

France at the Crossroads

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

By LEON TROTSKY

Editor's Note: In response to requests from many of our readers we are continuing publication of "France at the Crossroads" by Leon Trotsky. This introduction to the new French edition of "In Defense of Terrorism" is the third section of comrade Trotsky's series "Whither France" which is to be published in book form by Pioneer Publishers.

The sharpening of the class struggle, and especially the open emergence of the armed gangs of reaction, caused great ferment among the workers' organizations. The Socialist Party which had been peacefully performing the role of the spare wheel in the chariot of the Third Republic, found itself compelled to half-renege its cartel tradition, and even to break with its own right wing (the Neos). Concurrently, the Communists completed their evolution in just the opposite direction, but on a scale infinitely more extensive. Over a period of several years these gentlemen had raved deliriously about barricades, conquering the streets, and so on (their delirium, to be sure, remained primarily literary in nature). Now after February 6, 1934, realizing that the situation had taken a serious turn, the specialists in barricades scurried to the right. The normal reflex action of the scared phrasemongers coincided most propitiously with the new international orientation of Soviet diplomacy.

Status Quo—the Policy

Oppressed by the danger threatening from Hitler Germany, the policy of the Kremlin turned toward France. Status quo—in international relations! Status quo in the internal relations of the French regime! Hopes for the social revolution? Chimeras! The leading circles in the Kremlin refer to a rule only with contempt to French communism. One must hang on to what exists, lest things get worse. Parliamentary democracy in France is inconceivable without the Radicals; they must be supported by the Socialists. It is necessary to order the Communists not to hinder the bloc between Blum and Herriot, and if possible, the Communists, themselves, must join the bloc. No convulsions, no threats! Such is the course pursued by the Kremlin.

When Stalin renounces the world revolution, the bourgeois parties of France refuse to believe him. Needless caution! In politics, blind credulity is, of course, not a great virtue. But blind distrust is no better. One must know how to compare words with deeds and be able to recognize a general tendency of development over a period of years. The policy of Stalin, determined by the interests of the privileged Soviet bureaucracy, has become conservative through and through. The French bourgeoisie has ample reasons to place faith in Stalin. All the less reason for trust on the part of the French proletariat.

The Society for Bankrupts

During the Trade Union Unity congress at Toulouse, the "communist" Racamond gave a truly immortal formula of the policy of the People's Front: "How to overcome the timidity of the Radical Party?" How to overcome the bourgeoisie's fear of the proletariat? Very simply: the terrible revolutionists must fling away the knife clenched between their teeth, they must put pomade on their hair, and flich the smile of the most fascinating courtesan. The result will be Vaillant-Couturier—latest model. Under the onset of the pomaded "communists," who with all their strength pushed the leftward moving Socialists to the right, Blum had to change his course once again, fortunately, in the accustomed direction. Thus arose the People's Front—the society for insuring Radical bankrupts at the expense of the capital of the working class organizations.

Radicalism is inseparable from Freemasonry. When we say this, we have said everything. During the debate in the Chamber of Deputies on the Fascist leagues, Mr. Xavier Vailla recalled that Trotsky had once "prohibited" French communists from participating in Masonic lodges. Mr. Jammy Schmidt, who we believe is a high authority in this field, immediately explained this edict by the incompatibility between despotic Bolshevism and the "free spirit." We shall not dispute this point with the Radical deputy. But we still consider that a labor representative, who seeks inspiration or solace in the rapid Masonic cult of class-collaboration, is unde-

serving of the slightest trust. It was not accidental that the cartel was supplemented by the extensive participation of the Socialists in the mummery of the lodges. Now the time has come for the repentant Communists, also, to don the aprons! Incidentally, the newly converted pupils will be able to serve the old masters of the cartel more comfortably in aprons.

Safety Valve for Capitalism

But, we are told not without indignation, the People's Front is not a cartel at all, but a mass movement. There is, of course, no lack of pompous definitions, but they do not change the nature of things. The job of the cartel always consisted in putting a brake upon the mass movement, directing it into the channels of class collaboration. This is precisely the job of the People's Front as well. The difference between them—and not an unimportant one—is that the traditional cartel was applied during the comparatively peaceful and stable epochs of the parliamentary regime. Now, however, when the masses are impatient and explosive, a more imposing brake is needed, with the participation of the "communists." Joint meetings, parade processions, oaths, mixing the banners of the Commune and of Versailles, noise, bedlam, demagoguery—all these serve a single aim: to curb and demoralize the mass movement.

While justifying himself in the Chamber before the Rights, Sarraut declared that his innocent concessions to the People's Front were nothing else than the safety valve of the regime. Such frankness may seem imprudent. But it was rewarded by violent applause from the benches of the extreme left. Ergo, there was no reason for Sarraut to be bashful. In any case, he succeeded, perhaps, not quite consciously, in providing a classic definition of the People's Front: a safety valve for the mass movement. M. Sarraut is generally lucky with his aphorisms!

Foreign Policy of People's Front

Foreign policy is the continuation of home policy. Having entirely renounced the viewpoint of the proletariat, Blum, Cachin and Co. adopt, under the screen of "collective security" and "international law," the viewpoint of national imperialism. They are preparing precisely the same policy of bootlicking which they had conducted in the years 1914 to 1918, adding only the phrase "For the Defense of the U.S.S.R." Yet during the years 1918-1923, when Soviet diplomacy was also obliged to veer considerably and to conclude a good many agreements, not a single one of the sections of the Communist International so much as even dared to think of a bloc with its own bourgeoisie! Is not this alone ample proof of the sincerity of Stalin's renunciation of the world revolution?

The self-same motives which impelled the present leaders of the Comintern to suckle at the paps of "democracy" in its period of agony, led them to discover the glorious image of the League of Nations, when the death rattle was already emanating from it. Thus was created a common platform of foreign policy between the Radicals and the Soviet Union. The home program of the People's Front is concocted of generalities which allow of as liberal an interpretation as does the Geneva covenant. The general meaning of the program is to leave everything as of old. Meanwhile, the masses refuse to accept the old any longer; therein lies the gist of the political crisis.

Proletarian Disarmament

Disarming the proletariat politically, the Blums, Paul Faures, Cachins and Thorezes are most concerned lest the workers arm themselves physically. The agitation of these gentlemen does not differ in any way from the preacher's sermons on the superiorities of the moral principles. Engels who taught that the problem of state power is the problem of armed detachments, and Marx who looked upon insurrection as an art seem to be akin to medieval barbarians in the eyes of the present deputies, senators and mayors of the People's Front. For the one hundred and first time, Populaire prints a cartoon picturing a naked worker with the caption: "You will learn that our bare fists are more solid than all your black-jacks." What a splendid contempt for military technique! Even the Abyssinian negus holds more progressive

views on this subject. The overturns in Italy, Germany and Austria apparently do not exist for these people. Will they cease singing paens to "bare fists" when de la Rocque claps handcuffs upon them? Sometimes one feels sorry that such an experience cannot be afforded privately to the Messrs. Leaders, without involving the masses!

From the standpoint of the bourgeois regime as a whole, the People's Front represents an episode in the competition between Radicalism and Fascism for the attention and good graces of big capital. By their theatrical fraternization with Socialists and Communists, the Radicals want to prove to the master that the situation of the regime is not as bad as the Rights assert; that the threat of the revolution is not at all so great; that even Vaillant-Couturier has swapped his knife for a dog collar; that through the medium of the domesticated "revolutionists" it is possible to discipline the working masses, and, consequently, to save the parliamentary system from shipwreck.

Not all the Radicals believe in this maneuver; the most solid and influential among them, headed by Herriot prefer to take a watchful position. But in the last analysis they have nothing else to propose themselves. The crisis of parliamentarism is first of all the crisis of the confidence of the voters in Radicalism. Until some method for rejuvenating capitalism is discovered there is not and cannot be any recipe for the salvation of the Radical party. The latter has only the choice between two variants of political doom. Even the relative success it may score during the coming elections can neither avert nor even long postpone its shipwreck.

Is This a Bloc?

The leaders of the Socialist Party the most careful politicians in France, do not burden themselves with the study of the sociology of the People's Front. No one can learn anything from the endless monologues of Leon Blum. As for the Communists, the latter, extremely proud of their initiative in the cause of collaboration with the bourgeoisie, picture the People's Front as an alliance between the proletariat and the middle classes. What a parody on Marxism! The Radical party is not at all the party of the petty bourgeoisie. Nor is it a "bloc between the middle and the petty bourgeoisie," in accordance with the idiotic definition of the Moscow Pravda. The middle bourgeoisie exploits the petty bourgeoisie not only economically but also politically, and it itself is the agency of finance capital. To give the hierarchic political relations, based upon exploitation, the neutral name of a "bloc" is to make mock of reality. A horseman is not a bloc between a man and a horse. If the party of Herriot-Daladier extends its roots deeply into the petty bourgeoisie, and in part even into the working masses, it does so only in order to lull and dupe them in the interests of the capitalist order. The Radicals are the democratic party of French imperialism—any other definition is a lie.

The crisis of the capitalist system disarms the Radicals, depriving them of their traditional implements for lulling the petty bourgeoisie. "The middle classes" are beginning to sense if not to understand that it is impossible to save the situation through paltry reforms, that it is necessary to scrap audaciously the existing system. But Radicalism and audacity are as incompatible as fire and water. Fascism is fed above all by the growing lack of confidence of the petty bourgeoisie in Radicalism. One can say without fear of exaggeration that the political fate of France in the period immediately ahead will largely take shape depending upon the manner in which Radicalism will be liquidated, and who will fall heir to its legacy, i.e., the influence upon the petty bourgeoisie: Fascism or the party of the proletariat.

An Axiom of Marxism

The elementary axiom of Marxist strategy reads that the alliance between the proletariat and the little men of the city and country can be realized only in the irreconcilable struggle against the traditional parliamentary representation of the petty bourgeoisie. In order to attract the peasant to the side of the worker, it is necessary to tear the peasant away from the Radical politician, who subjects the peasant to finance capital. In contradistinction to this, the People's Front, the conspiracy between the labor bureaucracy and the worst political exploiters of the middle classes, is capable only of killing the faith of the masses in the revolutionary road and of driving them into the arms of the Fascist counter-revolution.

Unbelievable as it may seem, some cynics attempt to justify the policy of the People's Front by quoting Lenin, who, if you please, proved that there is no getting along without "compromises" and, in particular, without making agreements with other parties. It has become an established rule among the leaders of the present Comintern to make mock of Lenin; they trample underfoot all the teachings of the builder of the Bolshevik party, and then they take a trip to Moscow to kneel before his Mausoleum.

The Tradition of Lenin

Lenin began his activities in Czarist Russia, where not only the proletariat, the peasantry, and the intelligentsia but also wide circles of the bourgeoisie stood in opposition to the old regime. If the policy of the People's Front has any justification at all, one should imagine that it could be justified first of all in a country that has yet to achieve its bourgeois revolution. The Messrs. Falsifiers, however, would not do badly at all if they were to point out at what stage and under what conditions the Bolshevik party ever built even a semblance of the People's Front in Russia? Let them strain their imagination and rummage among the historical documents!

The Bolsheviks did conclude practical agreements with the revolutionary petty bourgeois organizations, for example, for joint li-

legal transport of revolutionary literature; sometimes for joint arrangements of a street demonstration; sometimes to repulse the Black Hundred gangs. During elections to the state Duma they did, under certain conditions, enter into electoral blocs with the Mensheviks or the Social Revolutionary parties, on the second ballot. That is all. No common "programs," no common and permanent institutions, no renunciation of the criticism of temporary allies. Such episodic agreements and compromises, confined strictly to practical aims—and Lenin never spoke of any other kind—have absolutely nothing in common with the People's Front which represents a conglomeration of heterogeneous organizations, a long term alliance between different classes, that are bound for an entire period—and what a period!—by a common program and a common policy, the policy of parades, declamations, and of throwing up smokescreens. The People's Front will fall to pieces at the first serious test, and deep fissures will open up in all of its component sections. The policy of the People's Front is the policy of betrayal.

The rule of Bolshevism on the question of blocs reads: march separately, strike together! The rule of the leaders of the present Comintern is: march together in order to be smashed separately. Let these gentlemen hold on to Stalin and Dimitroff, but leave Lenin in peace!

Is France Saved from Fascism?

It is impossible to read without indignation the declarations of the bragging leaders who allege that the People's Front has "saved" France from Fascism. In point of fact, they mean only to say that the mutual encouragement "saved" the scared heroes from their exaggerated fears. For how long? Between Hitler's first uprising and his coming to power, a decade elapsed, which was marked by frequent ebbs and flows. At that time, the German Blums and Cachins also used to proclaim more than once their "victory" over national socialism. We refused to believe them, and we were not mistaken. This experience, however, has taught the French cousins of Wels and Thaelmann nothing. In Germany, to be sure, the Communists did not participate in the People's Front, which united the social democracy with the bourgeoisie left, and the Catholic Center ("the alliance between the proletariat and the middle classes"). During that period the Comintern rejected even fighting agreements between working class organizations against Fascism. The results are quite well known. The warmest sympathy to Thaelmann as the captive of executioners cannot deter us from saying that his policy, i.e., the policy of Stalin, did more for Hitler's victory than the policy of Hitler himself. Having turned itself inside out, the Comintern now applies in France the quite familiar policy of the German Social Democracy. Is it really so difficult to foresee the results?

The coming parliamentary elections, no matter what their outcome, will not in themselves bring any serious changes into the situation: the voters, in the final analysis, are confronted with the choice between an arbiter of the type of Laval and an arbiter of the type, Herriot-Daladier. But inasmuch as Herriot has peacefully collaborated with Laval, and Daladier has supported them both, the difference between them is entirely insignificant, if measured by the scale of the tasks set by history.

(To be continued)

Dubinsky Finds a Haven in Roosevelt Camp

David Dubinsky, head of the International Ladies Garment Workers, has declared his support of Roosevelt. Another long-time member of the Socialist Party, Emil Rieve, president of the American Federation of Hosiery Workers, pushed through his union convention a resolution endorsing Roosevelt. The General Executive Board of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers voted likewise. Joseph Schlossberg being the only one reported to have voted against the proposal. Among those voting with Sidney Hillman were Abraham Miller, Louis Hollander and Samuel Levin, Old Guard Socialists, while Leo Krzycki, national chairman of the Socialist Party, is asserted by the New Leader to have merely abstained on the vote.

These traitors give as their excuse for supporting Roosevelt the preposterous claim that Roosevelt will save the labor movement from reaction. They speak of Roosevelt in much the same terms with which the German Socialists supported Hindenburg in 1932. Fortunately, there is this difference in the analogy: the German bureaucracy dragged the whole Socialist movement along with them, while in America the main forces of the Socialist Party continue to fight for an independent proletarian course.

Thus the treachery of the Dubinskys and the Rieves stands out still more nakedly as the treachery of union bureaucrats who have reached a point in their degeneration where they drop even the pretense of being Socialists.

Logic of Right Wing Policy

Their treachery is the inevitable outcome of the Right wing Socialist policy of the last two decades in the "Socialist-controlled" unions. Built by class-conscious workers, these unions were from the first officered by Socialist Party members. Even when a bureaucracy developed in these unions and crystallized during the war years, it had to continue to render lip-service to the Socialism adhered to by the most active union members.

But after the 1919 split in the Socialist Party, there ceased to be even the semblance of a Socialist policy pursued under party direction in the unions. Under the specious formula of "cooperation with the unions, not trying to dominate them," the Hillquit leadership collaborated with the union bureaucracy in its class-collaboration policy, its venality, its persecution of the militant union members. When rank and file Socialists protested against this course, they were told by Hillquit that it would be a crime against the unions if Socialist union members joined together to formulate a policy for a union.

Living and Acting Like Bosses

Thus freed by Hillquit from any possible restraining influence of the Socialist rank and file, the Dubinskys were free to develop all the repulsive characteristics of a reformist trade union bureaucracy in an era of relative capitalist stability. Never called upon to give an accounting of themselves to the Socialist rank and file, much less called upon to collaborate with the Socialist workers in formulation of policy, the Dubinskys lived like bosses, acted like bosses, and thought like bosses; the psychology of the employers becomes far more akin to such bureaucrats than the psychology of the workers whom they dominate so ruthlessly.

So long as the Communist Party was a revolutionary organization, whose organized fractions in the trade unions confronted the Socialist bureaucrats with the needs of the workers, the Dubinskys found it easier to maintain their control by retaining their Socialist membership, thus being able to assert that their differences with the Communist Party was one within the proletariat. But with the degeneration of the Communist Party, and its resultant impotence in the unions, this restraining influence disappeared. Meanwhile, the generation of Socialist workers who built the needle trades unions has been dying off. The younger generation which has taken their place were not met by organized Socialist activity which drew them into the party; and those who went to the Socialist Party on their own initiative were repelled by the fact that they and the Dubinskys were members of the same party. It is a sobering fact to realize what a small percentage of the present union membership even vote Socialist or Communist, as compared to the solid Socialist ranks of the generation which built these unions.

Thus the stage has long been set for the treachery of the Dubinskys. They have been treacherous in their

whole course in the unions. There only remained that they should set the formal seal on this treachery by coming out in support of capitalist politicians.

So long as the Old Guard remained in control of the Socialist Party, the Dubinskys found the mantle of Socialism useful enough so that they refrained from making open commitments with capitalist politicians (in New York, however, they tacitly supported Governor Lehman). But with the collapse of the Old Guard, the Dubinskys dared not remain "Socialists" any longer.

One has only to read the full—and laudatory—reports in the New Leader, April 25, of Dubinsky's speeches before the cloakmakers and the United Hebrew Trades, to see clearly his real animus. His attack on the Communists and on the united front for May Day is just window-dressing. The source of his rage is the fact that the Militant Socialists have adopted a policy of organized Socialist activity in the trade unions and are building Socialist Leagues to formulate and carry out policy in the unions. This, according to Dubinsky, is a "Communist assault on the unions." "Dubinsky deplored what he characterized as the attempt by the Socialist Party, under the leadership of the left wing group, to dictate policies to the labor unions, and abandonment of the policy of cooperation with the trade unions." Dubinsky wept for the good old days of Hillquit:

"The party of Morris Hillquit had won the reputation for seeking to work harmoniously with the labor movement, and now the Socialist Party, under the leadership of Norman Thomas, endeavors to split and disrupt the labor movement."

Dubinsky's Hatred of 'Militants'

Here is the root of Dubinsky's hate and fear of the Militant Socialists; and well may he fear. For despite their present weaknesses, the Socialist Leagues in the unions constitute the most serious threat to the Dubinskys in a decade. In these leagues, inevitably, the Socialist workers will hammer out a class-struggle union policy and come to grips with the bureaucrats.

We are sure that these Socialist workers, who know Dubinsky and his like at close range, are happiest of all that these traitors are no longer members of the Socialist Party. A deadening weight has been lifted from the shoulders of the Socialist workers; they are freer to recruit the masses in the unions to Socialism.

It is unfortunate that the Dubinskys were permitted to take the initiative and choose their own opportunity to leave the Socialist Party. They should have been driven out long ago by the party on its own initiative. The workers dominated and oppressed by the bureaucrats would have had all the more respect for the Socialist Party had it done so. Nevertheless, the fact that the Dubinskys are no longer covered by the mantle of Socialism is a good, healthy sign of the leftward development of the Socialist Party. Given a continuation of this development, and one Dubinsky will be replaced by a thousand honest workers.

We refrain from commenting at length on the truly disgusting behavior of the Old Guard Socialists. Dubinsky abandons Socialism and jumps on the Roosevelt bandwagon. Not a word of reproof from the Old Guard Socialists! Instead, they give columns and columns to his bellyhoo for Roosevelt and attacks on the Militant Socialists. The Old Guard taunts Krzycki for abstaining on the Roosevelt vote in the Amalgamated; and if it is true, Krzycki deserves the severest treatment. But not a word in the New Leader about the three official and six non-party Old Guardsists who voted for Roosevelt! The most likely explanation is that the Old Guard is leaving the door open for them to follow Dubinsky, Rieve, Miller, et al, into the Roosevelt camp.

Peoples Front Salvages Radicals in Elections

(Continued from Page 1) be realized, the relationship of forces in the new Chamber will differ little from that in the last.

In the last Chamber the "left" bloc numbered 314 out of the total 611 (of these the Radicals had 151; S.P., 93; C.P., 10; the dissident communists, 10; and Paul Boncour's Socialist and Republican Union, 39).

In the new Chamber, a "left" majority—320-340 out of 618—can be had only with the participation of the Radicals, including both the "faithful" and the dubious friends of the People's Front.

In other words, if the Radicals choose (i.e., if they are so ordered by French finance capital), they may agree to head a People's Front government, or even participate in it with Leon Blum as Premier; or they may prefer to enter into a bloc with the reactionaries of the Center or the Right as they have done innumerable times in the past.

The Merry-Go-Round Again

Thus, the "victory" merely re-

produces under more tense conditions the main aspects of the Chamber that was elected in 1932. The old Chamber was also the result of a "leftward sweep," it was likewise headed by the "left" government of Daladier-Frot, the government which capitulated in 1934 to the Fascists. We have the same setting, and even the same leading actors from Daladier down, supported by an extra cast of Stalinists and Socialists.

It is the good old merry-go-round. It is therefore not surprising to find that the editor of the New York Sun holds the same views on the subject of the French elections as does the Manchester Guardian and Ludwig Lore of the New York Post, who, in turn, is in agreement with Harry Gannes and the Daily Worker.

On April 29, the New York Sun carried an editorial entitled "A Blow at Fascism," which pointed out that Fascism took "a beating" at the ballot boxes. The English liberal Manchester Guardian sees

the Fascists turning into "respectable conservatives." Ludwig Lore prophetically foretold in his column a few days before the elections that the "French Fascists Seem About to Join the 3-toed Horse"; and Gannes and the Daily Worker shout with him that "Fifty Million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong!" (April 29), and that "Fascism was effectively smashed by the results of the elections on Sunday in France." (H. Gannes in D.W., April 28).

Fascist bullets and knives cannot be exorcized by ballots, not even by such magicians as Lore or Gannes.

While the misleaders of the French working class are celebrating the "defeat" of Fascism, the agencies of finance capital are swinging into action.

Finance-Capital Into Action

Even though the leftward movement of the masses is being dissipated by the bankrupt and reactionary labor bureaucracies of the C.P. and the S.P., it constitutes a dire threat of the rulers of France. They mean to stem the movement and sow demoralization even before the run-offs. The prices on the stock market are tumbling, and preparations are being completed to suspend the threat of devaluing the franc (which can be done by the bankers whenever they choose) over the victory-drunk

Under the cover of these moves, the Fascist hordes, now numbering close to 700,000 are being prepared for more intensive operations on the extra-parliamentary field. With gun and knife the armed thugs will try to stem the tide and to spread the demoralization, for which the policies of the People's Front lay the foundation. In short, instead of being crushed, Fascism will pro-

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