

**THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY  
WAS ITS POLICY FROM 1939 - 1941 JUSTIFIED?**

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A careful study of the French Communist Party's history provides ample evidence to prove that this group closely follows the Soviet line -- whether by direct orders from Moscow or by attentive observation of the Soviet's moves is immaterial. There is no other logical explanation of the Party's zigzags in 1935, 1939, and 1941. However, the more fundamental problem to be resolved concerns the justification for so-tortuous a policy. The French Communists today are extremely proud of their record, and they claim to be the only party that has consistently pursued a program designed for the good of France. There are many Frenchmen, though, who not only fail to agree with such a statement but who also accuse the Communists of having betrayed France in a moment of crisis.

Since the French Communist Party is not an expended force but is an even greater factor in present-day France than before the war, an examination of this Party's development and especially of its actions during the controversial period from 1939 to 1941 may prove to be of some assistance in evaluating its role at that time and in the France and Europe of today.

This period is so recent that objective works on it are conspicuously lacking, and even many of the primary sources such as government files are still either unpublished or unavailable here. Nevertheless, with the material at hand, let us attempt to determine the nature of the French Communist Party's policy and whether this policy was the wisest one for the French people and therefore was justified.

## CHAPTER II

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARTY FROM 1920 TO 1939

[ The French Communist Party, formed in 1920, had developed into such a well-knit organization by 1939 that it could suffer the serious shocks of that period and still emerge as a powerful unit in French life. What were the basic elements which comprised this success story?

One of them certainly was the Party's ability to overcome internal rebellions in such a way that only individuals were lost, never significant segments of the Party itself which might have led to its disintegration. Another element was the conquering of the electoral slump that the Communists experienced in the early 1930's, so that by the end of the decade they had a more sizable representation in the national legislature. The Popular Front period, during which the Communists cooperated with the Socialists and Radicals, was significant because it aided in the Communist Party's growth and because it partially explains the strong antagonisms between these groups in 1939; while the tracing of the Party's foreign policy is both a key to and a reflection of the principal reversals which the Communists executed in 1935 and 1939.]

Now let us develop these elements in order to under-

stand more fully this party and its conduct when France became involved in World War II.

### Formation of the Party

In 1920 at Tours the French Socialist Congress was split into factions that soon proved to be completely incompatible. The Central Executive Committee of the Third International, child of the newly-formed workers' republic, had sent to the French Socialist Party a list of twenty-one conditions to be met uncompromisingly before the French Party would be accepted into this world organization. Some of these conditions included: the strict censorship of the Party press by proved Communists, purification of the Party at regular intervals, the use of any means to obtain its goal, the carrying out of all orders of the Communist International and its Executive Committee, and various hints and admonitions on the methods of propagandizing workers.<sup>1</sup> Should the answer be "yes" or "no"?

One wing of the Socialist Party consisted of extremists such as Marcel Cachin and L. O. Frossard who loudly demanded that the Congress accept the twenty-one conditions so that through world unity workers might gain more power.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Gerard Walter, Histoire du Parti Communiste Français, (Paris: Aimery Somogy, 1928), pp. 25-29.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 39.

Facing these advocates were doubters -- men like Leon Blum, Renaudel, and Paul Faure who saw no chance of an internationally representative party but only one directed by a foreign power, Russia. They also foresaw, besides foreign control of the French Party, a change in party methods from the traditionally legal French ones to clandestine ones of Russian extraction.

For a brief moment, conciliatory tendencies flickered as the Marseillaise and the common memory of Jaures overwhelmed the delegates, but these were quickly gutted out by terse telegrams from Soviet leaders urging a definite break with the doubting centrists, and by the appearance of the stern old German militant, Clara Zetkin, who personally reiterated these instructions.<sup>1</sup> By a three to one vote the Congress joined the Third International. The French Communist Party was born, but the dissenters remained in the old Socialist group, to be a source of friction in the future.

#### Internal Development

The practical work of party organization followed this formal beginning by the French Communists, and one of their most critical advisers was the fiery Leon Trotsky, who be-

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<sup>1</sup>Walter, op. cit., pp. 41-42.



came the permanent reporter to the Third International on Party affairs in France. His aim was to build a truly organic unit that actually revolved around the worker, so one of his first suggestions concerned l'Humanite (the official newspaper of the French Communist Party) in which he urged that they substitute extremely simple language and oft-repeated catch phrases for the current vague and difficult style. Trotsky also advocated a merciless censuring of all men and programs of the Social-Democratic type, compromisers of the revolution.

From 1921 to 1923 squabbles over basic theories and petty jealousies flared in the French Party so Moscow sent several high officials there to bring unity and a leadership favorable to the Third International. These Comintern officials demanded, for one thing, that the French Party stop hedging on the Masonic question and bluntly announce that all Communists who refused to give up their Masonic affiliations would be expelled from the Party. This ultimatum and the fact that the Russian officials seemed to support Boris Souvarine, the French representative to the Comintern, were extremely disturbing to Frossard, who was the Secretary of the French Communist party at that time. He had had several disagreements with Souvarine because he felt the latter wanted to follow the Moscow line too tenaciously. After several preliminary skirmishes over this

dissention, Frossard resigned from the Party, accusing it of becoming "jesuitical,"<sup>1</sup> and a group of so-called "centrists" was either ousted or followed Frossard's example.

L'Humanite announced on January 8, "The ranks of the Party are purified."

During the middle twenties a movement toward greater "Bolshevization of the Party"<sup>2</sup> was pushed by the French Communist leaders following the instigation of the Comintern. The goal of this program was a still greater centralization of the party and another attempt to make the individual workers the actual basis of this pyramided structure. To accomplish this, the cell system was inaugurated. The cell, organized at the place of work became the basic unit; and these units were gathered into twenty-seven large regions, instead of the previous forty-eight departments into which the Communists had organized the French Party. Although there was some dissatisfaction at first because of the confusion which this reorganization entailed, the bolshevization was consistently advocated by Maurice Thorez, arising young militant at the head of the Party's Bureau of Organization,<sup>2</sup> because he believed that the temporary confusion would eventually give way to a stronger, more firmly rooted

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<sup>1</sup>Walter, op. cit., p. 122.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

party.

This drive to strengthen the French Party had scarcely begun when the Trotsky-Zinoviev break in the Third International caused repercussions in France in the Souvarine-Trient dispute. Souvarine criticized "an excessive centralism and a too mechanical discipline" in the Party<sup>1</sup> and supported Trotsky in the latter's interest in the world revolution; while Trient, Secretary of the French Party, proved to be a better politician and backed Zinoviev. The Fifth World Congress of the Comintern excluded Souvarine from the Communist Party and branded his followers, including men like Rosmer, Menatte, and Dunois, as Trotskyites and their group as that of the "Right".<sup>2</sup> These recurrent dissensions within the Party's leadership failed to aid in the promotion of the Revolution, and the Cahiers du Bolchevisme (the monthly journal of the Party) remarked that at this point one could discern "20% Jauresism, 10% Marxism, 20% Leninism, 20% Trotskyism, and 30% confusionism."<sup>3</sup>

The decline in the membership which the Party suffered from 1929 through 1932 provided the setting for the last

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<sup>1</sup>Walter, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

important internal threat to the French Communists until 1939. The central figure this time was Jacques Doriot, that "spoiled child of the Communist Party",<sup>1</sup> as Marcel Cachin once remarked. Doriot was the most popular Communist leader throughout the twenties, both with the masses and with members of Parliament; and when in the 1932 elections he and Clamamus were the only Communists elected on the first ballot, he began formulating plans for a new workers' party, which he alone would head.<sup>2</sup> The Central Committee of the Communist International tried to restrain Doriot from this rash move but he considered this a sign of weakness and his self-confidence increased, so the result was Doriot's expulsion from the Party in 1934. However, the feared loss in the Communist ranks failed to materialize to any large extent because within a year the drive toward the Popular Front and the ensuing Party expansion had renewed the Communist strength.

### Electoral Strength

Although the French Communist Party instructs its candidates for Parliamentary seats to remember that the center of gravity of their political life is definitely outside of Parliament,<sup>3</sup> the Party has always made a concerted

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<sup>1</sup>Walter, op. cit., p. 265.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

effort to win votes because through its members of Parliament and the campaigns which aid in their elections the Party is able to influence a larger number of citizens than merely through Party channels.

Following is a brief resume of the Communist Party electoral strength in France during this period:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>Seats</u>
1924	875,812	27
1928	1,063,945	14
1932	784,036	10
1935	1,495,503	72

The Party's initial participation in the national elections in 1924 was considered a smashing success, and on May 21 the critical Zinoviev wired: "The Executive Committee of the Communist International notes with satisfaction that the French Communist Party has become a great Communist Party and that it effected its electoral campaign with an intransigence of absolutely irreproachable principles as true Communists ought to do."<sup>1</sup>

From the chart above there would seem to be an error, because although the number of votes that Communists received increased noticeably in 1928 they actually lost thirteen Parliamentary seats. The explanation is found in the different electoral systems used. In 1924 the scrutin du

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<sup>1</sup>Walter, op. cit., p. 149.

lists, adopted during the World War, was still in effect, and under it, each party submitted a list of candidates for a whole district. The votes were tabulated and, by a very complicated method, each party was assigned the number of seats proportional to its total number of votes. The old system of scrutin d'arrondissement, readopted by 1928, provided that parties nominate one candidate for each electoral district and that if no one candidate received a majority vote on the first ballot, a run-off ballot would occur a week later. This system obviously encouraged coalition votes on the second ballot and tended to strengthen parties of the center.

Since in 1928 the Communist Party refused to cooperate with the others, it experienced a definite drop in Parliamentary representation, but in 1932 the continued decline was mainly due to an actual loss of votes, although the system was responsible in certain instances.<sup>1</sup> The seventy-two

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<sup>1</sup>Walter, op. cit., pp. 234-235, illustrates:

In the Seine-et-Marne district, there were four candidates on the first ballot. The Communist obtained 2,513 votes; the Socialist, 1,426; the Radical, 1,999; and the Conservative, 2,201. The Socialist and Radical candidates withdrew before the second voting. The Communist received 4,113 votes on the second ballot, while the Conservative received 4,199 and was elected.

seats which the Communists won in 1936 were a direct result of the Popular Front policy, and although this cooperation didn't last long, the Party had an important share of the Parliamentary seats when the crisis of 1939 arrived.

### The Popular Front

During 1929 and 1930 the French Communist Party's influence and membership declined drastically. L'Humanite underwent a financial crisis. Feebleness seemed to prevail throughout the ranks. The Socialist Party, however, continued to be strong. Thorez felt that the basic explanation for the Socialists' strength was that the Socialist leaders had not been in power as yet so they could continue to lure the masses to their standards with speeches alone. Besides, no economic crisis to test the parties had occurred,<sup>1</sup>

The Communist solution to this situation was to try to win the Socialist workers over to cooperation with the Communists but at the same time to unmask the Socialist leaders as traitors to the working class. This policy, however, produced disappointing results, as the Party discovered in the 1932 elections. Nevertheless, the Communist leaders pursued it for another two years.

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<sup>1</sup>Walter, op. cit., p. 216.

The Socialist Party was also anxious for cooperative action between the two workers' parties, and several abortive attempts at coalition were tried from 1932 to 1934. The fascist threat in Germany caused the German Socialists to petition the Second and Third Internationals to stop their inter-party strife in order that both the workers' parties might unite throughout Europe in the face of this critical situation. The conditions which the Communist International submitted to the Socialists were wholly acceptable to the latter -- except for the final clause, which declared that the Communist Parties would still try to proselyte the Socialist workers. The negotiations halted abruptly.

On February 6, 1934 there was rioting in Paris, resulting from a clash between demonstrators of fascist leanings and those of the Communist and Socialist Parties. The Socialist leaders suggested that this was an appropriate time to commence some kind of active cooperation, but the conditions on which the Communists insisted were again uncompromising so the conclusion of this attempt was unsuccessful like the previous one.

When a number of Socialists joined the Congress of Amsterdam peace group, to which many Communists belonged, and this body issued a joint anti-Fascist declaration in April 1934, rumors that the parties were finally in agreement began to fly; but Thorez, in order to dispel such



popular conclusions wrote in the April 13 l'Humanite: We do not wish to be joined with the Social-Democrats. One does not marry water to fire.<sup>1</sup>

Within a few months, however, the Communist and Socialist leaders were actively cooperating, and by 1935 the Radical Party was included in this coalition. This change seemed to be a very sudden one to the public. After curtly refusing the Socialist proposals for so long, Thorez, on June 23, 1934 at the Party Conference in Ivry, made his customary denunciations of the Social-Democrats but added:

We do not want fascism to come to France. That is why we wish at any price to accomplish the union with the Socialist workers against fascism.<sup>2</sup>

And although there is some evidence to show that the Communist leaders in France had discussed the possibility of an entente with the Socialist Party directors as early as January, 1934,<sup>3</sup> this swerve in the party line, whether it occurred in January or June of 1934, marked a definite contradiction of the previous fourteen years policy.

The drive toward united action, once begun, moved rapidly. On July 2 both Socialist and Communist leaders

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<sup>1</sup>Walter, op. cit., p. 260.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

spoke at a large joint meeting in Paris, and the principal theme of both representatives seemed to emphasize the future gains that were possible now that the workers were cooperating. By the end of this month, a Communist-Socialist Pact was signed by these French parties which was aimed against any further fascist growth in France and even proposed the dissolution of such fascist groups as the Creix de Feu. This agreement also included a truce in the inter-party verbal warfare so that the accomplishment of their common goal--to defeat fascism and to win workers' benefits-- might not be hindered. This entente soon embraced another important group, that of the middle classes, because Thorez had been negotiating with Radical Party leaders, and on Bastille Day 1935, the Popular Front, as this wide coalition became known, paraded in Paris.

What is the explanation for this about-face, prior to which the Communists had denounced the Socialist leaders as "traitors to the working class" and after which these same Communists held out a cooperative hand -- not only to these same Socialist leaders but also to the bourgeois Radicals?

Certainly the earlier attempt of the Party to gain strength by trying to attract only the Socialist workers had failed in the 1932 elections, so it is possible that the French Communists believed that at least a temporary coalition with the successful Socialist Party was the only cure for its electoral slump. The second explanation -- that of

the fascist threat in France -- was the one cited by the Party at that time. It is true that such ultra-conservative organizations as the Action Francaise and the Creix de Feu had, with their show of military force and cry for a more authoritarian government, terrified the Republican French. And the fascist threat to Socialists and Communists in Germany had by then become a reality, although Hitlerian Germany was not yet recognized as a menace to France. The third hypothesis concerning this Communist reverse concluded that new orders had arrived from Moscow, but as Leon Blum (who propounded this explanation) added, "What motivated Moscow in this step?".

In answer to his own question Blum wrote:

The February Fascist scare had permitted the Soviet to begin its change in front, the necessity for which had been realized since Hitler had ascended to power in 1933 and had threatened an eastward expansion. Look for no other cause for the N.E.P. diplomacy, Litvinov's trips, Russia's entrance into the League of Nations. The Soviet Government wished to guarantee the security of its European front by a system of international agreements .... At the same time that the Soviet preaches the French government, it looks for a point of support from the French masses grouped around the idea of an anti-fascist struggle.<sup>1</sup>

One historian comments:

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<sup>1</sup>Walter, op. cit., p. 290.

The ascension of Hitler constituted a grave menace to the U.S.S.R., for he did not hide his desire for expansion toward the East to gain Lebensraum. The Soviet resigned herself to seeking allies among the capitalistic countries .... in each of which she was supported by the Communist Parties.<sup>1</sup>

All of these factors probably figured in this reversal by the French Communist Party in 1934, but regardless of the reasons, the Popular Front that was formed proved to be a smashing success in its first test, the 1936 elections. This coalition of the three leftist parties left the Right in ruins; but when the cabinet was formed by Leon Blum, one cloud appeared in the political sky. The Communists, who had benefited most from the electoral bargain,<sup>2</sup> refused to enter this government, although Theres pledged his Party's loyal support. This meant that there would be always present a Left Party which was not involved in the immediate responsibilities of government. Aware of this Leon Blum addressed this warning to the Communists:

I sincerely hope that the Government which the Socialist Party is going to form will not be the Kerensky Government. But, if it were to be so, believe me, in the France of today it is not Lenin who would replace it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leon de Riedmatten, Le Communisme, (Versailles: Editions De L'Observateur, 1946, 71.

<sup>2</sup> D.W. Brogan, France Under the Republic, (London: Harper and Brothers, 1940), p. 702.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 703.

The French workers expected immediate results from their political victory; and even before the new Government took office they began to occupy the factories, demanding, in these strikes, wage increases and various improved working conditions. From May 26 to 28 these strikes spread rapidly throughout France, with a second wave of them the first week in June. The discipline and self-confidence of the strikers has led certain historians to conclude that the strikes were planned and directed by the syndicalists and unofficially by Communists,<sup>1</sup> but others explain that the workers could, quite logically, have expected no opposition from the new Leftist government and so this was the reason for the calmness and self-assurance exhibited during the strikes.<sup>2</sup> At any rate, the Socialist Cabinet acted promptly to settle the situation because it feared that these work stoppages might alienate public opinion against the Popular Front. The Government obtained for the strikers several concessions from the large industrialists, and the forty-hour week was adopted by Parliament. The Government and many economists saw that this shorter work week would lower French ability to compete in the world market, but the measure was necessary to bring peace to the industrial scene.

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<sup>1</sup>Walter, op. cit., p. 313.

<sup>2</sup>Brogan, op. cit., p. 704.

As usual, there were extremists whom the settlement did not satisfy, and strikes dragged on in certain areas. However, when Thorez saw these prolonged strikes create an uneasiness in the middle classes from which he perceived the Right might profit, he urged immediate cessation of the strikes, saying, "It is necessary to know when to end a strike."<sup>1</sup>

On the whole, the Popular Front Government coped rather successfully with its domestic problems during 1936, but foreign policy issues led to serious controversies within the Leftist bloc. The Spanish Republic to the south also had a Popular Front Government, so when it was threatened by the France-led Rightist forces, the French masses naturally sympathized with the Spanish Loyalists, and many Frenchmen urged the Government to send aid to their republican neighbors. The French Communists were very outspoken in their demand for intervention on behalf of the Spanish Government because they feared a Franco victory over the Spanish Leftists and because the Soviet was materially reinforcing the Loyalists. Blum made the difficult decision to remain strictly neutral, for he believed that intervention would lead to war with Germany and Italy and that if France chose

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<sup>1</sup>Walter, op. cit., p. 320.

Madrid she would lose London.<sup>1</sup> No matter how well-founded Blum's reasons might have been, this decision broke the spirit of the Popular Front, and soon other differences led to the loss of any unity among the Leftist parties.

By February 1937 the Blum Government called for a "pause" in its reform program in order to "consolidate the ground we have conquered",<sup>2</sup> but to the Right this was a signal that the peoples' government was weakening; and to the extreme Left this was an admission by the Government of its failure to fulfill its promises to the workers.

Incidents followed rapidly -- Blum's resignation; the ascension of the Chautemps Radical Government; its resignation just before Austria capitulated to Germany; a second attempt and failure by Blum to form a cabinet; and in April 1938 the ascendancy of the Daladier Government. By this time, the Popular Front that had been dead in spirit for some time was dead in name as well.

### Foreign Policy

The French Communist Party's foreign policy from 1920 to 1939 can be divided into two distinct periods. One might

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<sup>1</sup>David Thomson, Democracy in France, (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 205. According to this author, from this period French foreign policy was completely subservient to the British.

<sup>2</sup>Brogan, op. cit., p. 718.

call the first one, which lasted until 1935,<sup>1</sup> the anti-national-defense phase while conversely, the second period, which lasted from 1935 to 1939, might be named the pre-national-defense phase. Of course this is an over-simplification, so in the next few pages let us review the important foreign issues which the French Communists faced prior to that controversial period - 1939 to 1941.

In the first place, the Party had to settle the question of whether war was to be sanctioned in certain instances, and, if so, what these instances were. Since many French Communists had been pacifists in World War I, this was a problem but by 1922 the official answer had been given by Boukharine to the Third International:

This problem of national defense which, for all Communists, was completely clear at the beginning of the war, since it admitted the pure and simple negation of national defense, presents itself in a more complicated manner now.....The presence of a proletarian state modifies the whole situation.....thus it is necessary in our program to demand that the proletarian state can and ought to be defended, not only by the proletariat of the country in question but also by the proletariat of all other countries.....The second question is whether proletarian states ought to form military blocs with bourgeois states.....Of course, if it is a question of purely strategic and tactical opportunity.....Supposing that a military alliance had been concluded with a bourgeois state, the duty of the comrades in each country would consist

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<sup>1</sup>This date is only approximate because 1934 to 1935 seems to have been a transition period.



in contributing<sup>1</sup> to the victory of the bloc of the two allies.

In 1928 at the Sixth Congress of the Communist International the kinds of wars were discussed and the following instructions about them were given to the delegates: All imperialist wars must be denounced. Wars in which Communists should participate included those imperialist ones which could be transformed into civil war, those which would defeat the Communists' own imperialist governments, and those in which imperialist forces threatened the U.S.S.R.<sup>2</sup>

The French government dispatched occupation troops to the Ruhr industrial region in 1923. The Communists immediately labeled this move as imperialistic and started a campaign aimed at mass uprisings in France and Germany, for Moscow still believed that the world revolution was imminent and felt that this situation might be the one to kindle the revolutionary fire. French Communists held joint meetings with their German brothers to plan methods to further: fraternization by the French soldiers with the Germans, German sabotage of the French-controlled industries, and mass demonstrations in both nations to protest this "imperialist act." The effort was vocal enough to bring prosecution against ten Communist leaders, among them Marcel

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<sup>1</sup>Maurice Ceyrat, La Trahison Permanente, (Paris: Spartacus, 1947), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Walter, op. cit., p. 194.

Gachin, for high treason;<sup>1</sup> but the class uprising failed to materialize, the reason probably being that Frenchmen in general were too tired of fighting to be aroused to protect German property.

Since freedom for the Colonial populations has appeared consistently in Communist platforms, the Riff War in 1924 brought all-out denunciations of the Government's policy of "subjugation" from the French Communists. Doriot stated in Parliament: "The soldiers will hold out a brotherly hand to those whom you call enemies. They will impose the peace on you."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, he and Semard, another Communist leader, sent a congratulatory telegram to Abd-el-Krim, the Riff chief.<sup>3</sup> The Party also ordered a protest strike to show the Government that the workers sided with the Riffs. The strike occurred on October 12, 1925 and a million workers participated.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout these years until 1935 the French Communist Party thoroughly stigmatized the theory of national defense, and in the way of practical action, it refused to vote military credits and attempted to undermine authority in the army. In fact, in 1929 Maurice Thorez was sentenced to six

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<sup>1</sup> de Riedmatten, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Geyrat, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Walter, op. cit., p. 157.

months in prison for "inciting soldiers to disobedience."<sup>1</sup>

The Party attitude toward national defense failed to alter when Hitler first came to power.

On November 11, 1933, l'Humanite charged:

The bugbear Hitler is a pretext to exact prompt sanctions that would mean war against the Reich.

If the war occurred, it would not, as the "neo" Socialist leaders claim, be a struggle between democracy and fascism, but between two imperialisms which we combat under the same name.<sup>2</sup>

And in September Maurice Thorez declared:

Because we subordinate everything to the necessity of preparing the proletariat...for its dictatorship, our attitude in time of war would make us determined adversaries of national defense.<sup>3</sup>

As late as March 15, 1935, Thorez, in answering a group who had affirmed that the workers would rise to resist a Hitlerian aggression, stated to Parliament:

We will not permit the working class to be swept into a war to defend democracy against fascism...The Socialist Party declares itself for national defense, while the Communist Party remains true to the manifesto of Marx and Engels: the proletariat has no fatherland.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Gayrat, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>Rene Lefeuve, La Politique Communiste, (Paris: Spartacus, May, 1948), p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, pp. 10-11.

However, the year 1935 marked a turning point. Whether the France-Soviet pact of friendship, signed in May of that year, instigated this turn or whether the French Communists realized only then that Hitlerian Germany was a threat to the masses as well as to the "two-hundred families," the result was that the Party began to uphold national defense and even became noisily patriotic. Thorez began to refer to France as "our country that we love."<sup>1</sup>

In his report to the Party Congress of 1937, Thorez urged immediate military aid to the Spanish Loyalists<sup>2</sup> and blamed the policies of the Government that had allowed Fascist Italy to conquer Ethiopia and Germany to occupy the Rhineland. The difference between democratic France and fascist Germany seemed quite obvious by then, and Thorez informed the delegates that the French Communist Party's foreign policy for the future was "both democratic and French -- a plan for peace."<sup>3</sup>

The events of 1938 climaxed by Munich were branded by the French Communists as the treacherous deeds of a few foes of the masses. On October 7, 1938, Thorez charged:

Munich is not peace. Munich is the attempt of the English and French reactionaries to come to

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<sup>1</sup>Walter, op. cit., p. 285.

<sup>2</sup>Maurice Thorez, Une Politique De Grandeur Française, (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1945), p. 166.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

a secret understanding with the German and Italian fascists; over the heads of the laboring masses of all countries; over the heads of the small, trusting States; and over the head of the Soviet Union, country of Socialism and peace.

From the autumn of 1938 through August 1939 the Communists exalted the defense of France and of her allies, especially Czechoslovakia and Poland. On November 21, 1938, Thorez lashed out at pacifists:

You whining hypocrites weaken the combatants who die for your freedom, your satisfied peace.

To defend France against Hitler at this moment carries a very definite significance for the working class. To defend France against Hitler is to be loyal to the international proletariat in act and not just in words.<sup>2</sup>

The France-Anglo-Soviet negotiations seemed to drag on endlessly throughout the summer of 1939, and the French Communists blamed the two western powers for all the delays. When one Socialist suggested that the Soviets' "excessive legalism" might be slowing up the conversations, l'Humanite branded him as "a falsifier of the negotiation records."<sup>3</sup>

Consistently, the Communists urged a strong policy to support Poland, and as late as August 21, 1939, demanded: "No second Munich!"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Maurice Thorez, op. cit., p. 215.

<sup>2</sup>Ceyrat, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

On August 23, 1939 the German-Soviet Pact was signed.  
The French Communist Party entered a new era.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE COMMUNISTS' "DELICATE PERIOD" --

AUGUST 1939 TO JUNE 1941

#### August to September 19

The German-Soviet pact forced no critical decisions upon the French Communists for several weeks. They interpreted it as a sign of the U.S.S.R.'s power to bring peace to Europe, so they continued to support a strong national defense and the rights of Poland.

L'Humanite declared on August 23;

The conversations in Moscow between the U.S.S.R. and Germany serve the cause of peace in Europe.

On August 24 a prominent Communist journalist added;

I repeat that war receded yesterday. Already radio stations are stating that the anti-Soviet attempt -- which pretended that, in consequence of the Berlin-Moscow pact, a twenty-four hour ultimatum had been sent to Poland concerning Danzig -- was a falsehood to exploit the state of spirit developed in Paris by a delirious press. The twenty-four hours have passed; Hitler has not taken Danzig. One would do well to be suspicious of false news.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lefevre, op. cit., p. 15.

These naive statements continued to roll from Communist presses for several days; and even after Germany had attacked Poland and France had declared war, September 3, the French Communists repeatedly praised the Soviet for having tried to save the peace. The Party continued to support Polish aid, and on September 1 the Communist deputies voted war credits. The patriotic gestures continued.

M. Thorez affirmed:

If Hitler, in spite of everything, begins war, may he know that he will find before him the people of a united France, the Communists in the first rank, in order to defend the security of the country, the liberty and independence of the people.<sup>1</sup>

In a letter to the Senate on September 6 Marcel Cachin wrote:

The French Communist Party maintains the same attitude toward Hitlerism. It declares that the workers have a primal duty; that is to accept the military measures required by the Government in order to defeat Hitler and to guarantee the security of the country.<sup>2</sup>

This sort of declaration by Communists appeared repeatedly in France during the first half of September. On September 17 Russian armies marched into Poland, and yet on September 19 the Central Committee of the Party in a joint

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<sup>1</sup>Ceyrat, op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 63.



meeting with the Communist deputies at the Chamber of Deputies issued this statement:

On the eastern front, the bravery of the Polish people has not been able to put a stop to the loss of the cities and the most important industrial and cultural centers of this unfortunate country. Guided by the anxiety to serve well the cause of social progress and of France, we cannot separate the two; we are true to the declaration made by the General Secretary of the French Communist Party, April 25, 1936: 'It is neither by Rome, nor by Berlin, nor by London, nor even by Moscow that the direction of our country will be determined, it is by Paris.' Vive la France!<sup>1</sup>

Since the news of the Russian invasion of Poland must have reached Paris by September 18, it is hard to understand this declaration by the French Communist leaders on the 19th. One could use it to support the proposition that the French Party does not take orders from Moscow, except for the fact that immediately after this statement, these same leaders remained silent for almost a two-week period, after which they began an anti-Polish and defeatist campaign. Under these circumstances the logical explanation of the September 19 text seems to be that it was an emotional blunder by men who had been defending Poland for so long that they couldn't reverse themselves overnight.

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<sup>1</sup>Ceyrat, op. cit., p. 64.

### A Transition Period

Perhaps the most significant fact about the Communists for the rest of September was their complete lack of action. Their silence on the war was more noticeable than any explanatory words might have been.

On September 26, when Russia and Germany were engaged in dividing Poland between them, the French Parliament dissolved the Communist Party and any other groups which showed allegiance to the Third International.

In protest, the Communist deputies declared:

In the name of the ideal of liberty and human dignity inscribed on our country's flag, we energetically protest a decision contrary to the republican spirit....

This is the first time that so arbitrary a measure... has been taken against a party of the working class and the French people.

In our capacity as French deputies, we proclaim our indignation which we are positive is shared by the people of our country.

By September 28 the partitioning of Poland was substantially complete, and the victors issued a statement which reaffirmed their mutual cooperation and concluded that the European war could now be successfully ended -- specifically:

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<sup>1</sup>Walter, op. cit., p. 380.

....A sure basis for a durable peace has been created....

The two Governments therefore enter into common efforts in accord with other friendly powers in order to arrive as rapidly as possible at this end. If, however, the efforts of the two Governments are not successful, the fact will be undeniably established that England and France are responsible for the continuation of the war.

(Signed) Molotov - Von Ribbentrop<sup>1</sup>

### Defeatism Begins

{ The French Communists, upon the dissolution of their Party on September 26, had immediately formed themselves into a new organization, The Workers' and Peasants' Group.<sup>2</sup> In the name of this organization, Florimond Bonte and Arthur Remette dispatched their famous letter to President Herriot on October 1. This was the first comment by the French Communists on the foreign situation since September 19. Here are the essentials of the letter:

Scarcely have peace proposals been made, due to the diplomatic initiatives of the U.S.S.R., than a controlled press answers in chorus: 'No!'

Is it possible that peace proposals can be rejected even before their details are known and without the national and sovereign representative body having been consulted?

We do not think so, and we ask you, as President

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<sup>1</sup>Ceyrat, op. cit., pp. 65-66.

<sup>2</sup>Walter, op. cit., p. 351.

of the Chamber, to demand:

1. That Parliament be called to deliberate in a public session on the problem of peace;

2. That the deputies in the Army be authorized to take part in the deliberations on this important question, upon which depends the life or death of millions of Frenchmen.

We desire, with all our might, a just and durable peace, and we think this can be obtained rapidly, for in opposition to the imperialist warmongers and Hitler Germany, which is a prey to internal contradictions, there stands the might of the Soviet Union which would permit the realization of a policy of collective security that would ensure peace and safeguard the independence of France.<sup>1</sup>

Since the French Communists had been the most outspoken critics of Munich and had cried loudly for assistance for the "brave Poles",<sup>2</sup> many Frenchmen were unable at first to comprehend this proposal to conclude peace over the Polish corpse.]

In Le Peuple Leon Blum wrote:

This dose of cynicism and hypocrisy is physically intolerable....But it is necessary to go beyond this instinctive movement of distaste.... On reflection, what is most serious in this step taken by the Communist deputies is its servility-- what I called the other day 'omni-obedience'.<sup>3</sup>

[An important French Communist leader, Andre Marty, continued to argue in a book written a year later that a just

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<sup>1</sup>Geyrat, op. cit., These excerpts are from the complete text on p. 69.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 70, note 1.

peace would have been possible on the basis of the Communists' letter to Herriot;

The country had been at war for a month to defend Poland but ten days earlier the reactionary Polish State -- that prison of the peoples -- had ceased to exist. It was clear that the government of the colonels, led by Beck, had arranged everything in advance. The multi-national Polish State (that artificial creation of Versailles) had collapsed in three weeks. It was clear that the action of the U.S.S.R. and Germany laid a solid foundation for peace in Eastern Europe and could at the same time serve as a basis for the termination of the war in Western Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Following the receipt of Bonte's and Ramette's letter proposing peace, the Government ordered the arrest of all Communist deputies, with the exception of those in the armed forces. The police arrested thirty-four deputies at that time, but the number of Communist deputies had diminished since the Russian invasion of Poland, and throughout October and November the resignations had accumulated to a total of twenty-four.<sup>2</sup> The remainder of the seventy-two Communists deputies who were not arrested or had not resigned were either in the Army, were arrested later, or escaped the police net.

Besides deputies, the Party lost numerous officers in various districts. For instance, of the thirty-five council-

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<sup>1</sup>Andre Marty, The Trial of the French Communist Deputies, (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., 1941), pp. 25-26.

<sup>2</sup>Geyrat, op. cit., p. 67.

ers-general of the Seine, fifteen resigned. It should be noted that this depletion of the Communist ranks occurred principally after September 19 and that although a few promising militants like Marcel Gitten, who resigned in November,<sup>1</sup> were lost, none of the high-ranking leaders swerved from the Party line, once it was established on October 1.

Maurice Thorez, the Secretary General of the Party, deserted his army post on October 6. In his address to the Party Congress in June 1945 he explained:

After the suppression of our Party, decreed on September 26, 1939, the Central Committee made the wise decision, imposed on October 4, to have me go into clandestine work in my position as Secretary General of the Party....That was our duty to take all the necessary measures to try to check the Hitlerian plots, aiming at the invasion and the annihilation of France. The French Communist Party in the exclusive interest of the people of France, was obligated to preserve organizations which have played a role of first magnitude in the struggle for the national liberation and to assure the security and the continuity of its direction and even to care for the lives of its leaders.<sup>2</sup>

One author claims that Thorez was not even in danger of being arrested, because he was in the Army and the decree for the arrest of the Communist deputies had stipulated "that those who accomplish their duty as soldiers

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<sup>1</sup>Walter, op. cit., p. 352.

<sup>2</sup>Thorez, op. cit., p. 288.

will be sheltered from all prosecutions."<sup>1</sup> However, "accomplish their duty" is a vague phrase and most Army officers interpreted it to mean "renounce all Communist ties" so well-known leaders like Thorez actually had little chance of escaping arrest. ]

In the course of a debate in the National Assembly on December 5, 1947, Rightist Deputy Andre Meynet accused Maurice Thorez of having betrayed France by his desertion in 1939, so the latter rose and defended himself saying:

The Communist Party aided the war effort at first by voting military credits and urging its members to join the Army....I was honored as a soldier by my superiors.

But while we were in uniform no fighting was begun to save Poland. The Government let Germany erase her....It was my first duty to lead the Party which was so important to France's welfare.

In response, Henri Teitgen, another deputy, noted that Thorez had made two points in his address: that France didn't go out to aid Poland and that Thorez, with determination and courage, had fulfilled his job as head of his party -- thus placing his party above his country.

Thorez answered: "The Communist Party, alone, was defending my country."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Geyrat, op. cit., p. 71, note 1.

<sup>2</sup>Journal Officiel, Assemblée Nationale, Dec. 5, 1947, p. 5524.

Thorez' accusation that the French Government did not attempt to aid Poland in September is accurate. Whether such an attempt would have been successful is unknown, but it is possible that a quick French thrust at the Ruhr would have relieved Poland and greatly handicapped Germany. At any rate this is a point to be remembered in the following chapter of analysis. The other point regarding Thorez' duty to his party first is a fundamental one. Granting for the moment that this party was working for the best interests of France, had it any right as a minority group to decide that the laws of the Government (which represented the will of the majority in a democracy like France) could arbitrarily be broken? This is a problem to be pondered while studying this period in France's history.

[ During the winter of 1939 a deluge of defeatist propaganda for the masses and instructions for the Communist militants descended upon France. An example of the defeatist literature was an open letter to Leon Blum written by Andre Marty. In it one seeks in vain for a condemnation of Hitler. Instead the enemy is pointed out to be the French and English capitalists who:

looked for a new excuse to justify this war....and found it by calling it an anti-fascist struggle.

Ah, M. Minister (Marty continued) do you take the workers and peasants for imbeciles? They do not forget that the Communists are the only ones who judged accurately on all the events which happened



in France and in the world, and above all on the problems of war and peace.<sup>1</sup>

George Dimitrov commented on the Socialist leaders' part in the war in an article in Pravda:

The moral directors of the Second International play the most sordid and criminal role in the war. They fool the masses by preaching the antifascist character of the war and aid the bourgeoisie in pushing the people to the slaughterhouse.<sup>2</sup>

The addresses made by Moscow leaders were rich in defeatist material.

In October 1939, Molotov declared:

But there isn't the least justification for a war of this nature. One can accept or reject the Hitlerian ideology as well as any other ideological system -- that is a question of political views and anyone will understand that an ideology cannot be destroyed by war.

That is why it is not only useless but criminal to engage in such a war.

And on November 2 he added:

We have always been of the opinion that a strong Germany is a necessary condition of a solid peace in Europe.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Geyrat, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

The fact that Communist-authored leaflets were dropped in France by German planes has been repeatedly alleged and proved,<sup>1</sup> but that this propaganda was actually prepared for German distribution by Communists in order to aid the Nazi war machine does not necessarily follow. It was perfectly natural for the Germans to utilize this defeatist propaganda, but at the same time the Communists could have been working toward peace without desiring the Nazis to be the victors.

There were reprimands as well as instructions from Moscow for the French Communists. In an organ of the Comintern there appeared an editorial, in December 1939, that denounced:

....the opportunism of the Communist Parliamentary group....which did not utilize the special Chamber session September 1 to protest against the policy of reaction and war of Daladier and the Socialist leaders and which voted war credits. The Central Committee committed grave mistakes; it did not understand at the time the significance of the changes which were precipitated at the end of August and at the beginning of the war.<sup>2</sup>

This article seems to indicate that Communist leaders are supposed to follow the Moscow line closely but that the method is, at least partially, not one of direct orders from Moscow but one of consistent interpretation of the

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<sup>1</sup>Journal Officiel, March 20, 1940, p. 266.

<sup>2</sup>Lefevre, op. cit., p. 19.

Soviet's actions. Sometimes the Communist leaders interpret either incorrectly or haltingly or both.

### The Fate of the Communist Deputies

If Communist sources are to be believed, the French Communist deputies who were arrested in October were thrown into a prison with the most vicious criminals. The officials then not only neglected them but also deprived them of ordinary privileges such as writing materials and visitors.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to determine the authenticity of this account, but at any rate two Communist deputies, Bonte and Cornavin who had evaded capture to that time, attended the Chamber session on November 30 to protest the treatment their comrades were receiving. The appearance of these Communists naturally amazed the other deputies, but when Bonte began to address the Chamber about the necessity of concluding the war with Germany, this amazement turned to indignation. The Communists were ejected from the hall.<sup>2</sup>

Another incident occurred in the Chamber on January 9, 1940 at a session to which all mobilized Parliamentarians had been invited. Only seven of the twenty-two Communist

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<sup>1</sup>Marty, op. cit., pp. 26-27.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 27. This author describes the removal of these Communists as a very brutal affair, but his is the only evidence of this interpretation.

deputies in uniform attended.<sup>1</sup> The President proposed a salute and a vote of appreciation to the armies of the Republic, and the whole Chamber rose spontaneously. All rose, that is, except four of the Communist deputies: Grenier, Gayot, Mercier, and Michel, who refused to join in the manifestation, despite their colleagues' urging.<sup>2</sup> They refused to honor the "capitalist army"<sup>3</sup> and were dragged out of the Chamber.

A year later, Andre Marty concluded his account of this incident by saying:

What a satisfaction it is to the Communists to have merited the hatred of the Judases! But also what a new proof of the power of Communism.<sup>4</sup>

On January 16, 1940 Etienne Fajon, a prominent Communist deputy, appeared in the Chamber to protest a pending bill to expel all Communists from public office. In his warning that this new "persecution" would not defeat the Communists, he proclaimed:

We will always remain faithful....to the true cause of the French people -- to believe that to-

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<sup>1</sup>Ceyrat, op. cit., p. 83, cites this number while Walter, op. cit., p. 382, lists only five. However, both accounts record that only four of remained seated.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Marty, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 46-47.

gether with the Soviet Union we represent the true working class cause, the cause of Communism.<sup>1</sup>

The trial of the French Communist deputies was postponed repeatedly throughout the winter. According to one author, the reason for this delay was that the officials were attempting to force the deputies to renounce their party affiliations, but that since the deputies resolutely refused, the waiting period was extended.

On March 18, 1940 the trial finally opened; and Marcel Willard, "the soul of the defense",<sup>2</sup> led off by requesting that Daladier, Bonnet, and Herriot be called as witnesses. These men excused themselves, however, and did not take part in the proceedings. After the first day of trial, it became obvious that the defendants were using the bar as a tribune for the exposition of their doctrine, so the Military Tribunal ruled that the trial be held in camera.<sup>3</sup> The prosecution insisted that this step was taken to keep the trial from degenerating into a mass testimonial, but the defense was outraged. It charged that this deed was unprecedented in French history and that the political leaders feared the Communists' influence on the public.

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<sup>1</sup> Marty, A., op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> de Riedmatten, op. cit., p. 91.

During the trial, the deputies staunchly upheld the letter to Herriot and supported the Third International, and their testimony was strongly defeatist.

Waldeck - Rochet told the court,

The aims of this war, on both sides, have nothing in common with liberty and justice.<sup>1</sup>

Etienne Fajon asked the Government's representatives,

Why is war material being officially sent to Finland? Why has M. Daladier been keeping troops in readiness ever since February 26, when we are in the thick of a war with Germany?<sup>2</sup>

The trial closed on April 4, 1940. The verdict pronounced all of the defendants guilty of participating in the Workers' and Peasants' Group, which propagated the slogans of the Third International, but found only Bonte and Ramette guilty of publishing the letter to President Herriot.

In other words (wrote Andre Marty) the Tribunal itself did not find all the accused guilty with regard to the letter to Herriot, which was the sole ground (pretext) for their arrest and trial.....

Nevertheless,<sup>3</sup> the accused were sentenced to the maximum penalties.

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<sup>1</sup>Marty, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 91.

Many persons have censured the French Government for having denied free speech to the Communists, especially to the elected deputies of the people. An English witness in the trial commented that he was "deeply surprised at the prosecution of members of parliament."<sup>1</sup> Leon Blum approved the trial but felt that it should have been held before the Communist deputies were deposed from the Chamber.<sup>2</sup> It is probable that the Daladier Government, sensing the popular tension during the "phony war" months, did resort to some "red-baiting" to divert the public; and one historian believed that:

The effect was bad. Had the Communist leaders been given enough freedom to defend Stalin, they might have made themselves very unpopular with the workers, who would have swung around in favour of the war. But all this persecution aroused in them feelings of party loyalty... Thus the anti-Nazi working class, which might conceivably have remained anti-Nazi in spite of the Stalin-Hitler pact, became pacifist.<sup>3</sup>

However, in time of war all democracies have had to curtail individual liberties to some extent, and it is impossible to know whether the anti-Communist laws actually aided or hindered France in the war. It should be remem-

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<sup>1</sup>Marty, op. cit., p. 88.

<sup>2</sup>de Riedmatten, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>3</sup>Alexander Werth, The Twilight of France, (New York & London: Harper & Brothers, 1942), p. 346.

bered that these French Communists were consistently uphold-  
ing a government that was allied to Germany, with whom France  
was at war.

Quite naturally, the Communist deputies believed that  
they had been unjustly persecuted, so they issued a leaflet  
which reviewed their case and proved to their satisfaction  
their innocence. This publication concluded with the usual  
denunciation of the Socialist leaders,

who are nothing more than lackeys of the capital-  
ists and who think they are insulting us when they  
call us "Stalinites."

Thanks to Lenin and Stalin, Communism is no  
longer a spectre but a reality on one-sixth of the  
globe.

The Imperialist war having broken out, the  
U.S.S.R. has succeeded in limiting the world carn-  
age by liberating thirteen million Byelorussians and  
Ukrainians. It has established friendly relations  
with the Baltic States.

Yes, we regard the building of Socialism in  
the U.S.S.R. as the first act of the world revolu-  
tion which will deliver the peoples from oppression  
and war.

Forward to Communism.<sup>1</sup>

### The "Real War" and Armistice Period

The Communist propaganda did not change when the ac-  
tual fighting began in April and May of 1940. It was still

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<sup>1</sup>Marty, op. cit., pp. 124-126.



defeatist and it still blamed the British and French Governments as the aggressors.

The May 1, 1940 manifesto of the Communist International read:

In response to the brutal violation by England and France of the neutrality of the Scandinavian countries, Germany was forced to enter Denmark and Norway.

The British and French war-mongers are furious that the Soviet Union remains neutral in an Imperialist war.

And the clandestine l'Humanite, on May 15, 1940, published this item:

When two gangsters fight one another, honest men do not have to aid the one of them, under the pretext that the other has hit him an illegal blow.

However, on June 6, 1940 the French Communists sent a last-minute proposal to the Government, urging the defense of Paris:

The Communist Party considers it treasonous to abandon Paris to the Fascist invaders. It considers as its first national duty the organization of its defense. For this it is necessary:

To transform the character of the war, making it a national war for liberty and independence;

To free the deputies and Communist militants from imprisonment and internment;

...to arm the people and to make Paris an

impregnable fortress.<sup>1</sup>

What is the explanation of this patriotic gesture just before the fall of Paris? Perhaps the clue is provided by the fact that this call for the defense of Paris wasn't issued until June 6 and that the demand was also for the Communists' release and the arming of the citizens. In the confusion of a retreating army the Communists as the only organized group may have hoped to direct the armed citizens in a revolutionary coup which would bring the Communists to power.

The French Communists issued two declarations in July which seem to indicate that they were still hopeful of coming to power.

On July 4, 1940 l'Humanite (still clandestine) wrote:

It is necessary that France have a government composed of suitable, honest men, who have struggled against the war, have not been attached to the capitalists and have given proof of their attachment to the cause of the people.

On July 10, Jacques Duclos and Maurice Thorez made an "Appeal to the People":

Our country knows now the consequences of the criminal policy pursued by worthless governments, responsible for the war, the defeat, the

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<sup>1</sup>Thorez, op. cit., p. 289.

occupation.

Never will a great people like ours be enslaved, and if this people knew how to show its disapproval of seeing France chained to the British Imperialist cart, it will know how to signify to the present group in power, its desire to be free.

Who is able to restore France?

It is only the working class guided by the Communist Party which is able to establish the re-birth of France.<sup>1</sup>

During the debates in the French Constituent Assembly in 1946, the Communists questioned the right of certain elected deputies to take their seats because they regarded these deputies as "collaborationists" during the war. One of these deputies was Frederick Dupont and in defending himself, he counter-attacked by asserting that "five days before the armistice the French Communists were negotiating with the Germans to have l'Humanite appear again."<sup>2</sup>

Here are excerpts from the letter which the Communists are alleged to have sent to a German official about their publication:

We ask, therefore, authorization to publish l'Humanite under the form in which it appeared to its readers before the suspension by Daladier.

l'Humanite, published by us, would follow a

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<sup>1</sup>Geyrat, op. cit., Complete text on pp. 97-100.

<sup>2</sup>Journal Officiel, April 16, 1946, p. 2593.

policy of European pacification and would defend the conclusion of a Franco-Soviet friendship pact that would complement the German-Soviet pact and thus create conditions for a durable peace.

(Signed) Treans Maurice, Gatelos,  
Jean, and Robert Foissin

This question of the Communist negotiations about l'Humanite was broached again on December 8, 1947 in the Assembly by Deputy Pierre de Chevigne. He stated that Mme. Ginollin (who became a deputy after the war) was another Communist who had approached the Germans on June 21, 1940, and he quoted the official government record of her testimony when she was arrested on June 24 by French police. In it she testified:

I was received by Lt. Weber to whom I explained our plan to have l'Humanite appear regularly... He answered that in principle nothing opposed such a publication. It was understood that all the articles were to be first subjected to the censorship of the Commandant.

The French police commissioner found her guilty of infractions of the 1939 decrees which dissolved the Communist Party and which suspended Communist publications, so Mme. Ginollin was jailed.

However, several days later the director of the Petite-Reqquette prison (where Mme. Ginollin was held) sent

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<sup>1</sup>de Riedmatten, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

a letter to the Attorney-General of the court of appeal of Paris. The letter reads:

I have the honor to inform you that in the course of a visit of the German authorities, yesterday June 25, in the Roquette prison, the following prisoners were freed by the order of Dr. Fritz, high councillor for the chief of the superior German administration at the Chamber of Deputies:

Reydt Eglantine Deniar, Mme. Ginellin., etc. <sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the final authorization to publish l'Humanite was never obtained by the Communists.

Another event which the Communists like to cite now is the one mentioned by Etienne Fajon in the Constituent Assembly on July 5, 1946. He declared:

On June 10, 1940 the Communists Jean Duoles, Gardette, and Guffret asked to be sent into combat. <sup>2</sup>

However, Fajon didn't mention that these Communists were in prison and that June 10 was the period when Thorez was demanding arms for the masses -- possibly for revolution.

Fraternalization with the German soldiers was urged by the French Communists for a time. The clandestine l'Humanite of July 4, 1940 wrote:

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<sup>1</sup>Journal officiel, Dec. 9, 1947, pp. 5560-63.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, July 6, 1946, p. 2621.

It is particularly comforting in these unhappy times to see numerous Parisian workers conversing amicably with the German soldiers in the street and the bistrot. Bravo, comrades, continue even if this does not please the bourgeoisie.<sup>1</sup>

September 1940 to June 1941

A French historian has recently argued:

When the Communist Party saw itself as the only organized survivor of the 1940 debacle, it made a bid for the direct leadership of the nation, relying on Soviet support and its own strength to neutralize the victors. By the autumn of 1940 this hope had failed, the Party retired into deeper illegality and tended more and more toward belligerency in the war.<sup>2</sup>

This statement that the French Communists dropped their attempts at leadership and became more belligerent in the autumn of 1940 seems to be contradicted by considerable evidence throughout the winter of 1940 - 1941.

In September 1940 an illicit issue of l'Humanite asserted:

But more and more people of France understand that there is only one republic possible in our country, the French Republic of the Soviets, which will give men bread, peace, liberty.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ceyrat, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>2</sup>A. Rossi, op. cit., p. 288.

<sup>3</sup>Ceyrat, op. cit., p. 101.

Another Communist journal, Jeunesse de France, also published in September wrote:

This war is not ours. It is an imperialist war..

We have never believed that the existence of a strong regime in Germany had to constitute an obstacle between France and Germany. We proclaim without reticence that if we had directed the destinies of France in June 1940, as the Bolsheviki directed the destinies of Russia in 1918, we would have ended the war, we would have signed the peace as the Bolsheviki signed it in 1918.<sup>1</sup>

And in a "Letter to the Communists of the North Suburb" in November 1940:

The Communists, the workers, the peasants, the true Frenchmen do not have to choose between a Petain and a de Gaulle, between a Laval and a Churchill, between one imperialism and another imperialism.

The right road is the one that the Russian workers followed in 1917... The regime of the Soviets is alone capable of giving the people bread and liberty in security and peace.<sup>2</sup>

On December 19, 1940 Francis Billoux, one of the imprisoned Communist deputies, wrote a letter to Marshal Petain. The essence of this long text concerned the fact that the Communists, who had steadily denounced both the war and the men like Daladier who led it, ought to be freed and reinstated in public life because a new and anti-Daladier

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<sup>1</sup>Lefevre, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>Ceyrat, op. cit., p. 102.

government had come to power and the war was over. Billoux also asked that while waiting for this just step to be taken he might receive food parcels at the prison and his wife and child might visit him. In order to denounce Daladier and his Government, "who are truly responsible for the war," he offered to testify as a witness against Daladier, Blum, and the rest in Vichy's Riom trial. And Billoux concluded, "Kindly accept the assurance of my high esteem."<sup>1</sup>

During the debates in the Assembly on December 21, 1947, one of the deputies accused Billoux, with an excerpt from this letter, of a subservience to Petain.

I wrote Petain, (answered Billoux) not to ask for my freedom, but on the contrary, I proved that I did not cringe before him by indicating that I did not ask for my freedom. I demanded of Petain that I be allowed to go to the Riom Trial in order to indicate those responsible for the war, meaning there, Petain, Laval, and the others.<sup>2</sup>

One must have a very active imagination besides an ability to pass over certain passages, in order to arrive at the same interpretation of this 1940 letter which Billoux offered in 1947.

There is one piece of evidence that has been used to show that the Communists were in the resistance movement

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<sup>1</sup>Ceyrat, op. cit., p. 106-108.

<sup>2</sup>Journal Officiel, Dec. 22, 1947, pp. 6020-6021.



against Hitler as early as the winter of 1940. Marcel Rosenblatt, an Alsatian Communist, later testified that the "Communist party from December 1940 distributed illegal tracts to promote an uprising against the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine."<sup>1</sup> It should be remembered, though, that the Communists had been urging the independence movement in Alsace-Lorraine against France in the twenties, so this was hardly evidence of Communist participation in French resistance actions in 1940.

The clandestine l'Humanité of March 18, 1941 said:

The movement of de Gaulle and Larminat, fundamentally reactionary and anti-democratic, aims also at nothing other than depriving our country of all liberty in case of an English victory.<sup>2</sup>

The coal miners of northern France participated in strikes in May 1941, and since the summer of 1941 the Communists have claimed to have organized these strikes. However, there seems to be no evidence at that time which would point to Communist instigation of these strikes. So it is probable that the miners struck over local grievances and that the Communists later claimed this incidence as one of their anti-Nazi actions before June 1941.

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<sup>1</sup>Journal Officiel, Dec. 12, 1947, p. 5701.

<sup>2</sup>de Riedmatten, op. cit., p. 98.

During the last part of May the U.S.S.R. and Germany were finding it increasingly difficult to remain on friendly terms. In France in this same period the Communists began launching an appeal for a "National Front" against the invaders. But perhaps indicative that this early move was only a reflection of the Moscow situation is the fact that this appeal made no actual statement concerning German-Soviet relations and it continued to abuse de Gaulle and Britain:

Certain Frenchmen who suffer by seeing our country oppressed by the invader wrongly place their hopes in the de Gaulle movement. To these compatriots we say that it is not backing such a movement of reaction and colonialism in the imperialist British image that the unity of the French nation for the national liberation can be realized.<sup>1</sup>

After June 22, however, the French Communists entered into the anti-German resistance with the zeal characteristic of Communist campaigns and from that period they have a patriotic record to which they constantly refer today.

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<sup>1</sup>Ceyrat, op. cit., p. 126.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PROS AND CONS OF THE "DELICATE PERIOD"

The French Communists today claim that during the period of the Nazi-Soviet Pact they followed a policy both consistent and correct for France. In fact, Maurice Thorez, in his report to the Party Congress of June 1945, concluded:

We alone of the French parties are able to take up again word for word our speeches, our writings, our resolutions. And our acts have always conformed to our words. For the Communists say what they do and they do what they say.<sup>1</sup>

With the preceding chapter as a factual background, let us try to decide whether the French Communist Party's policy in this period was consistent, whether it actually aimed at the welfare of France, and whether the justifications which the Communists give for it are valid.

In the first place, the inconsistency of the Party line is obvious. The number of shocks to which the Party had to adapt itself, especially in September 1939, was hardly conducive to a consistent policy. There is a complete contradiction after October 1 of the pre-war statements which the Party made up to September 19, with the interval

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<sup>1</sup>Thorez, op. cit., p. 304.

evidently required as a period of reorganization. The defeatism which the French Communists practiced throughout the winter of 1939 and the spring of 1940 was abruptly reversed in a sudden "patriotic demand" for the defense of Paris in June 1940. However, the Communist actions immediately following this "call to arm the citizens" point to the probability that the defeatism had been dropped only when the situation seemed such that the Communists might have used it to gain strength in France. During the remainder of 1940 and the early half of 1941, the Party continued its defeatism in regard to the German-British conflict and continued to place the war guilt on the British and French Governments. Only during the month before the German invasion of Russia did the French Communists start in the direction of an anti-German resistance movement, and we now know that Nazi-Soviet relations were definitely cracking by that time. On June 22, 1941 the French Communists dropped defeatism completely and embraced all groups, including de Gaulle's and the British, which would aid in the defeat of Germany. Therefore, this period seems only to add to the evidence that demonstrates that Communist Parties closely follow the Moscow line and consequently often appear to have inconsistent policies.

However, because the Party's line was inconsistent, it does not necessarily follow that this policy was hurting

France. When Maurice Thorez explained the Party's September 1939 actions, he charged that the Communists supported the war at first, but that the Government let Germany erase Poland without a struggle by the French. So when Poland was lost, the Communists saw no reason to continue the war. It is true that France might have helped Poland if she had attacked Germany's Ruhr region immediately, but now that we know that the Soviet had planned to grab the eastern half of Poland as early as August 25, it seems improbable that France could have saved the Polish State even if she had struck at Germany. Unless, of course, the U.S.S.R. might have dropped her partitioning plans if France had effectively challenged Germany. We shall never know the answer to this "historical if."

When the Communists review the sort of peace terms which Hitler always demanded, it is difficult to understand they can still claim that their defeatism was the wisest course in 1939 and 1940. Somehow, it seems that if the Communists had applied their energies toward stimulating the prosecution of the war as enthusiastically as they did toward defeating it in that crucial year, the final showdown with Germany might have been accomplished much sooner than 1945. No one will deny that the French Government during this period had definite failings and weaknesses, but the method of defeatism which the Communists

chese brought no aid to the French situation and only accentuated and provoked graver governmental errors.

The justifications which the French Communists make for the Soviet line (and consequently their own) during those years are based on a few patchwork-facts. For instance, they argue that the allies deliberately left the Soviet alone so that Hitler would attack her and besides, that Britain and France actively prepared to attack Russia themselves.<sup>1</sup>

These are offered as the reasons for Russian-acceptance of the German-Soviet pact. However, Thorez, who quotes Daladier's statement about troops "in readiness to be sent against Russia through Finland,...and Syria,"<sup>2</sup> in order to prove the foregoing point, failed to mention that these allied preparations occurred long after the German-Soviet pact, and, in fact, were partly a result of it.

Thorez cited Andre Pierre's book; Stalin Against Hitler to refute the "infamous slander" that Russia helped partition Poland:

It was only when most of the Polish ministers and generals had taken refuge in Rumania, when the Polish State had practically<sup>3</sup> ceased to exist, that the Red Army entered Poland.

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<sup>1</sup>Thorez, op. cit., p. 280.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

But Thorez must have forgotten that the whole world knows that the U.S.S.R. had agreed to partition Poland as early as August 23, when the German-Soviet pact was signed.

The Communists also assert that the reproaches which the French Government hurled at them about their following the Soviet line in September 1939 were only a pretext. Actually, according to these Communists, they have proof that the Government had planned since July 1939 to persecute them. Their evidence is a quotation from the Government's Yellow Book and is a phrase in the minutes recorded by George Bonnet on his conversation with Graf von Helldorf, German Ambassador in Paris, on July 1, 1939:

I finally said to the Ambassador that he could observe in France a unanimous national movement in support of the Government; elections would be suspended, public meetings banned, all attempts at foreign propaganda repressed, and the Communists brought to their senses...<sup>1</sup>

This evidence must be weighed to determine its true value. In the first place, although Bonnet was the Foreign Minister at that time, he was not the Government and therefore a statement of his would not necessarily represent the opinion of the whole cabinet. It is generally recognized that Bonnet was in favor of a France-German understanding and that he was very anti-Communist so this remark seems

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<sup>1</sup>Marty, op. cit., p. 112.

in character; however, it should be noted that the Communists never quote the whole conversation between Bennet and von Welseck and it is possible that the complete text might give a different interpretation. Therefore, this evidence does not seem adequate for the Communists' serious accusation.

On the whole, the evidence which the Communists cite to justify the Communist line from 1939 to 1941 is very feeble, but it is obvious that there must be many Communists who are intelligent enough to reach this same conclusion if they are pressed to defend these justifications. Thus we must recognize that the basic premise from which Communists work is one of faith -- a belief that Communism will benefit all people (and therefore, France) and that the Soviet Union must be preserved as the protector of Communist ideology. So Communist leaders accept any policy no matter how contradictory it might appear to be (to the non-Communist) to the best interests of France, if it aids in the preservation of the U.S.S.R.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The French Communists do not deny that they pursue a course similar to that of the U.S.S.R., and yet they repeatedly affirm that this policy is never disloyal to France because the interests of the Soviet Union and of the French people are the same.

They justify their actions and those of the Soviet Union (with evidence which, upon objective scrutiny, is only partial and half-true) because the final result was victory. The Communists subordinate the period from 1939 to 1941 to that one from 1941 to 1945, because the policies of the latter period brought success. After all, today the Soviet Union is one of the world's two greatest powers and the French Communists are "heroes of the Resistance". Maurice Thorez, in commenting on the final action by the Soviet Union which aided in the allied victory, could not understand how some men could criticize the U.S.S.R. now, and asked, "Where would France be, where would the world be without the Soviet Union?"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Thorez, op. cit., p. 286.

But he failed to realize that later Communist actions against the fascist power, no matter how important, do not justify that period when the Communists gave at least passive assistance to Germany by assuring Hitler that his eastern borders would not be threatened while he attacked the west. Fate was with the Communists in the last war, because their widely-contradictory vacillations ended on the winning side; but it is dangerous to change one's standards and one's methods too radically, even for an objective one considers valuable.

A wise man once said,

If a man uses foul means to gain an end, no matter how laudible, he usually loses sight of that end on the way.

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