

LMM/012/0003/7

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Reg

I'm sorry some of this is
a bit skimped, and sorry about
the typing mistakes - but I
think it gives a clear idea
of what's there.

A.

Libération 10 March 1980:

LONGO MAÏ: FROM ULTRA-LEFT COMMUNE TO SWISS MULTINATIONAL

In 1973, 30 young people bought a piece of fallow land at Forcalquier (Haute Provence). 7 years later, their cooperative has given birth to a little multinational with its headquarters in Switzerland.

Longo Maï (Occitan: "So long as it lasts"): cooperative in Forcalquier, former capital of Haute-Provence, now a town of 3,500 inhabitants. The original commune was formed from two groups arising out of the student movement of the late 60's:

- a) *Hydra*, founded in 1970 in University of Basle; forbade use of drugs and engaged in serious activities with young apprentices; members chiefly from solid bourgeois background in Basle, eg two brothers, Nicki and Thomas Busch, sons of the famous violinist; Gotthard Klinger, son of neurosurgeon, now a director of Hoffman Laroche pharmaceutical group.
- b) *Spartacus*, founded around the same time in Austria; school-students' movement, members generally from more modest background than those of *Hydra*. In Vienna they got to know Roland Perrot who was to become "the guru of Forcalquier". *Spartacus* members travelled to Switzerland and set up links with *Hydra* which also extended to Germany.

December 1972: c.100 activists, mainly from *Hydra* and *Spartacus* but also members of youth movements from France & Switzerland, met in Basle. From this meeting resulted the analysis on which Longo Maï is based: series of theses on European crisis and youth unemployment, need to recreate eco-system based on production cooperatives. *Hydra* and *Spartacus* were dissolved. In June 1973, 300 acres of fallow land were bought near Forcalquier. The money was raised with the help of parents: the Busch brothers, who had just inherited their father's money, contributed 75% of the sum needed. 25 "pioneers" moved into Forcalquier and began work in the early summer of 1973.

The collective now own heavy machinery: a mechanical digger, several tractors, 3 small harvesters, enormous ploughs... some bought second hand in Switzerland w money collected from an enormous network of sympathisers.

There has obviously been considerable development work, and hundreds and hundred of young people have passed through either on summer work-camps or trying to join more permanently during the "back to the land" period of 1974 -78. Nevertheless, the commune does not give the impression of an active farm; local opinion is that although a lot of land has been cleared, the enterprise is an economic failure.

Local people were at first suspicious, now increasingly opposed to Longo Maï, which has upset the local economy [not clear how].

The collective claims to have made every effort to fit in with local community: exchange of work, assistance, interest-free loans to farmers and traders, creation of jobs eg by setting up cotton spinnery near Briançon. However, nobody can give figures for the jobs created; local opinion has it

that only cooperatives directly set up and run by members of Longo Mai really operate; all the rest have been doomed to failure.

There has been spectacular development since the establishment of the pilot scheme: a cooperative in the Ardèche, one in the Grisons (Switzerland), one in Austria; a spinnery near Briançon. Since 1977, many purchases of real estate in Forcalquier itself: 5 ruined buildings, a café, and laundry, a garage. 3 houses and a bar in the hamlet of Pierrerue, 5km away; this hamlet has now become a "people's tourist village". "So that we can see our friends and supporters" says Roland Perrot. This financial power worries local inhabitants, and opposition is growing to the "destruction" of the region.

Meeting in labour exchange of Chateau-Arnoux, 3 Feb. 1980, called by "Regional Action and Study Group". A paper circulated by Longo Mai dissidents claimed that the cooperative existed to fulfil the delusions of grandeur of Roland Perrot - first sign of any opposition from within.

The Strategy of collections

First indications from Forcalquier were that the cooperatives set up in France had never been self-sufficient. Apart from money provided by parents, funds had also been collected on a country-wide promotional tour (of Switzerland) by horse-drawn caravan in the summer of 1973. This was successful in bringing in money.

There was a support committees' journal, a network of sympathisers and contacts set up in villages after the caravan had been through. A card index was set up. The publicity campaign was helped by the French Interior Minister's expulsion of the Swiss and Austrians from Forcalquier in June 1973. Card-index of contacts grew rapidly.

2 main growth-points: a) establishment of spinnery nr Briançon in 1975; LM succeeded in interesting 14 Catholic priests and protestant pastors in the project, therefore thousands of people contributed financially; b) during the drought of 1976, LM launched "drought tax" throughout Switzerland; in three months, 80,000 people contributed 400,000 Swiss francs.

All the important purchases (land, machinery) were made possible only by big campaigns centred on Switzerland. There is therefore no mystery about LM - just a support chain: activity-collection-card-index...new activity...etc. All proof of skillful marketing techniques.

Nothing extraordinary about this, except that this regular cycle presupposes a "contract of confidence": confidence that money will be well used, that loans will be promptly repaid. After years of trial and error both in projects and in money-raising techniques, LM came of age in 1978. In that year the card-index reached 120,000 names.

Pierre Benoit

CEDRI DOCUMENT 10a:

(i) Profile of Roland Perrot: 50-ish, charismatic, son of Provençal mother and father who fought in International Brigades; some doubt re his rôle in 1968 student movement (suggestion that he may have been with rather than against the "Katangans" - ?=anti-student security brigade), Leading figure in *Spartacus* in Vienna 1969 onwards.

(ii) *Women and Ewes*: interview with Dominique, former member of Longo Mai cooperative. Commune based on complete loyalty to the group and total break with the individual's past. Recalls exploitation of women, partly by group of young men surrounding Perrot: this group lived apart from the rest, with better conditions and better food. Women were relegated to housework and breeding. Perrot: women are like ewes, only profitable if they produce two lambs per year. Objections swept aside in group sessions; women interiorised the criticisms made of them.