

Post-War France

Lecture No. 0012 (February 13, 1974)

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Preliminary remarks

The thing on my mind that really bring to focus the things, a lot of the things that we've been trying to say — I'm going to try to situate these things as well go along — but I want you to watch very carefully the events that transpire in Great Britain now. They are extraordinarily important, and they reflect, really, I think, the deepest crisis in what is a very critical period for Western capitalism. And the results of the miners' strikes, I think — and how far the Labour Party will go in deserting the miners — I think will tell us a great deal about how defensive the system really is going to become. Watch it as closely as you can. I don't know what to tell you to read in Madison, frankly, because it's difficult — and *The New York Times*, of course, is just so full of baloney that it's very, very difficult really to even derive that much out of it. But I have some things that I will bring to your attention as we move along.

Also, I don't know very much about it yet, but I'm really sort of interested, I must say, in the very local case of the woman who is fighting for her career, or for her job, here on campus. I hadn't known very much about it until somebody made an announcement in class here, largely because I live in a world outside of the university, for the most part, and I have long since given up the idea that very much can go on inside. But it suffices to say that every once in a while, I really am sort of magnetized into it again. And I just read some things that she wrote and I myself am going to, I think, interest myself in this somewhat. I think she's got a good case in accusing people of bouncing her for critical reasons... not the least of which being that she's a woman [applause].

Lecture

Now, you see, I think, if we really looked at French events in retrospect, if we look at French events of period right after the Second World War with that kind of leisure of thirty years of history at our back, that we can say with a certain amount of confidence that we can circumscribe those events of August of 1944, as a kind of very symbolic turning point in the evolution of contemporary French society — and, by implication and by extension, the evolution of West European societies, and the evolution of all of those millions of people who lived in the French Empire. Because, quite obviously, those events in August of 1944, that great transpiration in the city of Paris, constituted the effort to make a popular insurrection. A popular insurrection that should, not only make the liberation of France and put that liberation in the hands of the French

people, but that should really begin to chart a course that is revolutionary in French society. And we know from that we have analyzed already that national insurrection, that kind of popular effort in Paris, in August of 1944, was, in the first place, co-opted by General de Gaulle, and, in the second place, was contained by the American armies — and that it was not a revolution that resulted from those events, but that it was a provisional government with General de Gaulle as the president of that Provisional Government.

And we really have to ask ourselves how many of the lessons that the French masses had learned really could not have been acted upon as a result of that. Did the French masses, after all, learn by that particular time that an electoral, and a peaceful, and an evolutionary strategy of the kind that was inscribed in the Popular Front really was too limited to make profound changes in society? Had they learned by that point that the capacity of the ruling class to make a revolution as it was inscribed, after all, in the Vichy regime, to make a revolution against the people — that that capacity really, was limitless? Did they understand what had gone on in the Popular Front and what had gone on in Vichy? The point is, you see, that if they learned those lessons, they were not able to act upon them in August of 1944, and in the period that followed. And what we are saying then, is that something of a turning point was reached at that moment.

But, you see, all of that is retrospective. If you move in rather closely to the events, if you don't have thirty years of history at your back to elucidate, then it looks different. Then, you don't think that August '44 is a turning point: you think it is really just a beginning. And the point I want to make to you today, because it is crucially important, is that it took almost three years — it took, really, until May of 1947, until the government of Paul Ramadier (who was a Socialist prime minister at that particular time), until that government of Ramadier ousted the Communists from the ministry — it took until May of 1947, before the issue was clearly settled: that there would be a restoration of French capitalism. And that French capitalism would be client to American capitalism, and that France, like the rest of Western Europe, would become that great open-door market for American goods and American investments. All of that was perfectly clear after May of 1947. But until that time, there was, if you were living through it, a question.

You see, if you look at it closely, consider these facts. Consider that the deterioration and the destruction of the living standards of the French people was very decisive as a result of the occupation and, then the war of liberation and, then the Resistance movement itself. You are talking, if you please, about the objective reality which is potentially revolutionary. You are talking, after all, about the destruction of infrastructure in France. A commission that was established by the French government in 1947 to determine how much had been destroyed in the country from 1940 through 1944 estimated that it was 91 billion gold francs worth of destruction. You are talking about 25,000 kilometers of rail out of 43,000; you are talking about the destruction of 3,000 bridges; you are talking about the destruction of a third of the port facilities of France. In other words, you are dealing with an infrastructure that really lies in ruins in that

country.

And you are talking in the second place about production standards that go all the way down. If you take that year, from the middle of 1945 to the middle of 1946, the first year after the war, you find that the index of industrial production, using the year 1938 as the index number of a hundred, that it is down to 60%, that agricultural production is only half as great as it was in 1938. And I ask you to think of what that means to the French people. It means that, for those six months after the war, the average Frenchman or Frenchwoman ate 160 grams of meat a week, that, if they went into stores to find shoes or to find clothes, they found mainly empty shelves. And I'm talking about an inflation that is so terrific, because of these shortages, that the purchasing power of the masses really deteriorates and disintegrates. In that first year, after the war was over, that workers were making, in skilled work, only 65% in real wages of what they made in 1938, only 70% as unskilled workers. The point is that there is a structure, objectively, which is potentially revolutionary.

And I ask you to consider a second fact. And that is that, in the only way in which the French people had a chance of expressing themselves in the period after the war and telling what they wanted — namely through elections — in that electoral forum, the French public showed that it had moved very sharply to the left. In part, that indicator is demonstrated by the role of the Communist Party. The Communist Party emerged, from the war, far and away the most impressive political formation in France — really, a major political constellation. You are talking about a party which was known as the *parti des fusillés*, the "party of people who got shot," the great patriotic party that had made countless sacrifices for the liberation of France. You are talking about the party that in the public imagination will make the great structural reforms to give France a new start. You are talking about the party that gives vent to the revolutionary aspirations of part of the French population.

And if you ask where was that French Communist Party? I tell you that in 1945 and '46, it was everywhere. It was in the working class, quite obviously, and very deeply rooted in the working class. It was among young people. It was among intellectuals. It was among women. It was among peasants. If you look at the electoral maps for 1945 and 1946, the one thing that impresses you is that there aren't sections of communism but that the Communists pick up strength everywhere inside the country. Think about departments of France that are so backward and so rural — the departments of the province of Brittany, like the Côtes-du-Nord or Morbihan, departments that never had had a left-wing orientation at all — and the Communists have picked up a lot of strength. Think of departments that had been strongholds of the Radical Party, departments like the Haute-Marne or departments like the Aude, and suddenly they are Communist departments. What does that show? It shows that, in the peasant sector of French society — among those tenants, among those poor sharecroppers, among those peasant proprietors who were in debt to the banks — that they had enrolled in the *maquis* and, suddenly,

in that Communist-led Resistance movement, they had got a sense of their collective strength. And voted Communist with the idea that they wanted to change their condition and change it very profoundly. And so you have that Communist Party emerging at the center of this left-wing orientation.

Or consider the results of the elections. The two elections that are so impressive: the election of the 21st of October of 1945, and the election of the 10th of November of 1946. And in that '45 election, elect a Constituent Assembly, the first postwar election. And it's the assembly that will draw up the constitution for the new Republic. And, in those elections, the Communists are the largest party. And they get 26.4% of the vote, and the Socialists are next. And they get 23.8% of the vote. And add that up, because the two parties that nominally are Marxists, that nominally are anti-capitalist and revolutionary by their aspirations, those two parties have more than 50% of the vote in those elections of the 21st of October of 1945. And if you go a year after that, to the elections of November of 1946, which are the first elections held under the new constitution that is finally adopted, the Communists increased their strength. In those elections of November 1946, they have 28.6% of the vote. And they have picked up votes from the Socialists who have declined to 15% of the vote. But the important thing is that, in both of those elections, Communists and Socialists plus the third party, which constituted the third Resistance party — a bourgeois party but progressive, presumably, and on the left — the MRP, the Mouvement républicain populaire, the Popular Republicans, among those three parties, in both of those elections, the Resistance coalition got 75% of the vote and 75% of the seats.

And consider, in the third place, that the one bourgeois party that is involved, namely the MRP, is a new party and that it stands somewhat to the left — that it is the French variant of Christian Democracy in Italy. It is the French variant of the De Gasperi party [*Alcide de Gasperi, founder of the Christian Democracy party and postwar prime minister of Italy*]. And they are the Catholic *résistants* who found the MRP. And they found it under the banner "revolution within the law." They want a peaceful change, but a revolutionary change. They say they want reforms in society. They want to adapt the Church to a very progressive, reformist society. Now, we know that that banner is a phony one with the MRP. And we know that under that banner, all of the conservatives and reactionaries of France, who couldn't show their true colors in 1945 and '46 — who were afraid to claim that they supported Vichy or were collaborationist — they would find in the PRP their particular haven. But we know that now. And that was not discernable in 1945 and '46.

Or consider, in the next place, that the French governments, from the time that De Gaulle established his Provisional Government, in August of '44, down until Ramadier ousted the Communists in May of '47, that over that almost three year period, the governments of France were what we call "tripartite governments." And that, important to note. Because tripartism is a coalition of the three Resistance parties, the three left-wing parties. They are coalition

governments of Communists, of Socialists, and of MRP. And, note it well, that from the beginning the Communists are in the government. And their strength in the government increases. De Gaulle puts them in at the beginning because he, after all, establishes an *union nationale*, a "national union," in 1944. And he can't do anything to us but that. These Communists had made the Resistance — he has to include them. And so, this National Union includes those three parties plus a few conservatives that De Gaulle puts in. Now, he leaves to the Communists very little ministerial influence. None of the big ministries: not interior, not justice, not foreign affairs, and not defense. But there are two Communist ministers under De Gaulle: one of them for aviation, Charles Tillon, the other one in the Ministry of Health. But the Communists are there. It is a presence.

Then comes the elections of October of 1945, the first elections after the war is over. And in those elections the Communists come back the biggest party. And they have a problem about presence and participation. As I have said, between Communists and Socialists, there was more than 50% of the vote. And the Communists wanted for there to be a ministry of Communists and Socialists together, and that's all. And Blum, on the 25th of October of 1945 — coming back to head the Socialist Party of France — Léon Blum rejected this. He would not be a cat's paw for the Communists. And he said that any government had to include the MRP, and the Communists accepted that. And they did it with the idea that they wanted their presence in the ministry. And the second crisis they faced: that when De Gaulle, who was still the head of the government, handed out the ministries, he still didn't give them any of the big ones. So that the Communists had five ministries out of twenty-one, and Thorez was included. The Secretary General of the Communist Party was included as so-called minister of state — in other words, a minister without portfolio. And there was the minister of armaments who was a Communist, and then three deputy ministers. Five of the twenty-one, none of the big ministries — but the Communists were there.

And, then, they increased their position even more. Because, on the 21st of January of 1946, an explosion hits French politics. Something that presumably, hadn't been anticipated. And that is that General De Gaulle, the head of this French government, suddenly resigns and temporarily leaves French politics. Now, you have to understand what *le grand Charles* is about. And you have to understand that when he makes this explosion, on the 21st of January, it is out of all of this great *orgueil*, this great sense of pride of De Gaulle. And that is that when you had those elections of October of 1945, and you elect a Constituent Assembly of the left, it begins mucking around with a constitutional proposal that he can't accept. They keep talking about a one-chamber parliament; they keep talking about a very weak executive. No, no. De Gaulle wants to be the head of a very strong French executive. He wants to be the president of a France in which he can guarantee the greatness of the country internationally, in which he can guarantee the retention of the French Empire, in which he can guarantee internal peace so that capitalism, as a disciplined phenomenon, can expand in France. And all of that will be taken from him. And he

will go away. And he will wait. And De Gaulle, when he goes away, he does it in typical De Gaulle fashion. He says, as he resigns, "*Les Français, ce sont les vaches*" — "The French are nothing but cows." And, consequently, I will wait until they come home, after all, into the pasture. And so, he goes away to Colombey and goes into a kind of a sulk and comes out again in April of 1947, at Strasbourg, does he not, to found his RPF — a reactionary party. Not to overthrow the Republic but to revise it, to replace it, to make it a strong kind of authoritarian republic, as he thinks is necessary.

But you see what that means for the Communists. What it means is two things. First of all, with De Gaulle gone, they got more clout inside the ministry. So that Thorez, in the ministry of Pierre Gouin [*here Goldberg erroneously refers to Félix Gouin as Pierre*], who replaced De Gaulle as the head of the French government, and Pierre Gouin, who is a Socialist, makes Thorez now the vice-president of the Council of Ministers. In other words, here is the head of the French Communist Party who is now, basically, the vice-premier of the country, and adds to the ministry four Communists in ministerial positions, and so they have more clout. And besides that, with the disappearance of De Gaulle, a certain mystification is gone. So that the French public no longer thinks that De Gaulle is the Resistance but, really, can concentrate on that Resistance coalition which is governing France. Isn't all of that promising?

Well, we know the answer. Well, we know that none of this really added up to anything that was anti-capitalist. We know that the Communists were not a revolutionary party in the years '44 to '47. And we also know that they hadn't been during the Popular Front, that they would not be during the Algerian War, that they would not be in the '60s, under De Gaulle, that they would not be in May of '68, and that they are not now, as they sit at their computer feeding it information on every electoral contest in France. And, consequently, the Communist Party stood, in those years 1944 to '47, for unity of these three parties, and for order. They stood against strikes, against "adventurism," against the appeals of their own André Marty or Charles Tillon that they ought not to follow an opportunistic line. They are for production, against strikes, against anything that will disturb or destroy their participation in the government.

And what can possibly justify that? Well, Thorez, you see, after the November elections of 1946, when the Communists are suddenly very large, gives an interview to *The London Times*. And in that interview, he suggest what this is all about, although as I will suggest this is baloney, but what Thorez suggests on November in 1946 in *The London Times*, after they had won almost 29% of the vote, "The progress of democracy throughout the world permits us to consider other paths to socialism than the one followed in Russia in 1917." Now, rather bold, for Thorez, to talk about the idea of independent paths to socialism. And he did that rather tantalizing, from time to time, in this particular period — what he is implying is that there is a peaceful road to socialism or an electoral road to socialism. But never, you see, does he really theorize that. Never does he spell it out in detail. What will happen if there really is a confrontation with the bourgeoisie?

What if the capitalists don't really want to give up their enterprises? He never discusses that. The only argument he ever uses is that it happened without an uprising of the people in East Europe. And in East Europe you did the installation of communist regimes. What he neglects to point out is that there was the Russian army. And the Russian army was on the scene, and that was a variable of some importance. And, consequently, quite obviously, there is this kind of myth perpetrated.

But you see the point. The point is that no matter what the Communists were in these tripartite governments, if they were revolutionary or not revolutionary, they were prisoners. They were prisoners because they had not even gotten a third of the vote, because they shared these ministries with two other parties — with the Socialist Party and the MRP. And I want you to note, just parenthetically, before we really plunge into the analysis: and that is that you're dealing with two parties that really are very anti-Russian, very anti-communist, very pro-American — that, ultimately, will be the funnel for the American influence in France, will be the frontrunners for it.

I'm talking about a Socialist Party that in this post-war period was really pretty bad, that became very much client to American foreign policy. A party whose head is Léon Blum, still — 74 years old, beatified after the war because he had spent the war in Buchenwald, because he had suffered as a result of the Nazi occupation — and, consequently, kind of a seer. But, you see, Blum was too old, and he had learned nothing in thirty years. And he hated the Communists from the word go. And he thought that they were fratricidal, and they had destroyed the socialist movements right after the First World War. And so Blum's position always was to be suspicious of the Communists, to check them, to use the American influence as much as possible in order to circumscribe them. A party, if you please, that defended the French Empire at every turn, because it felt that the French Empire was important to maintain French freedom against Soviet aggression.

And so, it is a Socialist-led government led by Léon Blum, at the end of 1946, that blunders France into the First Indochinese War and that makes the attack upon the Vietnamese people. A party whose key figure in 1947 and '48 was Jules Moch, who was first minister of the interior, then minister of defense. And with Jules Moch you have really a type, a paranoid of the first order — somebody who thinks the Communists are everywhere ready to subvert the society — who faces those great strikes in France in 1947 and '48 with the generalship of somebody fighting against a foreign enemy, and who has maps of the strike fields with little pins placed in them wherever there were police installations, so that he knows how to deploy the police against these strikers. No, no. It shouldn't surprise you that out of this Socialist Party, in 1956, came a Guy Mollet as the prime minister who really upped the ante in Algeria and mapped the strategy of repression of that Algerian revolution. Or a Robert Lacoste, who was the resident minister in Algeria at the time, and was a Socialist, and did the job of repression. Nor should it surprise you,

though you should know more about it, that they were the Socialists who were the leading spokesmen of the American position. And these were not only the French socialists but social democrats in Europe. I'm talking about the Paul-Henri Spaaks, that Belgian socialist who was virtually the father of NATO on the European continent. I'm talking about Joseph Buttinger, the Austrian socialist who made his way into the American State Department to be the advisor on the Vietnam desk and who really is the inventor of [South Vietnamese president Ngô Đình] Diệm. No, no. You have something strange with the socialists, and not very revolutionary.

But one thing makes them look good, and that's the MRP. Because the MRP is so bad that, fundamentally, to be in a coalition with it is really to be in a prison. As I said, it was a haven for the conservatives and the reactionaries. But you take the head of that MRP, that is our good friend Bidault, Georges Bidault. And Bidault, a terrifically important figure — somebody who really is an architect for the American position in Europe. Somebody who is an architect for the repression of liberation movements in the French Empire. Somebody who becomes so frenetic over Algeria that Bidault was willing to establish a military, fascist regime in France in order to keep Algeria French. And this Bidault passed for a man of the left. He was, after all, somebody who, as a Catholic in the 1920s, had approved [Pope] Pius XI in 1926, when Pius XI had condemned the Action française. So he passed for a left-wing Catholic, and then became the President of the Conseil national de la Résistance. But he himself gives himself away because Bidault says to Roger Stéphane in the midst of the Resistance movement — and Stéphane, an intellectual, who really was a good Resistance fighter — and here is Bidault saying to him one day in 1944, "You know, I tell you a secret. And that is that if I lived in the time of the Commune, I would have been on the side of Versailles." Well, quite obviously, you are dealing with somebody who understands his own limitations as a revolutionary leader in French society. And consequently, you are dealing, really, with a kind of imprisonment.

Well, you see, all of that leads us to the questions with which I want to begin to deal. And the question is, first of all: What was the Communist strategy and why? That's terribly important because it is a paradigm for the Communist role everywhere in Western Europe and, indeed, in the rest of the world. The second question: How did American policymakers really succeed? The third question: What kind of a French society was the result of that success? What do we mean by neo-capitalism? And finally, that very crucial question: What happens to the masses in the French Empire? What happens to the Vietnamese people? What happens to the Algerian people in particular?

Well, you see, I've tried to grapple with this Communist problem a lot. And the documents are extraordinarily interesting if you read them closely. Now, take a date. Take the 12th of December of 1945. The 12th of December there was a big meeting in Paris. It was held in one of those big meeting halls called Vélodrome d'Hiver. And it was a meeting called by a coalition of French workers who were in the public sector: railroad workers, workers who worked on the metro,

workers in the municipal offices, workers in the post office. And what they were calling a meeting about was to get support for a defensive general strike. They wanted to call a general strike of workers as a warning to the government that they were suffering terrifically from the inflation and from the policy of the government of blocking wages — frozen wages — as a kind of warning to the government. Now, at this meeting of the 12th of December, everybody there speaks in favor of that defensive general strike except the Communist representative. And the Communist representative is a man named Henri Raynaud, who is a responsible figure in the General Confederation of Labor. And this is what Henry Raynaud says at that meeting, "In the present circumstances a general strike would be a catastrophe. By stopping the trains, it would starve the country." In other words, what he is saying is that the battle of production, behind which the Communists stood foursquare, would certainly jeopardize.

And two days later, on the 14th of December of 1945, Thorez, at a meeting of the Council of Ministries, expostulated on that question. And he said, "The government should not yield to intolerable pressures. And the proposal of the minister of finance to keep wages frozen should be adopted." Now, you see what that means. De Gaulle knew what it meant. And De Gaulle writes very eloquently in his memoirs about the year 1945, and the year that the Communists call the "year of the battle of production," and De Gaulle writes this about Thorez in '45:

"In regard to Monsieur Thorez, though he was of course interested in events in Communist influence, he rendered great service to the public interest. He tirelessly urged workers to produce whatever the cost. He persuaded them that their work in the national cause was pure joy. Now, was all of that part of some secret Communist tactic? I don't know and I don't care. I don't want to bother deciphering Communist tactics. All I can say is that France, *la France éternelle*, was very well served by Monsieur Thorez."

Now, unlike De Gaulle, we are interested in deciphering those tactics. And we want to know what it is. Have they just gone stark mad? Are they just producing for the sake of the system? Are they just automatons doing what Stalin said? Well, it's a little more complicated than that. So, go back a few months to the explanation that Thorez gives of what the line is. And that comes at the 10th Party Congress, which is in June of 1945. And I translate for you what I think is an extraordinary passage that really is very little expounded upon by people who write upon this question. Because Thorez talks in his very long report — it took four hours to the 10th Congress — in this very long report, he talks about "*la démocratie débarrassée des trusts*" — in other words, democracy that will be rid of monopolies, that will be rid of trusts, that that is the goal. The goal is to get a government that can demonopolize France; in other words, that can destroy that kind of feudal sector of capitalism and democratize the social and economic system. And he goes on this way, and listen to it well, because what a kind of a weird misconception Thorez and the party leadership were about. "The happiest perspective for our country would be the prolonged rule of a government of broad national and democratic unity which can gradually

refurbish the country. That is possible, however, only if *la grandeur de la France peut être assurée* — only if the greatness of France can be assured. Today they are the volume and the quantity of our material production and our place in the world market which are the measures of French greatness. The people should gird themselves for the battle of production as they did for the battle of the liberation. It is a question of assuring, otherwise than by bombastic empty phrases, the material conditions of French independence."

Now, do you know what that means? It means that Thorez is saying that the party strategy is to opt for a strong national government that should be of the left, that should be the Resistance coalition — that the only way that that government can stay in power is if it delivers. In other words, if it really produces: that if it stays in power and produces, gradually, along the way, it can begin to dismantle the trustified structure of the French economy. What Thorez is gambling on, what the party leadership is playing for, is that a left-wing coalition will stay in power, will have the productive élan and the productive prestige to remain in power and gradually will reform the structure. And he talks at the end about independence, and that's very interesting. Because he really does mean that, if this is done, the French can get back on their feet without American influence. And that means the exploitation of Germany. Because Thorez and the French Communists were foursquare behind getting German reparations, German labor, getting the Saar annexed to France, getting German iron and steel — and consequently using that as part of the build-up with a kind of autarky that would enable France to make her recovery without a subservience, then, to the American position.

Now, let's say all of that was a fantastic jumble, and it failed dismally. And Thorez, you see, understood, implicitly, that it did fail. But its failure is so monumental that you have to understand it. Go a year later — that was June of 1945 — go to June of 1946, just one year later. And Thorez is making another long report, this time to the Central Committee of the French Communist Party. And this time he is talking about "a serious and grave crisis that we are confronting."

Now, what's this serious and grave crisis? In the background of that is the fact that, in May of 1946, in the referendum over the constitution, which had the support of the Communists, which had a strong single-chamber assembly, which had a very weak executive, in the referendum the French people turned down the constitution. And they turned it down because the MRP and De Gaulle and all of the French conservatives really organized against it. Consider, in the second place, that, in the elections that were then held in June of 1946 to elect a second Constituent Assembly to draw up another constitutional proposal — that, in those elections, the Socialists lost very badly, the Communists just about held their own, and the MRP made a great increase. In other words, when Thorez comes to this meeting in June of 1946, he's saying, in effect, that the French bourgeoisie, the French ruling class, is on the rise again. And that the Resistance coalition is really disintegrating. And so, he explains it this way: "This great French bourgeoisie,

endowed with its great capacity to maneuver and deceive, has used all of its men and tricks to break up the great liberation coalition. It has blocked the unity of the Resistance forces."

Now, that's an extraordinary admission for Thorez to make. It means that two years after the liberation, two years after these tripartite coalition governments, Thorez, in effect, is saying that it is not the popular movement that has advanced, but it is the old ruling class that has advanced, that has really gotten an economic recovery and has begun to get back its political clout. He is saying, in the second place, that all of the concessions that were made in order to keep the petty and the *moyenne bourgeoisie* in line and voting behind the MRP were for nought, because the petty and *moyenne bourgeoisie* was moving to the right. He is saying, in the third place, that all of that telling to the French workers to pull in their belts, that it was their system that they were really working for, that all of that was nonsense. They were working for the system of capitalist hegemony which really was showing its face. And in the fourth place, he was admitting that the French Communist Party, by its tactics of parliamentary cretinism, was no different than the politics, after all, of the German SPD before 1914, and its parliamentary cretinism, to use Lenin's well-chosen phrase.

Now he went on, Thorez, and he said: "At the hour of the liberation, the great bourgeoisie didn't dare to meet the popular movement head on, but tried to undermine it covertly. And then, after all, we have seen the dismantling of the liberation committees and the Conseil national de la Résistance. Very interesting, because what Thorez admits here, implicitly, is that what his critics said at the liberation — when there was a powerful, popular movement — that the old ruling class didn't dare to confront it, was true. And what its obligation was to try to develop that kind of a popular movement.

But, you see, all of these lessons are lost on Thorez. Implicitly, there is an admission. But Thorez goes before that Central Committee of June of 1946, to defend the strategy of the party and to say it was correct. Because into this report sneaks the most tantalizing evidence of opposition at the base in the party. Now, you know, you have to read, really, with a fine-toothed comb and search with a fine-toothed bomb to find out what goes on in the party. And it's only by reading documents with scrupulous care that you find out. But here is Thorez talking about certain cells in the party that are attacking. He refers to a cell in the department of the Yonne which criticizes the leadership for collaborating with anti-revolutionaries and making one concession after another to them. He refers to another cell in the department of the Hautes-Pyrénées who attacks the leadership for collaborating with reactionaries and being an accomplice in passing anti-democratic laws.

And then Thorez gives the coup de grace. And this is the ultimate explanation. Note it well. It is June of '46, it is the first time that the party uses this particular excuse, but it will be used over and over again. And it is this in answer to the critics who say that the party, after all, deserted the

revolution at the liberation, and Thorez answers: "Those who criticize this policy haven't been educated by the article of the American journalist Walter Lippmann, who wrote in *Le Figaro* that American troops were ready to intervene in August of '44 if the Communists tried to take power in France." And that will be the ultimate argument. The ultimate argument was that nothing else was possible, that the American armies were there.

But, you see, inside the French communist movement there were people like André Marty, the great hero of the mutiny of the Black Sea in 1919 — like Charles Tillon, who had headed up the *Francs-tireurs et partisans* [FTP] — who kept saying, "Look, this is not the issue. The issue isn't whether there could have been a taking of power in August of '44. The issue is that there were three years before August of '44. Why didn't the party, then, prepare the masses for a struggle for socialism? Why did it put itself, always, under the aegis or the flag of De Gaulle?" And they kept pressing that. And they kept talking about the fact that in 1945 there was another situation: Why didn't the party, really, promise revolution at that point? Finally, the party answers these critics. And note this well. Marty is expelled from the party in 1952. And, in the course of that, there are a lot of documents. And here is the political bureau, the politburo, answering Marty in the *Cahiers du communisme*, the party theoretical organ, on the 3rd of October of 1952. Listen: "In August of 1944, the war still wasn't over. A reversal of alliances — that is, a capitalist front against the USSR — was possible. If they had a pretext, the Americans, out of fear of revolution in the West, wouldn't have hesitated to ally with Hitler and with Japan. In France, in spite of the considerable progress of its influence, the party would have been isolated if it had followed any other course than continuing the war against Hitler."

Those became the two primary arguments, neither of which holds very much water. First of all, the notion of a reversal of alliances in the midst of the war is, really, logical but not very realistic. That is to say, that if American policymakers had been able to make a viable deal with Hitler and Japan they never would have gone to war in the first place. The problem was that problem, after all, of imperialism or the problem of the division of the world markets. And on that, Germany and Japan simply weren't conciliatory enough. So far as the Communists being isolated because the war against Germany would have been deserted, the implication is that a revolutionary government would not have promoted, not have launched, not have continued that war. But the essence, you see, of what the party says is in the last sentence: "The attitude vis-à-vis the USSR, in the final analysis, is the touchstone of Communist behavior at home and abroad." And that was the clue to the whole thing.

So, the Communists didn't backtrack. It was a terrific defeat. What the workers did was to work for the restoration of French capitalism at the behest of the CGT and at the behest of the Communist Party. And here, in July of '46, simply a month after that June report about the "critical situation," we have Thorez speaking — and this a year after the famous appeal of Waziers [a mining town in northern France] — speaking about the workers have done in

production. Listen to this. This is July of '46: "With almost 160,000 tons a day, we have gone 8% beyond our pre-war level — a marvelous success. Aside from the Soviet Union, France is the only war-torn country which has compiled such an admirable record. We congratulate our miners who have given their muscle and have given their sweat in this great effort." Now, you see, if Castro had said that, or if a Communist Chinese minister had said that in the period of the Great Leap Forward, you would have understood it. In other words, it was the idea that workers had made a terrific contribution to a socialist society in the building. But what Thorez is doing is congratulating the workers, really, for pulling the capitalist chestnuts out of the fire.

The consequences of that — oh, terrific. The consequences of that, terrific. If you think of it, first of all, in terms of the fact that French workers, after all, suffered a deterioration of their living standard, worked like hell with declining real wages. But that isn't even the beginning of it. The real implication of the Communists remaining within this coalition — and I really do want you to stay for a minute and listen to this — the real implication has to do with the colonies. And it is staggering.

Because, you see, in this period between '44 and '47 there are liberation movements everywhere in the French Empire. And those liberation movements come to be bloodily repressed. And the Communists are ministers in the government, and they rouse no protest — they do not resign, they do not make solidarity. Now, look: from the time that Molotov met De Gaulle in London in May of 1942, the Russians were saying that they would support the restoration of the French Empire under De Gaulle. And the French Communist Party said nothing differently. It said that it supported the French Union, which is the euphemism for the French Empire, and whatever little paper reforms were made within this French Union. So the 10th Congress in June of '45, on its colonial plank, says this: "To create conditions for a free and fraternal union between colonial peoples and the people of France, is the Communist position." Well, it's no different than the position of [Dutch socialist and imperialist Henri] Van Kol and those so-called socialist colonialists at the Congress of Stuttgart in 1907, in the Second International: the idea that you can improve conditions for colonized people without offering them independence, without offering them liberation. And then, you see, the test comes.

And the test comes first in Algeria, about which I will speak at length in another connection. But listen to this well: that the Algerians, the Arabs, had mounted a terrific liberation movement in that country. And they had expected a great deal from the end of the war. And they had listened to promises, and they had listened to rhetoric about the end of all kinds of feudalism and the end of all kinds of dependency. And, consequently, came to end of the war in '45 and they wanted something. And the big *colons* in Algeria wouldn't permit it, and De Gaulle wouldn't permit it, and there was the famous provocation of the Constantine wilaya. The Constantine wilaya is that sector of Algeria around the city of Constantine and around the city of Sétif.

And on the 8th of May of 1945, there was a provocation, and, consequently, an Arab uprising. And that Arab uprising was put down with simply incredible force. This is a left-wing government in power in France, but they are the French warships that bombard the coast of Algeria. They are French planes that bombard it. There is a literal manhunt into the countryside, into the *bled* of Algeria, there are villages burned — in all, in two weeks, 40,000 Algerian Arabs were killed.

And the party met in June of '45, a month after that, and this is the only thing in that four-hour speech Thorez says about Algeria: "And speaking of democracy, we cannot forget that one of its requirements is a just attitude toward the colonized masses. In Algeria, after the recent unfortunate events, there is nothing more urgent than to apply the ordinance of the 7th of March of 1944 for the extension of democratic rights to the Algerian people." And that's all.

And the Communist ministers stay in that ministry and there is no movement of protest. And then, you see, toward the end of '46, comes the explosion in Vietnam, about which we will talk at length later. But it suffices to say that you understand what was at stake: that the Vietnamese people, after all, had made their own liberation in August of '45; that it had been a great liberation uprising led by the Indochinese (or the Vietnamese) Communist Party, under the leadership of Hồ Chí Minh, that had driven out the Japanese and established — over the entire country of Vietnam — established a democratic republic under Communist aegis. And the French immediately went to work to try to dismantle that. Under the pretext that they were sending French soldiers there to disarm the Japanese, they began to drive this government out of Saigon and to drive it to the north. And finally, all through 1946, while there are five Communist ministers in the French government, there is one pretext after another to engage that northern regime in a war. Until finally, there is on the 23rd of November of 1946 that dastardly shelling of Haiphong. And the shelling of Haiphong, by French warships, cost 6,000 lives.

And how do the Communists respond? They had, after all, five ministers in the government. And from January of '47 until they're booted out, during those five months of the war in Indochina, they have one of their own — François Billoux, who is actually the minister of defense — and the first reaction on part of the Communists is to say that it has been a provocation by adventurers. And then it is painful for them. And there comes the vote on military credits in March of 1947 and, granted, the Communist deputies abstain. But the Communist ministers vote the credits, saying that they must maintain the solidarity of the ministry.

And that isn't all. Comes the 29th and 30th of March of 1947, something that it is not your fault that you have never heard of — but should have. And it is the great uprising in Madagascar. And it is led by the Mouvement démocratique de la révolution malgache, by the independence organization of Madagascar. And, again, it is a provocation. And there is an attack on a French military camp and about two dozen *colons*, Frenchmen, are killed. And there is a repression. We

don't know how widespread that repression is, it's never been properly reported. All we know is that General [Pierre] Garbay, speaking at the end of 1948 before an assembly of the French Union, said that, conservatively, the number of victims in the repression in Madagascar of those killed and imprisoned was 89,000. And there was no response by the party.

Now, all of that, you see, to stay in a government. All of that under the strategy that I have described. And all of that useless — because by 1947, the Americans had decided that the Communists had to be out of that government. And, by that time, they had a lot of clout. And by that time, after all, it was the exchange of manna — in the form of the Marshall Plan, of credits, of military protection, of the atom bomb — all for the subservience, after all, of those European economies. And they were getting uptight, those American policymakers, about the existence of Communists in the government. There was Senator [Brien] McMahon of Connecticut, during the Atomic Energy Bill in August of 1946, saying, "We can't pass atomic secrets to foreign powers as long as there are Communists in government as there are in France."

And there is Robert Blum, who is the son of Léon Blum, writing back after that mission of Blum to Washington in April and May of 1946 — poor Blum, he was 46 years old and he came to the United States and he really was ga-ga, and he got out in New York, and he was wandering around and he said to a reporter, "I am terrified to think that I would have died before seeing all this." Well, you can see how ga-ga he is — you come from Paris and you are really terrified to die, after all, before seeing all that! But it suffices to say, at any rate, that Blum went to Washington to negotiate a loan. The Americans negotiated the loan: 650 million out of the Import-Export Bank, 300 million in direct credits, all with the proviso that there be no restrictions upon imports of American goods. All of that is perfectly orderly. But Blum's son writes back to Félix Gouin, and he says something very revealing about the position of Americans, and how they really are beginning to interfere politically: "There are American personalities who view these negotiations in purely political terms. They're astonishingly blunt in stating their expectations that France will, as a result of economic aid, take a pro-American position on all issues of conflict with the USSR. In the course of a private conversation with [Frederick Moore] Vinson, Secretary of the Treasury, my father insisted on the importance of some upturn in the French economy before the French elections. And he understood what we were talking about."

Or listen to [foreign policy advisor Dean] Acheson on the 27th of February of 1947 at the White House, referring to France in a preview of the Truman Doctrine: "If the Russians make one more move, we are lost," says Acheson, dramatically. "If the Russians make one more move, we are lost. In France they have only to shake the branch of the tree whenever they please to pick up the fruit. Communists are in the government, they are in every walk of life, and the country is ready to fall under Moscow's heel." Well, you see what that's about. What it's about is that the American ambassador to France, Jefferson Caffery, goes to Paul Ramadier in April of 1947 and

says that you will get much more help and much more easily if the Communists are out of the government. Ramadier looks for his pretext.

The pretext: the Renault strikes. The Renault strikes of May 1947 — began on the 25th of April — a great strike movement that the Communist didn't call at all, and didn't want, and that they tried to repress. It was sponsored, really, by the Trotskyists, but the workers went out by the tens of thousands. And Ramadier did the clever thing: he said, "I put my government on the line. Confidence on our wage freeze." The Communists couldn't lose face with the working class totally, couldn't be out flanked by the Trotskyists, and voted no confidence and were ousted from the government.

And you see, until Moscow told them differently at the Cominform meeting of September of '47, those French Communists still thought they would get back in the government and that they were part of this particular strategy. All so weird and ironic. And Thorez, in June of 1947, saying something so plaintive at a Communist meeting, saying: "We were booted out of the government, and we did so much to restore French production. Compare what we did to what France did in 1919 to 1921, then, wages went up but production went down. Now, even though wages went down, production went up." And he was proud of that. And proud of the fact that in 1919 to 1921, under a reactionary *bleu horizon* [the color of French uniforms during WWI] government, that the workers had fought and had raised their living standards but that the Communists didn't let them fight in that period of '44 to '47. So ironic.

And [Communist publisher Marcel] Cachin stood at that same meeting, and he said, "Disgraceful that a man of state like Thorez should be booted out of the French government." Well, he was a "man of state." Senator [Arthur] Vandenberg of Michigan, for example, met him in May of '46 in a luncheon in Paris and said that magnificent thing. He said, "I just don't understand it. How can a man so humorful, how can a man so healthy, be a Communist?" [*laughter*]. And consequently, quite obviously, he was coming on well, Thorez was. And here is Cachin saying, "How could they throw this man of state out?" Well, they threw him out because they didn't really ever understand what a great boon the Communists were to the American strategy. The Communists never got the proper appreciation from the Americans for what they did. Terrific irony.

And my friend Alex Werth... my friend Alex Werth, about whom I think so very frequently, who was more knowledgeable about France and Russia than any human being I have ever known — and who eventually, about four years ago, threw himself out a window and committed suicide — in the letter that he sent to me which came just two days before he did that... the letter that he sent to me, really, is at the center of this irony. It was after the Russians had moved into Czechoslovakia with their tanks [in 1968], after the Americans, after all, were everywhere in the world and in Vietnam especially — and Werth, who was then, after all, an aging man, said: "I mean, you know, what is there finally to believe?" And when you think, you see, of a

Communist Party that permits as a co-existence the repression, massively, of people that should be brothers, on the basis of a certain kind of *Realpolitik*, it drives you to the very extremities of your discouragement. Except, you see, we're not as old as Alex was. And we still work our way out of that and say, "Okay, you start from there." But the ironies are terrific. And it is true that the Americans never properly appreciated their Communist friends. [*applause*]