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France

[A Speech of Daniel Mayer]

On September 9th, 1944 Daniel Mayer, the General Secretary of the S.F.I.O. (French Socialist Party) made a speech to the Federation of the Seine district of the S.F.I.O. from which the following extracts seem to us especially noteworthy.

"Out of the 169 M.P.s who were members of the Socialist Party in 1939, only 54 have been retained, of whom 8 are deported. But everywhere in the masses, the militant rank and filers have been loyal to the Party. ...

Toulouse, Roubaix, Marseilles, Tours, Le Mans, Morlaix have socialist mayors. ...

At our side, in the clandestine struggle, we have found courageous men whose conceptions are close to ours, particularly the Democrates Populaires (a Catholic group whose chief is Georges Bidault [1], former head of the C.N.R. and now foreign minister). We can go with them on many issues, struggle with them for a revolutionary justice, on the strict condition that the lay character of the State, the schools and the welfare services shall not be contested ...

We shall oppose with all our force ... any anticommunist bloc. I only know one way to be stronger than the communists, it is to make the revolution before them ...

For the working population, social laws were decreed by the first Blum government; their permanence and inviolability must be confirmed. ...

The Socialist Party asks for the complete and rapid realisation of the programme of the C.N.R. (National Council of Resistance) which was worked out at our initiative ...

France must play her role among the great Allied powers. She must take the lead in a 'Popular Front of nations'. Our Party has remained the French Section of the Second International ...

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We beg pardon for France from all the political refugees whom Pétain handed over to the Gestapo, from the volunteers of 1939 whom Vichy sent to hard labour in North Africa, as a gesture of gratitude ...

It is difficult to speak of the future of Germany while every German soldier is an enemy who has to be killed. But here is the attitude of the Party to this subject: Once Hitler has been defeated, we must exterminate the 'cadres' of Nazism at every level; we must deprussianize Germany by all means, including, if necessary, force; and finally destroy the caste of the Junkers and of heavy industry. But once that has been done,

we must extend a fraternal hand to the German people, to the anti-Nazi revolutionaries, and not create conditions that might bring us a new Hitler.

Moreover, this problem must be settled within the framework of a renewed League of nations, with a sovereignty superior to each national sovereignty, and with power to intervene, if necessary, in the internal policy of the States. ..."

[Some Letters received from Correspondents in France]

We publish below a number of letters we have received from correspondents in France which throw an interesting sidelight upon the situation there. The letters were dated from end of September and beginning of October.

"It has now been possible for me to meet and discuss with some progressive French people. It is difficult, however, to disentangle the personal outlooks one gets from local people when it is not possible to get an adequate picture of broader developments.

I met a professor of social history at the municipal university and he has been very friendly. I asked him about the extent of communist influence and growth in the resistance movement. He believes that outside the Paris area they do not have much influence. The more educated workers and the intelligentsia are largely socialist. He told me the following incident as an indication of what has been happening. When the railroad union was reorganised recently, the communists sent in an organiser who took the leadership. When he tried, however, to superimpose his party line he was replaced by a socialist. He feels that the unions will maintain a policy of independence from sectarian politics.

Another person, a librarian, who was a conservative before the war and has been pushed, as she puts it, by the pressure of the occupation and the treachery of the right to an indefinite leftward position, is not very sympathetic to the socialists. She claims that the socialists have their leadership centered too much among the intellectuals without sufficient roots in the working class. Although she was formerly bitterly opposed to the communists for their undermining French defence against the Nazis before the attack on Russia, she has forgiven them because of their active participation in the resistance movement and because of the Russian sacrifices and successes. She believes that the communists have surpassed the socialists in winning support of the working class because of this.

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Incidentally, the different politics being followed by the parties can be seen in the nature of their reorganisation. The communists recently called a public meeting. They presented two main points: continued resistance to the Germans and full punishment to the collaborators. They did not offer a programme; that, they said, would be left to the people to decide when the Germans were defeated. The socialists, on the other hand, are still meeting clandestinely. They held a reorganisation meeting a few weeks ago. Only former members were invited, and applicants who were vouched for by two old members.

Both the professor and the librarian believe that it is yet too early to make firm predictions regarding future political trends. The 2½ million workers and prisoners now in Germany and the possibility of women's suffrage may be deciding factors and they are very uncertain quantities. The professor termed France a country of revolutions, but not a revolutionary country.

There is another difficulty: During the occupation, the Germans evidently treated and propagandised the youth quite well. Many young people, we are informed, left with the retreating Germans. The disillusionment following the ineffectiveness of world democracy, and democracy at home, against Nazism in the early stages of the war, plus the rapid French military defeat, in addition to this special treatment of the youth by the Germans, has made a strong impact upon the youth, I suspect. The Free French authorities and progressive and labour groups are putting a major effort into winning youth support. One can only hope that they will be successful in this venture."

"The political situation in France is characterised by the extraordinary enthusiasm of the people, and their will to reconstruct their country in national union. Even amongst the politically organised people you find no partisan views. So many men of different opinions fought together in the resistance struggle and learnt to respect each other. There seems to have been a very close identity of purpose and loyalty.

That unity is represented particularly by the C.N.R. whose new president - its founder was Bidault of the Christian Democrats, now Foreign Minister - is Saillant [2] of the C.G.T. Now that France is liberated, one might wonder whether the C.N.R. has any justification for continuing to exist. But the C.N.R. decided to remain in existence, at the side of the Government, as long as its programme which is very progressive (it was printed in 'Europe Speaks' of June 10th, 1944) has not been carried out by the Government.

In a very good speech the General Secretary of the Socialist Party, Daniel Mayer, pleaded for the fulfilment of this programme which can be taken as the 'action programme' of the Socialist Party. The Socialist Party seems to have considerable influence. The 'Populaire' is selling very well in spite of the competition of the 'non-political' papers such as 'combat' - which is excellent these days, serious and intelligent - 'Libération, Zone Nord' [3] (directed by Socialists) and others. I believe that - after the realisation of a good deal of the C.N.R. programme - when the need for national union will no longer be felt so strongly and when more thorough and farther-reaching programmes will be needed, these 'non-political' groups will lose in influence and strong parties will be formed.

The purge is proceeding much better than in North Africa, except in some high posts of some 'Administrations' where the collaborators are difficult to find. But nearly every paper urges

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every day the thorough and ruthless pursuit of the purge. Some prominent leaders of the capitalist class (heads of big banks such as Worms [4] and Mirabeau [5]) have been struck - a very good sign.

In short, on nearly every ground, the political situation in France offers splendid opportunities for a strong and definite 'coup de barre' towards the Left, exactly what we saw from the underground press. The reactionary and capitalist forces are, for the time being, in retreat. But they may recover if the progressive forces do not act now decisively and intelligently. The opportunity for progressive advance exists now, and I am sure that the people would give enthusiastic support. The more we can give them now, the greater will be their enthusiasm, and the more we can ask. The less we give them now, the less they will support us and the less we can ask."

"As to the press, it is very sensitive when its liberty is touched. A week ago, a communique of the C.N.R. about the F.F.I. was censored. This provided the opportunity the papers were waiting for. The 'Populaire' started a violent campaign against political censorship camouflaged under military censorship. Almost the whole press joined in the chorus and the Minister was obliged to make a clear statement that censorship would be limited to strictly military necessities. The public was asked to watch over the freedom of the press. The Government, if they had ever wished to keep a hand on the press - which I do not believe - will certainly understand that this is out of the question.

The great difficulty of the Socialist Party - as elsewhere - is the general ignorance which prevails about the political situation outside France. This is very understandable. I hope that France will realise how much depends upon her giving a lead to all progressive European nations, especially Italy, where the left parties are desperately looking for help, and soon Spain. Nearly all the papers are splendid in their sympathy for the cause of the liberation of Spain."

"The Communist Party and the Young Communist papers emphasise solely the struggle for national honour etc., absolutely no social appeal. 'Front National' is unquestionably communist; many people formerly of the right seem to have got connected with it. It is serving a very important role as a link between the Communist Party and those segments of the bourgeoisie who for one reason or another want to go fairly well along with it.

Most of the liberation papers take a strong anti-German line, for the future as well as for the war. Only the 'Populaire' says that we must remember that there are anti-Fascist Germans with whom we must work once Germany is disarmed.

Yesterday I went to a mass meeting addressed by André Philip and André le Troquer [6]. Le Troquer is the hard-plugging type, Philip one of the greatest orators I have ever heard. Philip stressed the need for taking a large step towards socialisation now - within the next six months - to take advantage of the present heroic state of the public mind, and not to sit by and hope that with the end of the war socialists can then win out through the older type of easy going parliamentarism."

"There seems to be a pronounced opinion amongst Frenchmen that the whole era between wars was ruined by England's balance of power activities and by her very positive aid in the rebuilding of nationalist Germany. This does not mean a nasty anti-British feeling. Of this there is none apparent. But there is a feeling England must never again be allowed to interfere with Continental developments."

Editorische Anmerkungen

1 - Georges Bidault (1899-1983), französischer Politiker und aktives Mitglied der Résistance, Herausgeber der christdemokratischen antifaschistischen Zeitung „l'Aube“ (ab 1934), Führer der christdemokratischen „Parti Démocrate Populaire“ (PDP), Beitritt zur Résistancegruppe „Liberte“ (1941), nach der

Verhaftung Moulins Vorsitzender der CNR (Conseil National de la Résistance), nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg Mitglied verschiedener französischer Nachkriegskabinette (1944-1954), Abgeordneter der Nationalversammlung (1945-1956, ab 1958), Vorsitzender des Mouvement Républicain Populaire (MRP, 1949-1952), Ministerpräsident (1946, 1949-1950), Exil (1962-1968), u.a. in Brasilien (1963-1967).

2 - Louis Saillant (1910-1974), französischer Gewerkschafter, aktiv in der Widerstandsbewegung, Präsident des Nationalrats der Résistance (1944), Sekretär der CGT (1944-1948), Generalsekretär des Weltgewerkschaftsbunds (1945-1969).

3 - „Libération, Zone Nord“, sozialistische Widerstandszeitung, vermutlich ein Ableger von „Libération“ für den Norden Frankreichs.

4 - „Worms“, französische Bankiersfamilie, deren international tätiges Bankunternehmen von Edouard-Raphael Worms zur Zeit des Ersten Weltkrieges groß gemacht wurde; ursprünglich jüdische, später protestantische Familie, in der Besatzungszeit Anhänger von Marschall Pétain, Unterstützung des Vichy-Regimes sowie von Zeitungen und Organisationen der Rechten, daher von 1940 bis 1944 von großer Bedeutung in der französischen Wirtschaft und in politischen Kreisen.

5 - „Mirabeau“ = „Mirabaud“ (?) = „Banque Mirabaud“, französisch-schweizerisches Bankunternehmen, das 1814 von Jacques Mirabaud (1784-1864) gegründet worden war und von seinem Sohn Henri (1821-1893) fortgeführt wurde, 1878 fusionierte die Bank mit den Bankhaus seines Schwiegervaters und hatte fortan die Firma: „Banque Mirabaud, Paccard, Puerari et Cie.“, im Besitz der Rothschilds während des Zweiten Weltkriegs, nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg (1953) Fusion mit der „Banque de l'Union Parisienne“.

6 - André le Troquer (1884-1963), französischer Politiker, Abgeordneter (ab 1936), einer der Verteidiger Léon Blums im Prozess von Riom (1942), bei der Befreiung von Paris an der Seite de Gaulles (1944), Abgeordneter der Nationalversammlung (1945-1958), Innenminister unter Gouin (1946), Verteidigungsminister unter Blum (1946-1947), Vizepräsident und Präsident der Nationalversammlung, Rückzug aus dem politischen Leben (1960).