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France Heads Toward a Decision

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With the international and French bourgeoisie having shifted abruptly in favor of completely supporting de Gaulle's movement, and with the Stalinists systematically stifling the workers' will to struggle, we are today rapidly approaching a decisive turn in the French situation.

Such a turn began shaping up with the fall of the Marie government which entailed the liquidation of Paul Reynaud's "plan of financial rehabilitation."

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Why Did the French Bourgeoisie Change Its Policy ?

The Reynaud plan had been looked upon by the French bourgeoisie as a whole as the last opportunity for "solving the immediate economic difficulties within the constitutional framework under the government of the "Third Force" (the reformists plus the bourgeois center parties). This plan corresponded to the new needs which have been systematically replacing the old economic difficulties of French capitalism. Three years ago, the French economic crisis was a function of extreme underproduction, acute scarcity of consumer goods and a chronic lack of raw materials. Today the self-same basic illness – the senility of the capitalist order in France – assumes new forms : a commercial crisis, piling up of goods, flight of capital, export difficulties because production costs are far above those of competitors disposing of a more modern productive apparatus, the USA, Great Britain, Canada and even Belgium.

The needs of the bourgeoisie are consequently summed up in the demand for RATIONALIZATION. This means : balancing the budget by eliminating expenditures for nationalized industries and for social security ; cutting production costs and speeding up the reequipment of industry by lengthening the work-week, that is to say, by intensifying the super-exploitation of labor-power ; "inspiring new confidence in the currency" by slashing the taxes upon rich peasants and the big bourgeoisie in order to halt the flight of capital.

This program also received the enthusiastic backing of American imperialism which was by no means desirous of investing its Marshall Plan billions in an already bankrupt enterprise. "To rationalize and render profitable capitalist France" – this was the program, this was the focal point of the interests of the bourgeoisie, of the well-to-do middle-class layers, of their Yankee "protector" and of all the conservative political groupings from the MRP to the de Gaullists.

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De Gaulle's "Public Salvation" Campaign

General de Gaulle offered no opposition whatever to the Reynaud plan. His attack centered solely on Reynaud's personal participation in the government of Andre Marie, because, according to de Gaulle, Reynaud in this way contributed to "gilding the coat of arms of a dying regime." At the same time this would-be Bonaparte prepared a huge publicity campaign eloquently entitled, "*For Public Salvation*." The significance of this campaign was clear : De Gaulle was telling the bourgeoisie that the economic program advanced by Reynaud could never be realized within the constitutional framework through a coalition of parliamentary parties ; but that, on the contrary, it demanded the

reinforcement of the authority of the State, that is to say, the installation of de Gaullist semi-dictatorship. De Gaulle's campaign was an invitation to the bourgeoisie to leave his hands free for the creation of political and social conditions necessary for realizing the program of capitalist salvation.

So long as Reynaud appeared to be able to impose his solutions by parliamentary means, the bourgeoisie hesitated to come out openly in support of de Gaulle and to incur the costs of a constitutional crisis. But the working class began seething, becoming more and more intensely agitated against the Reynaud plan, which was a plan of working class misery. This agitation led to a powerful resurgence of united working class action, with the split-off reformist trade unions of *Force Ouvrière* being drawn into opposition to the Reynaud plan by the irresistible tide of labor discontent. The pressure from below inside the *Force Ouvrière* has been so strong that the reformist chieftains found themselves compelled to take an ever more critical attitude toward Reynaud. The unity of the coalition Cabinet was thereby disrupted. Marie offered his resignation to the President of the Republic and a protracted governmental crisis ensued, demonstrating, especially after the swift downfall of the second Schumann government, the impossibility of continuing the "Third Force" coalition under the existing relation of forces.

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The Bourgeoisie Goes Over to De Gaulle

At the very time when this series of governmental crises was taking place, de Gaulle was in the process of executing the first phase of his "public salvation" campaign. He undertook a grand tour of public meetings in Southern France and Corsica. At Nice he issued for the first time the cry : "*We are marching to power !*" It was not a chance remark. During the fortnight which elapsed between the abandonment of the Reynaud plan and the downfall of Schumann's government, the entire public opinion of the bourgeoisie went over, bag and baggage, into the General's camp. **Le Monde** and **Le Figaro**, the two semi-official organs of the bourgeoisie who had previously maintained a slightly ironical and disapproving attitude to the General, suddenly began to sing his praises. **The New York Herald-Tribune** analyzed de Gaulle's chances of seizing power at once. The moderate conservative Swiss weekly **Die Weltwoche** expressed the hope that de Gaulle would be able to come to power immediately and with a minimum of trouble ; six months ago this same weekly had been violently attacking the de Gaullist movement. For any attentive observer there can be no doubt that the bourgeoisie has decided to back to the limit the pretensions of the General.

Queuille's government today is generally considered, by analogy with the German events of 1932, as a "Von Papen government," secretly supported and at the same time undermined by the de Gaullists, and designed to assure the legal passage of power to de Gaulle. This legal transfer is of utmost importance to the bourgeoisie. They understand only too well that the slightest provocation in the streets can still produce a powerful upsurge of working class resistance, which must be avoided at all costs. That is why the bourgeoisie severely reprimands the police each time the latter shows itself too "energetic" in the face of working class manifestations.

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The Criminal Policy of the Stalinists : On the Parliamentary Field

A legal passage of power to de Gaulle is not possible within the framework of the existing constitution except through the dissolution of the National Assembly. It is the Assembly which alone has the power to order its own dissolution. How can it be forced to do so ? The de Gaul-lists have openly disclosed their plan. In October, cantonal elections of slight importance an themselves, are to be held. If the de Gaullists score during these, elections such smashing successes as will show that the existing Assembly bears no relation at all to the actual disposition of the various

political forces in the country, then the Assembly will be compelled to dissolve. The struggle for the passage of power to de Gaulle comes down by and large to the struggle for the cantonal elections in October.

But the parties of the "Third Force" are desperately opposed to cantonal elections in which they will doubtless see the complete collapse of their forces. The Stalinists hold the balance of power between the parliamentary bloc of the "Third Force" and the de Gaullist bloc. They have begun to cynically abstain in votes upon this question, thus creating a constitutionally impossible situation : the opponents of cantonal elections have a slight majority in the Assembly, but carry little weight in the Council of the Republic (an upper chamber similar to the Senate). But recently, during a debate in the Assembly on September 20, Jacques Duclos, chief Stalinist whip, brusquely announced that his party, alongside of the de Gaullists, would demand cantonal elections. If the French CP maintains this position, the cantonal elections will unquestionably be held in October, provoking such a de Gaullist landslide as will cause the Assembly to dissolve and, in all likelihood, as Pierre de Gaulle declared recently in New York, bring his brother into power by the end of this year.

We see here a duplication by the French Stalinists of the criminal policy followed years ago by the Stalinists in Germany when they joined with the Nazis to precipitate the notorious "Red Referendum" in Prussia in order to bring about the overthrow of the Social-Democratic government.

It is not, however, in the Assembly that the Stalinists are rendering their best services to de Gaulle. They do this by their cynical trade union tactics which they have been systematically applying for the past month in order to break the militancy of the workers and in this way eliminate the last factor that could still defeat the General.

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The Criminal Policy of the Stalinists : In the Factories

Since the close of the vacation period a violent agitation set in among the working class, reaching its peak when the Marie government fell. The strikes realized in life unity in action from below as well as at the top among the different trade unions and they swept virtually over the entire country. The Stalinists did everything in their power to keep these strikes within the limits of "demonstrations," that is to say, movements limited to stoppages of a few hours or of a single day. This tactic drains the energies of the proletariat, spreads among the toilers the impression that they are subjecting themselves to useless sacrifices, provokes among the bourgeoisie the impression of proletarian feebleness and creates among the middle class an atmosphere of intensified nervousness, without in any way imbuing them with the idea of working class power that might cause them to hesitate anew.

During the second week in September, when the Parisian metal workers struck, this criminal tactic of the Stalinists reached unheard-of proportions. The mass of the workers demanded a general strike ; clashes broke out on Maussman Boulevard where the police charged and fired on the demonstrators ; the entire communist-worker vanguard was prepared to go to the end and there was open talk of the struggle for power. The Stalinist chieftains brutally curbed the movement and thus provoked a fearful demoralization.

The reasons for this defeatist Stalinist policy are evident. The Stalinist chieftains fear the revolutionary masses. They still nurse a slim hope that will be able, by their desperado policy, to force the SFIO (French SP) into a new "People's Front" coalition. For the French Stalinist leaders the fate of the continent will be at stake in the first phase of the next war. They hope to be installed in power by Russian bayonets. A de Gaullist dictatorship would enable them to mobilize a new "democratic resistance" movement. It concerns them little that in the meantime tens of thousands of the best working class militants will have been crushed morally and physically by the dictatorship. On the contrary,

after his recent experience with Tito, Stalin prefers more than ever to set up Quislings who lack a powerful mass base which could provide them with an independent means of support. Such are the overall considerations which impel the Stalinists to cold-bloodedly sacrifice the French proletariat for the benefit of de Gaulle.

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De Gaulle and Hitler

Assuredly, it would be profoundly erroneous to mechanically identify the de Gaullist movement with that of the Nazis. Hitler was the mouthpiece of a petty-bourgeoisie that was pauperized, desperate and prepared for the worst ; de Gaulle, on the contrary, is the idol of a middle class that is conservative, newly-rich and desirous of order and tranquility. Hitler's arrival to power signaled the need of German capitalism to break out by force from the constricting frontiers of Versailles which were strangling the over-developed productive forces ; Germany's imperialism was epileptic in its aggressiveness and rushed to precipitate the second imperialist world war. The arrival of de Gaulle to power would, on the contrary, express the need of French imperialism to maintain by force the existing framework of the French empire, which has become far too vast for the senile structure of French capitalism ; French imperialism is conservative and, abandoning one by one all of its "own" objectives, it plays ever more the role of the leading stooge of the Yankee imperialist bloc.

But there is one feature that is common to both the French situation today and that in Germany before 1933, namely : today as in the past, it is impossible to realize the program of "bourgeois salvation" without destroying the capacity of the working class to resist. Even if de Gaulle should come to power in a "cold" way and even if he should accept a coalition with the remaining fragments of the Social Democracy, the logic of the situation would compel him to begin by outlawing Stalinism, and then the trade unions "under Stalinist control" and finally, the labor movement as a whole.

The outcome is as yet far from decided. The weeks ahead will undoubtedly see successive upsurges of resistance by the proletariat. In the factories heated discussions are taking place over the question : "What to do ?" In these debates, only the Stalinists and the Trotskyists participate. This struggle of ideas is the struggle over who shall influence the action of the vanguard of the communist workers in the factories. The comrades of the PCI (French Trotskyist party) have again succeeded, even to a greater extent than in the November-December 1947 strikes, in influencing important sectors toward broader and more decisive struggles. But their weight in the entire situation – still remains too slight to modify it fundamentally. Only a spontaneous and sharp upsurge of the communist vanguard can again produce a change in the situation. To pave the way for this upsurge – that is the task to which the revolutionary militants are devoting all their energies today. Until it comes, their work of agitation is concentrated on preparing their future inside the labor movement as the party which had the correct policy at the critical hour.

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