned" as his comrades called him colloquially, died in 1978 from cancer.

vi Open Letter of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Chile to the Communist Party of China (1978) Toronto: The Norman Bethune Institute: p 3

vii It consists of the remnants of the Reinoso-Palma-Cares group that was expelled from the Communist Party in 1950. In 1950 this dissident Communist group had fused with Enrique Sepulveda's dissident Trotskyists to form Vanguardia Revolucionaria Marxista. Halperin 1965:245

See congratulatory speech by 'George Diaz', head of delegation of the PCR in *Communist and Workers' Parties and Marxist-Leninist groups greet the fifth congress of the Party of Labor of Albania* (1966) Tirana: Naim Frashëri pp174-181 https://archive.org/details/communistworkers00part

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xxiv First published in *Revolutionary Worker,* July 18, 1980. https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-5/rcp-rcp.htm

xxv Jorge Palacios, *Del Mapocho al Sena* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2001), 134–7. A fictionalized autobiographical account of his exile in France.

xxvi A World To Win #4 1984 p2. All the issues of AWTW are now posted here at http://bannedthought.net/International/RIM/index.htm