The Rise of De Gaulle and the Class Struggle

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By Ted Grant

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By Ted Grant

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Marx and Engels said that France is the country where the class struggle "is always fought to a finish." Ted Grant's pamphlet, originally written in 1958, shows how true that is. It updates the Marxist analysis of the history of revolution and counter-revolution in France to explain de Gaulle's coup.

In doing so, it supplements and explains the important Marxist concept of "bonapartism." This is a scientific definition, not just a term of abuse, and a key to understanding present and future developments. It is true that de Gaulle's regime was perhaps the most democratic form of bonapartism that has ever existed. This is because the power of the working class provided a check against the state elevating itself as much as it would have liked above society. Nevertheless, de Gaulle's accession to power represented a psychological defeat for the workers. The following year saw the French workers suffer the most significant fall in living standards of any European working class during the period of the post-war boom.

Gaullism heard its death knell in the mass movements of May and June 1968 throughout France, movements which its reactionary measures had brought into being. The pre-revolutionary situation in 1968 can only be understood in the context of de Gaulle's coup, for which this pamphlet is the basic Marxist text.

In 1968 the French working class proved to all the sceptics and pessimists that revolution was possible, necessary and [given a correct leadership] inevitable. France was once again the classic country of class struggle. Marxism remains a guide for all workers who understand the need to fight the class struggle through to a successful conclusion, a classless socialist society.

INTRODUCTION

Events in France have shaken the country from top to bottom. Coming on the heels of the developing slump in America, the crisis in the Iberian Peninsula and civil war in the Lebanon, they highlight the coming upheavals in the capitalist world.

Even in sleepy Britain, the 'bus strike, meat market strike and other strikes up and down the country herald a new period of class conflict.

A new period opens up, similar to the stormy nineteen-thirties. In the last decade, illusions have been fostered in a slow, gradual, peaceful and progressive change in society. These were predicated on the temporary economic upsurge following World War II; and, unfortunately, in the reaction against the excesses of Stalinism, on this economic background, dreams which should have been dispelled have remained in the consciousness of the working class, to paralyse the limbs of the sleeping giant of labour.

These pernicious fantasies have been spun especially by the top leaders of the Labour Party, as for example Gaitskell's attempt to water down the Party programme to avoid "frightening" the middle class. In Germany, despite the frightful price paid by the German labour movement and the peoples of the world, the endeavour has been made to "junk" any pretence to stand for a Marxist policy, and adopt instead the empirical method of British Fabianism.

In France, we have seen the open support accorded imperialist policies by the "Socialist" leaders, Lacoste and Mollet.

I. DE GAULLE'S FORERUNNERS

> "... the Party of Order showed that it knew neither how to command nor how to obey; neither how to live nor how to die; neither how to bear with the republic nor how to overthrow it; neither how to uphold the constitution nor how to scrap the constitution; neither how to work hand in hand with the President nor how to break with him." (K. Marx, **Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte**, p. 110.)

To understand the situation in France today, it is necessary to know the history of France in the most recent period and the place France occupies in world politics at the present time.

France is the country in Western Europe, as Engels explained,

where the class struggle "is always fought to a finish." The history of France is the history of revolution—and of counter-revolution!

The bourgeois revolution of 1789 was carried through to the complete destruction of feudalism, and laid the basis for the development of capitalist civilisation not only in France, but throughout the modern world. After the exhaustion of the revolutionary wave came Napoleon I's **coup d'etat** and the establishment of the military-police state in France. It is from this that the classic conception of Bonapartism is derived. Even after the defeat of Napoleon and the restoration of Louis XVIII, the basic conquests of the revolution remained intact: the feudal landowners remained dispossessed, the land staying in the hands of the peasants; the capitalist economic foundations of the modern régime had been firmly laid.

It is often forgotten, on this side of the Channel, that the reforms and rights which the working class has obtained have been partly due to revolutions in other countries. Fearing a like pressure on the part of the masses here, the ruling class has made concessions.

The revolution of 1830 overthrew the Restoration régime and established the bourgeois monarchy of Louis Philippe. Instead of a tight oligarchy, a bigger section of the capitalist class now ruled. Yet the franchise was still limited, and the workers had none of the rights they enjoy in a modern capitalist democracy.

The revolution of 1848 is important for study today in that there are certain striking parallels between the antics of the bourgeois democrats and working-class parties of that time, and the policies of the working-class parties in France today.

Marx and Lenin both made detailed studies of these events, to warn the working-class not to repeat the mistakes then made. But the leaderships of the Socialist and Communist Parties in France have learned nothing from history, and are acting in a way which could bring disaster to the people. Marx ironically described their predecessors as "democrats of the phrase."

In 1848, the "financial aristocracy" had been overthrown in the revolution, with the masses manning the barricades. The idea

of the masses was to establish a socialist republic, but the capitalist class ran away with the fruits of the revolution.

In the past, as Marx expressed it, "a restricted portion of the bourgeoisie ruled in the name of the king; now the whole bourgeoisie (ruled) in the name of the people." Exasperated by the fact that the gains of the revolution were being enjoyed only by the rich, the working class was provoked into a new insurrection in June of that year, which was drowned in blood. All this in the name of "property, religion, the family, order." On December 10, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was elected President. The peasants supported him, because of the Napoleonic legend, and a struggle now began between the capitalists as a class and the adventurer, Louis Napoleon.

Napoleon stood for "infantry, artillery, cavalry" and, in order to pay for these, enormous taxes were imposed on the peasants and the working class. The by-elections of 1850 showed a defeat for the Napoleonic forces: in Paris, the middle classes voted with the workers to return socialist candidates throughout the city.

The working-class leadership now vacillated. Instead of using the victory to push forward towards the socialist revolution, the capitalists were given time to prepare. The strength of the masses was frittered away in "petty intrigues, futile declamations and illusory movements." That was all the leadership offered, when the gains of the masses had engendered an atmosphere of enthusiasm even in the army.

"During the electoral campaign, the democrats had raged and stormed. Now when it behoved them, arms in hand, to make a serious use of their electoral victory, they outdid themselves in their respect of constitutional forms. They preached order, tranquillity, perfect legality—this meaning blind submission to the will of the counter-revolution posing as law." (Karl Marx, **The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.)**

Laws restricting universal franchise were hurriedly introduced: three out of ten million were disfranchised. Press laws and censorship were imposed, and the ranks of the Army were punished for their fraternisation with the workers. Seizing his opportunity,

Louis Bonaparte formed his Society of December 10, a forerunner of later fascist organisations. This was composed of the scum and dregs of society—a "society of disorder, prostitution and theft, in which pimps and broken-down poets rubbed shoulders with the zealots of private property." (K. Marx, **The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.)**

Formally dissolved because of the scandalous conduct of the elements composing it, the Society continued in existence. Using it as a base, Louis Napoleon effected a **coup d'état** and seized power on December 2, 1851. A drunken soldiery shot down members of the bourgeoisie, as well as the working class, in the ensuing terror. The middle-class democrats naturally put the responsibility for the debacle not on their stupidity and vacillating leadership, but on the shoulders of the masses.

Louis Napoleon succeeded in maintaining his rule for nearly 20 years. He was lucky in that his coming to power coincided with an enormous development of the productive forces, in France and internationally.

In 1870, he embarked on the adventurous war with Prussia. The French Army collapsed like a box of cardboard soldiers. The miserable corruption and inefficiency of the régime guaranteed defeat.

II. THE LESSONS OF THE COMMUNE

> "The petty-bourgeois democrats, those alleged Socialists who substituted dreams of class harmony for the class struggle, even pictured the socialist reformation in a dreamy fashion—not in the form of the overthrow of the rule of the exploiting class, but in the form of the peaceful submission of the minority to the majority which has become conscious of its aims. This petty-bourgeois utopia, which is inseparably bound up with the idea of the state being above classes, led in practice to the betrayal of the interests of the toiling classes, as was shown, for example, by the history of the French revolutions of 1848 and 1871, and by the "Socialists" joining bourgeois cabinets in England, France, Italy and other countries at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries." (Lenin, **State and Revolution,** p. 21.)

Then the workers of Paris and of France showed the qualities for which they are famous. On September 4, 1870, they overthrew the régime in a revolutionary rising in Paris and armed

themselves in the National Guard. Now, as in 1948, the capitalists attempted to disarm the workers, and on March 18, 1871, an attempt was made to take the artillery away from the National Guard. The workers replied by seizing power.

This was the first time in modern history that the working class had succeeded in doing so. But the failure to nationalise the Bank of France and to march on reactionary Versailles resulted in the defeat of the Paris Commune.

The lessons of the Commune were assiduously studied, first by Marx and Engels and then by the Bolsheviks. It was on an analysis of these that the through and through class policy of Bolshevism was based. Without the experience of the French workers in the Commune, the theoretical basis for the victory of Russian Bolshevism could not have been prepared.

However, in France itself, resulting from the economic upswing within capitalist society in that period—a period of tremendous expansion and development of the productive forces—there was a certain lull in the class struggle. But a new crisis was provoked towards the end of the century by the Dreyfus scandal. This exposed the rottenness and corruption of the French Army and its officer caste. The Dreyfus case shook the decadent structure of French society from base to summit.

The Army responded to the criticisms of Socialists and Radicals by moving in the direction of a neo-Bonapartism around General Boulanger. As Lenin explained, a crisis of this sort, exposing the degeneracy of the "Republican" régime and arousing not only the working class but the popular masses, could lead straight to revolution and the seizure of power by the working class. Using the cry that "the Republic is in danger," a section of the Socialist leadership of those days (Millerand) formed a coalition or "popular" front with the Radical Socialists, the Party of liberal capitalism or, as Lenin expressed it, "the most vicious and consummate representative of finance capital, the political exploiter of the peasants and middle class."

The fear of the ruling class, of provoking civil war with all its attendant risks, led to a passing of the crisis and the suicide of Boulanger. The economic upsurge had not yet spent itself.

Basing themselves on their empire, from which huge revenues were drawn from the exploitation of colonial peoples, and through fear of the working class, with its rich revolutionary traditions, the French capitalists deliberately hampered the development of French industry and relied on **rentier** rather than on industrial capital for their income and interest. French capital was primarily moneylenders' capital. **The French capitalists did not want the working class to be the majority of the population,** and relied on the peasantry as a conservative force to balance against the working class.

III. EARLY YEARS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

> "Fascism is not merely a military and technical matter. Fascism is a fighting organisation of the bourgeoisie dependent upon the active support of Social Democracy. Objectively, Social Democracy is the moderate wing of Fascism" (J. V. Stalin, **International Press Correspondence,** October 9, 1924).

This relationship of forces continued until the crisis of imperialist capitalism broke in the first world war. Like their brothers in Britain, Germany and other countries, the Socialist and trade union leaders betrayed the workers by supporting the war and rallying around the slogan: "La patrie est en danger." The syndicalists too, despite their radical-sounding phrases, deserted to the side of imperialism in the war.

However, small groups of revolutionaries remained true to the ideas of Marxism. The French masses grew increasingly weary of blood and slaughter in the interest of finance capitalism. The revolution in Russia in 1917 had an electric effect on the war-sickened workers in France, as in other countries. Big strikes in Paris of the women garment workers took place. Whole regiments began to leave the trenches and the soldiers began a march on Paris. The Commander-in-Chief of the German Army gave orders not to advance: order must first be restored. In other words, he put class solidarity (with the French capitalists) above the German national aims.

The tragedy lay in that there was no revolutionary leadership strong enough to link the discontent of the workers with the army

rebellion. One in ten in the mutinous regiments was executed, and "order" was restored. However, from 1917 to 1920 the revolutionary wave threatened to engulf France.

In 1919, André Marty, an officer in the French Navy, led a mutiny in the Black Sea fleet against an attempt to intervene in the Russian Revolution. So strong was the revolutionary ferment that at the 1920 Tours Congress of the French Socialist Party, the faction standing for affiliation with the Third International gained the majority. **L'Humanité** became the official organ of the Communist Party. The trade unions were split by the reformists and ex-syndicalists (Jouhaux), who refused to accept the will of the workers and linked themselves with the Amsterdam reformist trade-union international.

Yet the young Communist Party was inexperienced and very ultra-left. It was with difficulty that the International convinced it of the need to apply a United Front tactic to expose the reformists. Before they had an opportunity to become seasoned and tempered in ideology and tactics, Stalin had come to power in the USSR; and between 1924 and 1927 all the independent-thinking elements who were not prepared to give blind obedience to Moscow were expelled from the leadership of the French Communist Party.

However, the Party remained sufficiently geared to revolutionary internationalism to perform its class duty of opposition to the colonial war of 1925 and support for the right of the Moroccan people to national independence. Strikes, demonstrations, leaflets, agitation amongst the soldiers even at the front—all were carried out in an intensive struggle against the criminal policies of French imperialism.

The evolution of the Communist Party of France is, of course, linked intimately with the degeneration of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of the Third International. The period of 1924 to 1930 was a period of economic boom in France, with the French ruling class making concessions to the workers and peasants in order to bolster reformism.

In 1929, the Communist International announced the theory of the Third Period and Social Fascism. The Third Period (as

distinct from the "first (post-war) period" of the revolutionary wave, 1919-24, and the "second period" of "temporary consolidation of capitalism," 1924-8) was announced as the period of "this final crisis", the crisis from which world capitalism could never recover. This was false. Unless capitalism is overthrown—which it can only be by the leadership of the working class following a correct policy over a whole period—it can always find a way out of its difficulties.

The Social Democracy was declared to be the main enemy of the working class, a worse form of Fascism. "Fascism and Social Fascism (i.e. Social Democracy)," said Stalin, "are not antipodes but twins."

The task of revolutionary leadership is to convince the mass of the working class of the need for a revolutionary policy as the only solution to its problems. This can only be done by showing the workers **in practice** that the reformist leadership is not prepared to fight capitalism to the end. It cannot be done by denouncing the Social Democratic leadership as Fascists, which only alienates the Socialist rank and file, who know that it is sheer nonsense.

The workers' eyes can best be opened by the tactic of the United Front—by putting forward a programme which will be acceptable to the reformist workers. These workers will then exert pressure on their leaders to accept a struggle on an agreed programme. If the reformist leadership accepts, then a struggle will be waged in which the superiority of revolutionary ideas will be demonstrated; if it refuses, it stands exposed.

At a time when industrial prosperity still reigned in France, the Communist Party leadership made frenzied efforts to provoke revolutionary outbreaks. Naturally, this madness could only alienate them from the working class. The reformist unions gained enormously, while the CGTU (Communist) unions fell to pieces. The Socialist Party regained most of its support at the expense of Communism. The adventurism of the CP's policy thus set it apart from the workers. From 150,000 members in 1920, the Party dropped to 7,000 members in 1933.

France was affected later than other countries by the world slump. There was even, until the crisis, a chronic shortage of

labour, and it was necessary to import labour from Poland and other countries for the mines and other industries. France's backwardness thus first delayed, but later exacerbated the crisis in French economy and French society.

As a result of the betrayal policies of the German Social Democrats and the Communist Party of Germany, Hitler emerged victorious in 1933. At the same time, the economic crisis began to affect French society. The French Fascists, emboldened by the victory of reaction in Germany, began to prepare. Fascist Leagues composed largely of ex-servicemen, such as the Croix de Feu of Colonel de la Rocque, were formed. Ruination came to many French peasants, artisans and small business men, and in this atmosphere scandal racked the French Parliament.

Stavisky, in league with certain deputies, was perpetrating a swindle involving millions and signifying the bankruptcy of tens of thousands of small investors. The rottenness of the Third Republic was laid bare. On February 6, 1934, the Fascists demonstrated for the overthrow of Parliament. With razors and revolvers, the Fascist thugs came on to the Champs Elysées.

Despite the terrible lesson of the Hitler disaster, the Communist Party leadership, basing itself on the Stalinist line of the Comintern, had learned nothing. Denouncing the "Radical Fascist" Daladier, who at that time headed the Government, the CP demonstrated with the Fascists. Had it depended on them, the Fascists would have been victorious in establishing a military-police state in France at that time.

The Radical Socialist leader Daladier, cowering before the Fascist onslaught, resigned and made way for the reactionary government of Doumergue, who governed by decree (just as the reactionary governments of Bruening, von Papen and von Schleicher in Germany prepared the way for Hitler).

Fortunately, the French working class, with its great revolutionary traditions, had learned from the terrible experiences of its brothers in Germany. Under pressure of the workers, the French Socialist Party and its trade unions (CGT) declared a counter-offensive. As a warning to reaction, the reformist trade unions called a General Strike for February 12, 1934. Although only one

million workers were organised, four million came out. The Fascists were forced to pause—for the time being. It is ironical that Jacques Doriot split from the French CP at this time for demanding that the Party advocate the United Front, taking with him the St. Denis district of the Party, one of the most proletarian districts in Paris, of which he was Secretary (he later went over to Fascism).

IV. THE POPULAR FRONT

"But this excellent idea (increase in the purchasing power of all sections of the population)—like so many others—was exceedingly inadequately applied during the first months of the Popular Front Government, and even the minor gains registered then were cancelled out by the fact that finance-capital was able to put into execution its own proposals for a solution—a solution which implied a restriction of the purchasing power of the masses" (Joanny Berlioz, **World News and Views**, July 2, 1938, p. 783).

"... the experience of two years of the Popular Front—two years during which but very inadequate efforts had been made towards the realisation of the existing programme, moderate as it is ... (J. Berlioz, **World News and Views**, July 9, 1938).

"The sentiment in favour of unity (CP-SP) is now increasing, above all among those workers who realise the ominous consequences of the concessions which have been made to the forces of capital by the various Popular Front governments" (J. Berlioz, **World News and Views**, December 10, 1938).

Now the masses began to take action against the vicious decree laws of Doumergue, and against the attacks on their conditions and standards provoked by the crisis of French capitalism. In Brest and Toulon, barricades were erected resulting from clashes with the police in the course of strike struggles. "Les soviets partout"—"Soviets everywhere"—became a challenging rallying cry for the Communists in France.

It was just at this period that the Stalinists changed their line. Stalin, having failed to arrive at an agreement with Hitler—at that time—now swung over to try for an agreement with British and French imperialism. As an unwritten part of this agreement, the Communist Parties were to be prostituted to the service of the ruling class.

After the signature of the Franco-Soviet Pact, the Communist Party in France intensified this change in line. Passing through the correct tactic of the United Front, they demanded a Popular Front including the Radical Socialists, the excuse for this being that the Radicals represented the middle class. But, as Lenin had shown in relation to the Millerand crisis, the Radical Socialists were **not** the Party of of the middle class, but a party of finance capital exploiting middle-class grievances. The policy of the Popular Front was Millerandism under another name—a name selected because of the discrediting of the idea of open Coalition with capitalist parties.

Meanwhile, the masses had begun to swing into action. The Fascists were intensifying their propaganda preparations and demonstrations. Fearing revolutionary outbreaks on the part of the people, the Radicals then joined in what Trotsky called "the strikebreaking conspiracy of the People's Front." (Leon Trotsky, **Whither France?).** With the middle class becoming restive and frustrated, with the workers passing to direct action, finance capital needed a means of holding the masses in check. Always when the ruling class is in difficulties and in danger from mass discontent, it tries the tactic of coalition in order to demoralise, disintegrate and confuse the workers.

In the elections of February, 1936, following the Popular Front agreement, the Socialist Party became the strongest Party and the Communist vote reached one and a half million. As an indication of the crisis and of the upsurge of the masses, the Radical Socialists, for 50 years the strongest Party in France, were reduced to third place—this in spite of the efforts of the Socialist and Communist leaders to provide for them a revolutionary aura. Had they fought on class lines, the Socialists and Communists could have commanded an overwhelming majority and reduced the Radicals to impotence.

The upsurge in the working class was revealed in the events which the victory of the Front provoked. The workers had believed their leaders that the Front was just a manoeuvre to strengthen them, and they boldly set out on what could have been the path of a new French Revolution. A series of stay-in strikes

was begun. All the main centres of French industry were occupied by the workers at the point of production. From the depths of French Society, even the hitherto unorganised, most backward and exploited sections of the working class moved into action. The shop girls occupied the big department stores, and proudly announced that the regulations which strictly determined the application of lipstick, paint and powder, were null and void; they were not actresses, they said, but members of the working class.

Huge mass demonstrations took place in all the cities of France, not least important being the participation, in Paris, of the Algerian workers en masse, under the leadership of their national organisation headed by the ex-Communist revolutionary, Messali Hadj. The Army, the Navy and even the police were infected by the prevailing revolutionary mood. In the ports, the Navy men marched through the towns with their arms linked, singing the **Internationale.** The **poilus** and the police fraternised with the demonstrating crowds. The forces of capital were entirely paralysed. Here was one of those rare occasions when the revolution could have been carried through peacefully: the seizure of power and the arming of the masses would have nullified any resistance on the part of finance capital.

Through this mass action, the whole programme of reforms for which the Popular Front had campaigned was carried through in a matter of days by the workers. Then, in pursuance of Moscow's foreign policy line, the CP leader Thorez came forward and announced: "One must know how to end a strike." (Paris, June 11, 1936). At the persuasion of the Communist Party, the workers evacuated the factories under the slogan of "republican legality." Panic-stricken, the capitalists pushed forward Blum, the Socialist leader, as Prime Minister. His task was to hold the masses till the revolutionary tide had ebbed. Under the direct cover of the Popular Front, reaction began to prepare its counterblow against the workers.

The state has been carefully assembled and prepared as an instrument of the ruling class. The officers' corps of the Navy, the Army and the police, the heads of the civil service, all the key positions in the apparatus of the Establishment, are filled by

members of the upper middle class and ruling classes, loyal to the latter. This theoretical analysis of the state by Marx has been confirmed over and over again in the history of France.

Fascist admirals and generals began almost immediately to conspire against the Popular Front régime. Even in these early days a strike was provoked in Toulon naval dockyard, the workers being incensed by the officers placing of Fascist placards on the quays.

Meanwhile, the employers began gradually to nibble at the gains of the workers after the first wave of enthusiasm had subsided. The bosses tried to recoup their losses by putting up prices and promoting inflation. Finding one pretext or another, they tried to rid themselves of the factory militants, provoking a whole series of strike actions.

One of the points in the programme of the People's Front had been the dissolution of the armed Fascist leagues. Under pressure of threatened mass action, the Fascist organisations were "dissolved." The Fascists hid their arms for the moment and then announced that, instead of the leagues, they were going to form—a Party! They were allowed to do this under the protection of the Popular Front Government.

Emboldened by lack of opposition from the Popular Front parties, de la Rocque, on March 16, 1937, insolently announced a march through Clichy, a solidly proletarian suburb of Paris; this was a provocation similar to Mosley's attempt to march through the East End. The workers replied by blocking his path in tens of thousands. The police, who had been disciplined following the fraternisation experience of 1936, tried to force a way for the Fascists. They fired into the crowd, killing some workers (five dead, 200 wounded) provoking nation-wide indignation. Again an opportunity opened for a move towards the taking of power.

As a safety-valve, the Communist Party called a 24-hour General Strike, but limited it to Paris, despite working-class feeling on a national scale. A million workers came out in Paris. The strike was absolutely solid and the city was paralysed.

The workers, with a sure instinct and understanding the nature of the threat with which they were faced, began to take action

against Fascists and scabs introduced into the factories by the employers. They began to expel them from the factories and refused to work with them.

Then Léon Blum, Popular Front Premier, intervened again. Frenchmen, he said, were entitled to any opinions they pleased. He would not tolerate action against anyone for his opinions. The Stalinists, without revolutionary perspective and hamstrung by the People's Front policy, accepted this with only verbal protest.

Thus the enthusiasm of the workers began to wane. Their gains were being lost, their aims frustrated, their ideals betrayed. The working class is not a tap to be turned on, hot or cold, as the mood of its "leaders" dictates. The development of mass opinion towards revolution proceeds according to certain laws. If the workers are frustrated by their own organisations, their interest in the struggle diminishes and the whole movement can disintegrate.

Under the protection of the People's Front, the big capitalist combines and trusts continued to reap enormous profits. The workers began to be demoralised, and the reaction to prepare its revenge.

The gradual swing to the Right was marked by the substitution of first Chautemps and then Daladier, the Radical, for Blum, the Socialist, as Premier. In 1937-8, there was a conspiracy of the so-called Cagoulards, or "hooded men," a secret society financed by the big trusts with links and members in the armed forces and the police. They were turning the catacombs of Paris into a fortress. They even had warplanes and other arms which their forces were being trained to use against the working class.

While the Popular Front Government condemned this, no real action was taken against the Fascist conspirators in the Army, in the police or on the streets. To have done so, the Radicals would have had to undermine the bourgeois state, which they had joined the Front precisely to preserve.

With the threatening international situation and the Kremlin's foreign policy, the CP bureaucracy was degenerating at a rapid rate. From support of the Popular Front, the CP leaders moved to advocacy of a National Front. All Frenchmen should

unite, from the "national" Fascists on the Right to the Communists on the Left, against the danger from Hitler. Quite logically, from their discovery of the "difference" between "good" and "bad" capitalists, and having abandoned the class criterion, they now began to discover a difference between "good" and "bad" Fascists. National Socialism was proclaimed the worst form of Fascism, with "aggressive" intentions that threatened the whole world. Thus the Marxist analysis of the nature of war as flowing from the policies of nations and of classes was abandoned. Italian Facism was "not so bad" as German National Socialism; therefore "France" (i.e., the French ruling class) must make an agreement with Mussolini against Hitler.

In this atmosphere came the Munich crisis. Daladier and Chamberlain capitulated to Hitler on Czechoslovakia. In the eyes of the French masses, the Communist Party was trying to push them into a war which they dreaded; the whole propaganda of the CP—chauvinist and anti-internationalist—together with the frustration of the previous two and a half years, had demoralised the working class completely. Munich was seen as the culmination of the betrayal of their own fellow-People's Frontists in Spain by Blum and Daladier, who by their participation in the so-called "Non-Intervention Committee" of the League of Nations had sabotaged all effective aid, and cynically defied the workers' demand of "planes for Spain." They could do this in the knowledge that the CP was not prepared to lead the masses into action on the question.

After Munich, in response to Moscow's fear of a deal between France and Germany, the CP changed to a more "radical" line. Daladier introduced a whole series of measures through emergency decrees to cut the standards and conditions of the workers. Without systematic preparation, and despite the fact that the mood of the masses was now disinterested and apathetic, the CP issued the call for a General Strike. Even then, had they offered the masses some perspective, there may have been possibilities of a rearguard action. But the sacrifices demanded were not proportionate to what the workers could gain; for the capitalists, it was a case of heads we win and tails the workers lose. They could

risk a clash. If the masses' reaction were too strong, they could hurriedly change Herriot for Daladier, which would have satisfied the CP: it would have been the same Party in power with the same programme, save that Beelzebub would have been exchanged for Satan. They could wait a little longer if necessary till the mood of the workers had ebbed, and then proceed to new attacks. Thus the bourgeoisie had nothing to lose from a trial of strength.

For the workers, the situation was exactly the reverse. They would, even had they won, very rapidly have been faced with the same situation again. Daladier, who had retreated in such a cowardly fashion before the Fascist razors, played the "strong-man" when it came to a clash with the workers. He ringed the factories with the machine guns of armed police and soldiery The workers would have risked armed conflict if the demand had been the capture of power, and thus the transformation of their whole manner of living; for a few paltry reforms, it was not worthwhile.

The most ironical part of this clash was the fact that the Fascists, protected by Blum while in office, were the first to scab. Under these conditions the workers, dispirited, began to move back into the factories and the strike (November 30, 1938) collapsed. It is significant that the strike had least support in those areas where the CP was strongest.

The social conflict was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War. Daladier, drawing the Socialists into his government, imposed a police-military dictatorship with the participation of the reformist leaders. And the CP, which for five years had been poisoning the workers with the crude slogans of a demented chauvinism, now abruptly changed face with the Stalin-Hitler Pact (though not before Maurice Thorez had made a fool of himself by enlisting in the Army for the "war against Fascism" —an Army he deserted, without explanation, after the Kremlin **volte-face).**

This demoralised and confused the workers, and the capitalists rained down a series of repressive blows upon the masses, systematically slicing away their standards of living. The corruption and degeneration of the ruling class, the rottenness of the officer corps, resulted in a breakthrough by Hitler's forces.

V. THE CP IN THE RESISTANCE

Paris could have been defended if the ruling class had been prepared to arm and organise the workers. But, haunted by the spectre of the Commune, the ruling class preferred surrender. Weygand, in an interview with the **Daily Telegraph,** explained this quite boldly. Thus was the fiction of " national defence " exposed! The French capitalists understood by this slogan only defence of the interests of their class. The way was prepared for the military dictatorship of Pétain, a dictatorship against the workers and peasants, in the interests of the capitalists, and at the service of the national oppressor.

When the Germans marched into Paris, the Communist Party tried to publish **L'Humanité** as a legal journal and even sent an emissary to German military headquarters in Paris to request this. The Germans treated this emissary with contempt and arrested him forthwith: thus was France spared the sight of a "Communist" journal published legally under the aegis of a Fascist occupying power, while all other journals of the Left were suppressed!

With the attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 the CP switched lines once again and came out for a struggle against the Nazis—or, to be more accurate, **against the Germans,** as such. The ground was favourable for this line, the masses having begun to recover from the previous sell-outs and to organise resistance. The revolutionary Marxists, on the other hand, invoked the solidarity of the German soldiery with the French masses. They made a careful distinction between the S.S. scum and the ordinary German soldiers: "Kill the S.S., but solidarity with the ordinary German soldier against the officer caste and the Nazi filth!" By publishing a paper, in German, for the German soldiers, at a later stage in the war the Marxists were able to win over groups in the German Army. Many German soldiers were shot alongside French revolutionists for this fraternisation, which terrified the Nazis more than anything else.

The Stalinists, on the other hand, by their racialist propaganda against all Germans, increased the difficulties of the Resistance fighters by solidarising, despite everything, the Occupation

troops with their reactionary officers; many of the sacrifices made by the French workers in the Resistance were therefore needless, despite the gallantry of those involved.

As the war developed, the Resistance began to grow and spread through all sections of the French masses. The working class bore the brunt of the struggle—as conceded by Claude Bourdet in the **News Chronicle** (23.5.58). Not only the workers, however, but wide strata of the middle classes participated in the struggle. A wave of anger and disgust spread, not only among the workers, but through the middle class, against the trusts and cartels, the generals and bishops who collaborated with the Nazis. The real rôle of the "élite" in society was exposed, with their rotten slogans of "defence of the motherland" and "national unity" turning to vinegar in their mouths, and exposed as meaning, in reality, "defence of the profits and privileges of the ruling class." These slogans now boomeranged, and the masses saw their erstwhile rulers as traitors and Vichyite agents of the national oppressor.

So strong was this feeling that the programme of the Resistance promised measures of expropriation of the trusts and combines, and of the property of all who had collaborated with the Fascists. A clear social-revolutionary line would have gained the support of the overwhelming majority of Frenchmen.

Instead, the CP sedulously spread the legend of de Gaulle as "saviour," this being in line with Moscow's foreign policy. As revealed by Marty and Tillon after their expulsion in 1952, even a section of the Party leadership, more exposed to the pressure of the mass movement, was in opposition to the policy of social sell-out. The MRP (Mouvement Républicain Populaire) came forward, as the result of the discrediting of the old-guard Radical Socialists, as the Party exploiting peasant and middle-class needs—a Party which at that time was compelled to pretend to stand against capitalism on a programme similar to that advanced by the Socialists and Communists. The Stalinists headed the movement of mass discontent into the channels of class collaboration and Popular Frontism. This veering and changing of the middle class was a symptom of the revolutionary crisis in France.

VI. THE POST-WAR UPSURGE

The "liberation" lifted the lid off the class struggle. It was achieved partly by the uprising of the Paris masses (August, 1944). General de Gaulle's forces, indeed, were rushed frantically to Paris to forestall the possibility of a new Commune. At the first General Election in 1945 the shift in class relationships and the change in the psychology of the masses were reflected. Fascism and capitalism were completely discredited, and all the Right Wing Parties were overwhelmingly defeated. For the first time in history the CP emerged as the strongest Party, and Socialists and Communists together had a majority (51 per cent.) of the votes: a higher proportion than the Labour Party obtained in Britain at about the same time (48 per cent.).

The Right Wing, headed by clerical reaction, was forced, following the defeat of its open forces, to rally around the MRP, as in similar circumstances its Russian opposite numbers had grouped themselves around the Constitutional Democrats (Cadets) after February, 1917. To retain the support of small peasants and backward, Catholic workers, the Right was forced to take on a "left," "socialist" coloration. The index to the revolutionary crisis was that the CP commanded the support of the overwhelming majority **of the workers,** obtaining five million votes. Big sections of the middle class swung over to the SP. The symptomatic significance of this is shown by the fact that even in the revolutionary crisis of 1936, the workers' Parties were still in a minority.

Further irrefutable proof that France in 1944-5 was rotten-ripe for revolution lies in the fact that for the first time **the majority** of the workers were organised in trade unions. This is something achieved in no other country at no other time under a capitalist régime: Lenin himself made the point that such a state of affairs was all but impossible under capitalism. In fact, such was the mood of the workers that the CP took the leadership of the CGT (the French TUC), and thus led both the official and the "unofficial" (factory committees, etc.) movement of the French working class. Capitalist reaction was helpless in face of the revolutionary wave.

A revolutionary policy on the part of the workers' parties would have clinched a class victory, which in turn would have lit a conflagration which could have swept France, including Britain. France would have stood once more at the head of the revolutionary forces throughout the world.

Britain and America would have been unable to intervene. The American and British troops, weary of war and longing to be home with their families, wanted " out "; not only that—they themselves would have been infected, as had the German soldiers before them, by the agitation-propaganda of the revolution (witness Russia 1917). This point is underwritten by the fact that the USA was unable even to intervene directly against the Chinese revolution at a later stage: if not in China, how much less in France.

The ruling class had to play for time. They were in a similar position to that which they occupied in 1936, except that—at least temporarily—they were far weaker. At such times, as Lenin so often pointed out, the capitalists turn for comfort to a coalition with the Labour and trade union leaders. But this time the most pernicious rôle was reserved for the leaders of the so-called " Communist " Party.

At that stage de Gaulle could not have carried even a majority of the MRP for a programme of Bonapartist dictatorship. As a consequence, he resigned and awaited events. The CP participated in a " government of national unity " in which, incidentally, there were 11 capitalist Ministers against ten from the workers' parties.

The masses still had tremendous faith in the Communist Party, and as late as 1947 hundreds of thousands of Parisians demonstrated in the Party's favour. Yet, in the name of " national unity," this CP participated in the government which waged war against Indo-China, was responsible for the slaughter of the Algerian people, the Madagascar massacre and all the other colonialist atrocities of French imperialism. They acted as the worst strikebreakers, holding back the movement in the factories. Later, they began to offer verbal opposition. As Marcel Cachin expressed it, they were afraid of being " outflanked from the Left."

Then, having fulfilled their scab rôle, the CP Ministers were

ignominously cast out of the Government in 1947. But for the rest of that year they functioned as a "loyal opposition," until the new turn in the Kremlin's line following the formation of the Cominform in October, 1947.

VII. DE GAULLE'S FIRST BID FOR POWER

"Whatever be the current Bible of the petty bourgeoisie, Power is always its God" (Colvin R. de Silva, **Socialism Reaffirmed**).

Meanwhile, de Gaulle tried to organise his own "Society of December 10" under the title of the Rally of the French People. The Rally managed to secure 40 per cent. of the votes in the municipal elections of 1947 and a fairly large percentage in the Parliamentary elections of 1951. But the strength of the working class at that time was too great. The middle-class cadre of the Rally was not prepared to fight on the streets in support of its idol. The decisive section of the ruling class wanted peace in which to enjoy the profits brought by the mounting boom, and were not prepared to back a political adventurer, financially or otherwise; they were afraid to face the incalculable risk of a civil war in which victory was by no means certain to be theirs.

The laws of revolution and counter-revolution are the same on this point. Twenty years of struggle against capitalism may be necessary to build up the exasperation and determination of the workers to destroy the system. But by its very nature a revolutionary situation cannot last. If the leadership of the working class does not avail itself of the opportunity to seize power—an opportunity which may last only a few days—the chance can be lost and many years may pass before a new occasion can arise. For the working class becomes demoralised and, not understanding the reasons for the defeat, tends to blame the mass for the catastrophe, and to bend anew to the yoke of capitalism.

The development of the counter-revolution follows a similar path. Failure to take advantage of the upsurge of the middle-class masses, disillusioned in the Left and leaning towards the "Great Man" as saviour, may mean the loss, for the counter-revolution, of the opportunity to seize power.

De Gaulle's failure to seize control in 1951 meant the debacle

of his hopes for a whole period—no thanks to pale-pink compromisers in the Socialist and Communist leaderships.

The instability of the Fourth Republic has continued. Despite the boom, the decay of French capitalism has continued apace. The attempt to "modernise" France has been largely at the expense of the middle class and peasant masses. A symptom of this crisis has been the continued search by this class for its Messiah—first de Gaulle, then (partly) Poujade.

During a considerable part of this period, the CP (1948-52) provoked all manner of adventurist strikes and demonstrations on an anti-American basis, leadling their men, like the "grand old Duke of York," up the hill and down again, without ever posing a perspective which could justify the sacrifices so constantly demanded of the Party's supporters—the conquest of power. As a result the movement of the workers ebbed and ebbed. From the position when millions of workers could move into the streets at the CP's behest, a time was reached when the Party was lucky if it could mobilise 10,000.

These are the events which paved the way for the present situation in France.

French imperialism emerged from the war weakened and debilitated. For 20 years the armies of France have suffered nothing but defeat. As a consequence of the anti-imperialist upsurge following the Second World War France has lost Syria, the Lebanon and Indo-China, and direct control of Morocco and Tunisia.

In every case the greedy and myopic ruling class was forced out only after tremendous struggles by the colonial peoples. In Indo-China alone, the cost of the war to France was more than she received in economic aid from the US. All this blood and treasure was spilled in vain, and French imperialism was compelled to retreat. The Suez adventure, under American pressure, turned into an inglorious fiasco.

Yet all these losses pale into insignificance beside the potential loss of Algeria. French imperialism, after its experience in Vietnam, Tunisia and Morocco, would perhaps have preferred to make some sort of compromise with the Algerian nationalists. Yet, ironically, Algeria was the one place where such a compromise

was least possible within a capitalist framework. The interests of the big landowners and capitalists in Algeria stood, breaker-fashion, in irreconcilable conflict with the surging wave of the Algerian independence movement.

Under pressure of these **colons,** a colonial war of classic pattern, exceeding in violence, torture, murder, rape, all the past atrocities of imperialism, was launched against the Algerian people: a war that has stretched its shadow over the last three years, a war which is bleeding France to the extent of £600m. and more per year.

Not the least tragic element in this situation has been the fact that the Algerian war could have been the basis of renewed struggle against the régime in France, in fraternity with the Algerian people. Had such a struggle been waged, it could have split the settlers in Algeria, winning the lower middle class and small landowners to the demand of a socialist Algeria, linked fraternally and with full right (including that of secession) with a socialist France.

But the passivity of the Communist Party and the Socialist betrayal, whereby Mollet and his friends supported the war and even intensified it after gaining power on a programme of peace in Algeria, meant that the war became a ghastly conflict of extermination on both sides. The **colons** were welded into one reactionary mass, and the Algerian freedom fighters pushed back on to a purely nationalist programme.

The first reaction of the reserves called back, and the conscripts called upon, to serve in Algeria, was one of active opposition—demonstrations, the stopping of trains, strikes and agitation against the war (Henri Martin). But there was no mass campaign against the war like that waged in 1925 against the war in Morocco —and this at a time when the CP was a hundred times as strong. All that the CP did was to offer verbal opposition, not linked with the day to day work of the Party, in order to "make the record." Not only this, but the shameful treachery of Thorez and Duclos was spotlighted when they voted the war credits of the Mollet Government. It was with this vote—and not with their "anti-colonialist" phrasemongering—that the leaders aligned the activities of their Party.

VIII. CONSPIRACY IN ALGIERS

"The rice is well cooked—we should eat it" (Radio Algiers, May 26, 1958).

The pay-off for this crime is the recent events in Algeria. In Algeria, all workers' organisations have been long since illegalised. To carry on the war, the French Army, and above all the paratroops, have waged a war of terror in the areas they dominate. The paratroops have been revealed as a Praetorian Guard, similar at best to Hitler's SA, with Massu as their Roehm. They have become a hardened force of torturers, rapists, murderers, ready for anything.

In the meantime, the workers' Parties failing to give a solution to the problems of French society, the officers corps have begun more and more to express its discontent at the "half-measures" of successive French administrations, General Massu naïvely revealed the thinking of this corps in an interview with Randolph Churchill, of **The Evening Standard:** "The Army has suffered one defeat after another for the last 20 years. It is all the fault of the politicians, who would not give the generals a free hand."

These people burn with the desire to destroy the workers' organisations and their rights, which frustrate them at every turn. These organisations, Massu and Company believe, stand in the way of "Greater France."

It was in this atmosphere that the basis was laid for a **coup.** Playing on the fears of the **colons** of a deal between the ruling class in France and the Algerian nationalist movement, the conspirators prepared their plans.

In France the régime has been racked by continuous crisis: one Prime Minister has followed another, without any of the problems being solved. Parliament has been deadlocked between the open representatives of capitalism and those deputies who, in a grossly distorted form, reflect the interests of the masses. In the last crisis, preparations were laid by the Algerian settlers for a **coup d'état**—preparations directly involving the arch-conspirator de Gaulle himself. A week before the outbreak in Algeria Lieut. Neuwirth went to Massu's headquarters direct from Gen. de Gaulle.

Using as their excuse the execution of three French soldiers

by the FLN—in reply to countless executions and tortures by the French—the settlers organised demonstrations in Algiers. With no real opposition from the police, they marched on Government House. Then the paratroops, supposedly in Algiers to keep order, joined in, helping to sack the building. Instantly General Massu appeared on the balcony of Government House and announced the formation of a " Committee of Public Safety." In this he was joined by Raoul Salan, commander of the French forces in Algeria.

Taking advantage of the fact that there was no Government in France, they demanded that Pflimlin (one of the MRP leaders) be not invested, and that President Coty called General de Gaulle to power at the head of a " Government of Public Safety." It was intended that the movement should take place simultaneously in Paris and Algiers. The Right Wing rabble demonstrated on the Champs Elysées for a Government headed by de Gaulle. As in 1934, they intended to intimidate the deputies into changing the government. But they were even weaker than the Fascist razor-gangs of 1934. At this stage, there is no basis for a mass Fascist movement in France: all they could mobilise, in all Paris, was 6,000, who ran in cowardly flight from the blows of the police.

The movement in Algiers seemed on the point of isolation. The **coup** had failed. The " brave " Massu and General Salan were explaining that they had been forced into this position and had only accepted " the call " to preserve order. Admiral Auboyneau, who had already turned coat once, turned it again and vowed anew his loyalty to Paris. Two members of the General Staff were arrested, and the Chief of the General Staff resigned.

It was at this point that General de Gaulle intervened, stating that he would take power " if I am called." This declaration rallied the insurrectionists in Algiers—indeed, that was its purpose. It put fresh heart into the most reactionary elements in France.

The three trade-union confederations, in response to the alarm of the workers, issued a call to general strike if there were any threat to constitutional government. In the meantime, Pflimlin had been hurriedly invested. One thing was clear: this was a crisis in which the whole fate of the régime was at stake.

In this situation, not only did the Socialists behave according

to classical social-democratic pattern, but the self-styled "Leninists" of the CP succumbed to all the parliamentary illusions against which Lenin had so sternly warned. Saying that they were acting "to bar the road to de Gaulle," they voted for the Pflimlin Government and for the proclamation of a state of emergency forbidding meetings and demonstrations. Yet the leaders of the French CP had been (correctly) among the most vociferous critics of the German Social Democracy for voting for Hindenburg "to stop Hitler" and supporting the decree laws of Bruening, leader of the Catholic Centre Party (the German equivalent to the MRP) as the "lesser evil" to Nazism at that time.

The **only** way to stop de Gaulle is the extra-parliamentary mobilisation of the working class, drawing behind it the plebeian masses.

Truly, the "Little Plum" has proved "worthy" of the support given it by the Socialist and Communist Parties. In the heat of the moment, Pflimlin had denounced the insurrection of the generals. But the basic class interests of French capitalism dictated a different course. The most barefaced high treason was meekly accepted, and Pflimlin tried to placate the mutinous scum by adopting its programme: war to the death in Algeria, moves towards dictatorship by "strengthening" the executive, castration of Parliament, and so forth.

Then in the traditions of French bedroom farce we had the spectacle of the CP leaders appealing to Pflimlin, Pflimlin appealin to Salan, Salan appealing to de Gaulle, and de Gaulle appealing for power.

If the Pflimlin Government had been worth the least confidence, even from a "democratic" point of view, it would have immediately cut off all supplies to Algeria, outlawed the generals, and appealed to the 350,000 conscripts in Algeria to arrest them and hand them to the authorities.

IX. GAULLISM WITHOUT DE GAULLE

"One cannot fight efficaciously by means of spectacular demonstrations which have no positive sequel. The struggle against political servitude can hardly be led by those who have failed in the struggle for bread" (J. Berlioz, **World News and Views**, July 9, 1938).

Instead, the Government advanced a programme of "Gaullism without de Gaulle." In the words of the reporter, Randolph Churchill, who cannot be accused of a working-class or even an ultra-democratic bias, "the most unprecedented thing in history has happened. Mutinous generals, instead of being denounced for their crimes, have actually been reinforced." And these bewildered troops have been met, on disembarkation, by representatives of the Committee of Public Safety who have subjected them to a barrage of propaganda over the loudspeaker.

When General Franco organised his insurrection in Morocco against the elected Spanish Government, Pflimlin's counterpart, Azana, had to negotiate secretly with the insurgents for fear of the masses' reaction. In this he was, from the standpoint of the Spanish bourgeoisie, justified, as was proven by the mass outbreak of the Spanish workers when news of the insurrection of the generals reached them. How good for nothing, then, are the rotten leaderships of the French Socialist and Communist Parties when Pflimlin can allow himself the luxury of conducting similar negotiations **openly!**

Metaphorically slapping his tommy-gun on the table, Massu has put the issue squarely. "Pflimlin has to support either us or the Communists; and he prefers us."

Such is the record of French "Communist' leadership. The British CP newspapers, **Daily Worker** and **World News,** have had obvious difficulty in putting the sell-out across to their members. They have contented themselves with trying to fix all the blame for the betrayals on the Socialist Party. "It is the result of the attempt to suppress the national liberation movement in Algeria, which has been carried out by successive French governments with the full support of the leaders of the French Socialist Party . . . As on many occasions before, the Socialist Party leaders are in fact leaning on the Right—and this means paving the way for the Fascists" **(World News,** 24.5.58). We may ask these gentlemen: what the hell is the Communist Party doing in voting for Pflimlin and Company?

The full perfidy of the Stalinist leaders is revealed in a further passage. Correctly, **World News** points out: "The French

events have once again underlined the nature of the state, as in essence armed forces linked with the actual rulers of France—the big business interests, whose only concern is to keep their wealth and privileges. The immediate defection of the French generals has arisen over Algeria, but we must not forget that de Gaulle was seeking a Fascist solution for French big business before Algeria became an acute issue."

This characterisation of the state is correct. Marx and Lenin have emphasised the fact that the state can in the last analysis be reduced to armed bodies of men. The officer caste is, then, the mainstay of the capitalist state. To proceed against them would be for capitalism to destroy the instrument of its own rule. The road to seizure of power by the workers would be opened.

Yet in the very next paragraph, **World News** proceeds on exactly the opposite assumption.

"Now the Pflimlin Government is calling on the generals to serve it loyally, and has removed some high officers from their positions; but it remains to be seen how far the military leaders are already committed to support de Gaulle. The police seem so far to be carrying out the Government's orders, but it is well known that the heads of the police are Fascists."

As if the generals are not in collusion with de Gaulle, and as if Pflimlin would behave in any other way! So "severe" has the Pflimlin Government been with treason that the two generals removed, instead of being put under arrest and court-martialled preparatory to being shot for high treason as the mutinous **poilus** were in 1917, have been sent to different parts of France to live with friends—other high officers—where they can continue plotting to their hearts' content. So "loyal" have the police been that Soustelle the Gaullist escaped from their "protection" only to place himself at the political head of the rebel settlers.

This Pflimlin Government, which is supposed to be barring the way to de Gaulle, has sent emissaries to him and to the revolting generals, as if they were the government and the government were some order of mendicant friars, supplicating favours. Instead of arresting de Gaulle as the principal mutineer and arch-conspirator, they beg him to mediate between the mutineers and

themselves. Naturally, de Gaulle and the mutineers are emboldened to press all the more for "adjustments" in their favour. How could it be otherwise? For it follows, as a law of class society, and . . . from the criminal policy of the Socialist and Stalinist leaderships.

The ruling class, of course, prefers, if there is to be a **coup,** that it should take place in a "cold" way, which will not threaten the destruction of property or risk the loss of power. But the policy of cowardly support for Pflimlin, this Alsatian hound cringing like a whipped cur before its master, the General, can encourage the idea in ruling circles that a transition to a Bonapartist régime can occur in just such a "cold" manner, without any unpleasantness on the streets. It is the eighteenth brumaire all over again, with the Socialists and Stalinists in the rôles of the democratic buffoons of 1848.

Certain of the Socialists—Mollet and Lacoste, the latter a direct accessory to the crimes of the Algiers clique—are hoping to become the Left Wing of such a Bonapartism. Others, more responsive to the pressure of their rank and file, are prepared to "struggle" to prevent the generals from coming to power.

And the policy of the Communist leadership—flowing partly from dependence on the Kremlin, partly from sheer ineptitude, partly from its long history of betrayals over thirty years, partly because, for all these reasons, a cadre capable of fighting has not been and could not have been assembled—plays into the hands precisely of the Bonapartist wing of the Socialists.

These traitors even abase themselves, in the Assembly and the Senate, to the extent of voting, with the Fascists, to greet the Army and its officers in their civilising mission in North Africa! This is hardly the way to explain the class nature of this Army to the workers, or to prepare them for a possible struggle to the death with its officer caste, the agents of the ruling class. It is, on the contrary, the way to demoralise and disorient the workers, and to pave the way for defeat.

And yet, apart from the top leadership, the very lives of the members of the CP are at stake. The top leaders can always flee to Moscow—it has happened before! But the ranks, and even

the middle and lower strata of Party officials, must stay to suffer under the jackboot of a Bonapartist dictator. Let them be under no illusions as to the fate in store for them. Let them remember the words of his torturer, quoted by Henri Alleg in his book, **La Question:** " What we are doing here we will do in France. We will do it to your Duclos and your (sic) Mitterand*. We will do to them what we are doing to you. And your whore of a Republic, we will blow it up into the air too " (the words are those of Lieut. Irulin).

*Francois Mitterand (UDSR), Left Radical and former Minister of the Interior.

If the leaders of the CP were even one per cent. Leninists; if they even based themselves on the history of France; their whole policy would be the exact opposite of what they are advocating now. The revolt of the generals is not some unlucky accident precipitated only by the problems of Algeria, but is rooted in the whole class structure and present position of French capitalism. Had Algeria not " happily " chanced to be on hand as a pretext, the generals would have found some other excuse to move against the régime and to destroy what for them remains the real menace: the workers' organisations.

X. THE STATE LAID BARE

Lenin, in dealing with the lesson of Boulangerism, pointed out how the whole class structure of capitalist society could be laid bare and the masses prepared, in the course of struggle in defence of their democratic rights and liberties, to pass over to the socialist revolution. Surely now, more than ever, it is necessary in the tradition of Marxism-Leninism, to warn the workers over and over again: rely only on your own unity, your own organisations, your own strength. No one can, no one will help you, if you cannot, if you will not help yourselves.

Workers! There is no power on earth can stand against you once you are organised, once you are drawn up for action!

But for this action the workers must be prepared ideologically no less than materially. The one is as important as the other.

It is useless, worse than useless, for the workers to put their trust in some Parliamentary clown, some tumbler who will perform nothing but crazy somersaults before the General, his ringmaster! The struggle against Bonapartism is, in the main, an **extra**-Parliamentary struggle: force must be met with force!

If the CP leadership were Communists, they would be explaining that the workers and their allies among the middle class and the peasantry are the **only** force which stands for democracy—to the end. Moch, Minister of the Interior, to frighten some Air Force brass who were threatening an uprising in metropolitan France, replied, according to the **Daily Express,** by telling them that he would arm 40,000 miners. If the CP leaders were worth their salt, they would have taken this as the starting point for their agitation. Arms to the workers! That is the only certain guarantee against any conspiracies on the part of the generals, or anybody else. Let Workers' Defence Guards be formed!

The overwhelming majority of the rank and file Catholic and Socialist, as well as Communist, workers are against the victory of Bonapartism. The main problem is to arouse, organise and prepare the masses for direct action against any eventuality.

If the Communist Party had come out for unity around a real programme of **action** on these lines, even at the eleventh hour it would be possible to organise the United Front on this basis. The Mollet wing of the Socialists would be isolated if they did not respond to the demand to arm the working class. It is true that the monstrous Soviet intervention in Hungary and the brutal crushing of the Hungarian workers has left the Socialist and Catholic workers suspicious, especially as the French leaders, most particularly, defended to the hilt the foul crimes of Stalinism in Hungary. But the obeisance of the CP leaders to the ikons of abstract democracy and Republican virtue will cut no ice with the workers. It must be explained to the workers that what is involved is defence of democratic rights—free speech, freedom to organise, and so on.

These rights can at this stage only be defended arms in hand. And the only way to defend them finally is by dispossessing the millionaire owners of the Press, radio, cinema and other means of

moulding public opinion and the transfer of these organs to the workers' organisations in proportion to their strength and support among the working class. The only road, not only to peace and plenty but to real freedom, lies through workers' democracy—expropriation of the means of production and their operation under a workers' plan with participation in management of the workers on the job at every level, and the running of the state by the masses themselves.

However, the Pflimlin Government, to continue total war in Algeria against the Algerian people at the behest of the generals, has announced a programme of **increasing** service with the colours to 27 months (an increase of nine months), harsher taxes and two meatless days a week. Such a programme cannot enthuse the workers, nor the peasants and middle class. It is the way to demoralise the workers and prepare the painless victory of Gaullism.

The middle-class and peasant masses must be mobilised, alongside the workers, against this programme of the Pflimlin Government, against the war in Algeria, against the generals, against the trusts.

In its place must be put a programme in the interests of these masses: cancellation of debts, cheap credits, cheap fertilisers, state tractors, assistance and loans to small businessmen, shopkeepers and professional people, and the like.

Boldly and audaciously this programme, with the demands in relation to the workers already mentioned, must be advanced as the only road to salvation. Historically, it is only yesterday that the Communist Party ridiculed the Social Democrats in Germany, who screamed: " Act, State, act "—against Hitler. The state acted: Hindenburg kicked the social-democratic ministers in Prussia into the street. The CP then had an ultra-left policy that was wrong but the only thing that was correct about it was their criticism of the passivity of the SD leadership, with its reliance on the state authorities to bar the road to Hitler. But now their policy is a caricature of that of the Social Democracy and, if it depends on them, can only have the same results.

" Now," said the Political Bureau of the French CP on May

25, " is the time for anti-fascist action. It is time for the Government, which has all the necessary powers and which is supported by a strong Republican majority, to start such action " (**Daily Worker,** May 26, 1958).

The Pflimlin Government also acted—by resigning to prepare the way for de Gaulle.

The CP and the CGT, together with the CFTU (Christian trade unions) have threatened a General Strike if a **coup** is attempted in France. But that, while correct in itself, is not enough. The general strike is not a panacea that by itself will solve everything. A programme for power, on the lines sketched above, is a vital necessity as a **positive** aim for the masses. Not only that. Against the counter-revolution's Committees of Public Safety, and even as a mass lever on Parliament, which can capitulate to the generals, Councils of Action (which tomorrow can be organs of power), linked locally and nationally, must be set up.

These Councils of Action must appeal for the formation of similar Councils of Action of the sailors, soldiers and airmen in France to watch over their officers and see that they do not attempt any counter-revolutionary acts.

The Communist Party should have conducted agitation among the dockers to refuse to load arms and supplies to Algeria, and to appeal to the conscripts boarding the ships to form committees of action in conjunction with the workers in the ports, and to refuse to go to Algeria.

It would be unbelievable, if one did not know the class position of the SP leadership and the bureaucratic degeneracy of the CP leadership, that they should have learned nothing from the tragic pages of the past. The only way to win the vacillating or apathetic ranks of the middle class and the peasantry would be by an audacious policy, striking blow after blow against the counter-revolution. Whatever one's view might be of the gang around the generals and Soustelle, they have understood this law of revolution and of counter-revolution: of moving continuously from one success to the next, of keeping the movement going by seizing the initiative and maintaining it throughout. The capture of Corsica, in itself of no especial importance, was intended for this purpose.

Yet the lack of a mass basis for the counter-revolution is the most striking aspect of the whole situation. That, and the helplessness of the official organisations of the working class: for example, not a murmur was heard from the strong CP organisation in Corsica (where the Party had an MP before the rigging of the electoral law). When it is a question of struggle to the death against Bonapartist reaction, all that the CP can offer in the face of events is the proud boast: "Until changes in the electoral constituencies took place, the island had some Communist MPs in the post-war years . . . The island's 300,000 people are in the main strongly pro-Republican, and the Communist Party has not inconsiderable support there" (**Daily Worker,** 26.5.58). With all this support, it would have been possible to mobilise the workers and arm them against the reaction. Instead of this, a meeting was held in the largest town in Corsica of the Bastia Municipal Council. Half the Councillors were unable to attend, or prudently decided not to. Of the 16 present, nine were members of the Communist Party, and the **Daily Worker** proudly proclaims: "This morning the Bastia Municipal Council holds a special session in the Town Hall, which Deputy Mayor de Casalta has refused to hand over. The Council sends a resolution to the Government in Paris affirming its loyalty to the Republic and its support for the Premier. **It calls on the population to remain calm and not carry out any demonstrations** (!) " (ibid).

Thus it was in the early days of the Franco insurrection that the way was paved for Franco to seize towns on the mainland. In those towns where the masses took action with their own hands—Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia—while the Popular Front Government were negotiating (secretly) with Franco, these masses were victorious. Even according to the capitalist Press, they marched against the barracks with table legs, knives and sporting rifles taken from the shops. Most of the rank and file soldiers, under the impact of this move, joined them; the police and the army disintegrated as a force.

In those towns, however, where the masses listened to the advice of their Socialist and Communist "leaders"—Oviedo, Cordoba, Huesca, Granada, Teruel and others—and, after demonstrat-

ing for arms, dispersed peacefully to their homes, the Fascists won. The leaders of the CP and SP advised the workers to have confidence in the "liberal" governors and mayors of the provinces and cities, and this prepared the generals' path for them.

The officers of the garrisons rose during the night and, armed with lists prepared by the police, marched to the workers' quarters and massacred the leaders of the working-class organisations. A reign of terror followed, against which the masses, politically beheaded, had no opportunity to mobilise.

As in Spain yesterday, so in Corsica and France today! As a direct result Bastia, and all the Corsican towns, have fallen to a handful of counter-revolutionary stormtroopers: 60 paratroops took one town!

It is absolutely clear that the Pflimlin Government has paved the way for de Gaulle, despite their highly "revolutionary" act in depriving the insurgent deputy, Arrighi (nominally a Radical) of his seat. Only the shell of the Republic remains. Unless there is an intervention in the immortal tradition of the workers of Barcelona, nothing can keep de Gaulle from power.

The responsibility for this rests fairly and squarely on the "leaderships" of the Socialist and Communist Parties.

What of the future?

It is the impasse of French capitalism that has led to this position. Even if de Gaulle takes power, his dream will be rudely dissipated by the realities of the situation. Big Asparagus (as the cadets of St. Cyr irreverently called him) will melt quickly enough in the maw of the wolf—the wolf at the door of French capitalism.

This wolf assumes the form of the unsolved problems of two decades: the lagging behind other nations of the capitalist West in technique; the running sore of Algeria; the developing movement for independence in French Africa, which no Bonapartist boot can permanently crush against the background of the growing strength of the Afro-Asian peoples; above all, the developing slump, which will impose new burdens on the workers, ruin sections of the middle class and the peasantry and undermine the frail structure of French capitalism.

XI. FASCISM OR BONAPARTISM?

It is vital, in this context, to grasp the difference between Bonapartism and Fascism. Fascism is a **mass movement** of the middle class, the **lumpenproletariat,** the peasants and even backward sections of the working class, financed and organised by capitalism as a desperate last resort in the face of growing crisis and the threat of a possible socialist solution. Unscrupulous demagogues, usually plebeian in origin, utilise anti-capitalist slogans to mobilise a mass force for destroying **all** the organisations of the working class. Fascism means the complete destruction of any form—Communist, Socialist, Christian, Liberal—of independent working-class organisation: that is its job, and it is this which gives it its strength in the early stages.

Using the middle class as a battering ram, and with the support of the police and the army, Fascism extinguishes every democratic right. After the initial delirium, the middle class and plebeian masses discover their betrayal and become disillusioned (June 30, 1934, in Germany): Fascism is then transformed into an ordinary police-military dictatorship, able to retain power only on the basis of the apathy and inertia of the workers, who feel themselves betrayed by their own organisations. Before it can be overthrown, new shocks—a new sweep of events—is necessary, to give back to the masses their perspective and to convince them anew of the hope of victory against the tyranny that oppresses them.

Bonapartism, as defined by Marx, is rule by the sword. It is, **from the start,** a police-military dictatorship; but, at the same time, it is a condition wherein the state raises itself above the whole of society and, while remaining an instrument of the ruling class, arrogates to itself the role of "arbiter" between the classes. "I belong to everyone, and everyone belongs to me" (Charles de Gaulle, the new candidate for the rôle of Bonaparte).

To play this rôle, the "arbiter" has to balance between the classes and between the conflicting interests within the society. Thus de Gaulle's programme is not (immediately, or even necessarily at all, depending on events) the abolition of Parties. But

he will " arbitrate " between Left and Right.

For this purpose de Gaulle will need the support of at least a section of the Socialists and perhaps of the reformist unions. He needs a split in the working class to maintain the base of his rule. It is quite possible that he will illegalise the Communist Party (perhaps by stages) and seek to smash the CGT in the interests of the Catholic and reformist unions. This will be his " Left " point of support. On the Right, he will lean on the " Independents," the existing neo-Fascist organisations (Biaggi, Tixier Villancourt) and Right Wing ex-servicemen's movement, and even on out and out Fascist organisations which may arise with the development of the slump.

But the Bonapartism of Napoleon I and even of Napoleon III had a base in an expanding economy. The Bonapartism of de Gaulle has as little base as that of Pétain: in fact it has less, for Pétain could at least rely in the last resort on the German Army for protection. Even Louis Napoleon had his victories in the early years; but what can de Gaulle offer by way of military triumphs?

De Gaulle will be faced with the problem of North Africa. The war may go on, and even if the French imperialist forces achieve a temporary victory, by letting loose the paratroops on the Algerian people, such a victory will not solve the Algerian question for imperialism. Even the occupation of Morocco and Tunisia would merely aggravate the North African problem for French imperialism, besides involving the whole Arab world. The burdens of this war, and of the " need to maintain France's position in the world " will mean a colossal drain on French resources and manpower.

What little mass support that has been rallied to de Gaulle during the last period will vanish. The temporary support he may gain through the intoxicant of nationalist phrases will soon evaporate. For the moment, the workers will be entirely disoriented and apathetic, arising from the deception of the official leaders. The disgrace of Germany, where Hitler took power without firing a shot, has been repeated, and this in a country where the CP in numbers, organisation and support, was stronger than were the

Bolsheviks in 1917 before the revolution.

However, no thanks to these leaders—the situation in France differs somewhat from the German situation of 1933. Hitler headed a real mass reactionary movement which swept away, in the first few weeks of his power, all the organisations of the working class. Through the Nazi Party, he penetrated every sphere of social life, paralysed the working class, atomised and dispersed it. Apart from the disgust and disillusionment of the masses at the complete incapacity of their organisations to struggle against reaction, the secret-police apparatus—informers in every factory, spies in every neighbourhood block—was a powerful factor in the consolidation of the régime.

XII. THE EIGHTEENTH BRUMAIRE OF CHARLES DE GAULLE

"Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it" (George Santayana).

Hitler and Mussolini, moreover, were lucky enough in each case to seize power on the eve of a boom. De Gaulle, on the contrary, assumes office on the eve of a slump. The paratroops, an élite of regular soldiers, are quite prepared to play the same rôle in France as in Algeria. But this small force, 50,000 to 60,000, strong enough in itself to seize power in the face of the apathy of the mass, is entirely insufficient to maintain it. The ordinary sailor and soldier, whom the nationalist intoxicant might temporarily affect, will not for long remain bemused. The social situation induced by slump must have its powerful effect. All history has shown that it is impossible indefinitely to rule through the army and the police alone. Any attempt to use the Army against mass outbreaks will mean splitting it on class lines.

A new mass upsurge in the coming period is inevitable. Events, national and international, will shake the senile régime in France. The twilight of the Franco dictatorship (shorn up for the moment by de Gaulle's victory) will cast its lengthening shadows over France. The workers' struggles in Britain, Italy and West Germany will have their effect.

The Socialists, Radicals and MRP have endeavoured to "leave a good memory" by their vote for Pflimlin on the eve of the de Gaulle take-over. The CP is again pumping out the poison of People's Frontism, claiming that had there been a Popular Front "all this could have been averted"—notwithstanding the fact that it was precisely the People's Front which paved the way to defeat in Spain, and that the People's Front in France prepared the groundwork for today's situation.

The mass demonstrations and strikes, convened at the twelfth hour, have shown that the masses would have responded to leadership in action, rather than Parliamentary manoeuvre "at the top." So much greater the disgrace of the CP-SP leaderships, which have put the working class in this peril at the behest of a handful of paratroop gangsters. In striking contrast to Hitler in 1933, de Gaulle is coming to power, not only without the support of the middle-class mass, but in the face of its hostility. According to **The Times** (May 29, 1958) half the crowd of 400,000 to 800,000 was petty-bourgeois.

The coming to power of de Gaulle will be more akin to the situation in Spain in 1934, when Gil Robles, the leader of clerical-fascism, was taken into the reactionary Lerroux Government. Despite the defeat of the answering Socialist insurrections, when the workers seized power in Asturias, the Gil Robles régime could not consolidate. Fearing a new uprising on the part of the masses, Robles allowed new elections in 1936 and ceded to the Popular Front, to demoralise the workers and prepare under its aegis for civil war against the masses.

De Gaulle's take-over will be, therefore, premature from the capitalist standpoint. It was forced by the settlers and the officer caste in Algiers. De Gaulle, also, will be unable to consolidate. The ruling class may prepare again for a retreat to a new Popular Front, counting on the confusion and demoralisation this would cause to prepare again for full-fledged civil war.

When the de Gaulle dictatorship rots from within, the capitalists can still turn, with the assistance (as ever) of the Communist and Socialist leaderships, to a new Popular Front as a way out for the régime. The advanced worker-militants must learn from

the rich history of the French and international working-class movement. If the lesson is not assimilated in time, a new Popular Front, bringing with it fresh defeat and disillusionment, could prepare the way for a real Fascist dictatorship on the lines of Hitler's monstrous régime.

We have confidence, however, that the best militants in the French Communist and Socialist Parties and in the trade unions **will** learn from these events. The Communist Party will split, and from its ranks the revolutionary elements will gather to them the best militants from the trade unions and the Socialist Party to create the Marxist mass party of the French working class.

This Party, basing itself on the great tradition of the Commune, of the struggle against the Moroccan War, of the stay-in strikes of 1936, will lead its class in mortal combat against the class enemy. From this death-struggle the French workers and peasants will emerge victorious and proceed to the construction of the Socialist order in France.

Many workers in the British Labour Movement regard the events in France with horror, but see them as of little direct consequence to themselves: " it can't happen here!" England is different.

It is not well known that the strategists of British capitalism learned from the history of the continental class struggle in the pre-war years and were making preparations for the fight against the British working class. In 1938 and 1939 Army manoeuvres were based on the idea that civil war was raging in Britain. A special strike-breaking force, composed of members of the ruling and upper middle classes, to learn to man the basic posts in the economy—the running of locomotives, the operation of power stations, and so on—was created. The insurance companies were refusing to insure against the risk of civil war. And, as an interesting forerunner of present events, Duff Cooper, Tory MP and former First Lord of the Admiralty, was writing articles in the **Evening Standard** advocating the formation of Committees of Public Safety in Britain.

It is no accident, that, in the present crisis, the leading organs of Tory opinion have rallied to de Gaulle. The **Daily Mail** and **Evening News,** flunkeys of Hitler and Mussolini before the war,

have now been joined by the **Daily Telegraph,** the **Daily Express** and the **Evening Standard** in warm support for the Gaullist **coup d'état.**

British workers will ignore this lesson at their own peril. Their fate is bound, as it has always been, to the international struggle of the working class against capitalism.

In their hour of agony, the French workers must know that they can draw, not alone on the passive sympathy, but upon the active class support of their British brothers and sisters.

Side by side we shall rally against dictatorship and for a Socialist France and a Socialist Britain in a Socialist Europe.

May 29, 1958.

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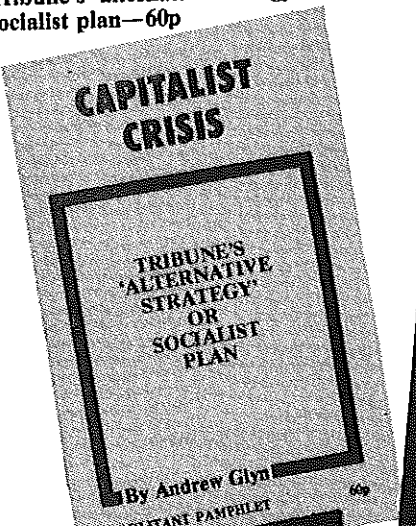

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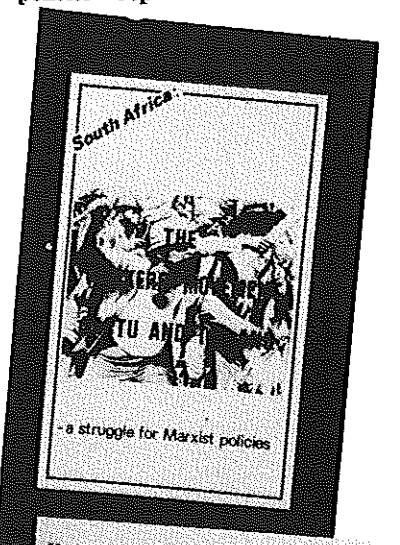

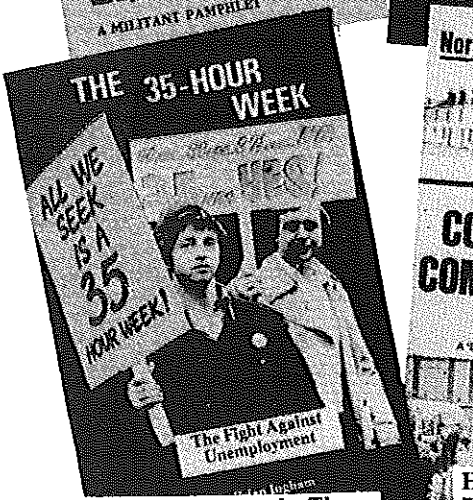

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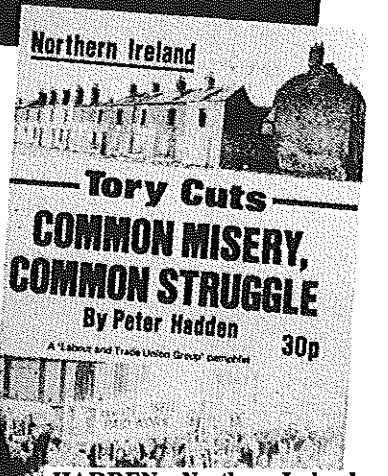

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