

# André Marty

Member of the Chamber of Deputies for Paris

## The Trial of the French Communist Deputies

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THE TRIAL OF THE FRENCH  
COMMUNIST DEPUTIES

# THE TRIAL OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST DEPUTIES

A Contribution to the History of a Crime

*By*

ANDRÉ MARTY

*Member of the Chamber of Deputies for Paris*

LONDON

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*At a time when nearly all the "Socialist" (excuse the abuse of the word!) parliamentary deputies of Europe proved to be chauvinists and servants of the chauvinists, when the notorious "Europeanism" which enchanted our liberals and liquidators proved to be an obtuse habit of servile legality, in Russia one working-class party was to be found whose deputies shone, not for their rhetoric, not for their "freedom" of bourgeois and intellectual salons, not for the business adroitness of "European" lawyers and parliamentarians, but for their ties with the working-class masses, for the selfless work carried on among these masses, for their fulfilment of the modest, unseen, difficult, thankless, and particularly dangerous functions of illegal propagandists and organizers. To rise "higher"—to the title of a deputy or Minister influential in "society"—such was in fact the meaning of "European" (in other words, servile) "Socialist" parliamentarism.*

*"Does the government hope to intimidate the workers by exiling the members of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Group to Siberia? It will find that it is mistaken. The workers will not be intimidated, but will only the better understand their tasks. . . ."*

(LENIN, "WHAT THE TRIAL OF THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC LABOUR GROUP HAS SHOWN," SOTZIAL-DEMOKRAT, No. 40, MARCH 29, 1915.)

*We have been arrested and prosecuted, because we are Communists, because we have remained Communists in spite of all solicitations, threats and repression.*

*We are being prosecuted because we have opposed, and are*

*opposing to the last ounce of our strength, the imperialist war which has afflicted our country; because we have appealed to the people to demand that the war be ended and peace established, and because we are indicating to the people of France the way to make our country free and happy.*

*Neither trial, nor condemnation, nor concentration camp will prevent the Communists from performing this eminently humane work.*

(DECLARATION OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST DEPUTIES  
BEFORE THE MILITARY TRIBUNAL.)

## THE PEOPLE WILL TRIUMPH!

MILLIONS of men, women and children are wandering through the rich land of France, starving while the harvest is rotting on the stalk. They are living in hovels, with the half-empty mansions of the rich nearby. Hundreds of thousands of French workers, so marvellously skilled, such magicians in the arts and crafts, are begging for food! Thousands of ragged soldiers, their faces and bodies bearing the marks of their heroism, are begging their way home, only to find unemployment and hunger awaiting them there. Forced labour on the roads is held out to the fine youth of France as their future! Poverty and prostitution are spreading far and wide. In France, meat and milk have become luxuries!

The schools are closed, but the prisons are crammed! The factories and fields are deserted, but the hideous concentration camps are crowded with men and women. Frightful infernos! Two million prisoners of war working like convicts, with 100 grams of bread and a handful of rice a day as their only nourishment! Already, both in the occupied zone and in the unoccupied zone, workers are "disappearing without trace". In France, the word *Liberty* is being effaced from the walls of public buildings.

Once again death is ravaging thousands of homes, carrying off the sons of fathers who fell in that other war, the "last". Thousands of families are again

suffering the frightful torment of not knowing the fate of their dear ones! War has passed by here, and death with his scythe is still reaping his harvest. Every day he silently carries away women, children, old people and the wounded whom abominable treachery has caused to be abandoned by those who should have attended to them! There he is again, hovering over the country night and day and gathering his harvest when tons of dynamite drop from the skies! In the name of peace, the war is still crushing and massacring the people of France.

So immense is the disaster, so profound the devastation, that it required many weeks before the broad mass of the French people could realize the full amplitude of the crime which has plunged them into war and disaster without parallel in their history.

\* \* \*

The pseudo-deputies of the last Chamber of the Third Republic have just wallowed in the mud and blood, driven out by a *coup d'état*, neither glorious nor dangerous, to which they themselves had helped to pave the way. It required neither the drums of Brumaire nor the police spies of Napoleon the Little. All that was required was for the sinister trio, Laval, Weygand and Marquet—the one an unscrupulous adventurer, the other a Jesuit general, and the third a charlatan and rascal—supported by foreign bayonets, and for insignia the baton of an old mummy of a marshal, for them to vote their own death. After which they departed, content that their fat parliamentary salaries were guaranteed. That was the end of the last parliament of the bourgeois Third Republic.

It did not die, it was not slain; it collapsed from

internal decay! And the people, discouraged, betrayed, sold and martyred by their shepherds, far from weeping, only spat in their faces in contempt.

For never has the glorious and brilliant history of the French nation witnessed such infamous acts of treachery, perpetrated by men more vile than the deputies of that Chamber. The men of February 6—Chiappe, Ybarnegaray, Montigny—having succeeded in returning to the Chamber, although in a small minority, at once began their work of corruption and disintegration, using every instrument in their power: blackmail, threats, “persuasion”. Beneath the banner of “integral nationalism”, they perpetrated the most heinous treachery the country had ever known since Louis Capet. It was thus that, beginning with the fight against the forty-hour week and paid holidays, they imposed the policy of non-intervention, and, by way of Munich, ended in the final treachery of June last.

The others—Daladier, Blum, Herriot—sank even lower. These felonious deputies had been elected to parliament after having, with hand on heart, accepted the charter of a mass movement such as has been unknown in France except in the great eras of revolution!

The powerful movement of the Popular Front, as a result of stern struggles, brought about a marked amelioration in the condition of the working class and of the people generally, and opened up even brighter prospects for the future. It was then that the two hundred families, terrified at these encroachments on their preposterous privileges, were dominated by but one aim—to break this tremendous force united around the working class, in order to be able to continue



tranquilly in their bloodthirsty parasitism. And, with the aid of their fellows outside, they succeeded in penetrating, shaking and winning the leaderships of all the parties, the Communist excepted. It was then that we saw one deputy after another betraying his most solemn pledges. Fantastic villainy! Having promised the people bread, they reduced them to starvation. Having promised peace, they unleashed war, after having stabbed in the back two great nations—Spain and Czecho-Slovakia—whom they sold to the German imperialists, and then betraying the great country of the Soviets. Having promised liberty, they did everything in their power, first to save from destruction the reaction of February 6 which had been routed by the people, and then to restore it to power. Then, by conferring one emergency power after another, they granted complete liberty of action to their masters, the two hundred families, who responded by allowing them to prorogue themselves for two years!—which had the additional merit of saving them from the necessity of rendering account to the people whom they had betrayed. Finally, they consummated their treachery by assisting the potentates, the two hundred families, in plunging into war this country which they had knowingly enfeebled and deliberately isolated in the world.

Came the catastrophe. Seeing the rage of the people mounting at the sight of devastated towns and the blood, still warm, of the youth of France, whom they had sacrificed to the calf of gold, they were possessed by only one thought—to exorcise this menacing spectre which constantly reminded them in letters of fire of their solemn vows: Bread, Peace and Liberty. Then,

for the sake of their masters, they abased themselves to the rôle of police agents and delivered over to the jailors the Communist deputies, the men who had alone remained faithful to their election promises, and had not capitulated; they tortured them, arrested them, and, finally, in order to be able to perpetrate their last acts of treachery unhindered, they voted to deprive the Communists, the only genuine representatives of the people, of their seats. This was the last “independent act” of these pseudo-deputies; by expelling the Communists from parliament they voted their own downfall.

They even drew the thirty pieces of silver for their crime; for, the expulsion of the Communists having been voted, these “honourable” deputies, these vulgar money-changers, cynically divided among themselves the parliamentary salaries of the fifty-two deputies whom they had just unseated! Then they resumed their “business”, happy to be rid of the Communists who had alone exposed the rottenness of the bourgeois parliament, those men of political integrity who alone can hold their heads high in the eyes of the French people. For

“not a single Communist was implicated in any of the scandals which followed one after another from 1920 to 1939. No Staviskys nor Oustrics, no Colonels Guichets nor clients of the Banque de Basle, no wreckers of the Aero-postale nor pensioners of Abetz, are to be found in our ranks!

“They are to be found in all the parties of the Right and Left united in a ‘holy alliance’ for the imperialist war.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Joint Declaration of the Communist deputies before the Third Military Tribunal of Paris.

And so, when the bourgeois and bourgeois-socialist deputies committed the supreme crime of sacrificing the independence of France, they were already dead as far as our people were concerned!

\* \* \*

The moral, political and military degradation of the financial aristocracy, the masters of the country, was complete. In their indescribable suffering and misery, the people of France cursed the men, the parties and the deputies who had betrayed them and led them to disaster.

But at the same time the people saw the true, healthy, pure and immense force which represents their interests, the real and only force that can save the people. That force was symbolized by these heroes, the Communist deputies, who had alone remained faithful to their vow of July 14, 1935, and to their promises of May, 1936. This cohort, whose stubborn resistance in face of all obstacles we are now about to recall, is part of the ardent and courageous working class of France, personified by its party, the Communist party of France, the party "of a class which is not to be bought or sold", as one of the accused deputies proudly declared!

Who are these Communist deputies of France? They are workers by hand and brain, deputies of a new type, living on the wages of a skilled worker, voluntarily contributing half their parliamentary salaries to the cause of the liberation of the workers. They would hasten untiringly from parliament to people in order to tell them the truth that was being hidden from them. These Communist deputies were to be found wherever

there were strikes and demonstrations, in the fields and in the universities, among children and among unemployed, among old people and among soldiers. They were to be seen everywhere, explaining, educating, organizing. Everybody could approach them and tell them of their misery and the way they were being exploited, and demand their aid.

Wherever, in any part of the world, the interests of other menaced, oppressed or enslaved peoples were in danger, in common with the interests of the people of France, there they hastened: New York and Saigon, Prague and Jibuti, Beyreuth and Algiers have seen the French Communist deputies come to voice the true sentiments of labouring France. When, for almost three years, the people of Spain fought heroically and with their own blood inscribed immortal pages in the history of mankind, the French Communist deputies visited Spanish territory every week, accompanying, amidst a hail of bombs, convoys of food for the people and milk for the children. They could be seen in the very firing line, expressing in action the solidarity of the working class of France. And when France's bloody hordes and the foreign invaders, aided by the French government, surrounded 20,000 men and women at Alicante and turned on them the muzzles of machine-guns ready to spit fire and death, it was a French Communist deputy who offered his breast in an attempt to protect the victims of the infamous Bonnet.

After so many villainies and crimes of the bourgeoisie and the French socialist leaders, of all those who, having betrayed the people, are still acting as lackeys of the French ruling class, it is necessary and

comforting to recall the honest, proud and incorruptible attitude of the Communist deputies, who remained faithful in the face of death to their promises and vows, faithful to the proletarians, to the people, to France. And it is not a handful of vile renegades, who have been pilloried by the people of France, and who are the usual price that every great popular movement has to pay for all great heroisms, that can obliterate the glorious example of these Communists, members of a bourgeois parliament, who were equally deaf to violence and to promises.

It is the working class that has produced such men, such true representatives of the people and defenders of the interests of the people. It was the Communist party that formed them.

That working class and that Communist party therefore stand forth as the young, new, healthy, bold and intrepid forces which will make France "free, strong and happy".

The French Communist deputies have been condemned—just as Galileo was by the Inquisition. But, like him, they concluded by saying:

"E pur si muove!"

Yes, truth will triumph and the people will win the day!

## IN THE SERVICE OF THE PEOPLE

### OATH OF THE COMMUNIST DEPUTIES

We, the deputies and militants of the French Communist party, swear to fight for the greatness of the people of our country and for the defence of the international proletariat.

We, the deputies and militants of the French Communist party, are totally at the service of the labouring masses united in the Popular Front on behalf of bread, peace and liberty.

Gladly ranging ourselves beneath the discipline of our party, and confident in its irresistible forward march, we swear to do our utmost for the union of the French nation, to work for a free, strong and happy France, which the Communists want and which they will bring about.

## ACCUSERS AND ACCUSED

### THE REAL CRIMINALS IN ROBES OF JUSTICE

**A**LONE, facing the tempest and faithful to its policy of peace, our great Communist party rose up against the war, as it rose up alone against the occupation of the Ruhr by Poincaré, for it has always been opposed to the oppression of one people by another.

We Communists defended the German-Soviet pact because it was a factor of peace, and, in the very first month of the war, when the Daladier repressions were launched against us, in face of all the profiteers, swindlers and politicians, for whom the war only meant good business, we hailed the name of peace by sending the letter of the Communist deputies to the President of the Chamber.

It was for this that the deputies were imprisoned and condemned; it was for this that thousands of Communists have been flung into jail and concentration camp, while, under menace of prison and gallows, our militants valiantly continued the struggle for peace.

On behalf of the Central Committee of the Communist Party,

MAURICE THOREZ.

JACQUES DUCLOS.

*Paris, October 1, 1939.*—For a month already the country had been at war. What for? Ostensibly, for the sake of Poland. But ten days earlier the reactionary

Polish state—that prison of the peoples—had ceased to exist. It was clear that the government of the colonels—led by Beck—had arranged everything in advance. The multi-national Polish state, that artificial creation of Versailles, had collapsed in three weeks.

Ever since the outbreak of the war, the French Communist party had said that it was not a war of the people, but of high finance. It had insistently demanded—and had alone demanded—that peace be concluded; and peace was still possible. It was for this the Communist party was outlawed by government decree. It was a natural development of the infamous campaign against our party, whose glorious paper, *L'Humanité*, had been suppressed since August 25, and its militants arrested by the hundred, including even the miner Quinet, deputy for Pas-de-Calais.

### EXECUTION BEFORE SENTENCE

This campaign, conducted for many months, openly and cunningly, suddenly grew in dimensions when the German-Soviet treaty of friendship and commerce was signed, and then rose rapidly to a crescendo.

All the parties and all the politicians, without exception, vied with each other in their anti-communism. But two groups distinguished themselves particularly: the Executive Committees of the Socialist Federation of the Seine and of the Young Socialist League of the Seine, which were under the control of Paul Faure, general secretary of the Socialist party. He, René Brunet and Arnold were proved at the time of Munich to have close connections with Bonnet and his gang. This was the same gang of Munich socialist

deputies who were later, on July 12, 1940, at Vichy, to approve the *coup d'état* of Petain, Laval and Weygand. It was, in fact, the Socialist Federation of the Seine which, on the eve of the suppression of *L'Humanité*, was the first to level the charge of treason against the Communist party and which was the initiator of this preliminary measure of the war—the banning of the largest political paper in France!

For its part, *Le Populaire*, the central organ of the Socialist party, through the pen of Léon Blum, carried on an anti-Communist and anti-Soviet campaign which daily surpassed itself in calumny and Jesuitism. The Paul Faure and Blum trends vied with each other in ignominy, and went so far as to demand the death penalty for the Communist leaders!

In the trade unions, a similar campaign was carried on under the direction of René Belin and Dumoulin, members of the Socialist party (of the Paul Faure, Munich trend). Belin, today Minister of Production and Corporations, also had close ties with Bonnet and his clique. This was the Belin who, with the support of Jouhaux, caused the arrest of Communist—or just honest—trade union leaders, and who, with the aid of the police, seized possession of the trade unions and of their property on the pretext of “defending the independence of trade unionism”!

The second group to lead the campaign was that of the gang of February 6, headed by Chiappe—the Chiappe who is today “governor” of Paris,<sup>1</sup> surrendered to the invader, and approved as such by the German authorities! With Chiappe naturally sided

<sup>1</sup> This was written before Chiappe's death in an air crash on his way to take up an appointment in Syria.

the Cagoullards (De la Roque), the slum gang (Doriot), the group of Topaze<sup>1</sup> municipal councillors, headed by the business lawyer Fernand Laurent, shareholder in the armament firm of Société Brandt, suppliers both to the Cagoullards and the Ministry of War.

More even than the police weekly *Gringoire*, the property of the Chiappe-Garbuccia tribe, it was the *Matin* which vied in infamy with *Le Populaire*. This is the *Matin* which for forty years has been notorious for its campaign against the workers, for its venality, and for the fact that it was the first newspaper to be authorized by the German authorities—the *Matin* of Bunau and Varilla, with de Corab, brother of the general who “forgot” to occupy the Meuse and to blow up its bridges, as chief anti-Soviet contributor. Naturally, the *Matin* also demanded the execution of the Communist leaders; in its eyes the enemy is the Soviet Union. For the rest, the two groups were closely interlocked: the most faithful contributor of the *Matin* in the anti-Soviet campaign was the Socialist deputy Barthélémy, a vulgar scoundrel, of whom more anon.

Behind the scenes was Laval—Flandin's aide-de-camp—who pulled all the wires, urging some and threatening others, all following suit behind the most corrupt and the most vile: Frossard, Déat, Bergery and the rest. Not a single party, not a single group, not a single man dared raise his voice. When Kérellis and Buré timidly denounced defeatism in high quarters, they first took care to demand violent measures—against the Communist leaders! These men vied with each other in baseness at every step. For

<sup>1</sup> A farce in which Topaze was the symbol of the most corrupt body in France, the Municipal Council of Paris.

example, when, after the arrest of Quinet, the Bureau of the Communist Parliamentary Group appealed to the President of the Chamber, Herriot—the man who for four years had been trumpeting: “I know a country which will never be Fascist”—to intervene and enforce respect for members of parliament, the reply he gave was: “This very afternoon I will denounce you as traitors” (September 2, 1939). The notorious cowardice of the demagogue of Lyons had found a field for exercise—against the Communists.

As to the government, it naturally fulfilled, point by point, the orders of Chiappe, the Cagoulards and Laval. Its censorship even decided that the word “communist” must disappear from the columns of the press! As a supreme guarantee for the Fifth Column—including that of the General Staff, headed by Generals Weygand and Georges—Daladier placed Bonnet-Abetz at the head of the Ministry of Justice, where, together with Berthoin, chief of the Sûreté and a Cagoulard, he fought—and with what vigour!—the war on the home front.

\* \* \*

On September 2 the Chamber of Deputies sat for ninety minutes, after which it adjourned indefinitely. Thereupon, the Central Committee of the Communist party sent all Communist deputies who had not been mobilized on a speaking tour through the country. Night and day, they explained to the workers and peasants what was going on, what were the causes of this “queer war”, and what it signified. While the armies and the air force in France were immobile, troops and war material were being daily despatched

to Syria—that is, in the direction of the Caucasus, against the Soviets. While the men of February 6 and the Cagoulards were openly appearing everywhere—in the prefectures and government departments, in the army and the ministries—prefects and police commissars were tracking down Communists and arresting by the hundred class-conscious, revolutionary workers who protested against a war for the benefit of the rich.

The workers were suffering privation and misery; the trade unions had been destroyed and social legislation abolished in the name of a “war for liberty”; but, meanwhile, trainloads of iron ore were being despatched by M. de Wendel (Croix de Feu, No. 13) from Briey and Caen, through Belgium without stop, to Germany, addressed to his cousin, Herr von Wendel. It was clear and obvious that the policy of Munich, the policy of the two hundred families, was being continued and accentuated. They still hoped—and still worked—to turn the war against the Soviet Union. And these were the men who demanded the death penalty for the Communists—before judgment was passed.

#### SENTENCE BEFORE INDICTMENT

As the reactionary Polish state had disappeared, the Central Committee of the Communist party not only continued but intensified its efforts for the re-establishment of peace, which was still possible.

On its instructions, our group in the Chamber, which had been dissolved because it was Communist, constituted itself the “Worker and Peasant Group”.

This was perfectly legal, as is shown by the fact that the *Journal Officiel*, in reporting the dissolution of the Communist group on September 29, announced the membership of the new Worker and Peasant Group.<sup>1</sup>

The following day the group resumed the work of the party on behalf of peace by addressing the following letter to Herriot, President of the Chamber, distributing this letter to the press in the usual way.

*Paris, October 1, 1939:*

*To the President of the Chamber of Deputies*

MR. PRESIDENT,

Overtures of peace have been made to France.

At the mere thought that peace may be possible, an immense hope fills the people of our country, who are tormented by the prospect of a long and cruel war, a war that will bury the treasures of human culture beneath mountains of ruins and cost the lives of millions of men, women and children.

Scarcely had mention of these overtures, which were due to the diplomatic initiative of the U.S.S.R., been made, than a controlled press replied in one voice: "No!"

Is it possible that journalists who have no mandate from the nation can coldly decide in favour of a war to the finish?

Is it possible that the peace overtures may be rejected before they are even made known and before the sovereign representation has been consulted?

We, for our part, do not think so, and we demand of

<sup>1</sup> The Presidium of the Chamber acknowledged as members of the Group only such as were present in Paris and able to sign. That is why some of the deputies do not figure in the list, since they were either mobilized or engaged on party duties too far away from the capital.

you, as the President of the Chamber, to approach the public authorities and demand:

1. That parliament be assembled to discuss the question of peace in public session.

2. That the members of parliament in the army be allowed to take part in the deliberation of this cardinal question, on which the lives of millions of Frenchmen depend.

Every Frenchman wants peace, for he feels that a long war will be calamitous to our country and will jeopardize both its future and its democratic liberties.

The possibility of peace overtures being rejected *a priori* and our thus being led into a hazardous and disastrous adventure must be absolutely precluded.

We desire with all our might a just and durable peace, and we think it can be secured very quickly, for, as against the imperialist warmongers and Hitler Germany, which is a prey to internal contradictions, there is the might of the Soviet Union, which would permit the realization of a policy of collective security, ensure peace and save the independence of the country.

That is why we think we are serving the best interests of our country in demanding that the overtures of peace made to France be examined with the object of securing as early as possible a just, loyal and durable peace, which our fellow-citizens long for from the bottom of their hearts.

ARTHUR RAMETTE,

*President of the Worker and Peasant Group.*

FLORIMOND BONTE,

*Secretary.*

It was clear, in fact, that the pact of friendship and frontier concluded between the U.S.S.R. and Germany on September 28 considerably developed and comple-

mented the pact of August 23. It laid a solid foundation for peace in Western Europe, and could at the same time serve as a basis for the termination of the war in Western Europe.

The letter was therefore opportune in demanding the convocation of parliament to discuss the question of peace.

And just for that reason, what a howl was raised! The *Matin*, the organ of the eye-washers and capitulators, demanded—once more—the gallows for the Communists, and emphatically declared:

“For us a peace without honour is out of the question. We have no interest in delaying the clash with Germany.” (October 1.)

Several days later it demanded a “more active” war—in Finland!

The Socialist party and its organ *Le Populaire*, naturally headed the hue and cry. The Socialist parliamentary group, headed by Paul Faure and Blum, violently attacked the Soviet Union, backed the slanderous charge of treason brought against the Communist party for the action it had taken on behalf of the people of France, and could find nothing better as its supreme argument than—to associate itself unreservedly with Chamberlain! (*Le Populaire*, October 6.)

Acting on the orders of the two hundred families, the government, over the radio, denounced as traitors the

“new Communist group in the Chamber, which has just addressed a letter to President Herriot demanding a discussion of peace.” (*Paris Mondial*, October 4.)

The same day, Prime Minister Daladier announced that

“he was about to commit for military trial and deprive of their seats the Communist deputies who are demanding the convocation of parliament to discuss peace proposals supported by the U.S.S.R.”

But if there was treason, Chiappe, Flandin, Blum, Paul Faure, Daladier, Bonnet and their government had an excellent opportunity of opening a big debate in the Chamber and thus publicly proving that the Communist deputies were betraying the interests of the people. It must be assumed that in spite of their clamour these gentlemen were not very sure of the result. They surreptitiously closed the session, and, without even depriving the Communist members of their parliamentary immunity, had all the Communist deputies they could lay their hands on arrested. A dozen or so happily escaped discovery, among them Maurice Thorez, Jacques Duclos, Ramette and Bonte.

But the letter of the Communist deputies itself was kept in profound secrecy; everything was done to conceal from the people the “act of treason” itself, the *corpus delicti* on which the whole charge rested.

The Communist deputies, who had been elected by a million and a half voters, were thus arrested and “tried” without even a precise charge having been formulated against them.

Why? Because there was none!

And, as we shall soon see, even when, after their arrest, the charge was at last drawn up—of having addressed the famous letter to the President of the



Chamber—it was rejected even by those valets, the judges of the Military Tribunal. The belated charge thus rested on a nullity.

# A SWIFT TRIAL—IN REVERSE GEAR!

The arrested deputies were incarcerated in the old prison of La Santé, which had been turned into a military prison. This was a “select prison”, under the direct supervision of the Paris Prefecture of Police. Swindlers of the first water, like the Oustrics and Staviskys, and criminals like the Cagoulards and the Doriot gangsters, had always enjoyed favouritism in this prison; but the Communist deputies, because they were honest men and political prisoners, and only on remand at that, were subjected to a treatment infinitely more severe than that meted out to the worst criminal offenders. They were kept completely isolated, forbidden all communication, and every time they were brought before the investigating magistrate were handcuffed and transported in the “Black Maria”.

“The preliminary investigation in the case against the Communist deputies is progressing at an accelerated pace,” declared *Le Populaire* on October 9, 1939. Accelerated pace!—the trial eventually opened only on March 20, 1940. The pace of the preliminary investigations was accelerated—in the reverse.

There is no doubt that the two hundred families wanted a swift trial; they thought they could quickly get the upper hand of our comrades. They wanted the great majority of the deputies to disavow the Communist party and its efforts on behalf of peace and the working class. They wanted a sensational repudiation of the Soviet Union and of the Communist Inter-

national; and they wanted rapidly to exploit it against our party and the working class, the only forces capable of defeating the machinations of these rascals and criminals, who had made treachery a fine art.

The purpose of expediting the preliminary investigation was therefore not to establish proofs—which did not exist; it was to set in operation physical and moral means of confounding and demoralizing the accused with the object of extorting the expected renunciations. This was the purpose of the efforts of the Ministry of Justice (Bonnet) and of the Supreme Police (Berthoin), under the direction of Daladier, himself directly—and even publicly—advised by Chiappe and Paul Faure (*Gringoire* and *Le Populaire* are witnesses to the fact). The two hundred families had arranged things well.

“We were submitted to all the formalities of being measured, which can only be applied in the case of common criminals,” Berlioz later declared before the Tribunal. “Our cells were verminous; we suffered terribly from cold. Lights were extinguished at 6 p.m. and we remained in total darkness until the morning. Yet among us there are consumptives and men who were severely wounded in the war. A man in my borough who had been arrested for robbery and murder was treated exactly like us. . . .

“Such actions are an indictment and condemnation of the régime and of all who exercise it.”

Was this chance? No, it was deliberate. Bonte put it more precisely before the Tribunal:

“The last time I was led to the preliminary magistrate I was shut up in the ‘mouse-trap’ with a gangster who was implicated last year in the robbery of Gobelins, the jewellers.”

Throughout their detention the deputies were not allowed to receive any books or documents to help them prepare their defence. After two months of imprisonment they were allowed to receive only the *Journal Officiel*, containing the decrees and ordinances of the government, and—the reactionary weekly *L'Illustration*. Even books on science, technology and art, which prisoners awaiting trial for ordinary crimes are allowed to receive, were forbidden them. Contrary to all French penitentiary regulations, the Communist deputies were not allowed to receive either paper or pencils.

This régime was all the more odious in the case of the deputies of poor physique and health. For example, Doctor Georges Lévy, deputy for Lyons, aged sixty-six, might have died of heart attack at any moment. He was ruthlessly kept confined to his cell for that very reason. But the most scandalous of all was the treatment of the men who were wounded and injured in the "other" war. Gaston Cornavin, ex-combatant in that other, "last" war, suffered from two heart attacks that were almost fatal; one left him with a paralysed side, but it was only after two months of severe imprisonment that he was provisionally released—for a few days. Jean Duclos, deputy for Versailles, Legion of Honour, Military Medal and Croix de Guerre (with palm), a 100 per cent. war invalid, has undergone twenty-four surgical operations in the last twenty years; he is blind in one eye and can scarcely see out of the other. Owing to the abominable conditions to which he was subjected, his eyes began to suppurate. In the middle of June, 1940, he was threatened with total blindness; but another month passed before he was provisionally released.

Félix Brun, deputy for Lyons, also decorated with the Legion of Honour, Military Medal and Croix de Guerre, is a 100 per cent. war invalid, who had lost both his legs in the "other" war. Like all severely wounded men, his military pension was so calculated as to permit him to employ somebody to assist him in performing the essential acts of life. Yet here was Brun, completely isolated in his cell, having to drag his tortured body to the tin receptacle when he had to attend to his natural needs. When irritation grew among the workers of Lyons and the ex-combatants of 1914-18 as news leaked out of the infamous treatment meted out to their deputy, the wounds of whose amputated legs still suppurated, Brun, by government order, was given an aide—Jean Duclos, himself a 100 per cent. war invalid and almost blind!

Yes, it may be safely asserted that this treatment was designed to crush the Communist deputies physically and morally.

But all these measures were ineffectual; and so these men, thus maltreated, some of them even martyred, were subjected to the most refined tortures of the Inquisition—moral tortures. First, calumnies were launched by sinister individuals, like the wretched Capron of the Laval-Doriot gang, supported by several lawyers who did not shrink from abasing themselves to this infamous rôle. The fact was that the Central Committee of the Communist party had succeeded in putting several comrades in a position to continue their activities illegally. In the first place, and as an exceptional measure, which should be quite understandable, they withdrew Maurice Thorez from his military unit several hours before the order for his arrest arrived.

In the same way, they ensured the safety of about a dozen other Communist leaders, such as Jacques Duclos, Bonte, Ramette, Tillon and Catelas. The unexpectedness of the wholesale arrests prevented similar measures being taken in the case of other comrades.

The police tried to exploit this fact by insinuating to the arrested men: "Well, here you are! But why aren't Thorez, Duclos, Marty, Bonte, Ramette and the others here? Couldn't they have saved you, too? Take Bonte. He wrote the letter, and then he makes himself scarce and leaves you to foot the bill." To others they said: "Your family is despised by everybody as the family of a traitor. Your children are ostracized in school. When people pass your mother and wife they turn their heads away so as not to speak to them. What is more, they have nothing to live on." Berlioz, before the Military Tribunal, denounced the pressure brought to bear upon his father, a small peasant seventy years of age and a member of the Radical Socialist party: "Tell your son," he was told, "to quit the Communists. If he does he will be released from prison, he will remain a deputy and your little plot of land, which cannot feed you any longer, will prosper again."

The Communist deputies were allowed to see their families only five or ten minutes a week in the common reception room of the prison in the presence of a warder and separated from them by two iron grilles. They could scarcely hear themselves speak amid the din of conversation of their neighbours.

Similar, too, was the behaviour of the examining magistrate, whose function it was to register, not so much avowals—which were non-existent—as renunciations. He was an aristocrat, if you please, a M.

de Moissac, flaunting his captain's stripes in the corridors of the Palais de Justice—certainly a safer place than the firing line.

Jesuitically, this "magistrate" began with an illegality: he conducted the first interrogations in the absence of defending counsel. It will be understood why: it left him free to display his wares and make his infamous proposals unhampered. But in spite of this, he had but meagre success: only Capron—who had long ago been suspected of connections with Doriot and Laval. Afterwards he was obliged to carry on the interrogations in the presence of defending counsel. As he was unable to act openly, he resorted to another "stunt": after each interrogation, this "magistrate" drew up the reports for the press in conjunction with Roches, commissary of the political police and a provocateur of the lowest order. It was with these sensational reports that Bonnet and Berthoin hoped to influence our comrades. In this way was the preliminary investigation conducted.

But in vain! Neither the prisoners nor their friends and families yielded. As to the pressure brought to bear on the families, here is the retort of the old peasant Republican Berlioz, who wrote to his son on the eve of the trial: "I am proud that you have not betrayed your ideals." Then there was Bartolini, who at the trial read a letter from his boy of twelve: "Everybody at school, the master in the first place, are always asking for news of you. . . . I am proud to be your son." And the women—workers and housewives, more cruelly tortured by the campaign in the corrupt press than by the sufferings of the prisoners—turned their heads in disgust from the infamous proposals. They

were suffering severely, in spite of the sympathy and help of workers and of many others, shown in a thousand different ways; yet, during the few minutes of the visits, in defiance of the truth, they would cry: "Cheer up, everything is all right at home!"

As to the insidious questions of Captain (?) de Moissac, the examining magistrate, as to his infamous words of encouragement or menace, the reply would come, sometimes irritably, sometimes sarcastically, but always firmly and distinctly: "Yes, I associate myself with the letter demanding a meeting of the Chamber to discuss peace! . . . Yes, I am a Communist, and I will remain a Communist! We are right! We and we alone are the masters of the future!"

What slaps in the face for this footman of the two hundred families! The schoolmaster Barel, deputy for Nice, Legion of Honour, Croix de Guerre, etc., four times wounded in the "other" war, said:

"Yes, we demanded peace; and peace was possible. . . . Naturally, we wanted a peace with honour, not a shameful peace."

And, echoing him, the mechanic Musmeaux, the brave and honest deputy for Anzin-Valenciennes, secretary of the powerful metal workers' union of Anzin, who fought at Denain in 1906:

"Naturally, I am in favour of peace, but, naturally, not for a capitulatory peace."

Another echo from the locksmith Cossoneau, mayor of Gagny and deputy for Seine-et-Oise:

"Yes, I am in favour of peace; and an honourable peace was possible."

Was a slap in the face needed? It was administered by the brilliant organizer of the general railway strike of 1920, Lucien Midol, secretary of the Railwaymen's Federation:

"I was court-martialed once before, at the end of the 'other' war, and I am not going to change today."

Here is the reply of Mocquet, agricultural labourer, then railwayman and deputy for Paris (17th arrondissement), severely wounded in the "other" war:

"Why did I sign the letter? That is my business."

He was echoed by Professor Prachay, deputy for Seine-et-Oise:

"Why did I sign the letter? Because it was my duty. That's all."

Cornavin, deputy for Cher, worker at the Bourges arsenal, twenty-four years member of our party, his eyes fixed on those of M. de Moissac, replied with contempt:

"Why did we write the letter? Because it was our duty as the representatives of the people, Monsieur."

For M. de Moissac, that Machiavelli of the stables, was trying to divide the prisoners.

Bartolini, deputy for Var, honest worker that he is, also cut him short with the words:

"What happened at the meeting of the group where the letter was discussed? That is for you to say, not me"—

while that fine metal worker, Costes, deputy for Boulogne-Billancourt, mockingly said:

"We all stand solidly together. That is our habit as revolutionary workers."

When Captain (?) de Moissac interrogated Brun, Legion of Honour, Military Medal, Croix de Guerre, deputy for Lyons, who had been severely injured in the last war, his presumption met with the merited retort:

"I shall say what I think the day I am allowed to speak in the Chamber to which I was elected by my constituents."

"But why did you demand this discussion?" asked M. de Moissac. And it was again a railwayman, Charles Benoist, deputy for Villeneuve St. Georges, who countered the insidious trap with the retort:

"It is our right as workers' deputies to occupy ourselves with the problem of peace."

The clown of a magistrate wanted Touchard, deputy for Paris (19th arrondissement), a Metro mechanic, to abase himself, but the reply he got was:

"I agree with the letter as a working-class deputy and as an ex-combatant of the first 'last' war."

No success! Poor "magistrate"! One can understand why he made no progress.

As to Jean Duclos, market gardener and manual labourer, 100 per cent. invalid of the last war, Legion of Honour, Military Medal, Croix de Guerre, and deputy for Versailles, his reply was:

"My place is where my electors have sent me, in the Chamber, not in a cell."

That was the way all our brave deputies replied to the agent of the "great patriots"—who had sold the people.

Even the worst of the bourgeois newspapers were obliged to admit, as *Le Matin* did on October 15:

"Yesterday the military judge interrogated eleven of the deputies of the Worker and Peasant Group: Gaou, Grésa, Lozeray, Martel, Petit, Waldeck-Rochet, Touchard, Midol, Demusois, Dadot, etc. The first eight declared that they are in agreement with the letter. . . . They indignantly protested against the accusation of serving a foreign power, and were particularly indignant against the charge of having rendered service to Hitler."<sup>1</sup>

Every machination failed: the Communist deputies remained firm. Capron and Co., on whom hopes were placed in high spheres, were therefore liberated as useless.

But as to the wretched Marcel Déat, whose signature had figured on a noisy intellectual tract demanding *immediate peace*, he had the effrontery to deny it, and—naturally—Captain de Moissac dropped the charge against him in the middle of November. The Fifth Column entrenched in high places had need of him!

<sup>1</sup> Gaou, deputy for Var, wheelwright, twenty years in the party; Grésa, deputy for Paris (19th arrondissement), functionary; Lozeray, deputy for Paris (11th arrondissement), printer, twenty-six years in the party, member of the Central Committee; Martel, deputy for Douai, twenty-five years a miner, twenty years in the party, member of the Central Committee; Petit, deputy for Seine, mayor of Bagneux, tramway employee, gassed in the "other" war; Demusois, deputy for Aulnay s/Bois, secretary of the Railwaymen's Federation, twenty-eight years in the party; Dadot, deputy for St. Germain-en-Laye, worker at the Puteaux arsenal, severely wounded in the "last" war, secretary of the Munitions Workers' Federation.

## GLORIES AND MISHAPS OF THE ACCUSERS

**Y**OU may persecute us today, gentlemen of the government, you may imprison some of us and drive them from parliament.

"But you will not succeed in breaking the will of the people of France for peace, their will to preserve their social gains, the fruits of past battles, nor their will to march forward along the path of social, economic and political progress."—ETIENNE FAJON, in the Chamber of Deputies on January 16, 1940. (*Journal Officiel*, January 17, 1940.)

By the middle of November it had become clear that the "case of the Communist deputies" was not very promising for the employees of the two hundred families. In spite of all their efforts and violent methods, neither the police nor M. Bonnet, Minister of Justice (!), could secure the wholesale recantations they desired. In these circumstances, the "swift trial" dragged on and on. . . .

And so orders were given to "eliminate" the Communist deputies who had been called to the colours. It was thus that Pourtalet, deputy for Grasse (Alpes-Maritimes), sergeant in the engineers, was arrested on November 13 on the charge of "endangering the security of the state".

## AN UNEXPECTED SPOIL-SPORT: FLORIMOND BONTE

In order to consolidate his "emergency powers", Daladier decided to summon parliament after all. These powers were to be endorsed before midnight on November 30; he summoned the Chamber of Deputies for 3 p.m. on November 30. Naturally, exceptional precautions were taken; besides the exterior guard of military and police, the lobbies were filled with elegant young men, all of mobilization age—gentry from the Prefecture of Police. And naturally, too, the mobilized Communist deputies were not given permission to attend the session.

And so the gates of La Santé were locked fast. . . .

And these gentlemen were tranquil, self-confident and absolutely sure of being "among themselves".

Daladier had scarcely been speaking for five minutes when Florimond Bonte calmly took his seat at the side of Cornavin, who had been provisionally released on account of his grave state of health. What stupefaction! What a tumult!

The strident voice of Chiappe howled "Turn the traitors out! Call the police!" Chiappe—that corrupt police official, protector of the Staviskys and the gaming-house kings, Zographos and Heliopoulos! Chiappe—whose treasonable ties with Italian fascism were fifteen years old! Chiappe—the conspirator of February 6 on behalf of the two hundred families and foreign reaction! Chiappe—driven out of the Prefecture of Police by the people, and today the "governor" of Paris and recognized as such by the German authorities!

Bonte rose from his seat and retorted: "The enemy

is in our midst; you are the traitors!" But his voice was drowned amid vociferations. It was obvious that the courageous President of the Chamber, Herriot, would have to carry out the orders of Chiappe, and this queer "democrat" was heard defending the rights of parliament in the following terms:

"The mere presence of Monsieur Bonte here at this juncture is scandalous. I call upon him to quit the Chamber immediately."

As Bonte, amidst howling from all parts of the Chamber, demanded the floor, Barthe, the sergeant-at-arms, followed by his men, approached Bonte and requested him to leave. Our comrade stood erect and immovable, facing the unchained pack. He refused to leave his seat; he demanded the right to speak in the name of those whom the entire Chamber had committed to jail from fear of the truth; he began to read a statement. Then the assault began on this solitary man, Cornavin, who was seriously ill, scarcely being in a position to protect him. Two groups launched themselves upon him: the one consisting of Socialists, his immediate neighbours, led by Barthélémy, the other of Right deputies, led by Chiappe and by Herriot, the man who had spent the first "last" war—and was about to spend the present war—at Bordeaux, whereas Bonte had been seriously wounded in the front line!

An ignoble scene ensued. Furiously assailed, stunned, flung to the floor and trampled upon, Bonte, the deputy from the glorious suburb of Saint-Antoine, was dragged from the Chamber and delivered unconscious into the hands of the police detectives installed in the lobbies. And when these brave valets of the two hundred

families, flushed with the victory of a hundred to one, resumed the session, the wretched Daladier, that man of Munich, anxious to impress his servility on his all-powerful masters of high finance, had the audacity to declare that "the French parliament cannot deliberate in the presence of traitors"!

Our courageous comrade was in such a condition that the preliminary magistrate waited five days before interrogating him, in order to avoid having to take cognizance of the testimony of the doctors. But in the factories and working-class quarters of Paris the indictment which Bonte was prevented from reading from the floor of the Chamber passed from hand to hand.

"... The Communist deputies, whom the government is imprisoning and persecuting in defiance of its own laws, were right in demanding that the representatives of the nation be summoned to state their position on the problem of peace, instead of its being left to a corrupt press and to rulers acting on the orders of the two hundred families to exalt and pursue a policy of war contrary to the interests of the people of France. . . .

"Thus the people of France, who formed a Popular Front against Fascism, now find Fascist methods being applied to them. . . .

"The purpose is to reduce the French people to a state of shameful slavery, and to this end to smash in advance all the centres of resistance to oppression. . . ." (*Le Monde*, December 16, 1940.)

Today every worker, every honest Frenchman must admit that our party was right. And as to those who dared to assault Bonte and to call the Communists traitors, men like Chiappe and Paul Faure, it is clear

today that they were the backbone of the Fifth Column.

As to Bonte, he fully justified the confidence the party placed in him when it appointed him secretary of its parliamentary group. He behaved as a worthy member of the Central Committee when, interrogated by M.de Moissac only on December 10, he proudly claimed entire responsibility for having drawn up the letter in conjunction with Ramette; he claimed entire responsibility for having communicated it to the press, "thus performing my duty as a Communist deputy". And when this puppet of Bonnet wanted to push the interrogation, Bonte dealt him a slap in the face by saying: "As an elected deputy of the people, I owe account only to the people!"

The effect of the noble and courageous attitude of the secretary of the Communist Parliamentary Group was such that the government attempted to weaken the impression by loudly trumpeting the resignation from the Worker and Peasant Group of the wretched Valat, and his consequent liberation. For years, the bourgeoisie had been accusing Valat of lying. But his renegation of Communism was enough to whitewash him. The proletariat of Paris and the people of France, however, were proud and enthusiastic at Bonte's gesture; everybody understood that our comrade was perfectly well aware that he was not only running the danger of arrest but even risking his life; nevertheless, deceiving the vigilance of the police, he made his way into the Chamber of Deputies in order to discharge his duty as a deputy of the people.

In face of so much treason and cowardice, what immense hope is inspired by this act of a Communist!

FOUR SOLDIER DEPUTIES ASSAULTED BY THE  
JUDASES

On January 9 the Chamber of Deputies met in ordinary session. Once more the government clique found it necessary to appease the growing anger of the people. The session was presided over by the senior member, Lévy Alphandery. Four soldier deputies took their seats: Raymond Guyot (Villejuif), Michels (Paris, 15th), Fernand Grenier (St. Denis) and Mercier (Paris, 3rd). They were Communists, and had come, like Bonte before them, to raise their voice in the name of the Communist party and the revolutionary workers against the arrests of the deputies, against this war, with its sufferings and the growing dictatorship of the two hundred families.

Once again, as in the case of Bonte, the pack of Chiappe men and Socialists, led by Paul Faure's gang, demanded the expulsion of the four soldier deputies. The latter sat immovable and showed by their attitude that they were determined to exercise their parliamentary rights. The tumult rose, and the session was suspended so that these gentry might plot their blow in the lobbies, after which the sitting was resumed. The President began his address. When he arrived at the passage greeting the capitalist army, the deputies bared their heads and rose to acclaim those whom they had sent to the slaughter on behalf of the sordid interests of the two hundred families, and whom they had betrayed. Naturally, the four soldiers refused to associate themselves with this demonstration and remained silently seated.

"Stand up!" the five hundred deputies howled in



chorus. "We are the army!" replied the four soldiers, showing their army breeches beneath their civilian clothes. "Stand up!" the cry was repeated. "Release our imprisoned comrades," the four soldiers retorted. "Turn them out, turn them out!" the infuriated pack howled. "Down with the war! Down with fascism!" exclaimed the soldiers.

*Le Temps* reports the scene as follows:

"... The Chamber expressed its indignation and demanded penalties on the spot. The tumult grew and threatened to degenerate into a scuffle. Many deputies left their seats and tried to make their way towards the Stalinists so as to expel them by force.

"The men-at-arms intervened.

"The President then voted a motion to pass censure on the deputies and temporarily suspend them.

"The assembly voted by a show of hands. All hands rose spontaneously in a sort of enthusiasm.

"The vote of censure was passed and immediately put into execution.

"M. Barthe, the sergeant-at-arms, approached the extreme Left benches, pointed to the penalized deputies and formally requested them to quit the Chamber.

"They refused and resisted. Thereupon, two waves of assault precipitated themselves upon them: the one from the Right, led by M. Tixier-Vignancourt and Bietrix, and the other from the ranks of the Socialists, led by M. Saussoy, an ex-Communist dissident. . . .

[Ten lines deleted by the censor.]

"But they were pushed towards the exit and soon disappeared. They were MM. Guyot, Grenier, Mercier and Michels. The three others are awaiting a decision in their case, too, which will most likely be adopted on Thursday.

"Barely had the expelled deputies been 'conducted'

beyond the precincts of the House, when the appealed Chamber paid an ovation to its aged president, as though in excuse for having interrupted him. . . ." (*Le Temps*, January 11, 1940.)

But all this, although it admits the brutality of the assault, gives only a very feeble idea of what actually happened.

The vote of censure having been passed—unanimously—on the only soldiers present in the Chamber (for the other mobilized deputies were all officers), the president had the public gallery and the press gallery cleared. They were thus able to act behind closed doors.

The four soldier deputies refused to quit the assembly to which they had been sent by the will of the people. Immovable in face of insults and threats, they remained firmly seated. Thereupon the sorry heroes, who one day were to be cast up on the strand at Vichy, began to strike them and kick them. Michels, deputy for the 15th arrondissement, vigorously called to these brave fellows, "That's enough!" and began to return blow for blow. He cleared a circle with his fists and the blows ceased. But perceiving that they were fifty to four, the aggressors took heart of grace and again launched into the attack. It must be confessed that some of them bore the marks of the scuffle for many days after. Finally, the weight of numbers counted. Michels<sup>1</sup> was struck down and overpowered, dragged from the Chamber and flung to the floor in the lobby in an unconscious condition. The pack then turned

<sup>1</sup> Michels, deputy for Paris (15th arrondissement), shoemaker and secretary of the Leather Workers' Federation; member of the Communist party for fourteen years.

their attention to Raymond Guyot,<sup>1</sup> pulled him from his seat and likewise dragged him from the Chamber, raining a shower of blows on him on the way. As he passed through the door, tugged and beaten by thirty deputies, and incapable of making a movement, the courageous Tixier-Vignancourt—member of the traitor Doriot's "party" and entrenched in the Commissariat Department with the rank of officer—foaming at the mouth, aimed a violent kick at the pit of Guyot's stomach. Guyot was flung down by the side of the still unconscious Michels. The savage scene was repeated in the case of Mercier<sup>2</sup> and Grenier.<sup>3</sup> Nobody was to be found in the Palais-Bourbon to attend to the unconscious Michels.<sup>4</sup>

It should be mentioned that two Socialists particularly distinguished themselves in this brilliant action: Arnold (deputy for Isère), Paul Faure's right-hand man, and Barthélémy (deputy for the Seine). So did the renegade Valat.

Thus, on two occasions, against Bonte and against the four soldiers, the deputies resorted to acts of unparalleled savagery, in which the Socialists of the Paul Faure trend vied with men like Doriot and Chiappe.

What a satisfaction it is to the Communists to have

<sup>1</sup> Raymond Guyot, deputy for Villejuif, president of the Young Communist Federation of France and general secretary of the Young Communist International, member of the Central Committee of the party.

<sup>2</sup> Mercier, deputy for Paris (3rd arrondissement), secretary of the Waiters' Union.

<sup>3</sup> Fernand Grenier, deputy for Saint-Denis, an old party militant, general secretary of the Association of Friends of the Soviet Union.

<sup>4</sup> Our four comrades managed to leave the Palais-Bourbon without being arrested.

merited the hatred of these Judases! But also what a new proof of the power of Communism! It is because they feel the ground trembling under their feet that the attorneys of the bourgeoisie are emulating the Versailles. For, during that "other" war, the five Bolshevik members of the Duma and Karl Liebknecht in the Reichstag were arrested, calumniated and condemned, but never assaulted by other deputies.

Without honour or glory!

Such is the verdict passed on these wretched scoundrels by the French people.

#### THE SOLE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLE UNSEATED BY THE TRAITORS AND JUDASES

The four soldier deputies had fulfilled their duty of representing the people, of directly representing the millions of soldiers who had been driven to the shambles. Nothing remained for those who had betrayed their solemn vows and had led the country to disaster but to "finish the business". For it was clear that the attitude of the Communist deputies was winning them wider and wider sympathy among the people every day, and it might be impossible to continue the treachery much longer.

The two hundred families therefore demanded the unseating of all Communists holding elective office, and this was the cry raised in concert by that so-called "French" press whose "abominable venality" had been notorious all over the world for the last forty years.

A bill to unseat all Communists holding elective office was therefore submitted by the government—

that government which was headed by the Radical Daladier, whose "public life is a chronicle of the misfortunes of France",<sup>1</sup> and who in private life was intimately associated with the Comtesse de Crusols, an enemy agent.

The expulsion was demanded by the Vice-President of the Council, the Radical Camille Chautemps, that political chameleon, successively a member of the Bloc National, of the Left Bloc, of the National Union (with Doumergue), of the Front Populaire (with Blum), then Minister in the Union Sacrée (together with Marin), and, lastly, member of the *coup d'état* government of Pétain-Laval-Weygand; Chautemps—Stavisky's business agent and, through his brother-in-law Pressart, the public prosecutor, agent and protector, with Chiappe, of that swindler Stavisky.

And in this grand debate of January 16 we find that the most corrupt of the corrupt were the first to demand the unseating of the Communists.

All honour where honour is due: the bill was introduced by M. Georges Barthélémy, Socialist deputy for Puteaux, expert in anti-Communism and in the swindles of the Banque des Vignerons de l'Hérault in 1921, as Camelot de Roy. This honest deputy, of course, adduced no arguments or facts. The Communists were to be expelled—because they had remained faithful to their party and to their promises. The law would affect over 4,000 elected representatives: members of parliament, senators, city councillors, district councillors, mayors, municipal councillors and members of trade arbitration councils.

The Socialist party deemed it necessary to leave no

<sup>1</sup> Marx of Thiers (*Civil War in France*).

doubt as to its sentiments. Its parliamentary group, at a meeting presided over by Léon Blum, had voted for immediate expulsion by 69 votes to 38, the latter favouring postponement. To make it quite clear that they would firmly support every measure against the Communists, the Socialist chiefs announced through *Le Populaire* that they had assigned those who had been enemies of communism longest to take part in the debate. And that is why, following Barthélémy, the man designated to officially represent the Socialist party in the Chamber was the very honourable M. Chasseigne, who had been expelled from the Young Communist League for larceny. Naturally, M. Chasseigne demanded the expulsion on the ground of the danger created by a party so powerful that nothing could repress it.

Then came Frossard (Socialist Republican Union), a renegade from all parties, whose name one does not like to touch even with a pair of pincers, the man associated with the Martinique Negro, sugar and rum owners. He backed his own candidature for a ministerial post by criticizing the "indecision of the government", by complaining of the delay with which this bill was introduced, and by attacking the Third International and the great Soviet Union "with the arguments used by Léon Blum at the Tours Congress", as *Le Populaire* proudly remarked.<sup>1</sup>

The Radical party naturally associated itself with this infamous law which was about to "assassinate the Republic", not only through Daladier and Chautemps, but also through Herriot, President of the Chamber,

<sup>1</sup> Léon Blum was defeated at the Congress (1920) by a two-thirds majority voting in favour of the Third International.

Georges Bonnet, Minister of Justice and man of Munich, and of Abetz, a man connected with the most shady financial and political affairs, whose rôle in the immense treachery which was to end in the sacrifice of France is now known to every infant in the country; and, lastly, through Chichéry, chairman of the Radical Parliamentary Group, once a cyclist messenger and now a manufacturer of bicycles and supplier to the army—especially since the war.<sup>1</sup>

As to the "Right", they put forward Flandin himself, the man who sent the Munich telegram, and who, with taxpayers' money, refloated the bankrupt Aéro-postale and the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique, of which he was solicitor. Then there were François Martin and Maurice Drouot (Democratic Alliance), the latter of whom even considered the penalties insufficient. Then came the gangster Tixier-Vignancourt, of the Doriot gang, an officer in the Army Commissariat. Like the Chiappist Phillipe Henriot, the

<sup>1</sup> This is the opinion once expressed by Daladier and the Radical party on the subject of arrests of deputies (on January 13, 1928, during the debate on the demand of Barthou and Poincaré for the arrest of Communist deputies):

*Daladier* : . . . "The Constitution is formal, deputies must be free during sessions, and I not only protest against their imprisonment, I also protest against sentences based upon scoundrelly laws. (*Loud and prolonged applause from the Left benches.*)

" . . . The Republicans must remain united over the question of the imprisonment of the elected Communists. The new holy alliance which has been ostensibly formed against Communism is actually designed to combat all social reform." (*"Hear, hear!" from the extreme Left and from many of the Left benches.*) "The Radical Socialist party must remain united in order to preserve the Republican rights intact." (*Prolonged applause from the same benches.*)

patriot of Bordeaux (twice), member of a family in which husbands murder their wives to secure their dowries, this chartered quill-driver of that blackmail sheet *Gringoire* claimed to show that "France has only one enemy: Bolshevism".

The debate closed with the shameful speech of Dewez, who, slaverling and spitting at the Communist party, begged—and obtained—the retention of his seat.

But one deputy—de Kerillis—while associating himself with the measure about to be taken against the Communists, had the courage to say that attention should also be paid to the Fifth Column. "Is there not a drawing-room defeatism which has affected even the highest spheres?" he asked, and cited many proofs in support. "Are there not enemy agents on all the benches of this Chamber and in all the parties? Have not their names been known for a long time?" (The names current in the lobbies were not only Bonnet, Minister of Justice, and Flandin, Déat, Frossard and Bergery, but also Paul Faure, Arnold, René Brunet, L'Heveder and other Socialist deputies.) He was scarcely allowed to finish his speech. And on the following day his arrest was demanded for "attempting to undermine the moral of the country"!

#### A SOLDIER DEPUTY SILENCES THE PACK

But two Communists still kept their seats. Both were soldiers: Etienne Fajon, deputy for Courbevois (Seine), a young schoolmaster, and Adrien Mouton, deputy for Arles (Bouches-du-Rhône), first a miner, then a metal worker, then a railwayman and one of the founders of the Young Communist League of France.

Fajon was able to mount the tribune. And the pack of traitors and Judases, taken by surprise, could not find a single objection to hurl at him.

Calmly, emphasizing every word, Fajon lashed them stungly:

"You want to expel the elected Communists. It is because they refuse in spite of all penalties to disavow their past, their ideals and their party, which has been arbitrarily dissolved."

Having expressed full solidarity with his imprisoned comrades, Fajon went on to say:

"As to us, we remain unshakably faithful to our common ideal. . . .

"Whether you like it or not, we have been elected by universal suffrage. Mandated by the people, we consider that the people alone are entitled to pronounce on the validity of our mandates, and it is to the people alone that we have to render account.

"You are attempting today to supersede the people, arbitrarily to deprive one section of the French population of the representatives they have elected. The vote for our expulsion will be a flagrant violation of the principles of democracy, of which you dare to pretend to be the defenders." (*Interruptions from many benches.*)

Fajon exposed the real purpose of this measure. Complementing numerous earlier measures against the Communists, it was being passed on the pretext that our party, our militants and the vast mass of the workers had remained loyal to the Soviet Union. Was approval of the German-Soviet treaty of commerce and friendship the reason for the repressive measures against the Communists? The hollowness of this pre-

text became clear when Fajon revealed the true reasons for the persecution by quoting from the French government's Yellow Book. These reasons are contained in Bonnet's note of July 1—that is, two months before the German-Soviet pact was concluded. Bonnet then promised the German Ambassador in Paris that "elections will be suspended, public meetings prohibited . . . and the Communists brought to their senses".

How important Fajon's revelations are today in the light of present events! It was for purposes of treason that the men of the Comité des Forges and of the two hundred families promised their imperialist rival to "bring to their senses" the only ones who were and always are the incorruptible defenders of the interests and independence of the people of France—the Communists.

Impervious to all interruptions, Fajon continued:

"The truth is that the meaning of the measures you are taking against us has not escaped the great majority of the workers of our country.

"Your persecution is opening their eyes to the true character of the present war, which you, at a moment when you are annihilating all liberties at home, have the audacity to claim to be a war for the defence of liberty.

"The workers rightly perceive a relation of cause and effect between our expulsion and your policy of destroying social legislation, of extraordinary taxation of wages, of crushing the farmers and small tradesmen, and of high prices.

"We draw attention to the fact that this policy, which strikes at the labouring masses, has the support of all the parties in this Chamber, including the Socialist party." (*Exclamations on the Socialist extreme Left.*)

Max Lejeune (Socialist): "We wanted it. It puts new life into us."

Etienne Fajon: "... You preach the class struggle during periods of calm. In periods of storm, as in the case of the war today, or of the war of 1914, you bow before the imperialists of your country and try to induce the workers to consent to the blows aimed at them. . . .

"It is because you know that the people do not approve of this policy that you are dissolving their organizations and striking at their best defenders.

"You may persecute us today, gentlemen of the government, you may imprison some of us<sup>1</sup> and drive them from parliament.

"But you will not succeed in breaking the will of the people of France for peace, their will to preserve their social gains, the fruits of past battles, nor their will to march forward along the path of social, economic and political progress.

"This popular will will find expression in spite of your decrees, in spite of our expulsion, in spite of your persecution. One day it will be stronger than you.

"As to us, I repeat, in my own name, in the name of my comrade and friend Mouton, and of the vast majority of our comrades and friends imprisoned in La Santé, that we will always remain faithful to the cause of the working class and of proletarian internationalism, to the true cause of the people of France, to the cause of Socialism, and that we continue to believe that, together with the Soviet Union, we represent the true working-class cause, the cause of Communism." (Sitting of the Chamber of Deputies of January 16, 1940. *Journal Officiel*, January 17, 1940.)

<sup>1</sup> What Fajon said was: "Imprison the Communist deputies." It was the Presidium of the Chamber who made the correction.

## PARLIAMENTARIANS OF INTEGRITY

And the expulsion was passed by 521 to 2 (Fajon and Mouton).

Naturally, the Senate followed suit—by 294 votes for, and one abstention, on the report of Achille Naudin and after two violent speeches, one by a Poincaréist, Charles Reibel, and the other by the old Radical Chaumié. Camille Chautemps—noisily supported by the ex-Socialist policeman Fiancette—even improved on his declarations in the Chamber.

A special commission was set up by the Chamber to supervise the expulsion (what solicitude!)—a commission based on a holy alliance, made up of Frossard and Lebreton (Socialist Republican Union—ex-Socialists) and four Socialists—Barthélémy, Amédée Guy, Lambin and the lawyer Lazurick.

But on the day following this disgraceful session of the Chamber, thousands of Paris workers dashed to the printing office of the *Journal Officiel*, and in a few hours the report of the parliamentary debate was sold out. A second edition had to be printed. All labouring France read the speech of Etienne Fajon. In the factories of the Paris region, in the regiments at the front and in the rear and in the most remote villages, copies of the *Journal Officiel* passed from hand to hand, were copied and distributed by thousands and thousands of workers, soldiers and women of the people.

The great attack on the Communist party and on our faithful deputies rebounded like a boomerang on the heads of those who had launched it.

## THE ACCUSED BECOME THE ACCUSERS

### THE MASKS FALL

**F**OR having, in Paris, on the territory of France, between September 27 and October 5, 1939, and in any case at a time not authorized, by participating in the formation and functioning of a group known as the Worker and Peasant Group, and particularly in the composition and dissemination of a letter dated October 1 addressed to the President of the Chamber of Deputies and advocating a peace under the auspices of the Soviet Union, participated in activities whose direct or indirect purpose was to propagate slogans emanating from or advocated by the Third Communist International—that is, an offence punishable under Articles 1, 3 and 4 of the Decree of September 26, 1939, adopted in pursuance of the law of March 19, 1939.” (From the indictment of the Communist deputies.)

The trial was to commence on March 18, the anniversary of the Paris Commune, but it was delayed for two days. It was therefore on the morning of the 20th that it opened in the court where the big criminal cases are tried, the Court of Assizes of the Seine. It was too small, however, to contain the host of workers who were anxious to attend the trial. Nevertheless, more than half the court was occupied by police, and very little space was left when the mothers, wives and children of the accused had taken their places. For there were more than a hundred of them, those courageous companions of our comrades. Most of

## THE ACCUSED BECOME THE ACCUSERS

them working women and housewives, they had but one concern, to take advantage of every opportunity to let the fathers know that they were there, and to show them their children, whom they held shoulder high every time the accused, whether going out or coming in, could get a view of the room.

Naturally, all the trappings of military “justice” were in full evidence: the professional judges clad in military uniform, the armed guard with fixed bayonets, the insolence of the forage caps on the table of the tribunal and of the government prosecutors. . . .

The President of the Third Military Tribunal of Paris which tried the Communist deputies was Gaffajoly, Court Counsellor and “colonel”. He was later to distinguish himself in the surrender of Paris. The government prosecutor was Colonel Lorient, like Léon Blum a State Counsellor. The case for the prosecution was, however, conducted by his assistant, Commandant Bruzin, Advocate-General of the Court of Paris and former chief of the finance section of the Public Prosecutor’s office of the Seine; in other words, a common employee of high finance.

Facing them were the Communist deputies elected by the people. On the benches reserved for the defence sat Marcel Willard, two Belgian lawyers, Maîtres Chaumé and Fonteyne, Maître Thoyot, chief of the Amiens bar, Maurice Boitel, Albert Willm and others.

But it was Willard who was incontestably the soul of the defence. From the very first day he devoted all his energies to it, toiling night and day on the legal preparations for the trial.

Always a Communist, he too felt that the trial of the deputies would be a trial of Communism. At a

time when the country is a witness of so much cowardice, it is well to recall the courage of a man like Willard. Sixteen years ago Willard had wandered all over bleeding Bulgaria at the risk of his life, inquiring into trials and prisons and crying the truth in a famous brochure.<sup>1</sup> Since then he has never ceased to fight on behalf of persecuted workers wherever they might be: in the International Defence League or in the International Red Aid, he was always to be found in the breach. He was one of the initiators of the campaign in France on behalf of Dimitrov. And his book *The Defence Accuses*, illustrating by facts how workers should behave in a class court, remains a treasury of heroic examples. In the great trial of the Communist deputies Marcel Willard once more proved himself a faithful champion of the proletarian cause. For from the very outset pressure and intrigue and even threats of arrest were brought to bear upon him. Willard was a defender worthy of our brave deputies.

#### FIRST ATTEMPTS TO STIFLE THE TRUTH

Symbolical hour! At the moment the trial began, the government resigned, stricken by the peace the U.S.S.R. had just offered and concluded with Finland. Bonnet instantly disappeared from the Ministry of Justice, where he was replaced—by a Socialist, Sérol.

The President, Colonel M. Gaffajoly, thought it needful to open the trial by declaring that he accorded "full liberty of defence to the accused and to their counsel", but he requested them "not to wander into dissertations or declarations or to cite third per-

<sup>1</sup> *Ce que j'ai vu en Bulgarie (What I Saw in Bulgaria).*

sons. . . ." A superfluous warning—for the real accused were not there. When the roll-call of witnesses was read, it was announced that Daladier and Bonnet had declared that under a decree of 1812 Ministers were exempt from giving evidence in court.

Willard got up, and in a calm voice petitioned to have Daladier and Bonnet subpoenaed as witnesses.

"The Prime Minister has publicly branded the Communist deputies as traitors and enemy agents. He has made this assertion before the microphone as well as on the floor of the Chamber and in the lobbies of parliament. This is an encroachment by the executive power on the judicial power without precedent in France. They must therefore appear before the bar as witnesses.'"

And he concluded by saying:

"On the other hand, M. Edouard Daladier, as President of the Radical and Radical Socialist party, in 1935 and after, participated in conjunction with the Communists in the *Rassemblement Populaire*, and up to September, 1939, he did not seem to consider the affiliation of that party to the Third International (of whose rules and theses he could not have been ignorant) as an obstacle to their collaboration in the national life, in the parliamentary majority and even in the French government, in which they were requested to participate together with M. Daladier.'

"*The President*: 'The Tribunal will retire to deliberate.'

"On their return, the petition was rejected, as had been expected." (*L'Œuvre*, March 21, 1940.)

Herriot, President of the Chamber, was likewise cited as a witness. But he did not find it possible to come, on the grounds that "his appearance would be contrary to the principles of parliamentary immunity,



and, in addition, his high functions at the present juncture demanded all his energies"! Naturally, the Tribunal condoned this cowardice.

As to the witnesses who were present, they were unable, owing to the measures of the police, to respond to the roll-call—for they were all under lock and key. The court had to wait. . . .

But the Tribunal was already guilty of an "omission": that of interrogating the accused as to their identity, which they wished to avoid. On the protest of the defence, they had to start all over again from the beginning. The first clash was not long in coming.

#### STINGING REPLIES

The deputies were interrogated in alphabetical order, beginning with Barel, who said: "My son is at the front, and yet you accuse me of treason?" Asked what his profession was, Benoist replied: "Unseated deputy."

*The President:* "That is not a profession."

*Benoist:* "Well, then, put 'Unseated'."

The reply given by Billoux,<sup>1</sup> "Deputy for Bouches-du-Rhône (Marseilles)", drove the President into a rage. "You are no longer a deputy, you have been unseated." Reply: "I am a deputy. The workers of Marseilles who elected me have not unseated me, and you cannot alter the fact." Bonte hurled the reply: "Deputy of the glorious Faubourg Saint-Antoine de Paris."

<sup>1</sup> Billoux, deputy for Marseilles, textile worker, one of the founders of the Young Communist League of France, member of the Political Bureau, member of the party for twenty years.

Reverting to the refusal of Daladier and Bonnet to appear as witnesses, the accused attacked:

"They protested, they rose up vehemently against those who had been their accusers and yet refused to bring proof of the 'infamous' and 'ignominious' allegations.

"One after another, Barel, Demusois, Florimond Bonte, Petit, Lareppe,<sup>1</sup> Cornavin and Martel expressed their indignation. They were ex-service men, the sons of many of them were at the front; who dared to accuse them of treason? This was the burden of all their speeches, which were as much professions of faith as fiery attacks on the policy of MM. Daladier and Georges Bonnet. The atmosphere became incandescent: Munich and the abandonment of Czecho-Slovakia were frequently evoked. . . .

"The tone now became sharp and acrid. . . . The British and French governments came under fire." (*L'Epoque*, March 21, 1930.)

Fajon, in the uniform of a cavalry regiment, said:

"The soldiers may read in the papers that I am a traitor. As far as they are concerned that is not serious, for after several weeks of personal contact with me the soldiers, and I may say the officers, no longer believe that there is any truth in the calumnies. We must be allowed to argue it out with our accusers before you gentlemen. That is why I associate myself with the demand of my comrades that MM. Daladier and Bonnet be summoned before this bar as witnesses."

"The Tribunal again withdrew to deliberate on a question on which a ruling had already been made, for

<sup>1</sup> Lareppe, deputy for Charleville (Ardennes), mayor of Nonzonville, steel worker; member of the party for eighteen years.

it was the same as the one already raised. MM. Daladier and Bonnet were not to appear." (*L'Œuvre*, March 21, 1940.)

By refusing to appear as witnesses, Daladier and Bonnet themselves branded their allegations as calumnies, and themselves exposed their cowardly fear of the truth.

#### THE TRIAL MUST BE BLANKETED

For this was a fine opportunity for them—this "safe" military tribunal, whose president, five minutes before the opening, had said: "I shall drive this trial like a horse, with a whip." Not only did the government of the two hundred families not want this, but they even ordered the trial to be blanketed.

At the second sitting, on the afternoon of the 20th, the government prosecutor demanded that the trial be held *in camera*, "in the interests of order and the national defence". What an admission! For 150 years not a single political trial in France has been held *in camera*. Louis XVI was tried in public, and every member of the Convention had to announce his vote from the tribune. The Girondists and Danton were tried in public. When, in 1797, the Thermidorian reactionaries of the Directory tried Babeuf, Buonarotti and their comrades—the precursors of Communism in France—ninety-two public sittings were held in Chartres, lasting three months. It was there, in fact, that stenography was first used in court. All the innumerable trials of Blanqui, the "incarcerated", were held openly. The same was true of the trials of Varlin and Benoist Malon in connection with the First International on the eve of the war of 1870. It was so in the case of

the Communards. It was so in the case of Jules Guesde, of Lafargue after Fourmies, of Louise Michel, and of the Bureau of the C.G.T. in 1908. During that "other" war, two men, accused, not of a political act, but of "intelligence with the enemy"—Senator Caillaux and Deputy Malvy—were tried in public. The same was true of Bolo, likewise accused of "intelligence with the enemy". Public, too, were the great trials of the Black Sea sailors in 1919 and 1921, and the great trial of the Communist party leaders in the High Court in 1923, which condemned them for working against the occupation of the Ruhr. It was also true in the case of the Council of Action against the Moroccan War in 1926, of the hundreds of trials of Communists, and of the three notable courts-martial of the mutinous sailors of Calvi.

Defence counsel Willard defined the purpose of this measure as follows:

"A trial *in camera* would be very convenient. . . . These thirty French citizens have been immured for over six months—thirty deputies representing a million electors—that is, four or five million French people. A trial *in camera* would be contrary to the spirit of the Constitution of the Republic.

"Even under the Monarchy, even under the Empire, political trials were always held publicly. One has to go to Hitler to find justice gagged in this fashion. Even the Leipzig trial in connection with the burning of the Reichstag was held in public and Dimitrov was able to accuse his accusers.

"If you declare in favour of a trial *in camera*, newspaper readers tomorrow morning, one hundred and fifty years after the capture of the Bastille, will ask, as M. Bonne-vay did: 'Are we living in a democracy?'"

Throughout all this period there was only one case of a trial held *in camera* in France: that of December 22, 1894, in which Captain Dreyfus was convicted. The infamy of that faked conviction was no greater than that which was now about to be perpetrated—even as far as fraud is concerned, as we shall see.

### THE DEPUTIES GAIN THE FIRST ADVANTAGE

The results of the first day were clear. The accused had gained the advantage. That is what, in spite of the censorship, a very much embarrassed press was obliged to admit. Here, for example, is *L'Epoque* of March 21:

"Publicly accused, they expected to be publicly tried, too. The argument rapidly turned into a most virulent prosecution.

"Doctor Georges Lévy cried at the top of his voice: 'We have been expelled without being heard, by an emergency law.'

"Ambroise Croizat<sup>1</sup> cited figures. 'What does it matter if I have been expelled by 492 votes in the Chamber, when 11,000 electors sent me to that body?'

"Barel had several moving words to say: 'Exactly twenty-five years ago a bullet smashed my leg on the field of battle. Yet I am treated as a traitor!'

"And he added: 'What they want in this court is a class trial.'

"Cornavin played with paradoxes: banging the edge of the dock with his fist, he cried: 'In the matter of the

<sup>1</sup> Ambroise Croizat, deputy for Paris (14th arrondissement), one of the founders of the French Young Communist League, metal worker, general secretary of the powerful United Metal Workers' Union, member of the Central Committee of the Communist party.

defence of the country, we Communists were the only ones to see clearly.'

"Other assertions were even graver, and one was painfully surprised to see the government prosecutor sitting impassively when Finland and her rulers were made the butt of the most odious imputations.

[Five lines censored.]

"Cornavin added: 'There are men in the Chamber of Deputies who attended the Nazi Congress in Nuremberg<sup>1</sup> and who still remain deputies.'

"Panegyrics to Stalin's policy followed one after another and were all of the same tenor. . . . Finally, at 8 p.m. the tribunal decided to deliberate on the demand for a trial *in camera*, and Colonel Gaffajoly announced a decision by which publication of the proceedings is henceforth forbidden.

"It was high time. . . ."

*Le Populaire*, that specialist in anti-Communist calumny, was also obliged to admit:

"It would be vain on the evening of this long day in court to be wanting in sincerity or to seek to mitigate the facts. The truth is incontestable, and a mere analysis of the proceedings is sufficient to prove it: the Communist deputies had gained a decided advantage and the Tribunal has suffered a decided setback. . . .

"From beginning to end, the morning session was an extremely unusual and, to me, unique spectacle. When the President, Colonel Gaffajoly, took his seat he seemed completely at a loss and overwhelmed by the sense of a thorny responsibility. The accused, on the other hand, seemed to be perfectly at their ease. The President hesitated, stammered and stuttered, issued orders and at

<sup>1</sup> René Brunet, the Socialist, legal adviser to the German Embassy.

once withdrew them, whereas the accused—or their defence—retorted by motions and petitions which dropped like so many arrows on the heads of the magistrates. Corrections and retractions had to be made and everything started all over again. The very opposite of what is called the serenity of justice.”

*Le Jour*, organ of the police and of the Fifth Column, protested:

“The deputies turned the dock into a platform from which to accuse their accusers with the utmost virulence and to carry on their propaganda with the utmost fire.

“Such was the paradoxical and lamentable spectacle offered to the public!”

As to the *Action Française*, another organ of the Fifth Column, it raged:

“Before the crowded court the prisoners’ dock was turned into a Soviet platform for men who are accustomed to public speaking. They proclaimed the U.S.S.R. an element of international peace and imputed the responsibility for the war to others.”

That was why it was decided to hold the trial *in camera*; it was a confession by the accusers that they had become the accused. Who were they? We shall soon see.

## TWO FLAGRANT ILLEGALITIES

And so, on March 21, the trial opened behind closed and carefully guarded doors. Nevertheless, on that day it was almost entirely public, thanks to the efforts of the defence, who, on purely legal grounds, by filing petitions, forced the Tribunal to open the doors each time to announce its decision—automatic and to order

—by which they were refused. All day, in the Palais de Justice, crammed with police, there was a going and coming between court and lobby, where the friends, mothers and daughters of the deputies with their children were permanently stationed. And every time the sitting became public, there was a rush, not so much to hear the mutterings of the President, as to show husbands, fathers and brothers that they were still there.

In the morning, another flagrant illegality was exposed by Maître Boitel, the lawyer of the Union des Syndicats of the Seine. In the motion for the expulsion of the Communist deputies which appeared in the *Journal Officiel* on February 1 (the motion was made by Daladier and Sarraut) excerpts from the records of the preliminary investigation then still proceeding were introduced. The lawyers and Costes denounced the flagrant illegality of this procedure. Prot cried to the Tribunal: “In this trial, there is one irregularity after another. We know why you wanted to dissolve us.” And Georges Lévy denounced the docility of the judges. Naturally, the Tribunal refused the petition.

That same day, Maître Thoyot, head of the Amiens bar, exposed another monstrous illegality:

“When an offence is committed in the Palais Bourbon,” he said, “it is the duty of the President of the Chamber to enforce justice.”

He then read a letter addressed by Herriot to Prot in which the President of the Chamber declared that

“he was ignorant of what was happening outside and what allegations were being made, but as far as he knew no offence had been committed inside the Palais Bourbon.”

## THE TRIAL OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST DEPUTIES

Under all the evidence, in virtue of the constitutional law of the Republic, there was no case for legal proceedings. The assistant prosecutor, Bruzin, tried to prove the contrary, and naturally to the satisfaction of the court. The farce was such that one of the few journalists who gave a report of the proceedings wrote:

"The hearing was regulated like a court pageant. The petitions threw a certain light, only to be refused point blank an hour later. And tomorrow it will begin all over again . . . for in all likelihood the new arguments will be rejected like the rest.

"What next? A trial is being heard *in camera* and men are going to be convicted. It is not for us to decide whether they are guilty of what they have been accused or not. More, we cannot, because it is behind closed doors that they are giving their explanations, defending themselves, and reacting; and it is behind closed doors that the witnesses, among them prominent representatives of the political, scientific and ecclesiastical world, will make their contributions to the light which must be cast before the verdict is given.

"I assure you that after a day passed like that, wandering through the corridors and putting in brief appearances to hear unintelligible words read to them who are there to be judged, it is true, but also to exculpate themselves, one begins to feel rather suffocated.

"At one of the earlier sittings, one of the accused,<sup>1</sup> turning to the Tribunal, which had refused to reverse the decision to hold the trial *in camera*, said:

"It is you that are judging us today, but it is history that will judge you tomorrow.'" (*L'Euvre*, March 22, 1940.)

<sup>1</sup> Costes.

## THE ACCUSED BECAME THE ACCUSERS

### THE PROSECUTOR CONFESSES TO FORGERY

All the more since the government prosecutor confessed to forgery.

The day before, in fact, Bonte had sensationally shown, by quoting the letter to President Herriot, that an entire paragraph had been suppressed in the indictment, thus altering the whole sense, and that the punctuation of two passages had been changed.

The original, which could have been obtained from the office of the President of the Chamber (although Herriot had demanded a vote before communicating it!), proves that after the passage

"Is it possible that the peace overtures may be rejected before they are even made known and before the sovereign representation has been consulted,"

"someone" had made changes in the following:

"We, for our part, do not think so, and we demand of you, as the President of the Chamber, to approach the public authorities and demand:

"1. That parliament be assembled to discuss the question of peace in public session.

"2. That the members of parliament in the army may be allowed to take part in the deliberation of this cardinal question, on which the lives of millions of Frenchmen depend."

The first paragraph had been omitted, while in the others the numbers 1 and 2 had been left out and the colon and full stop replaced by exclamation marks, thus transforming the letter into a public appeal. A monstrous forgery!

The prosecutor, very ill at ease, declared that it was—a typist's error.

Christofol immediately retorted:

"They are deliberate errors!"

Whereupon the President warned him that next time he made such a remark he would be expelled from court and committed to the punishment cells.

The government prosecutor accepted the responsibility for these two falsifications. After which the Tribunal decided—that no importance was to be attached to these "omissions"!

And after this proof that the prosecutor had deliberately committed two forgeries, the trial at last began.

#### FROM DEFENCE TO ATTACK: THE ACCUSED ACCUSE

On March 22 the trial began—in *camera*.

And the censor forbade all references to it.

The indictment, that "master instrument" which was to confound the Communist party, was read behind closed doors—proof that it was not a very sound document.

The gentlemen of Vichy, the Lavals and Weygands, are now trying to fix the responsibility for the war. It has already been established, clearly and convincingly—by the Communist deputies, the representatives of a million and a half electors.

The declarations of the Communist deputies irrefutably established who had plunged the country into war and for what purpose, who was responsible for the slaughter, the misery, and the present bandit dictatorship. Here are a few examples.

#### IT IS THE POSSESSING CLASSES WHO HAVE ALWAYS BETRAYED THEIR COUNTRY

So exclaimed Virgile Barel, deputy for Nice, who was four times wounded in 1914-18 and who had been a member of the Communist party for twenty years.

"They say we are traitors! We represent the people of France. We are here in that capacity. The people do not betray themselves. It is the possessing classes who have always betrayed their country when their class privileges were in danger."

It was on March 22, 1940, that Barel hurled this truth at the "judges", those scoundrels who, three months later, were to sell Paris and France!

"Yes, it is the spirit of the Third International which inspires our attitude. Long live the Third International! . . . Our strength lies in the fact that we express the profound aspirations of the labouring masses. . . . I recant nothing of my part. I admire the grand work of the Russian Revolution. I continue to remain solid with the Communist party of France.

"If you condemn us, the people of France will liberate us. . . . The real masters of France have plunged her into a terrible and risky gamble. But the war is not popular. The masses of the people will not tolerate for long the régime of the gag, of force, of prisons, restrictions and concentration camps. . . ."

Gaston Cornavin, also a soldier, and a Socialist, at the time of the "other" war, deputy for Bourges, four times committed to prison (once in Germany), hurled the accusation:

"Does not the French Constitution grant the representatives of the people elected by universal suffrage the

## THE TRIAL OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST DEPUTIES

right to examine and discuss questions of interest to the country? Should not the executive power, as its name would indicate, execute the will of the Chamber and of parliament instead of imposing its own will on them?

"In demanding the convocation of parliament, we were strictly respecting your laws and your Constitution. And we did so in a constitutional way, for Article 13 of the Constitution stipulates that deputies may not be prosecuted or haled before the courts for acts committed or opinions expressed in the exercise of their functions. . . ."

## THEY HOWLED TO CONCEAL THEIR OWN CRIMES

"Who demanded that the trial be held *in camera*? The entire press. Whose press? The press of the Aubins and the Poiriers. . . .<sup>1</sup> The entire corrupt and venal press, in order to conceal their own crimes and their own corruption, will tomorrow cry that we are traitors.

"We Communists have never been friends of the Oustrics and Staviskys. We have never destroyed an air field valued at 1,063,000,000 francs, as others did in 1919.

"We Communist deputies have never ceded the mineral wealth of Lorraine for a few hundred millions, when they were estimated to be worth over 8,000,000,000 gold francs. We have never been implicated in immoral or financial scandals. We are clean. The purpose of demanding a trial *in camera* is to create the belief that we are capable of such crimes and villainies. But you will never succeed. . . ."

Jean Christofol, deputy for Marseilles, a customs official who was dismissed as one of the leaders of the

<sup>1</sup> Aubin, editor of *Le Temps*, organ of the Comité des Forges, and Poirier, editor of *Le Figaro*, were arrested for espionage in favour of Germany. The latter "succumbed to illness" in jail.

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general strike of February 12, 1934, and who in 1934 went to Germany at the risk of his life to inquire into the fate of Thaelmann, also declared:

"You want to condemn us behind closed doors. It is because you are afraid of us. But the desire to gag us in this trial is a condemnation of our accusers. Despite all your measures, you will not gag us, for the truth is known to all the people of France, who regard us as their sole defenders."

## CAPITALISM AND NOT THE WORKING PEOPLE MUST PAY THE COST OF THIS WAR

So began Charles Benoit, deputy for Villeneuve St. Georges (Seine-et-Oise) and secretary of the Railwaymen's Union:

"This is a class trial. . . . Who will pay for this war—the capitalists or the workers? That is the question. We say that capitalism and not the working people must pay the cost of this war. If we had been left at liberty we would have said so repeatedly. In fact, they flung us into prison in order to get rid of inconvenient witnesses and objectors and to prevent us from exposing the crimes of capitalism."

Was he not right?

He was echoed by Félix Brun, deputy for Lyons, severely wounded in the last war, vice-president of the Revolutionary ex-Combatants' Association, founded by Barbusse and Vaillant-Couturier:

"You wanted to get rid of us. You wanted to prevent the war invalids from demonstrating the necessity for peace by their own example."

THE CHARACTER OF THE WAR AND THE DUTY OF THE  
PROLETARIAT

Emile Cossoneau, Paris locksmith, deputy for Seine-et-Oise and mayor of Gagny, ironically defined them—in the words of the examining magistrate.

“ . . . M. de Moissac said that the Communist International enjoins us to combat the imperialist war. Thus our accusers have themselves defined the character of this war!”

And what a slap in the face for the men of Vichy are these proud and staunch words of Georges Lévy, deputy for Lyons and thirty years a member of our party:

“I have been in political life for forty-three years, yet most of the time I have pursued my profession as doctor of the poor. For forty-three years I have served my ideas, not made them serve me!”

Louis Prot, railway mechanic, deputy for Amiens and mayor of Longueau, said:

“You will be obliged to convict us because we have remained faithful to our doctrine. We were Communists yesterday, we are Communists today, and we shall be Communists tomorrow!”

With all his strength and passion, Alfred Costes, the metal worker who defeated the Saigneur of Billancourt,<sup>1</sup> the militant most highly respected by the metal workers of Paris and president of their trade union, hurled in the faces of the wretched “judges”:

“For five months we have been confined to our cells, deprived of correspondence and of newspapers, and now

<sup>1</sup> Saigneur (blood-letter) of Billancourt—the name given to Renault by the metal workers.

the government prosecutor is demanding a trial *in camera*. History has already pronounced its verdict. Its full weight will fall, not on the men in this dock, but on others. . . .”

And what a slap in the face for the rascals without faith or law who demanded the expulsion of the Communist deputies were the following words:

“I am asked to renounce my ideas. But they are my very life! Renounce them? Never! I declare my complete solidarity with all the actions of our party. I know that our hope in Communism, in a higher ideal for the majority of humanity, will triumph, despite prison or death.”

So forceful were his words that even the press had to admit it:

“At midday, when Costes finished his long speech, the sitting was adjourned, and as the lawyers, young and old, filed out, one could see that they were deeply moved. . . .”

VYING IN HEROISM

There are no other words to describe the bearing of our comrades. One finds it hard to select quotations, they are all so profound, so sincere and so animated by an irresistible revolutionary spirit.

Take, for example, Waldeck-Rochet, deputy for Nanterre-Colombes, member of the Central Committee, who joined our party at the age of eighteen in 1923, at the time when the Political Bureau had been committed to trial before the High Court for activities directed against the occupation of the Ruhr:

“ . . . I am of the opinion that the Anglo-French policy as hitherto pursued may lead to grave disaster. . . .



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"That policy consisted, year after year, in making one concession after another to Hitler in the hope of directing the appetites of Nazi Germany towards the East and inciting her to go to war with the Soviet Union."

Waldeck-Rochet expressed his full approval of the letter:

"... because the true aims of this war in no way correspond with the true interests of the French people."

"This is supposed to be a war for justice, liberty and democracy," he continued.

"We stand for justice and liberty for the people; we are even the most bitter adversaries of Hitlerism and fascism.

"But can one seriously speak of a war for liberty when all the internal liberties of this country have been destroyed, when the working class is being oppressed and persecuted by methods which resemble those employed in Germany?

"The aims of this war, on both sides, have nothing in common with justice and liberty. . . .

"I declare that it was not we who defined the character of the war; it is the predominance of private interests and the suppression of liberties and the will of the people which stamps this war as an imperialist war. . . ."

## COMMUNISM HAS LENT MEANING TO OUR LIVES

And this one-time shepherd, later a market gardener's labourer, who became a member of the Central Committee of our party and director of its agricultural section, concluded his fine speech with the following moving statement:

"I remain faithful to my past. Yes, sirs, I retain my faith in Communism. What is more, present events have

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only strengthened my convictions. This war, coming twenty years after the war of 1914-18, proves that capitalism always engenders new wars, and at shorter and shorter intervals. . . .

"And since we have faith in the justice and ultimate victory of our cause, why should we renounce it?

"Renounce it? Why, Messieurs, it is Communism that has lent meaning to our lives. All that I have learnt, all that I am, I owe to the men alongside of whom I have fought for years. Some of these men are sitting here in this dock. . . .

"True, it is hard to be separated from those one loves. I think, for example, of my wife, who is in delicate health, and of my three children, the oldest of whom is not yet five. I love them very much, I assure you. But just because I love them, I want them never to be ashamed of their father. I will remain faithful to my past."

## OUR SOLICITUDE IS FOR THE IMMEDIATE INTERESTS AND FUTURE OF THE FRENCH PEOPLE

Joanny Berlioz, professor, member of the Central Committee, twice wounded in the "other" war, champion of the Third International, member of our party for twenty-one years, replying to the charge of having international connections, said:

"We have never concealed the fact! But we are not the only ones that have them. The capitalists of the various countries have international connections in their world consortiums, like the iron and steel magnates, for example, in their steel cartel—in order to divide up the profits. The men of the Franco-German Committee<sup>1</sup> had them too, and still have them today, most likely, with the object of furthering the penetration of Nazi influences

<sup>1</sup> M. le comte de Brinon.

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into our country. They have never been called upon to disavow these relations. . . .

"The indictment declares that the Communists are governed by an iron discipline. We agree. It is a discipline to which we conform voluntarily, resulting from common ideas and common activities. The essence of the idea is the fight against the forces of capitalism, which is retrogressing to a medieval past, as, for example, in those countries where fascist dictatorships prevail; it is the determination to advance unceasingly towards unlimited progress; it is for us, Frenchmen, a solicitude for the immediate interests and future of the French people; and it is the ardent desire to put an end to the exploitations of man by man."

And Berlioz recalled July 14, 1935, when Daladier marched with raised fist, side by side with the leaders of our party.

#### UNALTERABLY FAITHFUL

"Twenty years ago, with full realization of what I was doing, and after mature reflection, I joined the Communist party, for it was in my eyes the only party which defended the truth. I have remained unalterably faithful to my convictions to this day. And all the events, including those of recent times, have only reinforced them. . . .

"The letter to President Herriot was legal. It only served the government as a wretched pretext to get rid of adversaries who might be an obstacle to the continuation of the war at home—the only one, in fact, which you have so far known how to wage."

#### WHO ARE THE TRAITORS?

And Berlioz explained at length that throughout all its history the Communist party of France had been

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associated in the most intimate fashion with the struggle against imperialist war. He said:

"Unlike the leaders of all the other French parties, we Communists have never had any connections with Hitler."

And he concluded by saying:

"If you convict us, then convict the republican Constitution of our country, which has been the fruit of a long struggle of the people. . . . To convict us will mean . . . approving the attacks on our most sacred liberties, it will be a blow at the finest traditions of France. . . .

"During the police investigations, not only were Communist writings and ideas condemned, but also intellectual masterpieces which have nothing in common with the Third International. Victor Hugo, Anatole France, Pottier, with his splendid songs, and others were declared to be subversive writers! That is a proof that this is not a war for liberty, for liberty is being trampled underfoot in our country. . . ."

#### WHERE THERE IS DESPOTISM THE PEOPLE HAVE NO COUNTRY

Etienne Fajon, a soldier, who, in an attempt to bribe him, had been provisionally released until trial, pursued the attack:

"The crime of which we are accused," he said, "is that of having raised two political questions: the question of peace, and the question of the attitude of our country to the Soviet Union. Some of my comrades have already said: our hostility to the war is not dictated by a sheepish pacifism; it is a result of the analysis we have made of this war. . . ."

And Fajon then went on to show that the position of the Communists depends on the character of a war; he defined imperialism, and said:

"We are of the opinion that the present war is an imperialist war, and that today the question of oil and other raw materials takes precedence over the defence of democracy. . . ."

Fajon then quoted various articles from *La France Militaire* and *Le Jacobin*, which, in line with several independent journalists, claimed that there was no secret Soviet-German agreement.

"La Bruyère wrote that where there is despotism, the people have no country," Fajon said.

"It must be said that it is a despotism that now prevails in our country."

"Why", he continued, "is war material being officially sent to Finland? Why has M. Daladier been keeping troops in readiness against the Soviet Union ever since February 26, when we are in the thick of a war with Germany?"

And, like the other accused, Fajon declared:

"If our ideas are crimes, then we should be convicted, for we hold to them firmly, even if it means the guillotine."

Fajon recalled Diderot, who perceived his ideas spreading beyond the confines of his prison.

"Because economic and social phenomena in advance of man await the actions of man."

And he concluded by saying:

"Communism is a synthesis of the working-class movement with the Socialist idea. The working-class move-

ment sprang up again five years after the Commune with new and augmented vigour. Socialist thought cannot be suppressed. We await judgment with confidence: whether we are acquitted or condemned, we Communists know that the future belongs to us, come what may."

### OUR ACCUSERS ARE THE REAL TRAITORS TO THE COUNTRY!

This was the accusation launched at the end of his vigorous speech by François Billoux, member of the Political Bureau of the Communist party.

He attacked from the very outset:

"Why are we being tried? The truth is that it was realized that our letter might make it possible to unmask those who here, in this country, are responsible for the war from which we are now suffering. . . ."

"We said last September that peace was possible; and we now say it more firmly than ever. . . . I fully approve of the letter. . . . We are Communists, and we declare it with pride. Only the other day an officer of the Gardes Mobiles said to me: 'I don't know what the Communists could have inculcated in their members; I don't know what virus they have inoculated them with; but the more we fight them the more their numbers grow!'

"Yes . . . you can take all the measures you like against the Communists, you can try them behind closed doors; it will not help you: Communism grows out of your very régime. Your capitalist régime is marching to its fate; you cannot prevent it; it will founder, and do what you will it is we who represent the future.

"The indictment contains the words: ' . . . Communism, the only means of saving European peace.' We thank the government prosecutor; that exculpates us

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from the charge of having, as Communists, wanted war. Is it because you are afraid that the country knows that Communism is the only means of saving peace in Europe that you want to try us *in camera*? If so, I am not afraid of a trial *in camera*, because the whole country has already understood!"

Billoux explained the programme of Jules Guesde's French Workers' party, evoked by the Worker and Peasant Group:

"... In 1880, Communism could be nothing more than a hope; today it can be a reality, as it already is on one-sixth of the globe, in the Soviet Union!"

And, after having denounced the warmongers, Billoux proudly exclaimed:

"You will not prevent us in the course of these proceedings from saying all we have to say, or from striving to show that our accusers are the accused and the real traitors to the country."

## LET THE TRIBUNAL JUDGE US IN THE EYES OF THE PEOPLE IN THE LARGEST HALL IN PARIS!

It was Florimond Bonte, deputy for Paris (11th arrondissement), member of the Central Committee, and the courageous secretary of the Communist Parliamentary Group, who launched this challenge at the accusers concealed behind the judges. Our comrade had the right to speak in a loud voice: his father had fought in the Army of the North under Faidherbe in the war of 1870-71, and he himself had been twice wounded between 1914 and 1917, the second time while a lieutenant in command of a company. And

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in the war of 1939-40 he had two sons at the front. While a prisoner of war in Germany in 1918, Bonte took part in the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. An ardent defender of the October Revolution, he, with Barbusse and Vaillant-Couturier, was one of the founders of the A.R.A.C.<sup>1</sup> He is an indefatigable champion of the Third International and opponent of Social-Democratism.

"Anatole France said that 'one believes one is dying for one's country, when one is actually dying for the industrialists'," he began. "Scratch the varnish off pretexts, strip the words of their pathos, brush aside the hypocritical declarations about justice and liberty, and you will find yourselves face to face with the repulsive reality—the struggle for markets, for spheres of influence, for a monopoly of sources of raw material, and for world domination."

Speaking clearly and at length, Bonte revealed the causes of the war; he showed how the two hundred families were taking advantage of it not only to pocket profits and super-profits, but also, step by step, by means of a ruthless war at home, to establish the dictatorship of high finance.

He denounced the rôle of the Socialist party and of the reformist leaders of the General Confederation of Labour.

"The Social-Democratic parties," he said, "which today are neither social nor democratic, have firmly united their efforts with those of the bourgeoisie and have permanently sabotaged the realization of national and international united action."

<sup>1</sup> Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants (Republican Association of Ex-Servicemen).

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"Are not these Social-Democratic parties the strongest support today of the reactionaries and the big bourgeoisie? Are they not trying to harness the working class to the capitalist chariot by means of repression, and to place them at the service of the big employers and war profiteers?"

### *Who is Responsible?*

"The general responsibility for the war rests on the entire capitalist system, on its contradictions, the unevenness of its development, its conflicts and its crises, owing to which one country outstrips another, now becomes stronger, now weaker, and all are, therefore, at loggerheads with each other. They are intensifying their feverish but fruitless efforts to push their contradictions into the background and to resolve them at the expense of the socialist country, the Soviet Union. . . ."

"As to individual responsibility, all the rulers of the belligerent states share it in common.

"In our country, it is the opponents of the Communist policy, the saboteurs of collective security, the signatories of the Munich pact, the financial oligarchs, who bear the responsibility. They prefer the catastrophe of war to an alliance with the Land of Socialism. . . ."

After recalling the purpose of the letter which he, as secretary of the Communist Parliamentary Group, had sent to President Herriot, he, as a true representative of the people, turned to the Tribunal in the rôle of accuser:

"In order to show that we do not fear publicity, I demand that the tribunal be transferred to one of the largest halls in Paris and that delegates from the factories, the army, the navy and the air force be invited; that, on the one hand, the government prosecutor summon all the witnesses he wants, invite all the Ministers, all the

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deputies who decided to expel us without giving us a hearing; and that, on the other, only one of us be allowed to speak, no matter who, let him be chosen at random. I am tranquil as to the verdict of the people. . . ."

He was right—and neither the President nor the government prosecutor could find one word in reply.

## OUR CLASS IS NEITHER TO BE BOUGHT NOR SOLD!

At this hour, when all the treachery, all the rottenness of the capitalist régime stands out in all its hideousness, we have preserved for the last the brief declaration of Jean Bartolini, a modest worker, employee of the Toulon arsenal, trade union secretary, and member of the Central Committee of our party:

"We belong to our class, Messieurs, a class which is neither to be bought nor sold. . . . In the eyes of the workers and peasants we are a standard. If they love us, it is because all our life we have been devoted to the struggle for the amelioration of their lot, and they know it. The militants here present—trade union secretaries, federation secretaries, workers' delegates—have fought for the working people. Yet you would have us renounce our past! You must know us very badly. We are workers who know what poverty means. On the one hand, a salary of 107,000 francs a year to renounce our party, and on the other the prospect of prison. There may have been traitors, but we are Communists. We have made our choice. Faced with the alternative of renunciation rewarded by 107,000 francs a year and dishonour, or prison and the honour of working-class militants, we have not hesitated for a moment!"

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Let the Vichy gentry search their own ranks; they will find no one to resemble Bartolini, to resemble our heroic deputies.

Why the government ordered the trial to be held *in camera* is perfectly clear. If the people had seen the magnificent attitude of these men and had heard their ringing accusations, they would have understood the magnitude of the treason and put an end to it. With this infamous trial, the scoundrelly accusers completed the preparations for their colossal conspiracy against the people of France.

#### THE WITNESSES SOLIDLY BACK THE ACCUSED

It was in an atmosphere of dictatorship, police spying, and arbitrary action that the witnesses gave their evidence. Men of all parties and of all walks of life paid high tribute to the Communist deputies.

Who were the witnesses for the prosecution? Policemen, vulgar agents-provocateurs like Commissary Roches. The purpose of their "evidence" was so transparent that the Tribunal for the first time in the course of the trial did not disallow Willard's contention that

"the testimony of all the witnesses for the prosecution only relates to facts which occurred within the precincts of parliament."

Hence, "constitutionally" speaking, no charge could be upheld against the Communist deputies!

Then came the witnesses for the defence.

"A day of very moving scenes," this day of March 29, the newspapers admitted.

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Marcel Cachin appeared in the morning accompanied by his daughter Marcelle, a doctor, just returned from a concentration camp to which she had been confined with her husband for having accompanied two thousand Spanish refugees to Chile. In spite of his grave state of health, our old comrade had come specially from his Breton province to proclaim his complete solidarity with the accused. On his appearance, the latter rose in a body as a mark of homage to one of the founders of the French workers' party and one of the men who had done most of all to secure the affiliation of the French Socialist party to the Third International. . . . When he left the court, women and children dashed towards him and tearfully embraced him. That was a moving scene—for all but the servile "judges"!

Professor Langevin, Member of the Institute, collaborator and friend of Professor Einstein and of Marie and Pierre Curie, gave evidence in the clear and precise tones of a mathematician.

"I have studied the Marxian theory," he said. ". . . It is representatives of that theory who stand here in the prisoners' dock. Well, I too am a Marxist. I make use of that theory . . . it is thanks to it that I have made new discoveries in the physical sciences. . . ."

Then, after René Maublanc, equally solid with the accused, came Daniel Renoult, Counsellor-General of the Seine and vice-mayor of Montreuil. Daniel Renoult was a contributor to *L'Humanité*; he was a witness of the assassination of Jaurès on the eve of that other war; he had already fought as a Socialist and soldier against that first imperialist war; he was an old and

faithful member of our party. He was brought to the court from a concentration camp.

He, too, with vigour and enthusiasm, and proud of the work of our party against the imperialist war, proclaimed his full and unreserved solidarity with the accused in all their acts. After which, handcuffed like a malefactor, he was removed by his escort, back to the concentration camp from which he had come.

Jean-Richard Bloch, the well-known writer, former director of *Ce Soir*, likewise expressed his complete solidarity with our comrades.

So did the Communist Storez, wounded in both legs in the "other" war, and led into court by his wife and daughter—of which *Le Populaire* was careful not to say a word.

Curé Roubinet came to declare that the mayor of his commune, although a Communist, had never persecuted Catholics, and that this Communist mayor had done more for the children of the town than any previous mayor. This mayor was our old comrade Berlioz, now sitting in the prisoners' dock.

Then came Abbé Héral, Kenya missionary, followed by Professor Wallon of the Sorbonne, both of whom expressed their solidarity with the accused. The next day Lord Farringdon gave evidence. He said that "he was deeply surprised at the prosecution of members of parliament", and declared that he was

"very astonished to see deputies arrested and brought to trial for addressing a letter to the President of the Chamber. . . . This trial is having a bad effect on the prestige of France in England, where it is extremely unpopular."

WE WANT TO RID THE PEOPLE OF FRANCE OF THOSE WHO ARE LEADING THEM TO THE HECATOMBS AND TO RUIN

Then followed a powerful indictment of those who had ordered the trial, of those who were responsible for the war of 1939-40, of those who had plunged the people of France into their present misery and suffering.

On that day, April 3, 1940, François Billoux, deputy for Marseilles, rose up in the name of all the accused, three excepted,<sup>1</sup> in the name of the French Communist party, and as a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee, and pronounced a vigorous indictment against the criminals who had reduced the people of France to slavery in order to save the privileges of the two hundred families.

"In this trial", he said, "it is not the Communist deputies nor Communism that stand accused. That is the profound conclusion to be drawn from this big class trial."

Without a single interruption, before judges and prosecutors who simulated attention, but impatiently awaited the end, he read the magnificent *Declaration of the French Communist Deputies*.<sup>2</sup>

Billoux ended with the following peroration:

"... Yes, we love the people of France and we want to rid them of those who are leading them to the hecatombs and to ruin, of those who have inflicted upon them the disgrace of the dictatorship. . . .

"Long live a free France! Long live a happy and strong France!

<sup>1</sup> Vazeilles, Puech (Parsal) and Béchart.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 111.

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"Under the banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, following the example of Karl Liebknecht and Dimitrov, forward to Communism!"

"The proceedings are closed," pronounced the President dryly.

For those lackeys—the judges and prosecutors, who had no other faith but their advancement and their sinecures—the end had at last been reached. All that remained was to read the verdict, already drawn up by the Minister of Justice (Bonnet) and the Chef de la Stûreté, and which the new Minister, Sérol (Socialist), had approved without changing a single comma.

#### TOTAL SENTENCES—207 YEARS OF IMPRISONMENT

Naive people may have thought that the first to be condemned would be one of the men responsible for Munich and for everything that ensued—the Right Honourable Monsieur Bonnet, ex-Minister of Justice, the personification of integrity and incorruptibility.

All the more that this gentleman had refused a second time to appear as a witness. His first excuse was that he was a Cabinet Minister, the second that he was—sick. Excuses which the Tribunal naturally accepted.

"In other circumstances", the newspaper *Le 1er Avril* wrote, "this declaration of insolvency would have meant the end of the trial. . . ."

Then came the verdict.

Two questions had been submitted to the Tribunal:

*First question:* "Are the accused guilty of having participated in the formation and functioning of the Worker

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and Peasant Group, whose aim it was to propagate, directly or indirectly, the slogans of the Third International?"

*Answer:* "Yes."

*Second question:* "Are they guilty of having participated in the publication and circulation of a letter addressed to the President of the Chamber of Deputies the purpose of which was to advocate peace under the auspices of the Soviet Union?"

*Answer:* "No, except in the case of Bonte and Ramette."

In other words, the Tribunal itself did not find all the accused guilty with regard to the letter to Herriot, which was the sole ground (pretext) for their arrest and trial. And it was a Socialist, M. Sérol, who was at that moment Minister of Justice!

Nevertheless, the accused were sentenced to the maximum penalties.

*Nine sentences of five years' imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 francs.*

*Twenty-seven sentences of five years' imprisonment and a fine of 4,000 francs.*

*Eight sentences of four years' imprisonment and a fine of 4,000 francs (suspended).*

And, in the case of all, deprivation of civil and political rights for five years.<sup>1</sup>

#### <sup>1</sup> SENTENCES PRONOUNCED AGAINST FRENCH COMMUNIST DEPUTIES

*By the 3rd Military Tribunal of Paris (April 3, 1940)*

Tried in their absence: Thorez, Jacques Duclos, Catelas, Dutilleul, Monmousseau, Péri, Ramette, Rigal and Tillon (five years' imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 francs).

Then: Barel, Bartolini, Benoit, Berlioz, Bonte, Billoux, Croizat, Cornavin, Cossoneau, Costes, Christofol, Damusois, Fajon, Grésa, Gaou, Lévy, Lareppe, Lozeray, Midol, Musmeaux, Mocquet,



"Before the assembled guard . . . without the presence of counsel"—as the Military Code prescribes—the clerk of the court read the verdict to the heroic representatives of the people.

Scarcely had the guard grounded arms when the agents of the political police appeared. Brun, Jean Duclos and Dadot, severely wounded ex-service men, who had been at provisional liberty, were now arrested; together with others who had received suspended

Martel, Petit, Prachay, Prot, Rochet and Touchard (five years' imprisonment and a fine of 4,000 francs).

Lastly: Brun, Jean-Marie Duclos, Dadot and Renaud Jean (severely wounded ex-combatants), Philippot (who was sick when the trial began), and Béchar, Puech (Parsal) and Vazeilles, the three latter of whom disavowed the party (four years' imprisonment—suspended—and a fine of 4,000 francs).

*By the Tribunal of Douai (August 28, 1939)*

Quinet, deputy for Pas-de-Calais, miner: four months' imprisonment for having signed a leaflet expressing solidarity with the peace policy of the Soviet Union.

*By the Military Tribunal of Marseille (May 3, 1940)*

Pourtalet: five years' imprisonment for "actions calculated to undermine the security of the state."

*By the Military Tribunal of Arras (November 28, 1939)*

Maurice Thorez (tried in his absence): six years' imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 francs with deprivation of civil and political rights for ten years (also, by government decree of February 20, 1940, forfeiture of French nationality).

*By the Tribunal of Dunkerque (January 27, 1940)*

André Marty (tried in his absence): five years' imprisonment and a fine of 6,000 francs, with deprivation of civil and political liberties for ten years, for his letter to Léon Blum of September, 1939 (also by government decree of January 30, 1940, forfeiture of French nationality).

sentences, they were handcuffed and led off to a concentration camp.

All the condemned men, together with Fajon, who was arrested, were conducted to the prison of La Santé. . . .

The next day, the same newspapers which reported the conviction of the Communist deputies announced:

"The centenary of Emile Zola was celebrated in a very brief ceremony at the Panthéon. MM. Saraut and Herriot, surrounded by the friends of the novelist, descended on the morning of April 4 to the blue-lighted crypt to bedeck with flowers the tomb of Zola, which lies side by side with that of Victor Hugo. . . ."

Zola!

*Money*—describing the coming to power of finance capital! *Nana*—describing the corruption it brought in its train, today grown a thousand times worse! *Débâcle*—that merciless indictment which has retained all its force today, after a political and military débâcle compared with which that of the Second Empire was mere child's play! *Germinal*—describing how the proletariat grows conscious of its exploitation and of its mission!

Did they understand why the ceremony was so brief and the centenary of the great writer glozed over? Does not the spectre of Zola cry out:

" . . . To have been a prey to an urge for the truth was a crime. . . ."

" . . . The frightful despotism has returned. . . . Free speech is forbidden! Blows shatter the lips of those who defend the truth."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Emile Zola, *Letter to the Youth*, December 24, 1897.

On the morrow of this trial of the Communist deputies, which was marked by infinitely more rascalities, forgeries, and false accusations than the Dreyfus case, did not the Ministers, politicians, generals, all that band of lackeys prostituted to the Golden Calf, tremble at the mere memory of:

"*I accuse . . . the rascally gang who are insolently jubilating over the defeat of justice and simple honesty.*"

And of the clarion call:

"When the truth is forced underground it acquires such explosive power that on the day it bursts it blows everything up with it."<sup>1</sup>

It only remained for the donkey to kick. And it did.

"What is incomprehensible is that men like Costes, for example, whose whole life has been irreproachable, are not even today denouncing Moscow imperialism. . . . That is the mystery which troubles us."

That was written by *Le Populaire*, which had once again become the joint organ of Paul Faure and Léon Blum.

But scarcely had the sentence been pronounced than the government rendered the greatest homage it could to our comrades. On April 6 the papers announced in big headlines that "Communist propaganda is to be sternly repressed. To be punishable by death."

This referred to the decree of April 13, 1940, drafted by the new Minister of Justice, the Socialist Sérol,

"under which", the press wrote, "persons who in specified cases are convicted of having prepared, supplied or

<sup>1</sup> Emile Zola, *Letter to M. Félix Faure, President of the Republic (l'accuse)*, January 13, 1898.

stored for the purpose of distribution instruments of propaganda of the Third Communist International shall be deemed guilty of high treason and be liable to the death penalty."

And it was even provided that Communists convicted under this decree should not be shot, but guillotined.

Furthermore, emergency powers were conferred on prefects to make arrests at their discretion and without charge being preferred. At the same time measures were taken to evacuate the concentration camps in the vicinity of Paris to the terrible southern prisons of Oran.

This was a proof—as our brave deputies had proclaimed—that, far from intimidating the working class, the trial had inspired it with greater confidence in its strength and in the justice of its cause.

\* \* \*

On the eve of the shameful capitulation which surrendered Paris unconditionally, an infamous item appeared in the press:

"The Court of Appeal has rejected diverse petitions, notably that of twenty-seven of the Communist deputies who were convicted on April 3.

"Among other appeals rejected was that of Carnotel, who had been condemned to death at Versailles on March 19 for strangling a young girl from Aulnay-sous-Bois." (*Petit Parisien*, May 24, 1940.)

While Colonel Gaffajoly, President of the Military Tribunal, fled in an official automobile to the village of Samatan in le Gers, where he still was at the end

of July, the Communist deputies were transferred on the eve of the surrender of Paris from the prison of La Santé to the prison of the Department of Angers. On June 18, when the war planes were bombing and machine-gunning the town, they were again removed, intermingled with ordinary criminals, to La Rochelle. Fortunately, the soldiers who escorted them learnt their identity on the way and gave them food. From La Rochelle the courageous deputies were transferred to the convict prison on the Île de Ré; but not for long, for three days later they were sent to Tarbes. Once again they were removed, on June 27, when they were taken from Tarbes to the prison of Puy (Haute-Loire), where they are to this day.

Their régime, far from being ameliorated, has been made severer still on the orders of the sinister Laval,<sup>1</sup> the real head of the Pétain government. Two of them, the old militant Doctor Georges Lévy, deputy for Lyons, and Albert Petit, deputy for the Seine, are constantly spitting blood. But that does not worry a government which has sold France in order to install the uncontrolled rule of the two hundred families with the help of foreign bayonets.

<sup>1</sup> This was written before the dismissal and arrest of Laval by Pétain.

## THE COMMUNISTS WERE RIGHT

EVERY Frenchman can now judge for himself whether, if the proposals of the Communists, if their foresight and wisdom had been heeded, our country would not have been saved the war and its disasters. But the French rulers, while they did not want peace, did not prepare for war, and deliberately paved the way to treason. . . .

On behalf of the Central Committee of the French Communist party,

MAURICE THOREZ.

JACQUES DUCLOS.

This was the terrible conclusion drawn by the Communist party in its stirring "Manifesto to the People".

The Communists of France were right in denouncing the Treaty of Versailles from the day of its signature as bearing within it the germ of new wars more frightful than the one that had just ended. They were right in declaring that the crushing of the German people—for the benefit of the financial oligarchies of all countries—had cast into Germany the seed of a formidable ultra-nationalistic movement of revenge. The French Communists were right in ceaselessly combating this rapacious imperialist treaty, as when they opposed the occupation of the Ruhr, for which we paid by the trial of our Political Bureau before the High Court and the court-martial of hundreds of our comrades.

The Communists of France were right in denouncing

the policy of pillage and aggression pursued by diverse imperialist governments of France, as calculated to foster the idea of revenge and reaction in Germany.

The Communists were right when they initiated the powerful Popular Front movement of the working people: in uniting the whole nation in a struggle for a better life and to wrest greater liberties from the two hundred families, the Popular Front re-endowed the French people with the enthusiasm of its great epochs—that is, with an invincible force. And the Communists were right when they declared that the forces of progress, liberty and peace among the bigger nations of the world, united with the Popular Front in France, could prevent war.

The Communists were right when they declared that any attack on the Popular Front—and, more so, on its essential force, the working class and its organizations, the C.G.T., and the Communist party—would undermine peace and hasten war. The Communists were right in declaring that a parallel policy of capitulation in foreign affairs would strengthen the forces of war.

Lastly, the Communists were right when they denounced the imperialist policy as leading the country to disaster. They were again right when—after the war had broken out—they demanded through their deputies a public discussion of the problem of peace in parliament at a time when it was still possible to seize the opportunity arising out of the collapse of the multi-national Polish state. But such a discussion would have roused an irresistible movement in the country, which would have compelled the French government to start peace negotiations.

As our *L'Humanité* wrote: "Peace might have been concluded, and France would not have witnessed the devastation of its cities and villages, nor the occupation, nor the death of thousands and thousands of her children. . . . The Communists were right—as always."

But it is also clear that this government and all those who had paved the way for and approved of this war—that is to say, all the politicians and parties except the Communists, all those who had already begun to suppress the workers, the people—would have been utterly discredited. They would no longer have had an excuse for the unparalleled super-exploitation of the workers, or for the brutal measures of dictatorship over the people. A new popular wave—more powerful even than that of 1935-36—would have risen. That is what the two hundred families did not want.

The Communist party said, "The enemy is in our midst." "They" confirmed it by waging a pitiless and ferocious war at home against the Communists, who claimed and proved that the interests of the two hundred families are diametrically opposed to those of the people of France. That is why the Communist deputies were hounded and arrested. That is why they were dubbed traitors and brutally sentenced after six months in jail.

There we have the real meaning of this "queer war". The war was to be utilized to "put an end" to the Communists and, with them, to that rallying force of the working people in defence of their most precious possessions: Bread, liberty and peace.

And it was just because the Communists are always right that, the nearer the catastrophe approached, the more the lackeys of the two hundred families, scared at the thought of having to render account, struck at the only men who told the people how to defend their lives and their future.

"... certain richer Frenchmen feared victory in this war almost more than defeat, as likelier to bring 'revolution', an elastic but fear-inspiring term, that in their mind meant", etc. (Edgar Ansel Mowrer in the *New York Post*.)

That is what explains the ferocity of the Versaillais against the Communists.

That is why, even before the trial of the deputies ended (on March 29), the masters of the country loudly trumpeted through their "Socialist" deputy, Barthélémy:

"Communism, which refuses to die, must be annihilated. . . . The scope of the trial is too limited: there still remain the leaders of the Central Committee and of *L'Humanité* and the men at the head of the Communist trade unions. . . .

"For our [the Socialists'] part . . . we do not fear to demand their execution from the floor of the Chamber." (*Le Matin*.)

That is why, on April 5, sentence was passed on our comrade Pierre Sépard, general secretary and treasurer of the powerful Railwaymen's Federation and member of the Political Bureau of our party, and on Tournemaine, member of the Central Committee, who were arrested in October on the complaint of Jarrijon, a Social-Democratic member of the Bureau

of the Federation, and condemned for having, as Communists, continued their trade union activities in defence of the railwaymen.

That is why it was announced on April 10 that the first to whom Sérol's death penalty decree would be applied were the Communist militants of Paris-Nord, such as André Carré, former commandant of the Anna Pauker artillery group of the International Brigade in Spain.

That is why one batch of arrests followed another at growing speed: fifty-eight arrests on April 16 in Paris and other parts of the country; seventy-four on April 23 in the industrial region of Paris-Ouest for publishing and distributing *La Voix des Usines*, a trade union organ. And this at a time when Paul Faure (Paul Faure of the *Pays Socialiste*, founded on the money of Bonnet-Abetz) dared—he, the man of Munich and accessory to the massacre of Spain, of the Popular Front, and of the Czech peoples—to publish a letter to the British Labour party alleging that the French Communists constituted the Fifth Column of the German government, and when, to support his allegation, the police had it announced that Maurice Thorez was in Germany.

And on May 1, 1940, on the very eve of the grand attack, the hideous convict prison of the Ile de Ré "received" Racamond, secretary of the C.G.T.; Henri Reynaud, secretary of the Trade Union Federation of the Seine; Becker, secretary of the Woodworkers' Federation; Finck, secretary of the Chemical Workers' Federation; Carcia, head of the Transport Workers' Federation; deputies Brun, Dadot and Jean Duclos, all heavily wounded in the first "last" war; and many

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other trade union leaders and mayors. This at a moment when Jouhaux publicly affirmed once more his solidarity with the master class of France, who were responsible for the war and who supplied the funds for the Cagoulards, and who had imprisoned his old comrades.

When, on May 10, the great battle began which in five weeks was to lay France low, the blows began to fall with increasing violence on our party, on the Communist Youth, and on all proletarians who refused to reconcile themselves to the destruction of their social laws, the theft of their bread and the betrayal of their country, which was becoming more and more apparent.

On May 13, René Le Gall and de Frot, Municipal Councillors of Paris, the former ex-secretary of the powerful Bricklayers' Union of the Seine and Seine-et-Oise, were convicted. At this same moment, Blum, following Paul Faure's example, dared to repeat, as the central theme of his report to the British Labour party, the infamous accusation of treason against the Communist party of France.

On May 17 the front was broken and the German troops advanced on Amiens, Arras and Abbeville, isolating the Northern Army. And it was this moment that the wretched Socialist minister Sérol chose to pass three new decrees providing for the re-establishment of the odious courts-martial, for trials without defence counsel and without appeal, and for immediate execution of sentences without the right of appeal for mercy.

It was because the bourgeoisie trembled. It trembled not on account of the invasion of France, but at the thought that the betrayed people might "take their affairs into their own hands", as the Communist party

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appealed to them to do. Above all, they feared the proletariat of Paris. They were haunted by the spectre of the commune!

And so it struck with redoubled vigour, sadistically, as, for example, when, on May 23, in Dieppe, it had five workers shot two hours after their arrest for having left their place of work for a few minutes to warn their families to seek safety from the battle which was impending at the gates of the city.

Then, on June 10, on the very eve of the shameful capitulation, the trial was sensationally opened of thirty-three Communists who, under Sérol's decree, were liable to the death penalty for having distributed leaflets.

Then there was the terrible martyrdom of June 15 and 16 of the political prisoners who were transported like cattle in overcrowded trucks from Paris to Orléans; and then led on foot, dying of hunger and thirst, along the Loire. It is now called the Red Road—that road along the Briard Canal, where, beyond Montargis, the aged and the sick, all whom weakness prevented from going on, were coolly slain by a Garde Mobile on the order of the police commissary, a Cagoulard, in charge of the convoy—just as that old worker of sixty was slain for having quit work on a Sunday afternoon to visit his sick child.

At the moment when the Northern armies were caught in the trap of Dunkerque and were being crushed beneath a hail of shell, one might read in *L'Epoque* (June 1):

"Even at this moment, when the Hitler hurricane is raging through our unhappy land spreading devastation

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and death, when our cities are burning and our property is being pillaged, when our people are groaning beneath the bombs falling from the air or the roar of the motorized divisions, honest Frenchmen continue to believe that the Bolshevik danger is Danger No. 1. Even at this moment, when the ex-Communist railwaymen, or the ex-Communist employees of the T.C.R.P., or the ex-Communist soldiers are, in their overwhelming majority, stoically doing their duty like other Frenchmen, even at this moment . . . they have difficulty in throwing off the fear that was so skilfully instilled into them."

There is no country in the world today where the root causes of this débâcle are not widely known. . . .

"The faults of the French General Staff are literally unbelievable. Never has the world seen such total lack of understanding of the character of a war. . . . Such stupidity and short-sightedness are staggering. . . . But did it really wish to resist, this General Staff which refused to defend Paris? 'La levée en masse.' . . . But this appeal to the people would have assumed a quasi-revolutionary character. It corresponded to the Republican instinct of the country. We are entitled to believe that such a movement would not have been considered desirable by General Weygand and his colleagues. Let us say it plainly—they must have been more afraid of a popular movement than of Hitler succeeding."

*The New Statesman and Nation*, from which these lines are taken, concludes:

"The French bourgeoisie were eaten up with class spirit." (June, 1940.)

And *Time and Tide* wrote on June 29, 1940:

"The collapse of France is something more than military defeat. It is the moral breakdown of a nation.

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The rot went very deep. The foulness of a certain section of the French governing class—the section loosely known as the 'Two Hundred Families'—has long been notorious. The name of M. Bonnet has for years been associated with political treachery in every form. . . .

"France has been betrayed most of all by her Fascists, by her reactionaries, and by the Two Hundred Families."

True!

"France is the victim of a huge conspiracy. All who held even a modicum of power were inspired with but one thought: to introduce Fascism into France." (*National-Zeitung*, Zurich.)

That is the reason for this unique and unparalleled catastrophe in history. That is why the people of France were massacred, starved, martyred and sold.

\* \* \*

And the men who sold them are now the government. Pétain, who had been so long allied with the Cagoulards; Laval, who for thirty years already had sold himself up to the hilt; Weygand, the man with the horsewhip, the bastard offspring of kings and Austrian princesses. And into the bargain, men like Marquet and Chiappe!

They talk of finding the guilty men! But the guilty men are well known. They are those who for twenty-one years knew no enemy but the Communists, the finest sons of the working people. They are those who gagged and clapped in irons the brave militant workers, and the Communists in the first place. The bourgeoisie all over the world, anxious for their imperialist interests, may have sought for the causes of the sensa-

tional defeat of the France of the two hundred families; but the workers of the world have already pronounced their judgment. It has been pronounced by the unemployed of Amsterdam, the dockers of Copenhagen, the workers of Scandinavia and of Switzerland, who have shown repeated marks of their solidarity with the French Communist deputies. It has been pronounced by those Belgian workers with old revolutionary traditions, one of whose most faithful representatives, our comrade Deputy Lahaut, denounced with the help of an irrefutable document the Democratic and Socialist members of what remains of the parliaments of Europe, thus expressing the sentiments of those who gazed with pride at their brothers in France during the disgraceful trial *in camera*.

It has been pronounced by those ardent workers of Mexico, through their great Confederation of Trade Unions, when they expressed their solidarity with our deputies and recalled the speech of Fajon, whom they regard as one of their own.

It has been pronounced by the forty writers, artists and scientists of the United States in a celebrated letter denouncing the violation of the rights and prerogatives of the people in the trial of our deputies, while hundreds of thousands of workers demonstrated to the French consuls in New York and other cities that in view of the protection of the police, nothing remained for them, the people, but to express their contempt on huge placards for these envoys of the two hundred families, and to confirm it in thousands of letters and telegrams.

And, lastly, it has been pronounced even in England, that pitiless capital of finance, where voices were loudly

raised, even hissing Léon Blum at the Labour Party Conference, loudly proclaiming that working-class England does not sever its cause from working-class and peasant France. The resolutions and speeches in favour of the French deputies could be counted by the thousand. . . .

“We cannot understand how your government’s action can be claimed to be different from the Fascist régime in Germany against which you are at war”

declared the textile workers of Dundee. And they were echoed by the metal workers of Sheffield and by the London Trades Council, representing 300,000 members.

The British Anti-Fascist Aid Committee alone collected over two hundred resolutions, voted by 1,500,000 workers. Prominent members of the Labour party uttered their emphatic protest against the trial: Sir Charles Trevelyan, ex-Minister of Education; J. Wedgwood, M.P.; J. R. Squance, ex-general secretary of the Railwaymen’s Union; and many others. D. N. Pritt, K.C., M.P., publicly denouncing the trial in London, concluded by saying: “The people cannot and will not be crushed.” And even the liberal and governmental *News Chronicle* admitted that the trial has deeply troubled sincere democrats in this country. The trial and persecution of a big scale of leaders and members of the French Communist party make the declarations of the French government that it is fighting for democracy sound rather artificial.

The workers of the world have passed judgment. They have shown their contempt of those who falsely call themselves France—the successors of the Bourbons



and the Bonapartes, those who reincarnate Goblentz, Jules Favre and Bazaine, Cavaignac and Callifet, Charles I and Thiers—those Lavals, Weygands, Marquets and other lackeys of De Wendels and Schneiders. But all over the world, these numerous proofs of sympathy for our brave deputies, for all our imprisoned comrades, show that in the hearts of the workers and of all lovers of progress and liberty the true France still lives—the France of Descartes and Diderot, of Pasteur and the Curies, of Robespierre and Marat, of the fighters of June, 1848, and of the Commune, the France of Blanqui, Varlin and Delescluze. That France is more alive than ever. It was manifested outside of the Palais de Justice in Paris, when it was surrounded by a massive cordon of police to prevent the thousands of Parisian workers from approaching their elected representatives. It was manifested in the thousands of letters and telegrams which the accused displayed in court and which constitute the finest and most touching homage to our great party, letters from old militants and youths, letters from soldiers and women of the people, letters from children, often written with unskilful hand but always expressing the true and profound sentiments of the French people.

In both zones of France the prisons are filled with militant Communists, like that of Bourges, where are incarcerated Sépard, general secretary of the Railwaymen's Union and Councillor-General of the Seine; Tournemaine, treasurer of the Railwaymen's Union; and Frot and Le Gall, Paris municipal councillors. In the zone governed from Vichy, prisons and concentration camps (for men and women) are crammed

to overflowing: in the camp of Gurs (Basses-Pyrénées) militant Communists and women have replaced the volunteers of the International Brigade, like the courageous Daniel Renoult, who had fought in the "other" imperialist war, and who bravely testified as witness in the trial of the Communist deputies. It is estimated that there are at least 35,000 political prisoners in both zones of France. And the arrests are still continuing.

To these must be added the 40,000 military prisoners transferred from the zone of Belfort to the camp of Barcarès in the Pyrénées-Orientales, and 200,000 Spanish refugees and volunteers in the International Brigades—men and women—of whom many hundreds have "disappeared without trace".

The people of France are crushed beneath a weight of lead. They are afflicted by hunger, suffering and death. But among the millions who are paying for the crimes of the men in power voices repeat the final declaration of the Communist deputies read in firm tones amidst a wall of bayonets:

"We love France and what makes France: her people. We are proud of her savants, her thinkers, her writers and her artists, who win her the affections of the peoples of the universe.

"All through their history and their splendid revolutionary past, the people of France have risen up against tyrants. Is this not recalled in a stanza of the *Marseillaise* which the capitalists take good care not to teach to the children of the people?

"We do not want to be slaves of Hitler, or vassals of Chamberlain, or servants of Mussolini! We want to be Frenchmen, masters of our own life.

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"Yes, we love the people of France, and we want to rid them of those who are leading them to the hecatombs and to ruin, of those who are inflicting on them the shame of the dictatorship. . . ."

Confidence is being reborn, hope shines again, the idea of a great proletarian revenge, of an ultimate victory over this odious régime of exploitation and carnage, is filling with a new courage and strength even the most downcast, even those who thought that all had been lost. . . .

Our brave deputies are languishing in the old prison of Puy (Haute-Loire). But in spite of stone walls and iron bars, their voice resounds and will resound ever louder. They may have been loaded with chains and shut fast behind heavily locked doors; but has not history shown time and again that when truth is chained it only acquires the greater force? . . . One day, and sooner than many believe, the truth will triumph by the hand of the people of France.

## DECLARATION OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST DEPUTIES BEFORE THE PARIS MILITARY TRIBUNAL

APRIL 3, 1940

**I**N this trial it is not the Communist deputies nor Communism that stand accused.

You will not find in the arsenal of laws, designed though they were to serve the capitalist class, a single element to justify our incarceration and the proceedings taken against us.

There are periods in the history of societies and régimes when the ruling classes cannot maintain their power except by violating their own laws. Such examples are to be found in the history of our country; but we also find that sooner or later the people put an end to these dictatorships by revolutionary means.

With what are we charged?

With having formed a parliamentary group, though that is in conformity with the regulations of the Chamber, and of having, as deputies, written a letter to the President of the Chamber requesting him to convene parliament to discuss the problems of peace. That is the reason assigned for our arrest and for the proceedings taken against us.

Both the letter and the formation of the Group are covered by the absolute immunity and inviolability guaranteed to the National Representatives under Article 13 of the Constitutional Law of 1875.

It was our absolute right, more, our duty as deputies, to send such a letter.

What is more, the broad campaign of anti-Communist persecution was arbitrarily inaugurated on the basis of a diplomatic act—the German-Soviet treaty. We were called upon to disavow and condemn the Soviet signature, and when we refused to submit to this strange and unprecedented demand the persecutions began.

For six months it was sought to justify this persecution by our refusal to accept the government's view of the German-Soviet pact. It was claimed that we had ostracized ourselves from the national community. A section of the French public were invited to believe that that was the reason for our prosecution.

We claim that this is a lie. And we also claim that this lie was admitted by the government itself in its Yellow Book, where a document (No. 149, Annexe XX) will be found, entitled: "Minute by M. Georges Bonnet, Minister of Foreign Affairs, of his conversation with Graf von Welszeck, German Ambassador in Paris," which contains the following phrase: "I finally said to the Ambassador that he could observe in France a unanimous national movement in support of the government; elections would be suspended, public meetings banned, all attempts at foreign propaganda repressed, *and the Communists brought to their senses.* . . ."

That document is dated July 1. There was no talk at that time of the German-Soviet pact or of whether the Communists approved it or not.

On July 1, two months before the conclusion of the Soviet-German pact, while it was still negotiating with Moscow, the French government declared in an official

note that its policy was to suppress the Communists. Let them, then, abandon the subterfuges, petty machinations and mean tricks! Let them cease to cite as a reason what was nothing but a pretext, and a poor pretext at that! Let them cease to reproach us for our attitude at the end of August and in September, 1939!

It was on July 1 that, on their own confession, our persecutors decided on their fell deed.

It is true that attempts were subsequently made to invent other excuses. A most malicious and slanderous campaign was launched against us; yet we were deprived of the opportunity of defending ourselves, we were tried *in camera*, and certain newspapers were induced to state that we were being prosecuted for intelligence with the enemy. Is this not a proof that the rulers of our country had a profound fear of allowing the truth about this trial to be known?

Well, we have told the truth during the interrogations, and we shall tell it now. Our lawyers have rebutted the indictment and the speech for the prosecution.

*Our task is to place on trial our accusers—the financial and industrial oligarchs.*

We have been arrested and are being prosecuted because we are Communists, because we have remained Communists in spite of all solicitations, threats and repression.

We are being prosecuted because we have opposed, and are opposing to the last ounce of our strength, the imperialist war which has afflicted our country; because we have appealed to the people to demand that the war be ended and peace established, and

because we are indicating to the people of France the way to make our country free and happy.

Neither trial, nor condemnation, nor concentration camp will prevent the Communists from performing this eminently humane work.

The French capitalists are trying to create the belief that the responsibility for the war is unilateral, that they themselves are not culpable, that the people of France are fighting for justice, liberty and the independence of the peoples.

Lies! lies which the warmongers always resort to when they lead the people to the shambles.

We were the first in this country to denounce the danger to which international Fascism was subjecting the peace of the world. It was we who with the greatest ardour initiated the trial of Hitler before the court of French public opinion. We have always been, and we still remain, uncompromising enemies of Fascism in all its forms.

While we have never recognized war as a means of crushing this odious régime, while we have always asserted that the liberation of the German people must be the work of the German people themselves, we have advocated a policy of organizing resistance to Fascist ambitions. For years we have been saying to the French government: "Either you set about saving the peace and independence of our country by uniting men of goodwill all over Europe, or you sabotage this effort, in which case you will be responsible for the war that is bound to break out.

"We shall then be implacable enemies of this war which you refused to prevent, of this war which could have been launched on the world only because you

placed the defence of your capitalist privileges above peace and the independence of the peoples."

It is that war that is today ravaging unhappy Europe.

It is the capitalist régime that is responsible for it, the régime of which Jaurès said that "it bears war within it as the dormant night bears the storm".

The engineers of this war would like to deck it in all the virtues! They are concealing their real war aims, for they well know that the people will not fight for the sordid interests of an exploiting minority.

This war, like that of 1914-18, is a capitalist war. It is a conflict between the capitalist groups, the German-Italian-Japanese, on the one hand, and the Anglo-French, on the other, for markets, raw materials and the exploitation of colonial peoples.

*It is in order that one group of capitalist powers may dominate over another that millions of working people are slaughtering each other today.*

We said, and we repeat, that the working class and the working people generally have nothing to gain by this war. For them it will mean only the death of millions of their fellows, frightful hardships and ruin, the destruction of their liberties, while the financial and industrial oligarchies amass, as they are amassing, enormous profits.

Who is responsible for this war? We refuse to be accomplices to that immense imposture by which, in each country, the responsibility is thrown exclusively on the enemy governments.

We may proudly contrast our constant efforts for peace with the shady machinations of rulers who have persistently been piling up the elements of the present war.

It was the Rome pacts, signed by M. Pierre Laval and supported by the French Socialist leaders, which allowed Mussolini a free hand to strangle unhappy Ethiopia. The Communists were the only ones to oppose these pacts, which contained the seeds of war.

By his criminal policy of so-called "non-intervention", M. Blum, leader of the French Socialist party, destroyed the Spanish Republic by the hand of the rebel General Franco, the agent of Hitler and Mussolini and the enemy of France. The Communists were the only ones to rise up in defence of this friendly democratic republic.

M. Chautemps allowed Hitler to lay violent hands on Austria, a member of the League of Nations.

M. Daladier surrendered to Hitler another member of the League of Nations, Czecho-Slovakia, with its raw materials, its army, its fortifications, its stocks of material and its armament works. Yet M. Daladier and his Munich friends declared: "Peace has been saved!" The Communists were the only ones to proclaim that the Munich betrayal meant war—war and Fascism!

It is now clear to everybody what the London and Paris governments schemed at Munich, and after Munich: they tried to come to an understanding with Hitler Germany and induce her to attack the Soviet Union. In pursuit of that policy, they encouraged the Warsaw government, which the day before was still an ally of Hitler and his accomplice in the dismemberment of Czecho-Slovakia, in its refusal to allow the passage of Soviet troops.

The rejection of the Soviet proposals doomed the Moscow negotiations to failure (as is confirmed, in the

Yellow Book, by the reports of M. Coulondre to the Quai d'Orsay) and rendered impossible the conclusion of a tripartite treaty which alone could have saved peace.

When the war broke out, one of its aims, which our capitalists still do not dare to admit, but which they are finding it harder and harder to conceal, was to organize a crusade against the U.S.S.R. and to seize the oil of the Caucasus.

Hence the campaigns of lying, incitement and provocation which steadily multiplied from the Far North to the Near East, and by which it was hoped to prepare public opinion and to push the working people into an anti-Soviet adventure.

But the men responsible for this policy were to meet with unpleasant surprises. For the working people of France will never forget that the spirit of their country is the spirit of liberty. Never will they become accomplices to such a shady adventure. As in 1919, they will rise up against the criminal governments which betray the noble mission of France in the world.

We have been dragged into court because we alone had the courage to call upon the people to drive out the Daladier government, that government whose responsibility for the war is overwhelming and which is introducing reaction and Hitler methods into our country.

*How dare they speak of a war for liberty when they are destroying liberty at home?*

The Daladier government is guilty of a crime towards the Communist deputies, who represent 1,500,000 electors that are today deprived of their right freely to elect their own representatives.

#### THE TRIAL OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST DEPUTIES

It has suppressed *L'Humanité*, the largest political newspaper in France.

It has dissolved the French Communist party, the largest party in France, and has proceeded to confiscate its property.

It has acted in the same way towards the workers', peasants', artisans', professional, cultural and ex-service men's organizations.

In its rage for destruction, it has attacked everything the working people of France have built up by years of persevering effort: trade unions, co-operative societies, lay organizations, sports societies, mother and child welfare societies, holiday camps, etc.

It is reviving the days of the *lettres de cachet* by imprisoning, as M. Daladier himself admitted in the Senate, thousands and thousands of French citizens and by setting up concentration camps in France.

For the men in the factories, it has meant the destruction of social legislation. It has abolished the statutes protecting the civil servants. The elected representatives of the people in parliament, in municipal and departmental councils, in the trades arbitration boards, etc., the elected workers' delegates, have been removed from their functions, are being tracked by the police, persecuted, imprisoned, condemned, flung into concentration camps.

The government is taking advantage of the mobilization of the workers and peasants to interfere in the management of their organizations and to oust them from control of them for the benefit of those who are collaborating with the masters, dividing the ranks of the workers, condemning them to capitalist super-exploitation, and facilitating acts of social regression.

#### DECLARATION OF THE FRENCH COMMUNIST DEPUTIES

It is men who have been driven out by the workers and peasants that are being placed in charge of these organizations.

The banning of newspapers and magazines, the confiscation and destruction of books and literary masterpieces culminate the misdeeds of the Daladier government.

For the soldiers it has meant the scandalous pay of 14 sous a day and commercialism.

For the workers, office employees and civil servants it has meant lower wages and salaries, overwork and the accidents it entails, the 15 per cent. deductions (from which the police are exempt), not counting the other imposts with which they are burdened: 11,500,000,000 francs on them, and only 200,000,000 francs on the profits of the employers—such were the figures revealed in the budget debate. For the workers it has meant extra hours at absurdly low pay, while the cost of living is daily rising and the ulcer of unemployment persists.

For the small peasants it has meant requisitions in return for small payment and terrible difficulties in farming. For the families of the mobilized soldiers it has meant the scandal of the family allowances (unjustified refusals, insufficient amounts, irregular payments). For the refugees from the frontier regions and, in particular, from Lorraine and Alsace it has meant the scandal of the evacuations (deplorable material and sanitary organization, inadequate allowances).

For the artisans, the small traders, the infirm and aged, for all small folk, it has meant poverty, hardship and ruin.

*Poverty for the people! Profits for the rich!*

Daladier has fallen under the pressure of the people.

We now have the government of Paul Reynaud.

With all its majority, we cannot regard it as the representative of the sovereign nation, seeing that it is the emanation of a parliament which has been severed of the Communist representation.

Any real government of France will proceed to reinstate us in parliament.

Otherwise, that government will not represent the country. It will be able to maintain itself only by dictatorship.

We consider that the welfare of France demands the formation of a popular government directly emanating from the nation.

The capitalists think that they can go on deceiving the people indefinitely because they have the support of the Socialist party, of its chiefs, men like Blum, Paul Faure and Zyromski, and of the traitor leaders of the General Confederation of Labour. All these people have become the vanguard of chauvinism and of the repression of the workers.

The Blums, Paul Faures, Zyromskis and Jouhaux, who prevented the realization of the Popular Front programme and are now immersed up to their necks in the "holy alliance" for the imperialist war, are working to smash the proletarian organizations. It is they who are chiefly responsible for the hardships imposed on the French workers. They are revealing themselves in their true colours as enemies of the people.

They have snatched up the anti-Communist banner which Hitler was obliged to drop. This means the complete bankruptcy and decomposition of the Second International and of its French section, a repetition of their bankruptcy of 1914 in a worse form.

We are internationalists. We are the only internationalists. The workers of all races and colours are our brothers. Our fate is bound up with that of the British miner and seaman, of the steel worker of Essen and the docker of Hamburg, of the worker of Prague, of the Polish peasant and the Finnish lumberjack, of the Arab fellahin and the Chinese coolie, just as it is bound up with the fate of the now liberated Soviet worker and collective farmer.

The Socialist leaders, who are nothing but lackeys of the capitalists, think they are insulting us when they call us "Stalinites".

What does that mean? We have always affirmed, and we repeat it today, that the working people of France will not find a remedy for their ills in any foreign capital. Their emancipation must be the work of their own hands. They will take inspiration from the glorious traditions of our people. But it is true that for us, as for millions of men and women in all the five continents of the world, Stalin, that sturdy builder of the Socialist society, is the brilliant successor of Marx, Engels and Lenin, the precursors of whose immortal work were great Frenchmen, like Babeuf, Fourier and Blanqui.

Marx, having studied the capitalist régime, which was then in full development, showed us that it would be superseded by another régime—Communism. In 1848, in the *Communist Manifesto*, he wrote: "A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism".

*Thanks to Lenin and Stalin, Communism is no longer a spectre, but a reality on one-sixth of the globe; and tomorrow it will be a reality all over the world.*

Lenin, and the glorious Bolshevik party he founded,

showed us, in 1914-17, how to put an end to an imperialist war by liberating the workers, peasants, intellectuals and colonial peoples.

Stalin has shown us how a country ruined by imperialist war and capitalist anarchy can be transformed, in twenty years, by building Socialism and marching forward towards Communism.

Like the imperialists of all countries, the French imperialists have risen up in mortal hatred of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. That is quite understandable. Their hatred for the U.S.S.R. is the hatred of a class which feels it is menaced. Is not the U.S.S.R. a living example for the people of France, as for all others, of what a people that has got rid of its parasites can do and become?

The Soviet Union has upset the plans of the French capitalists. Their attempts to incite Hitler Germany against it have so far failed.

The imperialist war having broken out, the U.S.S.R. has succeeded in limiting the world carnage by liberating thirteen million Byelorussians and Ukrainians who were oppressed by the Poland of the squirearchy—which we do not confuse with the Poland of the people, whose restoration, we are certain, we shall one day hail. It has established friendly relations with the Baltic States, the beneficent effects of which were admitted by the correspondent of *Le Temps* several weeks ago. The north-eastern regions of Europe, Finland in particular, might have continued to this day to live peacefully and tranquilly, if a clique of adventurers, yesterday still allied with the German generals and today subsidized by the banks of London and Washington, had not assumed the responsibility

of creating tragic complications in that part of the continent.

We are not dupes of the criminal adventure which is being plotted. We are perfectly aware of the crusade which is being organized before our eyes. We know that no French national interest was then jeopardized by Soviet initiative in Finland; it was the obvious design of the French imperialists to pass from the "queer war" in the west to large-scale intervention against the Soviets.

The manœuvre having failed in Finland, attempts are being made to revive it in the Balkans and the Near East.

It is to facilitate this manœuvre that they want to condemn us after having ignominiously calumniated us. Let the governments beware! If they are so ill advised as to attempt to turn their dream of aggression against the U.S.S.R. into reality, if they want to renew the exploits of that barbed-wire policy which has caused so much damage to the French nation, their own régime may founder in the attempt.

The capitalists are busy spreading the worst kind of slanders about us. Their Socialist lackeys surpass them in ignominy. We are working against France, they say; we are in the pay of the foreigner!

Have the capitalists, who are bleeding our country white and growing fat on its sufferings, the audacity to identify France with their dastardly minority?

M. Daladier declared in the Chamber and the Senate that we are German agents. It is this man of Munich that dared to utter this monstrosity! The man who delivered to Hitler Germany the airplanes, arms and munitions of Czecho-Slovakia which are



slaughtering today and will slaughter tomorrow our wives, children and brothers; the man who had the German Communists who had sought refuge in France, and who are the most implacable enemies of Hitler, flung into prison. We would not have mentioned this infamy, were it not to recall that Jaurès, the apostle of peace, was assassinated in 1914 precisely as a result of such slanders.

It requires no little audacity and cynicism on the part of the international profiteers and of the mercenaries who are paid for their treachery to accuse the Communists of corruption.

They know perfectly well that devotion and self-denial are the appanage of the Communists, and that that honesty, which no one has been able to deny, only brings out their own corruption in greater relief.

Not a single Communist was implicated in any of the scandals which followed one after another from 1920 to 1939. No Staviskys, nor Oustrics, nor Colonels Guichets, nor clients of the Banque de Bâle, nor wreckers of the Aéro-postale, nor pensioners of Abetz are to be found in our ranks.

They are to be found in all the parties of the Right and Left united in a "holy alliance" for the imperialist war.

We love France and what makes France: her people. We are proud of her savants, her thinkers, her writers and her artists, who win her the affections of the peoples of the universe.

All through their history and their splendid revolutionary past, the people of France have risen up against tyrants. Is this not recalled in a stanza of the

*Marseillaise* which the capitalists take good care not to teach to the children of the people?

We do not want to be slaves of Hitler, or vassals of Chamberlain, or servants of Mussolini! We want to be Frenchmen, masters of our own life.

*Yes, we love the people of France, and we want to rid them of those who are leading them to the hecatombs and to ruin, of those who are inflicting on them the shame of the dictatorship.*

It is with profound disgust that the masses of the people turn away from the handful of cowards (Gitton, Capron and Co.) who have betrayed them. These renegades represent only themselves and their own ignominy. We leave them to the contempt of the people!

We salute the innumerable workers who are courageously battling for Communism!

We Communists call upon the people to fight for bread, liberty and peace.

Yes, we are Communists! We are proud to be the heirs of the Communards, who by their sacrifice saved the Republic and fought for the emancipation of labour, and of whom Marx said that they stormed heaven.

Communism means peace in the development of the individual and of human dignity, in the progress of science and letters, and in the blossoming of civilization.

We are Frenchmen, and that is why we long with all our hearts for a free, strong and happy France.

We are internationalists, and that is why we regard every victory of the proletariat, no matter where, as our own victory.

Yes, we regard the building of Socialism in the

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U.S.S.R. as the first act of the world revolution, which will deliver the peoples from oppression and war!

Communists of France, together with Maurice Thorez, André Marty, Jacques Duclos and all our fellow accused, we are working for the liberation of our country.

We want to rid it of war!

We appeal to the people to impose peace!

We have confidence in our country, in the France of 1793, of 1830, of 1848, of the Paris Commune, of February, 1934, and of May, 1936.

We have confidence in the people of France, and we are confident that they will very soon dig the grave of the capitalist régime which is responsible for poverty and war.

Long live a free France ! Long live a happy and strong France!

Long live peace!

Under the banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, following the example of Karl Liebknecht and Dimitrov,

FORWARD TO COMMUNISM!

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The Declaration was printed in leaflet form by the French Communist party on the day after the trial.