

France at the Crossroads

In Lieu of an Introduction to the Second Edition of "In Defense of Terrorism"

By LEON TROTSKY

Editor's Note: Following is an excerpt from the third section of Leon Trotsky's work, "Whither France," which is to be published in book form by Pioneer Publishers. Only the second section of "Whither France" has been published in the English language, in The New Internationalist.

This book is devoted to the elucidation of the methods of the revolutionary policies of the proletariat in our epoch. The presentation is polemical in nature, like the revolutionary policy itself. Once the masses have been won, the polemic against the ruling class turns, at a certain stage, into revolution.

Revolutionary policy has its theoretical basis in a clear understanding of the class nature of modern society, of its state, its laws, and its ideology. The bourgeoisie operates with abstractions ("nation," "fatherland," "democracy") in order to cover up thereby the exploiting character of its rule. Le Temps, one of the most venerated newspapers on the terrestrial globe, gives daily instructions to the popular masses of France in patriotism and altruism. Meanwhile, it is a secret to nobody that the altruism of Le Temps itself is on the market at fixed international rates.

The first step of revolutionary politics is the exposure of bourgeois fictions which poison the consciousness of the masses. These fictions acquire a particularly malignant character when amalgamated with the ideas of "socialism" and "revolution." Today, more than ever before, the tone in the workers' organizations of France is being set by the manufacturers of such amalgams.

Between Editions

The first edition of this book played a certain role in the formative stage of the French Communist Party. At that considerable evidence of this came to the author's notice, and, incidentally, it is not difficult to find traces of it in L'Humanite up to the year 1924. During the twelve years that have since elapsed, a radical reevaluation of values took place in the Communist International—after a number of feverish zigzags. Suffice to mention that this work is listed today among the proscribed books. In their ideas and methods, the present leaders of the French Communist Party (we are compelled to retain this name which is in complete variance with reality) do not differ in any principle from Kautsky, against whom our work was originally directed. They are only infinitely more ignorant and cynical.

The relapse into reformism and patriotism that Cachin and Co. are now living through might itself have served as a sufficient justification for a new edition of this book. However, more serious motives exist: they are rooted in the profound pre-revolutionary crisis which is convulsing the regime of the Third Republic.

A Significant Incident

After a lapse of 18 years, the author of this book has had the occasion to spend two years in France (1923-1925); to be sure, only as an observer in the provinces, who, moreover, found himself under constant police surveillance. During this time, in the Isere Department, where the writer had to live, a minor and quite banal routine episode occurred, which however, provides the key to French politics as a whole.

In a hospital, owned by the Comite des Forges, (steel trust—ed) a young worker, about to undergo a serious operation, took the liberty to read the revolutionary press (or, to be more precise, the press which he innocently accepted as revolutionary, namely: L'Humanite). The hospital put an ultimatum to the careless patient, and later, to four others who shared his sympathies: either they renounce receiving the undesirable publications or they would be immediately thrown out into the street. Of course it availed the patients nothing to argue that clerical-reactionary propaganda was being carried on quite openly in the hospital. Inasmuch as only ordinary workers were concerned, who had to risk neither mandates as deputies nor ministerial portfolios, but only their health and lives, the ultimatum had no effect. Five sick men, one of whom was scheduled for an operation, were ejected from the hospital. Grenoble at that time was a socialist municipality, headed by Doctor Martin, one of those conservative bourgeois, who generally set the tone in the Socialist Party, and whose consummate representative is Leon Blum.

The ejected workers tried to find a defender in the Mayor. In vain. Despite all entreaties, letters, and intercessions they failed to obtain an interview. They then turned to the local left newspaper "Depeche", in which Radicals and Socialists compose an indivisible cartel. Upon learning that the matter involved the hospital of Comite des Forges,

the director of the newspaper refused point-blank to intervene: anything your heart desires, except that! For, a previous indiscretion in connection with this mighty organization, "Depeche" had already been deprived of an advertisement, and suffered a loss of 20,000 francs. In contrast to the proletarians, the director of the "left" newspaper like the mayor stood to lose something. They therefore refused to engage in an unequal struggle, leaving the workers with their diseased intestines and kidneys to their fate.

A "Democratic Republic"

Once every week or every fortnight, the socialist mayor disturbs the dim recollections of his youth by delivering a speech about the superiorities of socialism over capitalism. During elections, "Depeche" supports the mayor and his party. Everything is in order. Comite des Forges maintains an attitude of liberal tolerance towards socialism of this sort, which does not harm in the least the material interests of capitalism. By means of an advertisement of 20,000 francs per year (so cheaply are these gentlemen priced!), the feudalists of the heavy industry and banks keep a large cartel newspaper in actual subjection. And not the newspaper alone, Comite des Forges apparently has arguments, both direct and indirect, weighty enough for Messrs. Mayors, Senators, Deputies, including the Socialists. Entire official France is under the dictatorship of finance capital. In the La Rousse dictionary this system is called a "democratic republic".

It seemed to the Messrs. left deputies and journalists not only in the Isere, but in all the departments of France that there would be no end to their peaceful collaboration with capitalist reaction. They were mistaken. Long corroded by dry rot, democracy suddenly felt the barrel of a gun at its temple. Just as the states, laying bare the vain and illogical fact—brought about a real armament of Hitler—a coarse epithet in the relations between history nature of the so-called "international law", just so did the arming of the gangs of Colonel de la Rocque result in convulsing the internal relations of France, compelling all parties without exception to reform their ranks, assume a different coloration, and effect reorganizations.

Friedrich Engels once wrote that the state, including the democratic republic, consists of detachments of armed men in defense of property: everything else serves only to embellish or camouflage this fact. Eloquent champions of "Law" like Herriot or Blum always became immersed at such cynicism. But both Hitler, and de la Rocque, each in his own domain, have once again demonstrated that Engels was correct.

More Vital than Statistics

Early in 1934, Daladier was the Minister-in-Chief by will of universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage:

he went around carrying national sovereignty in his pocket alongside of his handkerchief. But the moment that the detachments of de la Rocque, Maurras and Co. showed that they dared to shoot and to slash the tendons of the police horses, sovereign Daladier surrendered his post to a political invalid who was designated by the leaders of the armed detachments. This fact is of considerably greater importance than all the electoral statistics, and it cannot be erased from the pages of the most recent history of France, for it forecasts the future.

Assuredly, the course of the political life of a country cannot be altered by every group armed with revolvers, at any time. Only those armed detachments which are the organs of specific classes can play a decisive role under certain conditions. Colonel de la Rocque and his henchmen seek to insure "law and order" against convulsions. And inasmuch as law and order in France signify the rule of finance capital over the middle and petty bourgeoisie, and the rule of the bourgeoisie as a whole over the proletariat and the social strata closest to it, the detachments of de la Rocque are simply the armed pickets of finance capital.

Two Agencies of Finance-Capital

This idea is not new. One can often run across it even in the pages of Le Populaire and L'Humanite, although, of course, they were not the original formulators of it. These publications, however, speak only half of the truth. The second and equally important half consists in the fact that Herriot and Daladier with their followers are also an agency of finance capital; otherwise the Radicals could not have been the ruling party in France for a period of decades.

If we are not to play the game of hide and seek, we must say that de la Rocque and Daladier both serve one and the same master. This does not mean to say that either they themselves or their methods are identical. Quite the contrary. They fiercely war against each other, like two specialized agencies each of whom has its own special secret of salvation. Daladier promises to maintain order through the exercise of the self-same tri-color democracy. De la Rocque holds that outlived parliamentarianism must be swept away and replaced by an open military-police dictatorship. The political methods are antagonistic but the social aims they serve are identical.

The Decline of Capitalism

The historical basis of the antagonism between de la Rocque and Daladier—we use these names merely for the sake of simplicity in our presentation—is the decline of the capitalist system, its incurable crisis, its decay. Despite the constant triumphs of technology and the explosive successes achieved by individual branches of industry, capitalism as a whole is a

brake upon the development of the productive forces, engendering an extreme instability in social and international relations. Parliamentary democracy is indissolubly bound up with the epoch of free competition and free international trade. The bourgeoisie was able to tolerate the freedom of strikes, of assembly and of the press only so long as the productive forces were mounting upwards, so long as the sales markets were being extended, the welfare of the popular masses, even if only partially, was rising and the capitalist nations were able to live and let live.

It is otherwise now. If we exclude the Soviet Union, the imperialist epoch is characterized by the stagnation or decline of the national income, a chronic agrarian crisis and organic unemployment. These phenomena pertain internally to the present phase of capitalism just as gut and arterio-sclerosis pertain to certain ages of man. To explain the world economic chaos by the consequences of the last war is to lay bare a hopeless superficiality in the spirit of Calliaux, Count Sforza and the like. The war itself was nothing else than an attempt on the part of capitalist countries to unload the already impending crash upon the backs of the enemy. The attempt failed. The war only deepened the manifestations of collapse, which in its subsequent development prepares a new war.

Social Disintegration in France

Bad as French economic statistics are, though they deliberately evade the problems of class contradictions, even these statistics are unable to cover up the manifestations of a direct social disintegration. Amid the general decline of the national income, amid the truly horrifying fall in the income of the peasants, amid the ruin of the little men in the cities and the growth of unemployment, the gigantic number of 200-250 millions a year are doing a brilliant business. Finance capital is sucking the lifeblood from the veins of the French people, in the full sense of the term. Such is the social basis for the ideology and politics of "national unity".

Mitigations and flickers of better times are possible in the process of decline; they are even inevitable. They remain, however, purely conjunctural in character. The general tendency of our epoch imperiously drives France, in the wake of a number of other countries, to the alternative: either the proletariat must overthrow the utterly decayed bourgeois order, or capitalism, in the interests of self-preservation, must replace democracy with Fascism. How long can Fascism last? The answer to this question will be provided by the fate of Mussolini and Hitler.

The Fascists fired their guns on February 6, 1934 upon the direct orders of the Bourgeoisie, the banks and the trusts. From the self-same rutting summits, Daladier received the

instruction to hand over power to Doumergue. And if the Radical Premier capitulated—with the pusillanimity that is generally characteristic. In other words: sovereign Daladier surrendered power to Doumergue for the self-same reason characteristic of the Radicals—it was precisely because he recognized his own master in the gangs of de la Rocque that the director of "Depeche" and the Mayor of Grenoble refused to expose the abominable cruelty of the agents of Comite des Forges.

An Unsolved Question

The transition from democracy to Fascism carries with it, however, the danger of social upheavals. Thence arise the tactical vacillations and differences among the summits of the bourgeoisie. All the magnates of capital are in favor of further strengthening the armed detachments, which can serve as safety reserves in the hour of danger. But what place should be allotted to these detachments even today? Should they be permitted immediately to assume the offensive or should they still be held in reserve as a threat?—These questions remain unsolved as yet.

Finance capital no longer believes in the ability of the Radicals to lead the petty bourgeois masses behind them, and by means of the pressure exercised by these masses to restrain the proletariat within the framework of "democratic" discipline. But finance capital is likewise uncertain of the ability of the Fascist organizations, which still lack a real mass base, to seize power and establish firm order.

An Unstable Situation

The behind-the-scenes leaders have been instilled with the need for caution not by parliamentary rhetoric, but by the rage of the workers, by the attempt of the General Strike, which, to be sure, was stifled at its very inception by the bureaucracy of Jouhaux, and, later by the local uprisings (Toulon, Brest, etc.). A slight curb was placed on the Fascists, and the Radicals breathed just a bit easier. Le Temps, which had already rushed to offer its hand and heart, in a number of articles, to the "young generation" discovered anew the superior merits of a liberal regime, as the one most in harmony with French genius. Thus, the unstable, transitional, bastard regime was established, which harmonizes not with the genius of France but with the decline of the Third Republic.

What stands out most sharply in this regime are its Bonapartist traits: the independence of power parties and programs, the liquidation of the parliamentary legislation by means of emergency powers, the rising of the Government in the guise of an "arbiter" above the struggling camps, i.e. factually above the nation. The Ministries of Doumergue, Flaudin, Laval, all three with the invariable participation of the compromised and abject Radicals, represented minor variations of one and the same theme.

Leon Blum's Wisdom

Upon the inauguration of the Sarraut ministry, Leon Blum, whose perspicacity possesses two dimensions instead of three, proclaimed that: "The final effects of February 6th have been destroyed on the parliamentary plane" (Le Populaire, Feb. 2, 1936). This is commonly known as cleaning the shadow of a carriage with the shadow of a brush. As if it is possible, in general, to abolish "on the parliamentary plane" the pressure of the armed detachments of finance capital! As if Sarraut can escape feeling this pressure and not quake before it! In point of fact, the Sarraut-Flaudin Government represents another variation of the self-same semi-parliamentary "Bonapartism", only somewhat inclined to the "left". Sarraut, himself, in replying to the charge of his having resorted to arbitrary measures, gave the Chamber the best answer possible. Said Sarraut: "If my measures are arbitrary, it is because I aim to be an arbiter." This aphorism would not have sounded badly even on the lips of Napoleon III. Sarraut feels himself to be not the plenipotentiary of a certain party or a bloc of parties in power, as is proper in accordance with the rules of parliamentarianism, but an arbiter over classes and parties, as is in accordance with the laws of Bonapartism.

ors, Whitaker will have another obstacle to overcome in proving that the Modern Democrats were Communists. Hot in pursuit of the reds, Whitaker questioned Jensen closely about the finances of the local Committee for the Defense of Civil Liberties in Tampa of which Jensen is treasurer. A subpoena was issued for the books of the committee, but Jensen will probably refuse to turn them over to Whitaker because it will mean that those who gave money to fight Klan terrorism will become marked victims of it.

"If you mean the American Civil Liberties Union, I don't see how it could have affiliated because it is a non-partisan, non-political organization devoted to the defense of civil liberties," Jensen informed him.

"Isn't this the same group that offered a reward of \$1,000 for convictions in these cases?" Whitaker asked.

"I believe so," said Jensen.

Tricks of the Defense

"And," said Whitaker, his voice rising, "isn't this the same group that sent lawyers to the Scottsboro..."

Farrior and County Solicitor Manuel Clover, his first assistant, leaped out of their chairs shouting objections. Whitakers self-satisfied smile remained even after the judge sustained the objections—he had gotten that word in.

"Then you don't know," Whitaker continued, "whether the civil liberties league is a political or communist organization?"

Again the court sustained the state's objections but Whitaker was getting his kicks in.

Farrior tried three times to introduce the program of the Modern Democrats as a state exhibit, but was stopped each time by technical objections from Whitaker. The program consists of ten municipal reforms the most radical of which provides for "a planning board from the unemployed to plan and manage a system whereby production for use instead of for profit may be made possible." Should the platform be made available to the Jur-

Red Scare Is Raised In Tampa

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streetion days which makes it a felony to incite an insurrection. On the basis of this statute, he intends to establish that the advocacy of communism is a felony.

He will then try to prove that the Modern Democrats were Communists and that the police therefore had a right to arrest them. With the arrests justified and with Paulist painted as a red seeking to destroy the home, the church and white supremacy, Whitaker can rely on the normal prejudices of the jury to take care of the kidnapping indictment.

Whitaker used this approach with Charles E. Jensen, State Secretary of the Socialist Party of Florida and first witness for the prosecution. Jensen, one of the six arrested in the raid, told a damaging story which could not be altered in the slightest detail by Whitaker's tricky cross-examination.

The defense attorney then began a series of questions about the mimeograph machine Jensen had used to run off copies of the program of the Modern Democrats. It devel-

oped that Jensen had loaned the machine to your correspondent, the present writer, who is covering the trial for The Nation, the Milwaukee Leader and a group of labor papers. From then on, Sidney Hertzberg became the defendant.

Whitaker's Mysterious Evidence

Whitaker claimed to have mysterious evidence that this writer was in reality the correspondent for the Daily Worker, that he was a Communist; that he might be cranking out secret instructions on the mimeograph machine for an armed uprising. Jensen, he was sure, must be a Communist because he had loaned his mimeograph to such a person.

Despite the fact that Judge Robert T. Dewell sustained the state's constant objections, Whitaker again and again came back to the mimeograph machine and what your correspondent was doing with it.

"I Mr. Hertzberg is on trial here, let's arraign him, plead him not guilty and fry him now," State Attorney J. Rex Farrior suggested.

Finally, Jensen was given a chance to deny categorically that this writer was a correspondent for the Daily Worker and Whitaker stopped his play-acting. His insinuations, however, probably had their effect on the jury.

Whitaker added race prejudice to red-baiting while questioning Jensen about the setup of the Modern Democrats.

"Wasn't provision made for the affiliation of the New York civil liberties league with the Modern Democrats?" Whitaker demanded.

ETHIOPIA BETRAYED!

SPEAKER:
MAURICE SPECTOR
Former Member E.C.C.I.
Auspices: Workers Party U.S.
New York District

Lost independent state in Africa succumbs under the fire of Fascist armies.
Mussolini aided by diplomatic game of Litvinov, Eden and Flaudin.
League of Nations promises . . . but uses Ethiopia as a pawn of Imperialist struggles.
Bankruptcy of Second and Third Internationals again revealed.
Questions and Discussion

IRVING PLAZA
Irving Place & 15th St.
SUNDAY MAY 3rd

General Strike Marks New Left Trend in Spain

Azana Directs Shafts at "Communism" in Reply to Provocation from Fascists But Workers Action Makes Them Run for Cover

By ALFREDO ROJAS

The extraordinarily successful 24-hour general strike in Madrid on Friday, April 17, called in protest against Fascist murders and attacks on workers, is the most significant event since the February 16 election. It has thrown back the rising tide of rightist moves. Its full significance can only be understood when one realizes that it came, suddenly, after a period of proletarian retreat and growing assertiveness by the rightists.

Premier Azana's speeches in the Cortes have been a sensitive barometer of the move to the right. Six weeks after the masses had pushed him into power, Azana gave a speech which was hailed by the Catholics and Monarchists (reported in the NEW MILITANT, April 11). The Communist Party hailed his speech, and even the "left" Socialist, Largo Caballero, contented himself with being cautiously non-committal. Azana became more bold, and called off the municipal elections scheduled for April 12. The proletarian parties submitted. On April 15, with many economic strikes going on in all parts of Spain, the rightist deputies called upon the government to put an end to "the state of anarchy." "The troublemakers and fomenters will be exterminated," answered cabinet minister Salvador, on behalf of the government.

Robles Threat of Civil War

The farthest right was achieved the same day by Azana himself. Under the guise of interpellating the government as to what measures were being taken to stop disorder, Gil Robles, Catholic chief of the rightist forces, delivered a threat of civil war. "The civil war, if it breaks out, will be caused by the government's negligence. We declare now that it is preferable to die fighting in the streets than to wait in our homes to be assassinated by our enemies." Spain, declared Gil Robles—who was only thwarted from creating a Fascist regime by the revolt of Asturias in October, 1934—is divided into two camps and the hostile actions against the rightists are intolerable and will inevitably end in civil war.

What was Azana's answer to this threat? Did the "Man of the Republic" pillory the rightists for refusing to abide by the democratic results of the February elections? Not at all! Azana's "answer" was a rabid attack on revolutionary Marxism.

Azana Attacks Communism

"Communism," shouted Azana, "would signify the death of Spain!" He sharply denied that his government was permitting the gradual implanting of revolutionary Marxism. The government will work incessantly to maintain order, "revising, if necessary, the whole system of defense, in order to put an end to the reign of violence."

The socialists and communists remained silent when Azana finished, but the left republicans, the center and the right, cheered him noisily. Deputy Ventosa, spokesman of the rightist Catalan League, declared that Azana "is the only man capable of offering the country security and defense of all legal rights."

Yet, on the vote of confidence the next day, the socialists and communists voted for Azana! So, too, did many rightists.

This was the atmosphere on the very eve of the general strike. So emboldened were the rightists, in fact, that while the proletarian deputies were voting for Azana, young Fascists in Madrid were joined by officers of the Civil Guard in a revolver attack on workers who shouted replies against the "Vive el fascismo" of a funeral cortege of an arm-officer. But this provocation—the workers fought back and killed four fascists—proved to be the turning point.

The General Strike

The next day came the general strike. Despite the fact that it was called by the anarchist-controlled Confederation of Labor without any attempt to secure united action from the Socialist-controlled U. G. T., the strike met with powerful response. Early in the day the "whole commercial life of the capital was completely paralyzed," according to the Associated Press. Though the workers of Madrid are largely in the Socialist unions, and though they have always ignored the usually ill-prepared and irresponsible strike calls of the anarchists, proletarian Madrid came out on the streets.

The splendid response of the masses demonstrated the bankruptcy of the policy of the Socialists and Communists, who had not even attacked Azana, let alone considered a protest strike. Late in the day, they came out in support of the strike and secured an agreement with the anarchists to limit it to twenty-four hours. (The anarchists, as usual, set no time-limit to the protest.)

Azana Compelled to Act

Before the strike was over, Azana had promised to take steps against

the Fascist provocations. The Civil Guards who had participated in the firing on the workers were arrested, high officers in the Guard were removed from their posts, and mass arrests of Fascists took place in many cities, and in one or two the officials of the Catholic and Monarchist parties were also arrested and jailed. The Cortes remained in session throughout the night of the general strike, passing a law prohibiting army officers, including retired, from participating in politics.

The recent experiences in France demonstrate, however, the worthlessness of governmental measures against Fascism. No bourgeois government will seriously attempt to destroy the Fascist legions on which it may have to depend tomorrow. Only the workers' own defense forces can smash the Fascist corps.

Far more important than the government's assurances is the inspiration that the general strike has given to the proletariat.

Over a hundred thousand workers were out on strike a few days after, according to such a hostile source as the Associated Press. The same source reports strike victories in Huelva, involving 40,000 miners and in America, where a general strike forced the discharge of the government's labor officer. The government hastily sent ten million pesetas to Asturias for unemployment relief. The arrival in Gibraltar of many big landowners indicated new seizures of land by the peasantry.

Leftward Development in S. P.

Even more significant than the peasant and workers' struggles, which can have no successful issue unless led by a revolutionary party, is the latest news of leftward developments in the Socialist Party, which is by far the largest party of the masses. The Madrid organization, strongest unit of the party, has voted to seek revision of the party program at the June congress. Madrid's Socialists will present a program which adopts as its perspective the immediate struggle for proletarian dictatorship. Declaring that Spain's present crisis is not cyclical but permanent, the program declares that "the only definite solution of the national problem is revolutionary socialism," and that "in the period of the transition from capitalist society to the socialist regime, the form of government shall be a dictatorship of the proletariat with the aim of assuring the changes in social, economic and political organization and to prevent any attempts at capitalist restoration, as well as to consummate the destruction of the whole present social order."

It appears likely that this program will be adopted in June. The right and moderate wings, led by Besteiro and Indalecio Prieto, both closely identified with Azana, are fast losing ground.

If Caballero, head of the Madrid organization and chief of the U. G. T. were to take this program seriously, the first step would be repudiation of the "Popular Front" alliance with Azana. Dispatches early this week indicated that the U. G. T. would make the break by insisting on voting for Socialist candidates in the presidential election on April 26, instead of voting for a bourgeois-republican as Azana insists. According to the A. P., however, Caballero has agreed to support Don Alvaro Albornoz, bourgeois-republican candidate. If this is true, the Socialists will have no opportunity of estimating their strength among the masses by the outcome of Sunday's election.

Announce New Lecture Series

"Trotskyism or Stalinism?"—this is the general theme of a special lecture organized by the New York District of the Workers Party, to be held on Sunday, May 17. The speaker, Max Shachtman, who is well-known to New York labor audiences, will deal in his lecture principally with the struggle between the two tendencies, one led by Trotsky and the other by Stalin, in the period between the rise of the Left Opposition and its expulsion from the Communist International at the end of 1927. This will cover the struggle for party democracy, the dispute around the British general strike and the Chinese Revolution, industrialization and collectivization in the Soviet Union, etc., together with the famous "Third Period" and the course towards nationalist degeneration which followed it.

The lecture will be held in the Irving Plaza hall, 15th Street and Irving Place. Admission will be followed by questions and discussion from the floor. Further details about it will be contained in coming issues of the NEW MILITANT.