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# THE FALL OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC



# THE FALL OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC

*By*  
D. N. PRITT, K.C.

"Look on thy country, look on fertile France,  
And see the cities and the towns defaced  
By wasting ruin of the cruel foe . . . . .

"See, see the pining malady of France;  
Behold the wounds, the most unnatural wounds,  
Which thou thyself hast *given*, her wo'ful breast."  
*(Henry VI, Part I, Act III, Scene iii.)*

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## INTRODUCTION

The rich and tragic drama of the collapse of France in the spring of 1940 has inspired a number of people qualified by experience as eye-witnesses to write narratives and chronicles for which historians will be grateful in the near future. Indeed, we may all be grateful now for enlightenment on the course of the culminating events which, emerging suddenly through the murk of censorship, amazed most of us more than they should have done.

I offer this book in *no* sense in competition with these chronicles, but rather as a short historical analysis. I believe that, even so soon after the climax of the collapse, it is possible—and urgently necessary—to look at these events as part of a historic whole. The tragic events of less than a year ago; the crumpling up of resistance before the invading armies; the supersession of Generalissimo Gamelin by Weygand, who was more concerned with "the internal foe", the French people, than with their external enemy; the miserable breakdown of the Paul Reynaud Government; the transformation of the one-time "hero of Verdun", the aged Marshal Petain, into the capitulator of Compiègne; the abolition of the French Republic; the substitution for "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" of the slogans of Vichy's "National Revolution" (i.e. Fascist counter-Revolution); the "spirit of collaboration" with their Nazi masters shown by the kaleidoscopic government of Vichy—and all the rest of this miserable tale that is still unfolding, cannot be taken by itself. It followed closely upon another series of events,

upon the destruction of democracy in France, the suppression of working-class organisations, the taking away of the rights of the people, the wholesale disenfranchisement of constituencies and municipalities, the imprisonment of members of the French Parliament and of trade union and political party leaders. It followed hard upon the suppression of newspapers, the immuring of anti-Fascists in concentration camps, the fettering of the Press, and the savage censorship of views and opinions. It was a late act in a drama which was in progress before the war began.

If one carries one's mind back far enough—it need not be many years—to see the logical development of France's transition to Fascism, it will appear not as something unexpected, but as a process inevitable—and as terrifying—as a Greek tragedy. To express the point briefly by an illustration, we must not imagine that a gang of corrupt politicians, happening to be in office, brought France to acute disaster; the truth is that the chronic disaster of a decaying social system inevitably brought—among other misfortunes—a gang of corrupt politicians to France.

We cannot afford to neglect any lessons or to make any mistakes. We cannot even afford to be ignorant. For our own future's sake, we must understand these events, lest at some stage we find a section of our ruling class attempting to commit the same crimes as came to pass in France.

D. N. PRITT

## CHAPTER I

### THE THIRD REPUBLIC AND THE GROWTH OF FRENCH IMPERIALISM

*What was the French Republic?—The Commune—The Compromise Republic—Growth of Colonial Empire—The Entente Cordiale—The Triple Alliance—War,*

When France collapsed in June 1940 its sudden ruin appeared on the surface to be almost inexplicable. The consequence of the collapse in the course of the war was soon clear enough, but its causes have not been satisfactorily explained in this country. Indeed our public opinion soon reached the mood of thinking that France had become a thing of the past, and that for the time being the less said or thought about it the better for one's peace of mind.

But although France, as we have thought we knew it, is a thing of the past, the French people have not gone out of existence. They have a future, and a future intimately bound up with ours, and neither their future nor ours will be attained by a reliance upon or a resuscitation of old ways and old methods. The first step to the better future will be such an understanding of the old ways, of the causes of the French collapse, as will enable the new France of the people to find the path of revolutionary revival.

To answer the question "What caused the collapse of France?" we must first be clear what was this France **that** collapsed. What was this French Republic that has

been repudiated by the men of Vichy-France, the present ruling group of Petain? What was the rottenness within it that made possible a collapse so spectacular and so sudden?

To outward seeming the French Republic at the beginning of the war was firmly based and substantial. It was the Third Republic of France, and claimed to be in the direct line of succession to the Second Republic of 1848—51 and to the First Republic of the great French Revolution a century and a half ago. Its flag was the tricolour of the French Revolution; it had the old motto, "Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite", and its national anthem was the Marseillaise which had been sung by the people and the soldiers of revolutionary France. Its State festival held annually on the 14th July commemorated the taking of the Bastille, customarily regarded as the beginning of the French Revolution; each year the 14th July in France was as big a date as the 4th July in the United States of America, commemorating the Declaration of Independence. In 1939 this 14th July was celebrated as the Centcinquantenaire—the 150th anniversary of the taking of the Bastille. This was only six weeks before the outbreak of war, and in July 1940, one year later, following on a military defeat and an armistice, there was no longer a French Republic, there was no tricolour flag, the motto had been repudiated, and France politically as it has been known within the memory of almost all men living had ceased to exist.

What were the causes of this very rapid transformation? Of course, military defeats have occurred before, but they were seldom so rapid in a war waged on this scale; and perhaps never before has a military defeat been followed so swiftly by a startling transformation

of this kind. Some critics have suggested the answer that the fatal weakness lay in the clash between two traditions which had persisted in France through the last 150 years—the tradition of the French Revolution on the one hand and on the other the tradition of those refugees, or *emigres*, who established themselves at Coblenz under the protection of the Prussian armies and from there sought to overthrow the Revolution.

There is a superficial truth in the picture of the two traditions, that of revolutionary France and that of Coblenz. But it does not go very deep, for it was a Minister of the French Republic like Laval, it was soldiers of the French Republic like Petain and Weygand, far more than the small groups of Royalists who adhered to the traditions of Coblenz, who were immediately responsible for this change. Indeed, we may say that among those responsible were some who clearly derived from the other tradition—for example, the trade union leader, Rene Belin, now a member of the Vichy Government, who only a few short weeks before had been closely associated on terms of the greatest amity with some of our own trade union leaders. Moreover, General de Gaulle, who became the head of the organisation of Frenchmen in various parts outside the continental territory of France, had never been regarded as an extreme democrat or upholder of the traditions of the Revolution, but was understood, so far as his political views were earlier known, to belong to the reactionary wing of French politics. Therefore this simple picture—the tradition of Coblenz now victorious in association with the Prussians—does not carry the search for truth very far. We must *go* deeper into the matter and examine more closely the foundations of the Third Republic.

## THE ORIGIN OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC

The French Republic arose from the events of 1870-1 (the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune of Paris), and was based upon the suppression of the Commune. The inner drive to the Emperor Louis Napoleon's disastrous war with the Kingdom of Prussia came from the difficulty of holding down, or at any rate holding the allegiance of, the working-class and the people of France. This internal preoccupation which brought the Empire to war was at the same time the hindrance to its victory. The leaders of the Second Empire could not fight their external enemy effectively because of their greater fear of the internal enemy.

The war resulted in a complete debacle; the Empire collapsed like a pack of cards; the Emperor fled to England, to end his days at Chislehurst; and an Armistice was concluded after a few months (against the wish of the people of Paris) by a provincial Government. This government, headed by Thiers, "that monstrous gnome", represented the interests of the rich men of France. But the people of Paris, organised in the National Guard—all Parisians capable of bearing arms being enrolled—elected a Commune. Within a few weeks of the Armistice there were thus two bodies claiming authority in France, while the Prussian soldiers lay in their camps around or near Paris, and also occupied large portions of the whole country.

The government headed by Thiers, with its seat at Versailles, was anxious to conclude a rapid peace with Bismarck in order to deal with the armed people of Paris organised in their Commune. Within a few days of the election of the Commune, on the 18th March 1871, the Parisians were confronted with the threat of armed repression by the Versailles government of Thiers. The people's task of

building up a real Republic and a new type of democracy thus had to be undertaken at the same moment as it prepared for the Civil War that had been thrust upon it. That civil war was of brief duration; by the 28th May the Commune had been defeated and its supporters treated with extraordinary savagery. Nevertheless, in its brief life of seventy days it had given an example of a new kind of state which has been regarded as a pattern by subsequent generations of revolutionaries, and was celebrated at the time in the well-known "Address of the International Working Men's Association". This Address, written by Karl Marx, and signed, amongst others, by the representatives of the English trade unions on the General Council of that First International, ended with the words:

"Working men's Paris, with its Commune, will be for ever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working-class. Its exterminators, history has already nailed to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priest will not avail to redeem them."

#### THE COMMUNE IS SUPPRESSED

The Commune, as I have said, was suppressed with extraordinary ferocity—or so it seemed to the people of the latter half of the nineteenth century, to the generations which did not live to see the greater ferocities of these last twenty-five years. No less than 30,000 men, women, and children of the working population of Paris were massacred in cold blood. The massacre is commemorated in the famous *Mur des Federes*, which many British visitors to Paris have visited. The survivors were transported in thousands to Devil's Island and other parts of French Guiana.

## MONARCHISTS ESTABLISH A REPUBLIC

After the suppression of the Commune the question of the new kind of government and new form of state to be established in France remained unsettled for a number of years. The Chamber which had been elected was reactionary and Monarchist. Yet this Monarchist Chamber, which had drowned in blood the Socialist and democratic opposition of the working people of the capital, did not set up a monarchy. Its members were in a dilemma. On principle opposed to a republic, they yet dared not set up a monarchy. And so, as Shakespeare says, "Letting 'I dare not' wait upon \*I would', like the poor cat i' the adage", they deferred and postponed a decision for four years. There were difficulties also in any attempt to reconcile the conflicting claims of the Legitimists, the Orleanists, and the Bonapartists. But the greatest difficulty lay in the opposition of the people of France. The Orleans monarchy of 1830 had gone down before the Second Republic of 1848; the Second Empire of 1852 to 1870 had resulted in the disappearance of the Empire and the establishment of the Commune. A monarchy, it was known, might involve decade after decade of suppression of popular movements, with the chance that suppression might not always be effective and that the revolution might once again break through. Accordingly in 1875 those who then held power in France decided that France should be a republic, and the Chamber so voted. But this decision was still regarded by some of its authors as purely provisional, pending the arrival of a better opportunity to establish a monarchy. The President of France, Marshal MacMahon, actively strove to prepare the way for a return to monarchical conditions; and, even after he was defeated in this attempt in 1877, the Monarchists still continued to regard the Republic as a

temporary evil which was becoming more and! more ripe for overthrow, and made many attempts to restore the monarchy in France.

#### A COMPROMISE REPUBLIC

I have dealt on this at some length because it is essential to understand that the Third Republic was in its origin and essence a curious compromise, very different from the Republic of the great French Revolution or the Second Republic of 1848. This compromise can be best stated by saying that the ruling group of the rich men of France tried! to find a form of state which would give them the best chance of remaining powerful and becoming still richer, while reducing to the minimum the danger of a popular rising. The second consideration forbade the establishment of monarchy at the outset, and in succeeding years impelled them to concede additional forms that were more and more republican. The invisible monarchy of Finance renounced the monarchical form and operated through republican forms. Whilst a new generation grew up who, knowing nothing but the Republic, cherished a certain loyalty to republican forms, the French Republic represented in essence an endeavour to make the mass of the people rest content with the shadow of republican forms whilst the substance of power was preserved to the rich minority. In the *Cambridge Modern History*, published in 1910, M. Emile Bourgeois lays stress on the compromise nature of the then forty-year-old Republic, balanced uneasily between the pressure of the reactionary rich, to whom were assimilated the monarchists and the clericals, and the pressure of the working-class together with some sections of the peasantry and the urban populations.

## THE CONSTITUTION OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC

It is not easy to give to Englishmen, accustomed to the political framework of Great Britain, a brief and clear description of the essential political structure of France under the French Republic. National differences alone are substantial enough to make mutual comprehension difficult, and there are various other differences between these two political systems which increase the contrasts. It is perhaps sufficient for present purposes to say that, while Britain and France were both political "democracies", the French state was on the whole more "democratic" than Britain, largely because the French legislature, to which the Cabinet was responsible, was regularly re-elected at four-year intervals, and there was in practice no question of the Premier requesting the President to dissolve it before the end of the four years. In Britain, the power of the Government to confront rebellious or free-speaking Members of Parliament with the threat that if the Government is not supported it will ask for the dissolution of Parliament, and will thereby automatically inflict upon those M.P.'s the heavy cost of an election and the risk of losing their seats, greatly increases the power of the executive, and thus diminishes the control of the elected legislature.

## PARTIES IN FRANCE

Any modern Constitution, written or unwritten, is of course conditioned in practice by the organisation of political parties. The English-speaking world has built up in the course of the last two centuries what is known as the Two-Party system, though in point of fact this is often a three-party system wherein the Third-Party endeavours to hold the balance or to combine with one or other of the two main parties. In France, on the other hand, the tendency

was for each main separate interest to be represented by a separate party. Thus there were, at any time during this century, something up to a dozen separate parties in the French Parliament. It is unnecessary (especially now) to give a detailed list of those parties, particularly as they frequently coalesced and as members often shifted from one to another. In general, however, it would be correct to accept a general tripartite grouping of Left Parties, Central Parties, and Right Parties. Classed as being to the Left of the Chamber but not of it were, up to a few years ago, the Communist Party of France, and classed to the Right of the Chamber but not of it were the Monarchists and latterly the Fascists. The Right parties represented very largely financial interests, the Bank of France, the big trusts, and the Clericals. The Centre, which corresponded roughly to Left Conservatives in Britain, could combine either with the Right parties or Left parties to form a government. M. Poincare was a typical representative of the Right Centre. Of the Left parties the chief party up to a few years ago were the Radical-Socialists, corresponding to Liberals in this country. M. Edouard Herriot and M. Daladier were typical representatives of that party, and so also in an Ishmaelite fashion was Georges Clemenceau. The Socialist Party of France, itself resulting from a coalition of smaller Socialist groups, came into being in the early years of the century and was led by Jaures, Marcel Cachin, Jules Guesde, Edouard Vaillant and others up till 1914. It differed then and differs now from the English Labour Party in its structure, in that it was composed entirely of individual members; for the trade unions of France were not only not part of the French Socialist Party but were opposed to participation in politics. This attitude to Parliamentary politics was called "syndicalism", from the French word for trade union, "syndicat".

It will be *seen*, later that much of this description, as of the description of the Constitution itself, is only correct on the surface, and that the real attitude and policy of parties often differed very much in practice from their theoretical positions.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF FRENCH IMPERIALISM

In my book, *Must the War Spread?* published in 1940, I dealt at some length with the nature of a modern industrial state, and I explained how it is that real power in such a state gradually falls into the grasp of a very small handful of very rich men, masters of finance and industry, who own the means of life and death and so control the destinies of the working people to whom they concede—or from whom they withhold—the means of earning a livelihood. Here I need only say that the real nature of a modern industrial state is found to be fundamentally the same—notwithstanding all the differences in state forms—whether it be in the United Kingdom, or the Kingdom of Italy; in the republics of France and the United States; in the Germany of Hitler, of the Weimar Republic, or of the Hohenzollern monarchy. It was in the last quarter of the nineteenth century that France was becoming just such a modern industrial state; and the tendency of such states to develop into colonial empires was also demonstrated by France after the establishment of the Republic in 1875. She had acquired certain colonial possessions in the Americas in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, but the only addition to French territory during the early part of the nineteenth century was the acquisition of Algiers in the year 1830. In the early 'eighties, however, under Jules Ferry, the new Republic seized Tunis with the full acquiescence of the German Chancellor, Bismarck, who reckoned that in this way there would be a standing cause of quarrel between the

French Republic and the new kingdom of Italy, itself beginning to press towards colonial expansion. This was followed by the acquisition of the Chinese province of Tongking and of the former feudatory empires of China, Annam and Cambodia. These, together with Cochin China and Laos under various mixed forms of government, constituted what we may still call French Indo-China, though recent events make its future destiny uncertain.

In 1890, the annexation by France of Madagascar, which lies off the east coast of Africa, and is along with Borneo and New Guinea among the largest of tropical islands, was confirmed by the acquiescence of Britain (which for its part took Zanzibar) and other powers. About the same time in the West of Africa the French possessions on the River Niger were expanded into Dahomey, Timbuktu, and Senegal. From West Africa a push was made in the late 'nineties across by Lake Chad towards the head waters of the Nile, where the French flag was hoisted at Fashoda just before Lord Kitchener of Khartoum had ascended the Nile to that point. He compelled the French to retire from the upper Nile and there were bitter feelings between the rich men of France and the rich men of Britain over the incident. The *Daily Mail*, then recently established, threatened to "roll France in blood and mud".

#### THE ENTENTE CORDIALE

The growing power of Germany, which is dealt with later, led in the opening years of the twentieth century to the Anglo-French Entente Cordiale. This entente (the Lansdowne-Cambon Agreement of April 8th, 1904) was accompanied by important territorial arrangements. France resigned all pretension to a control of Egypt and gave up certain of her rights in the Newfoundland fisheries. In return she was confirmed in her sphere of influence in

Morocco and in parts of Africa, while in Polynesia certain of her claims were conceded; and in the case of New Caledonia an Anglo-French condominium was set up. (It was felt that this condominium would at once diminish local cannibalism and mitigate clashes between the larger cannibal states.) In 1907 the French Republic annexed three provinces of Siam, which that state, under its new name of Thailand, naturally sought to recover in 1940-1.

This colonial expansion carried the colonial population under the French flag from some six millions in 1876 to fifty-six millions in 1899, a figure destined, of course, to be further very largely increased as the result of the war of 1914-18. By the end of the century the French held the second largest colonial empire, four times as large as the German and nearly six times as large as the American.

Thus before the war of 1914-18, nearly nine-tenths of the colonies belonging to the Great Powers were in either British or French hands. By the opening years of the twentieth century practically all the "unoccupied"<sup>1</sup> territories (that is to say, territories not ruled by developed governments capable of resisting European forces) had been seized and turned into colonies. There were also semi-colonial countries such as the Ottoman Empire, China, and Persia, on which longing looks were cast by the great imperialist powers. In substance, from 1900 onwards, the partition of the colonisable world was sufficiently complete to make a redivision of territories the only means by which the younger imperialist powers could obtain what they considered their "fair share"; and such a redivision could only take place by means of surrender or war. Accordingly the twentieth century, beginning with the South African "War of 1899-1902, has already become the period of the greatest wars for over a thousand years.

## THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE

The French Republic, from the beginning of its period of colonial expansion, had been acutely aware of the growing power of Germany and of its inability to withstand German pressure if it stood alone. It sought accordingly for alliances. In the early 'nineties an alliance was concluded between the French Republic and Tsarist Russia. In 1904 the Anglo-French Entente Cordiale was established, M. Delcasse and Edward the Seventh playing a leading role in its establishment. In 1904 war broke out between Russia and Japan, with the latter of whom Britain had already in 1902 concluded a military and naval alliance. It was Delcasse's object to prevent Britain being ranged against Tsarist Russia, as the Anglo-Japanese alliance made more than possible. He was successful in this, and when the echoes of the Russo-Japanese War died away amid the tumult of the Russian Revolution of 1905, steps began to be taken for the bringing about of friendly relations between Britain and Tsarist Russia. A large loan was raised on the French Stock Exchange to enable the Tsar to crush the Russian Revolution, and for the same purpose a Russian loan was raised on the London Stock Exchange, for the first time for very many years.

By 1907 treaties were concluded between the Tsar and the British Government, and the grouping of the three powers, usually called the Triple Entente, had come definitely into existence. That France was thus largely putting herself in pawn to Britain is clear enough now, but it may not have been clear at the time to any but the most farseeing. (Similar speculations on the Anglo-American friendship are already rife.)

Against whom was this entente directed? It was against the Triple Alliance of the German Empire, the

Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Kingdom of Italy. That it was moving in this direction was already clear by the end of 1905. An attempt of the German Government to gain a "place in the sun" in Morocco had been remitted to the International Conference of Algenciras, and was there frustrated through the whole-hearted advocacy and support of France's case by the representative of Britain. It was a diplomatic defeat for Germany. Sir Arthur Nicolson, of the Foreign Office, who was instrumental in bringing about this defeat, was then sent to St. Petersburg to conduct negotiations with the Tsar's Government. These negotiations were successful. They entailed arrangements about the status of Afghanistan (without the consent of its ruler) and about the spheres of influence in Tibet, and were accompanied by the partition of Persia. The French Republic gained nothing from the alliance with Tsardom and its large loans to Russia, except what it hoped would be military security. Indeed, in the matter of colonial expansion after the Triple Entente had been concluded, it was chiefly occupied with the extension and consolidation of its position in Morocco, which entailed pretty hard fighting on the part of the Foreign Legion.

#### TRIPLE ENTENTE—TRIPLE ALLIANCE—WAR

The long-expected war between the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance nearly broke out in 1911 at the time of the Agadir incident. In July of that year the German gunboat *Panther* was sent to the Moroccan port of Agadir. Enormous tension resulted; for three months Europe was on the brink of war; the British Navy was mobilised; the railways in the south were guarded by soldiers. At length in the late autumn an accommodation was reached; the Germans withdrew from Morocco, receiving territorial compensations from France in Equatorial

## Africa.

Once the agreement was reached, Italy, having previously concluded a secret treaty (the Treaty of Coccenigi) to which the Tsar was a party, launched its attack on the Turkish provinces of Tripoli and Cyrenaica, now together called Libya. It was at once the beginning of a new partitioning of the Ottoman Empire, and an indication that the Entente were prepared to allow Italy a free hand in return for favours to come.

Meantime, however, the Triple Alliance had been expanding. The Hapsburg Monarchy, with the consent and backing of Germany, had annexed in 1908 the Turkish provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had been under its administration since 1878. This bore hard upon Serbia, which looked to Tsarist Russia for protection. The clash between the two groupings of European Powers arose in the end not from Morocco, as might have been earlier expected, but from the Balkans. Moreover, the attention of the German financiers and capitalists who had been baulked in Morocco was increasingly directed towards the Balkans and Asia Minor, crystallising in the project of the Berlin-Baghdad Railway.

The centre of gravity in the European quarrel had thus shifted largely to the conflicting interests of Britain and Germany in the Middle East, to their naval rivalry and struggle for commercial markets. Once, however, the trouble began in the Balkans with the shooting of the Archduke Ferdinand, the chain of alliances involved France, which found itself at war with Germany on the 1st August 1914.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PERIOD AFTER 1918

*New Balance of Power—France's efforts to dominate Europe—•  
Her weaknesses—The 200 Families—The World Economic  
Crisis.*

The French were nearly defeated in the war of 1914-18; but in the end they and their Allies came out as victors. The British claimed that their naval blockade was the cause of Germany's defeat. The Americans claimed the palm for their assistance in men, materials, and<sup>1</sup> money. The real head of the German armies, General Ludendorff, in his analysis gives no credit to either of them, but blames the effect of the spread of Bolshevism in the German armies and civilian population. The French Press claimed that it was the French and Allied arms under the French Generalissimo, Marshal Foch, and their Premier, Georges Clemenceau ("Pere-la-Victoire") which broke the German resistance.

But, whatever its real cause, the victory itself seemed—oh! cruel illusion!—complete, crushing, and final, and the ruling class of France was determined to enjoy the full fruits of it. It brought to France an expansion of territories and spheres of influence. Not only were Alsace and Lorraine recovered after fifty years' alienation, not only were the West African colonies of Germany divided between the United Kingdom and France, but the fertile region of Syria was carved out of the Ottoman Empire.

## THE NEW BALANCE OF POWER

In addition the political structure and balance of power in Europe was altered to the advantage of France. The Austro-Hungarian monarchy was dismembered. The great Hapsburg dominions, with a population of over fifty millions, were parcelled up into an Austrian Republic stretching from Vienna westwards to the Alps, a Hungary (under a regent) restricted to a small portion of the old Hungarian Kingdom, a new state of Czechoslovakia comprising the old provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, and in the east Ruthenia, and portions of the new states of Poland and Yugoslavia; some territories also went to Rumania.

Germany, in addition to Alsace-Lorraine, lost valuable industrial mining territory to Poland, and was separated into two parts by the Polish Corridor running to the new Free City of Danzig, whilst Schleswig-Holstein was handed back to Denmark, and the district of Eupen-Malmedy was given to Belgium; the Saar too was lost for some years. Similarly, large territories were taken away from what had once been the dominions of the Tsar; Bessarabia was seized by Rumania, and West Ukraine and Western Byelorussia by Poland, whilst new states—Lithuania, Latvia, Esthonia, Finland—were carved out in the Baltic. At the time of the Treaty of Versailles, still larger portions in the Caucasus, Middle Asia, Archangel, and in the Far East were in the hands of the Allies or under their control; and hopes were entertained of still more extensive partitions. Central and Eastern Europe had thus to a large extent been "balkanised".

All this appeared to the French ruling class to be greatly to their advantage. Instead of the Concert of Europe there were now left as Great Powers, besides France,

only Britain and Italy. The latter was only a great power in appearance; its ambitions had been baulked at Versailles, and the French Government felt no need to consult its interests. In continental Europe there seemed every chance that the French Republic would be supreme, disposing of the destinies of its client states and of its former enemies. But it had one anxiety; its population was a stationary forty millions while Germany already numbered sixty-five. Security for the future, in a military sense, was therefore essential; given this, a rosy prospect of exploitation seemed to open up.

#### THE SEARCH FOR SECURITY

How was security to be achieved? Like most ruling groups, the French were of course unable to calculate in any terms save those of force and counter-force, which are bound to betray one side and quite likely to betray both. The policy of force put forward by Marshal Foch was to make France's effective frontier the Rhine and to hold the left bank of that river, by creating there a buffer state mainly under French control. To this the Allies would not agree, and Clemenceau had to accept the less ambitious policy of force represented by the occupation of the Rhine bridgeheads, the demilitarisation of the Rhineland, the fifteen years' occupation of the Saar, and other similar measures laid down in the Treaty of Versailles, *plus* a guarantee for ever of French "security" by the force of the U.S.A. and the United Kingdom. But when President Wilson returned home, the guarantee was repudiated by the U.S.A., whereupon the British Government pointed out that the failure of the U.S.A. to implement the guarantee automatically released it from its obligations. The French Government, deprived of this guarantee, naturally turned to relying all the more on the force represented by its

system of alliances with the lesser powers, with Belgium to the west of Germany, with Poland to the east, and in the south with the Little Entente consisting of Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Yugoslavia. It supplied these its lesser allies with munitions and loans, and sought to make of them at once a market for exploitation and a bulwark against the resuscitation of Germany.

Lastly, France regarded the League of Nations as constituted in 1919 not as a new framework for the maintenance of peace, but as an element of force which she with her client states and Britain with its client states could control and use; that body in its earlier days was indeed little more than an instrument of the Supreme Allied Council.

#### FRANCE SEEKS TO DOMINATE

The policy of the victors of Versailles in those days was of course not only to hold down and exploit their beaten rival Germany, but also to encircle and if possible to strangle the new Soviet Socialist Republic. In this "balkanised" Europe, with these two objectives, the ruling class of France set themselves to play the leading role.

The most striking example of French efforts to dominate was the invasion of the Ruhr by the French Army in January 1923. Germany having defaulted on reparation payments, the French Government, under Raymond Poincare as Premier, decided to seize the rich industrial valley of the Ruhr. The German Government had as yet no possibility of military resistance, but it tried every other means, including general strikes. A catastrophic fall in the value of the Mark took place and Germany was brought to the brink of social revolution. The Franc was affected; the spectre of Communism began to stalk the Rhineland and Europe as a whole. American and British

banking capital, hostile to any attempt of the French Republic to secure European hegemony, profoundly alarmed by the danger of revolution in Germany, and preferring to risk the revived imperialist rivalry of a German capitalism, helped to its feet by themselves, intervened to bring about the restoration of "normal" capitalism in Europe. The scheme for reparations called the Dawes Plan was elaborated, the French capitalists accepted it willy-nilly, and in 1924 the troops were withdrawn.

#### RIVALRIES IN EUROPE

The French blamed the British and American bankers and monopolists for this defeat. They had some justification; for it is plain that the French policies, once they looked like giving France domination in continental Europe, were looked<sup>1</sup> upon with disfavour by Britain, which had its own "balance of power" policy, and by America, whose normal aloofness from the affairs of Europe could always be overcome by any peril of revolutionary developments. Britain, which at the beginning had a common concern with France in crushing Germany and attempting to strangle the infant Soviet republic, was not prepared to see France become the leading power in Europe. She thought, naturally enough, that it was better for her to hold this position herself; she had worked to maintain it through a tangle of conferences and treaties, such as the Locarno Treaties, an early form of the long-projected Four-Power Pact. She was therefore willing to lend a hand to Germany against the interests of France, in order to subordinate them both to British interests. A four-power pact would give, her the opportunity, as leading the quadrilateral, to deal with the U.S.S.R. on the one hand and the U.S.A. on the other; and France's bid for a leading role in Europe hindered these plans.

The U.S.A. on the other hand was not likely to take steps against France which would yield Britain the primacy in Western Europe; on many occasions—such as the Washington Treaties of 1922 and the assessment of State debts—the U.S.A. tipped the scales against Britain. But at the same time her old friendship with France, based on the memory of Lafayette and the American Revolution, did not lead her to tolerate French interference with her major interests, and on more than one occasion—such as the Dawes Plan and the Hoover Moratorium—she was willing to work against France in her own interests provided she did not thereby tip the scales too far in favour of Britain.

#### THE UNSOUND BASIS OF FRENCH IMPERIALISM

It is thus easy to see that British and American financiers and monopolists were willing to foil the schemes of France; but it is important to understand why they were able to do so. Politics depends on power; and an examination of the basis of French Imperialism will show where its power failed.

The weakness of France was inherent in its capitalist 'structure. To maintain one's place as a great imperialist power required more than a mere military victory brought about by a favourable conjunction of circumstances and alliances. As early as 1920, when France was still cock-a-hoop with victory, a British observer, writing in the Labour Research Department's monthly circular, pointed out that there were only five possible centres of world power in the twentieth century, namely, America, dominated by the United States; the British Empire; Central Europe dominated by Germany; Russia; and the Far East. And as the years went on this became more and more clear.

With the transformation in Russia there were left only

four great capitalist centres. France could not constitute one of these; it had not that advanced technique, essential to full imperialist development, which was the mark of defeated Germany as well as of Britain and America; its heavy industries were not so highly developed as theirs; its resources were in every way more restricted; and the French Empire could not compare as a field of exploitation with the rich possessions of Britain.

Above all, the degree of concentration of capital was far inferior in France to that of Germany. A few figures will make this clear. In the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century, and in the twentieth, the rate of development of productive power in France was slower than in the United States or Germany, who were pulling up very rapidly. (It was slower in Britain, too; but she had previously been so far ahead of every other state in production and trade that she could afford to see her rivals make a spurt without any fear of ceasing to be the greatest world power). But France was in a different position, and the increase of Germany and America left France not only relatively but absolutely falling behind in the race. If we take the sixteen years from 1897 to 1913 the development of industrial production increased in Britain by only a little over a third, and in France by 58.7 per cent; but in Germany the increase was almost 80 per cent, and<sup>1</sup> in America it was 100 per cent. Later in this chapter I give some further figures that show the disadvantageous position of France in production and economics. It is on these considerations that the strength of a modern industrial state depends; and, even though the actual production of Germany fell in the years following Versailles, its capacity to regain the position of a primary imperialist power remained unimpaired and always superior to that of France. It was thus not possible for France, organised on a capitalist basis, to

play a fully independent role amongst the great powers.

#### FRANCE AND GERMANY CONTRASTED

The relative position of France can best be *seen* by taking a comparison with Germany. The industrial production of Germany between the years 1860-80 increased by 78 per cent; that of France by 65 per cent; between 1890 and 1913 Germany increased by 148 per cent, France by 79 per cent; between 1913 and 1929 Germany had dropped right away down to an increase of 13 per cent, due to the special conditions imposed upon it, but France, whose position might have been expected to improve as fully as that of Germany was impaired, only increased by 38 per cent.

It is worth while to take in more detail the relative position of the two countries in 1913 and 1929. The most important factor, that of the labour force, can be judged from the difference in population. Germany had, in 1913, 67 million inhabitants against nearly 40 millions in the case of France. By 1929 the population of Germany, only slightly reduced, stood at 64 millions, and that of France had only increased to 41 millions; if we go on to 1936 we find relatively little change from this position. The output in steel in 1913 was, in Germany 19 million tons, in France under 5 million tons; in 1929 Germany, with the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, had fallen to 16·2 million tons; France, with that gain, had risen to 9·7 million tons. In 1936, however, Germany had risen again to 19·2 million tons, while France had fallen back to 6·2 million tons.

The export of manufactured goods from Germany in 1913, reckoned in terms of American currency, was \$1,610,000,000, whilst French exports were only one-tenth of that figure. In the favourable year of 1929, France's exports of manufactured goods had risen to \$1,230,000,000,

but Germany had increased to \$2,340,000,000. By 1936, Germany had fallen to \$1,440,000,000, but France had dropped down to \$310,000,000.

#### FRANCE'S STRENGTH HER WEAKNESS

With all these disadvantages, what were the resources which enabled French Imperialism to attempt to play so big a role? The answer lies in the field of Finance. France became in essence a modern money-lending state rather than a modern industrial state. All the savings of the French population, especially the peasantry, were re-invested by the banks and big financial houses in State loans granted either to military allies like Tsarist Russia or to lesser client states. If we take the distribution of foreign investments we find that about 1930 France invested some 15 per cent of her national wealth abroad as compared with only 4 per cent invested abroad by the U.S.A. The percentage invested by Britain was larger still (18 per cent), but in her case this was offset by her enormous trade and Empire resources, and was not "foreign" investment in the same sense. France was in this respect the most top-heavy of the great powers. She had become a "rentier"\* state, living by State usury.

This in turn had a big effect on the internal structure of French capitalist economy. The Bank of France and the "Two hundred Families" who controlled it played a disproportionately large part in French economy. These two hundred families, of whom so much has been heard in the last seven years, are often described—correctly enough—as the real rulers of France.

""A rentier is one who lives on invested money.

## THE "TWO HUNDRED FAMILIES"

Let us examine who and what these two hundred families are. They make up the Conseil General of the Bank of France, composed by the Edict of Napoleon Buonaparte of the two hundred largest shareholders of the Bank, who alone out of the 40,000 shareholders have the right to elect the Regents of the Bank. These Regents, apart from the three Treasury officials concerned with the issue department, are chosen as to six of their number from industry and commerce and as to the other six from finance and banking.

These twelve gentlemen alone hold one hundred and fifty directorates in industry and banking, and by this species of group marriage of finance and industry they constitute, so to speak, the "family council" of the finance oligarchy of France. Their one hundred and fifty directorates are held in nearly one hundred companies. Of these, thirty-one are private banks and eight are insurance companies. Those in industry are made up of twelve chemical undertakings, eight mining companies, and seven iron and steel concerns. Their transport directorates are made up of nine railway companies and eight shipping companies.

Besides the Bank of France there are two famous business banks, *la Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas* and *la Banque de l'Union Parisienne*, and four great credit banks which gather all the savings of small investors—*le Credit Lyonnais*, *La Societe Geneyale*, *le Credit Industriel et Commercial*, and *le Comptoir D'Escompte*. These in turn have their interlocking directorates and also control not less than two-fifths of the capital of the insurance companies.

On the industrial side of the finance-oligarchy the best known grouping is the *Comite des Forges*—the Iron-

masters' Association—which owned *Le Temps* and on various occasions appears to have been able to bribe or control the majority of French papers and many of the journalists. Similar groupings existed in other industries and the more "trustified" the industries the more powerful the grouping.

It can be readily understood that, if a dozen alone of the great families hold this key position in the Bank of France and in heavy industry and transport, the whole two hundred families hold practically all French industry, finance, and commerce in their grip. They are the real rulers of France. Their power over the government of France, and their ability to overthrow it if it resisted their dictates, have been a commonplace of French politics for the last twenty years and more.

They arrange or disarrange loans; they create or allay panics on the stock exchange; they can bring down the price of Government securities; they can "monkey" with the franc.

#### FINANCE AS MASTER

History has shown that these real rulers of France were prepared to run any risks to the national interests or national economy rather than let a little of their privileges be touched. In the "democratic and peaceable" period which seemed to be ushered in when the echoes of the last war had died away, each mildly "Left-Wing" government had either to bow to the behests of the Bank of France or be broken by it. For example, in 1924, there was a Left-Wing swing in the elections, and Edouard Herriot became Premier of France. Great hopes were entertained of his Ministry, coinciding as it did with that of the first Labour Government in England; but it lasted only ten months and was brought down by the Bank of France and the two

hundred families. Then the Right-Wing Radical, Caillaux, was not sufficiently subservient, and he in his turn was brought down. He was succeeded by the Radical Painlevé, who had to resign within a month. By the end of 1925, in bringing down the governments of France, the financiers brought down the franc to 130 to the pound. The regimes of Raoul Peret, of Caillaux, once more Finance Minister, of Briand, were successively overthrown by the same power. Herriot retired and the Bank delivered its great assault and brought down the franc to 240 to the pound. By organising a panic, it at last got the man it wanted, Raymond Poincaré, a reactionary Centrist, who governed with the help of the Bank of France against the majority of the French Chamber for a period of two years.

This strategy, as will be seen, was repeated in the later and more critical period which is the main subject of this book, for both from 1929 onwards and from 1934 onwards the real rulers of France were the two hundred families.

#### CORRUPTION

One result of the existence of this large rentier class, and indeed of France as a rentier state, was a profound parasitism which was reflected in a remarkable growth of corruption in the ruling class. France had no monopoly of corruption, but it was perhaps more widespread there and certainly more dramatic and shameless. The "inter-war" years of 1919-39 were punctuated by a series of great financial scandals—Hanaud, Oustric, and finally Stavisky, which last scandal is dealt with in some detail in Chapter IV.

#### THE WORLD ECONOMIC CRISIS

On this "finance" state the world economic crisis of 1929 onwards had a devastating effect. This was a crisis

of so-called "over-production". Such crises had occurred in modern industrial states from the beginning of the nineteenth century and to some extent even earlier. Looked at broadly, the first crisis can be regarded as starting in 1825 and thereafter they recurred decade by decade at more or less regular intervals, at first of ten to twelve years, and later with a shortened rhythm; for this reason they were called recurrent, periodic, or cyclical crises. The main symptom of the crises was that the capitalists who owned the means of production were unable to sell their goods, because the market was overstocked. This did not mean that everyone in Britain, Germany, or France had a sufficiency of food, clothing, shelter and of all the other things that money can buy, but that they had not the money wherewith to buy them. The expanding powers of production came up against this shrinking market—a shrinkage arising from the poverty of the mass of the people. The effects of these cyclical crises are so well known as to need no more than the briefest description. The capitalists cannot sell their goods; they stop production; the factories go on to short time and finally close down; thousands, then scores of thousands, and finally millions are thrown out of employment; bankruptcies pile up one after another; the smaller capitalists are ruined and the mass of the people are plunged into still deeper poverty. The warehouses are filled to overflowing with goods that no one will buy. Prices come down with a rush; and then gradually, on the basis of lower prices and in tenser exploitation of the labour forces, the machinery of production starts once more, increasing in speed and leading directly to the next crisis.

#### THE ILLUSION OF STABILITY

In the twentieth century there was a crisis in the

opening year, another in 1907, and yet another, it is now generally agreed, was due when the war of 1914-18 broke out. An immediate post-war crisis occurred in 1921-2 from which, however, the main capitalist states recovered speedily, with the exception of Britain. The speedy recovery in America and elsewhere led to the optimistic belief that crises had been eliminated for the future. This optimism, which predicted uninterrupted prosperity, was widespread in Europe, not only among the capitalists themselves, but in the Labour and Socialist parties. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald in particular, leader of the British Labour Party, held out a prospect of uninterrupted capitalist well-being in the course of which Socialism would be introduced by instalment after instalment, as it were, on the hire-purchase system. The war of 1914-18 was to have been the last of all wars, and the crisis of 1921 the last of all crises. "Peace and prosperity" was the firm assumption. The predictions of various Soviet leaders, and in particular of Stalin in 1928, that a new crisis was imminent, and would lead to an imperialist war, were regarded as mere gloomy forebodings, the product of Communist malice.

#### THE ILLUSION VANISHES

When the 1929 crisis came it proved to be the longest, deepest, and widest ever known. It began in America in the autumn of that year, and spread within a few months to most other countries. By the early spring of 1930 Britain was affected; by 1932 our unemployment figure had risen to 3 54 millions. World unemployment in that year has been estimated; as high as 50 millions. Production went down to one-half of what it had been, and world trade shrank to one-third of its previous proportions. British Tory propagandists, with their usual brazen lack of scruple, told the British public that the crisis had been

brought about by the Labour Party, just as they now (with the eager help of that very Labour Party) blame the Communist Party for everything. The political results were of course terrible, and included a whole series of wars, beginning with the invasion by Japan of Manchuria and leading to this present war. The only country unaffected by the crisis (save in some small repercussions on its foreign trade) was the Socialist society of the Soviet Union.

For a time it appeared that France would also be unaffected. In 1929-30 and to some extent in 1931, when the full ravages of the crisis were seen in the other modern industrial states, French economy appeared relatively immune. This was, however, a sign not of strength, but rather of the weakness of the rentier state. Not realising their own essential weakness, and thinking that they were immune from crisis, the large-scale money-lenders of Paris thought they had at last achieved the domination of Europe and began to lay down the law to the Continent. Relying on the great stocks of bullion in the vaults of the Bank of France, they apparently believed that at last they had attained full and lasting supremacy over their rivals; the British interests seeking accommodation in Paris were treated with disdain, a heavy price was exacted for each measure of assistance conceded, and a reckless attitude exhibited towards the rest of Europe. They were, even more than the American financiers, the chief external cause of the fall in value of the pound sterling. But in a few months they realised that pound and franc were "like two spent swimmers that do choke their art"; that the franc was in the clutch of the drowning pound; and that they had themselves hastened the extension of economic and financial crisis to France.

## THE CRISIS HITS FRANCE

When at the end of 1931 the crisis did begin to show itself in France, its effect was all the greater, and the recovery of French economy was slower than in the case of several other countries. There was widespread unemployment, and the opportunity was immediately taken to reduce the wages of the workers in the factories. At the same time the fall in prices affected the whole peasant economy of France in a disastrous fashion. Politically the effects were a certain polarisation of interests. The workers and the peasants began to seek a way out of their difficulties by a decided swing to the Left in the elections of 1932, and the ruling circles, in their efforts to organise and galvanise their decaying system, began to move towards Fascism.

It is with this rise of Fascism in France that I shall deal in the next chapter. It showed itself both in internal affairs and in foreign policy. It was already developing before 1933, when the Fascists came to power in Germany, and it continued to develop thereafter with greater speed and led to what can only be described as an extremely sharp stage of class struggle.

The details both of the incidence of unemployment and falling wages and of the fall in production are sensational. Taking first the labour position, the total number of wage earners in France has been estimated at between 13 million and 14 million. Of these 1,500,000 are clerical workers, domestic servants, and others who would fall outside the range of insured persons in Britain, at any rate at the beginning of the present war. Other statistics give a total of 11 million employed workers, excluding these special categories, and out of this 11 million some 6 million are factory workers. How were these affected by the

World Economic Crisis? It is not easy to determine the exact figures of unemployment in France, for only a part of the unemployed are registered. Nevertheless, the fact that the number of registered unemployed rose from 150,000 to 500,000 between 1931 and 1935 is an indication of over a three-fold increase. If we guess that the total number of unemployed is thrice the official figures, it would mean that unemployment rose from under 500,000 to 1,500,000. If, on the other hand, we make the very conservative estimate that the number of unemployed is only twice the official figure, the total would still have risen to one million; probably the true figure lies somewhere between one million and 1,500,000.

This corresponds to the British unemployment increase during the period of the world Economic Crisis. But wholtime unemployment was not the only industrial evil in France. In the textile industry, in the building trade, and in the mines there was extensive short-time working, involving sometimes nearly half of the total employed in these industries.

#### THE ATTACK ON WAGES

The employers took advantage of this situation to reduce wages. According to the *Statistique Generale de la France*, France suffered wage cuts from 1930 to 1934 of 12½ per cent for weavers, 9 per cent for bricklayers, and 5 per cent for other trades. In the Paris region the wage cut for engineers reached in these four years between 5 per cent and 7 per cent, coalminers' wages went down about 12 per cent on the average, and agricultural workers lost in general 10 per cent by wage cuts, and in some of the wine-growing districts 15 per cent to 20 per cent. In one group of factories, the total of wages declined from 86,000 million francs in 1930 to 71,500 million francs in 1933, a fall of

17 per cent.

So much for the official statistics. In the economic journal, *Revue d'Economie Politique*, the total fall of income of wage earners between 1930 and 1934 is estimated at 24 per cent. In the case of wage earners in industry and trade, the estimate goes up to over 30 per cent.

This cut of a quarter to nearly a third in money wages was not offset by any corresponding reduction in prices, which fell only by between 11 per cent and 17 per cent.

Taken altogether, the cut in wages, the short time, unemployment, and the miserable unemployment benefit of seven to ten francs per day for a single man, and twenty francs per day for a household of three children, laid a terrible burden on the working-class.

#### FALL IN PRODUCTION

The fall in production in France is best shown by taking the figures of some half-dozen of the main industries. If one takes 1913 as the basic year and reckons it at 100, then French production had risen by 1928 to 130, and by 1929 to 140. In the next year it fell back to 130; then the real drop began. In 1931 it had fallen to between 105-110. Iron and steel, engineering and building had fallen to 90 by 1932, in 1933 stood at 92, and by 1934 had fallen to 85. Mining, textiles, leather, automobiles, and rubber taken together had fallen to 100 by 1932, had risen in 1933 to 110, and in 1934 had abruptly dropped to 90.

The number of bankruptcies increased from 13,764 in 1933 to 15,052 in 1934, an increase of over 9 per cent.

Textiles give a more detailed picture. French woollen exports fell from 1,679 million francs in 1929 to 215 million francs in 1934; there was, of course, a fall in prices, but even if we take the picture in quantities, these dropped from 198,000 metric quintals in 1929 to 40,000 in 1934.

Export trade in wool had shrunk to a little over a fifth in six years.

The silk industry showed a rapid decline. It fell from 74 per cent of the pre-1914 level in 1930 to 60 per cent in 1931, and to 35 per cent in 1932. From this year it rose to 41 per cent in 1933 and 44 per cent in 1934.

A crisis of this depth and malignance, it is now easy to see, made it impossible for an industrial country to retain its political structure unimpaired. It was bound either to swing towards popular power or to react towards Fascism. In the next chapter we shall see how Fascism began to develop.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE TREND TO FASCISM

*The true nature of Fascism—The social and industrial structure of France—Democracy loses ground—Fascist organisations spring up.*

Up to a few years ago there was a tendency in British political circles to regard Fascism as something which could occur in Germany or Italy but had no chance of growth in Britain or France; those who held this view have done, often innocently enough, a great deal of harm. Since this war began and for nine months thereafter, they still shut their eyes to the existence of Fascism in France and were willing to provide almost any other explanation of events so long as they could still believe that Fascism was limited to Germany, Italy, and a few smaller countries. But it should be clearly realised that Fascism is not the work of a particular gangster or a group of gangsters, still less a proclivity displayed by certain races or nationalities. It is something which arises out of the very nature of the modern industrial state, once that state has reached a certain stage of crisis. In the last twenty years or more, all the modern states organised on the capitalist basis have been in a condition of crisis to some extent; and most of them passed, as explained in the preceding chapter, into a greater degree of crisis in 1929, crisis so acute indeed that millions of hitherto complacent people had to realise that a society in which—to take the year 1932—one man in four was

unemployed, and in particular industries one man in two, was a society in decay. What became apparent to so many then had already been true, as I said above, for about twenty years or more.

#### How FASCISM GROWS

Why does Fascism grow in a society in decay? It is because such a society is faced with only two alternatives; either to go forward to a Socialist state, or to attempt to preserve the crisis-ridden and decaying society, as it were, in pickle. To one or other of these courses it must turn, since it is impossible in such a period of decay to retain the existing forms of political democracy and the measure of freedom of speech and agitation that Britain still possessed, say, before the outbreak of the present war; for the increasing hardships and insecurities of the mass of the people, due to the crisis, would under such a regime lead to a successful movement to get rid of the ruling class and their system and set up a Socialist state. The ruling class is thus driven sooner or later to Fascism as the only form of capitalist organisation through which it can both suppress popular movements and organise a more or less static economy under which even in decay its own power may be maintained for a time.

As Fascism is thus the inevitable form of Capitalism in decay, "inevitable" only in the sense that it provides the one salvation for Capitalism, and not of course that its onset could not be successfully resisted by the working-class and the mass of the people. The action of Fascism is to suppress that possible resistance; to suppress that struggle of the working-class against its oppressors. At the same time it restricts production and holds up technical development. Thirdly it works towards self-sufficiency, "autarchy", which *inter alia* serves the ruling class in its

**preparation for war, to which it is bound to resort sooner or later, for Fascism not only does not eliminate the economic stresses that lead to war, but actually intensifies them.**

**There is occasionally in the Press of the English-speaking countries a tendency to regard Fascism as some entirely new stage of society, something that is no longer capitalist. This standpoint, which has also appeared amongst Labour writers, is very well met in Mr. J. Kuczynski's pamphlet *Germany's Economic Position*, when he says:**

"Fascism is a certain form of government which the ruling class uses under certain historical circumstances in the stage of monopoly capitalism or imperialism. It is no stage in the history of capitalism; it is no sub-stage or phase in the history of imperialism or monopoly capitalism; it is an episode. If, on the one hand, the ruling class sees no other way out of its difficulties, and if, on the other hand, the working class and the other groups belonging to the masses of the people are strong enough to endanger the position of capitalism, and yet if they are disunited, and thus too weak to stop capitalism taking this last way out, then finance-capitalism becomes Fascist. Then the strongest group within the ruling class succeeds in forcing the other finance-capitalist group to see that only possibility for them to keep in power is to give up part of their advantages, to undergo certain restrictions and to follow the lead of the heavy, the armament industries. These advantages which the other finance groups have to give up go to the armament industries, to the most reactionary Chauvinistic and most imperialist group within finance-capital. The only forces, however, which can dislodge the armament industries from their position again are not a united group of other finance-capitalists. They have lost for ever their role as rulers or co-rulers of a capitalist society. The only forces capable of overthrowing Fascism are the united masses of the people: the wage earners and the white collar

workers, the peasants and the intelligentsia, the small shopkeepers and the craftsmen, members of the liberal professions and the small State officials, the soldiers and the lower clergy, the Social-Democrats and the Catholics, the Communists and the Confessional Protestants."

#### FASCISM GROWS IN FRANCE

Capitalist decay is to be found, as has been explained above, in each of the modern industrial states, and each of them is thus more or less ripe for the development to Fascism according to the extent of its decay. When one studies the conditions in France which made it possible for Fascism to develop there, one must not be deceived by the superficial view that France was a pure Democracy and that its very social composition provided a firm basis for democratic resistance to the growth of Fascism. Actually the social basis of France is overwhelmingly *petit bourgeois*; the peasantry amounts to over a third of the population, a striking contrast to Britain, where the total agricultural population, landlords, farmers, and agricultural labourers together with a handful of peasants hardly amounts to a twentieth of the whole. In addition to this there is the continuation of small industry with a comparatively much smaller scale of big industry and of foreign trade.\* Dominating the small industry and the rural peasant production is the finance-oligarchy clique of bankers and monopolists, many of them centring around the Bank of France with its two hundred families, to which I have

\*In R. P. Dutt's *Fascism and Social Revolution* it is pointed out that according to an investigation quoted in the *Economist* of the 30th September 1933, out of a total of 6,167,647 establishments in 1926, 5,983,075 consisted of five persons or less and 2,981,521 were actually single-handed concerns. Further, out of 17\*8 million occupied persons, 11\*8 millions were occupied in concerns of five persons or less, and only 1.5 million workers were employed in concerns of over 500 workers, that is, in large-scale industry.

already referred in discussing the imperialist position in France. These millionaires have French democracy in their grip; French republicanism under these conditions was bound to be more and more purely superficial, with the ruling class governing the country largely by the use of their unlimited money power, exercised partly through extensive corruption. This reality behind the facade of formal democracy provided only too good a basis for a rapid change-over to Fascism when the right stage of decay should arise, in peace or war.

Now when the vast majority of a population find that the rights they nominally possess are vitiated by the power of wealth, when they see that although every citizen is free and equal in law and by the constitution, yet in practice the very richest men are able to do pretty much what they please and can restrict the freedom and equality of the majority; when the Republican watchwords, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" turn out to be hollow, the stage is set for drama, it may be for tragedy. The results of such a conflict may be various. Amongst the organised working-class the result for many years was a determination to make democracy more real both within the capitalist framework and above all by advancing towards Socialism, which alone, by destroying the power of wealth, could give full reality to democracy, to "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity"; and this determination took shape in the organisation of working-class trade unions, political parties, and other bodies.

### *Petit Bourgeois* REACTIONS

Amongst the peasantry, the small producers and the artisans (as well as a minority of the working-class influenced by this *petite bourgeoisie*) the results may again vary greatly. One possibility is that the *petite bourgeoisie*

may be bamboozled into believing that their interests will be protected by the very rich men of the ruling class, who for their part through their newspapers and speeches never cease to proclaim—quite falsely—that the rich will defend these interests. (This process is in operation in Great Britain at the present day.)

But when the hollow features of capitalist democracy become more and more plainly exposed, as the millionaires make more and more ruthless use of their wealth against the interests of the mass of the people, a second possibility emerges. The middle classes may turn towards co-operation with the organised working-class, with whom they have certain interests in common and upon whom they can rely to defend their special interests against the depredations of the millionaires. This second trend can only become a reality when the working-class is well organised, united, and well led. If the opposite is the case, as happened in Britain under Ramsay MacDonald, then it will not be able to rally wider masses of the people around it. In France, however, as we shall see later, this trend succeeded, and brought about the People's Front, or "Front populaire".

#### LOSING FAITH IN DEMOCRACY

This did not take place until after the people of France had been confronted by the instant menace of a third possible result of the contrast between the formal democracy of a modern industrial state and the actual harsh conditions of life imposed on the mass of the people by the millionaires; this was the danger that the *petite bourgeoisie* should begin to despair of democracy, and become utterly sceptical of the value of parliamentary institutions. Such a mood of disillusion may be a tonic for a Labour movement that is resolutely striving for Socialism; but

for the *petite bourgeoisie*, who have little political background, let alone a clear vision of any Socialist goal, and are not organised or easily organisable, it can easily result in the demand for a "saviour of the country", who will scrap democracy and (as they fondly hope) look after their own limited interests. In this mood the *petite bourgeoisie* can become a prey to Fascist propaganda, to purveyors of high-sounding words and hollow promises.

In France a stage had already arrived in the first decade after the 1914-18 war when a certain number of the *petite bourgeoisie* were in this mood, thus making the conditions for a move to Fascism all the more favourable. The Two Hundred Families were of course ready to take full advantage of the situation and to give to Fascist tendencies and organisations whatever support might appear to be necessary.

#### FASCIST ORGANISATION

Having seen this potential basis for Fascism in the French Republic, we may now turn to examine the Fascist organisations of the last seven years, the *Action Francaise*, the *Croix de Feu* ("Fiery Cross"), the *Jeunesse Patriote* (Patriot Youth), the *Francistes* (the meaning is conveyed if we imagine there existed here an organisation of "Britain-ists") and several others.

#### THE DREYFUS CASE

*Action Francaise*, much the oldest of these organisations, should be taken first; but in order to understand the tradition of struggle in which such an organisation could persist, it is necessary to recall an acute phase of this struggle which centred round the famous "Dreyfus case" at the beginning of the century. This case was an event rather than an episode, and something far wider than a mere *cause*

*celebre*. A Jewish officer of the French General Staff, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, was falsely accused of treason and condemned, an innocent man, to years of imprisonment in the pestilential climate of Devil's Island in French Guiana. It was not merely a prosecution, it was a whole section of politics and indeed of history. I quote from our authoritative English history of the period the main facts of the case. In his chapter on "The Third French Republic" in Volume Twelve of the *Cambridge Modern History*, Professor Emile Bourgeois wrote:

"While men were talking of social and religious peace, journals of violent Ultramontane sympathies, financed from the coffers of the middle-class pupils of the Jesuits and Assumptionists, papers such as the *Libre Parole* and the *Croix*, declared war to the death on French citizens of the Jewish and the Protestant faith. Drumont gave the signal in *La France Juive* which created anti-Semitism in France. The journal issued by the same writer spread tenfold the propaganda of the book, excited the priests, and through them the faithful, against the Freemasons and the Jews. Brunetiere, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, declared war for his part against science and the critical spirit. In 1895 he began a campaign against democracy, demanding blind submission to the discipline of the Church of Rome.

"The Republicans, surprised by this awakening of hatreds and religious factions, yielded so far as to let themselves be forced by the threats of Ultramontane journals to accept the sentence of degradation and exile to Guiana passed upon Captain Dreyfus, who was accused without proof of having betrayed his country to Germany (December 1894). This conviction was the proof of the progress made by anti-Semitic feeling, and above all of the enormous influence which the Church had obtained, in the four years past, in all classes of society and especially in the army. Thenceforth the Minister for War was in their power through his complicity in a crime against justice. The Chief of the Staff, Boisdeffre, and all the Commanders of Army Corps formed a sort of military parliament, encouraged by a false

patriotism, which began to be called Nationalism', to aim at the exclusion of the Jews, the Protestants, and even all Liberals, from French citizenship. Though, doubtless, many Catholics did not lend themselves to these proceedings, the Clerical party at least rejoiced in the progress made by these doctrines, and above all in the complaisance of Meline's Ministry, which from 1896 to 1898 pushed the fear of socialism to such a point that they saw and knew nothing of this movement towards a military and monastic tyranny.

"The silence so propitious to intrigue, was rudely broken by the unexpected announcement of Captain Dreyfus's innocence, which was made by Scheurer-Kestner from July 1897, onwards, and confirmed, to the great displeasure of the Nationalists, civil and military, by Colonel Picquart at the end of the year. In vain did Meline's Ministry at first offer opposition to the solicitations of the family of Captain Dreyfus and of his friends, whose numbers increased daily and included men like Reinach, Jaures, Zola, Clemenceau, Gabriel Monod, Havet, and Laborie, on the plea that it was impossible to go behind a 'judgment given\*', in vain did the General Staff, attempting to involve the 'honour of the army in the crimes of the anti-Semitic party, refuse to recognise in Esterhazy, the real author of the *bordereau*, the document upon which the charge of treason against Dreyfus had been based. By slow but sure degrees, the country, the deputies, and the judges became aware of the machinations of the Clerical party in league with the generals of the army. The elections of 1898 brought about the downfall of Meline's Ministry. The accession to power of a Radical President of Council, Henri Brisson, who had had no traffic with the Ultramontane party, soon converted his party, who up to this time, with the Socialists, had been opposed to a revision of the sentence. The Minister of War, Cavaignac, Nationalist though he was, forced to make known the forgeries committed at the General Staff by Colonel Henry and his accomplices, with a view to completing finally the ruin of Colonel Picquart and Dreyfus. On the discovery of his crime, Henry passed sentence on himself by taking his own life in prison; and the Government finally ordered a fresh trial (August 1898).

"Another year elapsed before the trial began at Rennes—a year full of efforts made, even in Dupuy's Ministry, from October 30, 1898, onwards, in order to prevent the Court of Cassation from pronouncing its decision. Success was only attained after the sudden death of Felix Faure, who had connived at these hindrances and delays (February 16, 1899), after the election of President Loubet, and the failure of a Nationalist plot organised by Deroulede and Roget; and it was due to the establishment of Waldeck-Rousseau's Ministry, which resolved to bring about the triumph of justice by the help of the Socialists, who did not play them false. It was through fear of socialism that moderate Republicans had let themselves slide into this policy first of indifference to, and subsequently of complicity with, the intrigues, which were in danger of bringing about a dictatorship as in 1851. Similarly, it was the reconciliation with the Socialists, and the inclusion of one of their party, Millerand, in the Ministry for the 'Defence of the Republic', which enabled Waldeck-Rousseau, himself a Moderate, and a friend and pupil of Gambetta, to avenge Dreyfus and his partisans. By the Council of War at Rennes Dreyfus was once more condemned; but President Loubet granted a pardon, in anticipation of the decision issued a year later by the Court of Cassation, declaring the innocence of this man whose sole crime was his birth."

Not only the people of France, but all Europe discussed the scandal of the Dreyfus trial, but as in the case thirty years later of Sacco and Vanzetti in the United States of America, it proved impossible for a long time to reopen the case, because the structure of justice and the high officials of the Army and the Government were all involved in this corrupt and dreadful business. France was rent in two, and it was clear to one foreign observer, Vladimir Lenin, that a social revolution in France could have developed from the case. The struggle had as its sequel a polarisation in France, on the one side of the Royalists with the Clericals and the forces of reaction in general, and on the other of the *petite bourgeoisie*, led by such radicals as Clemenceau,

with the working-class led by Jean Jaures. At the end of the struggle there emerged on the one hand the "League of the Rights of Man" to perpetuate the defence of the Republic, and on the other the organisation and newspaper known as the *Action Francaise*, to which I must now return.

#### ACTION FRANCAISE

The movement generally called *Action Francaise* thus dates from the early twentieth century, before the name of Fascism or the specific conditions of its growth had arisen. It was an epitome of that struggle between reaction and revolution with which the Republic had begun and which had continued for some fifty years, and it linked up all the surviving elements of earlier reactionary movements with the France of our time. Finally, its doctrines have stamped their imprint on the special brand of Fascism which we now know as the regime of Vichy-France.

*Action Francaise* was the name of the newspaper, the organisation attached to it being called "Les Camelots du Roi" ("the news-hawkers of the King"), at the head of which were Charles Maurras and Leon Daudet, the latter being the son of the famous writer, Alfonse Daudet. Maurras was a theoretician of Monarchism; he regarded the whole development of the previous century and a half as a turning away from the true path of France, which for him was a human society to be based on order, tradition, and classicism. For this it was necessary, in his view, to restore the monarchy and the Catholic Church (though he himself was not a practising Christian) and to get rid of democracy, freedom of thought, freedom of the Press, free-masonry, and all that was meant by the Republican watch-words of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.

For a considerable number of years the movement had little influence, and the paper's circulation ran to no more

than a few hundred copies taken by firm adherents of its standpoint and by a certain number who bought it for the literary brilliance of its articles. But after the war, and especially from the crisis of 1929 onwards, the circle of *Action Francaise* became larger. Its writings were not hampered by the law of libel, for French law provides a paradise for libellers and slanderers. For a time successive Republican Governments ignored this royalist agitation, although by a law of 1884 all such agitation was illegal, and the Bourbon pretender to the throne was not allowed to reside in France. For a time, too, some fifteen years ago, the movement suffered at the hands of the Vatican, which had pronounced against it at a time when the diplomacy of the Catholic Church inclined towards accommodation with Republican France.

*Action Francaise* plainly constituted, long before the word Fascism was heard, a nucleus of reaction which was to play a considerable part in the last seven years of the Republic and was to affect the fascist organisations and to be affected by them. Many of the Army leaders, including Marshal Lyautey—who had been the Governor of Indo-China and the conqueror of Morocco—and Marshal Petain, were sympathetic to the movement, if not fully subscribing to its propaganda; and as has already been stated, the present Vichy regime bears its stamp.

#### LA CROIX DE FEU

The more modern movement of the Croix de Feu, led by Colonel Comte Casimir de la Rocque, grew up from 1930 onwards and claimed to be an ex-Servicemen's association. A semi-military organisation, it had the declared aim of civil war and a bloody reactionary dictatorship; its meetings were conducted as though they were partial mobilisations of an army. The "leagues" of the Croix de

Feu would be summoned to meet at a particular town, to which the members would be driven in lorries and motor-cars, travelling several score or even several hundred miles and arriving on parade at a particular hour; its circulars were couched in military phraseology; it owned aeroplanes and even had a Red Cross section. Its arms, apart from some aeroplanes, consisted of field guns and machine-guns.

#### JEUNESSE PATRIOTE

Jeunesse Patriote, led by a Member of Parliament, Pierre Taittinger, was formed in 1924 "to combat revolutionary danger". It contained many students and had shock troops for street fighting, armed with bludgeons and revolvers. It was smaller in numbers than the Croix de Feu. After February 1934 these degenerate youths were joined by the aged Marshal Lyautey.

#### FRANCISTES

Amongst various other fascist organisations the only one I need mention here are the Francistes; they were the most openly anti-Semitic of all, and were directly in touch with Hitler and Mussolini, from whom they drew financial help. (This is not to say that other fascist organisations did not have their connections with the German and Italian fascists, but the Francistes did not trouble in any way to conceal the fact; their programme was a mere copy of the German and Italian programmes, and their members were largely gangsters and the rabble or "lumpenproletariat").

#### PARTI POPULAIRE FRANCAIS

There were similar organisations, though less developed, amongst the peasantry of France, but none of them had any influence amongst the industrial working-class. The attempt to gain this influence was to be undertaken by

another organisation, the Parti Populaire Francais, "P.P.F.", which came into being much later. Its founder, Jacques Doriot, had been the leader of the Young Communist League of France and in the first decade after the 1914-18 war had become one of the most brilliant speakers and leading figures of the Communist Party of France. In the years after the crisis, following upon his expulsion from the Communist Party, he retained his seat as Mayo/ of St. Denis, which may be described as the Hoxton of Paris. He had become an agent of the secret police, but presently was to find bigger gains and a more generous paymaster in Hitler. He used more effective demagogy and a closer imitation of Nazi methods than the Croix de Feu.

#### GROWTH OF FASCISM IN FRENCH FOREIGN POLICY

Foreign policy in France as elsewhere is of course dependent on the nature of French capitalist organisation. In the first years of this century, France, with Declasse as its Foreign Secretary, utilised Anglo-German and German-Russian antagonisms to build up the group of alliances destined to win military success in the war of 1914-18. As already mentioned, the policy of Clemenceau at Versailles, following on this success, was directed to obtaining guarantees for "security", and to the establishment of a chain of alliances which would both hold down the defeated rival Germany and help to destroy or cripple the new Soviet Socialist Republic. When this policy was largely nullified by American refusal to ratify the guarantee treaty, and the attempt of Raymond Poincare in 1924 to hold down Germany by the invasion of the Ruhr had also failed, French capitalism, unable to play a completely independent role, came to lean on Britain, and French governments had to play "second fiddle" and to accept the advice of the British governments on all major

questions, as was seen for example in the days of Munich, in September 1938.

Attempts were, however, made from time to time to break free from British influence. This could only be done by submitting to German influence, because the material strength of German capitalism was nearly as great as before, and highly superior to that of France. Accordingly, the close working agreement shown in the International Steel Cartel and in the trading arrangements between the coal masters of the Rhineland and the iron and coal magnates of French Lorraine, was reflected in political *rapprochements* such as the talks between Aristide Briand and Gustav Stresmann, the Foreign Secretaries of France and Germany, in the years from 1929 onwards.

These connexions had considerable influence on the attitude of French governments towards the social struggles in Germany. Instead of supporting the working-class and the people of Germany against the forces of reaction, they made great concessions to the more reactionary German governments; in fact, the more reactionary the German government, the more likely it was to receive concessions from France (as well as from Britain). When the Nazis came to power this tendency was at first reversed, but later developed more strongly than ever, many concessions which had been refused to previous governments being given to Hitler.

#### FRENCH REACTIONS TO THE THIRD REICH

The first effect of the Nazis' arrival in power was to produce a swing away from reaction. The earlier Nazi propaganda, with its policy of revenge and its threats against France, had naturally produced hostility; and six months after the burning of the Reichstag Germany's resignation from the League of Nations caused widespread

alarm and a hurried search for alliances. For the moment the policy of Delcasse, of Clemenceau, and of Poincare seemed to be revived in new forms and under new conditions. One result of this "tack" in foreign policy was the appointment as Foreign Secretary of M. Barthou, a middling reactionary, a friend of Poincare and one of the old men who had prepared for the previous war. In an effort to renew alliances against Germany, he travelled to Poland, to the countries of the Little Entente and—breaking the tradition of fifteen years—to the U.S.S.R. The result of these negotiations was the conclusion of the Franco-Soviet and the Czecho-Soviet pacts of mutual assistance, each of which, among other things, bound each party, in the event of unprovoked aggression by any European state against the other, to come immediately to its aid and assistance.

#### THE FRANCO-SOVIET PACT

The pacts were open to other powers to join, but Germany and Poland refused. The pacts were expressly worded to fit into the machinery of the League of Nations, which the Soviet Union agreed to join if invited to do so. The invitation was sent by leading states of the League of Nations, and in September 1934, against the vote of one or two minor states, such as Holland, the U.S.S.R. became a member of the League of Nations. The Pact would undoubtedly have made for European agreement, and if Britain at that time had also been favourable, it would have resulted in at least the postponement of the present European war.

#### FIRST STAGE OF FASCISM IN FOREIGN POLICY

But from 1934 onwards the Fascists in France and elsewhere turned to their natural course and made the most

determined efforts to wreck the Franco-Soviet Pact. Their efforts were facilitated by the assassination of Barthou, who had been visiting the countries of the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Yugoslavia) to arrange for the development of France's claim of alliances with those countries, the further details of which were to be worked out at a state visit of King Alexander to Paris in the late autumn of 1934. Alexander landed at Marseilles and drove up the main street of the town with Barthou. A group of Croat terrorists opened fire on the carriage; and the ruler of Yugoslavia and Foreign Secretary of France were assassinated. The organisation of this group had been prepared in Hungary with the connivance of Fascist powers, Germany and Italy.

The next stage was the attempt to wriggle out of the pact. For this the best trickster possible was found in the now more than ever infamous Pierre Laval, a renegade Socialist of *petit bourgeois* origin, who had found politics after his renegacy an extremely lucrative business. Laval had been forced to sign the pact, but it had still to be ratified by the French Parliament, and he put off the ratification from month to month. Meanwhile, along with Mussolini, Ramsay MacDonald, and Sir John Simon, he organised the Stresa Meeting in 1935, at which the Stresa Front was established. At this moment Mussolini was openly preparing for war against Abyssinia, but in all the discussions of international policy at that Stresa Meeting he did not raise the question of Abyssinia. Ramsay MacDonald also kept silent on the matter; but in the case of Laval, however, there was a secret agreement between him and Mussolini. Consequently, when the successful peace ballot, organised in Britain by the League of Nations Union, showed that eleven million electors were against the policy of the National Government, and when that Government,

rapidly manoeuvring to meet this situation, sent Sir Samuel Hoare to Geneva to proclaim its "support" of Abyssinia and of the League, and thus to win for itself the support of all the small powers and also of the deluded Trade Union Congress and Labour Party, Laval could do nothing publicly.

But privately he did a good deal. He completely sabotaged the action of the League of Nations in defence of Abyssinia; and arranged with Sir Samuel Hoare, with the full knowledge of Baldwin, Chamberlain, and others the infamous "Hoare-Laval" plan for the partition of Abyssinia. It must have seemed to him at the moment that all was going well with the Fascist policy of France; the ratification of the Franco-Soviet Pact was postponed; and he had only to wait for the results of the British General Election in Britain in November 1935, which the National Government was to win by proclaiming its full support of the League of Nations and of Abyssinia in order to carry out the opposite policy as soon as the elections were over. The premature discovery in December of the Hoare-Laval plan, however, caused such a revulsion of feeling in the minds of the British population that Sir Samuel Hoare was forced to resign and the Government had to declare that the deal was "off". Mussolini thereupon withdrew his support from Laval, and at the beginning of January 1936, Laval ceased to be Premier of France.

### THIRD STAGE OF FASCISM IN FOREIGN POLICY

The third stage was carried through largely by the agency of Britain. On the 7th March 1936, on the eve of the French General Elections, Hitler, who had already torn up clause after clause of the Treaty of Versailles, who had built an Air Force, introduced conscription, and secured the express agreement of the British Government

to the large-scale development of his Navy, suddenly marched into the de-militarised area of the Rhineland. M. Flandin was advised to mobilise the French Army. It is believed that if he had mobilised the French Army, the British Government, faced by an accomplished fact, would have been bound to give support and that Hitler would then have withdrawn. But instead of mobilising, the French ministers flew to London and asked if they might do so. London replied in the negative; and later the new Foreign Secretary, Eden, explained that he would take the extremely vigorous step of sending a series of interrogatories to the German Government. \* With this the French ministers were forced to be content. Needless to say, Hitler ignored the questionnaire and never gave any answer

\*The questionnaire came into existence in this way: After many negotiations of the League of Nations Powers at Geneva and after a meeting of the Locarno Powers, it was decided that the United Kingdom should undertake to have the questions at issue elucidated and to approach the German Government for this purpose. The British Government accordingly prepared a very long questionnaire, which was issued as a White Paper on the 8th May 1936.

The first question was whether Germany regarded herself as now in the position to conclude "genuine treaties".

The second question was whether Germany considered that a point had been reached at which she could signify that she recognised and intended to respect the existing territorial and political status of Europe, except in so far as this might be subsequently modified by free negotiation and agreement.

The third question was whether the German Government would suggest that non-aggression pacts between Germany and its neighbours might be guaranteed by mutual assistance arrangements.

Finally, with reference to a German proposal for an international court of arbitration, the British Government wished to know "the functions and constitution of the proposed court and the relation which the former would bear to the functions of the Council of the League of Nations and the Permanent Court of International Justice."

The questionnaire concluded with an expression of the hope that the German Government would consider it desirable to give some definition of the phrase "the separation of the Government of the League of Nations from its basis in the Treaty of Versailles setting".

to it. The effect in France was that still larger sections of the reactionaries moved towards pro-Nazism.

#### ATTITUDE TO SPAIN

The fourth stage followed almost immediately. The Republican Government of Spain was faced in July 1936 by a Fascist rebellion aided by a Fascist invasion from Germany and Italy. The pro-Fascist non-intervention policy of Britain and France powerfully aided Franco and the Fascist powers and dealt a fatal blow at France's security.

The events of 1938, the invasion of Austria and the betrayal of Czechoslovakia, ending in the surrender of Munich, were merely the further working out of this (policy, and Munich was of course the end of the Franco-Soviet Pact.

Throughout these years of Fascism in foreign policy, the mainspring was the fear which the French ruling class entertained of the people of France; for a sharp stage of class struggle had developed in France against the general Fascist tendencies, of which her foreign policy was only the reflection.

One of the best-known modern French authors, M. Jules Romains, who combined literature with affairs of state, and was employed many times on most confidential missions by his government, began in the autumn of 1940 a series of seven articles in the popular American journal, the *Sahirday Evening Post*. In the last of these articles he poses the question, "Who Saved Fascism?" M. Romains has no love for the Soviet Union, is an outspoken anti-Communist, and takes pains to absolve the French Tories from their due share of the blame, which he concentrates upon the one man, Pierre Laval, but the answer he gives to his own question is nevertheless worth recording; for whilst he asserts that the strengthening of the Fascist

powers, which was a contributory cause of the debacle of France, was not solely the fault of Frenchmen but was also partly due to Britain's deep reactionary fear of the Soviet Union and its influence, he makes clear what was the real guiding fear and motive. In the *Saturday Evening Post* for November 1940 he writes:

"But it would be unfair to let all the responsibility weigh on M. Laval, The English curry their share; first, in a general and inveterate fashion, through the lack of decision they've always shown, their perverse leaning toward spurious solutions which absolve them from acting or taking sudden risks. More precisely, England was handicapped by her fear of Bolshevism, and in England, specifically, three elements, closely linked to one another—the venerable conservatives in Parliament, the aristocracy, the City. When only one last fillip was needed to overthrow Mussolini, all these people said to themselves, with a spasm of fear: 'But then what's going to happen? What will replace Fascism in Italy? Bolshevism almost certainly, or anarchy tending toward Bolshevism, which Russia will immediately exploit. And as Mussolini's fall will almost immediately provoke Hitler's, the same appalling regime will rise in Germany. And as we already hear things aren't going so well in Spain, where the government is letting the Reds get out of hand, it may be the end of everything, and we'd be the ones, we good conservatives, good aristocrats, good English capitalists, to let all hell loose.' And they shrank back in terror. They didn't picture in the least the siege of England by the Nazis or the bombing of London. Venerable conservatives lack imagination."

In the next chapter I shall show how the attempts of the French Fascists to seize power by violence produced a strong working-class reaction, which led to the formation of the United Front (Front Commun) of the Socialists and Communists, and from that to the formation and electoral victory of the People's Front (Front Populaire) which comprised the Radical-Socialists and certain other groups, in addition to the parties of the United Front.

## CHAPTER IV

### GROWING TENSION BETWEEN CLASSES

*Conditions worsen—Scandals—The riots of February 1934—Government of Concentration—The United Front takes shape.*

The effect of the economic crisis in widespread unemployment, short time, lower wages, and a worsening of the conditions of the peasantry and the whole agricultural population, especially the wine-growing section, had an effect on the elections held in May 1932. There was a certain swing towards the Left, but this took merely the form of increased support to the Radical-Socialists, a non-Socialist party, often called simply Radical, corresponding roughly to Liberals in Britain. For twenty months after that election, France had a succession of Radical-Socialist governments. During this period every effort was made by the ruling handful of rich men of France both to trip up the Radical governments and to transfer all the burdens of the crisis to the mass of the people. All the difficulties of the crisis were ascribed to mistakes of the government; in some instances this had a measure of truth, for the governments of the latter part of 1932 and 1933 tried to play an independent role in words only, but in their deeds, in their actual policy, they remained under the influence of the rich men of France—and of the City of London. The power of the latter was particularly apparent in questions of foreign policy.

The year 1933—the year of the coming to power of

the Nazis in Germany—witnessed the rapid breakdown of all the attempts to fit the system of Versailles into the conditions of world economic crisis, and also revealed extensive dilapidations in the framework of the peoples themselves. Efforts were made to maintain this framework, but with the exit of Germany from the League of Nations in October 1933 and the subsequent agreement between Nazi Germany and Poland (a serious breach in the French system of alliances) dissatisfaction grew rapidly.

#### INTERNAL EFFECTS OF CRISIS

It was, however, in internal affairs, in the effects of the crisis on the livelihood of the mass of the population, that the strongest causes of discontent were to be found. Here the Royalist and Fascist organisations of France saw their opportunity. On the one hand they were encouraged by the giant strides which Fascism was making on the continent of Europe; on the other, the failure of the Government to break the shackles imposed by the rich men of France, and to solve the problems confronting it, seemed to give them a splendid chance. In addition, there had been during the period of the Radical governments a succession of financial scandals. Into the details of most of those it is not necessary to enter, but one of them—the Stavisky case—assumed such large proportions that some description of it must be given. It was enormously stressed by the Royalists and by the Fascists, and was made the basis for accusations that the whole of the French Government were corruptly linked up with swindlers and thieves. In all the foreign newspapers it became the main news from France for many weeks. More than one editorial was written in London newspapers, whose proprietors were big figures in the City of London, deploring the extreme degree of corruption in the business world of France, and

drawing melancholy conclusions about the conditions of democracy. (A few months after this display of commiseration, the extreme corruption of the London Salvage Corps was revealed by the trial and imprisonment of Captain Lloyd, but these same London newspapers discreetly forebore to draw any far-reaching conclusions as to the extent of corruption in English business life or the sad condition of English democracy!)

The disturbed conditions of French society became particularly obvious in the closing months of 1933. The contradictions of capitalist economy were being intensified, and the conflict between the ruling and the working-classes, based on the flagrant contrasts between the two classes both in their economic conditions and in their political power, was growing ever more patent and acute. As always happens at such times, there were rapid changes and reshufflings of the Radical cabinets. Daladier, who had been Premier since the spring of 1933, gave place to Sarraut in December. Sarraut within a fortnight had to give place to Chautemps. The Chautemps Government appeared to be a shade more to the Left than that of Sarraut; and so, in the opening days of January 1934, the *Action Francaise* started a concentrated campaign against the Chautemps Government, linking it with the Stavisky scandal.

#### STAVISKY

Stavisky was a common swindler who had forged bonds of the Municipal undertakings of Bayonne. Dalimier, a subordinate member of the Chautemps Government, and brother-in-law of Chautemps, had earlier recommended this Bayonne swindle as a suitable investment. In the first days of January *Action Francaise* published the documents, arraigned the whole government, and found its circulation leaping up as a result. The venal Press of France joined

in **the** cry. There were many citizens **who did not realise that** the Fascists themselves were corrupt and, as we have seen before, were not merely directly paid either by **the** rich men of France or the governments of Italy and Germany, but were also manufacturing the agitation in order to discredit the whole parliamentary political system in the hope of carrying it over to Fascism.

It is worth while recounting in some little detail the Stavisky scandal, both because it was the most sensational of the many scandals (mostly connected with the Right Wing of the Chamber), which had disfigured French politics in the 'twenties and 'thirties, and because it led directly to the fall of the Chautemps Government and later to the riots of the 6th February 1934. Newspaper column after column and even volumes of books were written about Stavisky. I believe as good an account as any can be gained from a contemporary speech delivered by the Socialist, Lagrange, on the 11th January 1934. It was the first occasion on which the name of Stavisky was mentioned in the parliament, though the newspapers had been full of it for days previously. I quote from his speech as follow :\*

"But while leading this racecourse and casino life, while running a sumptuous music-hall, Stavisky still managed to take a lively interest in pawnshops. In 1930—please note the date, gentlemen—he went to Orleans to pawn some emeralds; whether real or false I do not know; in any case, he got several millions. A complaint was lodged; there was great excitement; an inquiry was ordered and—Stavisky paid up. He then went off to Bayonne to set up a pawnshop. You know the result of his transaction.

"He became a company director. He had his own Press,

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his daily papers, his weekly papers, and a theatre of his own. He had become Serge Alexandre, a king of Paris. He had powerful connections, and many people were only too keen to get on to the boards of his companies. If only he had succeeded in placing on the market the 500 million of worthless Hungarian Bonds, he would have repaid the Bayonne Bonds, and the Stavisky Affair would no longer have been a 'scandal' but a 'financial crisis'—a *krach*. But the whole thing collapsed. Tissier was arrested, Stavisky hurriedly left the Claridge Hotel. A Deputy was arrested. The blackmailers and newspaper editors were locked up. The accomplices were beginning to be inconvenienced. There was a reshuffle in the Government. The police at last discovered Stavisky at Chamounix—dead. The scandal is now in full swing.

"Now let me just ask you this. How was it possible that a well-known crook, living in 'provisional freedom' since 1927, that a gambler figuring in the police records, who was debarred from all casinos; how was it possible that this notorious crook who, we are told, was closely watched by the police and the Surete Generale, should have been able to go on dazzling Paris during six years, and steal millions and millions of francs? It is simply because he found in our principal social organisms—in the police, in the judiciary, in public and private offices, in the Press and in Parliament, a sufficient number of greedy people and a sufficient amount of carelessness and corruption.

"What was the part played by our two police services—the Surete Generale and the Prefecture? The police knew better than anybody that Stavisky was a crook. . . . Yet he was allowed to frequent casinos. Who raised the ban? "When and why was it done? Stavisky regained his 'provisional freedom' in 1927, he went off to Orleans, where he aroused great suspicions. He was closely watched; and yet nothing happened to him. He then went on to Bayonne. He engineered the Credit Municipal fraud. Nobody worried, nobody sounded the alarm, no information came from anywhere. And yet we are told to-day that he was closely watched and followed by detectives.

"He gambled away millions at Biarritz. He lived in grand style, without any definite profession, without any definite source

of income. What were the gambling-house police thinking about?

"In 1929 he founded the *Compagnie Francaise d'Entreprises* with a former Prefect of Police, a general, and a retired official on the board of directors. In 1933 he founded another company with an ex-Ambassador, a Prefect, a president of an ex-service-men's association, and a foreign ex-Minister on the Board. What were our two police services and the financial department of the Parquet thinking about? And yet we now learn from a Press interview that a high police official now in retirement, M. Pachot, had watched Stavisky all the time and that he had drawn up several reports. I ask you what has happened to M. Pachot's reports? Such are the questions, Mr. Prime Minister, which call for an answer. M. *Chiappe*, the Prefect of Police, on returning from Florence the other day, *declared that he had been watching Stavisky for ten years*, drawing up report upon report. If this is true, what were the influences which prevented the Authorities from acting? (Cheers.) The day came when Stavisky's arrest became inevitable. He escaped. Who is guilty of this final piece of negligence? At last he was about to be caught; but at that moment he committed suicide. That may be the most dramatic point in the whole affair.

"Stavisky is dead. We are told that he committed suicide." (*Cries of "No!"*) "And yet public opinion has known for years that the police are inevitably mixed up in all financial scandals; we have seen the Hanau Affair, the Oustric Affair and many others—and public opinion has unanimously rejected the suicide theory; public opinion has risen like one man and has cried: 'Police murder.' " (*Cheers on Right and Extreme Left.*)

FEBRUARY 1934

The circumstances of the time, and the sensational facts of the scandal itself, made it particularly easy for the Royalists and Fascists to exploit it. In January 1934 excited scenes took place around the French Parliament, with some small-scale rioting. The cry of "A bas les voleurs!" (Down with the thieves!) began to be heard in

**the streets**, and everyone knew **that** this was directed **against the** Cabinet. The Chautemps Government was forced **to** resign, and on the 27th January 1934 Daladier once **more** became Premier. His Government was to last only **ten** days. During these ten days much happened, and **the** first fortnight of February seemed to be a turning-point in the history of France. Daladier decided to take one step against the Fascists, namely, to remove the Fascist Prefect of the Police for the region of Paris, the Corsican, M. Chiappe. Daladier knew that the excited demonstrations against the Republic had been carried out with the connivance of M. Chiappe, who was a ruthless persecutor of the working-class and a tool of the French Fascists. After June 1940 this same Chiappe was recalled to Paris to act as Chief of Police against the working-class, a tool this time of the German Fascists; his end came a few months later when the aeroplane in which he was crossing the Mediterranean was shot down.

Daladier, whilst anxious to get rid of Chiappe, was equally anxious not to offend the rich men of France, so he proposed that Chiappe should resign the prefecture of police and become the Resident-General of France in Morocco, thus obtaining not only the most important post in the whole of French colonial administration, but also the command of the Foreign Legion, constituting an immense accession of strength to French Fascism. Chiappe, however., refused the offer and published his version of his dismissal. The public was greatly excited and the Fascists judged that the time had come to overthrow the Republic. On the 5th February the Croix de Feu organised violent demonstrations. On the 6th February they attacked the Parliament houses. The police under the new Prefect, M. Bonnefoy-Sibor, had been posted on the bridge that leads across the Sein from the Place de la Concorde **to**

the Chamber of Deputies, to the number of 70 police, 100 foot-guards, and 25 mounted Republican Guards. From five o'clock in the afternoon onwards, the Fascist crowds gathered on the Place de la Concorde. The slogans they shouted were "Down with the thieves!" "The Government must resign!" "Down with Daladier!" "Long live Chiappe!" They threw stones and portions of railings, erected barricades, overturned a motor bus and set it on fire, slashed the bellies of the horses with razor blades on end of sticks and took every other means to cause a riot, on the approved method of the German Fascist Storm Troops. By the end of an hour the guard at the bridge-head had lost 50 per cent in casualties. At seven o'clock the Fascists opened fire. The various groups were coordinated; the Action Francaise, with others, attacked the bridge, while the Jeunesse Patriote made towards Parliament from the south bank of the Seine, and Count de la Rocque, heading the Croix de Feu, attacked the Parliament buildings from the rear.

The fighting went on till after midnight. Those who were behind the outbreak had hoped to make the 6th February a day that would mark the end of Parliamentary government in France, and they succeeded at any rate in making it a day of bloodshed. What was the response of the Radical Government, and of its Prime Minister, Daladier, to this attack on parliamentarism, to this open attempt against the Republic? It resigned! Without a hostile vote in the Chamber, it simply yielded to the Fascist pressure, and departed.

The next stage followed rapidly. President Jean Lebrun summoned from his retirement the ex-President Gaston Doumergue and asked him to form as Premier a government of concentration—meaning a government which would be formed, not from the majority of the

French Parliament, which was "Radical-Socialist" and Socialist, but from the minority plus the "Radical-Socialists" and to the exclusion of the Socialists, and, needless to say, of the Communists. By the extra-Parliamentary pressure of this riot, the Fascists had changed the government of France and obtained a government which suited their immediate purpose. "Calm and order" were now to be restored by the Doumergue Government, and if that order should lead away from Republican traditions, and in the direction of Fascism, no displeasure would be shown by the rich men of France.

The scheme had to be carried through rather carefully. Accordingly, the first stage was the "boosting" of this ex-President of France, coming from his country seat at Tournecfeuille like the Roman Consul Cincinnatus returning from his plough to save the Republic. Journalistic claptrap of this kind appeared to be successful; the Fascist demonstrations had miraculously ceased; and the way seemed smooth for the success of the conspiracy.

They had, however, reckoned without their host, the workers and peasants of France. The working-class of France had been stirred by the events of the 6th February, had realised what was at stake, and were determined that no Hitler regime should be insinuated into France. The history of France for the next two years and more is the history of the resistance of the working-class and the people of France to the Fascist advance.

#### THE UNITED FRONT AGAINST FASCISM

A one-day General Strike was organised for Monday the 12th February, as a protest against the events of the 6th February. The Communist Party of France, who were to join in the general strike demonstration, organised an advance guard demonstration at the Place de la Republique

**on the evening of Friday the 9th February. The authorities sent the police to attack this demonstration. The workers resisted. The fighting lasted until midnight; six workers were then dead or dying, hundreds had been wounded, and 1,200 had been arrested. On Saturday the 10th, the Communist Party issued a Manifesto as follows:**

"Under the leadership of the Communist Party, the proletarians of Paris have carried out heroic demonstrations in the streets of Paris. Thousands of Socialist workers took part in this demonstration. The united working-class thus shows that it is fighting energetically against Fascism. This class action on the basis of the United Front has terrified the capitalist class.

"To-day, in the factories, the workers will learn with anger of yesterday's shootings. They will meet in their workshops—workers of all tendencies, Communist and Socialist, trade unionists of the C.G.T. and those of the C.G.T.U.\*—to strengthen the bonds of unity in the common struggle; they will elect their Workers' United Front Committees. By strike action, by demonstrations, by a general strike on Monday, they will force Fascism and the gunmen's Government of National Union to draw back. Fascism is not inevitable. Its defeat depends on the proletariat and the work of Communist Party."

The General Strike of 12th February was a magnificent success. Four and a half million workers left the factories; in the demonstrations there were over one million, comprising both the two wings of the trade union movement and the adherents of both Socialist and Communist parties. The great majority of the postal workers and teachers and other State employees joined in the strike. In Paris alone the demonstration amounted to 150,000 workers, forming a striking contrast with the few thousands

\*These two bodies were in effect two separate "Trade Union Congresses", the trade-union movement in France being thus split into two main sections, the one to some extent under Socialist and the other under Communist influence. See pp. 68, 77-9.

of armed Fascists of the previous week. It inspired not only the participants, but the whole working-class of France with a feeling of confidence in its own strength, courage, and power to resist the Fascists. But the most significant feature of the demonstrations was the unity of action achieved by all sections of the working-class, who had hitherto been greatly weakened by division, particularly between Socialists and Communists. United Action Committees sprang up everywhere in France. In the four months from the middle of February till June, under the pro-Fascist government of Doumergue, 22 street demonstrations and 930 public meetings against Fascism were held in Paris.

The question of questions was, Could this splendid response of the working-class to the Fascist danger be forged into a united front of the working-class, that is, of the Socialist and Communist parties and trade unions? The rank and file were determined about it. The difficulty lay in the past hostilities between the various working-class organisations, particularly in their higher ranks. Earlier, the Communist Party had on more than one occasion proposed a United Front; for example, for the purpose of fighting against the Poincare Government of 1926, and again for the elections of 1928. When in the year 1932 the danger of Fascism was already acutely apparent, Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland, the two greatest living writers of France, had made an appeal on the 27th May of that year, for support of the then forthcoming International Anti-Fascist Congress at Amsterdam, which led to the formation of the *Comite Mondial contre le Fascisme et la Guerre*, commonly called in France the "Amsterdam-Pleyel Movement". The Communist Party had responded to the appeal, but the leaders of the French Socialist Party had refused, and expelled some of its members who attended

the Congress.

#### UNITED FRONT EFFORTS IN EUROPE

From March 1933 onwards, when the danger of Fascism had become still greater with the accession to power of Hitler, the burning of the Reichstag, and the suppression of the working-class parties of Germany, attempts were made throughout the rest of Europe to secure a united front. But the parties of the Second International, headed by the British Labour Party, stubbornly resisted and carried on a counter-agitation against the United Front. The French Socialist Party joined in this agitation.

Here and there, it is true, united-front activities, though not under that name, were undertaken with the participation of leading members of both Socialist and Communist parties, as well as others. For example, in September 1933, just before the Reichstag Fire trial began in Leipzig, an International Legal Commission of Enquiry into the burning of the Reichstag, over which I had the honour to preside, was held in London.

Whilst the six lawyers—of six different nationalities, and none of the Communist—who comprised the Commission confined themselves to the judicial examination of the facts proved before them, the British, French, and German people who took part in the laborious work of organising the Commission and collecting the witnesses included members of various parties, Liberal, Socialist, and Communist; among them, for example, were Miss Ellen Wilkinson, then an anti-Communist Socialist, and Mr. Ivor Montagu. Practically every one of the numerous Germans who came forward to give evidence in favour of the Communists involved in the accusation was a Social Democrat, and as such strongly opposed to the Communist Party; they included, for example, a Social-Democrat ex-Police

President of Berlin who had caused many Communists to be shot down in the streets of that city.\*

#### THE UNITED FRONT IS REALISED

It was thus possible, even before the 6th February 1934, to have a certain measure of unity on specific matters; but the important task of setting up a general United Front against Fascism did not prove so easy. Nevertheless the obstacles were overcome. At the Toulouse Congress of the Socialist Party of France, held in May 1934, over one-third of the delegates voted for the affiliation of the Socialist Party to the Comité Mondial contre le Fascisme et la Guerre, and also for the sending of a delegation to the Communist International in Moscow to discuss the possibility of united action. In the following month the National Conference of the Communist Party of France, meeting at Ivry, gave full adherence to the United Front, and a new appeal was issued. Following on this, the Communist and Socialist organisations of the Seine, on the 2nd July 1934, organised a joint meeting to agitate for the

\*It is interesting to recall, in these cramped days, that this tribunal was composed, in addition to myself, of distinguished lawyers from France, the U.S.A., Holland, Belgium, and Sweden. Lawyers of eminence from **Spain** and Switzerland were also to have attended, but were prevented only by illness in one case and public duties in the other.

It is also interesting that, although Hitler had at that time only been in power a few months and was still extremely sensitive to foreign public opinion, the British Government sought to "appease" him by preventing the Commission from sitting. As we were then living under the "rule of **law**", this could not be done by direct means; but the Government tried to persuade the professional organisation which had let the rooms in which the Commission was sitting to cancel the letting. This body honourably refused to break its contract. The British Government was angry, but the view is almost universally held both on the Continent and in Britain that the findings of the Commission were absolutely correct, and that its enquiry and report had a great deal to do with the acquittal at the Leipzig trial of the four innocent accused, including Georgi Dimitroff.

All this happened less than eight years ago.

&gt;

release of Thalemann and against Fascism. Discussions then took place during that month between the two national committees, and on the 27th July 1934 a pact for unity of action was signed. This agreement, which assumed that abusive criticism on each side should be stopped, provided for a great campaign of meetings and demonstrations against Fascism and the preparation for war. The United Front thus formed in the summer of 1934 was to sweep forward until it had brought down the Doumergue Government, embraced the people of France as a whole in common action, produced amalgamation of the two trade union congresses, and secured the electoral victory of the People's Front. As will be seen, this not merely added enormously to the strength of the working-class and anti-Fascist forces of France, but led to new and sharper developments of the conflict between the rising power of the working-class and the selfish and terrified ruling class of France.

In the next chapter we shall see the formation of the Popular Front and the temporary victory—which might so easily have become consolidated and made the basis for further advance—of the popular struggle for power and for the improvement of conditions.

## CHAPTER V

### BUILDING THE POPULAR FRONT

*Demonstrations of 14th July 1935—Programme of the Popular Front—Electoral victory—The strikes—Popular games—Counter-attack and "pause"*

The agreement on a United Front of the working-class, concluded in July 1934, was a signal achievement in the building of a bulwark against Fascism and war, at a moment when Doumergue, chosen champion of reaction, was moving towards what seemed to be a personal Cæsarean regime, and when all the Fascist organisations and the still more dangerous secret supporters of Fascism behind the government (Laval and the chiefs of the Comité des Forges) were mustering their strength for the overthrow of Republican France.

To beat back the danger of Fascism in France, to give a tolerable life for the masses of the French people, and to postpone and even avert the danger of war required, however, a wider grouping of forces than was provided by the United Front of the working-class parties. What was wanted was to establish in a different epoch and on a different basis that grouping together of the mass of the people which thirty years earlier, at the time of the Dreyfus case, discussed above in Chapter III, had defeated the attempts of reaction to undermine Republican institutions and to place the working-class and peasantry in complete subjection. Certainly nothing less than this could beat back the inroads that Fascism had already made into

French political life. In response to this need, the conception of a front not only of the working-class but of the whole mass of the people against the "200 Families" emerged as a necessity; not merely a "common front" of Socialists and Communists, but a Popular Front. It was the Communist Party of France which was the first to raise the question; and in the following way.

In October 1934, when the congress of the great Radical-Socialist Party of France was about to be held at Nantes, Maurice Thorez, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, started the campaign by going to Nantes and delivering a speech in which he proposed a People's Front for Liberty, Work, and Peace. The Radicals at the beginning fought very shy of it. Some of their leading members held seats in the Doumergue Cabinet, and in the cabinets of 1935, even in the Laval Cabinet, Edouard Herriot remained a Minister of State. By January 1935, however, great public meetings showed a vivid response to the conception of a People's Front, and the demand for it grew into a real movement.

Then came a very big step in advance. The League of the Rights of Man, formed in 1907 to defend the Republican institutions that had undergone such a severe threat during the Dreyfus case, brought the support of its 180,000 members to the People's Front. On the 10th February 1935, the Socialist and the Communist parties joined in leading 100,000 Paris demonstrators to the Place de la Republique, there to honour the memory of those who had fallen a year earlier in the fight against Fascism. It was clear that the united front of the working-class was powerful in itself and would form the strong core of any wider grouping.

Meanwhile, in December 1934, the Communist Party had taken a further step. It proposed local elected com-

mittees of the People's Front and again the response was immediate; the committees began to grow amongst the mass of the people. In May 1935 another step was taken, in the form of a Parliamentary grouping. A joint meeting of Socialist and Communist deputies held on the 28 th May sent the following letter to the members of Radical and other moderate Left-Wing groups:

"DEAR COLLEAGUE,

"After examining at our joint meeting the conditions of a concerted action against the (Flandin) Government's financial proposals, the representatives of our two parties have agreed that in the present circumstances it would be of great interest if their agreement could be extended to the other parties of the Left. We therefore invite you to nominate delegates for the meeting to be held on Thursday, 30th instant, at 9-30 a.m.

"For the Socialist Group: LEON BLUM.

"For the Communist Group: RAMETTE."

Thus by the early spring of 1935 there existed the growing "common front" of the working-class, now nearly a year old, the rapid growth of local elected committees of the wider People's Front, and finally the beginnings of Parliamentary joint action on the basis of the existing mass movement. The parliamentarians were not engaged merely in the ordinary parliamentary combinations or intrigues, but were reflecting the will that had already begun to develop amongst the people.

At this point the suggestion was made by another organisation—not a political party—that the State festival of the 14th July (the Fall of the Bastille) should be made the occasion of a demonstration of the people's unity against the 200 Families and the danger of war. This body was the "Amsterdam-Pleyel Movement", the Comité Mondial contre le Fascisme et la Guerre, which, as already

mentioned, had arisen from the anti-war conference held in Amsterdam in the autumn of 1932. The great mass of trade unionists, co-operators, and intellectuals present at that Amsterdam conference had realised the acute danger of war which was made<sup>1</sup> obvious by the defence of Japanese aggression in Manchuria by the British Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon, in the discussions at Geneva. This acquiescence in, or rather support of, the Japanese had encouraged them to seize more territory by the bombing of Shanghai. It was almost as though the delegates, stricken by the horror of the bombing, had some premonition of the similar horrors which were to take place seven years later in Western Europe.

THE 14TH JULY 1935

The idea thus launched was taken up. The 14th July celebrated not only the taking of the Bastille but the gathering together of all the forces in France that were, or claimed to be, in the revolutionary tradition. One thousand delegates, followed by half a million French men and women, marched from the Bastille in Paris, and took the following oath:

"We solemnly pledge ourselves to remain united for the defence of democracy, for the disarmament and dissolution of the Fascist Leagues, to put our liberties out of reach of Fascism. We swear, on this day which brings to life again the first victory of the Republic, to defend the democratic liberties conquered by the people of France, to give bread to the workers, work to the young, and peace to humanity as a whole."

The 14th July thus became a triumph of the *People's Front*. In the succeeding months of 1935, while Premier Laval was cooking up his pro-Mussolini plans with Sir Samuel Hoare, the British Foreign Secretary, the parties in the French Parliament were gathering opposition to the

**Laval** Government, not only on its foreign policy **but** on **its** decree-laws for "the defence of the franc" at the expense of the masses; and at the same time the programme of the Popular Front was being worked out. There was much discussion; concessions had to be made, especially to the Radical-Socialists, but eventually it was adopted as an election programme by the Socialists, by most of the Radical candidates and by the Communists, who, whilst regarding it as only a minimum, gave it their full support. It was first published on the 11th January 1936. As this programme, unlike the contemporary British election programmes, was precise where they were frequently vague (or as in the case of the National Government, deliberately deceptive—as Baldwin coolly explained to the House of Commons a year later!), and summed up the urgent needs **felt** by the majority of the French population at that time, after five years of the effect of economic crisis, it merits rather full treatment. It represents the world that we and our friends in France have lost—I hope, only temporarily.

#### PROGRAMME OF THE POPULAR FRONT

The preamble of the Programme demands ran as follows:—

"The programme of the immediate demands that the Rassemblement Populaire publishes to-day is the result of a unanimous agreement between the ten organisations represented on the National Committee of the Rassemblement: Ligue des Droits de l'Homme, Comité de vigilance des intellectuels anti-fascistes, Comité\* mondial contre le Fascisme et la Guerre (Amsterdam-Pleyel), Mouvement d'anciens Combattants, the Radical Party, **the** Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the Socialist-Republican Union, the Confederation Générale du Travail, and the Confederation Générale du Travail Unitaire. ..."

It should be noted that this was no parliamentary combination only, but contained the two great trade union federations, one of them, the C.G.T., friendly with the Socialist, and the other, the C.G.T.U., with the Communist Party. This was remarkable not merely as a sign of unity but also because the whole tradition of French trade unionism, unlike that of Britain, had been against participation in parliamentary politics. Four other organisations joining in this programme were also aloof from party politics. The programme continued:

"The programme is directly inspired by the watchwords of the 14th July. These parties and organisations representing millions of human beings who have sworn to remain united, in accordance with their oath, 'to defend democratic freedom, to give bread to the workers, work to the young, and peace to humanity as a whole', have together sought the practical means of common, immediate, and continuous action. This programme is voluntarily limited to measures that can be immediately applied. The National Committee wishes every party and organisation belonging to the Rassemblement Populaire to join in this common action without abandoning their own principles, doctrines, or ultimate objectives ..."

The programme was in two parts—political demands and economic demands. The political demands began with:

"(1) DEFENCE OF LIBERTY

(a) *General Amnesty*

(b) *Against the Fascist Leagues*

- (i) Effective disarmament and dissolution of semi-military formations, in accordance with the law.
- (ii) The putting into force of legal enactments in cases of incitement to murder or of attempts endangering the safety of the State.
- (c) The cleansing of public life, especially through the

enforcement of parliamentary disqualifications (i.e. inability of deputies to hold certain offices).

(d) *The Press*

- (i) Repeal of the infamous laws and decrees restricting freedom of opinion.
- (ii) Reform of the Press by the adoption of legislative measures
  - (a) which will make possible the effective repression of slander and blackmail;
  - (b) which will guarantee normal means of existence to journals, which will compel them to publish the source of their finance, which will end the private monopolies of commercial publicity, and the scandals of financial publicity and which, finally, will prevent the formation of a Press trust.
- (iii) The organisation of State broadcasting messages, with the aim of ensuring the accuracy of information and the equality of political and social organisations at the microphone.

(e) *Trade Union Liberties*

- (i) Application and observance of trade union rights for all;
- (ii) Observance of factory legislation concerning women.

(f) *Education and Freedom of Conscience*

- (i) To safeguard the development of public education, not only by the necessary grants, but also by reforms such as the extension of compulsory attendance at school up to the age of fourteen, and, in secondary education, the proper selection of pupils as an essential accompaniment of grants.
- (ii) To guarantee to all concerned, pupils and teachers, full freedom of conscience, particularly

by ensuring the neutrality of education, its non-religious character, and the civic rights of the teaching staff".

(g) *Colonial territories*

The setting up of a Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry into the political, economic, and cultural situation in France's overseas territories, especially in French North Africa and Indo-China."

It will be seen that these proposals cover much of what we would describe as the defence of civil liberties in England, including the right of association in trade unions, women's rights, and the freedom of the Press. But it also contained a measure applying to the colonies which, however tentative (and probably the most to which the Radicals could be expected to assent at that stage) was at any rate a great advance on the previous position.

The next section of the Programme, dealing with the defence of peace, ran as follows:

- "(A) Appeal to the people, and particularly to the working masses, for collaboration in the maintenance and organisation of peace.
- (B) International collaboration within the framework of the League of Nations for collective security, by defining the aggressor and by the automatic and joint application of sanctions in cases of aggression.
- (C) A ceaseless endeavour to pass from armed peace to disarmed peace, first by a convention of limitation, and then by the general, simultaneous, and effectively controlled reduction of armaments.
- (D) Nationalisation of the war industries and suppression of private trade in arms.
- (E) Repudiation of secret diplomacy; international action and public negotiations to bring back to Geneva the states which have left it, without weakening the constituent

principles of the League of Nations; collective security and indivisible peace.

- (F) Simplification of the procedure provided in the League of Nations Covenant for the pacific adjustment of treaties, which are dangerous to the peace of the world.
- (G) Extension, especially in Eastern and Central Europe, of the system of pacts open to all nations, on the lines of the Franco-Soviet Pact."

Again my readers will recognise, if their memory has not been overlaid by recent events, a standpoint very similar to that of large sections of the British people, who indeed on certain of these items had expressed themselves unequivocally to the tune of eleven millions in the famous Peace Ballot in the midsummer of 1935. Some of the items—such as (D), were a matter of common discussion in America and in Britain, where they were strongly opposed by the Government, above all by Lord Hankey, then Secretary of the Cabinet and later Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Again, Item E was clearly directed against the school of thought represented by Lord Londonderry, who at that time was in quite new mourning over his departure from the Baldwin cabinet.

The *Economic Demands* began with the "restoration of purchasing power destroyed or reduced by the crisis", and were in three parts, the first appealing mainly to the working-class, the second to the peasantry, and the third to all opponents of the finance oligarchy and its tricks. They ran as follows:

- " I . *Restoration of purchasing power destroyed or reduced by the crisis. Against unemployment and the crisis in industry*
  - (a) The establishment of a national unemployment fund.
  - (b) Reduction of the working week without reduction of weekly wages.

- (c) Drawing young workers into employment by establishing a system of adequate pensions for aged workers.
- (d) The rapid carrying out of a scheme of large-scale works of public utility, both urban and rural, linking local savings with schemes financed by the State and municipalities.

*Against the agricultural and commercial crisis*

- (a) Revision of prices of agricultural produce, combined with a fight against speculation and high prices, so as to reduce the gap between wholesale and retail prices.
- (b) In order to put an end to the levies taken by speculators from both producers and consumers, the setting up of a National Grain Board representing all sections concerned.
- (c) Support for agricultural co-operatives, supply of fertilisers at cost price by the National Boards for Nitrogen and Potash, control and certification of sales of superphosphates and other fertilisers, extension of agricultural credits, reduction of leasehold rents.
- (d) Suspension of distraints and the regulation of debt repayments.
- (e) Pending the complete and earliest possible removal of all the injustices inflicted by the economy decrees, the immediate repeal of measures affecting those groups whose conditions of life have been most severely endangered by these decrees.

**II.** *Against the robbery of savings and for a better organisation of credit*

- (a) Regulation of banking business.
- (b) Regulation of balance sheets issued by banks and limited liability companies.
- (c) Further regulation of the powers of directors of companies.
- (d) Prohibition of State servants who have retired, or are

## THE FALL OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC

on the reserved list, from being members of boards of directors of companies.

- (e) In order to remove credit and savings from the control of the economic oligarchy, to transform the Banque de France, now a privately owned bank, into the Banque de la France (i.e. to nationalise it).
- (/) Abolition of the Council of Regents of the Bank of France.
- (g) Extension of the powers of the Governor of the Bank of France, under permanent control of a council composed of representatives of the executive authority, and representatives of the main organised forces of labour and of industrial, commercial, and agricultural activity.
- (h) Conversion of the capital of the bank into bonds, with measures to safeguard the interests of small holders.

### *Against Financial Corruption*

- (a) Control of the trade in armaments, in conjunction with the nationalisation of war industries.
- (b) Abolition of waste in the civil and military departments.
- (c) The setting up of a War Pensions Fund.
- (d) Democratic reform of the tax system so as to relax the fiscal burden with a view to economic revival, and the finding of financial resources through measures directed against large fortunes (rapid steepening of the rates of tax on incomes of over 75,000 francs—reorganisation of death-duties, taxation of monopoly profits in such a way as to prevent any repercussion on the prices paid by consumers).
- (e) Prevention of fraud in connection with transferable securities.
- (/) Control of exports of capital, and punishment for evasion by the most rigorous measures, up to the confiscation of property concealed abroad or of its equivalent value in France."

This programme, it will be seen, was clear, precise, and definite. It was directed primarily against the "200 Families" with their Fascist leagues, and especially against the "merchants of death", the armament manufacturers. Positively, it held out to the people of France the revision of the Laval economy decrees, a steady market for the peasants, and full trade union rights and the shorter working week for the factory worker.

The Popular Front, based on the Socialist and Communist Common or United Front and on the mass-elected Popular Front committees, answered the real needs of the people, living under the threat of Fascism, reaction, and war. It was a French programme, but it corresponded to needs far beyond France. In Spain, during these same months of 1935, a similar programme and a similar grouping of the people (the Frente Popular) had been built on the original Workers' United Front (Workers' Alliance) that was cemented in the Asturias rising of October 1934. On the other side of the world, in China, a People's Front was being built up in the form of a National United Front against the war of the Japanese aggressors, which was destined to have—and is still having—remarkable effects on the history of China and the world. Nor was it limited to these three countries. Similar movements began to grow both in Europe and the Americas. The Indian National Congress in its election programme of 1936 set forth demands not dissimilar from those of a People's Front. It was the birth, one might almost say, of a new movement throughout large sections of mankind, who were beginning to realise more or less consciously the epoch in which they lived, and<sup>1</sup> for whom the defeat of their ruling class with its Fascist tendencies was the only means of avoiding the coming war. In the case of Spain, the electoral struggle took place in February 1936 and

resulted in an overwhelming defeat of the reactionary parties and the clique of militarists. In Spain the antagonisms were so clear and sharply defined that the moment it appeared that the Frente Popolar would be victorious General Sanjurjo went to Berlin and there obtained the help of Hitler for the forthcoming rebellion, already planned, of himself and Generals Franco and Mola.

Thus the Popular Front was an event of enormous significance, not only for France but for the whole of Europe and beyond Europe. This was immediately perceived by the ruling classes of all the major countries, who kept a watchful eye on France and on Spain, and on any signs of similar movements in their own populations. The People's Front had only to come into existence to find arrayed against it all the forces of reaction, in Italy and Germany, in Spain and Britain, in America and France.

#### BRITISH OPPOSITION TO POPULAR FRONT

In Britain there were two different forms of opposition to the conception of the People's Front. Open reactionaries dreaded it as Hitler dreaded it. They saw in it the gathering of the mass of the people around the leadership of the working-class. It spelt for them the end of the roguery and corruption, the profiteering and war-mongering, of their regime. But there was another opposition to the People's Front expressed in every country of Europe by the Social-Democrats, the old leaders of the Labour movement. In France and in Spain that opposition was largely overcome for a time; but it remained in full force in the northern countries of Europe and was voiced most vehemently by the leaders of the British Labour Party and the Trade Union Congress. They had been opposed to the United Front of the working-class and were even more opposed to its extension into a Popular

Front. The view was very frequently expressed by the British labour leaders (unaware that within a few years they would be taking their places in a non-Socialist National Government in Britain) that opposition to the People's Front was necessary on the ground that as pure Socialists they could not have anything to do with a movement which included or might include middle-class people who were not also convinced Socialists. This argument is not in fact historically correct from a Socialist point of view. The founders of scientific Socialism, Marx and Engels, whilst always laying the greatest possible stress on the independent programme and organisation of the working-class, and striving to make the workers conscious of themselves as a class, with their own programme and their own organisation, held the view that joint action between the proletariat and the middle classes was possible under certain conditions. It was one of the weaknesses of the Labour and Socialist movements of most European countries during the earlier twentieth century that they allowed the peasantry and other sections of the lower middle classes to be influenced by reaction and brought under its banner. This weakness, repeated in the years after the Versailles Treaty, had a dreadful sequel in the victory of Hitler. The importance of the Popular Front movement in France was that it avoided this weakness and set about the task of defeating it by associating the middle classes with the working-class against the dangers of reaction, Fascism and war.

#### BEFORE THE ELECTIONS

The effect in France itself of the programme of the Front Populaire was to break up the Laval Government, which was already shaken by the swindle of the Hoare-Laval pact. The Executive Committee of the Radical

Party met on the 18 th January and decided all but unanimously that the methods of M. Laval were "contrary to the doctrines of the Radical Party". This meant that Herriot had to leave the Government. The new Chairman of the Radical Party, now elected, was M. Daladier, who had been Prime Minister at the time of the Fascist *coup d'etat* in February 1934; in the previous year he had been veering more and more towards the Left, had appeared publicly in the spring of 193? on platforms along with Socialist and Communist leaders (the latter association a thing unheard of before) and was now frequently to be heard denouncing the "200 Families". This new chief of the Radical Party was indeed thoroughly committed to support of the Front Populaire and its programme against the "200 Families" and the danger of war.

A few days later the Radical ministers handed their resignations to M. Laval, and the Laval Government fell. It was succeeded by a government with a Radical premier, M. Sarraut, with M. Flandin as Minister for Foreign Affairs. (It was the representatives of this government which attended the funeral of King George the Fifth.)

It was clear that the Sarraut-Flandin Government could be no more than a stop-gap before the end-of-April elections. It was clear also throughout Europe that the elections would mean a big swing to the Left, a blow to Fascism in France. Everyone was looking forward to these elections with a certain suspense. But Hitler struck quickly before the Front Populaire programme could get its parliamentary majority. The Sarraut Government had ratified the Franco-Soviet Pact, and had passed a law against the Fascist Leagues in France, when on 7th March Hitler sent troops into the demilitarised Rhineland and denounced the treaties of Locarno. As I have already explained in Chapter III, the French Government made ready to mobi-

lise and looked to the British Cabinet, which advised them to do nothing at all, except, of course, appeal to the League of Nations—whose potency had just been utterly destroyed by the miserable business of the Hoare-Laval deal over Abyssinia—and itself sent a questionnaire to Hitler.

Just a few weeks before the election, the two trade union congresses of France, the Confederation Generale du Travail (C.G.T.) and the Confederation Generale du Travail Unitaire (C.G.T.U.), were formally amalgamated. This was of great significance for the success of the Popular Front and was to be still greater in the future. The Confederation Generale du Travail (dissolved by Marshal Petain in the late autumn of 1940) had had a very chequered career for over forty years. It was in the early '90's that Fernand Pelloutier gathered together the Bourses de Travail, or Trades Councils of France, in a Federation. As the national unions grew, the proposal was soon made to set up an all-embracing body. This came into being with the beginning of the century, but its basis differed from that of the British Trades Union Congress, in that it retained the affiliation of the trades councils which had been ejected from the British Trades Union Congress in the middle '90's, on the motion of Mr. John Burns. The more vigorous local life of French trade unionism as compared with British trade unionism is largely attributable to the inclusion of these Bourses de Travail in the Confederation Generale du Travail. The "C.G.T." developed rapidly to a militant attitude in the early years of this century, when the trade union leaders in the United Kingdom were still mainly attached to the politics of the Liberal Party and many of them sat in Parliament as Liberals. There had, however, been a strain of anarchism in the origins of the C.G.T. which led to what is nowadays called an anarcho-syndicalist attitude to parliamentary

institutions, but in the years before the war was called quite simply "syndicalism". The French trade unions took no part in electoral struggles and relied entirely on the fighting strength of their organisations in any conflicts that might arise with the employers. During the war of 1914-18, however, there came a very great change. The C.G.T. dropped its intransigent attitude and co-operated very closely with the war governments of France. After the war, there was a rift in the lute; in 1920 the C.G.T. lost heavily, and the next year lost still more heavily by a split in its ranks. The Confederation Generale du Travail Unitaire was formed in 1921, and for fifteen years thereafter the French trade union movement was split from top to bottom, with two trade union congresses functioning. Besides these, there was and always had been a certain number of "Christian Trade Unions", organised under the patronage of the Catholic Church and a rather smaller number of what were briefly called "yellow" unions, or, to use the American expression, "company unions", organised under the influence of the employers.

With forces thus divided, the working-class of France in these fifteen years had suffered defeat after defeat, especially after the 1929-33 economic crisis, during which years the standard of living was cut by 30 per cent, or nearly one-third. The C.G.T.U. to a large extent followed the lead of the Communist Party of France, but the C.G.T. itself could not be said to follow the French Socialist Party, but remained entrenched in its old syndicalism. One of the most important developments of the movement towards a united front of the working-class was the *rapprochement* between the two trade union congresses. This developed throughout 1934-5, and in September 1935 simultaneous congresses of the two federations were held, at each of which the principle of trade union unity was fully approved.

Fusion by industries was taking place during the winter of 1935-6, and finally in May 1936 a Congress of the now united C.G.T. was held. Both these bodies, which were formally separate, had adhered to the People's Front. As a united body they were an enormous factor of strength, strength which was to be multiplied manifold in the summer months of 1936. When the working-class of France thus finally attained unity of trade union organisations, the two trade unions together had less than one million members (600,000 C.G.T.; 300,000 C.G.T.U.); by the end of 1936 they had nearly five million members and were the largest trade union movement of any capitalist country. The elections in France took place within a month of the fusion of the two trade union bodies, and the results of these elections enabled the workers of France to start on the struggle to win back all they had lost in the years of schism.

#### THE ELECTIONS

Elections in France, as in the U.S.A., but not as in Britain, occurred at regular fixed intervals of four years. No government could in practice use the threat of a dissolution to bring the French Members of Parliament to heel. The electoral method also differed in that there was a second ballot, the purpose of which was to avoid the situation which has so frequently happened in this country—that an M.P. can represent the minority of those voting, in cases where there are several candidates. It is theoretically possible in Britain to have such a result as this: in a contest where, say, 50,000 votes are cast, 17,000 might vote Conservative, 16,000 Labour, 14,000 Liberal, and 3,000 Communist. If such were the results the Conservative would be elected though he would represent, it is clear, only about one-third of the votes cast. In France,

on the other hand, unless one of the candidates had an absolute majority over all the others in the first ballot, a second ballot had to be held a week later. In this the lowest candidate would normally drop out; other candidates, having tested their strength, would often retire and leave their supporters to vote for the one they liked next best. This led in the past to arrangements between parties who were prepared to combine against their chief opponents; for example, what was called a Cartel des Gauches, or Left bloc, was more than once formed between various Radical parties and the Socialists. Under this Cartel des Gauches the Socialist or Radical candidate would withdraw in the second ballot in favour of the other in order, to prevent the more reactionary Right Wing candidate being elected. Similar arrangements took place amongst the Right Wing parties. On the occasion of the 1936 elections, the agreement on the programme of the Popular Front carried with it as corollary an electoral arrangement by which each party of the Popular Front went to the polls in the first ballot and in the second ballot (if one was needed) concentrated on whichever Left candidate was in the lead; in some cases, of course, the candidate most likely to win was by previous arrangement put forward alone from the outset.

The result of the ballots held at the end of April and the beginning of May 1936 was a sweeping victory for the parties of the Popular Front. Out of some 618 seats, 378 fell to the Popular Front; of the remainder the Right Wing parties gained at the expense of the Centre parties.

The actual figures are as follows:

|                                                                             | <i>New Chamber</i> | <i>Old Chamber</i> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Right: Conservatives U.R.D. (Marin Group) and Popular Democrats (Catholics) | 122                | 105                |
| Centre: Left Republicans and Independent Radicals)                          | 116                | 164                |
| Left: Radicals                                                              | 116                | 158                |
| Socialist Union (Paul-Bon - cour) and other small Left Parties              | 36                 | 66                 |
| Socialists                                                                  | 146                | 101                |
| Communists                                                                  | 72                 | 10                 |
| Others                                                                      | 10                 | 11                 |
|                                                                             | 618                | 615                |

The table is taken from Alexander Werth's *Destiny of France*, and while the vagueness of political affiliation of some of the French Members of Parliament makes for a margin of error, it can be taken as fairly correct.\*

The total votes cast were as follows:

|                   | 1936      | 1932      |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Right Groups      | 2,254,000 | 2,262,000 |
| Centre Groups     | 1,938,000 | 2,225,000 |
| Radicals ..       | 1,461,000 | 1,805,000 |
| Small Left Groups | 518,000   | 511,000   |
| Socialists        | 1,922,000 | 1,931,000 |
| Communists ..     | 1,503,000 | 794,000   |
| Others            | 95,000    | 85,000    |

Of the separate parties—because the above seven groupings include a large number of parties—the Social-

\*It should be mentioned that the Socialists, who are shown in this table as having 101 members in the old Chamber, had secured 129 seats at the elections of that Chamber in 1932; their numbers had been reduced by a subsequent split and the formation of the "Neo-Socialist" group, headed by Deat and Marquet, who have since turned to Fascism.

ists were first, one of the Right parties was second, and the Communists were third. In the department of the Seine, Paris and its immediate neighbourhood, the Communists with 300,000 votes were the strongest single party.

It is perhaps worth recalling that the elections of that year 1936 were almost the last free or relatively free elections held in the major capitalist countries. Since then, in Spain, the victory of the rebel Franco, aided by Mussolini and Hitler and connived at by Chamberlain, has finished with elections. In France, the elections were postponed before this present war began; in Britain the elections due last autumn have been postponed; in Japan the elections in the beginning of 1936, which showed a swing to the Left, were followed by an attempted *coup d'etat* and extensive murders of politicians, including a Prime Minister, and since then no elections have been held.\*

#### THE NEW GOVERNMENT

It was clear immediately that the Popular Front had won and that when the new Parliament assembled in the first week of June Leon Blum, the leader of the strongest party in the Popular Front, i.e. the Socialists, would be called upon to form a government. How was this Government to be composed? The Executive of the Radical Party met on the 13th May and decided they would fully assist in the formation of the Government. On the next day the Communist Party and the C.G.T. decided that they would not participate in the Government—to which

\*Until a couple of months ago I myself thought that relatively free elections amongst the big capitalist powers could still be found, if nowhere else, in the U.S.A., but the remarkable revelations contained in the 11th November number of the *New Republic*—a journal whose support of Roosevelt is unimpeachable—showed that minority parties had been prevented from exercising their electoral rights in something like half of the forty-eight United States.

**they had received a formal invitation—but would support it and co-operate with it. A day later, on the 15 th, Leon Blum spoke of the "cordial and warm tone" of the decisions taken by the trade unions of France and the Communist Party of France. The comment of Alexander Werth in his *Destiny of France* on these decisions runs as follows:**

"For the Communist refusal he (Blum) was secretly relieved—though he never openly admitted it; he knew them to be troublesome customers; and he also knew that even a partly Communist government would make a bad impression abroad—especially in England; and the first principle of Blum's foreign policy was to keep on good terms with England."

Accordingly, on the 4th of June, within a day or two after the meeting of the new Chamber, the Sarraut Government resigned, and for the first time the Socialist Party of France headed a government. The new Cabinet was composed as follows:

- (1) *Premier and Ministers of State:* Blum, Chautemps (Radical), PauJ Faurc (Secretary of Socialist Party); Violette (Socialist Union).
- (2) *National Defence:* Daladier, Minister of War; Pierre Cot, Air; and another Radical as Minister of Marine (all Radicals).
- (3) *General Administration:* Salengro (Socialist) as Minister of the Interior, with two Radicals as Ministers of Justice and Education and two women Under-Secretaries.
- (4) *Foreign Relations:* Delbos (Radical), Foreign Minister, with a Socialist as Minister of the Colonies.
- (5) *Finance and State Debt:* Auriol (Socialist) as Minister, with another socialist as Minister of Pensions.
- (6) *National Economy:* Spinasse (Socialist) as Minister, with a mixture of Socialists and Radicals covering Mines, Public Works, Commerce, Agriculture, and Post Office.
- (7) *Social Solidarity:* Lebas (Socialist) as Minister, with a mixed team of Radical and Socialist Under-Secretaries.

Before this new government of France, resulting from the formation of the Popular Front and its victory in the elections, could formulate its programme of legislation, its immediate measures were hastened and determined by a movement of the people themselves, indicative at once of their economic distress and of their determination. Even as the Government was in process of formation in the last days of May and the first week of June, there broke out a series of great strikes in France.

#### THE GREAT STRIKES

Beginning in Paris, the workers of France in industry after industry came out on strike for their immediate economic demands. Strikes spread rapidly. The demands varied, but the determination to win back what they had lost was the same everywhere. Between 1930 and 1935 alone, the total wage bill of France had fallen by 30 per cent. From 1935 onwards there had been a further drop, due to the Laval policy of deflation. The workers had been awaiting the moment when they could restore their position and make a new advance. By the end of the first week in June about one million workers were on strike, and the strikes were spreading. They covered an enormous number of trades, such as motor works, aeroplane works, mines, textiles, printers, oil distillers, paper mills, cement workers, builders, food factories, etc., etc. Even the drivers of the "Black Marias" struck, and the prison vans had to be driven by the police inspectors! Most remarkable of all, the shop assistants in the great departmental stores of Paris, who had been completely outside the influence of trade unionism and whose wages were miserably low, came out on strike, formed themselves into a union, and became part of the tidal wave of recruits to the C.G.T.

The result was an overwhelming victory for the work-

ing-class. They won their demands, and one of the first tasks of the Government was to preside over the meetings held between the employers' federation and the C.G.T., and thereafter to embody the results in parliamentary measures. To tell the whole story of those strikes, which startled Europe by their universality, vigour, and discipline, would take up too many pages of this book, but there are certain points to which it is necessary to call attention.

First of all, why did the strikes take place at that particular time? An interesting answer to this is given by Mr. Werth, who was on the spot as the correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*. He says:

"The Press of the Right was much perturbed; 'they are asking for things that can be given them only by an Act of Parliament', the *Intransigent* wailed; 'the employers simply don't know what to reply to such demands.' But with a sound instinct, the working-class knew that *now* was the time to bring pressure to bear on Parliament. It was a propitious moment. Blum had been showing signs of weakness—had he not, on May 10, started his pre-governmental career by—reassuring the bankers? His government must be forced—or helped, as the case may be—to push through Parliament the essential Labour clauses of the Front Populaire programme, not gradually (as he had announced on May 10) but quickly."

Secondly, what was it that made the strikes so formidable? It was that the workers remained in occupation of the factories. They were "stay-in strikes", of a kind that had never been witnessed before in France. (It had happened in 1920 in Italy, but not on any great scale and thereafter not in any European country until now, June 1936.) The workers ceased work, but remained by their benches. They spent the night in the factories, organised factory and departmental committees, arranged their food supplies, kept everything clean, tidy, and in order but—

did not work. This, of course, was "not allowed", as the King of Wurtemberg protested at the time of the Revolution of November 1918, when his courtiers told him that the crowd was singing revolutionary songs in the courtyard of his castle.

The working-class for the moment had ceased to create surplus value. The employers were helpless. As was shown afterwards by incautious statements by Ministers, there were some Radicals who felt that it was the duty of the State to drive the workers out of the factories at the point of the bayonet. But no move was made towards this. It was impossible for the new Government even to dream of any such step. The employers knew this; the workers knew it even better, and had chosen their time well.

There could be no importation of blacklegs or strike-breakers; there could be nothing done by the employers except to surrender. And surrender they did. On the 7th June the General Federation of Employers, who had been meeting the delegates of the C.G.T. in the Hotel Matignon under the chairmanship of Leon Blum, concluded the "Matignon Agreement", by which they substantially conceded the demands of the strikers.

Next, what were the main demands which had to be and were made effective by Act of Parliament? The legislation passed within a few hours of the Matignon Agreement established in principle:

- (a) the forty-hour week without loss of pay;
- (b) fourteen days' paid holidays in every year;
- (c) collective agreements in every workshop, to be supervised by shop stewards directly elected by the men;
- (d) steps towards restoration of the wage cuts, etc., inflicted by the Doumergue-Laval decrees.

It should be noted that the demand for the forty-

hour week put forth and secured by the workers themselves in these strikes went considerably beyond the programme of the Front Populaire, which had spoken only of "a shorter week"<sup>1</sup>. At a leap the working-class of France gained in principle the clear concession of shorter hours than in any other major capitalist country.

In addition, there was an immediate rise in wages, varying in normal cases from 10 to 15 per cent; but in the case of particularly low-paid workers, or in sweated factories where there had been no trade unionism, the increase was as much as 50 per cent and even more. Nevertheless the workers, beginning to know their power, were feeling that they had not gained enough, and in spite of the Matignon Agreement of the 7th June strikes continued to spread for some time. On the 8th June, nearly half a million miners came out on strike in the North of France. On the 9th, insurance employees resorted to the stay-in strike, while 100,000 textile workers came out for a 10 per cent increase in wages, which they presently got. On the 10th still more Paris dressmaking establishments came out, and on the 11th the Paris hotels and restaurants. It began to be clear, however, that there was a danger of certain elements trying to get the strikes to go on to a stage where their continuation would begin to benefit the employers. Maurice Thorez, General Secretary of the Communist Party, made a speech on the 11th June, in which he laid emphasis on proletarian discipline and the necessity of knowing both when to come out on strike and when to return. Within a short time thereafter the wave of strikes came to an end.

There were, however, throughout the summer a number of further strikes, especially in industries or workshops where employers were failing to carry out the Matignon Agreement.

Finally, what was the effect on trade unionism? French trade union membership, which in March had amounted to less than one million, rose in three months to two and a half millions; within a twelve-month, as already mentioned, there were five million members of the C.G.T., which thus became the largest trade union body in any capitalist country, outstripping both the American organization and the British Trades Union Congress. Since Britain and America contain a much larger population (40,000,000 in France) and since Britain in particular has a very much larger proportion of its population engaged in industry than any other country, this increase in the numbers of the C.G.T. meant that France had become the most "trade-unionist" country in the world outside the Soviet Union.

It is difficult for us to measure exactly the effect of this, because in Britain trade unionism has in the main been of a slower growth, and it was only that sudden and tumultuous growth that rendered possible the enthusiasm and high spirit of resolve that began to be the mark of the French working-class.

#### POTENTIALITIES OF THE POPULAR FRONT

The victory of the working-class meant an enormous increase in the strength of the Front Populaire. Its backbone was the working-class of France, and now the great increase of the C.G.T. strengthened the whole Front Populaire, and enabled the C.G.T. itself to play a much bigger part than had been possible in the initial stages. The C.G.T., with the local elected committees of the Front Populaire (Radicals, Socialists, Communists), were able to keep a watchful eye on the events of the succeeding months and to give full assistance to the Government where need be in carrying out the programme. Much, of course, re-

mained to be done; in particular the concessions carried out in principle by the laws passed in the second week of June had to be brought into application by negotiation of details in the various industries.

The fortnight's holiday with pay was applied immediately and restored the fortunes of the small shop-keepers and lodging-house keepers in the coastal towns and holiday resorts of France, as well as giving the workers this great benefit. For the first time in their history, Cannes, Nice, Monte Carlo, and the other towns of the French Riviera saw the working-class and the mass of the people of their own country occupying the hotels and beaches, and crowding out the English and American millionaires and White Russian *émigres*.

But the enforcement of the law on the forty-hour working week was left to the Government to realise in industry after industry by administrative action. It was not until September that the mines went on to a forty-hour week, and the process continued with one trade after another. The enforcement of collective agreements and of the system of elected shop stewards met with considerable resistance from many employers, who tried to evade the Matignon Agreement and the laws. The Government had to intervene again and again to secure the carrying into practice of the June legislation.

Meantime, in the course of the first nine months, other parts of the programme of the Front Populaire were put into effect. The "Office du Ble" was created for the benefit of the peasantry. This regulated the price of grain, prevented the wild speculation which had robbed peasant and consumer alike, and ensured a guaranteed price for the tiller of the soil. Steps were taken to deal with the Fascist Leagues. An Act was passed to nationalise the armament firms; and finally, the hydra-headed Bank of

France was brought to some extent under Government control. Its constitution was altered, and the despotism of the "200 Families"\* was modified. The Bank of France had for years behaved almost openly as a power that dictated to the Government of France. It would have been difficult a generation ago for English readers even to begin to understand this, but it is easier now, since even the discreet Bank of England has been more visible in the service of reaction than before; one may recall the way in which it handed over the Czech gold to the Nazis in the summer of 1939, without in any way consulting Parliament or the general opinion of the people of the country.

In the case of France the pressure exercised by the Bank on the Government was offensively obvious. It used even to publish communiques in which it indicated its marching orders for the Government. For example, early in 1935, when the Government of M. Flandin had desired a more flexible discount policy, the Regents of the Bank of France expressed their decision in this semi-official statement:

"The Bank will discount Government Bills, but only within certain limits. It does not wish to find itself in the position of having to wonder what the signature of the State is worth. It will remain master of its own discount policy. . . . M. Flandin's Government has some praiseworthy actions to its credit. The Budget was voted in good time. By opposing the abolition of the economy decrees, it has shown a sound instinct. Its economic measures—though a little less certain—nevertheless deserve a good mark in view of the difficulties of the situation. This good mark has been given to M. Flandin in the form of credit facilities. These credit facilities may not prove sufficient. He will ask for more credit. Our reply will then depend on whether we are satisfied with the actions of the government during the first respite we have given it as a reward for its present determination to defend the currency."

It is doubtful whether, say, the German Governor of occupied France could improve on this hectoring and patronising tone of addressing the French administration. It was quite clear that France had been subjugated by the "200 Families", who had all the airs of conquerors over a subject population; their powers were now reduced somewhat, but unfortunately—as will appear—only temporarily.

With this list of changes it can be seen that the process of carrying out the programme went on fairly steadily throughout 1936, and up to the early months of 1937. The moment after any substantial working-class advance is always the most dangerous, for it is at such a time that all the cunning and experience of reaction is brought to bear; and it was inevitable that the French finance oligarchy should react with violent hostility and launch a formidable counter-attack. The first sign of this came in March 1937, when the timid Premier Blum announced that there must be a "pause" in carrying out the programme. This pause had been imposed on him by French finance, co-operating with the ruling class of Britain; the admission of this pause was the beginning of the defeat of the Popular Front. The Popular Front still had potentialities; it remained in being; and the process of its defeat was to extend over many months and years; but this pause of March 1937 was the first significant reverse. With this process I must deal in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER VI

### DEFEAT OF THE POPULAR FRONT

*Financial pressure—Currency manipulation—Blum yields—Further Fascist developments—The Cagouards*

Confronted by the determination of the working-class, as shown among other things by the wave of strikes of June 1936, the French capitalists retreated and made concessions, in order to gain a breathing space during which they could reorganise their own ranks and begin the work of undermining and if possible cancelling the gains won by the working-class. What were they to do? They could not set up an effective opposition in Parliament. Immediately Gignoux, the representative of the Comité des Forges and newly-chosen head of the Confederation of Employers, said in that month of June, "We have no intention of participating in the classic Parliamentary game, because the driving force for action quite clearly lies outside Parliament." Amongst the forces "outside Parliament" were, they hoped, the resuscitated Fascist Leagues. The attempt was made to put forward Doriot, the renegade Communist and Mayor of St. Denis, as a leader in place of the rather fly-blown Count de la Rocque, but the only effect at this stage was to give the appearance of a split in the Fascist forces, and neither Doriot nor de la Rocque could make any headway against the mass movement in the year 1936.

But there was one method that could be used without waiting, a method in which passive support or active help

might come from the City of London, if not the British Government itself; namely, financial pressure. This financial pressure began to be applied very early in the life of the Blum Government, and it was effective first in bringing about the devaluation of the franc on the 25 th September 1936 (the same day on which the miners received their forty-hour week), and six months later in compelling Premier Blum to announce "the Pause".

#### THE DEVALUATION OF THE FRANC

. The public finances of France had become chaotic, as they had been several times since the 1914-18 war. Before that war, the franc used to exchange at just over 25 to the £ and was worth about 9J4d., both currencies being of course on a gold basis. At the end of the war the franc had sunk and remained at between 100 and 200 to the £ for a number of years. This helped French exporters, but it robbed both the working-class, since it meant inflation and high prices, and also the peasantry, who had invested their small savings.

When Poincare was called in about 1927 to save the situation, he raised the franc from the value of about id. to approximately 2d., and then formally legalise its devaluation, fixing it at about 124 to the £. This meant that all State loans were now repayable in paper that had sunk to one-fifth of its previous level. British investors as well as French were hit by this, getting in effect 4s. in the £ on their French investments, and their complaints were strongly voiced by the Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Phillip Snowden, who denounced it as a partial repudiation of State debts and only a little better (i.e. 4s. in the £) than Bolshevism. In the collapse of 1931 sterling went off the gold standard ("pushed off by the Bank of France", said many City critics) and for a little while the

franc was the more stable currency. But presently France itself was affected by the world economic crisis and once more the franc fell into serious difficulties, which were accentuated by the "flight from the Franc", which was a regular feature of every time of financial difficulty.

This flight was not, of course, merely a cowardly act of "that cad among the gods, Mammon"; it was a recognised method by which pressure was put on French governments by the Paris Bourse and financial sharks and speculators.

In 1936 such a flight was again one of the forms of the counter-offensive against the Popular Front. In conjunction with the forces of the City of London the French financial oligarchy started a rapid export of capital from the spring onwards, until by the autumn forty milliards of francs had taken flight. The Government strove "to defend the franc", and M. Vincent Auriol announced an issue of Baby Bonds for small investors, which he launched on the 17th July, at the same time giving an assurance that the franc would not be devalued. "The Banks", says Mr. Werth, "were reluctant to subscribe to it"; for its success would have spoiled their plans. Usually it had been the policy of the Bank of France, like that of the Bank of England, to favour deflation, which would make money (their commodity) dearer, and to oppose inflation (which would cheapen it). But deflation, as the Miners' Federation learned in the United Kingdom in 1925, after the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Winston Churchill, had put the pound back on to the gold standard, meant immediate and drastic wage cuts and a general lowering of the people's standard of living. This deflation policy had been faithfully carried out in 1934 and 1935 by Doumergue and Laval, with a consequent additional effective reduction of the total wages bill, which had already during the eco-

nomic crisis sunk by nearly one-third.

This policy, however, was no longer possible, and there was, moreover, a section of financial opinion which stood for devaluation, since it enabled French exporters to undercut their competitors in the world market. Paul Reynaud, the apostle of devaluation from 1934 onwards, had urged this policy on the new ministry, but it had refused to adopt it and had tried instead the Auriol Baby Bonds for small investors. Such bonds had worked well in the U.S.S.R., and they thought that they would work in the French Republic. There was, however, one significant difference, that real power in the French Republic was not yet in the hands of the working-class and the mass of the people; and the Baby Bonds were strangled in their financial cradle by the banks, who were able in September to force through devaluation.

Another form of the counter-offensive was a deliberate campaign of sabotage against French industry and national economy. The measure for nationalisation of the arms industry was impeded in every possible way, and every attempt was made to provoke difficulties in the workshops so as to present the picture of the Government measures causing chaos in industry. I have said above that the French finance oligarchy were acting along with some of their fellows in the City of London. There would be few with knowledge who would deny this, although actual proof of these exceedingly private transactions and agreements is not perhaps easy to find. The outcome, however, was clear enough; the devaluation was carried through by a tripartite agreement of France, Britain, and the United States. This gave Britain, and to a less degree the U.S.A., a stranglehold over French finance. It was agreed that it should be called not devaluation but "alignment of currencies". This was the phrase used in the three-Power

declaration of the 25th September 1936. M. Blum, having to choose between a resistance in which he might well win a victory for the Popular Front and a surrender which was bound to be the first stage on the journey to final defeat, chose the easier course. He disguised this surrender by a display of enthusiasm, and in his speech on the 26th September to the Press, he spoke of the co-operation of the three great democracies and "paid warm personal tributes to Mr. Neville Chamberlain and Mr. Morgenthau". Mr. Werth, in his *Destiny of France*, p. 335, quotes M. Blum as follows:

"I think it is for the first time in history that three Great Powers have informed world opinion by a public document of their will to make a joint effort for the restoration of normal monetary and economic relations and to arrive at that material pacification which is a condition and a forerunner of political pacification. I believe this to be a political event of the first importance. . . . It is not true, as some papers have suggested, that this document was simply a little trick for camouflaging the real meaning of the financial operation. . . . The latter is not a sudden expedient or a measure imposed on us by this or that special consideration, though naturally the operation was not unconnected with certain events. . . . In spite of the great difficulties which we shall do our best to overcome, I think we have a right to consider our decision as one of the elements which will tend above all to facilitate international agreements and peace among nations."

It is interesting, if heart-rending, to speculate on the very different course history might have taken if M. Blum had stood firm at this time. A challenge to the powers of Finance and Reaction at this time would probably have succeeded; it would have been followed by a very different attitude in the French and British governments to the Spanish struggle; the Spanish Republican Government

would have won, Hitler and Mussolini would have suffered a set-back, there would have been no Munich, **and probably** no world war.

But it was not to be. M. Blum, like other leaders, **did** not take courage, and after this 25 th September, the pressure steadily increased, many different weapons being used, such as the personal attack launched by the gutter Press on Salengro, the Secretary of the Interior, who was driven to suicide, having, as the law of libel then stood in France, no legal protection against his Fascist libellers. At the same time the international situation, which I deal with in the next chapter, increased the dependence of the Blum Government upon the British National Government, and correspondingly weakened its position in relation to the finance oligarchy of France. Once surrender had begun, concession after concession had to be made. Blum took the step of calling in M. Baudouin to aid on financial matters, a step which—as has been shown clearly by that gentleman blossoming out as Foreign Secretary of the Vichy Government—was receiving the enemy right into the camp. So one way or another the Government activities were hampered until, as we have said above, further financial reforms were suspended in March 1937. Mr. Clemens Dutt, in his penetrating short study of the People's Front, in the "*Labour Monthly*" for January 1939, divides its history into four periods, the end of each period being marked by an acute financial crisis which in turn was the outward sign of a point reached in the continuous offensive of French and foreign finance capital against the People's Front.

The first period was that which began with the upsurge in the spring of 1936, and lasted until the "Pause" of March 1937; the second was the period of "Pause" until January 1938; the third was the transition period of a few months, marked by a more or less open British attack; **the**

fourth period—the period of disintegration—led from the early summer of 1938 to Munich and the collapse of the People's Front in Parliament at the end of 1938.

#### STAGES OF DEFEAT

I have already dealt with the first period, and I shall now briefly indicate the development of the succeeding stages.

The financial difficulty had compelled the Pause, and the Pause, explained as a temporary interval for consolidation, soon became a permanent halt. When the Pause came a whole number of vital measures in the Popular Front programme had not yet been put into operation. I am not speaking here of measures which amounted to pure Socialism, or even to a loosening of the grasp of the handful of extremely rich men upon the State, but merely of political and economic measures, such as had long been in operation in Britain—e.g. old-age pensions and higher income tax on the rich. Amongst the political measures were the suppression of the Fascist organisations, and the purging of the diplomatic service, which was largely staffed with Fascists—as was also the bureaucracy, both civil and military.

#### THE FLIGHT OF CAPITAL

Above all, it was absolutely necessary to balance the budget and to stop the flight of capital abroad. This, it will be remembered, was the demand put forward in the Programme (iii (d)) under the heading "Against Finance". Pamphlets were written explaining the English income-tax system and urging its application to France, which proposals the French capitalists treated as the duck treated the speaker in the nursery rhyme, "Dilly, Dally, come and be killed!" The unrestricted rapacity and avarice of these great money-lenders made them ready to betray all French national

interests for their own advantage. The result of the failure to apply this part of the programme was that by June 1937 the flight of capital amounted to sixty milliards of francs. The banks refused credits and every attempt was made to sow panic, as had been done in the summer of 1931 in London. Blum did not follow the same path as MacDonald on this occasion; he would not join the enemy, but he refused to fight them!

The quarrel worked out in the following way: The Senate, which, of course, is not elected in the same way or at the same time as the Chamber of Deputies, and which had passed the forty-hour week only with the utmost reluctance, defeated the Government by 168 votes to 96 in June 1937. Immediately it was assumed that a parallel situation had now arisen in France to that which confronted the Liberal Government thirty years earlier in England, when the Lloyd George Budget was rejected by the House of Lords, and that there would be an immediate drive to curb the powers of the Senate and assert the primacy of the directly elected Chamber of Deputies. But what the Liberal Lloyd George did in 1910-11 was not attempted by the Socialist Blum in 1937. Instead of fighting this resistance to the will of the majority, Blum resigned. A Radical prime minister took his place—the inevitable Chautemps—or as a witty Frenchman said on looking back to the alternations of these years, "de Chautemps en Chautemps"! Nevertheless, the following resolution was passed by the National Committee of the People's Front: "There is possible no other programme, no other majority, and no other government than those demanded by the majority of the nation"; after which Chautemps was accorded full support to deal with the situation as best he might. There is no question that in this second period the reactionaries, despite all their efforts, had not yet weakened in any way

the mass support for the Popular Front. At the local government elections, held in October 1937 in the cantons (which correspond roughly to district councils in this country), the result showed an even greater majority for the Popular Front than a year and a half earlier. This confirmed the faith of the Radicals, who at their annual congress at Lille at the end of that month adopted a resolution declaring that "the Radical Party to-day does not intend to entertain the hypothesis of an alliance with the men of the Right. It intends to remain faithful to the alliances into which it has entered." Meantime, however, every possible attempt was made by the reactionary elements to sow disunity within the Popular Front, and especially between its three main political parties. This had a certain effect; for example, the negotiations for unity of the Communist and the Socialist parties were completely suspended by the latter in December 1937. With these negotiations I must now deal.

#### PROPOSALS FOR UNITED WORKING-CLASS PARTY

The proposal for a single party of the working-class had been put forward a few months after the formation of the United Front was sealed in the pact of the 27th July 1934. In November of the same year the Central Committee of the Communist Party of France approached the National Council of the Socialist Party and proposed that in order to deal with its enemies more effectively the working-class should bring about unity and build a single party of the working-class. There already was unity of action; there should now be organic unity of the two great parties. The proposal was repeated on the 2nd March 1935 on the ground that the unification of working-class forces arose inevitably from the fight against Fascism and against capitalism. At the same time it was stipulated

that the bringing into existence of the united party should be prepared by democratic means. A joint committee for unification was set up and at its meeting on the 29th May 1935 it considered a proposal drawn up by the Communist Party, called the Charter of Unity of the French Working Class. This was in effect a draft constitution; it set forth such Socialist aims as the socialisation of the means of production and exchange, which could only be achieved by the "conquest of power by force against the capitalist class". The joint committee for unification did not meet again until October 1935 and by November the counter-proposals of the Socialist Party to the Communist draft were put forward.

These proposals which were "based on conciliation and synthesis" accepted certain proposals in the Communist draft, but omitted others, such as the dictatorship of the proletariat. A few days later, however, a statement was put forward on the dictatorship of the proletariat, which the Communists in turn criticised as being rather vague. It was then suggested that the matter should be publicly discussed by the rank and file of the two parties and by the workers generally. It is not worth while here to discuss at any length the differences between the two parties as regards the draft constitution, because these differences were bridged, or remained unbridgeable, as the case may be, not so much according to the standpoint of Leon Blum and other Socialist leaders as according to the pressure from the mass of the workers and the members of the two parties, which governed the whole question during the next two years. After the clear electoral victory and the establishment of trade-union unity in the single C.G.T., with its immediate fruits, the urgency of the political unity of the working-class parties was not felt to the same degree for some months, and when the matter again became urgent

the Popular Front was already in its second period, when reaction had been doing its utmost to split the country. By December 1937, as we have seen, their efforts were successful to the extent that the French Socialist Party suspended all negotiations for unification.

#### THE CAGOULARDS

Meantime the reaction in France were also employing once more their Fascist leagues, whose activities we have previously described. In one case this took a new and entirely conspiratorial form, which caused a considerable sensation when it was discovered in November 1937, namely, the conspiracy of the Cagoullards or "Hooded Men". The object was to overthrow the Republican regime. They had arms dumps, and plans for a *coup d'etat*, for wrecking, dynamiting and so on. After the first arrests it became clear that the Cagoullards had extensive connections in the Army and amongst leading capitalists. The French Minister of the Interior reported that they were organised on army lines with a general staff, intelligence departments, and similar machinery. Monsieur Max Dormoy, who was a Socialist, made the following report:

"The Formation of effectives in divisions, brigades, regiments, battalions and so forth shows beyond doubt that the organisation is intended for civil war. During the searches discovery was made of material for forging identity papers, instructions for the transportation of arms, information on the strength of the Paris Police Force, as well as that of the adjoining departments of Seine-et-Oise and Seine-et-Marne, with the names of the commanding officers, also card-indexed information concerning a large number of military officers and the material of certain regiments.

"In addition there were blank order sheets and memoranda stolen from army officials, a list of buildings having several exits, an exact plan of the Paris sewers with passages leading to the

Chamber of Deputies, plans of the interiors of buildings occupied by Left newspapers, and plans of the apartments of Socialist Deputies.

"There were also photostats of the signatures of certain Cabinet Ministers and legislators marked for arrest at the outbreak of the rising, a file detailing means of seizing garages and auto-buses belonging to the Paris street-bus system and municipal garbage trucks, to be converted into offensive weapons, plans to seize the supply of arms stored at the Mont Valerien fortress, and so forth."

The arms in the possession of the Cagouards were mostly of German or Italian manufacture, and it was quite clear that they were a body of terrorists organised and paid for by the reactionaries of France, Italy, and Germany. It was discovered that the assassination of Carlo Rosselli, leader of the Italian anti-Fascists and editor of their newspaper, *Gustizia e Liberta*, had been carried out on behalf of Mussolini by the Cagouards. The most interesting thing about this Cagouard society, whose depredations and practice of high treason were printed in full detail not only in France but in newspapers throughout the world, was the quite extraordinary delay and diffidence displayed by the authorities in dealing with them. It was clear that the capitalists of France, especially the "200 Families", were now strong enough in their counter-offensive to prevent really effective action being taken against their and Hitler's tools, the Cagouards. The anticipated prosecutions of these conspirators were never carried through, and the Cagouards sank into temporary obscurity—from which some emerged into high posts in September 1939, and still more after June 1940.

#### THE THIRD PERIOD

The third period of the Popular Front lasted only

four months, beginning in January 1938. The attack of finance capital was growing rapidly. A new onslaught was started on the franc. In the French Right-Wing Press it was more or less openly asserted that it was the British Government, or at any rate the City of London, which had provoked this new stage of crisis. The British City Press did not admit this; and the official Labour Press in England was completely innocent of it, confining itself to repeating the objections to any sort of democratic unity.

The Premier, Chautemps, gave in, and said that he would try to get the support of the banks—which meant of course surrendering to the Right Wing. Thereupon the Socialists withdrew their support in Parliament, the Government fell, and for two weeks there was a political crisis. There was dickering with Blum, who spoke of forming a government, but finally Chautemps became Premier once more, this time with a purely Radical government. The first declaration of this government, however, caused great enthusiasm, as it promised to take action against the Fascist conspirators, and to introduce old age pensions and other reforms contained in the People's Front programme, whilst at the same time it said there would be no interference with what had already been gained.

The curious result of this was that this government of M. Chautemps received an almost completely unanimous vote from the Chamber of Deputies; the Communists supported it for the sake of maintaining the People's Front; the Right Wing and the Fascists supported it because they knew how hollow were all its declarations. It only took a few weeks before the hollowness was revealed. Pressure from Britain continued, and by March Chautemps put forward a demand for "exceptional powers" in order to carry out a series of measures. These meant dropping old age pensions, asking for "greater flexibility" in the appli-

cation of the forty-hour week, cutting down social services, and dropping a great deal of the programme. It was tried too soon. The Radical Premier was forced to resign, and France was once more without a ministry. Thereupon Hitler invaded Austria, taking advantage of the days when there was no government in France. There was a strong reaction against the new situation thus created. Blum was asked to form a government representing all parties of the Left and Centre, and on the 12th March the French Communist Party Central Committee gave its support to the "rallying of all Republican forces of the country with a view to realising the programme demanded by the electorate". Frenzied efforts were made by French reaction, with British support, to prevent Blum allowing any Communist into the Cabinet. In 1936 (May) it had been said that this would displease the British Government; in 1938 (March) it was said that it would be too displeasing to—Hitler!

This second Blum Government, composed of only Radicals and Socialists, proved extremely feeble in foreign affairs and internally it was assaulted by a renewed financial crisis. There was an increasing budget deficit; bank reserves were low; Laval and Flandin appeared from their strategic retirement as prominent critics. They said that there must be concessions, and appeasement of foreign Fascism, and they hinted at the need for a government of concentration, for the suppression of Parliament and dissolution of the Trade Unions—as was afterwards carried out by these two gentlemen and their associates in the Petain-Laval Government of 1940.

According to Mr. Clemens Dutt, it was at this point that "the outlines of the Chamberlain plan became clearly evident, viz., by financial pressure and the help of the Right to split the Radicals from the Left bloc and to draw the

French Government into the British plan of negotiation with the Fascist aggressors, and thus prepare the way for a Four-Power Pact."

After a few weeks Blum, with his mixed Radical and Socialist team, resigned. This time his place was taken by Daladier, who formed a government no longer purely Radical, but with some elements of the Centre, which had been opposed to the People's Front. This did not prevent the Government from getting its vote in the Chamber by a declaration that it would be loyal to the People's Front.

#### THE LAST STAGE

The meaning of that "loyalty" was shown in the next and last period. Daladier was once more Premier in a Chamber the majority of which had been elected as supporters of the People's Front and its programme. He was to continue as premier until the spring of 1940. The introduction of Fascism in France was no longer to be attempted solely by means of the Fascist leagues and the Right Wing of the parliamentarians, but by making the Socialist leaders the conscious or unconscious agents of French and British finance capital. It was thus in truth a government of treachery from the start. Democracy was betrayed in its own house, the uncertain and vacillating elements of the *petite bourgeoisie* and Left-Centre generally swung over to the reactionaries, and the democratic regime in France had in reality disappeared long before the war began.

Daladier did not come out openly until August 1938, when he made his notorious speech, threatening the forty-hour week and the gains of the People's Front. Already in May the preliminary steps had been taken. Parliament had been dispensed with for all practical purposes and government was carried on by emergency decrees. In

that month, too, the fourth devaluation of the franc took place. By September, when Daladier at Munich was the shadow of Chamberlain, it was clear that the French Government was now as hostile to the Popular Front in foreign affairs as the speech of August had shown it to be in internal affairs. Munich was the culmination of a process that had been going on for several years. The policy of capitulation now reached its zenith, or rather its nadir. The Four-Power Pact for which the French governments fitfully and the British governments steadily had striven for over a dozen years appeared to be an accomplished fact, when Daladier and Chamberlain, Hitler and Mussolini had their love feast at Munich, over the mangled remains of Czechoslovakia. Two months later, in December 1938, Bonnet, who now came to the fore, signed the Franco-German Pact, which is set out in Chapter VII. The Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935, which had long been in cold storage, was in effect destroyed, and Hitler was given a free hand in the East.

Daladier could now afford to take the necessary steps to break up the combination which constituted the parliamentary majority. At the Radical Congress held on the 27th October at Marseilles—just four years after the question of the Popular Front had been raised at the Radical Congress of Nantes—he made a speech attacking the working-class and especially the Communist Party of France. On the 10th November the National Committee of the Popular Front met together, only to find that the Radical delegates refused to attend. Well they might, for four days later, on the 14th November, emergency decrees were issued which balanced the Budget by savage anti-working-class measures and by virtually abolishing the forty-hour week. The Socialist Party, which earlier that month had still been prepared to support Daladier at

its national council meeting, were now driven into opposition. A week later the transformation was complete; the finance committee of the Chamber met on the 22nd November to sanction the emergency decrees. They sanctioned them by a small majority, which included all the reactionaries and some of the Radicals. To this sudden and savage attack on the working-class the response was made by a General Strike called by the C.G.T. on the 30th November 1938. The Government had made its preparations for this. It was severely repressed and every method of terror used. When the Chamber met again on the 8th December Daladier was warned by the reactionaries who now supported him that he could not hope to manoeuvre, but was their prisoner and must take their orders from them.

The next chapter carries on the story and shows in France, in Spain, and in Europe generally, the drift of the ruling classes to war. It ceases to be a question of hoping for peace, and becomes rather an effort to turn the inevitable war towards the East, the U.S.S.R.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE DRIVE TO WAR

*The Spanish Civil War—Non-intervention—The Ruling Class takes its stand—Attitude to U.S.S.R.*

I have hitherto virtually omitted one of the most important factors in the defeat of the Popular Front—a factor which began to operate within two months of the formation of the Blum Government of June 1936. This was the whole question of foreign policy, the kernel of which was Spain. The road to the ultimate defeat of the Popular Front and of the peace movement of Europe, and to the victory of reaction, Fascism, and war, was built more intensively in the summer of 1936 than at any other point of time in this last horrible decade.

The Spanish elections of February 1936 had yielded an overwhelming majority to the parties of the People's Front (Frente Popular). It was the Radicals who formed the government, who released the innumerable political prisoners, and put forward measures to carry out the programme of the Spanish People's Front. Meantime, ever since the last months of 1935, the conspiracy of the generals and the reactionary parliamentarians, backed by the millionaires of Spain and by the German and Italian Governments, was being elaborated and planned in detail.\*

\*Even earlier preparations for a Spanish monarchist rebellion with foreign aid had been set on foot. Witness the following, which has been published in several works, among others in the Penguin Special *Searchlight on Spain*, by the Duchess of Atholl, pp. 273-4:

**On the 17th July 1936 the rebellion broke out; Generals Franco, Mola, Sanjurjo and their associates endeavoured to seize the main positions throughout Spain and overturn the Government. They were defeated by the heroism of the working-class and the mass of the people in Madrid, Barce-**

"Translation in full of the proces-verbal of the interview of Signor Mussolini with Spanish Monarchist leaders, March 1934. 'We, the undersigned: Lieut.-General Emilio Barrera, in his personal capacity; Don Rafael Olazabal and Scnor Lizarra, on behalf of the "Communion Tradicionalista", and Don Antonio Goicoechea, as leader of the Party of "Renovacion Espanola", have drawn up this document so that there may remain on record what happened in the interview which they had at four o'clock this afternoon, March 31, 1934, with the head of the Italian Government, Signor Mussolini, together within Marshal Italo Balbo. The President, after carefully informing himself from the answers, which each of those present gave to his questions, of the present situation of Spanish politics, and the aspirations and state of the Army and Navy and the Monarchist parties, declared the following to those there assembled:

- " '1. That he was ready to help with the necessary measures of assistance the two parties in opposition to the regime obtaining in Spain, in the task of overthrowing it and substituting it by a Regency which would prepare the complete restoration of the Monarchy; this declaration was solemnly repeated by Signor Mussolini three times, and those assembled received it with the natural manifestations of esteem and gratitude;
- " '2. That as a practical demonstration and as a proof of his intentions he was ready to supply them immediately with 20,000 rifles; 20,000 hand-grenades; 200 machine-guns; and 1,500,000 pesetas in cash;
- " '3. That such help was merely of an initial nature and would be opportunely completed with greater measures, according as the work achieved justified this and circumstances made it necessary.

" 'Those present agreed that for the handing over of the sum previously referred to, a delegate of the parties should be chosen, Scnor Don Rafael Olazabal, and he should take charge of these funds and place them in Spain at the joint disposal of the two leaders, Conde de Rodezno and Antonio Goicoechea, for its distribution (here there is a word which is illegible) between the two, in the form and at the time and in the conditions on which they may decide.

" \*In the same way it was agreed that with regard to the distribution of the first quantity of arms, the leaders in question should have what was necessary for the part proportional to the charge undertaken by each group and also for its transport to Spain. Rome, March 31, 1934."

lona, and other cities. In the north it was only in Saragossa and in the intensely Catholic districts centred round Burgos that the rebellion was successful, while in the south it held Seville. Franco began to transport Moorish troops from Africa and was already receiving munitions of war from his foreign Fascist allies, including aeroplanes, as was revealed by the forced landing of two Italian aeroplanes in French Morocco. Both were military aircraft, flown by Italian officers, and their documents revealed that they—together with others—were Italian army planes mobilised for use in Spain three days *before* the outbreak of the Rebellion.

Within a few days it was clear that the rebel generals represented no one but themselves and the group of landlords, millionaires, and ecclesiastical dignitaries of Spain. But what arms there were in Spain were largely in the arsenals at Burgos and Saragossa; and in the south there was no army, for the soldiers had followed their generals in the main, however unwillingly, and were not to be relied upon as the troops of the Republic. The militia were new and largely untrained, especially in the use of the more modern types of weapon. It was necessary for the Government to purchase arms, aeroplanes, and munitions, as it was entitled to do by international law. The standpoint of international law may be put briefly as follows: at the very least, the lawful government of Spain was entitled not only to buy munitions freely from anyone who was willing to supply, but also to insist that other states should not restrict or interfere with these supplies. It was, moreover, also entitled to demand that other states should not supply troops or munitions to the rebels.

#### HELPING SPANISH FASCISM

The case was therefore abundantly clear; there could be no doubt as to the duty of the French Government, and

indeed of every other government. Besides, still more compelling, there was the national interest of France, which should have made it ready and anxious to avoid the domination of Spain by Fascism and the establishment of a hostile frontier on the Pyrenees.

But what took place was the exact reverse of what might thus have been expected. The French Government refused to supply or permit the supply of arms to the Government of Spain. What was the reason for this extraordinary policy? The reason was to be found in the attitude of the British Government. The members of that government and their backers in the ruling class of Britain were hostile to the Spanish Republic and at that moment extremely favourable to the building up of Hitler Fascism in Europe. They were personally friendly with the Spanish *grandees*—some of them *were* Spanish *grandees*, for example, the Duke of Wellington was also the Duke of Ciudad Rodrigo. The British Government put the utmost pressure on the French Government, and even went so far as to threaten it with the risk of having to face unaided an attack from Hitler. The treaties of Locarno had been denounced by Hitler in that spring, but this denunciation had been followed by a reiteration of the Anglo-French alliance, of the obligation of Britain to defend France against an unprovoked attack from Germany. Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Eden nevertheless told the French Government that if by fulfilling its duty under international law it brought on itself an attack from Hitler, the British Government would not regard this as being unprovoked, and would therefore be unable to come to the assistance of France. The evidence for this has never been given in any State paper, but the fact is well known. M. Jean Zyromski, one of the leaders of the French Socialist Party, revealed it in his speech at the end of August 1936,

and added that

\*"he did not wish to throw any stones at the Blum Government, for it was the British Government which had placed them in such an impossible position." {*The Destiny of France*, by Alexander Werth, page 379.)

"NON-INTERVENTION"

What Mr. Eden proposed was that the chief European powers should join in a policy of "non-intervention". The French Government agreed, and accordingly about the end of August "non-intervention" was launched. The German and Italian governments agreed immediately to this policy, which they interpreted as meaning that no munitions would go from Britain or France to the Spanish Government, while they would continue to supply munitions and men to Franco. The Soviet Government, which also joined the Non-intervention Committee, announced after a month or two of this intolerable and criminal farce that it would observe the policy to the same extent as the Italian and German governments. The British Trade Union Congress, destined to follow the interests of the British ruling class, as it has done frequently since, decided to support the policy of non-intervention. The Labour Party leaders followed suit. This in turn reacted on the Labour and Socialist International (the "Second International") which was hamstrung in any endeavour to help the working-class and people of Spain, or even its fellow Spanish Socialist Party, by the attitude of the French Socialists and above all the British Socialists and the Trade Union Congress. The people of the Soviet Union were able to give the greatest amount of help to the people of Spain, and it was the General Secretary of their Communist Party, Joseph Stalin, who wrote the famous message: "The struggle in Spain is not the private affair of the Spaniards but the common

cause of all advanced and progressive mankind."

Throughout Europe and the whole world, the mass of the common people rallied to the help of the Spanish Republic. They knew that the Spanish cause was their cause, the cause of democracy and peace, the fight against reaction, Fascism, and war. Some of the best sons of the people of France and Britain, of America and Canada, and of the other European countries, not forgetting the exiles from Germany, Italy, and Poland, fought in the ranks of the International Brigade. As the situation got worse, food-ships were sent to Spain, mammoth collections were made at working-class meetings, trade unionists, co-operators, and the rank and file of the Labour movement did their utmost to save the people of Spain. It is not here that that epic story can be told; it is enough to say that all the foresights and all the efforts of the people and by the working-class were fatally hampered from the start by **the** fact that the Socialist Prime Minister of France, Leon **Blum**, with his Socialist-Radical Government, was following the policy laid down by Chamberlain and the City of London in accord with the interests of reactionary financial, industrial, and political forces, and—as a corollary—of Hitler and Mussolini too.

#### APPEASEMENT

The policy pursued first by the Baldwin Government and then with greater intensity of purpose by the Chamberlain Government which came into existence in the summer of 1937, was the policy of appeasement. Appeasement involved the satisfying piecemeal of the demands of Hitler and Mussolini in order to strengthen the German and Italian governments. It meant the subordination of French policy to the purposes of the British Government and therewith ultimately the breaking up of the Popular Front

in France; it meant the abandonment of the Franco-Soviet Pact and of the whole policy of realising collective security through a Peace Front; it meant the building of the Four-Power Pact of Italy, Germany, France, and Britain for use against the Soviet Union and eventually against the United States of America. The policy of appeasement was carried steadily through to the point where at Munich in September 1938 the bastion of Czechoslovakia was handed over to the Nazis; France was thereby permanently weakened and the Soviet Union isolated. Throughout these years, this appeasement policy was steadily followed in spite of every warning that such a policy could have no other result but a European—probably a world—war, in which Britain and France would be put at a great military disadvantage.

#### WAR OR SOCIAL REVOLUTION?

But whilst the fatal policy of France was thus largely settled in the City of London and in Whitehall, it must not be supposed that those who still held the determining power in France—the finance oligarchy—were in any way reluctant to follow it. It was in truth no more than the policy accepted by the ruling classes of all the Western democracies—accepted with their eyes open and with a full realisation that it would almost certainly lead to a large-scale war, accepted deliberately because the alternative was something which—however much it might benefit the millions of common people of their various countries—they were determined to resist in their own selfish interests.

It is easier for us in Britain to study and understand the attitude of our own ruling class than that of France, and I propose here to examine the position in Britain; it may be taken that with minor modifications the same is true of France.

Let me begin by asking what was the basis of this appeasement policy with its inevitable drive to war? Was it stupidity, feebleness, ignorance, lack of courage, or any of the other defects which the *Daily Herald* used frequently to attribute to Chamberlain and his Government? Was it that the ruling class of the British Empire did not see the strategic consequences of their various moves? Were they unaware of the advance of Japan in the Far East and its threat to British interests? Did they not know that a Franco Spain would endanger the sea route to India through the Mediterranean, and indeed most of our Atlantic routes as well? Did they not know that the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935, which sanctioned the construction by Hitler of a large submarine fleet, was furnishing him with a weapon for which the British Fleet was the most obvious objective?

Of course, they were quite well aware of these things. They knew the risks they were running; but they were willing to face these serious threats to their Imperialist strength rather than follow a policy which might strengthen its fundamental enemy, the working-class and the common people in every country. The Four-Power Pact was directed against the Soviet Union, not as a commercial rival, not as a naval rival, but as the country where the workers and peasants had come to power and built a Socialist state. The danger did not lie mainly in anything which they thought the Soviet Union might do to them. It lay in any and every possible extension of genuine democracy tending to encourage the working-class and the common people in any country to carry forward an assault against privilege and the money power. The Soviet Union would "put ideas into their heads". The Spanish Republic threatened to do the same thing. It too was a great danger, for it represented the defeat of a ruling class by the common

people, and the possibility of advance of the working-class and the peasants towards Socialism. The Popular Front in France and every People's Front movement, whether in Asia, Europe, or America, presented the same danger and evoked the same active opposition. For in all these parts of the world the City of London had its interests, which might be endangered if the people once got a grip on their own destinies. This was the kernel and root of the whole appeasement policy, and of all the actions that went to break down the Popular Front in Spain by bloodshed and violence and in France by chicanery and bribes, whilst in Britain any sttch movement was stifled in its cradle by the skilful manoeuvring of the Right, aided by the obduracy and folly of the Labour leaders. The ruling class of Britain, especially from 1934-35 onwards, saw social revolution lurking behind every Popular Front, and preferred the only alternative, namely, to accept a risk of war, even under great handicaps.

#### MUNICH AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Munich was the highest point reached in the policy of appeasement, of the Four-Power Pact, of the isolation of the Soviet Union and the rupture of the People's Fronts; it was, too, the great propellent explosive in the drive to war, which reached its hideous destination within a year. It is interesting to recall tire comments of Mr. Zilliacus in his book, *Why We are Losing the Peace*, written early in 1939. He describes the result of the betrayal of Czechoslovakia at Munich in the following words:

"France has ceased to be a Great Power and Great Britain has sunk to the position of the uneasy client of Hitler and Mussolini. . . . France has already been degraded to the position of a third-class Power, just as Spain and Holland and Sweden in former centuries sank from the position of being Great Powers

to their present status ... it has become a physical impossibility for France to defend Tunis or Morocco or any other French colony alone against Mussolini and Hitler combined."

Mr. Palme Dutt, writing in the *Labour Monthly* for November 1938, put the point more crisply: "The French bourgeoisie, to save their class power, have committed suicide as a Great Power."

Mr. Zilliacus, too, *sees* the growth of Fascism in France; he writes in the same book:

"This international evolution of France is being accompanied by the sapping of the foundations of French democracy. The French Right is more and more openly relying on the Fascist regimes to bolster them up against their own people in return for unlimited servility. Anyone who wants France to stand by her treaty obligations or to help Spanish democracy or to oppose the Fascist powers in any way is promptly called a war-monger. The Right does not even scruple to use the argument that no Left Government would be tolerated in France because its existence would be displeasing to Hitler and Mussolini. The state of confusion and defeatism and sheer despairing apathy among the French masses since the Czechoslovakian betrayal is indescribable. In fact, all the conditions are present out of which Fascism arises."

The first direct consequence of the Munich gathering of that not very oddly assorted quartet of Hitler, Mussolini, Chamberlain, and Daladier, was the prolonged negotiations and ententes between Bonnet and the Germans. The following passage from the French Yellow Book shows the extent to which the Franco-German Entente was carried at this time:

"M. Georges Bonnet, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the French Republic, and M. Joachim von Ribbentrop, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the German Reich,

Acting in the name and by order of their respective Govern-

ments, have agreed on the following points at their meeting in Paris on December 6, 1938:

(1) The French Government and the German Government fully share the conviction that pacific and neighbourly relations between France and Germany constitute one of the essential elements of the consolidation of the situation in Europe and of the preservation of general peace. Consequently both Governments will endeavour with all their might to assure the development of the relations between their countries in this direction.

(2) Both Governments agree that no question of a territorial nature remains in suspense between their countries and solemnly recognise as permanent the frontier between their countries as it is presently drawn.

(3) Both Governments are resolved, without prejudice to their special relations with third Powers, to remain in contact on all questions of importance to both their countries and to have recourse to mutual consultation in case any complications arising out of these questions should threaten to lead to international difficulties.

In witness whereof the Representatives of the two Governments have signed the present Declaration, which comes into force immediately.

Executed in duplicate in the French and German languages at Paris, on December 6, 1938.

*Signed:*   GEORGE BONNET.  
              JOCHIM VON RIBBENTROP."

#### TURNING WAR THREATS EASTWARDS

The significance of this harmless-looking pact was underlined by M. Georges Bonnet in his note to the French Ambassadors in London, Berlin, Brussels, Rome, Barcelona, and Prague (but not Moscow) in which he gave an account of Ribbentrop's conversations in Paris. Ribbentrop, he related, proposed co-operation between the "two Axes" (i.e. the Four-Power Pact) and indicated that "the struggle

against Bolshevism" was the basis of the Berlin-Rome Axis. Then, "concerning Spain, he gave us to understand that there again the action of Germany had from the beginning been inspired solely by the struggle against Bolshevism." (French Yellow Book, No. 32—page 38 in English edition.)

It is easy to realise, and worthy of emphasis, that the French ruling class were at least as greatly inspired by hostility to the U.S.S.R. as that of Britain. They had every motive. Whilst that country grew and prospered, she was an object-lesson to the working-classes of the world, and it was advisable at all times to work up as much public hostility against her as possible, both to prevent people realising her success and seeking to follow her economic system, and also to discredit Communist and other supporters of that system in France. Moreover, if Hitler could only be induced to attack her, the Nazi menace would be averted from the West, and Germany and the U.S.S.R. would both be weakened by fighting each other. This hostility to the U.S.S.R. will be found to run like a blood-red thread through all the behaviour of the French ruling class at every stage of the nightmare of reaction and corruption of these last years; a good illustration towards the end is to be found in the speech of M. Blum to the Labour Party Conference on the 15th May 1940, which is mentioned in Chapter XI.

(One can quote copious examples of similar conduct in Britain. One typical phrase: "An unspeakably dangerous enemy is threatening our civilisation, and primarily the British Empire. This enemy is Bolshevism", is to be found in *Russia and Ourselves*, published in England in 1931. The book is a revealing one. It is written by a foreigner who seems from the sentiments he expresses to have identified himself entirely with the standpoint of the more extreme British "Colonel Blimp". In the title

of the book, "Ourselves" means apparently the British, or perhaps the "Nordic" races, for the writer is full of the ordinary Fascist nonsense about races; Marxism is to him "a race revolt", and a "brachycephalic religion" mainly prevalent among "the short-skulled Alpine races who compose most of the lower classes in Europe"; and the only salvation from it is to be found in our "Nordic" origin and character.

(The book itself is a hotchpotch of prejudice and misrepresentation, with a pronounced Fascist bent, and resembles a caricature of a conversation between reactionary old gentlemen in any West End club.

(The writer was until recently a Companion of the Order of the British Empire, having been given that rank in recognition of services rendered to the British Government in connexion with the protection of British interests in the U.S.S.R. He has recently come into prominence through manifesting that perfectly logical loyalty to his class interests, as against those of the people of his own country, which some people call treason. His name is Quisling.)

The year 1939 opened with some prospect—and many hopes—that the war to which Munich was driving might be a war of the Nazis directed towards the east of Europe. But the Nazis were not willing to attack the U.S.S.R. They were, of course, much strengthened by British and French help and by the whole series of concessions that culminated in the handing over of the bastion of Czechoslovakia and the liquidation of the Czech Maginot Line; they were organised as a centralised state now in its fifth year of war preparations; they were inflamed by that hatred of Bolshevism which they held in common with the ruling classes of Britain and France; but nevertheless they were not yet in a mood to attack the Soviet Union. When

they looked eastwards they saw a Red Army whose numbers and equipment far exceeded their own, and a society bound together in an extraordinarily firm moral unity. They were bound to pause, and they did pause, before this formidable obstacle.

#### SOVIET POWER

The strength of Soviet Russia was very well described by Hitler in a conversation which he held with Lord Londonderry in Berlin in 1936. Lord Londonderry in his book, *Ourselves and Germany*, records Hitler's words as follows:

"Against this decay in continental Europe stands the extraordinary development of Soviet power. Soviet Russia has not only become the greatest military power, but at the same time the embodiment of an idea. ..."

Lord Londonderry continues:

"The fears which he [Hitler] had expressed would not have been proved imaginary but founded on undeniable facts. He summarized these facts as follows:

- (1) In Russia one has to deal with a nation of 180 millions.
- (2) Russia is territorially immune from attack.
- (3) Russia can never be overcome by a blockade.
- (4) Its industries are safe from aerial attack, as the most important industrial centres are from 4,000 to 6,000 kilometres from the frontiers.

"These four facts, he said, should be enough to establish the dangerous power of this country. . . .

"Russia has a solid trade, the strongest Army, the strongest Tank Corps and the strongest Air Force in the world. These are facts which cannot be ignored."

The Government of the Soviet Union for its part knew also exactly what the situation was, knew that the

governments of the "democratic" powers were determined to avert social revolution even at the price of war, had based their non-intervention policy on this hope, and **had** further hoped and planned that the inevitable war should be fought in the east of Europe. It is worth while to recall the words of Stalin, uttered on the occasion of the 18 th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1939, with much of which many readers who are neither pro-Russian or pro-Communist will agree:

"The majority of the non-aggressive countries, particularly England and France, have rejected the policy of collective security, the policy of collective resistance to the aggressors, and have taken up a position of non-intervention, a position of 'neutrality'.

"Formally speaking, the policy of non-intervention might be defined as follows: 'Let each country defend itself from the aggressors as it likes and as best it can. That is not our affair. We shall trade both with the aggressors and with their victims.' But actually speaking, the policy of non-intervention means conniving at aggression, giving free rein to war, and consequently transforming the war into a world war. The policy of non-intervention reveals an eagerness, a desire, not to hinder the aggressors in their nefarious work, not to hinder Japan, say, from embroiling herself in a war with China, or, better still, with the Soviet Union; not to hinder Germany, say, from enmeshing herself in European affairs, from embroiling herself in a war with the Soviet Union; to allow all the belligerents to sink deep into the mire of war, to encourage them surreptitiously in this; to allow them to weaken and exhaust one another; and then, when they have become weak enough, to appear on the scene with fresh strength, to appear, of course, 'in the interests of peace' and to dictate conditions to the enfeebled belligerents.

"Cheap and easy.

"Take Japan, for instance. It is characteristic that before Japan invaded North China all the influential French and British newspapers shouted about China's weakness and her inability

to offer resistance, and declared that Japan with her army could subjugate China in two or three months. Then the European and American politicians began to watch and wait. And then, when Japan started military operations, they let her have Shanghai, the vital centre of foreign capital in China; they let her have Canton, a centre of Britain's monopoly influence in South China; they let her have Hainan, and they allowed her to surround Hong-Kong. Does not this look very much like encouraging the aggressor? It is as though they were saying: 'Embroil yourself deeper in war; then we shall see.'

"Or take Germany, for instance. They let her have Austria, despite the undertaking to defend her independence; they let her have the Sudeten region; they abandoned Czechoslovakia to her fate, thereby violating all their obligations; and then they began to lie vociferously in the Press about 'the weakness of the Russian army', 'the demoralisation of the Russian air force', and 'riots' in the Soviet Union, egging the Germans on to march farther east, promising them easy pickings, and prompting them: 'Just start war on Bolsheviks, and everything will be all right.' It must be admitted that this, too, looks very much like egging on and encouraging the aggressor. . . .

"Even more characteristic is the fact that certain European and American politicians and pressmen, having lost patience waiting for 'the march on the Soviet Ukraine', are themselves beginning to disclose what is really behind the policy of non-intervention. They are saying quite openly, putting it down in black and white, that the Germans have cruelly 'disappointed' them, for instead of marching further east, against the Soviet Union, they have turned, you see, to the west and are demanding colonies. One might think that the districts of Czechoslovakia were yielded to Germany as the price of an undertaking to launch war on the Soviet Union, but that now the Germans are refusing to meet their bills and are sending them to Hades.

"Far be it from me to moralise on the policy of non-intervention, to talk of treason, treachery and so on. It would be naive to preach morals to people who recognise no human morality. Politics is politics, as the old case-hardened bourgeois

diplomats say. It must be remarked, however, that the big and dangerous political game started by the supporters of the policy of non-intervention may end in a serious fiasco for them.

"Such is the true face of the prevailing policy of non-intervention.

"Such is the political situation in the capitalist countries."\*

#### SUMMER MANOEUVRES 1939

On the 15 th March 1939 the Nazi Government committed its last major aggression in which France and Britain acquiesced; it seized the now defenceless Czechoslovakia; the story of the negotiations which followed, of Chamberlain's first half-defence of this seizure, his subsequent denunciation of Hitler, the pseudo-negotiations with Moscow, the real negotiations for a £1,000,000,000 loan to Germany in the Hudson-Wohltat talks, the mission of Lord Kemsley, all these and many other events of the six months prior to the war, are too well known to be repeated here; but I must deal for a moment with the French aspect of these fateful months.

In the main the French Government was now compelled to follow the British Government in practically all respects. But there was still a French Embassy in Berlin and occasional attempts by M. Bonnet to drive a better bargain with Germany. These attempts culminated in the

\*It becomes easier, in the light of these observations and reminders, to understand the immense clamour in the British, French, and American Press arid elsewhere, which continued even after the present war began, for a war against the Soviet Union with Germany by our side; evidence of this is largely stated in my Penguin Special, *Must the War Spread?* It is also easier to understand how Lord Lloyd, in his propaganda pamphlet, *The British Case*, could come to describe the German-Soviet Pact of August 1939, as "the final apostasy"; the word "apostasy" would only be appropriate if Germany owed us some duty to remain hostile to the Soviet Union **side** by side with ourselves. That is, in truth, just how our ruling class looked at the scene.

discussions between the German ambassador and M. Bonnet, when the latter stated that if war broke the French working-class would be dealt with roughly, the Communist Party "put in its place", and all trade-union opposition stamped out. It is worth quoting the passage from the French Yellow Book (page 147, or page 176 of the English edition):

"Finally, I told the Ambassador that he could observe the unanimity with which the French nation had rallied to the support of the Government. Elections would be suspended; public meetings would be stopped; attempts at foreign propaganda of whatever kind would be suppressed; and the Communists would be brought to book. The discipline and the spirit of sacrifice of the French people could not be called in question by anybody. 'Count von Welczeck informed me that, on this point, all his reports made mention of the present admirable attitude of the French people. He promised me that he would most faithfully repeat to his Government the conversation we had had together, the importance of which he fully realised.'"

The last eleven months before the war must have seemed to the French like the eleventh hour; there was always the chance of a respite, but the one real chance of avoiding war—the formation of a Peace Front with the U.S.S.R.—was thrown away at the bidding of British and French reactionaries, as it was bound to be.

In the next chapter I shall show what was inevitably the development of this triumph of reaction during the war.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE WAR: REACTION TRIUMPHS

*Attitudes to the War—The drive against the people—Preferring defeat to victory—Traitors in power—Inefficiency and corruption—Persecution and suppression.*

In this chapter I have to assess the nature and quality of the present war not as it may appear to various sections of thought in Britain, but as it must have been seen through the eyes of the two great groups in France, the ruling class and the working-class, whose acute antagonisms I have studied in preceding chapters. Only thus is it possible to understand the attitude which the Right-Wing Government of France would naturally take up to the war itself, to Hitler, and to their own working-class, the treatment to which they would be likely to subject the latter, and the attitude which those workers themselves would be likely to adopt.

It is not easy to assess the true nature of any war. It is fruitless to judge solely or even mainly by examining the situation immediately preceding the outbreak of the war, or by giving much weight to the question whether in its direct origin it was "offensive" or "defensive". For one thing, such considerations meet with a complete tangle of evidence. The Nazi war against the Polish State appears as plainly "offensive"; but the British and French response may in its turn superficially be labelled an "offensive" war against Germany. When this is countered by the state-

ment that the war was not offensive because it was brought to restrain aggression and to defend the sanctity of treaties or the independence of nationalities, then the question arises why innumerable previous aggressions and breaches of treaties were not answered in the same way. Why did Britain and France not defend the independence of Czechoslovakia against Germany or the independence of Albania against Italy? And why did they not defend earlier treaties, and fulfil their obligations under international law in the case of Spain?

One might continue indefinitely on these lines, to no profit. The only sure way to judge the character of a war is to examine the whole of the historic circumstances out of which it arose. These include the relations of the classes amongst each of the belligerents; for it is impossible to judge the nature and quality of a war without knowing the nature and quality of the ruling class that is waging it.

#### FRENCH ATTITUDES TO THE WAR

If we take amongst basic considerations only this last question, then it is clear that the war that broke out in September 1939 could not appear to the French people to be comparable to the war of the Spanish Republic, where a victory of the Popular Front had been followed by an armed rebellion of the landlords, aided by foreign invasion. In short, the struggle between the classes in Spain had been growing steadily sharper until it took on the acute form of civil war.

In France, on the other hand, the victory of the Popular Front had been followed by its gradual destruction from within by its enemies, the Two Hundred Families, giving their orders to Daladier and other politicians. There was the same sharpening of the class struggle, but it was the reactionaries who were "on top" and would be sure to

utilize any war to increase the repression of the working-class and the mass of the people, exactly as Foreign Minister Bonnet foretold to the German Ambassador, in the summer of 1939, as quoted at the end of the last chapter. This meant that from the standpoint of the French factory workers, the war was directed by the very men who had been the enemies of the Popular Front programme, of the forty-hour week, and of all the other gains of the working-class. Reaction was in the saddle, and a war carried on by reactionaries was to many of them simply a reactionary war. Does Reaction that has long co-operated openly with Fascism at home as well as abroad become any less Reaction because it is at war with a Fascist state, even of a particularly brutal type? Their answer to this somewhat abstract way of putting the question would undoubtedly be that Reaction, in all experience, becomes not less but still more reactionary in war time; it seizes the chance given by war to intensify its assault upon the interests and livelihood of the mass of the people. Furthermore, the leaders of Reaction in France had utilized not only Fascist methods but openly Fascist organisations: and not only native Fascist leagues but Fascist bodies in the pay of Germany and Italy. Moreover, they had not merely utilized such agencies but had themselves more and more blatantly assumed the specific dictatorial style of government. What in these circumstances, the workers of France might well ask, was the validity of the distinction between Fascism and this developed degree of Reaction?

Even those who repudiate the suggestion that the British Government is fighting the present war for Imperialist motives may well see without difficulty the point of view, held by many of the working-class in France, that the reactionary French Government was acting in its own imperialist, reactionary, and Fascist interests,

and may understand that in such a war the working-class and common people of France could not have the same interest as their masters, nor could they have any part of that enthusiasm which inspired the people of Spain from 1936 to 1939, or the people of China from 1937 to the present day. It was for them in its origin a reactionary war, a war of rival imperialisms.

#### THE DRIVE AGAINST THE PEOPLE

The French ruling class plainly considered itself to be confronted in the autumn of 1939 with two enemies, the" foreign enemy and the enemy at home. Throughout the winter of 1939-40 British observers in France were to record that the serious talk in *salons* was all to the effect that the working-class was the more dreaded enemy, and that a German occupation would be preferable to the rule of the workers. It was an ominous feature; for it was an historical repetition of the Petrograd *salons* in 1916-17, where it was said that it was better to open the front to the Germans than to have a social revolution at home.

As Edgar Mowrer wrote in the *New York Post*: "Certain richer Frenchmen feared victory in this war almost more than defeat, as likelier to bring devolution', an elastic but fear-inspiring term."

The first steps towards internal repression had been taken before the war began. The French Parliament had already on more than one occasion in the previous seven years seen its powers over ministries limited by the institution of emergency decrees. These corresponded not so much to the Emergency Regulations which govern Britain in wartime as to the famous "Paragraph 48", by which the Chancellor of the German Reich and his Ministers were enabled to put laws into effect without the Reichstag, thus undermining democratic forms in Germany and pre-

paring the way for the coming of the Nazis. In the same way the Decree Laws of Doumergue in 1934, of Laval in 1935, and of Daladier in 1938-9 prepared the way for the coming of Fascism in France. Parliament in itself is not the whole of democracy, even of a capitalist democracy: but the frequent supersession of Parliament is undoubtedly a grave infraction of capitalist democracy, and prepares the way for atrophy and for still more serious inroads.

Thus in the summer of 1939, the unprecedented proposal was brought forward to postpone the French elections, a step that not even the most reactionary governments of France in the previous fifty years had ever dared' to suggest. But now it was easy. The French elections, due in the spring of 1940, were postponed for a year. The only possible reason for this appears to have been that suggested at the time in some of the newspapers, that the Communist Party of France would make unprecedented gains in the forthcoming elections.

A second step was the attempt of the Foreign Secretary, Georges Bonnet, in July 1939, to use the Decree Laws to prosecute Lucien Sampaix, the managing director and one of the editors of the Communist newspaper, *L'Humanite*. Two prominent French journalists, one connected with *Figaro* and the other with *Le Temps*, had been arrested on charges of receiving German money and espionage, and Sampaix had made their names public in an article in *L'Humanite*. For this he was prosecuted for infringing the law forbidding the publication of details relating to the investigation of espionage cases—a highly convenient law at that stage of France's descent into Fascism and corruption. The case had the air of a "frame-up". In the course of his defence, Sampaix asserted that France was riddled with German agents well furnished with funds, and that he had acted as he did "as a journalist, a Communist, and

a Frenchman". How abusive these Communists are; they blurt out the truth even before others know or admit it. Sampaix was acquitted amid popular rejoicing. It was one of the last chances any French court had of behaving judicially in a political case. That the attempt should even have been made was a symptom of the "fascisation" of France and a sure sign, war or no war, of a governmental conspiracy against the freedom of the Press, and, above all, against the paper that Jean Jaures had founded, and that Cachin, Vaillant-Couturier, Cogniot, and Sampaix had made the biggest political influence amongst the French working-class.

A month later, the third step was taken. The conclusion of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact\* and the rapid diplomatic moves which preceded the outbreak of war were made the occasion for carrying out the plan which Bonnet had outlined to the German Ambassador as described above, at the end of Chapter VII. Some ten days before the war began, *I'Humanite* was suppressed, and with it *Ce Soir*, the large Paris evening paper.

France declared war on the 3rd September, after two days in which Bonnet and friends of Hitler did their utmost to delay the declaration. Immediately thereafter the Maginot Line was manned, and there was complete mobilisation, accompanied by the application of emergency laws of unprecedented severity. For the next nine months France was to be held in a reign of terror. Not only military but political censorship was imposed. Not only news but views, even the mildest criticisms, were brought under the ban. Those who saw French papers at that time remarked on the large number of gaps in their columns where the censor had blacked out whatever dis-

\*Dealt with in full in my *light on Moscow*.

pleased him. (The satirical journal, *Le Canard Enchaîné*, used to fill these spaces with cartoons of an extremely aged and formidable spinster called Anastasie, wielding a titanic pair of scissors.) This made it harder, of course, to understand in Britain what exactly was happening in the French Republic. Nevertheless there were enough British observers in France to have brought back an approximately correct picture, had they been willing; but, as so often happens, "there is none so blind as those who will not see". It is necessary, therefore, to give some picture here of the general nightmare of reaction and degradation that reigned from the outbreak of the war. For this there is now material enough and to spare, from the multitude of revelations by French writers, some of whom kept obstinately dumb when their utterance would have been particularly helpful, but are now competing with one another in the volubility of belated wisdom.

Here I shall mention only some half-dozen aspects of this Witches' Sabbath of reaction. First and foremost was the quality of those to whom was handed over the responsibility for important posts in the conduct of government and of the war. In Chapter VI the story of the Cagoularde ("the Hooded Men") has been briefly told. Within twenty months of this unsavoury episode, some of these Hooded Men were to be found in Government posts; for example, M. de POnclé, in prison as a Cagoularde at the beginning of the war, was presently found to be occupying a prominent position in the Ministry of Supply. Then the various Fascist parties and organisations, whose roll of dishonour I have given in Chapter III, would, it might reasonably have been demanded, have experienced a greater degree of restriction after August 1939; on the contrary their adherents were found in many of the most responsible positions. One of the most outstanding of the French Fascists

was Jacques Doriot, renegade Communist and police-agent, who was built up into a sort of Fuehrer after the electoral struggle of 1936 had exhibited the feebleness of the Croix de Feu and its leader, Count de la Rocque. This creature, who did not even trouble to conceal the resemblance of his organisation to its German model, was soon to be found filling a high office in the Censorship. Outside the Army command itself, no post could be found more convenient for a Fifth Columnist. This placing of Fascists, Cagoulards, and others of the worst elements of reaction in key positions made it extremely easy for German and Italian agents to carry on that work of corruption which was to reach such a high pitch by the summer of 1940.

#### THE ANTI-SOVIET DRIVE

The second aspect to which attention should be drawn is the extent to which the reactionary ruling class of France concentrated its hatred on the Soviet Union. This, of course, was common to Britain, France, and the U.S.A. But in France it even went to the length of demanding the withdrawal of the Soviet Ambassador from Paris on the ground of a private telegram sent by him to Moscow (and read by the French censorship) in which he expressed approval of his own Government's policy. This hatred rose to a pitch of mid-winter madness during the Finnish episode. I have already written of this (though more particularly with reference to Britain) in my books *Light on Moscow* and *Must the War Spread?* and here I need only refer to the decision of the French Government to send an expeditionary force of 50,000 men against the Soviet Union. It meant that hatred of the U.S.S.R. had so blinded the French ruling class that they were ready to launch an attack upon the Red Army, perhaps the greatest military force in the world, before they had reached the

day of reckoning with the Nazis—and against any opposition on the part of the Norwegian or Swedish governments, as Pertinax, the well-known French commentator, revealed in his article in the *Daily Telegraph* of the 14th March, 1940.\*

#### INEFFICIENCY AND CORRUPTION

The third aspect was the incapacity of the reactionary and bureaucratic army command. The war, like all previous wars, began with a widespread adulation of the High Command; the censorship prevented any whisper of criticism; and not until after the invasion of France was any light of day let into this bad business. The French General Staff behaved like the Bourbons, of whom it was said, "they forgot nothing and they learned nothing". Their text-book for what was to prove an entirely new kind of war was the experience of the 1914-18 campaign. Everything was thought of and planned in terms of the previous war. This does not mean that the strategy of Marshal Foch and others was to be exactly copied. No, the lessons drawn from the last war were of a defensive behind an impregnable Maginot Line. Of events subsequent to the last war, of the advances made, for example, by the Red Army, which was the first to employ parachute troops, the French military men remained either ignorant or contemptuous, and in particular the roles in modern warfare of the tank and the aeroplane were completely underesti-

\*Pertinax in this article referred to the conclusion of the Soviet-Finnish Peace Treaty as a loss to the Allies, and that more moral than material. \*'Now as to the material loss', he asks, \*'where is it to be found? In the fact that we have failed to seize an occasion to set foot in Scandinavia and to cut Germany off from her supplies of Swedish iron-ore as well as to close to both Russia and Germany all land approaches to the Norwegian coastline.... Finland's surrender will deprive the Western Powers of an excellent opportunity to make their blockade of Germany more effective on a vital spot."

mated, a piece of folly of which newspaper readers in this country have been made fully aware by the partisans of General de Gaulle.

Again, mobilisation was carried out in such a way as to strip vital war factories of their essential cadres of skilled workers. Skilled engineers were to be found peeling potatoes and sweeping out courtyards in provincial barracks remote from the line, while the line itself was maintained in nearly as sleepy a condition as a provincial barracks. For example, says Andre Maurois in *Why France Fell*: "The Renault factories, which in peace time employed more than thirty thousand workers and which should have filled a place of immense importance in the manufacture of tanks and trucks, were reduced at the outbreak of war to a personnel of from six to eight thousand men. It was fantastic." The rottenness which was seen in the French ruling class had infected the reactionary and bureaucratic army command.

That corruption, an open feature of French politics, spread rapidly during those first months of the war is unquestionable, whilst profiteering was on a scale resembling that of the last war. These twin evils were carried to the point of supplies going to Germany via Luxemburg and Belgium. As Andre Marty wrote in *The Trial of the French Communist Deputies* (Lawrence and Wishart. Ltd., March 1941):

"The workers were suffering privations and misery; the trade unions had been destroyed and social legislation abolished in the name of a \*war for liberty'; but meanwhile trainloads of iron ore were being despatched by M. de Wendel (Croix de Feu, No. 13) from Briey, through Belgium, without stop, to Germany, addressed to his cousin, Herr von Wendel."

Still another feature of the nightmare of degradation that set in with September 1939 was the savage censorship

of the Press, whose general effects I have mentioned earlier, and which, it must be remembered, was used to protect the growth of corruption as well as to suppress the growth of democracy.

All these aspects and many others can be summed up by saying that there was in all spheres of French political life and economy an increasingly Fascistic regime. It was, however, a merely imitative regime, faithfully copying the Nazis in everything except those particular methods which would have assisted France's military effort. On one aspect of the totalitarian regime, the suppression of the working-class, it is now necessary to go into considerable detail.

#### REPRESSION OF THE WORKING-CLASS

The measures for the repression of the French working-class took various forms, which deserve somewhat close study. I shall deal firstly with the suppression of the Communists and secondly with the suppression or mutilation of the French trade unions.

Early in September the French Communist Party was declared illegal, its offices raided, and its property seized. The Communist Party at this time had over 300,000 members in a population of forty million, and far exceeded in its size the Socialist Party of France. In the Paris region it was the largest party of all and had an immense following in the more industrial regions as well.

Next came the attack on the municipalities of France. Many of these had Communist majorities in the Town Council. Many of the mayors were Communists, and in other towns there was a large minority of Communist councillors. Here the attack on the Communists turned into an attack on the right of the French people to elect their own local government. In a whole series of towns

**the** regular local government institutions were suppressed and government agents were sent down to conduct the affairs of the municipality. Altogether several thousand Communist councillors were thus removed, and hundreds of thousands of the people of France placed under arbitrary rule.

These ferocious methods of persecution of the Communists by the Daladier Government were exultantly reported to the French Senate on the 19th March 1940, by the Radical Minister, Sarraut, who some ten years earlier had proclaimed "Communism is the Enemy!" and who was now able to carry through a capitalist vendetta under the pretext of national defence. He said:

"The Communist electoral mandates no longer exist. Three hundred Communist municipal councils have been suspended. In all, 2,778 elected Communists, city or district municipal councillors, have been deprived of their seats.

"Measures have been taken against 443 public employees and officials belonging to the Communist Party. Many other Communists have been dismissed from posts of various kinds.

"The Communists had *VHumanite* and *Ce Soir*, with a circulation of 500,000 and 250,000 respectively. These papers have been suppressed, together with 159 other sheets. The printing plants have been closed down. Communism no longer has a platform or a press.

"Six hundred and twenty-nine trade unions have been dissolved, and measures have been taken to prevent their being reorganised. Eleven thousand raids have been made on premises that might serve for Communist meetings.

"Furthermore, 675 Communist political groups have been disbanded.

"The militants are being tracked down; 3,400 had been arrested by the 7th March and the pursuit is still in progress. Numerous foreign accomplices have been interned in concentration camps or deported. In all, 8,000 individual sentences have been passed on Communists."

The excuse has, of course, been advanced for these and other repressive measures against the Communists in France that strong measures had to be taken to suppress them because, as it is alleged, they were "anti-War" and "pro-Hitler", and preaching defeatism. It is worthwhile stating some of the many answers to this assertion. The first is that the allegation as made is untrue; any plausibility that clever press campaigns may have given it disappears into thin air when one realises that the accusers, the French ruling class, were from the start themselves "anti-War", in many ways "pro-Hitler", and in all respects "defeatist". The "sell-out" which they accused the Communists of seeking was their own secret ambition, destined to be rapidly and fully realised; it is unlikely that they and the Communists would have held the same views. One can perhaps test this by considering why Paris was not defended against the Germans, after the many official boasts that it would be defended house by house. There is now scarcely room for doubt that the reason for not defending it was that the Government knew the defence would be rapidly transformed into a fight of the French working-class against the invader, followed or accompanied by a transfer of power to the working-class.

Another answer, less important but nevertheless of great value, is that repression began before the Communists really had a chance to show what their reactions were to the war; this answer is certainly true in respect of any period after the latter part of August 1939. Yet another answer, that the suppression of the Communists can hardly have been brought about by anything they did during the war, since it had been definitely planned long before, is amply proved by the conversation between Bonnet and the German Ambassador, which is set out in Chapter VII. When one reflects on the position in France, it becomes

clear that the ruling class would inevitably plan to use the opportunity of the outbreak of a war for the suppression of all the Left-Wing opponents whom they really feared, and would equally inevitably seek to excuse their actions by accusing those opponents of being anti-War. Few students of history have failed to observe that in every war and in every crisis reactionary rulers seek to weaken the opposition and maintain their own power by the wildest and most unscrupulous misrepresentations of the attitude and activities of the more formidable and unbribeable of their opponents, be they—according to period—liberals, radicals, socialists, anarchists, or communists. They have equally sought to destroy every progressive element, such as shop steward or trade union officials, who have sought to defend working-class conditions, by plastering them with the opprobrious label of "Communists" and meting them out the same treatment.

#### PURGING PARLIAMENT

Next came the Parliament. Here the Communist deputies had formed a "Workers\* and Peasants' Party which was not caught by the decree for the suppression of Communist mandates, and enrolled themselves as *its* representatives. The endeavour was made to treat them as pariahs and exclude them from the normal rights of deputies, while an occasion was being sought to take criminal proceedings against them. This occasion was found in the demand put forward by the Communist deputies for a secret session of the French Chamber to discuss the question of war and peace. It adds a touch of irony that at the same time Mr. Lloyd George put forward a similar demand for a secret session in Britain on the same subject—to which the British Government eventually agreed. No news of this parallel happening in Britain appeared in

the French newspapers, apart from a couple of lines or so in *Le Temps*. The news was suppressed because the French Government had chosen to make this the ground for depriving the Communist deputies, wholly unconstitutionally and illegally, of their seats, and thus disfranchising a million and a half of the French electorate. At the same time, they not only excluded them from the Chamber but also arrested all of them whom they could find. Currency was also given through the kept and gagged Press to the most absurd rumours, such as that the leader of the French Communists, Maurice Thorez, one of the deputies whom they could not find, was in Germany.

#### ATTACK ON TRADE UNION RIGHTS AND CONDITIONS

The attack on the conditions and trade union rights of the French working-class began with the general mobilisation of the 1st September 1939. On the 3rd September the weekly rest-day for workers engaged in war work was swept away. On the 7th September a decree was issued lengthening the working week to 72 hours (*in theory* an 80 per cent increase), while collective agreements and conciliation measures were abolished. By the 11th November 1939 the right to elect shop stewards (workers' delegates) was abolished.

Wages were cut in an astounding way. Overtime, which was applied to an excessive degree, was at first ordered to be worked without any pay at all for a number of hours, and in any case was actually paid at less than the normal hourly rate. Moreover, wages were undermined in various indirect ways. Five million Frenchmen had been mobilised, for example, women and children filling some of their places at very low rates of wages, whilst in many factories the mobilised workers were sent back to work and given soldiers' pay, which was so low (1JS^d. a

day) that the inadequate pay of British soldiers appeared princely by comparison.

By a "national wages policy" decree of the 10th November, so-called "stabilized" wages were fixed—which might have been defended had the cost of living remained stabilized. It had been stabilized *on paper* in the opening days of the war, but before five months were past such a journal as *Le Peuple* admitted on the 25th January 1940 that "in a number of districts, the cost of living index had risen 25 to 30 points".\*

The attack on the French trade unions and on the trade union rights of the French working-class took a second form; the trade unions themselves were disrupted by the wholesale expulsion and arrests of Communists. A considerable number of the unions affiliated to the C.G.T. had Communists as general secretaries, while in some unions and trades councils a majority of the workers' delegates (shop stewards) were Communists. Wholesale arrests in such cases meant the disintegration and break-up of any effective trade unionism; as M. Sarraut boasted in the passage quoted above, 629 trade unions were dissolved by the Government. In other cases, where the unions were under control of those who held a standpoint similar to that of M. Rene Belin, then Assistant-General-Secretary of the C.G.T. and now in the Vichy Government, there was no effective protest whatever against the most extreme measures taken by the Government.

Further, as stated in the issue of *Civil Liberties* for February 1940, vacancies for the positions of trade union officials could "no longer be filled by election", and the appointments made were subject to the confirmation of the

\*A short digest of some of the labour decrees in question appears in the Appendix at the end of this chapter.

Ministry of Labour. To explain this rather extraordinary invasion of the democratic rights of trade unionists, a note was appended to the Decree of 10th November 1939 specifically stating that this provision was necessary in order to exclude members of the Communist Party from official positions in the trade unions. The comment made in the English journal runs: "The gradual disappearance of civil liberty in France gives us ample warning of what may happen in this country if we are not continually on our guard to ensure that the Government does not, under the guise of legislation for the defence of the realm and the efficient prosecution of the war, introduce measures which fundamentally curtail our rights of organization, assembly and freedom of speech."

This wholesale destruction of French trade unionism could never of course have been achieved without the aid of the French Socialists, who were led by their fear and hatred of the Communists to join in the work and to break up the unions from within. This extraordinary episode, which bound the working-class of France hand and foot, deprived it of its democratic rights, and rendered it temporarily unable to resist the sell-out to Hitler that was being prepared, is unhappily only a repetition of equally disastrous episodes in other countries.

#### A TRIAL BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

The *next* stage in this drive against the enemy at home came in the trial of the French Communist Deputies by a military court in Paris in March and early April 1940. The proceedings were held for the most part in camera and scarcely reported in the British Press. (There was, indeed, little report of any kind available until the publication of Andre Marty's book mentioned above.) Forty-four French members of parliament were put on trial for opinions

expressed in their letter of the 1st October 1939 addressed to M. Edouard Herriot, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, in which they requested the summoning of Parliament to debate the issue of war and peace. Now in France, as in Britain, it had hitherto been believed that, whether in war or in peace, it is a touchstone of democracy that members of parliament should have full privilege to express opinions within Parliament. In France it was not left as a matter of historical tradition, but was made part of the fundamental law of the Constitution of the French Republic. According to the Law of 16th July 1875 (section 13), "No member of either Chamber may be prosecuted or made responsible for opinions expressed or votes given by him in the exercise of his duties." It was in direct violation of the constitution and laws of the French Republic that the deputies were arrested, held in prison for nearly five months as common criminals without even the privileges conceded by French law to political prisoners, and brought to trial.

It is true that precedents can be found for such treatment. The Bolshevik deputies in the Tsar's Duma, or semi-parliament, were tried in November 1914, imprisoned and exiled to Siberia; and the Nazis in 1933 broke the constitution in their arrests in connexion with the Reichstag Fire. Daladier did not dare to quote these precedents; nor would they have sufficed, for as will be seen things were done from which even the Nazis had shrunk; they had at least conducted the Reichstag Fire Trial in public. Perhaps only Daladier's Minister of Justice, the crook Bonnet, could have cited such precedents without a blush; but then Bonnet was destined in the following August to be appointed as the prosecutor of Daladier and others in the "Riom Trials", then being projected by the new Fascist France of Petain!

The indictment charged the accused with

"Having, by participating in the constitution and functioning of a group entitled the Trench 'Workers' and 'Peasants' Group' and particularly by drawing up and sending out on 1st October a letter addressed to the President of the Chamber of Deputies, which preaches peace under the auspices of the Soviet Union, taken part in an activity which has directly or indirectly the object of propagating the slogans emanating from or dependent on the Third Communist International and organs controlled in fact by this International."

The first two charges do not bear examination. The first is that they formed a "French Workers' and Peasants' Group." To form such a group was perfectly within their rights, as was recognised by Herriot himself, who in his capacity as Speaker or Chairman of the House had written these M.P.s a letter in which he assured them that their action was legal and constitutional. The second, that they put forward certain opinions, was fully safeguarded by the Constitutional Law of 1875, quoted above. It is clear, therefore, that the only count in the indictment which had any substance in it (by which I do not mean that it showed an offence but that the allegations did at any rate have some plausibility) was their connection with the Communist International.

#### THE PRECEDENT OF THIERS

Now for this there was a precedent, and a dreadful one. When the bloodthirsty Thiers, a few months after his butchery of the Commune of Paris (to which I have referred in Chapter I), was giving evidence before a parliamentary enquiry, he declared that the "very existence" of the First International, led by Marx and Engels and composed of representatives of the working-class of the countries of Europe and North America, including the British trade union leaders, and embodying in itself **and** in

its personnel the highest aspirations of the working-class, was a crime. Thiers said:

"It was I who conceived the idea of regarding mere affiliation to the International as a crime. Membership in this society, whose very existence is a crime, must be regarded as a new crime to be added to those which it is the purpose of criminal legislation to suppress, for the aim of this society is to combine the efforts of foreign malefactors with those of French malefactors."

This was the precedent adopted by Daladier & Co., and then by Paul Reynaud, to the accompaniment of applause from the reactionaries and the pro-Hitler section of the "200 Families". But they improved on it. Thiers had stated in 1872 that the original idea was to deprive the Communards of their French citizenship, but that "such a measure seemed to us too extreme". The successors of Thiers in the spring of 1940 took a leaf out of the book, not of Thiers but of Hitler, who deprived Einstein and many of the greatest German writers and scientists of their citizenship; and they proceeded to deprive some of the best working-class fighters of France of their French nationality.

Thus the nemesis of the French Republic, in the grip of the millionaires, brought about in the last weeks of its life the same persecution of the working-class and its representatives out of which it had been born. For within a few weeks of this trial, in which the only criminality and infamy attaches to the prosecutors, the Republic had ceased to exist.

Monstrous as was the indictment, the procedure, conduct, and circumstances of the trial so far exceeded all the norms of French justice that it was considered better to hold it in secret. The legal battle on the demand of the prisoners for a public hearing took up twelve hours of argument, which had to take place in public, for the law

demands that all points of procedure must be discussed in public. "There is no precedent", said the defending advocate, the courageous Marcel Willard, "for a political trial in France taking place behind closed doors. The trials of Danton, Baboeuf, and Blanqui were all public. The judge may say 'We are at war', but during the last war there was no case of a trial being held in secret."

For the rest, we may quote the account given by an English Barrister, one of the few foreign observers of the trial, and printed in the May 1940 issue of *Civil Liberties*:

"The trial opened with a public session. Apart from formal matters, the only question discussed was whether MM. Daladier, Bonnet, and Herriot should be called as witnesses by the Defence. M. Herriot, whose evidence would undoubtedly have been of the utmost importance, claimed immunity as President of the Chamber. MM. Daladier and Bonnet claimed immunity as Ministers, under a law of 1812. Neither was a Minister when the matter was discussed, the Daladier Government having resigned that morning. The matter was finally decided in favour of the prosecution.

"M. Bonnet was subpoenaed again later, after the formation of the present Government—of which he is not a member. He claimed to be too ill to attend, and the Court upheld his objection. I understand that he spoke at the Radical Party Congress the next day.

*"Trial in Camera.*

"The second session, also held in public, consisted of a discussion as to whether the case should be held in camera. It was not pretended that any official secrets were involved: the only reason for excluding the public was that publicity for this trial would have embarrassed the French Government. This, after hearing the prisoners in action during the first session, I can well believe. It should be remembered that the Reichstag Fire Trial was held in public.

"Not content with this, the French Government ordered at

least one newspaper to cease reporting the trial at all. The ban was withdrawn next day, but important parts of Press reports were deleted by the censor throughout the trial. It should be emphasised that the censored reports related to those parts of the trial which must always be public. . . .

"At the end of the evidence for the Prosecution, the Defence asked for, and obtained, a declaration by the Court that all this evidence related solely to events taking place within the precincts of the Chamber. This was remarkable as being the only occasion on which any point was decided in favour of the Defence. But, further, it entitles us to assume that no evidence was given as to any communication between the prisoners and the Third International, because, clearly, if any such communication had taken place it must have done so outside the Chamber. . . .

"As to the letter to M. Herriot, requests that the British Parliament should discuss peace proposals were made and acted upon in England and the Third International was not held responsible. It must further be remembered that the French constitution forbids the prosecution of Deputies for opinions expressed in the course of their parliamentary duties.

*"The Sentences.*

"There is reason to suppose, therefore, that the charge against these Deputies would hardly have stood up to public examination. All the prisoners were nevertheless convicted and 36 sentenced to 5 years\* imprisonment (the maximum). These 36 included all those tried in their absence. The remainder were 'released\*' as first offenders, that is, they have been interned.

"The issue at this trial, then, was not whether the prisoners would be convicted; in fact, it became a question of to what extent could the Defence break through the secrecy surrounding the trial. This was possible, after the first sessions, only with the help of carefully chosen points of procedure, as decisions on points of procedure are settled in public. Thus it was, for instance, that we learnt that the prosecution had 'altered' the Deputies' letter to Herriot so as to fit their argument.

*"English Witnesses.*

"It should be mentioned that two English witnesses gave

evidence for the Defence at the trial. One of these was Lord Faringdon, the Honorary Treasurer of the National Council for Civil Liberties. But as all witnesses were heard in secret, it would be 'contempt' of the French court to reveal the evidence which they gave."

#### THE DEFENCE SPEAKS

For commentary on the trial and its significance, it may be best to let the prisoners themselves, whose voice in their own country was muffled, be heard. The speech delivered by one of them, Deputy Billoux, began with the words:

\*"Neither the Communist Deputies nor Communism are on trial here. There is not a single serious element in the entire arsenal of laws established to serve the capitalist class that can justify the Communist Deputies being imprisoned and haled before the Courts. The history of societies and regimes contain periods when the ruling classes are only able to maintain themselves in power at the cost of violating their own legal system. We know of such examples in the history of our country, but we also see that sooner or later the people put an end to such dictatorships by revolutionary means."

Then, after dealing briefly with the trumped-up charges of the indictment, Billoux turned to indict the accusers. He traversed the whole internal and foreign policy of the Government and of the ruling class of France. He defended his party's policy, saying:

"We were the first in this country to proclaim the danger of international fascism to world peace. We it was who, with the greatest zeal, exposed Hitlerism to the French public. Although we never preached war as a means of doing away with this hated regime, although we always asserted that the liberation of the German people must be the work of the German people themselves, we stood for the policy of organizing resistance to the

ambitions of Fascism. For years we urged on the French Government: Either you exert all your efforts to save the peace and the independence of the country, by uniting all men of good-will throughout Europe, or you will sabotage this effort and will bear the responsibility for the war that will then break out.

"We shall be implacable enemies of this war which you had no desire to avert, this war which may spread over the whole world, because you placed the defence of the capitalist privileges above concern for the peace and independence of nations. It is this war that is now raging over ill-fated Europe.

"The culprit is the capitalist regime, which, to use Jaure's words, 'bears war within itself as the cloud bears the storm' . . ."

At another point he bitterly criticised the leaders of the Socialist Party ("The capitalists hope to be able for a long time to deceive the people, because they have the support of the Socialist Party"), and went on to say:

"We are internationalists. We are the only internationalists. The working people of all races and all colours are our brothers. We feel a common bond with the miners and seamen of England, the metal workers of Essen, the dockers of Hamburg, the workers of Prague, the peasants of Poland, the fellahin of Arabia, and the coolies of China, as with the free workers and peasants of the Soviet Union."

Inspired by the examples of Karl Liebknecht at his trial by the German Government in the 1914-18 War and of Georgi Dimitroff in 1933, Billoux fought to expose his accusers of the ruling class. Amongst his final remarks were:

"We don't want to be the slaves of Hitler, the vassals of Chamberlain, or the servants of Mussolini.

"Yes! We love the people of France and wish to deliver it from those who are leading it to the catacombs and ruin, from those who are subjecting it to the shame of dictatorship. . . ."

". . . We Communists call on the people to fight for bread, liberty, and peace.

"Yes! We are Communists! We are proud to be the heirs of the Communards, who, by their self-sacrifice, saved the republic and fought for the emancipation of the working people. Marx said of them that they had stormed the heavens.

"Communism means peace, the development of the human personality and human dignity, the advance of science and the arts, the flowering of human civilization. We are Frenchmen and that is why we want, from the bottom of our hearts, to see France free, strong, and happy.

"We are internationalists and that is why we regard every victory of the proletariat, in whatever country, as our own victory.

"Yes! We consider the building of socialism in the U.S.S.R. to be the first act of the world revolution which will rid the peoples of oppression and war! . . .

"We are confident in our country, in the France of 1793, 1830, 1848, in the France of the Paris Commune, in the France of February 1934, and of May 1936."

#### THE GUILLOTINE FOR DANGEROUS THOUGHTS

The trial of the deputies ended on the 3rd April 1940. Six days later the climax of this savage persecution was reached. Decrees were promulgated imposing *the death penalty* on "every Frenchman who takes part willingly in an attempt to disaffect the Army or the nation with the object of hampering national defence"; and in the preamble to the decree it was said that "this clause, which has a general application, would strike at the same time at Communist propaganda, pro-Hitler propaganda, and eventually any propaganda evidencing the same characteristics which may manifest itself." Note how widely the net is spread by the last clause. Any critic of the Government, anyone who voiced opinions which were progressive or were disliked by a police spy, could be put to death under it.

By another decree "preparing, stocking, or supplying instruments of Communist propaganda" becomes a crime punishable by death. Now a leaflet would count as an "instrument" of Communist propaganda. To distribute one in Great Britain in a factory could lead to dismissal, or at worst, if the factory were a "protected place", to fine or prison; in France it would be "supplying"—and means the guillotine. To have a Communist leaflet in one's possession is no crime in Britain, though it may horrify a policeman; but in France it amounts to "stocking"—a capital offence. Similarly "preparing" covers the mere collection of facts and figures about wages and conditions, or profits, or food prices; and the penalty for "preparing" is death. So atrocious was this decree that it aroused immediate protest in Great Britain. The following letter was sent to the Press by some two dozen signatories, including G. Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, and E. M. Forster:

"We wish to protest as strongly as we can against the new French decree which makes the propagation of Communist and 'defeatist' opinions an offence punishable by death. It is unnecessary to labour the wide gulf which separates these repressive measures from the principles for which it is said the present war is being fought. We are convinced that the world cannot be saved from Nazism and the barbarous repression which that term implies by imitating the standards and the methods of that abhorrent regime.

"We urge that the French Government should realise the profound distress that has been caused amongst the British public by this decree, and that the British Government should press for its withdrawal."

Viewed in the light of the history of the last few years, it seems natural, almost inevitable, that this ruthless and unscrupulous suppression of liberty and of working-class standards should have taken place in the war, and indeed

that the collapse and "sell-out" of June 1940 should ensue; but at the time the trend of events was successfully concealed from all but the shrewdest observers. The Daladier-Bonnet Government managed to delude British Commentators into the belief that all was going well, and had effectively hidden, especially from those whose eyes did not want to be opened, the fact that something was rotten in the state of France. There was little military action against Germany; the conditions of the Army were abominable; the foreign policy was chiefly the working out of the future Anglo-French hegemony of Europe and the immediate preparation of war upon the Soviet Union. Daladier joined with Chamberlain in calling the farcical and jerry-mandered meeting of the League of Nations in December on the question of Finland; by February, when he must have known that his Army could not or would not resist a German attack, he had planned the dispatch of 100,000 Anglo-French troops to fight against the Red Army in Finland.

Then came the German seizure of Denmark and Norway, followed by the fiasco of Narvik, Namsos, etc. These brought down the Chamberlain Government in Britain, as the Finnish affair had brought down the Daladier Government in France. The Nemesis of the reactionaries was now beginning to work!

But things were not yet quite ripe for the "sell-out", or rather for the immediate transfer of power to those sections of the French ruling class who could carry out a deal with Hitler. M. Paul Reynaud became Premier, while Daladier continued as Minister of War, along with Gamelin as Generalissimo. Reynaud, whom we have seen previously as the apostle of devaluation in 1936, had no particular following in the French Chamber, and it was realised that his Government was at the mercy of the poli-

tical intrigues of the larger parties. At the best it could be only a stop-gap. What lay on the other side of the gap I shall relate in the next chapter.

#### APPENDIX TO CHAPTER VIII

#### BRIEF DIGEST OF FRENCH LABOUR LEGISLATION

Decree, September 1, 1939.

*Article 1.* Weekly hours for men

All establishments referred to in Article 6 of Book 11 of the Labour Code, i.e. all industrial, commercial, handicraft, and co-operative enterprises and public hospitals and institutions are authorised to increase working hours from 40 to 60 a week.

*Article 2.* Daily Hours

The working day must not exceed 11 hours, or 12 hours with the consent of the Inspector of Labour.\*

Where work in continuous processes is being carried on in the interests of national defence or for the public services, working hours may be extended to 72 hours with the consent of the Inspector of Labour.

Decree, November 10th.

The Minister of Labour may sanction unlimited extension of hours set forth in Articles 1 to 3 in decree law of September 1st, and in the case of mines he may in consultation with the Minister of Public Works sanction unlimited extensions of the hours provided in the Decree of 10th September.

Decree, September 1st.

*Article 3.* Women and children may not work more than 10 hours a day and 60 hours a week.

\*The Inspector of Labour corresponds roughly to our Chief Inspector of Factories.

*Hours of Miners*

Decree, September 10 th.

Increases the hours of miners from  $38\frac{2}{8}$  a week to  $52\frac{1}{2}$  (inclusive of 25 minutes rest periods and both winding times) and  $8\frac{1}{2}$  a day. Same rule regarding overtime applies to miners.

*Hours of Railways*

Decree, October 6th.

Authorises the suspension of the collective agreement between the railway staff and the National Railway Company. Increases the length of the working day to 10 hours actual work and 5 hours additional travelling time, with a minimum rest period of 12 hours between working days.

*Minister's Powers in Relation to Hours and Working Conditions*

Decree, November 10th.

In all industries any alteration in working conditions requires the consent of the Minister of Labour, and in national defence industries the consent also of the appropriate Minister.

*Overtime Rates*

Decree, September 1st.

*Article 9.* The hourly rate is to be paid for the first 40 hours worked. Thereafter the worker is to receive no pay for the next five hours worked, and three-quarters of the hourly rate (calculated as  $\frac{1}{45}$ th of the normal week rate), for all work hours in excess of 45, the employer being obliged to pay the remaining quarter to the Public Treasury for the National Solidarity Fund. Decree of September 26th amended this system. By the amendment, the employer was obliged to pay to the Treasury the wages for the 5 hours between the 40th and the 45 th and one-third instead of one-quarter of the hours worked in excess of 45, the worker receiving for hours over 45 only two-thirds of his hourly rate.

The Decree of 27th October repealed this amended article and substituted the following:

- (1) The workman is to receive three-fifths of the hourly

rate for all hours worked in excess of 40, balance being payable to Treasury.

(2) Workmen not working a full week are to have their wages proportionally reduced, balance being paid to the Treasury.

(3) Employees paid by the month in commercial enterprises and administrative staff paid by the month in industrial enterprises are to have their wages reduced for hours worked in excess of 43.

(4) Employees whose remuneration is independent of the number of hours worked—largely managerial staff—are to have a deduction of 40 per cent on any increases in wages they may be paid arising out of increased hours of work. If, however, they work longer hours without getting an increase in salary, the levy does not apply.

#### *Taxes on Wages*

Decree, September 1st.

From October 1st the wages of all workers aged between 18 and 49 who have not been called up are subject to a 15 per cent tax on earned income.

Decree, January 1st, 1940.

From January 1st all wages are to be subject to a special tax of 5 per cent in addition to the ordinary tax of 8 per cent, and the special tax of 15 per cent on the wages of men of military age as set out by the decree of September 1st.

#### *Wage Rates Policy*

(1) Decree, November 10th.

In industries not engaged on national defence, alterations in wage rates may be made only with the consent of a State Higher Committee, or a rate may be imposed by it if it cannot be agreed upon by the parties in the industry. The Minister may fix an appropriate wage-scale for a region or profession.

A penalty of three times the over-payment is imposed for payment in excess of the legal rate. (*Note*.—Same applied to under-payment.)

*Article 13.* "All existing legislation respecting conciliation **and** arbitration in labour disputes is suspended. The wage-revision clause of all existing collective agreements are suspended."

*Note.*—Various statements have been made to the effect that the practice of collective agreements remains the keystone of French policy.

*Suspension of existing Workers<sup>9</sup> Delegates (Shop Stewards)*

Decree, November 10 th.

The election of workers' delegates (or shop stewards) is abolished for the duration of the war. All existing delegates are dismissed and replaced by persons nominated by the trade union (whether industrial, religious, or a company union) most representative of the workers employed in the undertaking. In the case of national defence industries the consent of the Minister of Labour to the nomination is required.

## CHAPTER IX

### INVASION AND DEBACLE

*Fifth Column in power—Military debacle and moral collapse—  
Capitulation—A new Fascist Constitution.*

At 3 a.m. on the 10th May 1940, the German land and air forces invaded the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg, and followed this up a few hours later by ultimata demanding surrender. The invaded Powers appealed for help to the Allies, who agreed and issued declarations. General Gamelin, supreme commander of the Allied forces, issued an order of the day which concluded with the words: "The passwords for France and her Allies are courage, energy, confidence." On the same day Mr. Neville Chamberlain resigned, following on the debate of the 7th/and 8th May in the House of Commons on the Norwegian fiasco. It only took the German armies, using airborne troops, a few hours to overrun a great part of Holland. On the 14th May the Dutch Commander-in-Chief, General Winkelman, capitulated. Meantime, the German advance in Belgium continued against mixed Belgian, French, and British armies.

On the 18th May, Reynaud, the Prime Minister, took over the Ministry of National Defence from Daladier, who became Foreign Secretary. It will be remembered that the Daladier Cabinet, after holding office for twenty-two months had resigned on the 20th March, in the face of the hostile attitude of the Chamber of Deputies. Paul

Reynaud, former<sup>^</sup> Finance Minister, had become Premier and Minister for Foreign Affairs on the 21st March; Bonner, **who** had been Minister of Justice for some months, disappeared from the Government.

Reynaud, as already stated, was without any following in the Chamber. His hold on the premiership was bound to be precarious unless he was able to enrol support from the extreme Left or from the extreme Right. He chose to seek help from the Right, who for their part were prepared to use him for a space until they could throw him aside. Meantime it was generally thought that as Premier he would wage war more vigorously, and he was certainly prepared to use vigorous language. The Allies appeared very pleased to have Reynaud, and he was publicly spoken of as an outspoken foe of the Nazis.

#### INFLUENCES ON REYNAUD

Actually, however, Reynaud was very directly subject to Nazi influences. His mistress, Helene de Portes, was a Fifth Columnist. This ambitious woman had a talent at once for money-making and for political intrigue, and had become one of the most important agents of the Nazi spy, Abetz. Her *salon*, with its political parties, became the rallying point of the Fifth Column in France. Part of it was organised in the Comite France-Allemagne, corresponding to the Anglo-German Fellowship in Britain. In effect Ribbentrop directed Abetz and Abetz directed Madame de Portes. At a critical moment such a combination would obviously be able to turn Reynaud. At the beginning of his premiership the influence was already being exerted, and in the middle of May his invocation of support from the Right was a significant step towards the "sell-out". This was the Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence who announced on the 18 th May that

in France's hour of trial he was calling on "new and fresh forces". These turned out to be the 84-year-old Marshal Petain, who was made Minister of State and Vice-Premier of France, and the 76-year-old General Weygand, who on the 20th of May was made Generalissimo in place of Gamelin.

Gamelin had been exalted to the skies in the British Press, but nothing positive was known about his qualities. After his dismissal it was assumed that he had antiquated ideas about the conduct of war. This is not wholly correct; and the ideas of Weygand, who replaced him, were certainly far from advanced.

#### GAMELIN

What sort of man then was Gamelin? Interesting light on his personality is thrown by an interview reported by Jules Romains, held on the 16th December 1939. The interview exhibits Gamelin as one who understood the kind of war he had to face and the probable course of it, going even so far as to predict a German onslaught through Holland and Belgium in the month of May. And yet, says Romains, "the man who predicted as if by magic the events of May allowed the armies he commanded to become an almost passive prey to these events". After explaining that Gamelin was a dreamer, he says that the most unusual thing was "that a dreamer of this type should be Generalissimo of the French armies, and Commander-in-Chief of the Allied armies; that he should dream of tanks, unconcerned by the fact that few tanks were available; and dream of an absorbingly interesting Blitzkrieg which would take place in May, yet do nothing, or very little, to assure victory for himself rather than for the other fellow."

These conclusions of Jules Romains present Gamelin

as the "pure scientist" of warfare, but they are to some extent invalidated by another passage in which it is recorded that Gamelin, some three years before the war, said of the German Army: "I can think of very few of their present generals who fought in responsible posts in 1914-18 while we are almost all former 1914 Division Commanders, an experience which it is difficult to replace." It is clear he was not intending to praise the German Army, but to blame it for the qualities of possessing youthful commanders which had characterised the armies of Napoleon Bonaparte and Soviet Russia!

Meantime the German advance continued; the French armies had been swung forward on a hinge and at the weak point of the hinge the German armies had broken through into France. The situation became more and more critical. On the 21st May, Reynaud made a long statement to the Senate in which he said that "By incredible mistakes, which will be punished, the bridges over the Meuse were not destroyed." The breach opened on the French front was, he said, about 100 kilometres in extent; he concluded his statement by saying that he had confidence in "Marshal Petain, conqueror of Verdun, the great leader who knows how French victory can come out of the abyss". He went on to speak of "General Weygand, Foch's man, who stopped the German rush when the front was broken in 1918, and who knew later how to change our destinies and lead us to victory."

#### PETAÏN

Who were these hoary paladins? Philippe Petain had become famous as the defender of Verdun in 1916. It was widely known that he had frequently, indeed<sup>1</sup> usually, displayed an anti-British standpoint, and still more an anti-popular standpoint. This was not surprising in one who

lived in a reactionary Catholic tradition, and in whom class prejudice had become a passion. In a book published a few months ago, Mr. Cecil F. Melville, himself a Catholic and an anti-Communist, describes Petain as the French edition of Colonel Blimp: "He is the product of the kind of mentality in both France and Britain which, while it cannot abide 'damned foreigners', nevertheless prefers them, even German ones, if only they are 'officers and gentlemen', to its own co-nationals if these should be socialists, communists, anarchists, liberals, progressive conservatives, or anything under the sun which is anti-reactionary and can therefore be conveniently put under one heading and stigmatized as 'damned Reds'. One can imagine Petain and Laval getting together and ejaculating the French edition of 'Gad, sir!'"

This description, accurate enough as a cartoon, does not of course go very deep. Actually Petain not only formed a suitable facade for the thieves' kitchen of big business, the "200 Families" and their paid politicians, but had himself a profoundly reactionary standpoint which in the guise of *Action Francaise* has, as we have already seen, become a form of Fascism. In point of fact, the Charles Maurras theory of the reactionary return to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the destruction of democracy is the best guide to the outlook of Philippe Petain.

#### WEYGAND

In the case of Weygand a reactionary outlook had been fortified by many opportunities of reactionary activity. Foch's Chief-of-Staff in 1918, his mind obsessed with the military theory of 1914-18 and with the social theory of two centuries earlier, Weygand was first and foremost a furious anti-Communist. He had gladly taken up the task of advising the Poles in 1920 when the Red

Army was advancing on Warsaw. Thenceforth in his anxious vision the Reds were always advancing on Warsaw, on Paris, or on Rome. As Mr. Melville says of him in 1940: "Weygand was defeated in his soul, and in his mind, long before he was defeated on the actual field of battle. He was defeated because, fundamentally, his heart was not in the battle against Hitler. In his inner consciousness he was more concerned to fight Communism at home than Nazism abroad."

These were the paladins, these were the "new and fresh forces" whom M. Reynaud summoned to his side.

#### BAUDOUIN

At the same time Baudouin was brought into the inner circle of the Government. At the time in May 1937 when Leon Blum announced the "pause" in the reforms demanded by the Popular Front programme, Baudouin was one of the agents appointed by the Bank of France, whom the unhappy Blum was compelled to accept. He was a great admirer of Italian Fascism, had undertaken secret missions to Mussolini on behalf of Bonnet, was in touch with the Nazis, and toyed with the idea of the "Latin bloc", which was to consist of Italy, France, and Spain, who for some reason, never very clearly worked out, were bound to combine naturally against Britain and also against Germany. The influence of Baudouin increased rapidly and a few weeks later, when Weygand, whose antiquated ideas of warfare proved even less able than those of Gamelin to stand up to the German invaders, was concentrating his energies against the, to him, ever-increasing "Communist menace", it was Baudouin who, in collaboration with Madame de Portes, continually and from the earliest moment urged capitulation and surrender.

On the 25th May it was announced that fifteen French

generals had been deprived of their command, and on the 26th Sir John Dill was appointed Chief of our Imperial General Staff in place of Sir Edmund Ironside.

Still worse trials were to await the Allies. The Belgian Army, commanded by King Leopold III in person, surrendered without notifying their French or British Allies that they intended so to do. M. Reynaud on the 28 th May broadcast an attack on Leopold III for having laid down his arms, and announced firmly that a new line had been established on the Somme and the Aisne.

On the last day of May, a meeting of the Supreme Allied Council was held in Paris, and Reynaud, Marshal Petain, General Weygand, Admiral Darlan, and M. Baudouin met with Winston Churchill, Attlee, Sir John Dill and other British generals. Full agreement was reached and was expressed in the following communique: "The Allied governments and peoples are more than ever implacably resolved to pursue in the closest possible concord their present struggle until victory is achieved."

Meanwhile Mr. Churchill had warned the House of Commons to prepare for "hard and heavy tidings". The British Expeditionary Force, together with several divisions of the French Army, had been bottled up in Flanders; the Germans had taken Dieppe and then Boulogne and Calais; everything was based on Dunkirk. With the help of the British Navy and the volunteer efforts of civilians who owned boats and sea-going craft of every description, the vast majority of the British Expeditionary Force was rescued in the first days of June. The evacuation from Dunkirk went on continuously from the 1st to the 4th June.

#### THE DEBACLE

On the 5 th June the German armies commenced a new

offensive along the Somme and the Aisne over a front of 120 miles, into which as the attack developed they put as many divisions.

On the 6th June, Paul Reynaud reconstituted the War Cabinet. He himself, as Premier and Minister of Defence, now took over from Daladier the Foreign Secretaryship in addition. Chautemps and Marshal Petain became the two vice-Premiers. The Right Winger Marin and the Fascist Ybarnegaray became Ministers of State, with Mandel—the pupil of Clemenceau—as Minister of the Interior, Monnet as Minister of Blockade, and Dautry as Minister of Armaments. The German troops steadily advanced. Paris was soon threatened, and was put in a state of defence. The ministries began their evacuation to Tours and ultimately to Bordeaux on the 9th June. The decision was then taken not to defend Paris. It is understood, as I mentioned in the last chapter, that the main reason for this was the fear lest the revolutionary working-class and people of Paris should re-enact the heroic struggle of the Commune. It was about the 13th June that the excited dotard Weygand solemnly informed his colleagues at a Cabinet meeting that Maurice Thorez was already installed at the Ely see as the head of a proletarian government in Paris. The rumour, for better or worse, was false, and was immediately contradicted by a telephone call to Paris, but its repetition or perhaps its invention by Weygand makes it clear that even at that moment, in the agony of the French people, the old anti-Bolshevik fanatic was more concerned with the internal enemy than with the defence of his country.\* From Tours Reynaud sent a message to Roosevelt asking for the

\*He had indeed, according to M. Elie J. Bois (*Truth on the Tragedy of France*, Hodder & Stoughton, February 1941), as early as the 27th May, "expressed certain apprehensions about the social consequences which might result from a rout of the regiments, and displayed his passion for authority.

assurance of help from America; to which on the 15th the French Government, now at Bordeaux, received a reply promising all material assistance but stating that there could be no military commitments without the consent of Congress.

The British Prime Minister flew to France, to be met by the request to release the French Government from its engagement not to make a separate peace or a separate armistice. This request he refused. A little later the British Government said that it would be willing to agree to the French making an armistice if, before that took place, the French Navy was safely lodged in British ports. It is clear that from the 12th June Marshal Petain, Weygand, and their supporters had been preparing for an armistice. On the 16th, with the German armies still advancing, the French Cabinet held two meetings, and a little after midnight, early in the morning of the 17th, Reynaud resigned, and President Lebrun called on Marshall Petain to form a Cabinet. A new Cabinet was formed with the, up till now, inevitable Chautemps as Vice-Premier, Weygand as Minister of Defence, and Baudouin as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

#### CAPITULATION

A few hours later, on the 17th, Marshal Petain broadcast to the people of France the news of surrender. He **said:**

"It is with a heavy heart that I say we must cease to fight.  
"I have applied to our opponent to sign with us, as between

... In him the strategist and the tactician began to give way to the partisan with a fear of Bolshevism. From then on his chief thought was to keep ready to his hand an army of social defence against an imaginary revolution. No longer would he command victory."

soldiers after the fight and in honour, a means to put an end to hostilities."

It appears that negotiations had been going on for some time with the German Government through the medium of Senor de Lequerica, the Spanish Ambassador to France, with whom Marshal Petain had been on terms of closest acquaintance.

On the previous day a last effort was made by the British Government. Mr. Churchill submitted to the French Cabinet the draft of an Act of Union by which there would be "no longer two nations but one Franco-British Union". This went no further.

The German armies continued to advance while arrangements were made for the meeting of Armistice plenipotentiaries. On the 21st June 1940, in the Forest of Compiegne, General Huntziger, M. Noel, and two other French delegates were confronted, in the train in which the armistice of the 11th November 1918 had been signed, with Hitler, Goering, Hess, von Ribbentrop, General Brauchitsch, and General Keitel, and were informed of the terms of Armistice, which they accepted on the following day. They included in Article 8 a demand that the French Fleet should be demobilised and disarmed and placed under German and Italian control.

A Franco-Italian Armistice followed, and at 12.45 a.m. on the 25th June hostilities ended.

When the terms were made known, Mr. Churchill issued a statement saying that "His Majesty's Government had heard them with grief and amazement", and went on to say that "they cannot feel that such or similar terms could have been submitted to by any French Government which possessed freedom, independence, and constitutional authority." The next day General de Gaulle, of the French

Committee, was recognised by the British Government as the head of the organisation of the "Free French".

#### WHAT THE FRENCH PEOPLE THOUGHT

What had been the feelings of the mass of the French people as these sad events took place? Mr. Hore-Belisha asked the Prime Minister whether these terms would have been accepted if the French Parliament had been functioning and if there had not been such a severe censorship. Mr. Churchill replied by giving an assurance that the British Parliament would always be in a different position.

But the fact remained that it was hard to discover what the French people were feeling, owing to the suppression of all legal means of expression. In the first days of June a statement of the French Communist Party, with much of which many opponents of Communism will agree, was circulated throughout all parts of France, though it was not published in England until the very day of the Armistice, or "Diktat", of Compiegne. It began:

"French people are experiencing tragic days. Tremendous calamities which the Communist Party sought to avert have befallen the French people. A foreign army has burst into France. The French imperialists, having unleashed the war, having brought the people to catastrophe, and having brought millions of workers and peasants to their doom on the fields of battle, are preparing to capitulate behind the backs of the people. France is faced with the danger of disappearing as a nation, as an independent State."

The declaration goes on: "We see before us the utter bankruptcy of the French ruling class, their regime, their corrupt politicians, their incompetent generals. It is the bankruptcy of the imperialist policy of the French rulers which provided food for the Chauvinist revenge propaganda of German reaction and facilitated its advent to power."

The document quotes a number of facts to prove this bankruptcy; it mentions the Lavals, Flandins, Daladiers, Bonnets, and Blums who, against the interests of the French people and to the detriment of the cause of peace, gave all possible support to the machinations of world reaction.

The Lavals, it pointed out, signed the Rome agreements which gave Italy a free hand to conquer Abyssinia and prepared the present onslaught of Italian Fascism on France. The Flandins strengthened German imperialism by allowing it to re-militarise the left bank of the Rhine. The Blums, by their criminal policy of so-called non-intervention, brought danger to the Pyrenean frontiers. Daladier and his ministers handed over to Germany, together with Czechoslovakia, the armaments of its forty divisions which, including 1,600 aeroplanes and 500 tanks, were now being used to slaughter the French soldiers.

Creatures of the Stock Exchange, such as Bonnet, it declared, systematically sabotaged the Franco-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact. "They, all of them, are directly and immediately responsible for the imperialist war."

The document goes on to point out that the bankruptcy of the French ruling class is also the bankruptcy of the radical and socialist politicians, the reactionary leaders of the Government who betrayed the working people, smashed the People's Front, let loose the forces of reaction and caused the present war. It is also the bankruptcy of the Socialist Party and its leaders, who stand forth as ring-leaders of the imperialist war. "France would not have fallen into its present tragic position had the French Government pursued a loyal and honest policy towards the Soviet people, had it accepted the Soviet proposals which were aimed at the maintenance of peace and the organisation of collective security."

It points to the bankruptcy of incompetent generals,

with their out-of-date ideas about war, who ignored **the** achievements of modern military technique, and the bankruptcy of the French General Staff, which obstinately sought to prove, despite common sense, that the present war would only be positional. Responsibility for this it lays directly on Daladier, who was Minister of War for the greater part of eight years.

"The French ruling class had eight months in which to make up for lost time and to organise a real defence of their country. . . . During these eight months all that concerned the imperialist rulers of France, their actions based on their narrow class interests, was how best to maintain and consolidate their domination over the colonies. They waged war not against the German Army, but against the working-class of their own country. They disorganised war production by driving the most highly skilled workers out of munitions plants for the mere fact that they were Communists or Communist Party sympathisers. The ruling class subjected the most steadfast and honest defenders of the people to fierce persecution, while they handed out the highest posts in the army and State machine to those agents of German Imperialism, the Cagoulaards. The ruling class, by pursuing their line of suppressing and wiping out most active sections of the nation, the Communists, the foremost fighters among the working people, undermined the morale of the people and the army, weakened the defence of France, and doomed it to military defeats."

In order to save France from catastrophe, states the declaration, it would be necessary urgently to adopt extremely bold measures of political, social, economic, military, and organisational character, measures which would mobilise all wealth, all resources, and all the means of the country for the defence of the people, measures that would set free the initiative of the masses of the people. It would be necessary in the first place to call a halt to the policy of repression against the masses of people and of hunting down Communists, and to restore democratic

rights and liberties. At the same time, it would be necessary immediately to remove the Cagoulards from responsible posts and to deal ruthlessly with traitors, saboteurs, speculators, and all "Fifth Column" hirelings.

Finally, the French Communists addressed the French people in these words:

"The ruling class has brought our country to the brink of the precipice. To-day, when German imperialism is putting into practice its plan of enslaving France, all that the French rulers are concerned with is to save their privileges, their capital, their class domination. They are ready to sacrifice the independence of our country, to sacrifice the vital interests of our people. They are ready to come to terms with the conqueror, to use German bayonets behind which to shelter from the reckoning which an indignant people are preparing for them. The ruling class and their 'Socialists' are the real curse of the people. Their regime is one of organised treachery towards our nation. We Communists of France have always fought against capitalism, against oppression by the ruling class, against the robbery and oppression of the colonial peoples.

"We have always fought against the robber imperialist policy of the French bourgeoisie towards other peoples, and particularly towards the German people. With all the greater right, justification, and strength, will we fight against the enslavement of our people by foreign imperialists. The working-class, the people of France, will never be reconciled to foreign enslavement.

"As ever, under all conditions, so in present days of severe trials, horror, and boundless calamities, we Communists have been and remain with our people. Their fate is our fate. We profoundly believe in the strength and future of our people, in the future of France. Our people will not perish. Their will and their freedom-loving spirit are not to be shattered by the dark forces of traitors, exploiters, plunderers, and conquerors!"

That is what some of the French people were feeling. A few weeks later Madame Genevieve Tabouis, writing in

the *Sunday Dispatch*, stated that the only resistance being offered in France was that of the Communist Party, and as late as the 20th December 1940, in the *Daily Telegraph*, a similar statement was made:

"Political sentiment in France is in a state of flux, the only party still existing, though illegally, being that of the Communists, and over 1,000 of them were arrested last month. They are distributing anti-German tracts with a strong appeal to French patriotic sentiment."

#### WHAT THE FRENCH RULING CLASS DID

What were the French ruling class thinking, or at any rate, what were they proposing to do? Having come to terms with Hitler, they now proposed to destroy the French Republic and set up a non-democratic State on a patriarchal basis. One might call it a Fascist-patriarchal regime. Of this the main agent was to be Laval.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> June, Laval was appointed Vice-Premier and Minister of State, while the neo-Socialist Marquet was also made a Minister of State. By the 1st July the French Government was at Vichy. On the 9th July, Laval explained the plan of the French ruling class. The following resolution was then carried by 225 votes to 1 in the Senate and 395 to 3 in the Chamber of Deputies, less than two-thirds of the Deputies being present:

"The National Assembly confers full power on the Government of the Republic under the signature and authority of Marshal Petain, with a view to promulgating in one or several decrees the new Constitution of the French State. That Constitution must safeguard the rights of labour, the family, and the fatherland. It will be ratified by the Assemblies created by it."

Next day, on the 10th July, in the French National Assembly (the two houses voting together), the resolution was carried by 569 votes to 80. M. Herriot, Speaker of the

Chamber of Deputies, explained that this meant that Parliament lost all its powers, that the Government was no longer responsible to Parliament, and that legislation would be carried on through two Chambers, one of which would be political and one occupational. (The last was presumably inspired by Mussolini's theories, and may have been thought to be acceptable to the Italian Government.) On the same day, orders were issued for the arrest of the various journalists who had fought against the "sell-out", viz., Madame Genevieve Tabouis, Philippe Giraud ("Pertinax"), Emile Bure, and Henri de Kerillis. On the next day Marshal Petain made a broadcast in which he attacked "international Socialism" and also "international capitalism". These sentiments had been frequently paralleled in German Nazi propaganda.

#### PETAIN AS CONSTITUTION BUILDER

On the 12 th July, Marshal Petain issued the following three constitutional Acts. By the first of these,

"We, Philippe Petain, Marshal of France", declared "that we assume the functions of Chief of the French State."

By the second of these Acts, he fixed the powers of the Chief of State, that is, of himself. Under this Act, he:

"Has full Governmental powers. He appoints and dismisses Ministers and Secretaries of State, who are responsible only to him. He exercises legislative power in Council of Ministers until the formation of new Assemblies. After their formation, in the event of tension from abroad or grave internal crisis, he also exercises that power on his decision alone and in the same manner. In similar circumstances he can take all measures of a budgetary or fiscal nature. He promulgates laws and ensures their execution. He makes appointments to all civilian and military posts which are not otherwise provided for by law. He continues to be in control of the army. He has the right of

amnesty. He negotiates and ratifies treaties. He can declare a state of siege in one or several portions of the territory." The only limitation is that "he cannot declare war without the previous assent of the Legislative Assemblies."

By the third of these three Acts, he decrees that:

"A Senate and a Chamber of Deputies will remain in being until the Assemblies, provided for under the Constitutional Law of July 10, 1940, are formed"; and "The Senate and Chamber are adjourned until further order. Henceforth they can meet only when convened by the Chief of State."

On the same day, the 12th July 1940, the Cabinet handed its collective resignation to Marshal Petain, the personnel of the new Cabinet being announced on the 14th July, a tragic date in view of its earlier associations. It comprised four non-Parliamentarians, MM. Alibert, Baudouin, Bouthillier, and Caziot; four members of the armed forces, General Weygand, General Colson, Admiral Darlan, and General Pujo; three Senators, MM. Laval, Mircaux, and Lemery; and three Deputies, MM. Marquet, Ybarnegaray, and Pietri.

Marshal Petain appointed twelve Governors of Provinces to take the place of Prefects of Departments, as a step to the restoration of the system of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Monarchy of France. The 14th July, the anniversary of the French Revolution, was observed as a "day of meditation".

On the 29th July, by a Cabinet decree, a supreme court was set up at Riom "to seek out and try all persons having committed crimes or offences or who failed in their duty in acts concerning the transition from a state of peace to a state of war." Of its seven members, more than one had pro-Fascist sympathies; M. Watteau, for example, had been associated with the Cagoulards. Those to be **brought**

before the Court included, to start with, Daladier and three of his ministers (Delbos, Mandel, and Campinchi). A further batch to be tried included ex-Ministers Pierre Cot, La Chambre, Leon Blum, and also General Gamelin.

On the 5 th August the Nazi model was further followed by a decree proscribing freemasonry and other secret societies (many of the Radicals, notably Chautemps, Sarraut, Delbos, and Cot, were Freemasons), while on the 2nd August, General de Gaulle was sentenced to death for treason and desertion to a foreign country.

On the 9th August it was announced that the C.G.T. would henceforth abandon "ideological struggles" and would be merged with the employers' organisations in a "French Community of Labour". Meantime, on the 16th July, M. Rene Belin, formerly Assistant General Secretary of the C.G.T., was made Minister for Industrial Production and Labour, on the ground that his appointment would secure the co-operation of the French trade unions with the Petain Government. (It may be remembered that in 1933 Leipart, the head of the German trade unions and a fierce "anti-Red", similarly offered to put the German trade unions at the disposal of Hitler.)

Decrees continued to pour forth against Jews, against Freemasons, against everything the Nazis are against, and for everything which recalls the French despotism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. People began to reckon Marshal Petain as being not 84 but 284 years old.

It is of little use, in this book, to attempt to keep pace with the still uncompleted shifts and changes of this tragic regime of a ruling class whose hatred of its own people and its workers drove it first to the "sell-out" and then to the exultant destruction of the Republic, of democracy and trade unionism, and of the whole heritage of the Great French Revolution. History looks with contempt on this

bunch of reactionaries, who have been well described as "taskmasters in whose eyes the yoke of slavery takes on the form of a triumphal arch".

## CHAPTER X

### THE FUTURE

*Realities of the present position—Horrors of a dictated peace—  
The Socialist solution.*

What is the future of France, of the French people? The part which the present rulers of Vichy-France may yet play or attempt to make their people play, in the war is naturally of great interest to all of us, and is not easy to foresee; but the more fundamental question as to what will become of the French people must be answered not by considerations of present-day foreign policy or external pressure, but through the clash of internal forces which grow ever more important in the shaping of history.

The future is uncertain, and no one, however great may be his knowledge of the people of France, or of the happenings of the last five or ten or twenty years in France, would claim to forecast it with confidence. Nevertheless, if one grasps the fundamental economic and social forces which have brought about the present situation—forces whose interplay has been studied in the chapters of this book—one can form a far more confident estimate of the future than would at first sight seem possible.

To this end, three questions must be faced and answered:

What are the realities of the present position?

What would be the fate of France if the present economic structure of Europe persisted?

What will become of that structure?

The realities of the present position will quickly be understood if we bear in mind the background against which the tragedy is being played. At this stage of our history, wars between nations are in the view of such ruling classes as that of France—and indeed in real truth—less vital and less important, in spite of their barbaric horror, than the conflicts between classes; the horizontal boundaries between classes are deeper and greater than the vertical boundaries between states. Those who sacrifice the national interests in conflicts with external enemies to the interests of their own class in its conflict with the working-class in their own country—the ordinary name for them is traitor—are thus more numerous and more influential than they were a century or two ago, when international conflicts appeared far more real than internal conflicts. The Quisling or the Franco, without necessarily becoming attractive to any but their exact counterparts in other countries, are at any rate far more easily understood; and espionage and "Fifth Column" work is rendered easier than at almost any previous period of history. (Even Ribbentrop had found many helpful friends in Britain.)

#### THE RULERS FEAR THE PEOPLE

It is equally part of the background that, however secure and powerful any ruling class may appear to be, it is in truth governed in all its actions, external as well as internal, by its fear of the mass of the people, by its desire to keep them in subjection, and by its anxious estimation of how much they will "stand". Many illustrations could be given in support of this assertion; perhaps the most apposite is the pretty clearly established fact that the particular composition of the Vichy Government, and the constitution which has been laid down for it, were plainly selected by the ruling classes of France and of Germany as those

best adapted to hold the French people down. It is equally clear that the hesitation shown for a time by the Germans to drive Vichy France as hard or as far as superficial observers might have expected them to do are due not to any attitude of the Vichy Government, but simply to the need to avoid provoking the French people to resistance. A very remarkable illustration of this came on the occasion of a great working-class demonstration held in Paris scarcely six months after the capitulation. It was the anniversary of the death of the Communist leader, Paul Vaillant-Couturier, poet and editor of *VHumanite*, who died in 1937 and was buried in Pere Lachaise cemetery. For four whole days columns of working men and women marched to the cemetery, where there stands the famous memorial to the martyrs of the Paris Commune, le Mur des F'ederes; they evinced such discipline and came in such vast numbers that the police gave up any attempt to stop them. Wreaths steadily mounted on the grave of the Communist leader, as the slow processions wound through the cemetery. Over half a million Parisians demonstrated in this way their working-class solidarity and their resolute hopes for the future.

If that is the reality of the present situation, the next question is, what would be the fate of the French people if the present structure of Europe persisted? The answer surely is that any state that emerged from this struggle with a military victory—or with sufficient military victory to enable it to dictate for the time the fate of the French people—and sought to maintain the existing capitalist structure would be driven to impose terms of great severity. The question assumes a survival of capitalist structure and consequently of a ruling class substantially of the kind now available; and in the stress and distress of an after-war period under such circumstances, with all the problems of

production, poverty, and unemployment, which were seen to be insoluble even before the war, multiplied a thousand-fold by the war, any ruling class that had the power to dictate terms would be driven to such policies as the reduction of the defeated countries to semi-colonial status as producers of primary materials—a course indeed already clearly enunciated by the Nazis, and accepted in advance by the men of Vichy, with their expressions of longing for a return to "peasant France".

#### A SOCIALIST FUTURE

If that point be grasped in its turn, it becomes relatively easy to answer the third question, what will become of this capitalist structure? and with it to answer the main question, what is the future of the French people? It is surely clear that the prospect, for the great mass of the people, of defeat and the imposition of peace terms based on that defeat, within a capitalist framework is one of such horror that no working-class with any capacity for resistance—let alone a working-class with the history, the traditions, and the unconquerable spirit of the French—would submit to it for long. In other words, if the major belligerent countries do not pass over to a genuine Socialist economy before the time comes for the dictation of any peace terms, they will do so very soon after; for the appalling effect on standards of living which any dictated peace under Capitalism is bound to have, the prospect of a further series of economic crises and major wars which will stretch before the masses, and the increasingly obvious advantages to be derived from a Socialist economy under which the only check on the continuous improvements of general standards will be provided by the physical limits—themselves constantly receding—of productive capacity, will be quite certain to drive any but the most supine people to throw

off both their home and their foreign oppressors, and to re-establish the Republic with a new, revolutionary basis upon which can be built the Socialist State.

It is accordingly right to assert with confidence that the future, the near future, of the French people will be the establishment of the Socialist State through the strength and courage of the French working-class, at the head of the people of France. Doubt and uncertainty must be confined to the question exactly when and how they achieve this, and whether the other European peoples will accompany, or precede, or follow them.

## CHAPTER XI

### LESSONS OF THE TRAGEDY

*"It can't happen here"—The Left Wing justified—Fascism presented as democracy.*

There are a number of lessons which we in Britain can draw from the tragic events of France.

The first and simplest, of course, is that we must be on our guard lest at some stage some section of our ruling class proceed to deal with our destinies like the ruling class of France dealt with those of the French people. "It can't happen here!" is the most dangerous phrase of the time, ranking high in the catalogue of "famous last words"; whilst it may seem incredible to most people in Britain that anything of the sort could happen here, it must be remembered that to nearly everyone in Britain and to vast numbers in France, as late as May 1940 it seemed incredible that anything of the sort could happen there, and it is idle to assume that the differences between the two countries falsify the comparison. Fundamentally, the class structure and problems of both countries are the same, differing only in degree of acuteness; and the crises of the last thirty-five years, world-wide in their scope, have struck both countries with but little difference in *tempo* or urgency. If it has in recent times appeared that France is more sick than Britain, it is not safe to assume that one patient will die whilst the other survives. If we do not have the most skilled treatment—and, above all, correct diagnosis—the

only ultimate difference may be that the second patient will die more slowly but not less painfully than the other.

#### SUPPRESSION OF CRITICISM

There are other lessons, too, to be drawn, of almost as great importance, if less wide in scope. Whilst our Government and various official and semi-official bodies are growing daily more autocratic and impatient of criticism, the French debacle provides a vivid demonstration—if we will only look at it—of the dangers of the wholesale suppression of criticism and opposition. Breaking up political parties, trade unions, and municipalities, suppressing newspapers and censoring wholesale the expression of opinion, purging Parliament of opposition, are not merely theoretical or technical offences against nice old-fashioned Liberal doctrines; they are the greatest possible evils in the State. In a modern political democracy, free and informed criticism is essential to efficiency in government, and the elimination of parliamentary opposition means that governments that ought to be turned out for inefficiency—or for worse defects—are kept in office for want of immediately available alternatives. It is not merely a complete illusion to imagine that a government immune from criticism can function more efficiently; it is the quintessence of Fascism to proclaim that it can do so, or that it is in any way entitled to such immunity.

Moreover, censorship of opinion—indeed, censorship of anything except information which can honestly be said to be of advantage to the enemy—does far more than put a premium on inefficiency. It masks and encourages corruption and treason, and there can be no doubt that sections of the ruling class in France used it consciously and deliberately to facilitate the development of their whole Fascist conspiracy, which led to the external and internal

collapse and capitulation. The people could not fight the conspiracy because they did not even know what was afoot.

To deprive the working-class of substantially all the weapons and organisations that it has built up to resist the oppression of the ruling class, and to instal the latter in virtually uncontrolled power, is thus equivalent not to strengthening the national effort but actually to encompassing the temporary ruin of the State and of the nation.

In this field, at any rate, no one will venture to say that "it can't happen here". The parallels are closer than is realised. The French suppressed the opposition newspapers; so did the British, after a time. The French interned not merely foreigners but their own nationals, without trial, appeal, or redress, at the mere will of the Government; so do the British, under the notorious Regulation 18 B. The French abolished the right to strike and introduced industrial conscription; so did the British, and that without conscribing wealth or interfering with private ownership or profiteering, although one prominent trade union leader, in February 1940, wrote of "the bankers and financiers . . . immediately we are at war . . . leading an attack on the working-classes with a view to working up a situation which will depress the standard of living and create a psychology favourable to some form of compulsion. They will not rest", he added, "until they have carried out this policy and induced Parliament to introduce some form of conscription of labour."\*

#### THE LEFT WING JUSTIFIED

There is another lesson that is not unimportant, namely, the complete lack of justification for the attacks

\*Mr. Ernest Bcvin, in *T. & G. W. Record*, February 1940.

on the Left Wing, and particularly on the Communists, as unpatriotic or dangerous elements. This form of giving a dog a bad name is, of course, a very old trick of reactionary governments, and it is never easier to play than when the public is in a mood to panic and there is no opposition Press left to carry the refutation of the libel. It has been practised at every stage of modern history; the derogatory label has been applied to every progressive element in turn, Radical, Liberal, Labour, and now Communist. It is, moreover, already the standard weapon of Fascist advance. It starts by making a target of Communism; and as it succeeds it widens its attack to embrace all the Left and finally the whole Labour movement. No one should be deceived by it; but someone always is. And in the French proceedings we get at once an extreme example of the practice of this craft and a clear demonstration of its falsity. The Communists were called every name imaginable; although their suppression in the event of war had been settled in advance so definitely that—as has already been mentioned—it was communicated to the German ambassador in the summer of 1939, long before the Soviet-German pact—this pact was made an excuse for attacking them, and they were called pro-Hitler, pro-Nazi, anti-French, unpatriotic, subversive. Events have proved that every accusation levelled against them by the ruling class—with the exception of the "charge" of being friendly with the Socialist state of the U.S.S.R.—was integrally applicable not to them but to their main critics, the core of that very ruling class, and that the only genuine opposition to the real enemies of France, the Fascists of whatever variety or origin, was to be found in the ranks of the Left. It is to be hoped that similar refutation of the slanders on the Left Wing in Britain will come in less tragic and terrible guise.

## FALSE DEFENCE OF "DEMOCRACY"

In this connexion, a lesson may also be learnt by all **but** the unteachable of the danger and futility of defending as "truly democratic", and thus greatly encouraging, conduct which is plainly reactionary oppression. At various stages in the sad progress of the French Government from one Fascist outrage to another, "pseudo-Left" writers in this country—more sinister than Left—suffering from an incurable incapacity to believe that anything done by any Communist could ever be right, and from an odd capacity to think well of even the most ruthless of reactionaries, stoutly defended as truly democratic the whole behaviour of the French Government. Now that it has been demonstrated to the world that this behaviour was in fact part of a logical and consistent transition to Fascism, it may be hoped—against experience—that these writers will hesitate before praising and encouraging as democratic the many pre-Fascist activities of the British Government.

It may be useful to examine one or two of these writings, to see how far they go, and how tragically unsound they appear in the light of subsequent events. By no means the worst example is the Fabian pamphlet, *Is France Still a Democracy?* written in April 1940. In the Introduction to this pamphlet the author says:

"It has been asked, and is still being asked by large sections of Liberal and Labour opinion, whether France is in danger of becoming a totalitarian state; whether the extensive powers granted to the Government have not led to an abuse of executive power which makes the call to fight for democracy sound like an empty phrase. M. Daladier was accused of governing autocratically, of reducing the French Parliament to impotence. The decrees by which the conditions of labour have been radically altered since the outbreak of war constitute, it has been claimed, a deliberate attack on the workers' standard of living and on

the social achievements of 1936. The dissolution of the Communist party and its subsidiary bodies has been seen as a prelude to Fascism in France. And the censorship, it has been urged, is being used by the authorities not merely to prevent the disclosure of military secrets, but also to curb that expression of opinion, of criticism, of comment on public affairs, which should be the right of the democratic citizen. In the same way, the accusations of ill-treatment of enemy aliens and of Spanish refugees in the camps of Southern France, accusations which have originated in extreme Left-Wing circles in this country, have given rise to genuine misgivings among people of many shades of political opinion."

One would have thought that the answers to all the questions and claims mentioned in that Introduction would have been that the allegations of the Communists and of the Left Wing were correct, and that even those who could not see this in April would have seen it in May, or at any rate in June. But the writer of this pamphlet not merely denied these allegations in April 1940, and asserted that France was still a democracy, but he found himself able to write in October 1940 that he had "nothing to retract".

#### M. BLUM SPEAKS

A more striking illustration came as late as the 15 th May 1940, a few short weeks before the collapse of France, the establishment of a Fascist state, and the imprisonment by that state of M. Blum—at a time in short when all with any inside information might have been expected to know that the French ruling class were on the point of selling out, were, indeed, not merely corrupt and inefficient, but either traitorous or blinded by savage hatred of the working-class. On that day M. Blum addressed the Labour Party Conference at Bournemouth. His speech had a mixed reception, on the whole favourable. He

paraded in very fine oratory all the phrases which would have been appropriate if his country had not been ruled by a gang of Fascists who were preparing to sell out, and if the real enemies had been the Left Wing rather than the reactionaries which he was supporting. "Our peoples are united. . . . We shall win. . . . We are at war to save liberty," he said. He denied the "ridiculous rumours" that "France has ceased to be a democracy, that she has become a military tyranny, a totalitarian regime". To this end, he indulged in the most extravagant attacks on the Communists; among other things, they had no right to represent in the French parliament the constituents who had elected them, because they represented Stalin; they would tell Stalin everything, and then he would tell Hitler (as if there was anything Hitler wanted to know that he could not get first hand from his agents in the French ruling class). He could find no difference, he said, between the propaganda of the Nazis and that of the Communists; it had not apparently occurred to him that, whilst the politicians he supported had by now become mere Nazi agents, the Communists he hated and reviled were anti-Nazi. He wound up, pathetically enough, by asserting that "because we are free, we have this great advantage over Hitler: We can meet and we can survive reverses and defeats."

When one studies these examples of what one hopes is no more than blindness, one is driven to wonder what was the attitude of the British Government at the time. It must have known, through all those tragic months, of the behaviour of the French Government in crushing all opposition and criticism in this fatal fashion. It was in constant communication with the French; and it had had years of practice in advising, suggesting, cajoling, pressing. Did it never give any hint that such a policy was fatal? There is no evidence that it did. Or was it perhaps merely a little

envious? And correspondingly grateful to the British Labour Party, which eased the way for similar behaviour in this country by defending this sabotage as "democratic"?

Let us at any rate realise that, if we are to maintain our morale and our will to resist, we cannot allow the more reactionary sections of our ruling class to control public opinion. There is need of incessant vigilance, of shrewd judgment, and of implacable resistance to every encroachment on freedom of criticism, if we are to avoid the fate which has temporarily overcome the great people of France.







