

COMMUNIST ACTIVITY IN FRANCE

“A PARTY OF TREACHERY”

THE FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF A LETTER ADDRESSED BY M. PAUL FAURE, SECRETARY OF THE FRENCH SOCIALIST PARTY, TO THE BRITISH LABOUR PARTY

It is said that France is a semi-Fascist country, where all liberties have been abolished, where parliamentary government no longer exists, where the Trade Unions have been suppressed and their leaders imprisoned, and, as a result, surprise is apparently expressed at the alliance between British democracy and French dictatorship.

Need I tell you that we are somewhat surprised and disconcerted by such allegations, which in no way correspond to the truth.

Without doubt, there at present exists in the French Republic a state of affairs which tends to restrict a certain number of liberties: this is the inevitable consequence of the State Emergency Law resulting from the war. In many cases the military authorities have taken the place of the civil authorities; certain abuses and excesses, it is true, have been noted and against these protest has been made, in order that their effects might be modified.

It is wrong to say that Parliament does not exist; it operates freely; the Government is subjected to and replies to questions, and when matters which concern National Defence are under debate and necessitate discretion, all the Parties and the Government agree to discuss them in secret committee.

During the early months of the War, there was a brutal and arbitrary censorship régime; after campaigns in the Press and a full-dress parliamentary debate, this régime has been a good deal modified and the political censorship suppressed.

It is not the above state of affairs to which I have referred briefly, which has aroused in Great Britain the accusations in question. The cause has to be sought elsewhere, and it is to be found, without any doubt, in the measures taken against the Communists. Measures, I do not deny, which are severe. But how can they not be considered legitimate? It is, in fact,

necessary to understand the magnitude of the danger which the Communists represent to us in France.

If they were a Party which acted in the name of our national defence and which determined its own policy and attitude, then, no matter what might be its social doctrines and revolutionary principles, the attitude of the French Government and of both Chambers unanimously, would be indefensible.

Must it not be borne in mind, however, that the Communists are the direct agents of a foreign Power? Should it not be remembered that the Communist Party made itself, in the National Assembly and the country at large, the mouthpiece of a foreign government which was the accomplice and associate of the government of another foreign country with whom France is at present at war?

Under these conditions the question was absolutely clear. It had simply to be decided whether a Party, under the orders and in the pay of a foreign Power, could, in time of war, take part, discuss, vote, legislate in a French Assembly and whether it could be informed in the parliamentary commissions or secret committees of the Chamber and the Senate, of the military and diplomatic situation of the country and given all the secret intelligence concerning national defence.

It has been said that the case of the exclusion of the Communist deputies was not provided for in the Constitution. Perhaps. But the Constitution did not foresee, either, the existence of a Party of treachery installed, with sly malevolence, in the Chamber, in the parliamentary commissions, in the ministerial ante-chambers—and why not on the ministerial benches? There are circumstances where natural rights make good the weaknesses and loopholes of the written law, and where the instinct of preservation dictates to the individual and to the community measures of self-protection and safety.

It should be noted, too, that the French Government and the Chamber were punctilious and used the method of reprimand and generosity. They allowed the Communist deputies weeks of reflection in order that they might disassociate themselves from the Hitler-Stalin collusion and those who thus disassociated themselves—there are examples—were allowed to retain their offices. Generosity was thus pushed to the point of imprudence. Those Communists who retracted are in a position to appreciate the superiority of democratic methods over those of Bolshevism. In Russia they would have been shot en bloc, without explanation and without judgment: there would have been a ball in the neck for each of them and for anyone who tried to defend or excuse them. The curtain would have fallen on this incident six months ago. The French Republic knows how to behave.

But there is something else that our British comrades ought to know and ponder over. That is, the importance which the Communists had assumed in the Paris region, thanks to large-scale propaganda fed by funds from abroad during twenty years.

They had cells in all the factories of the Paris region, which constitutes the vital centre of the country. They had got their hands on the greater part of the trade union offices. In the electoral sphere, thanks to the system of abstentions in the second ballot and to the Popular Front, they had secured 33 out of a total of 60 parliamentary seats for the Seine area; a very large number of suburban mayoralties were under their control and they made them into centres of Bolshevik propaganda pure and simple.

To-day, no one can doubt that the Communists place themselves outside the nation, that they obey a foreign government; and if this state of affairs is difficult to admit in time of peace, it becomes absolutely intolerable in time of war.

Let me repeat: no-one can doubt that the Communists have always been the agents of Moscow. We have only to look at their evolution since 1920. Naturally, there have been several turns, several periods in the life of this Party, but they have always been determined by considerations of foreign policy, dictated by a foreign power.

At first they attempted to form a party which should be at once legal and underground. They attacked everything which had until then been the basis of working-class action and propaganda. They claimed that they were essentially propagandists for the world revolution, and said that the era of reforms had gone by, that parliamentarism and democracy were things of the past and that the time had come for armed rebellion.

It is true that these new theories were not proof against experience and, with an extreme facility for

adaptation, the Communists turned themselves into reformists, while continuing to make use of a most unheard-of demagoguery. At the same time, they attempted to cause risings in the colonies; they encouraged the Alsatian autonomists and sent telegrams of congratulation to Ab-del-Krim at the time of the Moroccan War.

Then, they suddenly became very nationalist and very democratic. They took part in all popular demonstrations with the republican parties. They learnt to sing the Marseillaise. They entered the Popular Front in order to sabotage its internal policy and to impel its foreign policy towards war. They advocated war, whether in the case of Spain, Czechoslovakia or Poland. . . . They even got to the point of advocating the National Union, and, forgetting or pretending to forget, their formula about religion being the "opiate of the people," they ostentatiously held out their hand to their catholic brothers.

Then, once more, and without transition, changing their attitude they accused France and Britain of being responsible for the war. Hitler and Stalin are both as meek as lambs and innocent as newly-borns; only Chamberlain and Daladier and with them the "capitalist clique and their Socialist lackeys"—mentioned by name—have put fire to the powder. The glorious Russian armies happily put an end to their exploits first in Poland and now in Finland, where the rabble have had the criminal impudence to defend themselves against those who brought them liberation by methods which are known to have surpassed in horror everything that history has taught us of misery and the massacre of men.

This propaganda is carried on in co-operation with Berlin and Moscow. It is, however, not always so cynical and crude. Sometimes it assumes a more subtle form, more perfidious and more dangerous: this is when it seeks to exploit for its own ends the discontents and sufferings of those sections of the population who are most affected and suffer most from the war, in order to cause disorders the first result of which would be to break the resistance of our armies.

An abominable underground leaflet campaign is being carried on which describes the present war as having been desired solely by British capitalism. The Communists thus seek to turn French public opinion against Britain, to demoralise the mass of the people and the army in order to provoke moral disintegration and prepare the atmosphere for disorders. After that, no doubt, Hitler and Stalin will have the mission of restoring order.

That is the situation.

Once more, it justifies French policy and the measures taken against a Party of treachery, at the moment when the destiny of France, together with that of Britain, and all hopes of democracy and freedom, are in the balance.