

Background to Chaos

R. Palme Dutt, renowned British Marxist, delineates the history of the French collapse. The "Either—Or" issue confronting the peoples of Europe. Imperialist relations in the melting pot.

London, England.

WESTERN Europe, the old stronghold of capitalism, the stronghold of opposition to revolution because "it might mean bloodshed," the stronghold of the oppression of nations all over the world, is learning a hard lesson today. In the midst of the collapse of states and empires, the violent breakup of the rotting old order, millions and millions of people—nations which formerly appeared in the uppermost hierarchy of imperialist domination—find themselves in a moment hurled to the depths of misery, servitude, and national annihilation. The bourgeoisie in its downfall drags down the nation and betrays the people, wherever the mass movement, led by the organized working class, is not ready and equipped in time to take over the power and forge its salvation. This has been the bitter experience of France, last of a long series of countries. This in its own distinctive form threatens to be the experience of Britain, if action is not taken in time. Because they are only now in the remorseless sequel of events reaching that ultimate abyss to which their rulers have condemned so many other peoples, the people of England have still, even at this late hour, the chance to learn from the experience of those other peoples, break through the bonds which tie them to the ruling class, and find their way to salvation by their independent initiative for themselves and for the world. But this chance will not last long. The great "Either—Or" between the continued rule of the financial oligarchy and the existence of the people now approaches its climax. Through these past two decades this "Either—Or," this life-and-death issue of existence or destruction, which ever more sharply confronts the people of this metropolitan center of a historically doomed empire, has proclaimed itself with reiterated insistence through all the deepening decay of the rule of the finance-capitalist oligarchy, strangling, throttling, paralyzing, and finally betraying the nation. The edge of the precipice is here. The choice before the people takes on a terrible and elementary simplicity.

THE FINAL CHOICE

Over half a century ago Engels, basing his analysis on the inevitable doom of the former world monopoly of British capitalism before the onset of the rival German capitalism and American capitalism, pointed forward to the approaching hour when the British people would be forced to face the final choice between the continued domination of the ruling capitalist class and their own existence. History has fulfilled that prediction with an even more merciless completeness and in even

more startling fashion in the detail of its realization than Engels at that time could have possibly foreseen. Engels wrote of the approaching hour when the grim alternative "Starve or Rebel" would confront the British workers. Today the prime minister of the British millionaires makes a public speech in which he holds out the prospect of the bourgeoisie abandoning the island "subjugated and starving" and betaking themselves and their seat of government to the New World, whither they have already been engaged in moving their gold and valuables. Such is the glorious outcome of three centuries of bourgeois rule.

DEEPENING CRISIS

The advance of the war carries with it the deepening crisis of the bourgeois system, expressed in sharp inner social and political conflicts especially in the countries which suffer military defeats, at the same time as it throws all the relations of imperialism and the existing division of the world into the melting pot. The interaction of these manifold processes of upheaval, at a far more advanced stage of decay of the existing society than in the last war, leads to the extreme instability of development of the present war and of the whole international situation. Therefore "the international situation has become pregnant with surprises," in the words of the Soviet Trade Union resolution of June 26. Four years of the first imperialist war brought the world to the depths of an abyss of misery, want, and disease. Ten months of this war have already brought, in the train of the battling armies, the massacres and destruction, the advancing specters of general chaos, famine, and pestilence, which will not spare this country and know no frontiers of victors and vanquished.

As the awakening and struggle of the masses against their fate develop, so the counter-revolutionary fury of the bourgeoisie increases and in its turn exercises a powerful influence on the issues of the war. *The fear of revolution begins to become the overmastering fear of the bourgeoisie.* This outcome has received its classic demonstration in France, the weakest link in the imperialist chain, leading to the final shipwreck of French imperialism and the heavy burdens which have been placed on the French people by their ruling class in union with the German ruling class.

Twenty years ago French imperialism appeared at the highest point of its power. Having skillfully utilized the Anglo-German antagonism and the German-Russian antagonism to build up a new balance of forces in their favor and carry through their war of revenge

for the outcome of the war of 1870-71, the French bourgeoisie now held victory in their grasp and power to dominate and mold the Continent of Europe according to their own conception, while the German bourgeoisie lay temporarily prostrated by the blows of the German workers' revolution. They built up their Versailles system of vassal states to hold Germany disarmed, dismembered, and permanently subject. But the real strength of French capitalism, far inferior in resources, technique, the rate of development and concentration to the highly advanced German capitalism, was not equal to maintaining this artificial supremacy. On the one hand, British and American capitalism, from the day that the war ended, continuously undermined the French domination of Europe, working to restore German capitalism and reestablish the unstable equilibrium of France and Germany as the condition of preventing the growth of any single dominant European power. On the other hand, the real destruction of German militarism could only have been accomplished by the power of the German working people destroying the power of the large landowners, industrialists, and military caste. But the French ruling class, paralyzed by the panic fear of the socialist revolution spreading from the borders of Russia to the Rhine, did everything to strangle the German revolution, assist the forces of reaction, connive at their secret rearming, and thus build up just those forces which were the forces of revenge against Versailles and for the final destruction of French power. In this way the entire policy of the French ruling class as a whole (not simply of some individuals or sections allied to German capital) over twenty years built up the power of Hitler and prepared their own nemesis which has horrified the world. From the silence of their graves Clemenceau and Poincare may contemplate the final fulfillment of their handiwork.

FRENCH POLICY

Not after the German breakthrough in May, but already years before the war the French ruling class had lost their independence and were more and more clearly falling to the rank of a secondary power. The last attempt of French imperialism, swollen with overconfidence from the victory of 1918, to play a completely independent role against both Britain and Germany ended in shipwreck with the collapse of the Ruhr occupation of 1923. Thereafter French policy wavered between the line of unification with German capital (Briand-Stresemann, Thoiry, Pan-Europe) and increasingly dependent collaboration with the fickle and perfidious Brit-

ish partner. After the coming of Hitler to power even that possibility of maneuvering disappeared. A final desperate attempt to recover independence against the increasingly close Anglo-Nazi collaboration was made by the bold stroke, prepared by Barthou and carried through by Laval, of the Franco-Soviet pact in 1935. But again the same class fears, paralyzing even a clear imperialist policy, prevented the pact's being made operative; the staff conversations, which could alone have translated the pact from a gesture to reality, were consistently refused by the French government. Thereby the French rulers sealed their doom, and the rest of Barthou's attempted restored structure was made inoperative, as subsequently Munich revealed.

BRITISH POLICY

From 1936 every French government was the slave of British policy. British policy systematically destroyed the French system of alliances in Europe. By the rearming of Germany and stifling of French protests in the early stages when that rearmament could have been easily checked; by the shattering of Laval's attempt at Franco-Italian collaboration; and by the imposing of non-intervention in relation to the war of German-Italian aggression in Spain, the British Foreign Office rendered France vulnerable on three frontiers, and by Munich finally left France isolated in Europe. Then, when it suited British imperialist interests to reverse the engines and declare war on Hitler, Britain dragged this weakened France, robbed of her allies and of her whole system of defenses, into a desperate war against Hitler, whose forces France had to meet almost alone with only the most limited British military aid. And when France collapsed after nine months, the British ruling class had the insolence to accuse the French of "betrayal," only to find themselves met with no less fierce counter-charges from the French rulers. So, after thirty-six years, ends the idyll of the "Entente" of Anglo-French imperialism, begotten in greed of gain and plans of war and dying in shame and humiliation. From his grave Edward VII may also contemplate the final fulfillment of his handiwork.

As the star of the French bourgeoisie sank during those critical years of the middle 1930's, so the star of the French working class rose. The defeat of fascism by the militant working class under the leadership of the Communist Party in 1934, the consequent formation of the united working class front and the People's Front on the initiative of the Communist Party, followed by the election victories of 1936, placed the ball at the feet of the French working class. The path opened to lead the working class and democratic forces of Europe, to make effective the Franco-Soviet pact, to stand by Spanish democracy, and so to build up that front which could have prevented the war and cleared the way for the advance to socialism. This chance also was lost through the disruption of the front



Secret Weapon

by the leadership of the French Socialist Party, the Blums and the Faures. The same fear of the working class revolution which actuated the French bourgeoisie actuated the Blums and the Faures and their colleagues of petty bourgeois democracy, the Radical Socialists, the Daladiers and the Bonnets. Fearful of any independent course, they acted as the docile tools of the British Foreign Office; Blum sponsored Non-Intervention to betray Spanish democracy; they refused equally the staff conversations to make the Franco-Soviet pact effective; they carried through and applauded Munich as the victory of peace; they disrupted the united front and People's Front. Thereby they made the war inevitable; and when the war came, they blindly plunged into it as the servants of Anglo-French capital, mouthing the slogans of democracy against fascism, which they had already betrayed and rendered meaningless, and directing their fire against Communism and the left, whilst fascism was already installed in the high command. *The doom of France was completed during these years of betrayal; and on the tombstone above all other names will appear the name of Blum.*

THE FRENCH COMMUNISTS

The death decree against the French Communists was the death decree against the French republic. The French Communist Party, which had led the anti-fascist fight in the years of the betrayal of democracy to fascism, had alone correctly understood the real character of the war, and fought from the outset to save the French people from the catastrophe it correctly foresaw. The French bourgeoisie, consistently with their diminished

role of the preceding years, during which their imperialist interests had already been undermined and sacrificed by Anglo-Nazi policy, saw in the war, not primarily a struggle against Hitler, but a prolongation of the class war. While remaining completely passive on the western front, not even concerning themselves with strengthening the defenses of the extension of the Maginot Line, and leaving Hitler a free hand in Poland, they sought by every means to inflame war against the Soviet Union and dispatched their planes and equipment, in which they were already inferior to Hitler, out of France to the anti-Soviet front. While releasing and promoting the leaders of fascism, the Cagoulauds, the Doriots, the advocates of Franco-German union, to the highest positions in the administration and in the military command, they directed their main offensive against the Communists, against the trade unions, against the anti-fascist refugees, against democratic liberties, that is, against all the genuine anti-fascist and democratic forces. The infatuated leaders of the French Socialist Party, the Blums and the Faures, ably seconded by the leaders of the British Labor Party and the "left" intellectuals in this country, applauded and hounded on the campaign, directing all their fire against the left, and not against the right, as the danger to France; acclaimed every advance of fascism in the name of "patriotism" and "the fight against fascism"; entered into coalition governments with the open leaders of organized fascism, while suppressing the majority party of the working class, imprisoning all working class deputies, and breaking up their elected municipal councils; and thus, having gagged and handcuffed the people, having

opened the gates to Hitler and given the keys to his agents, ensured the final collapse.

Read today Blum's speech to the Bourne-mouth Labor Party Conference, received with such applause in the governmental and official Labor press. Every line is today an indictment of the leadership of the French Socialist Party, of the leadership of the British Labor Party, of the entire Second International. Read Victor Gollancz' (head of the Left Book Club) pamphlet and similar literature. Their words should today bring a blush of shame even to cheeks of brass. It was a French "Socialist" deputy who first publicly demanded the execution of French Communists, just as it was the Belgian "Socialist" De Man who led the campaign against the Communists in Belgium and has since turned out to be an agent of the Gestapo. When the death sentence against Communists was justified by Blum before an applauding Labor Party Conference, the shame and suicidal frenzy of the Second International touched bottom. When that death decree was introduced, we gave warning that it was a sentence of death, not against a handful of revolutionary workers, but against the entire French working class, against French democracy, and against the French nation. In how few weeks has the truth of this been demonstrated! Remember China, where the beheading of Communists was introduced in 1927; from that moment the sweeping advance of the Chinese national revolution was reversed; the way was opened to the Japanese partition of China; and only in these recent years, when the equal rights of the Communists in the national front have been reestablished, has the tide been turned to begin to stem the Japanese advance and save China. In every country the Communists, the representatives of the militant working class, are the backbone of the real defense of the people. Let the British labor movement learn the lesson in time. The democracy which suppresses its Communists has already surrendered to fascism.

POLITICAL COLLAPSE

The collapse of France was not merely a military collapse. It was a political collapse. It was the collapse of a rotten state, which had already been undermined from within by its ruling class, as in the case of Poland; of a disintegrating society, which had already lost the power and the will to defend itself; the upper class had lost the will to resist, because they feared their own people more than the foreign enemy; while the masses were bound and paralyzed and robbed of a possibility to defend themselves. Only a popular revolution led by the Communist Party could have saved France; but the Blums and the Jouhaux stood as policemen, disrupters, and executioners on behalf of the bourgeoisie to prevent that. Reynaud might mouth his perorations about no surrender and the retreat to North Africa or Devil's Island from which to maintain the power of the French bourgeoisie. But the words were empty bluff, even from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie, once

the French people, the basis of their power and exploitation, had been sacrificed. It was Reynaud who placed in power the Petains, the Weygands, and the Ybarnegarays, while suppressing the working class and democracy. These acts, and not his words, determined the outcome. Thereby Reynaud demonstrated the unity of the class against the people. It was Reynaud who sponsored the demand for an armistice. In the final crisis Reynaud, when he could no longer maintain his position, rather than appeal to the people, arrest the fascist leaders, and hand over power to the working class and democratic forces who could alone have saved France, preferred to hand over power to Petain, that is, to the alliance of French and German fascism against the people. Thereby was demonstrated the counter-revolutionary solidarity of the class in the final crisis.

In the last act of the crisis the French ruling class, incapable of maintaining its independent rule, had to face the choice between absorption into the British empire or absorption into the German empire. No other alternative was open to them, since the only other alternative was the power of the people, which they excluded. With the usual exquisite tact which has marked the dealings of the British Podsnaps with their erring French brothers, the lords of the City chose the moment of France's mortal agony to offer a document ready and complete for signature on the dotted line by which France should finally abandon her independent existence and become a province of the British empire. In that moment of history the reality of Federal Union was laid bare as the figleaf of the annexationist plans of British imperialism. Against this final humiliation the French bourgeoisie revolted. Faced with the choice of becoming a section of the British empire, with the final disappearance of their existence as an independent state, or with continuing as a vassal state of the German empire, they chose the latter. Nor was the reason of the choice difficult to understand. The former alternative meant the indefinite prolongation of an uncertain war, in which they would become a refugee government, cut off from their basis of exploitation and wealth, and with doubtful prospects of ever returning. The latter alternative meant that they could at any rate continue for a period as ruling exploiters in their own country, even though henceforth in a subordinate capacity and only permitted to enjoy such share of the spoils as would be left them. They chose the latter and signed the Nazi armistice terms. The long battle of Mitteleuropa, which had been opened, but not settled by the last war, since the weaker French capitalism had been placed in temporary domination over the stronger German capitalism, had now culminated in the establishment of Mitteleuropa under German domination. In the cannibal contest of imperialism there is now one power less.

R. PALME DUTT.

Mr. Dutt's second article will appear next week.

Thousands May Die

EVERY one of us would, if we could, give refuge to the unhappy Europeans who are forced to flee from the twin terrors of fascism and war. Not so long ago the refugee problem was relatively simple. Jews, liberals, radicals, enemies of the fascist regimes were able to find havens on the continent. But the tragic events of the last year have trapped new millions, and if it was once a fact that relatively few refugees were ever able to cross the ocean to America, it is now true that none but bankers, bankrupt politicians, royal puppets, and wealthy hangers-on can reach these shores. Even the few children who have been shipped to America were chosen by Great Britain on the basis of their parents' wealth or social position. No one begrudges their safety. But it is a bitter fact that no workers' children have arrived.

As for the anti-fascist fighters from many lands, few have been admitted to the United States. These hundreds of thousands—Germans, Italians, Poles, Czechs, Austrians, Spaniards of the loyalist ranks and members of the International Brigade—are in desperate straits. They may be slaughtered. Thousands may die. The League of American Writers last week sent an urgent appeal to the Pan-American Conference. The American Committee for Democracy and Intellectual Freedom sent Prof. Walter Rautenstrauch to Havana to plead with Secretary of State Hull. Cuba, Chile, and Bolivia supported the plea, but our government has not yet acted. Via Sweden comes another appeal. Extermination will be the fate of internationally known scientists, doctors, writers, lawyers, men and women such as Heinrich Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger, Hilda Maddalena, Siegfried Raphael, and many, many others still in France. The US cruiser *Trenton* brought the royal house of Luxemburg to safety over here. The Hapsburgs have found a regal haven in Massachusetts and new Rothschilds arrive on every Clipper plane. With each minute the danger to the uncompromising defenders of democracy grows. Do not wait: write at once to Secretary Hull, urging him to act before it is too late.

The Lion Twitters

"MISS [Dorothy] Thompson's radio eulogy of Mr. Churchill was also given respectful attention, although modest Englishmen blushed when she referred to this incredibly delicate and exquisite mechanism, this remarkable and artistic thing—the British empire." — *Mollie Panter-Downes' "Letter from London" in the "New Yorker."*

Among Pirates

NOW we know whose traditions the members of the New York Stock Exchange are following. According to the WPA's Historical Records Survey, Captain Kidd was the original beneficiary of a bequest conveying the land on which the Exchange now stands.