FRANCE FACES THE FUTURE

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BY

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PREFACE

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

By ANDRÉ MARTY

WHAT is happening in France?

Along what road is the country travelling?

Shall we see a brutal and bloody dictatorship *à la* Hitler or Mussolini installed there? Or is the country going to "end up in Bolshevism"?

What do the working people of France and the trade unions desire? Can fresh threats to the people of Great Britain arise in France to-morrow? Or is the contrary likely to happen?

What is the People's Front? What are its aims? Where is it going?

These are some of the questions which are just now worrying the people of the United Kingdom, and particularly the workers. Never since the great French revolution of 1789–93, never more than to-day, has there been such interest in Great Britain towards France. And this is as it should be.

For ten years now Great Britain has been suffering from an economic crisis. It strikes a sad note when in London to-day one hears people say, "Now we have only two million unemployed." There is a great movement afoot among the workers for the

restoration of wages. Moreover, it is a fact that the National Government was able to form itself because of the impotence of the Labour Government preceding it. The disillusioned workers turned in thousands towards the Conservatives with their policy of national union. Even the General Election of October, 1935, did not allow the Labour Party to win back its leading place. And it is for this reason that the many millions of British workers, trade unionists and Labour Party members, are quite right to look towards France.

. . . . .

The danger in France was a frightful one. Fresh wage cuts, a poverty greater than that which workers, employees and peasants were already experiencing, threatened the French people.

This is the reason why the Fascists, paid agents of big capital, attempted to seize power on February 6th, 1934. And at that moment, in the midst of the general panic, one party, and one only, the Communist Party, issued two slogans: "Swift and instant action"; "We cannot yield another inch," and at the same time called for unity of action of the workers.

In response to our call, on February 9th the workers of Paris, those splendid grandchildren of the Commune, came into the streets and fought for six hours around the Place de la République. Six dead and 300 wounded! But from this blood so generously sacrificed by the people there arose unity of action. The Socialist workers understood our appeals and joined us.

The great general strike of February 12th gripped

Fascism by the throat, and from then onwards throughout 1934 there occurred a wave of powerful demonstrations all over the country. The leadership of the Socialist Party authorised, in turn, local united front agreements, then on a district scale, and finally the great movement which had roused the whole working class resulted in the signing of the pact of common action with the Communist Party on July 27th, 1934.

But this was not enough. In France there is an immense peasant mass, a great part of which, together with the lower middle class of the towns, follows the Radical Party. For this reason, therefore, our party, in October, 1934, launched the idea of a great front of the popular forces for bread, peace and liberty.

After eight months of effort this was realised in the vast People's Assembly of July 14th, 1935, which brought together in a single united force workers of all political tendencies: employees, civil servants, peasants, the greatest scientists of the country, actors, musicians, retired army officers —all those who wished to defend the liberties so dearly won by the French people.

One more step. The division among the trade unions was very great. In every district, and sometimes inside every factory, there were at least two trade unions, and sometime three or four, catering for the same workers. This division has had to yield before our efforts and the powerful pressure of the People's Front. Since March, 1936, trade union unity was an accomplished fact in France, and the reunited Confédération Générale du Travail

(General Confederation of Labour) has become one of the most powerful forces within the People's Front. To-morrow, as a result of our efforts, and precisely because we Communists are so strong in great industrial centres like Paris, the single party of the working class will also be an accomplished fact.

It is for this reason that at the last elections the People's Front has just won such a great victory, a victory which is the fruit of our intense work in the last two and a half years.

. . . . .

We have not won this victory as a result of parliamentary manœuvres ; we have won it by our action in the streets, united against the Fascist bands.

Because we were able to prove to the people that it could successfully defend itself, it has given us its confidence at the elections. Because we have shown the working class that we could defend their wages, because we have shown the peasants we could protect their everyday interests, and the small shopkeepers their conditions of life, they have turned towards us.

Because the scientists and intellectuals understand that we offer them a free and radiant future they have entered the People's Front with enthusiasm.

These then are the reasons why it is so timely for the British workers and the people of Britain as a whole to read and study this book, " France Faces the Future," by my comrade Ralph Fox.

The French people are grateful to the British people for the ideas which they gave to the world

in their revolution, which preceded by more than a century that of 1789. In days nearer to our own we have not forgotten the cordial and fraternal welcome given to the refugees of the Commune in London. We have not forgotten that Marx and Engels found the greatest possible hospitality in England.

So, by way of thanks to the British people for what it has given to them, the people of France now offer in return the great movement of unity in action of the People's Front, forged and welded together in struggle. We have no doubt that our comrades in the Labour Party will not fail to understand its great importance, that they will not fail to grasp with what a burning ardour the Communists have given life to this great assembly.

Nor do we doubt that they will understand the lesson which France, like Spain, has given: that unity and common action between Socialists and Communists have checked Fascism, whilst in Germany and Austria, on the other hand, the inertia of Social-Democracy and their opposition to the United Front have paved the way for the barbarism and atrocities of Fascism.

The revolutionary workers of France ardently desire that the workers of Britain should understand this great teaching of the People's Front in France. It will be the best means of assuring that in Britain, as in France, bread and liberty shall be successfully defended, and, above all, peace, the dearest possession of all for the workers and the people as a whole.

ANDRÉ MARTY,
Deputy and Municipal Councillor for Paris.

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INTRODUCTION

A NEW force has arisen in Western Europe, the force of the People's Front for bread, for peace, and for liberty. the force which in the two Latin countries of France and Spain has driven reaction to the wall, revived the noble and revolutionary traditions of democracy and brought a breath of hope into the hot turmoil of the affairs of Europe.

The People's Front represents a new kind of unity, the gathering together of all those masses who see their very existence threatened by the terrorist tendencies in the development of modern capitalism. The worker is in this gathering of forces because he wishes to defend his wages, his conditions of life, the organisations of his class, the right of his family to live in peace, because, in most cases, he wishes to see an end made to all forms of human exploitation and build a new Socialist society.

The peasant has thrown in his lot because he can no longer bear the intolerable burden of taxation imposed by the militarist State, because he hates the banker who holds his mortgages, the great trusts who exploit him through their monopolies and control the market so that he is compelled to sell his produce at a derisory price.

The small State official, the shopkeeper, join because they too are burdened with taxation, crushed by rent and the tribute they pay to the big trusts which control the wholesale trade, because each year they feel the foundations of their life crumbling under their feet.

The intellectual, the professor, writer, artist, scientist or technician, is a part of the People's Front because in the twin menace of war and Fascism he sees the end of all civilisation, because every day he sees the quality of life cheapened and its further development blocked by the same deadweight of an outworn capitalism striving to maintain its powers at the expense of the people.

So we have witnessed in the last year a growing unity between the parties on the Left, Radicals, Socialists and Communists. If the unity has appeared to be chiefly expressed in election agreements and parliamentary support, it has certainly not been confined to that, nor can it be in any way compared with the corrupt parliamentary alliances of the past.

In France there have been, besides election agreements, a general strike against the threat of Fascism (February 12th, 1934), bitter struggles in the streets against attempts to make the poor pay for the crisis caused by the mismanagement of the rich (the movement in the naval dockyards in the summer of 1935), and agreements in municipalities threatened by Fascist raids for a mass rally of the people to defend their homes, their organisations and their municipal institutions. There have also been immense demonstrations like those of July 14th, 1935, and the great rally through the streets of Paris in January of this year which followed the murderous attack on the Socialist leader, Léon Blum.

In Spain the People's Front has brought down, without a shot fired, a government of the Fascist parties and replaced it by a Government of the Left pledged to social reform and the ending of feudal privilege.

In other countries, particularly in Czechoslovakia, the organisation of a similar front makes rapid headway. It

is therefore of the greatest importance, not only to the Socialist workers, but to every friend of peace and liberty, to try to understand this movement. This little book is an attempt to describe the rise of the People's Front in France, to show of what parties it is composed, what it has achieved, and what it will undertake after its victory at the polls.

Should the French People's Front have the support of a government in Britain based on the same wide appeal, the danger of war and reaction in Europe would be greatly decreased. Not only would Fascist countries like Italy and Germany be compelled to abandon hope of achieving their aggressive aims by force, but Fascism everywhere would be faced eventually with the mass mobilisation of popular strength.

Moreover, though the People's Front itself is not necessarily Socialist, it is a portent of the desertion of capitalism by those popular forces on whose support it has hitherto relied for a continued existence. For this time the movement is to the Left and not to the Right.

In such a position, with the constant example before their eyes of the success of Socialism in action in the Soviet Union, it will not be long before these masses become consciously Socialist. How quickly that process will be achieved depends mainly on the progress of the working-class itself towards complete unity and consequent leadership within the People's Front.

Peace, Democracy and Socialism have assumed a new meaning and a new strength as a result of the events in France.

FRANCE FACES THE FUTURE

CHAPTER I

FRANCE TO-DAY

VOLTAIRE once called the English a nation of shopkeepers. The average Englishman visiting Paris for the first time forms the impression that two-thirds of the population lives by driving taxis or keeping small shops.

A superficial view, but it has a certain justification. France is predominantly a petty-bourgeois country, a country of peasants, shopkeepers and small business men. With this difference, however, that since the War a strongly trustified, highly modern industry has grown up, which, together with the banks, plays the dominant part in the country's economic life.

The social and political crisis now shaking the Republic to its foundations, arises from the effort of the small group of bankers and industrialists who control this modern financial and industrial machine, to rob the mass of the people in order to maintain their own privileged position, now menaced by the economic crisis.

In England the working-class is overwhelmingly the most important in numbers and organisation. It has great political traditions which have absorbed all that was once advanced and militant in the liberalism of the petty-bourgeoisie. The lower middle-class, though still very important, no longer plays the same big role in the

country as it did before the collapse of the once mighty Liberal Party.

Not so in France. Here the peasantry are a political force of the greatest importance. If you add to them the small business men, the shopkeepers and the lower Civil Servants (including teachers), you have what is numerically easily the most important class in the country.

Moreover, this class has very great revolutionary traditions which have not been forgotten.

In France, the parties of the Right have never had a mass following. They have played an important part in the State only because they have been supported by the banks and big industry, and have the backing of the Catholic Church, the upper Civil Service, and the majority of the army officers.

The traditional party of the French peasantry, lower middle-class and intellectuals, is the Radical-Socialist Party. The largest party in the Republic, it has always furnished the majority of France's Governments in the history of the Third Republic.

The Socialist and Communist parties, which represent the working-class and poorer peasantry, before this year's Election did not have such a large following as the Radicals, though they are the parties of a better-knit, more organised, conscious and militant class.

This peculiar class structure in France is the cause of many features in French politics which are puzzling to the Englishman.

Why, for example, does every French politician begin his career on the extreme Left and end up on the extreme Right?

The answer is simple if we remember the above facts. Most politicians come from the petty-bourgeoisie, often

from the peasantry. Their class, for all its revolutionary traditions, cannot play an independent role in modern society, but for ever sways between the working-class and the big bourgeoisie.

Clemenceau began his career fighting for the Commune, Briand was a Syndicalist, Laval a Socialist and a lawyer of the French trade unions. Frossard, the late Minister of Labour, was a Communist, and so on.

The renegade's progress is almost a law of French politics.

It does not, merely, represent corruption, though this plays its part, but rather the political instability of the small bourgeois, torn between the two polar forces of modern society.

Lastly, not unconnected with this, we should note the strength of the democratic spirit in France—in many ways stronger than in the United States.

The brother of the present President has recently been made an officer of the Legion of Honour. His claim to distinction is that he is a farmer who has never left his native village and all the papers print his picture driving a plough through the fields!

Daladier, leader of the Radicals, Professor of history, ex-Premier, is a son of a peasant who likes to meet his constituents in the village bakery, which is owned and run by his sister.

French Fascism is led by a count and a colonel, a count, moreover, who is a descendant of those counter-revolutionaries who attacked their own country in 1790. He has no chance of ever leading a mass movement in France.

One of the chief supporters of Count-Colonel Casimir de la Rocque, leader of the Fascist Croix de Feu, is the Baron de Wendel, chief of the all-powerful Metal and

Coal Industrial Federation known as the Comité des Forges. De Wendel, Senator of France, one of the twelve Regents of the Bank of France, and his two brothers, are descendants of the Baron de Wendel, who, along with the then Count de la Rocque, was one of the royalist *émigrés* at Coblenz who conspired against the First Republic, during the great revolution. Both de Wendel and de la Rocque took the money of the King of Prussia and led regiments of mercenaries against their own countrymen in the wars of the Revolution. To a Frenchman that still means a great deal.

France is to-day a divided country, but it is a country in which the minority, the representatives of the big capitalist industrial and financial interests, definitely wish to get out of a severe economic crisis by forcibly imposing their will on the majority. They see the instruments of this will in Colonel de la Rocque and his Fascist bands of the Croix de Feu organisation, backed up by the army and the military police force of the Garde Mobile.

This economic crisis is of exceptional severity. While other countries are priding themselves on a return to "prosperity," with or without justification, nobody in France is able to pretend that even a transition from crisis to mere depression is at hand.

Since 1929 industrial production has fallen by one-third, and the end of 1935 saw the index figure in all chief industries reaching new low records. In January of this year nearly half a million unemployed were in receipt of relief (this is very far from being all the unemployed, for there is no complete system of State insurance). Part-time unemployment probably affects nearly forty per cent of the whole working class.

Foreign trade is at its lowest level, railway receipts have declined 15 per cent. in comparison with 1933, while the number of bankruptcies grows to menacing proportions.

The country's finances are in a deplorable condition. Treasury receipts are falling rapidly, while the public debt grows monstrously. The gold reserve of the Bank of France was 79,468 million francs in November, 1933. In November, 1935, it was 69,232 million francs, while it is reckoned that between 1929 and 1934 the national income fell by as much as 30 per cent.

With a chronic Budget deficit, the Government is driven to perpetual borrowing—nearly 20 billion francs last year alone. In these circumstances, with the national currency in danger from speculation and the flight of gold abroad, France is facing an acute financial as well as an industrial crisis.

The traditional financial policy of French capitalism has hitherto been the one dictated by the regents of the Bank of France, maintenance of the gold standard and strict economy by the State—the so-called policy of deflation. In practice this has meant that the State has economised at the expense of its employees, cutting their salaries by decree.

State employees are an important section of the French people, and the cuts in their salaries, culminating in the 10 per cent. cut imposed by the decree-laws of the Laval Government in summer, 1935, have naturally had their effect on other sections of the working population. The effect has been a general fall in purchasing power of the whole population, and an increase rather than a diminution of the crisis.

Against this policy of throwing the whole burden

of the crisis on the people France is in revolt. The slogan of the People's Front, "Make the rich pay," has won immense popularity, and because it signifies an attack on the economic privileges of the great capitalists it is of very great interest and importance to the workers and middle classes of other countries who are suffering also from the squeezing policy of big capital.

The economic crisis has been accompanied by an equally grave crisis in foreign affairs. The rise of an armed and menacing Germany, making no secret of its aggressive plans, has cast a shadow over the whole country. The French are not cowards, and they are not moved by threats, but they see that in three years Nazi Germany has built up an army greater than the French army, equipped with the very last word of motorised technique, while the General Staff estimates that by the end of 1936 German military aviation will be well ahead of the French.

The air-raid instructions which by law are posted in every French house, the building of the new system of fortifications on the frontier, the sense of lying under constant threat of attack, have brought a growing feeling of insecurity to the country.

In such circumstances the growth of extreme nationalism is not unnatural. The French jingoes would be not unwilling to see Hitler's armies attack in the East, against the Soviet Union, while France builds up her armed forces. Economic and foreign crisis, the political sympathies of Fascism, have created on the Right a violent terrorist movement towards a military-Fascist dictatorship. It is anti-Soviet, pro-Italian to a foolish degree, inclined towards tolerance of the worst excesses of Nazi barbarity, and in favour of using the utmost

force to attain its ends in home politics. French Fascism has the support of the big bankers and industrialists without concealment, for they see in it a useful instrument of both home and foreign policy.

CHAPTER II

"THE NEW FEUDALISM"

THE people of France are rightly proud of their country. For centuries it has been the hearth of European civilisation. Its rich soil has nourished poets, thinkers, scientists, inventors and revolutionaries who are the glory of the common human heritage. It is a country which possesses all the material conditions to make a people happy and prosperous.

French agriculture is able to yield an abundance of grain, fruit, flowers, vegetables, sugar-beets, wine from fields as skilfully and economically cultivated as any in the world. The country's network of roads and waterways is unequalled in Europe. French industry, which for long lagged behind that of Britain and Germany, is to-day highly developed, and in some respects—in production of bauxite and aluminium, for example—takes pride of place over other countries.

A people with the intense pride and concentrated energy of the French sees with alarm a general economic paralysis creeping over the country's life, menacing them with complete ruin. The intellectual life of France, which is dear to Frenchmen because it is so intimately part of their national tradition, is threatened also.

Finally, the French working class, the courageous and generous-hearted men and women who are the de-

scendants of the revolutionary fighters of 1793, 1830, 1848 and 1871, are faced with the possibility of a militarist and priest-ridden dictatorship of terror, with a revival of the spectre which their forefathers poured out their blood to crush.

Poverty, unemployment, idle factories, ruined farms, intellectual decay, are things which Frenchmen are no longer willing to support. They look for their cause, and they think they have found it in the domination of their country's life by the monopoly power of modern capitalism.

In the great demonstrations of July 14th, 1935, and since, in the meetings of the People's Front, in the conversation of the cafés and the working-class *bistros*, you can hear to-day a great deal about " economic feudalism," " the economic Bastilles," " the 200 families who ruin France."

Scientifically, economically, perhaps these phrases which have so won the popular imagination are not quite correct. The great bankers and industrialists of to-day think and act in a very different way from the feudal nobility of the eve of 1789. To reduce the capitalist class of France to 200 families is probably rather simplifying the problem, just as it is a simplification of things to imagine that an attack on the privileges of the Bank of France might bring such swift results as the storming of the Bastille by the people of Paris in 1789.

But the idea behind these simple phrases is correct. The modern monopolist has many features of the old-time feudal noble in his otherwise up-to-date and highly stream-lined make-up. To put it bluntly, he has used his immense economic power to put himself in a privileged

position, and he is not above using the methods of a mediæval ruffian to maintain that position.

The destruction of the power of the regents of the Bank of France might not bring about a revolution, but it would be a popular interference with a holy of holies of privilege which might quite well create the conditions in which revolution becomes possible.

Lastly, though there are many more than 200 families to be reckoned with in the ruling sections of French capitalism, it is a fact that the 200 most important shareholders of the Bank of France, in whose hands is the sole power of election of the Bank's regents, hold a position of overwhelming importance in the country's economic and political life.

The revolutionary movements in France during the nineteenth century all suffered defeat because the peasantry, its needs satisfied by the revolution of 1789–95, remained indifferent or hostile to the needs of the workers and intellectuals in the towns. They had fought once against feudalism and won their battle. But to-day the position is sharply changed, and indeed has been changing ever since the eighteen-nineties.

The modern peasant is no longer free. He is the serf of a new feudalism, his land and instruments mortgaged to the banks, his produce at the mercy of the great trusts with whom he must deal. He sells his harvest at the index figure of 3 and buys his goods for household consumption, renews his farm implements and purchases his manures at the index figure of 5 or 6.

Many hundred thousands are unable to own their land, and work as labourers on the big estates, in the vineyards or sugar-beet plantations. In a country where half the population lives by agriculture the mood of the

peasantry and farm labourers is all-important. And in the France of to-day the mood is an ugly one. The peasant has begun to understand that the present system works against him, and he is becoming an active factor in politics. Moreover, in general his influence is not on the side of reaction.

It is this background which gives such reality to the slogans about the "economic Bastilles" and the "200 families." Indeed, the organisation of the Bank of France is a very remarkable one, designed in such a way as to build up, in fact, a caste of hereditary oligarchs.

According to the Constitution imposed by Napoleon I, the twelve Regents are elected by the 200 largest shareholders. The State is represented by the Governor and the two sub-Governors, civil servants who in practice have heeded in moments of conflict the plutocrats on whom their future depends rather than the Government which appointed them. They have no choice in this, for they must take on credit from the regents the million francs worth of shares which they have to possess in order to qualify for the post. If the Government dismisses them, they are assured of lucrative posts on the boards of private banks in return for "services rendered."

The shareholders have tended to keep the regentships in the hands of a hereditary caste representing the most conservative financial and industrial interests. The seats have been transmitted from father to son for generations.

The Mallet family, for example, has been represented uninterruptedly in the Council of Regency since the Bank's foundation 135 years ago. The Hottinguers have been there since 1803. Among the other Regents are such aristocratic names as De Wendel (representing

the great coal, iron and steel interests of the Comité des Forges) and De Vogué, of the St. Gobain chemical industries, or Rothschild, the great Jewish bankers (represented in the Regency since the 1860's).

Before the War the French credit banks and big industries had escaped from the domination of the Bank of France to a considerable degree. Financial chaos since the War, and finally the crisis which began in 1931, have gradually brought them back beneath its thumb.

The Bank has never hesitated to interfere in politics. Before a Premier forms a new Ministry he must consult the Regents in order to give them the necessary guarantees on his economic policy. The Bank will ruthlessly bring down a government which goes against its wishes by the simple process of refusing to discount Treasury bills. In this way the Flandin Government fell in 1935.

The Socialist deputy Vincent Auriol told the Chamber of a scene at which he had personally been present in 1924, when Edouard Herriot, then Premier of France, had called a special meeting of leaders of the Left with the Governor of the Bank to protest against the policy of inflation the Bank was attempting to enforce at that time.

Herriot, showing signs of great emotion, addressed those present in these words :

" I want to say exactly what I think. As an individual I have never made a request to the banks. As Mayor of Lyon I have always maintained an absolute independence towards them. Now I must come here, as head of the Government, so that they may place me in this humiliating position. I say, no !

" I am the representative of the French State, and I

do not wish to see the nation humiliated through me. That is all. I beg you to inform the Regents that I shall not give way and that I am speaking here in the name of France.

"I shall appeal to the country. I shall say what I have suffered here. I shall not give way before the pressure they wish to employ against me. I shall stay and I shall fight."

Brave words! Herriot turned to his financial advisers and, in the presence of the Governor of the Bank, told them to prepare for him a draft Bill for a capital levy. The Bank yielded temporarily, but in the end the defiance was in vain and the Regents had their way.

Why? Perhaps if we mention that the twelve Regents are personally the directors of 95 companies, on the boards of which they hold 150 seats, the matter becomes a little clearer.

These companies include 31 private banks, 8 insurance companies, 9 railway companies, 8 steamship companies, 7 steel and iron companies, 6 electric power companies, 8 mining companies, 12 chemical enterprises and 6 other companies of varying importance. It was these gentlemen who flung out Flandin when he wished to oppose the policy of deflation. They supported Laval because they found in him an obedient servant.

It is this combination of concentrated power and hereditary privilege which is drawing the fire of French democracy to-day.

What are the relations of the peasantry to this plutocracy? The peasants also have their "representative" among the Regents—a certain Marquis de Vogué, the most important landowner in France, director of the largest chemical works which provides the peasants with

chemical manures, of the Creusot factory which sells them their implements and machines, of the railway and inland navigation companies which carry their produce, of two insurance companies which insure them against all risks, and of the Credit Lyonnais Bank which looks after their savings !

Is it an exaggeration for the French people to talk of two hundred " families " as forming this plutocratic oligarchy ? Hardly. The number of families may, in fact, be larger or smaller, but how essentially the control of the great economic monopolies has become a matter of family privilege can be judged from the fact that 203 leading capitalists, representing 57 families, control 1312 seats on various boards !

These are the people whose influence on the Press, on literature, on sport, on the snobbish life of " society," on diplomacy and the police force, is all-powerful. French life is corrupt. Scandals like those of the Oustric Bank and the Stavisky frauds involved many people who were unlucky enough to be caught in the act of robbery. It is commonly and not unjustly believed that they involved even more whose illustrious names or powerful influence enabled them to escape publicity.

CHAPTER III

THE EVE OF FEBRUARY 6TH, 1933

THE name of the adventurer Stavisky has found a place in history—undeservedly so. There were certain particularly scandalous features about the frauds he perpetrated, the fact that his operations were known to high officials of the Paris police, that some of his operations would hardly have been possible without the knowledge of Chiappe, the head of the Paris force, and that a number of second-rate politicians of various parties were involved in his fall. But Chicago and New York have known worse corruption and London bigger frauds. In short, if you subtract from Stavisky the political and social atmosphere in France in 1933, there remains only a very mean and ordinary crook.

The elections of 1932 had, as usual in French politics, returned a Left majority, with the Radical-Socialists as the largest single party. The tradition of a government of "National Union," hallowed by Poincaré and the War, still remained, but little beside the tradition. And then there was the crisis. The French capitalist class considered their country as an exception, much as Britain considers herself an exception now. Other countries might suffer unemployment, bankruptcies, financial panic, but not France.

All this confidence had vanished by 1933. The

Budget, unbalanced for years, was found to be unbalanceable, save by drastic measures. Financial institutions, great and small, began to rock, and some of them to crash. Factories closed down, unemployment rose, agriculture found it could no longer market its produce. Government became increasingly difficult, particularly as the seizure of power by Hitler in Germany created a new and menacing situation.

To say that the Radical Party failed to grapple with the crisis is to flatter them. They allowed it to roll them over.

One after another their statesmen tried to lead the country, first Herriot, then Daladier, then Sarraut, then Chautemps, then Daladier again, all in little over a year. The Treasury was empty, the working-class angry, the peasants bewildered, the reactionary Right buzzing like hornets. True, one cannot blame the Radical leaders entirely for their weakness. The Bank of France, the big financiers and industrialists, were more than hostile, they were prepared to act the moment any Premier attempted a step which threatened their privileges or interests, which turned away from the economic policy of deflation they had laid down for the Government.

The succession of scandalous frauds, first those of Madame Hanaud, then the collapse of the Oustric Bank, and finally the Stavisky sensation, created an atmosphere of rottenness, of society in decay, of Parliamentary corruption, which the Government's enemies were quick to use.

The French Republic has always had its foes. Certain sections of the financial and industrial oligarchy, the Catholic Church, the Army and Navy officers, the provincial "notables" have been ready to put it in

jeopardy at every crisis. Since the War they have found strong allies among all those who fear the rising strength of the working-class and particularly the danger of Communism. Clemenceau, the nearest man to a dictator in modern French history, was a Radical. Some people thought that the Radical party, with its solid peasant membership, might form an excellent transition to a Fascist State. Others considered the traditional Radical supremacy in French politics as the source of all evil and corruption.

In the end, the second party have won the day. French reactionaries have chosen the Radical party and its leaders for their mark, in order to attack the Parliamentary system, which in France has meant in practice Radical supremacy. When Louis Bonaparte wished to establish his dictatorship he had only to win over the peasantry, scared of revolution and suspicious of the towns. To-day it is impossible to win over the peasantry in any numbers without first smashing the Radical Party.

The Stavisky scandal gave an excellent opportunity. The foreigner may wonder how it was possible for an insignificant minority, controlling at most some eighty seats in the Chamber, to lead a campaign which was not only able to overthrow an apparently strong Government, but to put the whole Republican system in danger. It was possible, and may be possible again, because of the enormous concentrated wealth and influence at the disposal of reaction, a wealth and influence which enables them at times to employ almost the whole Press, the cinema, the radio, the Universities and the Academies, the Church and the influence of many higher officials to the end of discrediting a government and a system.

By the end of 1933, in Paris itself, always the centre of

all reactionary forces, a considerable movement against the Government and against the Parliamentary system had sprung up. In certain bars and cafés you could see notices hung up, " Deputies are not served here." Public insults to and demonstrations against well-known Radical parliamentarians became common (they never took place against those of the Right, who were looked on as " our boys ").

In January, 1934, the Chautemps Ministry fell and was succeeded by the second Daladier Ministry. Daladier, after Edouard Herriot the most prominent of French Radicals, had a reputation as a strong man with a genuine desire to get things done. He had young and energetic men in his Ministry like Pierre Cot, Air Minister, and Camille Frot, Minister of the Interior. There was some hope that he would clear up the Stavisky scandal, punish the guilty, take measures to end the financial disorder and to grapple with the crisis.

The last of these he probably very sincerely intended to undertake, and that proved his undoing. The Right were noisy in their demand for action, but thoroughly determined that such action should all be against the Left, in the form of suppression of the trade unions, dismissal of Parliament, laws against the Communist Party, and so on. Action which threatened the privileges of the wealthy was not such a pleasing prospect.

They had a powerful ally in Jean Chiappe, Prefect of Police in Paris. Chiappe had in seven years built up the Paris police into an efficient and obedient force over which he ruled with absolute power. Connected with the extreme Right in politics, he was not without ambitions to be a French Mussolini himself. He provided the enemies of the Government with all the ammunition they

needed to prove the complicity of the Radical Party in the Stavisky scandals. His own implication in these scandals as head of a force which had failed to check them, was fairly clear, and the Left, particularly the Socialist and Communist workers, were insistent in demanding his removal and arrest.

On January 30th the new Government was formed. Demonstrations of Royalists and other Fascist bodies took place in Paris the same night. They were not serious and were easily dispersed. Much more important was a demonstration fixed for Sunday, February 4th, the eve of the opening of the Chamber, by one of the ex-servicemen's organisations, the Union Nationale des Combattants. It was to take place in the Champs-Elysées, past the statue of Clemenceau, and meet in the great Place de la Concorde, opposite the Chamber of Deputies. The manifesto summoning the demonstration was drawn up in terms which could only be understood as a threat to the new Government.

The part played by Chiappe, the Prefect of Police, now becomes really interesting. Asked by Daladier to use his influence to get the ex-servicemen to call off their demonstration, he responded by spinning him a long story about a plot discovered by his secret agents to set up a Fascist dictatorship with the aid of—the Communists! The instigator of the "plot" was none other than Frot, Daladier's colleague, the Minister of the Interior and Chiappe's own departmental chief.

The reaction of the Government to this was typical. They insisted that the demonstration be abandoned, and Chiappe agreed (it is interesting to note that his personal intervention was sufficient for the ex-servicemen's leaders). Then the question of Chiappe himself was

raised. The Socialists and Communists had refused to vote for the Government unless he were dismissed. The agitation, not only among the workers, but among the rank and file followers of the Radicals, against his intrigues and assumption of a power within a power, was intense.

It was finally agreed to ask for his resignation and—make him Governor of Morocco. As though the British Cabinet were to dismiss an official for disloyalty and corruption and then offer to make him Viceroy of India! The cunning Chiappe at once saw the opportunity given him by this extraordinary display of weakness. He refused the "promotion," curtly told Daladier that he would find him "in the street," and set about his preparations.

His last words were taken to mean that he would be among the demonstrators against the Government, in which case no policeman would act. Chiappe has since denied having said this. All he said was, he claims, that he would be "on the street," that is, he would be a man financially ruined. Perhaps. If so, one can only say his prophecy has fortunately (for him) not yet been fulfilled, and Monsieur Chiappe shows no obvious signs of financial distress. As for Monsieur Daladier, he can no longer be sure one way or the other what was said.

In any case, this incredibly feeble gesture had given the reaction exactly the weapon they wanted. Chiappe in an hour became a martyr to honour and duty, another victim of the corrupt parliamentarians who had protected Stavisky. The demonstration abandoned for the Sunday was called again for the Tuesday, February 6th, in the same place and at a time when the Chamber was in session. The only difference now was that every Right-

wing organisation declared their intention of joining the ex-servicemen and that the police could be relied on to treat the demonstrators with the greatest respect.

The scene was set for February 6th, 1934, when the middle-class mob of Paris, reinforced by a section of deluded ex-servicemen and others who believed they were fighting for clean politics, came into the street to compel the fall of a legally elected Government. It was a challenge without parallel in modern French history.

CHAPTER IV

COUP D'ETAT AND THE ANSWER

THE story of the night of February 6th, in so far as the fighting on the Place de la Concorde is concerned, is well enough known. What is less well known is the effect on the Government and the answer which the Fascist demonstration evoked in the country.

When the columns of marching men attempted to storm the bridges leading to the Chamber they were held up by cordons of police and Gardes Mobiles. That they were ever allowed to assemble and march at all is remarkable until one remembers the part played by Chiappe and the sympathy of many police officers for the demonstrators.

Hot spirits in the crowd opened fire on the police and the fire was eventually returned, with considerable effect. That it was the rioters who fired first was definitely and unanimously established by the parliamentary commission of enquiry, on which deputies of the extreme Right served.

After the shooting began the crowd was dispersed, though not without some difficulty. There were more than a score of dead for the night's work, and many hundred injured, the great majority of them among the demonstrators. It is an axiom of modern politics that members of the Right parties have an inalienable right

to demonstrate freely. It is an accepted convention of political life in all countries that they shall not be attacked and shot down, a fate reserved for the less respectable members of the Left, who do not respect private property or religion.

So the conventions were broken and the right to demonstrate trampled on. Respectable members of clerical and militarist bodies had lost their lives. It was murder, and the Press said so next morning with no uncertain voice. They were joined by all the forces, tangible and intangible, of good society, and the fall of the Government, as the least possible reparation to the martyrs for clean politics, was certain by midday.

But need it have fallen? It need not if it had had the courage of its acts and the will to defend itself. During the Tuesday evening, under the threat of the reactionary crowd attempting to storm the Chamber, the Government had won a substantial majority. If it had at once declared martial law, arrested the leaders of the Right who had incited the riot, put the Press under control and appealed to the people, not of Paris but of France, for support in its action, it would have triumphed.

What followed was so remarkable as to be almost comic. A meeting of Ministers during the night of the 6th agreed on the arrest of a number of the chief inciters to violence. Daladier gave the order to the Prefect of Police for execution. Early in the morning of the 7th, Frot, the Minister of the Interior, who had not gone to bed all night, rang up the Prefect to know if the arrests had been successfully carried out. He was told that no one was arrested because the Prime Minister had countermanded his own order within half an hour of giving it!

Even more extraordinary, in the brief interregnum after the Government had resigned and President Lebrun was trying to find a new Ministerial combination, Frot, the Minister of the Interior, responsible for the maintenance of order in the country, was a fugitive hiding from the lynching mob of the reaction, who blamed him for the events of the night before! Concealed in the villa of a well-known Liberal editor, he had nevertheless eventually to make an appearance in the Chamber. The editor could find no means of ensuring his safety until he approached the Communist deputies, who arranged for the Minister of the Interior to be brought intact to the Chamber under a reliable bodyguard!

With the resignation of Daladier's Cabinet the last rampart of constitutional legality was down, and the parties of the Right and the Left faced one another with the conviction that they must fight for existence. For the Right it was a unique opportunity, and the dictatorial power they had been ceaselessly demanding for "the reform of the State" was theirs for the asking.

The Radical Party was shattered. The forces of the workers were hopelessly divided (or so it seemed) between reformist and revolutionary. Had the Right possessed a leader with a grain of political sense, had they shown any power of organisation or the ability to think out the most elementary programme of action (no need to implement the programme, had it only been there to catch the support of the hesitating lower middle classes), they had France at their mercy on February 7th.

They possessed none of these things. Beyond a certain mystical nationalism, their whole stock-in-trade was (and is) a denunciation of parliamentary democracy, of the legal organisations of the working class, and the

" degenerate " notions of human equality. In short, their class character and class prejudice were glaring. Perhaps success came too easily, perhaps they themselves had hardly expected the Government to take their threat so seriously. In any case the blow was premature.

Not a single town in France echoed the Fascist demonstration. On the contrary, the following days saw the streets of provincial France filled with quite another kind of crowd. At Lille, when the members of the Royalist Action Française appeared, they were driven off the streets by angry workers. At Toulouse over 20,000 working-class demonstrators filled the streets. Telegrams poured into the headquarters of the two trade union councils in Paris, to the offices of the Socialist Party and Communist Party. In many provincial towns a kind of popular front of all democratic forces was organised spontaneously—from both the trade union bodies, Socialists, Communists, Republican ex-servicemen, free-thinkers, who all united to form committees of vigilance.

Some of the decisions taken by these meetings are of the deepest interest as reflecting the temper of the provinces. At Grenoble a resolution in the following terms was sent to the President of the Republic :

" The representatives of the workers' organisations of Vizille and Grenoble remember the past and are conscious of their strength because they have remained calm.

" Workers, peasants, employees, citizens and mountain folk have decided to constitute a Vigilance Committee. This Vigilance Committee is ready, if necessary, to become a revolutionary committee. . . .

" The provinces have remained calm in face of all the appeals to murder, all the incitements which have just

made themselves plain. The Vigilance Committee of Vizille and Grenobles thinks it necessary to remind you that Paris is not the whole of France. . . .

" A few thousand rioters wish to impose their plans on France, preparing their work and dictating their orders despite the will of the people and the Government. . . .

" Perhaps the Republic is weak in Paris, but the Republic is strong in the provinces, and the workers of Vizille and Grenoble . . . thoroughly determined to defend their liberties, are ready to sound a fall in to the unanimous provinces and to restore to the word 'Revolution' its noble motives and generous aims.

" Republican legality will be defended by every means, even arms in hand."

Miners from Carmaux, at a meeting described by the reactionary *Petit Parisien* as enormous, passed a similar resolution :

" They remind you that Paris is not the whole of France and proclaim that the men who toil—miners, workers in field and factory—will make their voice heard if necessary, and will know how to resist by every means all trouble-makers."

In Upper Alsace all sections united to call a one-day general strike. In every town in France meetings and street demonstrations expressed hatred for Chiappe and for André Tardieu, the most prominent leader of the Right.

In Paris the Socialists and Communists had already mobilised their members on Tuesday the 6th, the day of the riots. The same night, at 11 o'clock, in the very midst of the fighting in the Place de la Concorde, the Postal Workers' Union issued a call for a general strike of their members against " the attack which is strangling

democracy." The fall of the Government, which did not even have the courage to appeal to the people who had elected it, put an end to any hesitations in the ranks of the workers' leaders, and the Executive of the Reformist unions, meeting during Wednesday, February 7th, agreed to call a twenty-four hours' protest strike on Monday, February 12th. The call met with the immediate approval and support of the revolutionary unions, of the Socialist and Communist parties, and of all organisations dependent on them.

The two political parties were still divided. The Socialist Party had called a counter-demonstration for the Thursday, at the Place de la Bastille; the Communists for the Friday, in the Place de la République. When the call came for the general strike the Socialists abandoned their demonstration, but the Communists, feeling that the right of the workers to demonstrate on the streets must be maintained, held to their decision to demonstrate on the Friday evening, February 9th.

A great number of the rank and file of the Socialists decided to join with the Communists, and between 7 and 8 o'clock on Friday evening a crowd of many thousands surrounded the Place de la République, cordoned off by heavy forces of police and Gardes Mobiles. Shortly after 8, foot and mounted police attempted to break up the crowds, and a series of running fights took place all over this north-eastern quarter of Paris. Such violent police charges had not been seen for many years, and they roused a furious resistance from the victims.

Barricades were built to hinder the mounted men. Police lorries charged into the crowds, their occupants firing without warning into the thick of the demon-

strators. Sometimes strong hands grabbed policemen off the lorries as they passed. Particularly bitter was the struggle round the eastern rail terminus, and workers and police, fighting desperately, fell side by side.

At Menilmontant, where the streets rise sharply uphill, the battle became a struggle of the whole population. Women threw bedsteads, iron stoves, chairs from the windows on to the mounted police. Men scattered marbles on the road, which brought their horses down. At the top of the Rue de Menilmontant two barrels of paraffin were requisitioned from a friendly lamp shop, broached in the street, a match flung in and a sea of flame sent running down the hill on to the horses of the advancing Guards. They turned and galloped away.

Six workers were killed on this night, some hundreds injured. But the police, though they had no fatalities, had a casualty list almost as large, and by midnight were quite glad to call it a day. Later a number of police officers expressed their astonishment at the desperate bravery of the resistance of these unarmed men and women whom they had been brought up to regard as a "mob," always ready to run. The lesson was not without its effect. In all the troubled period since there has been no serious police attack upon the workers of Paris.

February 9th had another, more important, consequence: it raised the spirits of the workers throughout France, who realised that Paris would not be surrendered to reaction without a fight, and it made certain the success of the general strike on the 12th.

The forces of reaction, including their allies in the Government, understood that they had gone too far. No sooner had the news of the Fascist rising on the

6th reached the provinces than workers in the big cities began seriously to consider marching on Paris. In the north lorries were commandeered. In Bordeaux 2000 workers held themselves ready to leave for Paris at a moment's notice.

The new Government, headed by the old reactionary Doumergue, was already formed by the end of the week. It was anxious to take repressive measures against the threatened general strike and the leaders of the workers' parties, but the events of the Friday night and the intense feeling in the provinces were a warning to walk carefully.

The general strike on the Monday was an immense success. Essential services of gas, water and electricity were maintained. The rest stopped. In the whole Paris region 75 per cent. of the working population downed tools. In the city itself it was remarkable that many even of the small furniture, clothing and dress-making establishments stopped. In the provinces the strike was equally solid. Huge demonstrations accompanied it in Paris and the main industrial centres. For the first time, at the heads of the processions Socialists, Communists, trade unionists of both wings marched together.

Apart from the cries against reaction, the most popular slogans of the demonstrators were those calling for unity. The immediate danger was over, but the question of the future was urgent. Doumergue, the new Premier, old and not very intelligent, was a pupil of Tardieu, a believer in Fascist " reform " of the State, the tool of reaction. So long as his Government lasted the men of February 6th were in power.

CHAPTER V

THE MILITARY FORCES OF REACTION

THE demonstrators of February 6th would hardly have brought down a constitutionally elected government, which only the evening before had won a big majority and a vote of confidence in the Chamber, if they had not represented very important interests in the national life of France. In fact, they represented the whole of the parties on the Right, and they were important not alone because of this, but because for the first time the Right had shown that in their desire to bring about "the reform of the State," they were willing to make use of para-military forces, of organised and disciplined bodies of young men who accepted all the new mythology of the Fascist parties and extreme nationalists.

To-day these same parties and these same forces have combined to appeal to the French electorate under the name of "Front National," thereby emphasising their bitter opposition to the "Front Populaire" and completing the division of the country into two camps.

These semi-military organisations, or para-military bodies as they are called in France, are five in number. Largest and most important is the Croix de Feu movement, noisiest is the Action Française, most devout is the "Jeunesses patriotes," most ruffianly is the "Solidarité Française," and most anti-semitic the "Francistes."

The " Croix de Feu " movement was first organised in 1927 by Colonel de la Rocque, a former staff officer, most of whose active service had passed in the relatively peaceful zone of Morocco where he had won considerable military reputation. The whole movement is dominated by the mysticism of the trenches, by the curious mixture of sentimentality and nationalist fanaticism which is the contribution of the ex-officer leaders of ex-servicemen's organisations in most countries towards a new order.

Originally the aim of the Croix de Feu was to group a small *élite* of ex-soldiers who had been decorated for their services. Their badge is the military decoration of the Croix de Guerre surmounted by a death's head, and they are largely ex-officers and non-commissioned officers, courageous men and first-class military material. It was soon found that such a narrow organisation, for all the moral emanations of patriotic devotion which it inspired, had little or no effective political influence. It was then enlarged to include ex-servicemen in general under the name of " Briscards." Croix de Feu and Briscards are now united.

When important political and financial interests saw a possible weapon in the Croix de Feu, its character was transformed by the formation of " National Volunteers " to include the post-war generation and " Sons of the Croix de Feu " as a junior movement, while around the party a sympathisers' organisation called " Regroupement National " was also created in 1933. To-day the whole complex of organisations passes under the name of " Mouvement Social Français."

The actual military force at the disposal of Colonel de la Rocque is probably nominally around 80,000 men, though perhaps the whole movement has as many as

800,000 or a million unorganised sympathisers. Its social prestige is very great and most well brought-up young men and women of the middle-class like to be considered as connected with the movement.

The actual fighting forces are formed into sections and brigades, and are very carefully chosen and drilled. The Colonel was quick to see that civil war could only be effectual if it could use the weapons of modern warfare and his shock troops are completely motorised. This has been a relatively simple matter, thanks to the number of wealthy adherents. In addition, there is a considerable air force which has been able to mobilise as many as 150 planes at one rally.

Mobilisations of the Croix de Feu take place at night, on receipt of a code message, usually in the park of some country house or in the grounds of a large farm. The men are brought together by motor and the whole movement is quite independent of rail or bus transport, and therefore cannot be crippled by a general strike.

The members are armed with rifles and revolvers, while arms depots in various parts of the country are said to conceal machine guns, hand grenades, and even mortars and light artillery. It is hard to say what is the extent of their armament, but during the friendly Premiership of Monsieur Laval, who maintained close personal connections with Colonel de la Rocque, it certainly made great progress. The few police raids which have taken place since the fall of Laval have confiscated machine guns and automatic rifles in small quantities, but no serious arms depot has yet been discovered.

Beside the business-like and efficient organisation of the Croix de Feu, the other bodies are mere noisy rioters, though in a crisis very dangerous customers. The Action

Française, storm-troops of French Royalism, are mostly students and have little influence outside Paris. Their newspaper, the *Action Française*, edited by those two virulent literary gentlemen, Charles Maurras and Léon Daudet, is chiefly remarkable for its incitements to terrorism and personal violence against parliamentarians of the Left. The "royalism" of this body is largely academic, and a screen for a more purely Fascist call to establish a terrorist dictatorship. The "King" of France has disowned his noisy supporters and the Church has excommunicated them.

The "Jeunesses patriotes" are a larger and more "respectable" body organised on military lines in groups of six men and a leader. They are strong in the Universities, have a clerical and military outlook, and until recently the support of the newspaper *Echo de Paris*. Their leader is the Paris deputy Pierre Taittinger. Among the rank and file there are strong leanings towards unification with the much more influential "Croix de Feu."

The other two organisations are of little importance. "Solidarité Française" was founded by the millionaire Coty, and is now led by an ex-officer of the Colonial army called Jean Renaud. They wear blue shirts and field boots and are recruited from declassed and sometimes criminal elements. Except as possible provocators in moments of great crisis they are not a serious force.

The "Francistes" are the French disciples of Hitler, and naturally enough their greatest strength is to be found in Alsace and Lorraine among the small Germanophile section of the population. Their leader is a certain Marcel Bucard, they are anti-semitic, have invented a French race, wear blue shirts, and use the Hitler salute.

It is doubtful if both the above bodies have more than 20,000 members.

Of these " Leagues " only the Croix de Feu is of serious importance. The more honest elements in the others have now mostly joined its ranks and it is the only Fascist body to receive serious financial support from the Banks, insurance companies and heavy industry. Important newspapers like *Le Matin* and *Echo de Paris* give open support to Colonel de la Rocque and his movement is undoubtedly looked upon as the trump card of French reaction should a grave political or economic crisis threaten the country.

The social prestige enjoyed by the Croix de Feu has been referred to, but hardly sufficiently stressed. In the closing months of 1935, when the Laval Government was entering its death agony and the idea of a Fascist coup was being seriously canvassed, it was even thought necessary to introduce the Count Casimir and his more aristocratic supporters to members of the British royal family, while articles and paid advertisements to popularise his movement appeared in the British Press. As the Count and Colonel was at this time threatening death and execution to the leaders of French democracy, the attitude of benevolence towards him among certain circles in our own country was perhaps a little strange.

It must be remembered, however, that the Colonel is " good form," and very fashionable among circles frequented in France by British millionaires in search of good manners and British aristocrats in search of a good time.

If the Colonel and his armed bands are a political force, it is pertinent to ask what is their programme. And here's the rub, for beyond brave words and great desires

the Croix de Feu have none. In the summer of 1935 a few of the more intelligent leaders tried to provide one, but it was coldly received by their leader and ended with their resignation, or expulsion as the Colonel preferred it to be called.

But let the Colonel speak for himself. An interviewer who asked what was the social, economic and foreign programme of the movement received this answer :

" We are defenders of order. We defend the family, workers and work itself, whatever kind it may be. We shall defend everything which affects the spiritual and material health of the country. We shall not defend either parliamentary combinations or the numerous secret forces which try under different forms to exploit for their own ends the healthy forces in the country, nor shall we defend a motionless and selfish capitalism. We even wish to break them once for all.

" We do not want to use the term ' programme,' which implies a convenient turn of mind for parties, candidates and ambitious persons. . . . Wise, independent, disinterested, obstinate and determined men set themselves a direction which they keep to, observing and preparing for every possibility, making the best of each circumstance. It is in this spirit that the ' Croix de Feu,' after forming their own mysticism, developing and imposing it, have set themselves a general line, and day by day choose their precise objectives according to the line marked out."

The gallant Colonel told his interviewers that some people considered this too vague, others too precise. In short, you can pay your penny and you take your choice. In so far as it is possible to dig up anything concrete from the mass of high-flown and sometimes illiterate

verbiage of the movement and its leader, the objectives of the Croix de Feu appear to be roughly the same as those of the Right parties in general.

The clearest formulation of a Right programme has come from Monsieur André Tardieu, colleague of Poincaré, and three times Prime Minister of a Government of National Union (though his three terms of office did not make more than thirteen months in all). Monsieur Tardieu wishes to reform the State so as to give the President power of dissolution, to deprive deputies of the right to introduce financial measures on their own initiative, confining this privilege to the Government, to give the vote to women and to introduce a " consultative plebiscite " on " ideas."

He wishes, in addition, to deprive the numerous class of State servants of the right to participate in politics and to substitute " professional associations " for their present free trade unions. He would also deprive them of the right to strike.

Gaston Doumergue, called to power after February 6th, announced his intention of carrying out a reform of the State along these lines. He survived the announcement for a few days only. The fact is, that the reforms, harmless as some of them may appear, or even necessary, are intended to be a mask for dictatorial rule with the Chamber suspended or else completely subservient.

The referendum in such conditions becomes the same thing as an election in Nazi Germany, while the formation of a national bloc in Parliament would merely, in such circumstances, be the prelude to the suppression of the Left altogether and the establishment of single party rule. This, indeed, is what Colonel de la Rocque hopes to achieve. He wants a nation " reconciled," in which

political parties, other than his own, will no longer exist, and a government based on such a single-party regime backed up by a powerful army.

Having achieved this, the gallant Count would break off France's pact with the Soviet Union and propose a "reformed" agreement to the smaller States of Eastern Europe, backed up by a Franco-German alliance. This diplomatic dream is shared by many French political leaders who are not usually reckoned as Fascist. It is the policy of Laval, and it is being eagerly canvassed on the Right ever since Hitler's coup on the Rhineland failed to meet any effective opposition from the Locarno Powers and the League of Nations.

It sees Europe dominated by a Franco-German alliance, in which Germany would seek territorial expansion eastward, while France would dominate south and south-eastern Europe.

In internal politics the Fascist movements and the Right in general, are vague when it comes to details, very concrete on matters of principle. Count Casimir de la Rocque, the pensioner of Baron de Wendel, descendant of the de la Rocque who was an *émigré* at Coblenz during the Great Revolution, as was the ancestor of the de Wendel family, has as his final aim the "liquidation" of that revolution which deprived his ancestors of their estates and feudal privileges. The ambition is not a small one. But the heart of the Colonel is stronger than his head. If one could overthrow a regime by fanatical courage, by military organisation, by ambition, by an inflated opinion of one's own "mystical" power, the descendant of the Royalist counter-revolutionary would ruling France to-morrow.

But in the twentieth century one needs other things,

the help of cunning and clever politicians, the certain backing of big capital, a favourable international situation, a programme to win the masses and blind them to the harsh realities of the future, the assistance of the army and police, or at least their benevolent neutrality. Unfortunately in France the Right have never been able to produce either a programme or a leader. French Conservatism, unlike British, has lacked men of talent and ability to lead. These have been almost the monopoly of the Left which has also furnished (through desertion) most of the few Statesmen of any ability that the Right has ever possessed.

Can French capitalism, should it feel unable to postpone the establishment of an open Fascist dictatorship, furnish the Croix de Feu with all these essential things which it now lacks so completely? To answer that question it is necessary to see what have been the consequences of February 6th on the other side, among the popular masses and the parties of the Left.

CHAPTER VI

THE ORIGIN OF THE PEOPLE'S FRONT

On November 8th, 1934, the Doumergue Government fell and was replaced, after a six months' inter-regnum under Monsieur Pierre-Etienne Flandin, by that of Laval. "Papa" Doumergue, with his red face, his beret, and his strong words, was a sham, a kind of imitation Clemenceau without the immense experience, clear brain and endless ability to manœuvre patiently of "The Tiger." As the hope of reaction, the aged Gascon statesman, dug out of his retirement, was a sad disappointment. He did not understand, and his supporters also did not understand, that what beat him was not a sudden change of combination among "fickle" and "corrupt" parliamentarians, but something new in French political life.

Doumergue was put in power by the unconstitutional Fascist coup of February 6th. He was put out by the forces which showed their strength for the first time on February 9th and again during the General Strike of the 12th, by the real French nation which had revived in the face of counter-revolution two great traditions, that of 1789–95 and that of the Paris Commune of 1871.

Laval, the new Prime Minister, is perhaps the most astute of living politicians. He has a considerable, if exaggerated, view of his own abilities, and is likely to play again an important part in his country's history, so

it is not out of place to attempt here a summary of his character.

A provincial, like most successful French politicians, he is also a small-town lawyer. He bears the marks of his origin in a strong accent and a certain cheerful vulgarity which never deserts him. He began life as a Socialist on the revolutionary wing. During the War he was one of the small minority in France which in 1915 and 1916 attempted to rebuild the International on a revolutionary basis and he accepted the platform of opposition to the War put forward by the two Left-wing conferences at Zimmerwald and Kienthal in Switzerland.

It will be remembered that it was in the manifestoes of these conferences and their very important decisions that the influence of Russian Bolshevism first became a leading one in the world Labour movement. The spirit of Lenin, then an exile in Switzerland, dominated both, and with infinite patience brought together the revolutionary minorities in the warring countries on to a common platform.

Laval, therefore, even more than MacDonald, to whom he bears a superficial resemblance, was identified during the War with revolutionary defeatism. The position was neither profitable nor pleasant, and we may therefore believe that he was animated by some passion and sincerity. After the split in the French Socialist Party at Tours in December, 1920, he went, however, with the Right-wing minority.

As official legal adviser to the French Reformist Unions (Confédération générale du travail, or C.G.T.), he found a post suited to his talents. A poor man, he rapidly became a very rich one, with a fortune estimated at some six million francs. He was never known to take a case

into court, where it could be avoided, and usually it was avoided. His contacts with big business grew closer and more intimate as his personal position became more progressively prosperous.

In France the trade unions are not connected with the Socialist Party, and it was therefore not difficult for the astute little lawyer to make yet another change of party. Almost imperceptibly he drifted through the various stages into the ranks of "Independent" Radicals. He has always managed to avoid the unpleasantness associated with a spectacular break from former allegiances, just as he has managed to make a quiet and unspectacular entry into the ranks of the wealthy.

Without culture, ignorant of world affairs, he is nevertheless the possessor of sufficient superficial knowledge of both men and affairs to impose upon himself and others the illusion of statesmanship. If his bargaining is often crude, as in the famous "free hand" given to Mussolini in Abyssinia at the beginning of 1935, it is usually sufficiently shrewd. It is not, after all, Monsieur Laval's fault that the complex and dangerous world of to-day sometimes demands deeper penetration, more exhaustive knowledge and subtler policies than those which have served him so well in his progress from small-town lawyer to millionaire Premier.

When one adds that his snobbery (he has acquired a Papal title of Count and married his daughter with flamboyant splendour to another Count of older lineage) and his meanness are among the most popular jokes of the French music-hall, you have the engaging portrait of the French Prime Minister who has made more noise in history than any since Poincaré.

Flandin fell because he defied the Bank of France and

refused to bring in further deflationary measures. Laval was pledged to do what Flandin refused. His Government was one of National Union, but inclined to the Left, for it included five Radical-Socialist Ministers, led by the influential Edouard Herriot, Chairman of the Party. The presence of these five, and of Frossard, ex-Communist and ex-Socialist, was considered a guarantee that the new Government would pursue a moderate policy at home and abroad.

But the Radicals were mere prisoners of State, hostages given to the Bank of France. Laval from the first made it clear that his sympathies were on the Right, that in Foreign policy he aimed at an agreement with the Fascist dictators, Hitler and Mussolini, while at home he was going to be amiably tolerant to the Fascist leagues, the men of February 6th, whose assistance might prove essential in carrying through his deflationary measures.

Doumergue, in 1934, against vigorous protests, had already carried through economy cuts of 5 per cent. Laval proposed to make new cuts of 10 per cent. and to govern, for the period in which they were to be introduced, without Parliament, by means of " decree-laws," or Orders-in-Council.

The bulk of the deflationary decrees were published in July and August of 1935. They affected all State employees, persons in receipt of pensions, and employees of concerns in receipt of State subsidies. Though the cuts were nominally of 10 per cent., through the suppression of bonuses, housing allowances and other extras, in many cases they went as high as 19 per cent. These sweeping measures affected all State and municipal employees, transport workers, seamen, dock and arsenal workers, tobacco workers, ex-servicemen, even the workers of

those industrial concerns under private management which receive some form of State subsidy.

Rents were reduced 10 per cent. by the decrees, efforts to cut the price of gas and electricity by the same amount and to reduce the prices of certain foodstuffs were also made. The results, however, of these efforts could not be felt by those affected owing to the many loopholes left for evasion. In any case, the loss of income was much greater than the proposed cut in prices. Moreover, the peasants were given no guarantee against a fall in prices, while no method of touching the great contracting and wholesale firms was put forward.

A promise, since proved quite illusory, was made to put a tax on munition makers, while the peasant was given a 10 per cent. reduction in farm rents and a cut in the interest rate on mortgages. But since the War farm rents have risen as much as 600 and 700 per cent., and the peasant was demanding, not a 10 per cent. reduction, but a 200 per cent. reduction and the revalorisation of his produce.

The shopkeepers saw at once that the decrees would hit them badly by decreasing drastically an already low purchasing power, while they had to reduce retail prices and continue to buy wholesale at the old prices from middlemen who escaped unscathed from this orgy of national "sacrifice." Ex-servicemen were no less roused at the attacks on their pensions, while the munition makers and wealthy capitalists whom they had defended were exempted from sacrifice.

Perhaps the biggest mockery of all was the "gesture" aimed against financial corruption. It attacked certain malpractices of share speculators and made things awkward for the fraudulent bankrupt, but the big men,

the bankers, great insurance houses and the trusts were evidently considered as above reproach, for no measure attacked their profits or limited their privileges.

Doumergue had fallen at the beginning of November, 1934, before the pressure of popular indignation. Flandin, who succeeded him, was a moderate Conservative, looking to the Left for support. He declared his intention of "deflating greed," whereat greed, just to teach him the art of government, promptly deflated him. Piérre Laval, coming into office at the beginning of June, had served in the previous administrations as Foreign Minister and had grown to think of himself as Briand's natural and permanent successor, with the mission of liquidating Briand's policy.

His leanings towards the French Fascist leagues, his friendly co-operation in foreign affairs with Mussolini, which he wished to round off by an agreement with Hitler, and his obvious efforts to prevent the ratification of the Franco-Soviet pact of mutual assistance, had already made him suspect to the democratic Left.

The fact that he succeeded to the Premiership in place of a man who was dismissed by the Bank of France because he would not consent to impose further burdens on the people in addition to those made by the Doumergue Government, and that he intended to govern by decree-law instead of through Parliament, was a definite challenge to the country, and above all to the working-class. Laval was known to be an expert politician, skilled in the intrigues of the lobbies and a dizzying performer upon the Parliamentary tight-rope. He was to need all his agility in the coming months. No doubt history will be content to find a place for him as the man of self-styled

Left sympathies who by his reliance upon the anti-democratic forces in French politics succeeded in uniting the Left against him in the popular front which brought his downfall.

CHAPTER VII

THE WORKING-CLASS ACHIEVES UNITY

THE French working-class in the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century led the emancipatory struggle in Europe. It gave great thinkers to world Socialism and its revolutionary traditions were unequalled. Saint-Simon, Fourier, Babeuf, are names which date from the great Revolution of the eighteenth century, though it was not till later that their influence was felt. It was the silk weavers of Lyon who in 1832 made the first armed attack by working men on the economic privileges of their masters and gave to the world an example of sacrifice and heroism, expressed in their song " We will working live or fighting die," which was later to inspire their class in every country of the world.

Socialism, as a doctrine, is a French creation. Marx and Engels built up their great work by using the ideas of the French Utopians as one of its three component parts. In June, 1848, the Paris workers by their revolt made clear, as Marx liked to emphasise, the reality behind the new capitalist democracy. In 1871 those same Paris workers were the first in all history to establish their own power, though for a brief time only. But the Commune exhausted them. When they had recovered from the blow of its defeat, the world leadership of the workers had passed to Germany, and from Germany it went to

Russia. In the capitalist world of to-day it has come back again to France, the consequence of the events of February 6th, 1934.

The proposal for united action against the Fascist danger was made by the national conference of the French Communists in June, 1934. It was not accepted by the Socialists. Meanwhile, however, in Paris and district unity of Socialists and Communists was already an accomplished fact. Finally the Socialists proposed a pact of "non-aggression" between the parties, discussions reopened, and on July 27th an agreement for united action was signed.

The agreement gave back its full vigour and life to the French workers' movement. The fall of the Doumergue Government seemed to be the sign that it must succeed in destroying finally all traces of the Fascist adventure of February 6th in French social life. A great part in the growth of the anti-Fascist front now began to be played also by the intellectuals.

It is difficult to explain why it is that in France the people of the country respect their writers, painters, scientists and philosophers. A respect for the intellectual life is as deeply ingrained in the average Frenchman as in the Scot, even though in France, as in Scotland, the intellectual is considered to be improved by the chastening influence of poverty. Certainly the names of Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland have played a great part in the resurrection of militant democracy before the menace of Fascism to civilisation.

A vigilance committee of intellectuals formed after the events of February has succeeded in rallying to its side most of the considerable names in French scholarship and science, while the cultural organisations of writers and

artists have also succeeded in rallying to them most of those French artists and writers with great European reputations.

André Malraux has expressed the effect of this energetic movement of the French workers on the intellectuals when he wrote that "Communism has restored his fertility to man."

The Radical-Socialists themselves were rapidly affected by this movement. The approach of the municipal elections in May, 1935, and the fear that a divided Left would allow the Fascists to win invaluable strong points to cover their illegal arming through the capturing of the municipalities, brought Radicals, Socialists and Communists together in an electoral agreement. The result was a triumph for the anti-Fascists and particularly for the Communists who won control of 297 councils as against 150 in 1929. In Paris the Communist Party had much the highest vote (99,877) though the reactionary Democratic Republican Union with 98,534 votes won the largest number of seats (Communists 8, U.R.D. 21).

The case of Paris is particularly interesting. For many years the city has been the centre of French reaction, anti-Republican and anti-democratic in its political sympathies. The gradual removal of industries to the suburbs has left it an administrative, trading and luxury centre, without a strong working-class. The city of the Commune has been transformed into the home of French reaction.

The municipal elections showed that the anti-Fascist forces which had grown up since February 6th had won back Paris for French democracy. Owing to the grossly unfair arrangement of seats (a small arrondissement of hotels and luxury buildings returns more members than

the popular quarters of the east and north-east) the majority remained in Fascist hands, with the notorious Chiappe as Chairman of the Council, but the Left parties had the bulk of the votes and an important minority of the seats. In the outer suburbs the Socialist and Communist triumph was complete.

The County Council elections later in the year brought fresh victories to this spontaneously organised People's Front of the three parties. It remained to give the organisation firm and legal justification. The assumption of office by Laval and the threat of new decree laws was the occasion for this.

A committee of representatives of the three Parties was formed in order to organise throughout France great meetings of Republican defence (" For Bread, Peace and Liberty ") on July 14th, the national holiday and anniversary of the capture of the Bastille by the people of Paris in 1789. In Paris two meetings preceded the great rally of July 14th, a united youth meeting in the Salle Bullier on the evening of July 13th, and the " Assize of Peace and Liberty " at the Buffalo Sports Stadium on the morning of the 14th.

Certain features of these meetings are worth recording. The youth meeting was packed to suffocation in the hot July night and the young people were both ardent and noisy, full of the restless energy of those who feel they are riding the crest of one of the waves of history. A singer from the Opera in between the speeches gave selections from the repertoire of the songs of France's past revolutions. When it came to the turn of the Great Revolution, " Ça Ira " and " La Carmagnole " were sung with tumultuous delight. And then he began the Marseillaise.

At once there were cries and jeers ; he was singing the song of French militarism and imperialism. For a split second it looked as though the meeting would end in a riot, and then quickly and spontaneously the revolutionary discipline of these young people reasserted itself. The whole audience suddenly rose to its feet and sang the national hymn with clenched fists and arms upraised in the Red Front salute. They had remembered its origin.

The next day there were two official hymns at the great demonstration—the Marseillaise and the Internationale. A few months later, at Lyon, the Secretary of the Communist Party, Maurice Thorez, speaking to the Congress of his party said :

" We have taken up again the verses of Liberty, and have applied to the Fascists, the enemies of the French people, the words of Rouget de l'Isle :

> " Ils viennent jusque dans nos bras
> Egorger nos fils et nos compagnes."

At the Assize of Liberty delegations from every provincial city met to take the oath which was to be put to the great demonstration to be held in the afternoon. Professor Jean Perrin (a Nobel Prize-winner), in a burning speech, warned the people to be on their guard against bourgeois encroachment on proletarian victories, and quoted Joan of Arc, daughter of the people, deserted by her King and burned by priests and now canonised by the bourgeoisie of to-day.

Jacques Duclos (Propaganda Secretary of the French Communist Party) met with a tremendous ovation when he declared : " In the tricolour we see the symbol of the fight of the past, and in our Red Flag the present struggle

and future victory. We Communists are the heirs of the glorious revolutionary tradition of our country. Forward, citizens of France! Fascism shall not break through!"

This is the oath which was sworn and repeated in the afternoon by the half-million men and women who marched through the Place de la Bastille:

"We swear to remain united, to defend democracy, to disarm and dissolve the Fascist Leagues, to put our liberties beyond the reach of Fascism.

"We swear on this day on which the first victory of the Republic lives again, to defend the democratic liberties won by the people of France, to give bread to the toilers, work to the youth, and a great human peace to the world."

Whilst these dense columns were marching through Paris, at the other end of the city, along the fashionable Champs Elysées, the Fascist bands were marching to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, in the name of "national solidarity." But it was difficult not to feel, that burning summer afternoon, that the real unity of the nation was already achieved and marching through the Bastille Square, where once stood the monument of feudal tyranny. Socialist and Communist workers, Radical shopkeepers and Civil Servants, writers, artists, teachers and scientists, men and women of all ages and classes, passed through in deep, unending columns, from three in the afternoon till eight o'clock at night.

On the Monday morning after this great people's demonstration of July 14th in Paris, the reactionary Press all sang the same tune. "You see how united France is! De la Rocque sang the Marseillaise. The People's Front sang the Marseillaise. Everyone enjoyed

himself, there was no violence, only devotion to the country, expressed in slightly different accents."

At the same time, of course, they tried to minimise the success of the People's Front.

But on Tuesday the tune was changed.

The demonstrations, it appears, were different after all. De la Rocque and the Fiery Cross were military and patriotic, the Popular Front were dull, revolutionary and disorderly.

" They were not picturesque," wrote Henri Bordeaux, novelist of the infidelities of the French bourgeoisie, and pillar of the Academy, after viewing the great procession at the Bastille.

No, the People's Front was not picturesque.

To a man who has made a fortune writing novels about " he and she and he," or " she and he and she," there was nothing picturesque in the war-wounded in their invalid chairs, the men with their faces half torn away, the war-widows in black, wearing the decorations of their dead husbands, the forest of banners of ex-servicemen's organisations which led the procession. This was " dull."

Nor, of course, could he see anything very interesting in the officers of the Army Reserve, their tricolour flag with a red Phrygian cap on top, who marched together with the workers. These men were Republicans, descendants of the victors of Jemappes and Valmy, were solid, middle-aged, upright figures.

Yet in spite of themselves, Henri Bordeaux and the other scribblers of the reactionary Press noticed many interesting things.

They noticed that this great mass of half a million men, women and children was gay and good humoured. They

noticed that they did not treat their leaders with awe or undue reverence. On the march, when the supporters of the Radical leader Daladier cried out " Daladier au pouvoir " (" Put Daladier in Office "), his friends caught up the little man and tossed him gaily in the air.

Thorez, the Communist leader, an ex-miner, young and burly as a professional footballer, did not feel it necessary to scowl like Mussolini or Hitler.

He smiled broadly at this friendly human mass, his own flesh and blood, fellow-workers and fighters.

As the procession swept down the Faubourg St. Antoine, storm centre of the great revolution of 1789–93, a street of small shopkeepers, petty traders and little furniture workshops, the reception was tumultuous.

M. Henri Bordeaux felt much more at home watching the Fascist march to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier under the Arc de Triomphe. The Fascists marched in step, they marched quicker, and they did not sing.

They had a leader also. The famous novelist could see that at once. Not merely because he marched alone, a gap of twenty paces fore and aft of his sacred person. but because, you see, he looked like a leader should, a drawn face, dreaming eyes, a supple step.

No wonder all the bourgeois women risked tearing their fine silk stockings as they climbed not very gracefully on to the café chairs to watch him march by.

Some were disappointed that he was not taller. Others felt his nose was rather large. But then he is a colonel, and colonels must have big noses, or what should one respect in them ?

On the whole though, they agreed with M. Bordeaux,

whose novels they read so eagerly, that he looked their ideal of a leader of men.

No one could claim that this crowd of a hundred thousand in which women predominated, gathered in the fashionable streets near the Etoile, was either gay or good-humoured.

But how they cheered when the Fascist troops appeared! Vive de la Rocque! Vive le dictateur! This was their only cry. Long live the dictator!

Who are the French Fascists? From the march past it is clear they are not a real mass movement, that they have no social programme. The kernel of the march was the 10,000 ex-servicemen, including priests and officers in uniform in their ranks. Their bearing was impressive, their discipline excellent.

The 15,000 or 20,000 "National Guards," who are the youth movement of the Croix de Feu, are a joke compared to these men—merely middle-class youths who follow the drum.

An incident at the official military parade of the morning was significant. The Croix de Feu were there as spectators. When President Lebrun appeared to take the salute they greeted him with cries of "Vive de la Rocque."

When Premier Laval came to his side they shouted: "Vive de la Rocque et Laval." That Laval was secretly in relation with the Fascists no one could doubt.

Will these two forces ever meet, the People's Front and the Croix de Feu? asked M. Henri Bordeaux in the *Echo de Paris*. He evaded the question and told us that France does not want Fascism, but that we must have "responsible authority, an *élite*," otherwise the country will die.

Perhaps it will really die, this France of M. Henri

Bordeaux, the France which persecuted Dreyfus (who died the night before this parade), the France of the Versailles Treaty, the France of Stavisky.

But in its place another France not unknown to history will win new life, the France of the Jacobins, of the June days of 1848, of the Commune, the France of the People's Front.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIGHT FOR BREAD

THE economic crisis, combined with a difficult external position demanding the expenditure of great sums on armaments and fortifications, has placed a heavy burden of taxation on the French people. The cost of living has risen steeply if we take into account the growth of unemployment and the decline in wages. From 1930 to 1934 wages, in general, fell by 24 per cent. and industrial wages by 30 per cent. According to some statistics the cost of living index for the same period fell by 17 per cent., according to others by 11 per cent. The second half of 1935, the period of the Laval Government and the decree-laws, saw in any case a sharp rise in the cost of living index from 407 to 435.

In such conditions the economic struggle of the workers has assumed great importance. It has been particularly sharp in the mining and textile regions of the north, among the dockyard and harbour workers, and the agricultural labourers of the south.

In the post-war period many of the strike struggles of the French workers have ended in defeat because of the division in the ranks of the organised workers between the reformist (confederated) trade unions and the revolutionary (unitary) unions. The former, with roughly half a million members, was the stronger, but in certain important industries the Unitary federation of labour was

also very strong, particularly among the railwaymen and the Paris metal workers. It counted something like three hundred thousand members. There are also small "Christian" unions in certain parts of the country, but the total of organised workers only amounted, in 1934, to about one in ten of all wage earners.

The unification of the two main trade union bodies into one, the "Confédération générale du travail reunifiée" (Re-united General Confederation of Labour) and the consequent increase in membership as a result of the growing confidence of the workers in their organisations, is a most important stage in the revival of French democracy and the building up of the People's Front.

When negotiations between the two bodies first began in 1934, the official view of the reformist body (the C.G.T.) was that unity could not be conceived under any other form than that of the complete disbandment of the revolutionary unions (C.G.T.U.) and the unconditional entry of their members into the C.G.T. Gradually, however, this position was found to be an impossible one to maintain, and step by step the Reformist leaders abandoned their opposition, as each side made concessions, till in March of this year the two bodies finally merged at the Congress of Toulouse.

The initiative for unity came from the Unitary body during the summer of 1934 at the time when the Doumergue Government issued its first economy decrees cutting wages and salaries.

The C.G.T.U. proposed common action against the emergency decrees, for the right to strike and on behalf of the unemployed, including the organisation of great demonstrations in the chief industrial centres, the calling of a twenty-four hours' protest strike, and the linking of

the movement with that of the miners, then engaged in a struggle with the employers. The leaders of the C.G.T. returned a complete refusal to discuss any kind of united action save on the condition of the disbandment of the C.G.T.U.

The latter, however, already felt certain that it would be impossible for the C.G.T. to maintain this attitude and at once set to work on drawing up the practical bases for the fusion of the two organisations. Why did they have this confidence that their unity policy must eventually be seriously discussed by the C.G.T.? Because the rank and file of the C.G.T. itself was already on the march towards unity and the situation in the country admitted of no compromise in the matter.

Political unity between Socialist and Communist parties was already a fact, and this naturally had its effect upon the rank and file trade unionists in both bodies. Certainly the difficulties in uniting were great. The Communist unions admitted the political leadership of the Communist party and had a fair degree of centralised leadership. The tradition of the reformist unions was syndicalist, one of freedom from control by any political party and a considerable degree of local autonomy.

Trade union unity began to develop through the practical fusion of local " syndicats " or district unions, a fusion which their autonomous constitution made possible, however strongly it might be discouraged from above.

The movement at first was strongest in the railway unions and in the course of a year, between August, 1934, and August, 1935, 90,000 railwaymen had created united organisations on all the chief lines of the French railroads. When the body is united it is not possible for the heads

to remain separated, and it was clearly only a question of time before the leadership of the rail unions also reunited. Rail workers were followed by postal workers and teachers, so that unity, naturally enough, first grew among those State employees whose conditions were directly attacked by the emergency decrees of Doumergue and Laval.

This local movement for unity, though disapproved of and condemned by the C.G.T. leaders, spread rapidly, and the syndicalist traditions of local autonomy were too strong to allow of direct interference from above.

In August, 1934, after the first economy decrees, the Teachers' Union of the C.G.T. at its Annual Congress in Nice called for direct negotiations for unity between the two bodies. The two railway unions likewise asked the C.G.T. and C.G.T.U. to meet to discuss the practical method for fusing the organisations from top to bottom. The C.G.T. refused to meet the revolutionary unions and again denounced the spontaneous movement for forming local single unions as being actually an obstacle to unity.

However, feeling was now too strong to be ignored, and in October, 1934, while the two executives were meeting simultaneously, delegations were exchanged and the Reformist body finally declared their readiness to discuss unity on the basis of the exclusion of the influence of all political parties from the unions and the voluntary dissolution of the existing local unions which had carried through fusion as a result of the movement from below initiated by the Communists.

The first step was taken, and the two bodies were now engaged in direct negotiation. The demand for direct dissolution of the united bodies was temporarily dropped,

but in its place the demand was maintained that the national unity congress should be called to discuss trade union unity only on the basis of the existing statutes of the C.G.T. and of affiliation to the Amsterdam Trade Union International.

Agreement was reached on the right of *trade union democracy*, the right of every member to express and fight for his own point of view. Nevertheless, the C.G.T.U. had to declare regretfully that the demand that unity should only be on the basis of the rules and constitution of the C.G.T. and the Amsterdam International was in itself a violation of trade union democracy and an obstacle to unity.

Upon this rock it seemed for a long time as though negotiations would founder. Direct meetings ceased between the two bodies and the C.G.T. affected to see only a Communist manœuvre in the united unions which had already been created locally. But the movement was growing ever more powerful, and at the beginning of December, 1934, the executive of the Public Services Union (Municipal Employees), one of the strongest sections of the C.G.T., declared in favour of commissions of unity being set up from the leadership (national and local) of both organisations to work out the methods of fusion. This proposal was at once accepted by the C.G.T.U., but the reformists still made no response.

At the beginning of 1935, however, the approach of the anniversary of February 6th, and of the anti-Fascist general strike of February 12th, called for immediate action. The C.G.T. refused a united front demonstration to commemorate this anniversary, and in addition violently attacked the Government of the U.S.S.R. for its shooting of the terrorists involved in the Kirov murder.

But despite this provocative refusal, negotiations, under the pressure of the membership, were resumed and this time began to concentrate around the question of political influence and of "fraction work" in the unions. Throughout the spring it looked as though the obstinate resistance of the reformist leaders to unity would succeed in sabotaging the movement and direct meetings again ceased.

May Day gave a fresh impulse from below and in many districts the two organisations struck work and demonstrated together. The C.G.T.U. refused in face of this clear signal of the feelings of the workers to give up the struggle and consented to make even further sacrifices in the cause of unity by removing every possible obstacle. Since the question of fractions was declared by the C.G.T. to be chief of these obstacles, in a declaration of June 6th, 1935, the C.G.T.U. declared in favour of unions "absolutely independent of the employers, the Government and of parties," while accepting the basis of class struggle.

The C.G.T., faced by this concession, had no choice but to resume negotiations. By the beginning of July, agreement had been reached on the question of proportional representation of the two sides in the new confederation and on the question of fractions. On July 14th, the leaders of both bodies marched together in the demonstration of the People's Front.

At the beginning of August the two teachers' unions decided, amid great enthusiasm, to fuse, with the consequence that a further meeting of the central negotiating committee was then held. Here the C.G.T.U. proposed that both bodies urge their respective Internationals to unite—the R.I.L.U. and I.F.T.U.—but no decision was reached on this question, though it was agreed that

another meeting take place before the two organisations held their national congresses in September.

These two congresses exchanged delegations, and finally, to the intense satisfaction of the rank and file on both sides, decided to proceed with the complete fusion of the two bodies. At the beginning of March this year the first congress of the new, reunited Confederation, was held, and some very important and interesting decisions taken.

Though the proposal of the Communist delegates that affiliation to the Internationals at Moscow and Amsterdam should be maintained simultaneously was defeated in favour of affiliation to Amsterdam only, as also was a proposal to change the statutes of the C.G.T., a united decision was reached to accept the social programme of the People's Front, while struggling for its enlargement and development along Socialist lines.

This programme is one of a democratic and enlightened capitalism, calling for sweeping reforms in the country affecting some of the most important privileges of the capitalist class. It demands the nationalisation of the Bank of France, control of the arms industry, complete freedom of Press and meeting, and the cleansing of journalism from its worst forms of corruption through breaking the power of the advertisers, calls for the revalorisation (by subsidy) of agricultural prices, the dissolution of the Fascist leagues, the introduction of a forty-hour week without reduction of wages, and the maintenance of full freedom of trade union organisation.

The old C.G.T. had a "plan" of its own which proposed a big programme of public works, certain measures of nationalisation on the lines of the "public corporations" of the British Labour Party and almost

certainly implied devaluation of the currency and controlled inflation. The plan, which remains in being, is, in fact, a mixture of our own Labour Party programme, Lloyd George's Council of Action plan, and the schemes of various credit enthusiasts for abolishing "poverty in the midst of plenty."

Moreover, the general effect of the entry of the Communists into the new trade union body and their sharing in the national leadership, even as a minority, has undoubtedly been to put this curious plan rather into the background and to make the trade unions a real and important factor in the People's Front. Unity has already increased membership to over a million, and there is no organised force in the country which can equal this disciplined army of industrial workers, now the very core and centre of the People's Front.

That the French reformist trade union leaders have learned many lessons which were rejected by their German colleagues with fatal results, and which are still rejected by their British colleagues, is clear. Their love for Communism is no greater than that of Sir Walter Citrine, but experience has shown them that Fascism is not to be played with and that it cannot be defeated by divided forces.

They have already, when the unions were still split, called one general strike against Fascism. Now that they are united, now that the Communists have proved their perfect loyalty to the principles of unity, the new Federation of Labour, which counts the Communists, Frachon and Racamond, among the members of its National Executive, would hardly hesitate to strike again and even more effectively against a repetition of the threat.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIGHT FOR PEACE

SINCE Hitler's coup of March 7th, when the echo of the goosestep was again heard on the frontiers of France and Belgium, many misunderstandings have arisen between the peoples of France and Britain, misunderstandings all too plainly to the satisfaction of the Nazi disturbers of the peace for their origin to be anything but suspect. The cry that France forgets nothing and learns nothing, that there is no sincere desire for a reconciliation with the German people, has been raised most loudly in two quarters.

One of these quarters is the reactionary, pro-Fascist section of the British Press represented by the interests of Lord Rothermere, who desires an Anglo-German alliance and British toleration for German aggression in the East. The other quarter, very surprisingly, is represented by that section of the Press which has always advocated collective security through the League, which supported the Peace Ballot and has, in general, been opposed to Fascism and all forms of reaction. Unlike the Rothermere papers, this second group (*News-Chronicle*, *Daily Herald*, *Manchester Guardian*) took a very strong line with regard to Italian aggression against Abyssinia.

It would be a mistake to imagine that the Liberal-Labour panic at Hitler's action and the subsequent

attacks on French policy, as opposed to their righteous denunciation of Mussolini, were entirely caused by the difference that Mussolini's action in Africa was a direct threat to British Imperial interests. Suspicious foreigners might think this to be the case and have good grounds for believing it, but they would be wrong if they ignored the equally strong factors of British liberal pacifism and British sentimentality.

Mussolini's outrage against peace did not immediately threaten a European war. Hitler's does. The British Liberal can afford to be righteous when it is merely a matter of concentrating the Fleet in the Mediterranean, for no one seriously believed in Mussolini's threats against the sanctionist Powers. But Hitler is a different matter. Here it might, in fact, be necessary to make real sacrifices for peace and, in effect, to have the courage to tell the people of the country that in the end only collective force can make collective security effective.

This is understood well enough by many of those who voted in the Peace Ballot much better than by the newspapers which claim to represent them. It is summed up perfectly by a conversation between two railwaymen, overheard on a bus by the author. They were talking of Hitler and of the Italian army's use of gas in Ethiopia.

"There's only one way," said the first railwayman, "that's to tell 'em straight we're not having any."

"Aye, and make 'em do as they're told," added his companion, "same as we have to do as we're told when we're at work."

That is the essence of the doctrine of collective security, well understood by the working man who accepts the discipline of the railway or factory. It is understood and believed in as well by the workers of France as by those

of Britain. It will be enforced when the peoples of Britain and France, despite their newspaper press, understand it as a whole.

To gain that understanding it is necessary to follow the development of French foreign policy in the last year and a half, as well as that of our own country. We must bear in mind that this policy has not had the approval of the French democracy as a whole, and that in fighting against it they have been fighting for the peace of nations, fighting our fight as well as theirs. The view of the People's Front on questions of foreign policy is essentially that of the Peace Ballot in Britain. If the eleven and a half million Peace Balloters were responsible for the dismissal of Sir Samuel Hoare, then the fall of Premier Laval less than a month later was equally the work of the People's Front.

Laval's policy was a simple one, but it could hardly be called a pacific or a wise one. It was to guarantee French security by an alliance with Italy and an agreement with Germany. He was not particularly interested in the inclusion of Britain in his German agreement, understanding perfectly well that the effect of this agreement would be to bring Britain to heel on his own terms.

He knew quite well that in order to achieve his two agreements with the Fascist powers he must be prepared to give them freedom of action in certain spheres—Italy in Ethiopia and Germany in the east of Europe, though not, of course, through Austria and down the Danube Valley, where French interests are centred. Laval hoped that the German blow would be directed through the Baltic lands against the Soviet Union.

To ally France with two Powers bent on war was hardly a sane course for a Power desirous of preserving

the peace of her own frontiers. Laval considered the Italian alliance would be sufficient guarantee against any German attempt to damage French interests in either the West or the East of Europe. The French General Staff, however, had other views on this, for they were better acquainted with Italy's military worth than Pierre Laval. An agreement with Italy was important for them because it removed a threat from France's southern frontier and made a barrier, even though imperfect, against a Nazi conquest of Austria.

But such an alliance in itself was quite insufficient to protect France against a possible German aggression. It is true that British policy favoured a French agreement with Italy at all costs, but to complete that agreement by an arrangement with Germany which left Germany free to pursue its aggressive aims in Eastern Europe, was to sign France's own death warrant. Clear-sighted Frenchmen could have no illusions as to who would get the most out of such a partnership. They had no illusions that German Fascism's eastern aims might be confined, as Laval fondly imagined, to limited and minor objectives, or canalised against the Soviet Union.

As opposed to the Laval policy of alliance with the Fascist Powers and support of reaction in Europe, there was another possible policy for France: the support of peace through collective security inside the League of Nations. This policy happened to be that desired by the majority of the French people, it was the policy to which the Radical Ministers in the Laval Government, and particularly Herriot, were pledged, and it was a policy which gave France the possibility of winning the support of the great Socialist democracy of the U.S.S.R., the strongest Power in Eastern Europe, and it also gave

greater hopes than any other of winning support from the British people.

For both military and political reasons, therefore, a League policy seemed to be the best for French interests. There are some shrewd political minds in the French military staff. Whatever their private political views they understand that France cannot defend herself with a disunited people, and that Fascism at home divides France. They see clearly that to tie France to German policy is to make France a second-rate Power. They understand that France's frontiers and European peace (and the two are really the same thing, as Laval did not understand) are best secured by collective security based on mutual assistance.

The framework of such a system of security would lie in two pacts, a Western Pact, an amplified Locarno, and an Eastern Pact, Germany should be an integral part of such a system by adhering to the obligations of both pacts.

For once certain French militarists found their views coinciding with those of advanced democracy throughout Europe. True, they would be prepared to abandon these views in favour of open military alliances, and, indeed, would prefer to do so, but they understand well enough the impossibility of this so long as the League exists as a real force in world politics and particularly so long as the Soviet Union gives its support to the League and the principe of collective security. It is important to make this point about the divisions in French military policy clear, because in Britain in the period since March 7th, the real position has been grossly distorted. French "militarism" has been attacked, and France accused of disloyalty to the League. Yet the truth is that French military policy is still based

on the League and adherance to collective security and French democracy is determined to keep it so.

Laval, however, was not acting for himself alone in his pro-Italian and pro-German policy. Important sections of French capitalism also favoured, and still favour, such a policy. The French steel and iron industry has big interests in Germany, particularly in the Saar region. It is true to say that German rearmament would have been impossible without the co-operation of British finance and French heavy industry.

Certain other interests are pro-German because they are themselves Fascist in outlook. They consider that French capitalism must in the near future wage something like a civil war at home for the " reform " of French democracy and the establishment of a military-Fascist dictatorship. They are therefore opposed to any policy which by bringing France into opposition to the aggressive designs of Fascist States, should fan anti-Fascist feeling at home. They are represented by such politicians as André Tardieu with his policy of isolation by a " France strong and alone." A certain section of the General Staff and high command also accepts this view.

Louis Barthou, the Foreign Minister who was assassinated in the attack on King Alexander at Marseilles, first conceived the idea of basing French security on two pacts of non-aggression and mutual assistance, Locarno in the West, and an Eastern Pact for the east of Europe. The Government of the Soviet Union, also alarmed by the declared aggressive intentions of German Fascism, had long been anxious for the conclusion of such an all-embracing " Eastern Locarno " to include the U.S.S.R., Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Esthonia. Such a pact they desired to see further

guaranteed by a Franco-German-Soviet Pact of mutual assistance and non-aggression.

There is nothing in such a scheme at all contrary to the spirit or practice of the League. Both Germany, Britain and France have for years participated in a precisely similar pact (that of Locarno) for the preservation of Western peace. Moreover, the conviction shared by the majority of the French people that the Soviet Union and the Soviet peoples stand irrevocably for peace and against any form of aggressive imperialism made the idea of such a pact very attractive.

Laval himself was from the beginning opposed to the idea of an Eastern pact when it became clear that Germany, fearing her hands might be tied against aggression in the East, would not join the Pact. Had he taken a strong stand and made France's position sufficiently clear as a consistent supporter of the principles of collective security and had he urged the Government of Britain to do the same, it is very doubtful if Hitler's Government, and still less that of Poland, would have rejected the idea of an Eastern Locarno.

Negotiations had already been started by Barthou. Laval had no desire to continue them. But the People's Front in the spring of 1935 was already coming into being. At the end of April the campaign for the local elections was in full swing. In Laval's own constituency of Aubervilliers his election agents assured him that his candidates would certainly be defeated by the Communists who were fighting on the platform of a peace pact with the U.S.S.R.

Victories of the Left were in any case certain. If they were not to be overwhelming and threaten his own position he clearly had to do something. Pierre Laval

decided to pack his trunk and leave for Moscow. On May 2nd the draft of the Franco-Soviet pact of mutual assistance and non-aggression was initialled by the representatives of the two countries, and Laval elicited the famous declaration from Stalin that the Soviet Government considered it perfectly just that France should maintain her armed forces in the condition necessary to fulfil her obligations under the pact.

But Laval could not convince the electors that he was sincere. The seats at Aubervilliers went to the Communists. The Pact was hailed as a great victory for peace by the three parties of the Left, but they did not for a moment conceal that they considered Laval incapable of carrying through that policy of peace consistently.

They were correct. Laval, the tool of French reaction, who for the greater part of his career as Premier governed without Parliament, had no intention of honestly carrying through the policy to which he had committed himself in Moscow. Had he done so, had he made his position clear in the Italian-Abyssinian conflict which broke out in the autumn (in February he had personally assured Mussolini that Italian action in Africa would have the benevolent neutrality of France), then it is very unlikely that Hitler would have been in the position to make his coup of March 7th, 1936.

British opinion considers France to have played a very doubtful role at Geneva in the Abyssinian affair. Certainly Laval's policy was nothing to be proud of, but at least it was no worse than Sir Samuel Hoare's. What is quite overlooked in Britain is the part played by the people of France, the great majority of whom are anti-Fascist, in favour of peace and their readiness to make sacrifices to maintain it. On the other hand, the British

Press, ever anxious to make life pleasant for Hitler, was lavish in its praise for Laval, known to be friendly to Hitler and opposed to the Franco-Soviet Pact, even when Laval was most effectively sabotaging sanctions against Italy.

The French people considered, and rightly, that British interest in the Abyssinian question was greatly affected by British imperialist interests and not merely by a passion for world peace. They disliked, and dislike, as much as do the people of Britain, Mussolini and his methods of warfare. They know, however, that Italy is France's ally. When they agreed even to the most limited sanctions they lost that ally. They had a right to demand in return that if any other aggressor should threaten France or France's friends, Britain should be prepared to take as strong action as she was demanding against Italy. They have never had that assurance, and in the practical test of the Rhineland occupation Britain has even gone back on her own solemn pledges in the Locarno Treaty.

Sir Samuel Hoare, that doubtful knight of peace, was thrown from office by the indignation of the British democracy. Laval, his co-partner in the crime of flouting the European conscience, was dismissed by the French people very shortly afterwards. The pact of peace with the Soviet Union which he had obstinately refused to ratify, was ratified by Chamber and Senate with an overwhelming majority. Even then an unequivocal statement from the British Cabinet that they stood in fact as well as in word for collective security and mutual assistance in all cases against aggression would have saved the position. No such unqualified statement, unhappily, has ever been made.

It is remarkable, therefore, that French Left opinion, the opinion of the majority of the people, is still pro-British. The cause is to be found in the deep impression made by the Peace Ballot and the conviction that the British people still stands for democracy against reaction.

CHAPTER X

THE FIGHT FOR LIBERTY

BEFORE the War it would have been unthinkable to connect the fight for peace with the struggle for one's liberties at home. The idea that a foreign aggressor might find allies and friends among the ruling classes of a country struggling to defend its frontiers was incredible. Class struggle then was confined within the strict limits of national frontiers and only the working-class was considered to have interests outside those frontiers, and even those interests, naturally, were not thought to be friendly to the governments of foreign Powers but only an abstract sympathy for the oppressed classes.

To-day this is no longer true. In the first place, the working-class itself now has a government of its own on the territories of the former Empire of the Tsar. It is a powerful government which has made its country second only to the United States in productive capacity, and brought, after much sacrifice, considerable prosperity to its citizens. When a capitalist government enters into close relationship with such a Socialist government the effect on the internal politics of the former is bound to be considerable, even when the Socialist government scrupulously refrains from any interference in the affairs of its ally.

In the second place, the emergence of Fascist dictatorships in certain countries, ruling by terror and recon-

structing the economy of these countries on a war basis, with the obvious aim of aggression against their neighbours, has made a great difference. The Fascist dictatorships have the sympathy of the most reactionary sections of the capitalist class in all countries. Fearing the democracy of their own nations more than they do Mussolini or Hitler, these persons are perfectly ready to risk the independence and liberties of their native lands for the sake of intimate relationships with these terrorist dictators.

Capitalism, once its "sacred" basis of private property and exploitation is threatened, has shown that it recognises no law save that of self-interest, no ties save those of economic power, and no methods other than those of war and terror.

In no European country is this position so marked as in France. While there are Czech, or Austrian, or Hungarian citizens ready to hazard their countries in intrigues with German Fascism, they have the slight excuse of a common blood bond. The enthusiasm of certain French (and British) politicians and industrialists for Mussolini and Hitler has no such justification. Here the class issue appears in naked ugliness.

For the last two years in France questions of foreign policy and of home policy have been so closely woven together as to make it impossible to consider them apart. The parties of the Right (Right Conservatives, Democratic Republican Union, Popular Democrats, Independents) entering the elections under the name of "National Front," issued terrible election posters showing the Popular Front handing France over to anarchy financed by "Moscow Gold."

M. Henri de Kérillis, editor of the newspaper *Echo de*

Paris, head of the propaganda organisation of the Nationa Front, is an ardent disciple of Mussolini. His newspaper, like those of the Right in general, has supported the Italian aggression in Abyssinia in the most unmeasured terms. The pro-Fascist popular weekly, *Gringoire*, with the largest circulation of any weekly in France, has printed a violent attack on Britain called " Must Britain be reduced to slavery ? " answering the question in the affirmative. The attack was as witty as it was unscrupulous and unrestrained, and it was unfortunate that the British Foreign Office and our Ambassador in Paris were so far lacking in humour as to demand and obtain its confiscation.

The unfortunate French professor, M. Jèze, adviser to the Abyssinian delegation at Geneva, has been persecuted in a manner which would have condemned his persecutors as savages in pre-war days. A concerted effort, backed by leading newspapers like *le Journal*, *Matin*, and *Echo de Paris*, has been made to drive him out of the Sorbonne, where he is a distinguished figure, even by resorting to physical violence. Similar methods have been used to prevent Camille Frot, Minister of the Interior, on February 6th, 1934, from carrying on his practice at the Paris Bar, and reactionary barristers, egged on by the pro-Fascist Press, have made physical attacks on him every time he has appeared in the Courts.

Most astonishing of all, perhaps, was the manifesto supporting and praising Mussolini's aggression in Abyssinia signed by over sixty intellectuals of the Right, literary men, academicians and professors. They were not the most distinguished names in France, but they included some of the best-known, as, for example, the " interpreter " of English life, André Maurois.

The National Front, the persecutors of Jèze and Frot, the signatories of the " intellectuals' " manifesto, are not distinguishable from the Fascist organisation of the Croix de Feu. De la Rocque supports the National Front in the elections, and in many localities it would be difficult to distinguish between their organisation and the election machinery of the National Front. It is now popular to deny that the Croix de Feu is Fascist at all, and certainly it is a fact that the welding together of the Left has deprived it of any popular support and has reduced it to a very nebulous body so far as policy goes. That its general sympathies, however, are of those of the Right in general, there can be no doubt.

Perhaps the position of Right and Left in French politics has never been better expressed than by M. Daniel Halévy in a bitter little book attacking the Radical Party, written after the events of February 6th :

" The Lefts believe in the equality of human beings and the sovereignty of number, the Rights believe in the inequality of human beings and the sovereignty of quality. The Lefts are interested in liberty and the well-being of the individual, the Rights are interested in the groups from which the individual draws his inspirations, instincts and beliefs."

At the conclusion of his book he makes his meaning quite clear :

" Throughout the world there is a tendency for States to become *totalitarian*. They get control of everything with increasing rapidity, by taxation and inheritance, through the schools and children, through the crisis, the control of banks, business and the Press. The tendency is universal, and only varies in the form it assumes. In many countries conscious wills have directed the blind

movement and given it the value of human design. Do not let us exaggerate the values produced in this way, the totalitarian State is not beautiful, it is the summary expression of a summary period, it bears disasters within itself. But vitality, even though summary, is preferable to the poison of slow decay."

I do not think any French Conservative would deny that these two extracts from M. Halévy's " La République des Comités " accurately express the political philosophy of the National Front and its military organisation of the Croix de Feu.

It will be objected that this is a long way from support of Hitler and the binding of France to the chariot wheel of a foreign Fascist aggressor. That is so, and in this matter the Right is hopelessly divided. One section, led by Laval and by the ex-Communist Doriot, sympathised with by de la Rocque, favours an agreement with Hitler, even though they know and in private conversation admit, that it would at best mean the reduction of France to the position of a second-rate power. Another section, represented by André Tardieu, by the Fascist Taittinger and others, desires the illusion of a France " strong and alone," which in practice could hardly differ from the more cynical realism of Laval. A third section represented by Kèrillis and others is anti-Hitler and pro-Italian, seeks an alliance with Britain and would even maintain the Franco-Soviet Pact, though they have never any intention of keeping to the Pact should Germany attack the Soviet Union and leave France in peace.

A story, which there is every reason to believe is true, of the discussion on the Franco-Soviet Pact in the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Senate before ratifica-

tion, illustrates very well the division in the ranks of French reaction.

One aged Senator of the Right, a supporter of the Pact, pointed out gleefully that Turkey was the ally of the U.S.S.R., that Italy was France's ally, and that the ratification of the Pact would therefore convert the Mediterranean into "Mare Nostrum." "Why," he exclaimed gleefully, "it would be perfectly safe and simple to transport in a few days divisions of the Red Army from Odessa to Marseilles to help us on the Western Front."

"My dear senator," objected a colleague, "we have plenty of Bolsheviks with French passports in our Army, without the necessity of importing other Bolsheviks with Soviet passports."

The Pact was ratified by an overwhelming majority in the Senate, but the anecdote illustrates well enough the perplexed position of the reactionary Right.

Laval, during his premiership, combined a policy of *rapprochement* with Hitler and Mussolini, with encouragement of Fascism and reaction at home. The Leagues grew so rapidly in the latter half of 1935, that they began to look upon themselves as a semi-official militia licensed to commit any outrage. The Left, conscious that the great majority of the country was behind them, nevertheless were seriously in fear of a Fascist coup similar to that of February 6th, but backed this time by the Prime Minister and some at least of the forces of the State.

At the end of November a meeting of Croix de Feu at Limoges when leaving their hall, opened fire on the crowd of Left supporters who had gathered outside to hoot them. More than twenty, including some police-

men, were wounded by the fusillade. No arrests were made, though the Chief of Police blamed the Fascists unreservedly for the outrage.

The indignation in the country against this licensed banditry, combined with dislike of Laval's support for Mussolini's Abyssinian war, threatened the Premier's position in a Parliament with a Left majority. The Congress of the Radical Party decided to withdraw support of the Government by recalling its Ministers unless the Leagues were dissolved and elected Daladier Party leader in place of Herriot, who was a Minister in the Laval Cabinet.

Without the Radical vote the Government could not live, and indignation in the country was so intense that even the most hesitating Radical deputy hardly dared continue to support the Government unless it took action against the Fascist Leagues. Laval resorted to what might have been a masterly Parliamentary manœuvre. A deputy of the Right, Ybarnégaray, an honest and simple man, looked upon as a close intimate of de la Rocque, was persuaded to intervene in the debate on the Leagues with a passionate plea for national reconciliation by mutual disarmament of Left and Right.

As the Left had no arms and the Right would not disclose their secret supplies in any case, Laval hoped this gesture would be enough to get him out of a tight corner. But despite the sincerity of Ybarnégaray, an essential factor in putting the trick across, it recoiled with deadly effect on its inspirer. Léon Blum, Socialist leader and brilliant Parliamentary tactician, at once accepted the offer and proposed not only mutual disarmament but also mutual dissolution of all semi-military bodies. This

turned the tables, for the Left, except in the imaginative propaganda of the Right, possessed no such bodies.

A Bill was at once drawn up, passed through both Houses with big majorities, and the Right placed in an impossible tactical position. Combined with the defeat of the Hoare-Laval plan for settlement of the Abyssinian war, this was the final blow to Laval's prestige. In January he resigned, to make way for a predominantly Radical Ministry with representatives of the Centre which rested on the support of the People's Front.

The real nature of the encouragement given in official circles to French Fascism was seen immediately afterwards in the attack on Blum, the Socialist leader, as he was walking through the street after a debate in the Chamber. He was murderously set upon by members of the Action Française and his life only saved by some house builders who took him into a yard and barred the way till the arrival of the police.

The new law was at once put into effect and the Action Française dissolved and two of its leaders arrested for incitement to murder. Two days later the People's Front held a demonstration of protest which was unequalled for its strength and militant discipline. This time the demonstration assembled in the heart of the Fascist quarter, by the University.

The Blum incident has caused French Fascism to retreat. Bodies like the Croix de Feu protest their constitutional and peaceful character. It is significant, however, that shortly after the Rhineland occupation de la Rocque held a secret mobilisation of the whole force, scarcely a normal, constitutional procedure for an election campaign. The mobilisation was preceded by the issue of a manifesto in the Colonel's name on the

Rhineland occupation which violently denounced, not Hitler, for whom the utmost regard was expressed, but "Free-Masonry and the Jewish Komintern," the secret forces behind the People's Front.

It is incidents such as these which have convinced the majority of Frenchmen that the safety of their lives and homes can no longer be trusted to those who call themselves "Nationalists." The National Front of the Conservative parties of the Right has chosen to enter the elections with the support of a private army of open Fascist sympathies. The question of peace is shown to everyone to be bound up with the question of the safeguarding of democratic liberties and the defence of the livelihood of the people and the precious possessions of French culture against Fascism. This is why a grave crisis in the national life, when the country is being menaced by a foreign enemy, has rallied the people to the Parties of the Left, and particularly to the Socialist and Communist parties.

It is recalled that in 1870 and in the wars of the great Revolution, when France was invaded by the foreigner in alliance with the reaction at home, France was saved by her revolutionary people. It is said by many to-day who are by no means Left in their political sympathies, that an attack by Germany on France could not be resisted except by revolutionary means. To carry through mobilisation would mean first the smashing of the Fascist Leagues.

Whether this be true or not, it is certain that in France, as in Spain, the people, led by the working-class, are on the march again, and that the forces they contain in their ranks may well build a new and better future for all Europe. For the British people, for the British Labour movement above all, it is necessary to maintain the

closest contact with French democracy. Civilisation is menaced to-day by Fascist aggression and by capitalist reaction in all countries. The most important contributions to progress in the modern world have come from the peoples of Britain, America and France in the three great revolutions which fertilised the life of humanity, causing it to flower so richly in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To-day the banner of progress has been advanced a great step further by the peoples of Russia. It is the responsibility of the Labour movements in Britain, America and France above all, to see that this advance is maintained and consolidated throughout the world.

On the eve of the Elections of 1936, the corps of foreign correspondents in Paris admitted themselves baffled by a change in the political weather, for which they were at a loss to account.

As the election posters appeared on the hoardings provided for that purpose in France by the municipalities, there disappeared from streets and cafés and public places almost all signs of political storm. The surface of life grew suddenly calm.

Some diagnosed "indifference," "listlessness," "apathy." Others simply "exhausted confusion."

Many people believed that the invasion of the demilitarised Rhineland zone by German troops on March 7th had shocked and unnerved the French people to such an extent that the evident "trend to the Left" of the previous months had been brought to a standstill, or even reversed.

The shock was indeed tremendous. With the roll of gun-carriages and the tramp of 50,000 men across the Rhine bridges, and bombers settling into new bases a

couple of hours flight from Paris, the shadow of Fascism and war lengthened suddenly across Europe, and turned from black shadow to blacker fact.

That there were jangled nerves in Paris that Sunday was clear enough. But the nerviness was on the Right and among the hesitant men of the Centre.

The Sarraut-Flandin Cabinet gave an exhibition of indecisiveness natural in a Government which had succeeded Laval without seriously altering the Laval policy of calculated flirtation with the Fascist Powers; which had accepted in principle the suppression of the Fascist Leagues in France but not dared to take any serious step towards making suppression a reality: a Cabinet, in fact, which registered by taking office from the Right, but in no sense itself expressed the vital, constructive forces of the working-class.

Monsieur Mandel wanted to mobilise. M. Deat, the "dissident Socialist," who was shortly to lose even his Parliamentary seat to the Communists, wanted to send a force of French warplanes to make a "demonstration of protest" above the German troops as they marched in, and dashed off to Nancy to see about it. M. Regnier, the Minister of Finance, doubted if enough money was available to do anything. The General Staff, within which existed powerful sympathisers with Hitler, displayed as its principal characteristic that *vis inertiæ* which is usually a feature of the more exclusive preserves of the officer class in the capitalist State.

Monsieur Sarraut made a broadcast speech declaring that he would never negotiate, while Strasbourg was under the German guns, and M. Flandin hurried off to London to convince the British Cabinet that something ought to be done.

At this moment of desperate crisis, with tens of thousands of young workmen manning the Maginot line for days and nights on end without taking their boots off, the fine militant gentlemen of the Right, the Fascist leaders whose ancestors had betrayed France before, ran true to family type.

Their admiration for Hitler and envy of his methods, their hatred and fear of their own people, upset their capacity even for the simplest political judgment.

Some of them attempted to organise a meeting in Paris at which young men of the Reserve were to pass a resolution declaring that they would mutiny rather than defend the country against Fascist attack. The meeting was held. The young reservists came and listened to the speakers' adulation of the man whose deliberate aggression had brought them almost to the trenches, and the bombers almost to their homes.

Then they rose and took charge of the meeting. The organisers made their escape, while the audience passed a resolution declaring their loathing of war and war-makers, and their determination to defend the people of France against them, alike at home and on the frontiers.

It was a fair specimen of the attitude of the French people to the treacheries and confusions instantly evoked by the crisis of the Rhineland.

The Left had always declared that the defence of the country against Fascist attack was not safe in the hands of people whose interests—as individuals and as a class—had already led them into the most sinister intrigues with the enemies of France and of European peace. The Right, faced with the Rhineland crisis, itself proved the correctness of the estimate.

It was in this sense that the "unity in face of the

national danger" which was so much remarked in the foreign press at the time, was a reality. The people of France rallied in defence against their enemies, external and internal; and the enemy within the gates—the Fascists and near-Fascists—found themselves for the time being reduced to desperate assurances that they were not really as unpatriotic as they seemed, mingled, as the elections approached, with threats of civil war in the event of the people electing a Government likely to damage their private interests.

From this nasty exhibition, wherein greed and class hatred so quickly shrivelled the old and flimsy mask of fake "patriotism," people turned in relief and confidence to the Communist election posters:

"Vote to make France free, strong, and happy."

The success of the People's Front in Spain in the elections of February 16th, had already give a powerful impetus and inspiration to the People's Front in France.

The attempts of the Right to turn this to their own advantage were an interesting confession by the Right of its realisation that the mass of the lower middle-class, the Civil Servants, the small shopkeepers and the professional men was now allied with the workers in the People's Front.

In its effort to split that alliance the Right staged a frantic campaign which was intended to demonstrate that the Communists would speedily "swallow" everyone else in the People's Front, and that the Communists were composed of hooligans with knives between their teeth and Moscow gold bulging in their pockets.

An absurd example of the lengths to which this campaign was carried was the laugh of Paris, when a correspondent of the *Petit Parisien* wrote a despatch

describing a sensational interview beside a newspaper kiosk in Barcelona with none other than Bela Kun, who obligingly expressed his conviction of the triumph of Communism in Spain simply as a result of the organisation of the People's Front, and by his mere presence there, of course demonstrated the Right thesis that the People's Front was being run from and financed by Moscow for some sinister aim quite at variance with the interests of the Spanish, or the French peoples.

Unfortunately for the *Petit Parisien* Bela Kun was without difficulty located at his desk in Moscow almost simultaneously with his miraculous manifestation to the correspondent in Barcelona. The latter wrote a second report explaining that the man he had talked to in Barcelona was awfully like Bela Kun, and that anyway " the matter is of no great importance."

On the morning of April 27th, the results of the first ballot of the General Election showed a record percentage poll which disposed of the theory that the prevailing calm was the result of popular indifference, and a vote for the People's Front which showed that the Rhineland crisis had accentuated rather than checked the " swing to the Left."

Out of 9,800,000 voters, 5,500,000 in all had voted for the parties of the People's Front. Of the remaining 4,300,000, a large percentage could be classed as " dubious," and certainly as deeply hostile to the Fascists and the extreme Right.

The Communist vote had almost doubled since the election of 1932, reaching a total of very nearly 1,500,000, giving them the position—in voting strength—of fourth strongest Party in the country.

Although any hard-and-fast statistical estimate would

be impossible, it is worth noting that a large number of politicians and others who watched the electorate closely in various representative districts of the country reported afterwards that among the Socialist voters there were certainly a very high percentage who voted Socialist on the strength, so to speak, of the People's Front Electoral Pact, but who would have found their party loyalty unbearably strained if a Socialist vote had meant a vote against, instead of a vote in alliance with the Communists.

Under the French election system, which manages to get a little closer to genuine representation than the British, no candidate is elected at the first ballot who has not got an absolute majority of the votes cast. Everyone else has to run again a week later in the second round, which is conducted on the same principle as English elections, with the seat going to the candidate polling the highest number of votes, even if that number is a minority of all the votes cast.

In the first round of the 1936 election, only approximately one-third of the 618 vacant parliamentary seats were filled. The Right, which—especially in Brittany and Normandy—still retains a number of safe rural seats among backward and isolated villages and country towns, actually had a majority of the seats secured in that round.

But the voting had already shown which way the country as a whole was moving.

Under the electoral pact of the People's Front it had been agreed that in all those constituencies where a second ballot was necessary, the candidates of any two parties of the People's Front should stand down in favour of any third candidate who had secured the largest number of votes at the first round.

It was the practical electoral expression of the united

action against Fascism and war which had already achieved so much. The parties of reaction saw the electoral pact as the weapon which would complete their discomfiture, and bent all their energies to break it before the following Sunday.

In view of the very mixed composition of the Radical Party, it was inevitable that there should be upon its Right Wing many who were somewhat startled by the huge advance in the Communist vote shown at the first ballot. To these elements the Right addressed themselves, with the most barefaced appeals to desert the People's Front and break their electoral pledges.

It was suggested, and there is no doubt that the suggestion would have been put into effect, that in certain instances the Right would be prepared to withdraw candidates and swing votes at the second round to any suitable Radical who refused to stand by the conditions of the Pact and insisted on standing against a Communist even though the Communist had received the largest number of votes at the first ballot.

The Right assured the Radicals that to stick by the People's Front was to run the risk of submersion, to which the ineluctable answer was that to desert it was certain political suicide. For even those Radicals who might have been inclined to listen to the blandishments from the Right only had to listen to their election agents' reports and look over the first ballot figures, to note that with all the will in the world the Right had not got enough votes in hand to deliver the price of betrayal.

The principal spokesmen of the Radical Party strongly denounced these manœuvres of the Right, and, declaring that they would resolutely refuse to act as the Judas of the People's Front, went ahead with the business of

organising the necessary withdrawals of candidates and the ironing out of the small number of disputes which existed.

The Right then declared that if the leaders of the Radicals refused to " listen to reason," at least the Radical rank and file who had quite suddenly become in the columns of the reactionary press " sound fellows " and the " backbone of the country," would certainly break away from the Pact and refuse to vote for the Communists.

A Radical journalist summed up the popular reaction to that: " You ask," he wrote, " whether we shall really make up our minds to vote for Communists? Yes, we shall. Why? Because when it has been a question of the struggle against Fascism we have found the Communists at our side. Why? Because we feel ourselves closer to a Communist ex-soldier hungry for peace and social justice, than to these ' patriotic ' gentlemen of the Right who sell war material to Hitler."

The day following the announcement of the result of the first ballot, there opened on the Paris Bourse a campaign which was intended to alarm the rank and file of the Radicals into doing in financial panic what they refused to do for motives of political dishonesty.

There was heavy selling of widely held securities, and a mild " flight from the franc," both hampered as political strategy by the fact that the great capitalist interests supporting the Right were themselves criss-crossed with deep division of interest. Some were openly or secretly in favour of producing a situation which would not only, they hoped, send the Radicals panicking back to the Right, but would actually involve the immediate devaluation of the franc.

Others, opposed to immediate devaluation, favoured a manufactured panic for political reasons, but were afraid that it would very soon get out of control if it were pushed too vigorously.

As it turned out, both groups had made a serious miscalculation, and their panic campaign boomeranged badly upon them at the second round.

For they acted as though they were dealing with people who had no stake in the country : as though they and their parties represented the " solid " classes of the community. Actually, among those who voted for the People's Front, including a large proportion of the Communist voters, were a vast majority who are the owners of small savings, and also of little packets of carefully selected franc securities—not to mention the enormous sums which careful Frenchmen and women, distrustful of banks, keep in cash in stockings and mattresses and cashboxes hidden in their homes.

(According to an unpublished report of the Bank of France, there are in the possession of peasants enormous numbers of 10,000 franc notes, hoarded.)

These people voted for the People's Front because, among other qualities, the People's Front programme included the most vigorous defence of the franc. The *Humanite* had for months been leading a campaign for drastic Government action against all those responsible for undermining the position of the franc—a campaign which included the punishment of individual speculators as well as the abolition of private control of the Bank of France.

The behaviour of the financial interests following the first ballot confirmed in the minds of millions of Frenchmen the conviction already inspired by their behaviour

in the face of the threat from Germany. They were people whose patriotism lay in any place to which they might be able to transfer their money, and it was obvious that considerations of the well-being of France played no role whatever in the effecting of such transfers.

The feeling of the people was that if the " men of the Right " talked about impending panic and showed themselves prepared to fly from the franc at the first sign of danger, they were evidently not the people to be left any longer in charge of the nation's financial and economic affairs.

The " defenders of the franc," like the defenders of the country against the war threats of Fascism, were in the People's Front. There was a fairly general belief that they might be compelled to retreat by forces beyond their immediate control, but the feeling of the " solid " men and women of the country was that at any rate they would make a good fight of it, and would see to it that the rich and not the poor would bear the brunt of the defeat of the franc, if it came to that.

Partly whistling in the dark, partly as a further proof of the dangerous cunning of the working-class party leaders, the reactionary press declared that May Day, 1936, which fell on the Friday between the two rounds of the election, would be unusually quiet, there would be very few strikes or public demonstrations, because the " revolutionaries did not want to alarm people or inconvenience them on the eve of the election."

The prediction that May Day, 1936, would be of an unusual character, and the suggestion that it was significantly bound up with the election struggle, were both correct. It was unusual in more ways than one.

First, it was organised entirely by the trade unions.

Second, it was organised not by two central trade union organisations—a Red and a Reformist—but by the new united trade union organisation which came into being after the Congress of Toulouse earlier in the year, whereat the unification of the trade unions was finally and gloriously accomplished.

Third, as the direct result of this unification, the strike was wider spread than it had been on any May Day since 1919.

For the first time since the War, the steel and iron masters of the Comité des Forges admitted in advance that May Day belonged to the workers, confessing tacitly that if the united trade unions called a strike on May Day there was just nothing anyone could do about it except close down.

The great automobile and armament factories of Renault and Citroen did not open that day: it was the first time since the War that Renault had thrown in his hand and accepted the totality of the strike before it even began.

In the building trades the strike was absolute. In the metal industries, absolute. In the textile districts of the north-east, again absolute.

In the whole of the Paris region, not more than a bare 15 per cent. of the workers went to work that day.

Their non-appearance at the factories had the force and significance of a huge parade of the industrial power of the People's Front, redoubled, like the political power, by the joining of forces which had been proceeding ever since February, 1934, and reached its completion at the Congress of Toulouse.

Particularly significant was the attitude of the workers in the public utilities—the suppliers of electric light,

heat and power, of gas, and of water. A majority of them had declared their readiness to strike on May Day, and thus ensure a complete standstill of all industry.

The strike was not called, for the reason—as was explained by their representative at the afternoon meeting in the Buffalo Stadium—that final steps were just then being taken which would ensure that within a very short space of time it would be possible for them to call out not a majority only, but 100 per cent. of the men in these vital industries, if need be.

In this and in every other speech made at Buffalo that afternoon, three points were emphasised.

One was the enormous increase in union membership following in every union upon the achievement of unity at Toulouse.

The second was the fact that this May Day was not a demonstration " in the air " as it were, but a demonstration on behalf of the immediate demands of the workers in every industry.

The third was the assurance that the trade union movement stands four-square behind the programme of the People's Front, and is prepared to throw its whole tremendous weight into the struggle for the realisation of the political and economic aims of the People's Front programme.

May Day passed off " quietly," as the reactionary Press had predicted. But it was a quiet more alarming to the reactionaries than a whole series of riots would have been.

On the eve of the election something happened which was significant both in itself, and because, as things turned out, nobody paid the slightest attention to it.

It was a statement by Marshal Petain, who was got

into position and loosed off like a big gun by the reactionaries within a few hours of the opening of the polls. Marshal Petain who, as some people on the Right thought, had previously said too little, nursing his reputation as a still water running deep, on this occasion said a good deal too much.

He made an appeal to France to rally the forces of the Right. A moment later, after drawing a sad picture of the divided and disordered state of France as it appeared to him, he let fall the interesting information that people in Germany and in Italy appeared to him happier and better off than people in France.

People shrugged, laughed, or did not even read the statement at all. Here and there the remark was heard that it was " all the same a bit thick " to represent the men of February 6th, the intriguers with Hitler, and the bandits of the franc exchange, as the representatives of order and dignity, and to suggest to people who had seen trade unions, co-operatives and small traders alike wrecked or ruined by the Hitler dictatorship, and had just faced a direct threat of war from the same quarter, should consider a Fascist regime as more beneficial than the " bread, peace, and liberty " for which they had struggled, and were still struggling so hard.

The big gun of Marshal Petain boomed, but failed to do any execution : the shell was a dud.

The failure even of Marshal Petain to pull any weight is of more than passing significance if it is recalled that at the end of 1933 and throughout the whole first part of 1934, before the action of the mass of the people against Fascism got under way, Petain's name recurred again in public and private discussion as the answer to the despairing search for " a man to save France."

Since then the French people had moved a long way towards saving itself.

A few hours after publication of the General's appeal to the people to rally against the People's Front, crowds were dancing on the boulevards in whole-hearted rejoicing over a People's Front victory far more extensive than even the most optimistic had dared to expect.

It was a strange sight, at the heart of the richest city on the continent of Europe, in the centre and among the most famous symbols of European wealth and luxury.

The reactionaries—who a couple of years before had seemed on the point of terrorising the capital—managed to gather a sizable crowd to cheer Right-wing victories flashed on the screen at the *Echo de Paris* office, on the Place de l'Opera.

But even there the cheers from the supporters of the People's Front were almost as loud as the cheers of their opponents, and the sound of the "International" rang out over the square.

Further down the boulevards—where the crowd seemed no longer just a crowd, but a whole population poured out over the streets and the side-streets, taking possession of whole quarters of the city with cheers and songs and dances—there was a picture of what was happening in thousands of French towns and villages that night.

Perhaps more striking than anything else to anyone who saw the police in action against the people on February 9th, 1934, was the attitude of the big forces of Gardes Mobiles turned out to "keep the peace between the rival sections." They laughed with the crowds, politely and gently eased buses and other heavy traffic through narrow lanes among the cheering people,

and themselves spent much of the time in discussion of the political situation.

Long before midnight the main force of Gardes Mobiles, on the boulevard by the office of *Le Matin*, was quietly marched home: there was nothing for it to do. There were no "rival sections"; there was only one section visible in that part of Paris that night—the supporters of the People's Front.

Election day had been as calm and disciplined as the campaign itself.

The results showed why: for the "swing to the Left" had gone so far that even the rowdiest and most unscrupulous adventurers of the reactionary side found it wisest to lie low for the time being.

With the second round of the election the Socialists jumped to first place in the Chamber—the first time in the history of the French Republic that they had obtained such a position. With 142 seats they had far outdistanced the Radicals, with 115.

Even more striking were the gains of the Communists, who raised the number of their seats at a single stroke from 10 to 72.

The People's Front had a clear majority larger than they had hoped, or their enemies feared.

The results were still not quite complete when Leon Blum published in a special edition of the *Populaire* the announcement of the Socialist Party's readiness to accept its responsibilities as the largest party by forming and taking direction of a Government of the People's Front.

The Communists immediately declared their determination to support such a Government, and Maurice Thorez, in an interview that morning, joyfully proclaimed that the People's Front had now really reached a position

where it would be possible to make a beginning with the business of making the rich pay, of suppressing the Fascist leagues, and of organizing collective security within the framework of the existing League of Nations.

The Right—which was utterly taken aback by the extent of its defeat—divided its public utterances between vague and sinister threats of what would happen if the People's Front attempted anything drastic in the way of carrying out its programme and prophecies of fatal divisions within the People's Front itself.

" The Right " one American commentator cabled sardonically, " now at length sees itself threatened with the stable Government which it has for so long pretended to desire for the good of the country."

" Funk " money immediately began to fly—literally—from the country in the money-belts of the drawing-room and bank-office patriots, who at the same time set up a minor panic in French securities as they sold them on the Bourse for international stocks. But the wholesale panic which had been so freely predicted as the immediate outcome of a popular victory was an unconscionable time coming, for the reason that the same factors which produced the " rich man's panic " produced a powerful renewal of confidence among the mass of the small *rentiers* who had voted—among other things—for the " defence of the franc."

Those who were most anxious to produce a panic hoped that the huge increase in the number of Communist seats would be followed immediately by a reversal of the Communists' earlier decision not to enter the Government, which—they thought—might enable them to start a " confiscation " scare that would more than counterbalance the fact that the Communists were

throughout the country regarded as the most powerful and determined defenders of the value of the common man's wages and savings.

It was on these grounds that the Communists declined to take advantage of the unexpectedly large increase in their Parliamentary representation to alter the basis on which the election had been fought. It was clear, however, that their temporary refusal of the Socialist invitation to take part in the Government by no means excluded the possibility that they might do so in no distant future if the situation were to change in such a way as to remove or reduce the dangers involved in an immediate policy switch of this kind.

Almost immediately after the announcement of the election results, Marcel Cachin, writing in *Humanite*, pointed out that it was the first task of the victors in the People's Front not to indulge in wild revolutionary gestures, but methodically to gather to their side " all the workers of France " in the struggle against the Fascist Leagues, the struggle for peace, and the struggle against the " 200 families."

While public attention—particularly the attention of the Right—centred immediately after the elections on the question whether the Communists would now reverse their pre-election decision and enter the Government immediately, the most vigorous forces of the People's Front, Socialists, Communists and Radicals alike, were occupied with the business of seeing to it that the election gains were consolidated and broadened into the basis of a further advance.

It is of great significance that in the immediate post-election period the most sustained attacks of the right were directed precisely against the development of the

"People's Assemblies"—the "Rassemblements Populaires"—which now began to become a principal factor in the life of the country.

These Assemblies, gathering in permanent activity and co-operation the militants of the People's Front parties in every locality, were the measure of the difference in character between the victory of the People's Front in the elections of 1936, and previous "Left" victories at the polls.

They were the instruments through which the political will of the people, expressed in the pre-election struggle and at the ballot-boxes, should not now be muffled, as it were, until such time as a new Parliamentary election should become necessary, but should continue to function at a pressure and with an effectiveness no less than on election day itself.

It had been the hope, and apparently the expectation, of the reactionaries, that the electoral victory of the People's Front would result in nothing worse than a large shifting of power purely within the limits of Parliament and Parliamentary action. They looked to see the situation now resolve itself into a series of bargainings between Parliamentary groups not essentially different from those which customarily follow a general election.

Hence their alarm and anger when they discovered that they were faced now with a new sort of situation, in which it was no longer possible for professional politicians to say to the people: "You have voted, so you had better go home now and leave everything else for Parliament to fix up." They found that through the People's Assemblies—whose points of similarity with the old Jacobin Clubs did not escape them—the people were to be kept permanently on the stage, instead of being packed

off behind the scenes as soon as the big election Act was over.

It is against this background of the People's Assemblies —which combine some of the functions of a vigilance committee, a political club, and a Council of Action— that the parliamentary and governmental manœuvres of the post-election period were conducted.

The development throughout the country of the People's Assemblies marks a new stage in the defence of democracy and freedom, for it provides the means through which the democratic will of the people can continuously and effectively exert itself in the terrific struggle against reaction that lies ahead.

Parallel with this development went new moves towards the consolidation of the unity of the working-class which had already brought results undreamed of in the old days of disunity.

Within a few hours of the election, the Communists addressed to the Socialists a new invitation to discuss the details of the organisation of a single working-class party, and to take part in preparations for a National Conference whereat the organisational unity of the Socialist and Communist Parties should be finally accomplished, just as the unity of the trade union organisations had been accomplished at the Congress of Toulouse.

Conversations between the representatives of the two parties, in which the question of organisational unity was discussed in the light of the electoral victory, were in progress within a week of the election.

The unification of the trade union organisations, with all that it implied in increased numerical strength and in national solidarity, had already shown itself on May Day

as the indispensable and promising basis for the struggles in factory, workshop, mine and dock, that will as the People's Front moves towards realisation of a programme under which the rich, and not the workers, are to pay the costs of the crisis and of the measures taken to meet it.

With its industrial strength thus unified, with the working-class parties—fresh from a magnificent victory achieved solely as the result of united action—moving towards a complete unification of their forces, and with the will and the demands of all the mass of the common people finding a new means of expression and action in the People's Assemblies, France faces the future with the alert confidence of people who know that though the tasks ahead are hard, they have found, and tested in experience, the means of carrying them to a glorious conclusion.

CHAPTER XI

FRANCE FACES THE FUTURE

Two things stand out about the French election. First, that the old deadlock in French politics is broken. Ever since the War the relations of parties have been almost unchanged; the Right groups have received so many votes, the Left so many, and various parliamentary combinations on this basis have made no great difference. This time the Left have actually won over 200,000 votes from the Right, and in addition received 250,000 new voters, or voters who had never voted before.

Secondly, those 5,600,000 people who voted for the parties of the People's Front have made it clear that they are voting for a change, that they are determined there shall be no gap between word and deed, between promise and performance, in the work of the new Government. They voted for a France free, strong and happy, and they mean to have it. That they are in earnest is proved by the remarkable strike movement which accompanied the coming to power of the government of Léon Blum—a movement to impress upon the employers and, where necessary, even compel them to understand that the popular will expressed in the elections must be obeyed.

No analysis of the election results has yet been made in England, and so interesting is a study of the figures and so important are the conclusions to be drawn, that

we will make one here before proceeding to consider the strike movement and the first acts of the Blum Government.

First important fact is the overwhelming character of the victory of the People's Front, which received 5,600,000 votes as against 4,250,000 for the National Front. Next point is that the passive voters, those who generally abstain from participation, voted Left, despite a special campaign by the Croix de Feu to win their votes for reaction—a campaign which included a house-to-house canvass on a scale unknown in French politics.

But no less important are the changes which have taken place inside the two hostile camps of Popular Front and National Front. The most striking feature of the election is the great gains of the Communist Party, whose vote rose from 800,000 to almost 1,500,000, practically the same as the total vote of the Radical Party, hitherto the leading party in the Republic. Inside the People's Front the leadership is now beyond all question in the hands of the two parties of the working class, Communists and Socialists. Before the election the Radicals could claim with some justice, on the basis of parliamentary representation, though not of feeling in the country, to be stronger than both put together.

Inside the National Front the extreme Right also gained, according to some calculations, as many as 300,000 votes. These gains represented a definite move among the Conservative voters towards open Fascism, and were at the expense of more moderate Conservative parties (Independent Radicals and Republican Left) as well as of the hesitating right wing of the Radical Party inside the People's Front.

The voters who gave their support to the Radicals

and Socialists gave their support to parties which had definitely moved to the Left since the election of 1932. It was the right-wing hesitating Radicals, the half-hearted believers in the People's Front, who lost seats and votes, and not those who sincerely and honestly co-operated in that front.

The Socialist Party is now co-operating with the Communist Party in a united working-class front, in the leadership of great mass actions outside Parliament directed against Fascism and in defence of the workers' standard of life.

The effect of this has been that the Socialist Party won back 19 seats and most of the votes given to the dissident "Socialist and Republican Union," which broke away from the Party because of its "Left" character and friendly relations with the Communists.

It is clear from the great advances made by the two working-class parties, and particularly by the Communists, that the mass of French voters went Left not merely through fear of Fascism and because of the power of democratic traditions in the country, but also because the French working class, having established its unity, acted with magnetic force on all the hesitating elements in the nation and was able to mobilise behind it great sections of the peasantry and urban lower middle classes in a powerful democratic, anti-Fascist movement.

Not only has the road to these masses been barred to Fascism, but reaction has received a serious blow through the winning over to the anti-Fascist front of many thousands who were formerly under the influence of Fascism.

It is necessary to make these facts clear in order to dispel the illusions spread by a section of the British

press that the People's Front will soon break up. It will not break up, because it is built on a true foundation, and those elements, whether Radical or Socialist, who through cowardice or treachery to its programme, attempted to break it, would at once find themselves in isolation.

If it had been clearly understood that the People's Front was something more than an electoral deal and a parliamentary combination (in the sense that certain politicians speak of the desirability of a "Popular Front" in Britain) there would not have been such surprise and misunderstanding expressed in our own country at the remarkable strike movement which has accompanied the taking over of office by the Blum Government.

The French working class, together with the majority of civil servants and employees, has suffered greatly in the last few years. Whilst greedy and unscrupulous politicians have hazarded the peace and security of the country, financiers and industrialists have attacked the people's living conditions to an intolerable extent. They have at the same time formed with impunity private armies in order to destroy all democratic liberties and democratic organisations, and in order still further to impose their will on the mass of the people.

And the worker, the intellectual, the peasant, looking across the Rhine frontier or over the Alps into Italy and seeing what was happening under the "leaders" Hitler and Mussolini, understanding the weaknesses which had made the existence of these terrorist States possible, very firmly answered, "No."

In the course of their struggle against Fascism the French workers have stored up immense energy, intense

passion. The victory at the polls has released it stormily. The orderly occupation of the factories, the firm insistence on the immediate payment of the first instalment of the free and happy life which they see as the reason for the existence of the People's Front, is the natural result.

It is more than doubtful if the French capitalists and their Fascist prætorian guard had understood the meaning of the election victory. It is very likely that attempts by the new Government to implement their programme would have met with sabotage and intrigue. The strikes were an overwhelming demonstration that the government elected by the people must be allowed to act for the people. They were the most direct possible declaration by the majority of the nation that the events of February 6th, 1934, when the Fascists destroyed a popularly elected government, were wiped out of the nation's history.

M. Blum's legislative programme, introduced immediately the Chamber opened, has been called by the British press a "New Deal." It is that and more; it is a New Deal backed by a force which will see to it that the New Deal is not smashed by the powers of wealth, who are going to pay for that New Deal. President Roosevelt has never dared appeal to the people in defence of his own "New Deal," far less sweeping than that of the French Government, and to-day it has almost disappeared. In France the New Deal is being operated at the command of the people, and the opposition, for the moment, has slunk, beaten, into its kennel.

The forty-hour week with increased wages (15 per cent. for the lower paid, 7 per cent. for the skilled workers), the repeal of the Laval economy measures,

collective contracts and recognition of shop stewards in all industries (including banks, insurance and the big department stores), holidays with pay, immediate assistance for the peasants—these are achievements which no other people outside the Soviet Union has yet won. They are a symbol of what can be obtained by a united working class organising the nation against reaction.

It would, of course, be a grave mistake to imagine that these victories mean the end of the danger of Fascism in France and a smooth transition to a new society. Fascism is licking its wounds, but it is not destroyed, any more than the real masters of the French people, the little oligarchy of financiers and big industrialists, are destroyed. Grave difficulties face the new Government. The ruling class in our own country looks at it askance, and there is no doubt that not only the British bankers, so anxious to break the franc, but also the Baldwin Government, will put many obstacles in the way of M. Blum and his colleagues.

The crisis must come when the financial question reaches its height, and the question as to whether or not the rich families who have plundered France for a century and a half shall pay for the new reforms is placed squarely before the people. If the present Government, then, keeps its head and appeals again to the force of the people, that danger will also be overcome.

In a few months working-class unity has more than doubled the strength of the trade unions. On the merging of the Socialist and Communist parties into a single revolutionary party of the French working class now depends the future in France. If this takes place, if the Government bases its legislative activity not merely on a parliamentary majority, but also on the firm democratic

foundation of the local committees of the People's Front, on the "Popular Assemblies," then there will never be any question of the "break-up" of the People's Front so ardently desired by the friends of reaction.

In conclusion, it is interesting to note that many of the demands of the strikers in the great movement of the first week in June were taken from the Labour Code of the Soviet Union—the forty-hour week, paid holidays, free milk for those on harmful work, the collective contract.

All witnesses of the strikes, moreover, emphasise the order and discipline shown by the men and women. Journalists who entered some of the great engineering and automobile works say that the machines were never so bright, the floors never so clean, as when the factories were in the hands of the workers. Those who know the French workers, with their old traditions of syndicalism and sabotage, will remark the change, the abandonment of that tradition for a newer and more hopeful one. They will also feel quite sure that the sentiment at the back of the mind of the striker as he polished his idle machine was not only that he must show his strength in discipline, but also that in the machine lay a new source of life, the gateway to a new existence.

He did not oil and clean the great presses and lathes for Monsieur Renault or the lords of the Comité des Forges. He did it for his own satisfaction, and it is no doubt a fact over which many in France are seriously pondering to-day. To those who ask if the New Deal will succeed, or whether the People's Front will break up, the answer is to think also of the French workman in occupation of his employer's factory, carefully cleaning his employer's machine, busily tidying up his employer's

floors and yard. This French workman is beginning to understand a great fact, the central fact of modern life : that the solution to the question of poverty or plenty, Fascism or freedom, peace or war, lies in the ownership of the means of production.

THE POSITION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY AFTER THE VICTORY OF THE PEOPLE'S FRONT

Statement by Maurice Thorez at a reception to French and foreign journalists on Wednesday, May 6th, 1936.

THE People's Front has gained a great victory.

Our Communist Party, which has the honour of having been the initiator of the People's Front, has obtained a million and a half votes; seventy-two of its candidates were returned, and they form one of the principal forces in the new Chamber.

We won forty-one constituencies out of seventy-five in Paris and the inner suburbs.

What is the meaning of the voting on April 26th and May 3rd? Before everything, the people of France desire peace. They have no hatred for other nations, but they are disquieted, not without good reason, by Hitler's menaces. Some people say that all of those who voted Communist are not whole-hearted supporters of the Soviet system and determined to institute that system in France.

This may be so, but at least on this point, so far as it confirms our foreign policy, it cannot be gainsaid that those who have voted Communist wish to preserve peace and guarantee the security of the country.

In his book "Class Struggles in France" Marx shows that during the Second Republic there was no one who more effectively propagated revolutionary ideas than

General Haynau, that Austrian general who had bloodily suppressed the revolutions in Italy and Hungary in the years 1848 and 1849.

We too might say that the best propagandist for our Communist Party in recent years has been Hitler.

The workers have shown their confidence in the only Party which formulated the indignant reply of our people to the insolence of Hitler.

You know that our Party's electoral campaign was begun by that tremendous demonstration at the Buffalo Stadium, where 80,000 workers of the *Front populaire* gathered eagerly, and where I was honoured with the task of expressing in the name of our party its reply to Hitler.

Our poster, "The Man with the Knife between His Teeth," has been displayed on the hoardings during the whole of the campaign.

To preserve peace the people of France have voted against Hitler and his agents, the leaders of the Fascist Leagues who threaten civil war in France.

The people demand that the terrible threat of civil war shall be removed.

THE VICTORY OF THE PEOPLE'S FRONT.

The victory of the People's Front is the legal reply of the working class and of all French democrats to the Fascist riot of February 6th, 1935, to the menace that the Fascist leaders have continued to hold over them too long; the French people hate oppression. They are determined not to submit to the shame and horror of a Fascist dictatorship. Finally, our people are sick of poverty. They desire to bring the economic crisis to an end. They want to work; they want work, an assured

livelihood for all; they desire the well-being of the whole people.

The unemployed demand work; the workers in the factories desire increases in their wages; the civil servants, the railwaymen, the postal workers, the ex-servicemen, the small dividend drawers, wish their pensions and salaries brought up to the level they were on before their tiny incomes were cut down by the decree-laws.

One of the most notable things about the voting is the success of our party in the central districts of Paris, where there are a great number of small business people.

The peasants desire to sell their produce at a remunerative price.

Our party has registered a great success in the big industrial centres, in the mining area of the North, and in certain great cities—Lyons and Marseilles, etc., but also in the country districts as well.

We have achieved great successes in the purely peasant departments. In the Lot-et-Garonne we have two deputies; two in the Dordogne, one in Correze, two in Var, one in Cher, etc.

AGAINST DEVALUATION.

In its entirety the people of France has expressed itself against the policy of deflation carried on by all the governments of the so-called National Union.

But it has expressed itself with equal force against an eventual policy of devaluation. It is well known that we, the Communists, have led a campaign for the defence of the franc against any fresh reduction in value, and here again there are very striking results. Monsieur Paul Reynaud obtained only twenty-seven votes more than

the Communist candidate, who in the second arrondissement of Paris led the opposition to devaluation. And Monsieur Patenôtre, who is also a supporter of devaluation, was obliged between the first and second ballots to send circulars to the electors in which he defended himself from supporting devaluation for the sake of devaluation.

Our people, in effectively expressing its desire to change things, made particularly clear its desire for straight dealing and honesty.

At the microphones of Radio-Paris the central committee of our party instructed me to address an individual appeal to all those workers and small middle-class people who might have been taken in by Fascist demagogy, by saying to them : " If you wish to struggle against crooked dealing, scandal and corruption, you cannot give your vote to any party but the Communists, to the party which is proud that on no occasion has the name of any of its militants been associated, however remotely, with any financial scandal."

And now, in response to our appeal, there have been numerous young, straightforward men belonging to our party and to other parties of the Left elected in the country, in Paris, in the suburbs and in the provinces, against corrupt and discredited politicians.

You know, too, that numbers of these politicians have had the greatest difficulty in retaining their seats.

In conclusion, it can be said that our people has declared itself for peace, for the ending of the economic crisis, for work under conditions of order and tranquillity, that it has declared against the Fascist Civil War Leagues, and for honesty in public office.

It has declared against those who exploit, who ruin

and who divide our people. It has declared for the reconciliation of all our people who suffer and hope, against those responsible for their sufferings to-day.

We can say that the most successful of the Communist slogans, that around which our campaign has been built, was that which was reproduced in all our election literature : " For a free, strong and happy France."

. . . . .

What is to be done now ?

We believe, as stated in the programme that we advocated throughout the country, that in the first place the rich must be made to pay.

As soon as Parliament reopens, the Communist group, which has grown from ten to seventy-two deputies, will table a number of very precise proposals. We shall submit our proposals for a progressive levy on all large fortunes. And here I wish with your permission to repeat that in this there is no question of confiscation. Nothing of a Communist or Socialist programme. It is simply a matter of taking a little of their superfluity from the very rich to ease the suffering of the poorest and most oppressed. It is well-known that this is a proposition which Monsieur Louis Marin put before the Chamber of Deputies on April 16th, 1920. And with the milliards thus recovered—our technical experts are now at work on the details of this project—the balancing of the Budget will be assured.

THE COMMUNIST PROPOSALS.

You know that the 1936 Budget is not balanced. We shall be able to guarantee the franc against any new decline in value, and to obtain the credits necessary for a policy of economic revival and a salvation of the

country. Our party will table proposals in respect of: (1) the realisation of a true programme of great public works in order to absorb the unemployed, to assure an increase in the workers' wages, and the forty-hour week. (2) Repair the injustices caused by the decree-laws which reduced ex-servicemen's pensions. (3) The effective protection of that which we consider the most precious possession of France—our children. That is to say, a policy of fighting against the falling birth rate, in conformity with the present and future interests of our country.

Here I should like to remark that a Communist has been elected in the place of a man who thought it witty to fasten on us the nickname of "New Rabbit Breeders," because of our attitude to the problems of the falling birth rate.

(4) With the same object in view, we shall demand that a milliard of francs shall be allotted for the organization of sport, to provide our young people with the means of taking part in sports, by building sports grounds, stadiums, gymnasiums, swimming baths, etc. We want to have done with the sport which is based on great publicity, which has brought about the deterioration of our representative teams. For in every great international event which has taken place the French competitors have suffered defeat.

We wish not only to obtain for our athletes better conditions of training, but above all to enlarge the circle of those who can actually take part in sport, and thus to assure the health and the future of our young people.

(5) To obtain a genuine revaluation of agricultural products, the assistance and the support of the working peasant.

Then the Communist group will propose, as soon as the Chamber reassembles, the setting up of a commission charged with the inquiry into the origin of the wealth of certain politicians, such as Monsieur Laval, at one time a needy solicitor and to-day the owner of newspapers and of numerous great houses.

In internal politics the Communist Party will insist upon the disarming and dissolution of the Fascist League.

PEACE POLICY.

In foreign policy we shall demand the application of a firm peace policy by the organisation of collective security within the framework of the League of Nations, by means of acts of mutual assistance open to all countries on the principle of the Franco-Soviet pact.

It is necessary above all to repair the damage done to our country and to the peace of the world by the foreign policy of Monsieur Laval, the signatory of the Rome agreements and the wrecker of the decisions of the League of Nations.

Is it not evident that the France of the People's Front will understand better and aid more effectively the democratic regime of Czechoslovakia?

Similarly the France of the People's Front will be able to work much more effectively for the bringing of Poland into line with the *bloc* of peaceful States.

The French have always loved the Polish people. They always desired their independence at the time when they were dominated by the Czar, the Emperor of Austria and the King of Prussia. I will remind you that Koscinsko was proclaimed a citizen of France by the National Convention. And everybody remembers the declaration of the democrat Floquet to Czar Alexander,

"Long live Poland, sir." And can we not in the person of Madame Curie salute the grandeur of French and Polish science?

The Communists, Republicans, the Democrats of France, believe that an independent Poland is a guarantee of peace for Europe. And the sincere friends of peace are watching with sympathy the efforts of those who wish to preserve the independence of Poland.

We shall Support without Reservations the Forces of Democracy and Peace.

The means?

Naturally a Government like that of Monsieur Sarraut could not put this programme into effect, especially when several of its ministers have been beaten by the parties and the candidates of the People's Front.

It will fall to the lot of the strongest section of the new majority, with which we are allied by a pact of unity of action, to undertake the control of public affairs. For our part, we shall assure it of our complete support in the Chamber and in the country for the application of a policy conformable to the wishes of our people as indicated in the last ballot. *We shall not take part in the Government. We have said so, and repeated it most loyally throughout the election campaign.*

We are the Communist Party. It is our ambition and our determination to conduct our people towards a better social order, where their possession of the great means of production will be the foundation of the power of the workers liberated from the yoke of capital.

In the meantime we shall support with all our strength the forces of democracy and peace. We shall back up every effort to ameliorate the lot of the workers.

Besides, the new government will possess an imposing majority. It should be the most stable that we have known for many years. For our part, we shall frustrate the counter-offensive of the reactionary forces by refusing it the opportunity of exploiting frequent ministerial crises.

We see as the essential condition of the success of the People's Front its cohesion, its organization, and the action of the masses of the population. We shall insist on the democratic election throughout the country, in towns and villages, of committees of the Popular Front.

We have proposed the organisation of great demonstrations of the people throughout the country. In addition we shall pursue our task of achieving unity.

A newspaper wrote recently that our party has got over many obstacles and broken down many prejudices. That is true, and we shall go on in the same way in the interests of our people.

We, who are most resolute anti-Fascists, have held out our hands to the Croix de Feu, to the National Volunteers, many of whom sincerely desire, like us, a strong and happy France, with rulers and representatives who are straightforward and honest.

And we know that the electoral statements of Colonel De la Rocque, inviting people to vote for corrupt politicians compromised by their association with many scandals, shocked and profoundly disturbed a part of those who had been led astray by the colonel's demagogy.

We laymen have held out our hands to Catholics, workers, peasants and office workers suffering under the same cares as their Communist or Socialist brothers. And there too we know that our appeal will have a definite repercussion, and that little by little a collabora-

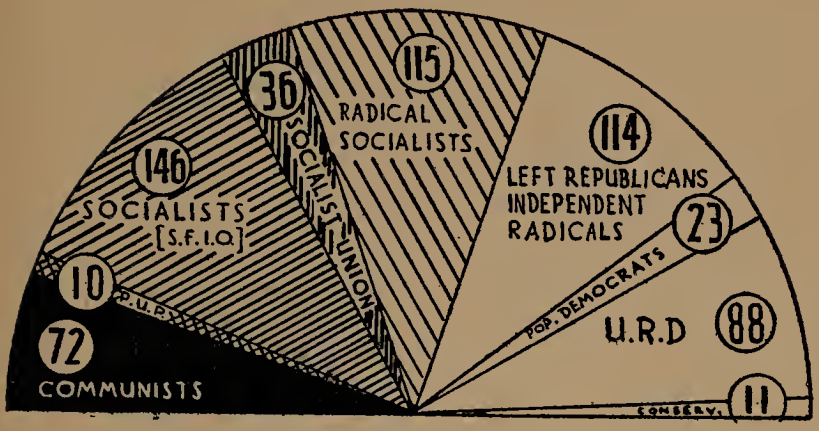
tion will grow up to further the interests of the whole people.

Our mind is set upon a single thing. To struggle for the grandeur and the future of the people of France and the great human brotherhood.

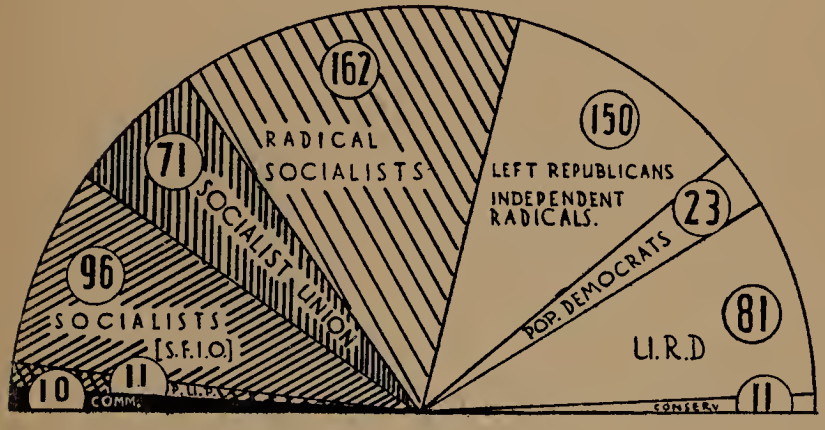
We know but one principle of action: unite. Unite to make the rich pay, unite to defend our liberty and our livelihood, unite so that France may be free, strong and happy.

Such is our programme. This it is which has been approved by a million and a half of French workers. This it is which the Communists in the Chamber and in the country will endeavour to bring about, in a sincere, complete and loyal collaboration with the parties of the People's Front.

DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES



1936



1932

The shaded sections are the parties of the Popular Front. The total figures are for 1936, *Popular Front* 379, *against* 236